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Asset Mapping: A Semester-Long Engagement

Asset Mapping played a central role in *Art in the Expanded Field*, a seminar focused on Solidarity Art Economies at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (2014-16). The lesson plan describes the introduction to the practice, the use of the tool, the map and the integration of the practice into the weekly structure.

History of the Practice

Participatory Asset Mapping enables communities to build political power through self-reliance and shared resources. It entails the self-identification of community assets, meaning that the community is not the object of external research.

The process involves community members collectively mapping information about what they understand to be their community's tangible and intangible strengths, sources, and resources, including individual and collective knowledges and skills. Community assets might also include both formal institutions (libraries, schools and health care clinics) and informal institutions (block associations, community gardens and food co-ops). Intangible resources might include offering emotional labor such as friendship and care.

John Kretzmann and John McKnight (1993) are acknowledged as the developers of Asset-Based Community Development.¹ Central to their work is the shift away from a social services framework that represents communities as deficient, to a community-building model. The act of collectively identifying abundance brings a shared awareness to communities enabling an energetic focus on what *is* present rather than what is often characterized as being scarce or lacking. At the same time the process can provide an analysis and dialogue about the conditions that act to prevent community members from accessing what is needed. Subsequently, such analysis can lead to collective involvement in research, decision-making, and action. Kretzmann and John McKnight's model is foundational to the work of J.K. Gibson Graham and the *Community Economies Project*.² Exemplifying a feminist critique of political economy, they counter the view of the economy as predominantly capitalist, foregrounding instead what they call hidden and alternative economies. Examples include producer cooperatives, gifts and informal lending; economies that become evident through the practice of Participatory Asset Mapping.

Lesson Plan

How do we operate from a place of abundance rather than scarcity? Can we utilize the skills, strengths, and resources that already exist in our classrooms to respect and support each other's work? Could this process of exchange lead to a more vibrant cultural ecology that result in everyone ending up with more than they started with? Will our exchanges create opportunities for the unsettling of institutional norms that shape what it means to be an artist?

¹ Kretzmann, J.P., & McKnight, J. (1993). Building communities from the inside out: A path toward finding and mobilizing a community's assets. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University, The Asset-Based Community Development Institute, Institute for Policy Research. In 1995 The Asset-Based Community Development Institute (ABCD), was established within the Center for Civic Engagement at Northwestern University. See <http://www.abcdinstitute.org/toolkit/> for comprehensive resources including training videos, and podcasts.

² See <http://www.communityeconomies.org/people/jk-gibson-graham>

Learning Objectives

- Understand how Asset Mapping efficiently identifies an inventory of resources and strengths in a learning and making environment.
- Understand how Asset Mapping promotes healthy community involvement.
- Connect the practice and experience of exchanging to our discussions and analyses of race, gender, and class processes.
- Connect the practice and experience of exchanging to our discussions and analyses of authorship and attribution.
- Connect the practice and experience of exchanging to our discussions and analyses of time management, slowing down, maintenance, and embodiment.

Assessment

Students will have met the learning objectives when they have:

- Completed 8 exchanges
- Created a blog with detailed descriptions and visual documentation of each exchange.
- An understanding of what solidarity art economies are and how they can be applicable to their own practices and projects.

Week 1

Duration: 2.35 hours

- A. 20 minutes: Introductions /class check-in
- B. 20 minutes: Embodying the Principles of Asset Mapping
- C. 30 minutes: Introduction to Asset Mapping: reading "*Tool Kit: What is Asset Based Community Development?*"
- D. 15 minutes: Writing Exercise: Listing of skills and needs
- E. 20 minutes: Creating list of assets, needs, and contact information
- F. 15 minutes: Dialogue in pairs
- G. 20 minutes: Reflection
- H. 5 minutes: Identifying Asset Mapping pocket
- I. 10 minutes: Description of required blog containing documentation of exchanges.

The Space of Learning:

Remove as many vernacular objects of learning from the classroom as possible (whiteboards, extra tables and chairs, portable equipment). Open the blinds to let light into the room and check thermostat to insure a comfortable temperature. Place Asset Mapping tool, 16 mugs, an electric kettle, variety of teas, honey, spoons, and a dish of trail mix on tables also off to the side. Place 15 chairs in a circle in the center of the room.

A. Introductions / check-in (Timing: 20 minutes)

Making space for a check in each class is an important component of the course. This is not about solving problems but about attending to / making transparent what is present in the room; that which conditions our learning on any given day.

Introductions / check in today includes providing name, preferred gender pronoun, and naming one thing that is urgent in our lives.

B. Embodying the Principles of Asset Mapping³ (Timing: 20 minutes)

Materials:

Chairs for participants
2 tablespoons
water in a cup

Protocol

1. Chairs remain in a circle.
2. Invite everyone to sit elbow to elbow.
3. The facilitator demonstrates the exercise by pouring water onto one of the spoons and then transferring it to the second spoon.
4. She then gives the empty spoon to the person on her left and pours the water from the other spoon into the one they are holding. She then transfers the empty spoon into their left hand.
5. They repeat what she has done, passing the spoons and the water to the person on their left until everyone has participated.
6. Take some time for discussion and reflection.

Prompts and questions for discussion might include:

What are the advantages and disadvantages in engaging collectively?
How can differences be managed within collective activity?

C. Introduce Asset Mapping (Timing: 30 minutes)

This part of the lesson plan draws upon three texts:

Kretzmann and McKnight 's *Community Asset Mapping*

Cameron and Gibson's *Shifting Focus: Alternative Pathways for Communities and Economies A Resource Kit*,⁴

Participatory Asset Mapping: A Community Research Lab Toolkit.⁵

Read together out loud and discuss "*Tool Kit: What is Asset Based Community Development?*"

³ My first experience of this exercise was in *The Sound of Freedom* at the New School, a seminar taught by Robert Sember, spring 2013.

⁴ Jenny Cameron and Katherine Gibson, *Shifting Focus: Alternative Pathways for Communities and Economies A Resource Kit*, Latrobe City and Monash University, 2001,
<http://www.communityeconomies.org/site/assets/media/old%20website%20pdfs/action%20research/Shifting%20Focus.pdf>

⁵ Janice C. Burns, Dagmar Pudrzynska, Paul; and Silvia R. Paz, *Participatory Asset Mapping: A Community Research Lab Toolkit*, Advancement Project- Healthy City Community Research Lab, 2012
<http://www.communityscience.com/knowledge4equity/AssetMappingToolkit.pdf>

D. Writing Exercise: Listing of skills and needs (Timing: 15 minutes)

Make a list in response to the following questions:

What do you have to offer the group (gifts/skills)?

What do you want from the group (needs)?

Some examples: **Skills:** Technological knowledge and expertise, (fabrication, Creative Suite, video editing) writing skills, cooking **Gifts:** transportation, friendship, materials, and support

E. Creating the list of assets, needs, and contact information for each class member

(Timing: 20 minutes)

1. Form a circle with other members of the group

2. Identify a note taker who will record and make a PDF of identified resources (skills and gifts), a list of identified wants, and contact information for each person listed.

A color coded PDF will be created matching each person to their pocket on the Asset MappingTool.

F. Dialogue in Pairs (Timing: 15 minutes)

Turn to the person next to you and collectively respond to the questions.

What are the benefits of identifying community assets?

What suggestions do you have for practical applications of your assets and how do you imagine integrating them into your work in this class?

G. Reflection (Timing: 20 minutes)

Form a circle with other members of the group and share findings based on dialogue.

H. Identifying your Asset Mapping pocket and labeling it with your name ⁶ (Timing: 5 minutes)



Maureen Connor and Susan Jahoda, *Asset Mapping Tool* held by Maureen Connor and Laurel Ptak, 5' x 3' Neoprene, Felt, Card, and Buttons, 2015

I. Brief description of required blog containing documentation of exchanges (Timing: 10 minutes)

Your blog will contain more detailed documentation of your exchanges.

Weeks 2-13

Duration: 30 minutes once a week

- A. 5 minutes: Cards, objects and links to documentation placed in pockets.
- B. 25 minutes: Sharing the process of exchanging.
Use your blog entry to support your narration.

Instructions for Exchanges and use of the Asset Mapping Tool

Each person is responsible for eight exchanges. These include providing others with four offers of skills and gifts and receiving four offers of skills and gifts. You can exchange with the same person or different

⁶ There are any number of ways to keep track of weekly exchanges. Choose a form based on available resources and a method that works best for the group. A class blog might suffice.

people. It is up to you and the person you are exchanging with to determine the “value” of your exchanges. For example: Is one hour of labor on a project equivalent to a cooked meal or a ride to the lumber yard? Please include the process for determining the value of your exchanges in your blog.

Each pocket contains eight cards. When you have determined a date for an exchange remove one of the eight cards from the tool. When the exchange is complete return it to your pocket.

1. Note on your card the date of your exchange (complete outside class time)
2. Note the name of the person you exchanged with (complete outside class time)
3. Provide a brief description of the exchange and the URL address of your blog entry
(complete outside class time)
4. When you come to class after making an exchange return the card to your pocket
(timing: 5 minutes)
5. Narrate the process of exchanging through blog entries
(timing: 25 minutes)