**Connecting Through Mapping: Introduction to the IJME Special Issue**

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| **ABSTRACT: In this introduction to the special issue of IJME, we highlight the tensions and possibilities of maps and mapping as scholarly pursuits in critical, justice-oriented education. We discuss the potential for maps to portray deeply personal stories and perspectives of the world while also acknowledging their sometimes fixed and hierarchical attributes. Through this discussion, we show how maps can be potent forces of connection or separation. The authors in this special issue showcase the challenges and opportunities of mapping scholarship and reveal its promise to inspire connection and collective action towards theory-building, advocacy, and social transformation in education.**  **KEYWORDS: Cultural assets, maps, mapping, multicultural education, social justice** |

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*A map is a divided thing.*

*To imagine a map is to picture a clean rendering of colour-coordinated division. Boundaries split seas from their source, towns from their twins, and people from their destinies. When performing at its best, a map should help locate individual entities that, ideally, exist in those locations. A generous spirit might allow a map some margin of error. But should you arrive at a desired spot, and find a molehill where you needed a mountain, then, what guided you there was not a map, but a fable in which you were, unsuspectingly, the main character. (Faloyin, 2022, p. 23)*

Maps are full of inherent tensions. Maps are both art and science—two-dimensional attempts to portray a three-dimensional world. Maps reflect the human experience yet they can be painfully dehumanizing—presenting images of the world around us yet drawing lines through community, cultural, and ecological connectivity. Maps are both fleeting and timeless—revealing the desires and political sensibilities of their creators. And, our use of maps continues to evolve in ways that show their tremendous importance in connecting us while also reinforcing arbitrary borders that divide us. It is this tension, this divide, that draws us to maps. As educators, we continually interrogate the roles that maps play in our own experiences as learners and as a part of our curricula as teachers. As scholars, we attempt to explore possibilities for mapping as a tool for social transformation in education. The tensions that reside at the very heart of maps are complexities that are worth exploring. We feel that this collection of articles for this special issue of the *International Journal of Multicultural Education* showcases these tensions and the importance of mapping in educational research, practice, and theory-building.

**Maps, Mapping, and Cultural Assets**

At the core of our scholarship about mapping is the belief that maps hold the power and promise to reflect personal stories and visions of the world. Maps show our perceptions and perspectives of the cultural contexts we navigate, call home, and share with others. We have explored cultural assets as living, breathing, fluid, and intergenerational ways of being (e.g., Borrero et al., 2021; Yeh et al., 2021). Cultural assets are things and actions; they are nouns and verbs. In historically targeted communities, bilingualism, for example, is not just the retention of a home language; it is a cultural asset that expresses intergenerational transfer of lived experiences and connectivity. This type of translanguaging (Martínez et al., 2018) reflects the dynamism and power of linguistic dexterity, and as such counters white assumptions about English monolingualism (Rosa & Flores, 2017). In these ways, cultural assets are traits that we possess and actions that we take. Maps, too, embody this duality. They are historical artifacts and they are living representations of the spaces we traverse. We experience maps and mapping, and we also use them as tools—relying on them as a way to interpret our surroundings, and in so doing we reinforce—or push against—the borders they project.

In the field of multicultural education—particularly critical, justice-oriented education that seeks to challenge white, patriarchal, heteronormative hierarchies of learning and teaching—mapping is a pedagogical and methodological pursuit (Annamma, 2018; Futch & Fine, 2014). We embrace mapping as a process that connects theory to practice and encourages dialogue across differences. For example, we developed ecological asset mapping (EAM) (Borrero & Yeh, 2016) as a tool for exploring and sharing cultural assets in classroom settings. Our learnings from youth in K-12 public schools, undergraduate college students, pre- and in-service teachers and counselors, and school administrators reinforce the idea that maps and mapmaking reveal deeply personal stories and journeys that are often silenced in school spaces.

Alongside these possibilities for maps exist limitations. Our research and our own experiences with maps and mapping show ways in which they can become fixed and outdated. Maps can incite and enforce arbitrary boundaries and separation. And maps can reflect our assumptions about other spaces and those who occupy them. In these ways, maps can reinforce the hierarchical power structures that we are attempting to dismantle. Maps are educational tools that can help us to unlearn the historical and cultural geographies that those in power—those making the maps that we see in school textbooks, in the media, and the applications we use for directions on our cell phones—want us to abide by and accept.

**Maps as Collective Cultural Pursuits**

The duality of maps and the tensions that mapping embodies are reflective of the opportunities and challenges of multicultural education. For example, one of the perennial dilemmas we face as critical pedagogues and scholars is an educational system that attempts to foster diversity yet promotes individual achievement and success. Particularly through our experiences in K-12 public education in the United States, we are steeped in an educational paradigm that values the individual over the collective. Learning is treated as a solitary pursuit and educational attainment is separate from family and community experiences. Yet, students who have the most to offer with regard to community cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005) often come from collectivist cultures and intergenerational homes and communities. This paradox is reflected in mapping research. Maps can reflect community-oriented and collective vision for shared spaces, yet such examples are often counterstories or counter-maps to predetermined, enforced portraits of particular places. As such, maps can reinforce individualistic and solitary perceptions of the dynamic cultural contexts in which we live.

This type of contention was incredibly potent for us in the Spring of 2020. At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the vast majority of the maps we saw every day on television, through news articles, and via social media portrayed city-by-city, county-by-county, state-by-state, and country-by-country comparisons of infection and death rates across borders. The message was simple—stay away, stay at home, shelter in place. Yet, at the same time, thousands of protesters were taking to the streets in our city and in places around the country (and the world) to stand in solidarity with Black Lives Matter and protest the murder of George Floyd. The maps we were seeing every day did not portray this collective action.

It is our desire as editors of this special issue to be a part of a movement to reinvision mapping in multicultural education by embracing the tensions that are inherent in maps and by fostering mapping scholarship as a collective and community-oriented process. Maps are not finished products and the borders that they display are not fixed. Mapping is a process and we can utilize it as a way to come together.

**Overview of Articles**

In this special issue, nine authors present 5 articles on different aspects of mapping in multicultural education including both empirical and theoretical approaches. Below we describe the unique and highly significant contributions of each of these articles.

**Powell**

In the feature article of this special issue, Kimberly Powell takes us on a theoretical and practical mapping journey. The article is an exploration of walking as a mapping practice—inciting agency to challenge historical assumptions about communities and provide alternative approaches to living with one another and our surroundings. Powell presents a theoretical framework that utilizes posthumanism, Indigenous and decolonizing theories of land, and Black geography to show how deeply mapping impacts our separation from and connection to people and things around us. This theoretical foundation is then put into action through counterstory mapping in an urban neighborhood in California. It is through walking and mapping that these countermaps come to life and reveal innovative ways to conceptualize the relational, intergenerational, and fluid possibilities of maps as place-based stories.

**Neal-Stanley, Duncan, and Love**

Historical injustices in education can also be delineated and underscored using multicultural mapping. Neal-Stanley, Duncan, and Love take a historical detour from traditional framings of Black history to center and map the phenomenon of white backlash in K-12 Black education beginning from the antebellum era to the current day. Through this approach to mapping, the authors reveal how the present status of Black education is not an unprecedented or extraordinary occurrence, but part of a lengthy and extensive lineage of anti-Black violence in education. Specifically, they describe how white backlash is an expression of white supremacist violence that has been continually used to destabilize and threaten pedagogical efforts that uplift, humanize, and support Black empowerment and education. Grounding their work in BlackCrit theory, the authors use historical mapping to analyze, acknowledge, and anticipate the ongoing battle for liberatory Black education. They argue that in educational contexts, a BlackCrit framing allows us to reflect on and critique how social and educational practices, programs, and policies are integrally linked to antiblackness and contribute to Black suffering.

**Banda**

Multicultural mapping has the potential to illuminate previously unseen strengths in historically-marginalized students in educational and community contexts, as well as the structural barriers impacting their lived experiences. Banda introduces the tool of *critical geospatial mapping* (CGSM) as a flexible pedagogical method for multicultural learning and counterstorytelling. This work challenges the dominant masculinity and perceived objectivity and neutrality of traditional mapping and is deeply grounded in multicultural feminism, critical human geography, and critical pedagogy. Banda shares examples of CGSM in her work with undergraduate and graduate students. Specifically, her undergraduate class used CGSM to collaborate with students from four neighborhoods surrounding a predominately Black high school. All students spent the day together learning from one another and discussing the resources and assets of the community. They also addressed what Banda refers to as *uneven landscapes* or inequities through geospatial barriers. In a class with graduate students, Banda immersed CGSM into their final project which centered on culturally relevant, community-based literacy leadership through engaging with selected school’s families and local residents. The project helped emphasize how collaboration, discussion, and critical reflection in CGSM allowed students to observe previously unseen strengths, resources, and structural challenges.

**Cho and Hayes**

Understanding identity journeys are the focus of a study by Cho and Hayes who offer the tool of Identity Journey Mapping to facilitate the exploration of Korean American identities in a small sample of college students of Korean descent. These students participated in a faculty-led study abroad program in Korea and utilized Identity Journey Mapping to question and confront singular and inflexible conceptualizations of Korean American identity. Specifically, these journey maps allowed for multidimensional, fluid, and shifting definitions of a transnational Korean American identity which challenges traditional stereotypes and racist views of being Asian American. This research is embedded in an Asian Critical theory (AsianCrit) framework, which acknowledges the complexity of identity negotiation across varying historical, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of Asian Americans and the importance of counterstories to policies and practices that ignore Asian American voices.

**Mansfield and Hernandez**

Using maps to showcase the multiple exclusionary policies impacting college access for undocumented youth in the United States is at the core of the article by Mansfield and Hernandez. The authors provide state-by-state data about policies that restrict higher education enrollment for students and provide three maps to portray the contested terrain that youth, family, and school counselors must navigate to understand college access. These maps help to show how states and regions of the U.S. actively enforce bans against undocumented and DACA students, restrict access to in-state tuition, and deny qualification for financial aid. The authors highlight ways in which state policies are often reactionary and complex—further occluding pathways towards educational matriculation for students and families that are continually pushed to the margins. They highlight mapping as a way to clearly show the varying policies across the country and provide information to students, families, and community advocates. Additionally, mapping is highlighted as a tool to create dialogue between and among constituents without focusing on the exclusionary jargon so prominent in educational policy and law.

**Conclusion**

As demonstrated in this special issue, mapping has the great potential to influence critical pedagogy, fluid identity-making, educational research, and historical understandings in multicultural educational contexts. Mapping can be transformative and liberatory and can illuminate community and student strengths and structural barriers. It also has the power to bridge communities and strengthen relationships across real and imagined borders and “uneven surfaces”. Maps are everywhere and can be used to restrict and label or empower and illuminate. The articles in this special issue provide a window of what is presently being done, as well as what is possible in terms of mapping in multicultural education. Our goal of this special issue is to inspire new and creative ways of thinking about and using maps in our everyday social justice practices in multicultural education and beyond. We believe and hope that the ideas presented in this special issue inspire more researchers, educators, and scholars to consider how approaches and methodologies in mapping can enhance their pursuits for justice in educational contexts.

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