Mapping the Neighborhood

Curriculum Unit 08.03.01
by Carol Boynton

Introduction

As a first grade teacher in a self-contained classroom in New Haven, I have a class of 26 mostly six and seven year olds with an occasional eight-year-old. Edgewood Magnet School is a neighborhood/magnet elementary school with over 400 students from kindergarten to eighth grade. With a fine arts focus, Edgewood’s rewarding environment has students coming to school each day from a variety of home circumstances and with differences in academic levels. As a result of these variables, the children have differing levels of background knowledge and life experiences. Each classroom is a mixture of varied ethnicities, economic strata and social and emotional strengths and weaknesses.

The New Haven Public School District requires a social studies focus on places and regions, historical thinking, interactions of humans and their environment, and responsibilities to families, community, state and nation for the first through fourth grade students. With these standards in our curriculum, a unit of study on neighborhoods and maps would invite and offer the students access and knowledge to build a firm foundation. Often subjects are approached in primary grades with the assumption that background knowledge is in place. Without a relative understanding to give the student some personal connection to the material, it can be difficult for the child to absorb and comprehend new information.

Developmentally, children in the primary level are cognitively at a stage that allows for learning best through order and sequencing. These two structures, order and sequencing, help a young child make sense of ideas, thoughts, concepts, and even things. They demonstrate a rationale for “what comes next” or “where something goes”. Many things in our world are ordered and have a sequence, but we are not always aware of the process that occurred to create the outcome. This curriculum unit will take the notion of learning sequentially and work from the micro to the macro -- starting from mapping the classroom environment to defining the school space to gaining an understanding of the neighborhood. The focus on sequence and order are instrumental in the flow of the lessons and acquisition of knowledge.
**Rationale**

My purpose in designing this unit is to build awareness and understanding of neighborhoods and the maps that explain that same space. I remember as a student being interested in maps and not really getting the guidance I needed in elementary school. At home, I would take maps and often the atlas to look up different things. I used my parents’ maps to locate cities I had heard of and places I would like to see. This became helpful only in my needs because I still found map reading in social studies classes to be difficult. As much as I enjoyed geography, I never felt that I really managed well with the information maps were offering. Because I recognize that some students are as interested as I was, I want to have the resources to give them the basic skills and hopefully inspire more students to find maps informative and engaging.

Also, I am realizing through the use of the Internet and Global Positioning System that students are getting directions differently than even the recent past. GPS is funded by and controlled by the U. S. Department of Defense (DOD). GPS provides specially coded satellite signals that can be processed in a GPS receiver, enabling the receiver to compute position, velocity and time. Four GPS satellite signals are used to compute positions in three dimensions and the time offset in the receiver clock. ¹ Although this is helpful and certainly current technology that needs to be understood, I feel that learning to read a map, to orient yourself, and to ultimately find your way is a rewarding skill. One example from my life lately is my teenage children using the “you are here” red star on the map at the mall to get to the next place they are looking for to shop!

My ultimate goal is to map our neighborhood. Although neighborhoods are organized to create a purposeful environment, these basic standards are not necessarily or readily obvious to young children. They walk or ride in car or bus to school each day, they may not notice what their neighborhood is comprised of and why, the general and specific buildings and landscape that make up the area. I have ridden on the school bus with my young students on field trips throughout our city. Many times I have been directed to, for example, “Look over here at my grandmother’s house. She lives right next to that store.” I mention this type of circumstance because I would knew where that child’s grandmother’s house was and that was not the house, the street, or even the neighborhood. But to the child the setting was similar enough to create the illusion that we were passing a very familiar spot for her. A similar experience has occurred many times with this age group and it makes me realize that the consistency of the common built environment. For a child, her relative experience of her grandmother’s setting can be easily transferred to another neighborhood, one that seems easily recognizable.

**Neighborhoods and Communities**

So to begin my thoughts, what is the definition of a neighborhood? As adults we are able to recognize our definition of what is involved in the structure of a neighborhood, although our different backgrounds and histories have given us a variety of experiences to bring to that definition. Webster’s Dictionary defines neighborhood as “1. the area or region around or near some place or thing, vicinity; 2. a district or locality, often with reference to its character or inhabitants; 3) a number of persons living near one another or in a particular locality.” ² Also of note is the suggestion of the word community as a synonym for neighborhood. These important words, neighborhood and community, embody concepts to bring to the classroom to not only
define but dissect.

Children that grow up in an urban setting have more of a sense of neighborhood likely than a suburban child. Being the latter, I spent some time when I came to New Haven learning how the city is divided into areas and then into neighborhoods. I found it quite amazing that although you can live in densely populated places, a neighborhood still forms from the residents within that area. I want my students to recognize that around the city, we have all types of neighborhood that are little communities within our big city.

By exposing the students to the structure of “where they go to school,” I hope to strengthen their understanding of similarities and orderliness of neighborhoods. They have a history, people who live in them, interactions between those residents and responsibilities to that area. Also, neighborhoods have order and symmetry in the buildings, homes, streets, and even landscaping.

In the same vein, communities are embodied within neighborhoods, but separate in definition. While neighborhood suggests those same buildings, structures, streets, and other physical features, community conjures up a more social definition. So back to Webster’s Dictionary for the definition which is as follows: “a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government and often have a common cultural and historical heritage.”

**Background**

Westville began as a small separate village outside of New Haven proper. As the city expanded, the trolley line traveled west, connecting Westville in the mid 19th century. The village became prosperous as a manufacturing center, with factories springing up along the West River, first paper mills, then the Diamond Match Company and others. In 1858, Donald Mitchell, a noted landscape architect moved from New York to Westville, into a section he named Edgewood. Mitchell was involved in the layout of Edgewood and the western end of the city, but his principal contribution was the design of the city parks -- a varied group of inland, wetland, shorefront, and mountainous pieces of land which he made into one of the most distinguished park systems in the country.

Edgewood Magnet School is part of a large urban school district. We are located in a residential setting with many of our students walking to school from their houses down the street. Directly across the street from the school is Edgewood Park, one of New Haven’s many parks. The school neighborhood is an ideal setting to give students the basic knowledge of a gridded neighborhood with streets running parallel to each other and perpendicular to avenues.

Within our neighborhood, we have many buildings that are common to an evolved setting. Different styles of homes and dwellings show passage of time. City buildings show the needs of our community, the police station, the fire station, our library, markets, restaurants, banks. Why are they different looking? How are they different on the inside?
Maps

One way to begin to show order regarding neighborhoods is to introduce maps. Children have seen maps in various forms whether as mazes to complete or on television or in movies or even sometimes on the back of cereal boxes. Treasure maps are something they seem aware of at this age, with the excitement that is attached finding something valuable. Maps are to them a way to get somewhere, a destination to reach. How do we get there? What path do you follow to get the dog to his doghouse?

Maps are created to give information. That information varies from map to map depending on the purpose and goal of the map maker. A map can show a simple set of arrows showing left and right turns for directions to your friend’s house or the borders of our United States or the weather patterns on the news forecast or track of Christopher Columbus’ ships across the Atlantic Ocean. They provide a way of letting us know what others know or have learned or discovered. We can all remember from seeing maps that the world view has changed from before it was common knowledge that the world is round to our images from space that certainly show that now. Maps have changed over time as knowledge changes, which indicates that maps are evolving descriptors of the space we use or are interested in.

Maps are everywhere in our society. We ourselves cannot see all that any map shows us; it is not possible from one vantage point. Learning that maps give us information, specifics, is necessary, not innate. Looking at a map and then transferring that information into their reality is not a natural progression for young children. Size, scale, meaning, reference, representation are just the beginning of decoding what sits in front of them. But what great power there is in looking at a drawn image and understanding what it means!

To discuss maps as a tool for imparting information one must first realize the purpose of a map. We, many of us, have collections of maps that help us travel through the state, or the northeast, or within the city itself. There are even maps located in telephone books that identify streets and landmarks within the calling area. These getting around tools have a connection to the mazes our students work on, kind of a destination focus, from here to there.

But maps are more diverse that our knee jerk reaction to the question, “Do you have a map?” These are a few types of maps giving different sorts of information to the reader. I have selected certain categories to focus on and define to help further understand the student activities and lesson plans to follow. This foundational information will help identify the purposefulness of each activity within this curriculum unit.

Sanborn Maps

Insurance maps were developed in the United States in the late eighteenth century in response to the need for detailed information concerning potential fire risks of commercial, residential or industrial structures. One of the earliest companies to provide the service of documenting the construction materials of these structures was the D. A. Sanborn National Insurance Diagram Bureau, later called the Sanborn Map and Publishing Company. Sanborn maps cover all major urban areas and many smaller cities and towns. A collaboration of surveyors and cartographers documented through these maps specific and in-depth detail, building by
building, of the built environment of that time. The Library of Congress has the largest collection of Sanborn fire-insurance maps although thousands of state, local and university libraries as well as historical societies have their own smaller collections. 7 (See Figure 1)

These maps are drawn to scale and color coded to distinguish each building’s construction material -- olive for adobe, blue for stone, pink for brick, yellow for wood and gray for metal. Additionally there are symbols to record details and particulars, such as sprinkler systems, fire alarm, steam boilers, elevator details as well as window and door openings. Kim Keister’s article, entitled “Charts of Change,” clearly delineates the specifics of these maps and includes the key used to create a common and easily readable resource. Sanborn maps became an essential tool for fire-insurance companies, allowing the underwriter’s to recognize possible risks based on clear evidence of the buildings’ characteristics in particular areas. 8

Currently, Sanborn maps supply incredible historical information. As many areas were surveyed on a regular basis, sometimes as frequently as within six months time, a historical record was being kept. The evolution of cities and towns can be researched through successive surveys with buildings going up and coming down, with land being used for differing purposes, with new and necessary businesses growing or diminishing. They are a window into the changes, again as Keister’s title suggests.

Figure 1: Sanborn map of several buildings at Yale University in New Haven, Connecticut. Courtesy of Yale University Library, The Map Collection
**Bird’s Eye Views**

A bird’s-eye view describes the view of an object from above, as though the observer were a bird. This term can also be used to describe oblique views, drawn from an imagined perspective. Of course this took place before manned flight was common or aerial photography was developed. This term, bird’s eye, was used to distinguish views drawn from direct observation at high locations, for example a mountain or tower from those constructed from an imagined (bird’s) perspectives.

Known also as persective maps, panoramas or aero views, these maps were not generally drawn to scale but did show street patterns, individual buildings and major landscape features in perspective. The last great flourishing of them was in the mid-to-late 19th century, when bird’s eye view prints were popular in the United States and Europe. Commonly found in lithographs of cities across the country, these bird’s eye views were sold commercially as decorative art in parlors, placed in public buildings and displayed in other marketable settings.

John Reps outstanding resource, *Bird’s Eye Views*, offers examples of many cities across North America during the 19th century presented in this format. He recognizes the rapid changes for some of these growing cities through the series of prints, two notable examples being San Francisco and Los Angeles, both growing during the highlight of this craft of bird’s eye view lithographs.

![Bird's Eye View of New Haven, Conn.](http://www.jud.ct.gov/external/kids/history/Postcards/box/NH-12.htm)

**Figure 2:** Postcard illustrating a bird’s eye view of New Haven, Connecticut courtesy of http://www.jud.ct.gov/external/kids/history/Postcards/box/NH-12.htm
Legends

A legend or key is an explanatory list that defines symbols appearing in a map or chart. These keys usually show a small picture of each of the symbols used on the map, along with a written description of the meaning of each of these symbols. Some symbols, such as a mountain range and waterfall symbols, may resemble the features they represent whereas others, such as restaurants or gas stations, may not be as identifiable. Clarity is important for the reader to be able to focus on the data.

Floor plans

Simply stated, floor plans are like maps of rooms. A floor plan is a drawing that shows a space as seen from above with everything appearing flat. The basic purpose of floor plans is to show what a room or building will look like when complete. Measurements, doors and windows, placement of structural details such as fireplaces, bathroom fixtures, and appliances are all pieces of information one might obtain from a floor plan.

In addition, floor plans show how a room is organized, from fixed features to moveable features. (See Figure 3)

Figure 3: Floor plan of the first floor of a single family home courtesy of studiogfour.com/furnitureplan

Elevations

This term refers to drawings that show the front, back, or sides of a building. The information is used to see
what materials will be used and what height the structure will be. Elevations are drawn at the same scale as the building plan. These are the views you would see walking by or around the building, observing the exterior characteristics and qualities. Doorways, placement of windows and other openings in the building, details of design, the true look of the finished building are the goals of the drawing. The elevation, in essence, is the face of the building.

**Strategies**

I have a number of strategies in mind to help the students learn and become aware of where we live. Because of the varying levels of development and the presence of different learning styles, it is important to have a variety of presentations. Visual, auditory and kinesthetic learners all need opportunities to receive information in their most efficient way. And certainly sensorial experiences remain strongest in young minds and with a neighborhood right outside our classroom, many opportunities will be available.

Because many students in my class do not have the opportunity to walk around their neighborhoods, there will need to be many discussions throughout the unit about the procedure and rules about being a “good neighbor.” Because we will be out and about in our school neighborhood (not everyone’s resident area), it is important to be mindful of our presence and not be intrusive. This connects our two ideas of neighborhood and community.

Becoming part of this environment in a very purposeful way will strengthen the understanding and skill of observation and hopefully the ability to carry this information to their own neighborhood, should it be a different one. If these young children move, these are skills and knowledge that can help them in their new area, always a stressful time for children. But knowing there are more similarities than differences may be a new tool for them to use.

**Classroom / Curriculum Activities**

The students would have activities using maps to understand representative space. Starting with something as relative to them as mapping their bedroom or our classroom or even the playground to introduce them to an aerial view of the place they are in would give them a guide to the way a map works. Using maps of our city, state and other areas and helping them locate rivers, lakes, parks, roads, and other landmarks would introduce them to an even greater view. Experiencing the aerial view is new to some who may have never been in an airplane or even in a high building looking down.

Incorporating non-fiction reading and writing would help their skills, learning about types of homes, local manufacturers, development of neighborhoods, civic monuments, artistic activity, and oral histories. The students would learn about the neighborhood having a history, inviting local historians to speak and share stories from the area or park rangers, particularly from Edgewood Park, to give insight into the neighborhood landscape. With all of this, written reflections and stories would develop a deeper understanding of the
Certainly drawing their own maps and even creating three dimensional objects as a class project of creating our Westville neighborhood seem to be activities that would be purposeful and constructive. Learning through hands-on experiences is essential for young children and beyond that exciting to participate in.

This curriculum unit would require many walking field trips again for the sensorial experience that would give meaning to the abstractness of seat work. With this in mind, it is important to have parental or guardian permission and possibly chaperone and support during the excursion. With a class on first graders, supervision is necessary for academic support but certainly for safety issues as well.

**Lessons**

These sequential lessons will occur after introduction of houses, neighborhoods, and maps through whole group shared reading and small group guided reading instruction using literature focused on these subjects. Some suggestions are in the student reading list within this curriculum.

**Lesson One**

Objective: The students will learn to use geometric shapes to represent furniture in their floor plans in lesson two.

Materials: construction paper, scissors, pencils, cardboard tracers of squares, rectangles, and circles predetermined to fit a completed floor plan, envelopes

Procedure: After a brief introduction explaining floor plans as maps of rooms, invite the students to discuss the floor plan of their own classroom. Start with the students identifying the pieces of furniture in the classroom. These pieces will be represented by a shape and a color. As a class, count the number of desks, decide the shape (square or rectangle) and using precut tracer pieces, have the students cut the “desks” out of construction paper. Continue with other furniture pieces, such as teacher desk, computer tables, bookshelves, reading areas. Discuss the need to use different colors for different types of furniture. This initial lesson will end with their collection of shapes being stored in an envelope.

**Lesson Two**

Objective: The students will create floor plan of classroom and be able to identify the location of their desk.

Materials: copy of floor plan indicating doorways, windows, envelopes containing students’ work from Lesson 1, glue, foil star stickers

Procedure: Each student will need one copy of the empty floor plan. It is important the paper is oriented correctly on the student’s desks before they begin. Guide the students through the placement of their cutout pieces to represent the classroom floor plan. Before any gluing, check that the location of the pieces is correct. When they have finished gluing, give them a foil star sticker to identify the location of their own desk.
Lesson 3

Objective: The students will walk the playground and create a “floor plan” or map to show where equipment is located.

Materials: large art paper to represent area of playground with perimeter indicated

Procedure: This is intended as a whole class experience. As in Lessons 1 and 2, this will go in stages, first identifying the shapes needed, how many of each, and what on the playground needs to be included in the floor plan. Again using the geometric shapes of square, rectangle, circle, triangle have the students determine what will be representative shapes. Working in teams, have them make the playground equipment, picnic tables, trees, landscaping, fences, gates, etc. from construction paper as before. They will glue their pieces onto the large map of the playground.

Lesson 4

Objective: The students will draw floor plan of school and identify their classroom within -- walk perimeter of school.

Materials: large art paper to represent area of school, markers, if possible the architect’s floor plan of the building from the building administrator

Procedure: The students will walk the perimeter of the school to generate a basic understanding of the whole building. Discussion of sides being longer or maybe not just flat walls, where are there openings or different shapes? The goal is to have the students identify the general footprint of the building, recreate it on paper and place their classroom within the context of the building. As a class, with the teacher guiding, draw the shape of the school placing the classroom in its location.

Lesson 5

Objective: The students will draw the elevation of homes seen from our school

Materials: clipboards, paper, sketching pencils, colored pencils

Procedure -- This activity can be done from the playground at our school. The students will pick one building, not the school, to draw with details, incorporating geometry and symmetry. Emphasize the importance of using the whole paper so there will be room for detail. Demonstrate by drawing the house too small and not being able to fit all the windows, doors, etc. Show then a positive example and how much easier the project becomes. This is a several day lesson, having the students either continue a drawing or begin a new one. They can generate a collection of different neighborhood homes or the same house drawn several times. This can begin the discussion of similarities and differences that the students begin to notice which will lead into the next lesson.

Lesson 6

Objective: The students will join in a walking trip to identify how many homes on our block street by street to determine similarities and differences (old, new, materials, size, porch, chimney, windows)

Materials: clipboards, pencils, chart of similarities and differences
Procedure: A pre-activity to this lesson would be a discussion about what the students have noticed about houses. Do they all have chimneys? Are they all the same height? Are some older looking and why? Decide what the students will be looking for and create a list. With several chaperones, enjoy a walking trip of the neighborhood. The students will collect data using tally marks on their charts to note the characteristics of the houses in the area. After the fact finding to tour use the data to create on general chart to post with all the data collected by the students,

Lesson 7

Objective: The students will create homes and other buildings with varied materials in a combined classroom project.

Materials: small milk cartons, juice boxes, small boxes, felt glue, markers, colored paper, cardboard pieces, 2-3 large foam core boards or similarly sturdy base

Procedure: Begin collecting materials to create the diorama several days before the project. This project will take several days of preparing the houses and other buildings, attaching them to the neighborhood (foam core board) and creating streets and trees and other added neighborhood details. This should look like a model of the neighborhood where the students have been working and learning. Although exactness is not quite possible, the general ideas should be apparent, homes of different sizes and colors, neighborhood buildings, streets they have visited, their school and playground.

Lesson 8

Objective: The students will follow a map to locate “treasure” to demonstrate orienteering skills.

Materials: students maps of the classroom, map of the playground

Procedure: This could be designed as a scavenger hunt. Generate a list of directions to be given orally to small groups of students. An example might be “Go to the fourth desk from the door, from that location turn to the second bookcase, walk five steps forward, stop, turn to the reading table, walk three steps, look under the rug for the treasure.” Have the students use their resources from the previous lessons to remember the locations of things to use for reference spots.

Lesson 9

Objective: The students will create their version of a Sanborn map using information from their created neighborhood.

Materials: copy of a Sanborn map; large art paper; construction paper in colors olive, blue, pink, yellow, and gray; glue; scissors; colored pencils; rulers

Procedure: Discuss the idea and use of a Sanborn map and what makes it an important tool for firefighters and historians. Identify the need to use the color choices to show construction materials. Using the prepared neighborhood from Lesson 7 as the guide, have the students create their own “Sanborn” style map. The students may add labels to show street names or other landmark information.
Student Reading List

This is a suggested list to begin the curriculum unit after providing some background information for the students. These are useful for shared reading or small group instruction.


Notes

1 Dana, Peter H., The Geographer’s Craft Project, (Boulder: Department of Geography, University of Colorado, 1999), http://www.colorado.edu/geography/ (accessed July 1, 2008)

2 Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary, 1286.

3 Webster’s, Ibid, 414.


Keister, Ibid.


Schlereth, Ibid.


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**Reading List / Bibliography**


Brown provides background on New Haven’s neighborhoods and historic roads. The chapter on the Westville and Edgewood provided photographs and historical narrative which I found extremely helpful in understanding the evolution of the neighborhood, discussing architects, buildings and renovations.


This collection of thirteen building styles popular in North America from the seventeenth the early years of the twentieth century shows elevations, floor plans, perspective and detail drawings taken from period sources. This covers styles located in Westville.


This scholar and historian presents his philosophy of cartographic history and the meaning of maps. These essays provided a social perspective and illustrate how the creation of maps is not necessarily a simple representation of reality.


The author provides a history of urban dwellings and the people who built them and lived in them. One aspect of this book that is directly helpful is that different types of town houses are considered, the merchant’s house, the servants’ quarter, the widow’s dower and more. Also floor plans and photographs are included to further clarify the differences.


The authors provide information on researching the social, cultural, and technological history of particular houses or neighborhoods. Written records, construction techniques, and putting together a house history are all included, as well as why it would be of interest to explore a home’s history.


This article described the importance of Sanborn maps from a historic perspective, helping to understand the evolution of the built environment.


This book includes several essays describing teaching and learning history through artifacts. Particularly useful was Chapter 3 on Past Cityscapes: Uses of Cartography in Urban History.


This book provides many illustrations, maps and photographs; particularly useful were the descriptions and floor plans of the three decker apartment buildings.


Many references to young learners and their perspectives on maps


The author provides insight into five themes: community, nature, technology, money and art. Most useful was discussion of architecture as a way of defining relationships within communities


**Appendix One: New Haven Public Schools: Implementing District Standards**

**Content Standard Two: Local, United States, World History**

2.4 Students will place the history of their family life in context.

**Content Standard Three: Historical Themes**

3.3 Students will examine family life and cultures of different people at different times

**Content Standard Four: Applying History**

4.3 Students will be active learners in cultural institutions, such as museums and historical exhibitions.

4.5 Students will recognize relationship between people of the past and present circumstances

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