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Engaging Students through Mapping Local History

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Abstract

This article argues that the integration of local history and geography through collaborative digital mapping can lead to greater interest in civic participation by early adolescent learners. In the study, twenty-nine middle school students were asked to research, represent, and discuss local urban sites of historical significance on an interactive Web platform. As students learned more about local community events, people, and historical forces, they became increasingly engaged with the material and enthusiastic about making connections to larger issues and processes. In the final session, students expressed interest in participating in their own communities through joining nonprofit organizations and educating others about community history and daily life.

Keywords

historical thinking; civic engagement; digital mapping; interactive learning; Web 2.0

INTRODUCTION

In *Geography for Life*, the seventeenth U.S. National Geography Standard appears under the heading, “the uses of geography.” Entitled, “how to apply geography to interpret the past,” the description provides a compelling case for integrating historical learning with geographical analysis. The authors contend that only by engaging with three different but interconnected points of view—those of space, environment, and chronology—can the human story be accurately told:

An understanding of geography can inform an understanding of history in two important ways. First, the events of history take place within geographic contexts. Second, those events are motivated by people’s perceptions, correct or otherwise, of geographic contexts. By exploring what the world was like and how it was perceived at a given place at a given time, the geographically informed person is able to interpret major historical issues. (, 101)¹

Unfortunately, the laudable goal of creating this geographically informed person appears elusive in many actually existing classrooms, and both history and geography remain the target of numerous school-related jokes. Geography is often derided for a reputed reliance on memorization, while history suffers for a supposed emphasis on dry detail at the cost of the big picture. Writing about history education in the United States, for example, the humorist Dave Barry (1997, 2) once quipped, "Another part of the problem is the system used to teach history in our schools, a system known technically, among professional educators, as the Boring Method."

Part of the problem for teachers hoping to integrate geography and history learning in the classroom is the broad-based suspicion by students that neither subject relates directly to their everyday lives. For young teens especially, historical events can seem remote and abstracted from their own issues and concerns. And as many educators have noted, early adolescent interests seem more naturally inclined to focus at the micro scale: on themselves, their changing bodies, social relationships, and proximate encounters, rather than on the grander sweep and scope of historical processes and events (Eccles and Midgley 1990; Roeser, Eccles, and Sameroff 2000).

Yet while some make note of a seeming lack of early adolescent interest in engaging the world's problems (Putnam 2000; Galston 2004), others have pointed to their passionate attentiveness towards things that matter to them, often characterized as subjects both literally and metaphorically "closer to home," as well as technologically novel and exciting (Rheingold 2002; Zukin *et al.* 2006; Xenos and Foot 2008). Clearly, many adolescents have great enthusiasm for certain kinds of civic engagement, most notably those that involve their own social worlds and networks, as well as innovative forms of e-learning (Bachen *et al.* 2008; Flicker *et al.* 2008; Calenda and Meijer 2009; Greenhow, Robelia, and Hughes 2009; Santo, Ferguson, and Trippel 2010). Moreover, the ability to harness this enthusiasm is critical for their political as well as intellectual development. How then can teachers capture these passions and teach them history and geography at the same time?

Our research on this topic speaks directly to a large and growing coterie of scholars in education, the social sciences, humanities, and information sciences, who are interested in young people's use of new digital technologies and social networking sites, and their potential adoption in school environments (e.g., Alibrandi 2003; Callison and Preddy 2006; Wells 2010). What are the potential learning opportunities afforded by embracing the teen digital revolution? How can this learning be tied to enhanced civic commitment? In what ways might new kinds of participatory mapping technologies be harnessed in pursuit of these goals? A key objective of our participant research is to engage these questions in geography through the use of new geovisualization technologies, and to build connections between new ways of representing space and historical learning.

A second goal of the article is to emphasize the value of interactive teaching and participatory research. In interactive teaching the instructor elaborates on students' comments and expands their thinking through fostering conversation about a particular topic. This can occur through pedagogic strategies such as revoicing, uptake, and various forms of instructional conversation. At its most basic, revoicing is a discursive strategy

wherein the teacher facilitates a student discussion by rearticulating or reframing students' answers; revoicing both reinforces student knowledge and fosters greater student attention and interaction (O'Connor and Michaels 1993). Uptake involves teachers posing questions that incorporate responses and feedback from students (Nystrand *et al.* 1996). Instructional conversation emphasizes the importance of exploring ideas of relevance to students through open-ended discussion (Leinhardt and Steel 2005). These pedagogic methods are considered to be student-centered approaches to learning, involving active communication, collaboration, and participation by students.

In participatory research the students are actively engaged in the research project, and the researchers are engaged in teaching the students and attempting to improve their skills, knowledge base, and their understanding of the core ideas and issues under discussion (Kindon and Elwood 2009). Our participatory research involved iterative interpretive analyses of a collaborative process of teaching and learning about mapping local history, not a pre-test and post-test mode of evaluating a specific set of tasks. The value of this approach as a useful complement to other methods is that it can provide insight into the interactive social process of teaching and learning, in this case helping us to better understand the process through which students gain both research and mapping skills. It is also helpful in understanding how they learn critical thinking about geographies and histories over time and in concert with others, including both their peers and their teachers (Wiegand 2002, 2006; Elwood 2009).

In the project introduced below we examined whether and how a participatory and reflective process of learning about local history could encourage young people's civic awareness and interest in greater public engagement. We investigated how interactive mapping technologies might enhance such learning experiences by encouraging teams of youth to research, compare, and discuss the cultural and political geographies of their own urban neighborhoods collaboratively and over an extended time frame (cf. Elwood 2006). Using Web 2.0 technologies similar to Google Maps, we developed an interactive mapping platform that enables young people to map and annotate significant historical sites with comments, icons, sketches, and general reflections.² The platform also functions as a flexible digital archive where youth can compile evidence gathered from their research activities and personal interactions related to particular sites on the maps. In addition to online research, these include participant observation, visits to libraries, oral history interviews, and personal and family experiences.

As students investigated and located themes or events that had occurred locally, they began to see the interconnections with larger processes and regions. The interdependencies between the local and the global thus enabled them to feel both personally connected to what they were studying, and also more attuned to the broader scope and sweep of history. In the

²The platform we developed is a fully open-source mapping interface that uses Javascript to display basemaps and student-generated map items in OpenLayers. The backend software products are MapServer and MySQL, served via Apache Web Server. A primary reason for developing our own platform was to allow primary and middle school students to engage with these basic geovisualization technologies. (Under Google's terms of service you must be 13-years-old to have a Google account.) Using our own platform also allowed us ownership of the data, and an ability to guarantee complete privacy to our research subjects. For teachers wishing to use similar geovisualization technologies in the classroom, Google Maps will accommodate most of the technological functions discussed here.

final few group sessions, students also expressed interest in the role that space plays in creating social and economic insiders and outsiders, and also in challenging dominant narratives about urban and national belonging.

HISTORICAL **T**HINKING AND **G**EOGRAPHICAL **E**NGAGEMENT

Project Design and Methods

The research was conducted in an independent girls' school located in a poor district of south Seattle.³ The class we worked with was composed of twenty-nine seventh-grade girls, of whom 30 percent received financial aid and 45 percent were girls of color. Our two-week mapping component was connected to a larger five-week project on the cultural history of Seattle. The broader project involved the creation of a video documentary on the history of a local Seattle group. The students chose to research the history of five different groups: African Americans, women, Filipinos, Japanese, and Chinese. Each girl was assigned to a team of four or five students, and each team then prepared historical research on their chosen group. They also conducted interviews with local individuals who were associated with the group in some way, including historians, writers, academics, community members, and community activists.

The online mapping component was introduced in six 2-hour sessions in the second and third weeks of the cultural history project. For the online mapping part of the project, students used our interactive platform, which supports multimedia mapping and interactive collaboration among student team members. The platform allows students to zoom in and out from street-level to globe, to create and locate features using the three geographic objects common to most GIS/mapping software (points, lines, areas), and to append additional media (such as text, photos, sketches, and videos) to each feature. A commenting function allows students to add additional content to the map objects created by others, a feature of our platform that significantly enriched the collaborative nature of students' learning. As students (and also teachers) posed questions, answered questions, and added additional information to original map objects, this running exchange created an ever-accreting record of the students' learning.

In the first session, the students chose screen names to use in the mapping platform, and experimented with the platform's basic tools for creating map objects, object annotations, and comments. To yield a baseline understanding of the students' knowledge about the urban histories/geographies of the group they were studying, and their initial skills for cartographic representation, we asked them to think of a place that was important to the history of their group, then to write it down. Using a paper map of Seattle, they were then asked to situate it by drawing a point, a line, or an area on the map. After the students located something of significance on a paper map, we asked them to repeat this process

³The research discussed in this article comprises the second year of a three-year research project. In the first year, the researchers worked with students in an afterschool YMCA program connected with a public middle school, which was also located in a poor district of south Seattle. The independent girls' school was chosen as a result of proximity to the first school, relatively high numbers of children of color (although not as high a percentage as in the public school), a good working relationship with the classroom teacher, and as a way of determining some of the differences between public and private institutional spaces vis-à-vis using the Web platform.

using our mapping platform. Repeating this initial mapping exercise in paper and digital forms allowed us to observe the students' basic cartographic skills *and* their digital mapping skills separately. (The latter required some proficiency in using the mouse to move between map scales, to re-center the map as needed, and to find and place the pin accurately.) Further, the introductory activity also seeded each groups' collective map with several important historical sites.

The research team was made up of two university professors and two graduate students. The team worked in concert with the classroom teacher, and prepared a detailed curriculum for each of the six sessions. Each session involved active participation by the researchers. For example, the researchers helped the students to think of significant places for their group's history with various prompts. We also explained how to find useful historical archives and how to experiment effectively with the Web platform. This approach is consistent with an interactive, team-based approach to teaching and learning. Notably, three of the four members of the research team were relatively new to the city, and were learning about Seattle alongside the students. At the end of every session, all four members of the team wrote detailed field notes about what he or she observed, and shared the notes with the others. During large-group meetings with the students, one researcher led the discussion, while the others took notes. Maps and handouts were all retained and filed.

Linking Historical Text with Spatial Thinking

After the students located and placed a symbol (point, line, or area) for their first significant map site, many then experienced difficulty in adding anything more to the Web platform. Most of them had trouble understanding how to research historical information about places or processes of significance, and then representing this textual data on a digital map. Some difficulties included finding useful sources online, navigating existing online archives, and finding relevant information from urban history books. Others struggled with how to use place names as search terms, or how to sift through the search results to identify the best possible sites to explore further. One student, for example, put "China" and "history" into Google's search engine, and ended up on a tourist Web site for the Great Wall of China. No matter what the prompts were from the researchers, on the first several tries many of the girls struggled with finding significant places for their groups. For many, it seemed that the concepts we were asking them to apply (e.g., historical significance, Seattle, Japanese) were initially too abstract and removed and they ended up finding things like sushi restaurants and defaulting time and again to Google for the bulk of their research. This was in spite of a list of good sites and archival resources supplied by the teacher at the start of the project, and which they had downloaded onto their personal computers. (These sites included the Washington State Municipal Archives, Historylink, the Museum of History and Industry, and numerous other sites and books related to each individual group's Seattle history and culture.)

One of the initial problems we noted was an early inability to identify "history" with place, especially, it seemed, with the places of a familiar, everyday landscape. With our help, however, the students began to make more direct connections between a good article or story pertaining to their group, and the Seattle neighborhood where the event occurred. It

was particularly helpful when they read about a building that was important, or about their group's literal spatial movement from one part of the city to another, or across the country.

For example, Beyoncé⁴ became quite interested in the story of the Mercer girls. The so-called Mercer girls were educated women and teachers from Lowell, Massachusetts, who were encouraged by Asa Mercer to travel to Seattle for jobs and husbands in the mid-1860s. Beyoncé read the following information on the Historylink Web site:

They would travel by train to New York City where a ship would be waiting to take them west to Aspinwall, Panama (then part of Colombia). From there they would journey across the Isthmus by train to Panama City and then again by ship to San Francisco and Seattle. The citizens of Seattle were eager to welcome them into their homes and the community while finding them jobs in the various schools. (Historylink 2011)

After reading this, however, she was confused as to why they didn't just "go straight across." When one of the researchers explained verbally that they took a ship because it was a time before the airplane, the transcontinental railroad was not yet completed, and it was cheaper and easier than cross-country travel, she still didn't understand. But when the researcher and the student spent time looking at a map and tracing the journey along the coasts, while also comparing the difficult topography of the land crossing, she became quite excited. After this, she understood better how the historical articles she was finding frequently contained the information necessary to allow her to think about and represent spatial processes on the map.

At first, after the students began to find useful articles from good archival sites, they just absorbed the information and talked about it with each other and the researchers. To be effective researchers, however, they needed to develop a conceptual model for their search strategy (what counts as *significant*), use search tools, identify something spatial or geographical in the resulting content, and then translate this into something map-able. These steps are all more complicated than it first appears. By the beginning of the third session, however, many of the students were beginning to comprehend space and spatial relations in a new way, including how people actually moved across space and were allowed (or not allowed) to live in specific places, and how this impacted their community and their lives. They started to assess the information they were finding for its spatial value (*vis-à-vis* adding it to their team's map), and enjoyed finding photographs and videos to accompany the text and points on their map.

Using Local Data to Connect to Teen Interests

One of the students we worked with appeared dis-interested in the cultural mapping at first, often rolling her eyes, talking with friends, and drawing cartoons and notes on our handouts. She became far more involved, however, after finding stories and places related to her own Filipino heritage. During the third session, this student, Nonnie, learned about Mariano Guiang, a boxer of Filipino heritage, who arrived in Seattle in 1924, and whose story was

⁴The students chose their own "secret names" to be used as pseudonyms throughout the research process.

captured as part of the Washington State Oral History Project in 1976 (see Historylink 2011). Nonnie wanted to map the boxing ring where Guiang fought, but found that it no longer exists. However, she mapped the street corner where the gym was once located, and in the process of looking for this information, gained expertise in a number of different mapping and research-based skills. She also picked up on more content-oriented knowledge related to the development of the Filipino community in Seattle during the early part of the century.

Nonnie remained interested in cultural history mapping after discovering that she is a distant relative of one of the Filipino men that her team interviewed for their video documentary. And when one of the researchers asked her to add something from her own life onto the team map, she pinpointed the Filipino cultural center as an important historic site, noting that the center still runs a variety of youth activities in which she has participated. She wanted to add “my school” to her map as well, and when a researcher asked her why, she said, “because I go here—I’m Filipino, so there’s Filipinos at this school.”

Nonnie thus began to connect her own life to the historical places and events that she was mapping. Some of the other students also found preliminary links between the people and communities they were studying and their own lives. In the first week of the project MaxChow, for example, discovered that her grandfather knew one of the people interviewed by her team. Another student felt that there might be a connection between one of the street names (in the International District) and her own last name. Even finding their own houses on the map caused great excitement and enthusiasm.

By the third and fourth mapping sessions all of the researchers noticed a surge of interest in the whole project as the students’ points, images, and text emerged online and were commented on by the others. Prior to this, the archival work had seemed more like schoolwork, whereas suddenly it became absorbing and fun when they could both see the product visually and connect it to their everyday lives and worlds. The visual cognition was clearly very important in their learning, as was the sense of immediacy and relevancy of the content.

During the group commenting session on the final day, we noted that the students researching the African American experience had underscored the fact that some of the people and places they were studying had had significant social impacts on the contemporary urban fabric of the city. For example, after mapping the Black Panthers headquarters (Fig. 1), they talked in detail about the social service provisions the group had coordinated in the Central District (where a few of the students lived), and how important these services still were for the community. Other students also commented on the importance of community centers and nonprofits that had been active in earlier eras of the city, and that were still in operation. Most of the teams included a cultural or community center such as the Japanese American Citizens’ League, the NAACP, the Chong Wa Benevolent Association, the Filipino Community Center, etc. The final team maps showed the critical role of civic institutions in Seattle both as a locus for social services, activism, and resistance, and as a site for reinforcing cultural practices and community ties.

What was most impressive, perhaps, was the growing ability of many students to talk about these ideas at a much more macro scale or conceptual level than they could at the beginning of the mapping sessions. At the start, they were focused on neighborhoods and individuals, with very little ability to contextualize why these might have mattered socially or politically. They did not include other related issues nor did they see some of the specific spaces or events as examples of broader processes or concepts. By the end of the two weeks, however, most of the students were able to make these kinds of local-global connections. The team working on the Chinese experience, for example, talked in detail about the Chinese Exclusion Act, telling us quite a bit about the social and urban implications of these forms of exclusion for Seattle, and how important the benevolent associations were in supporting the existing community during those difficult years.

Scaling Up the Politics of the Local

The researchers also noted that many students seemed to be thinking in more complex ways about the interdependencies of significant places and processes. They would begin from a site or place they had found interesting at the local urban scale, and use it as an entry point to a richer description of historical and geographical questions. Kelsey and Bubbles, for example, called the researchers over to help in finding something local they had researched and wanted to include on the map (Boeing Field); we collectively then explained and discussed the importance of the site in the broader context of the migration of women for industrial labor during World War II. This exchange manifests the value of a participatory research project, wherein the students' learning *process* can be observed as a result of the close interaction between researchers and students. The main substance of the inquiry and how the students make connections between historical and spatial learning becomes evident through active involvement with their struggles and insights.

In another example, the girls who mapped Port Townsend (where several hundred Filipinos had been quarantined) drew lines between Port Townsend and Seattle, and then also drew a line connecting these places to the Philippines. At least two of the teams placed markers on the nation from which their group had originally migrated (China and Japan, respectively). Without prompting from the researchers, and with a starting scale map of Seattle, the students zoomed out to place points regionally and also internationally. Their growing awareness and discussion of the spatial relationships between geographical regions reflected not just improved geographical knowledge, but also a growing understanding of the geopolitical relationships of specific historical periods.

Many of the girls began to get a good sense of the wider Seattle region as well, especially those who had placed points outside the city such as at Port Townsend or Olympia. They became adept at scrolling between Seattle and these points, and in the process learned about the whole urban network. Overall, the students became much more comfortable navigating through their maps, and gained a greater sense of where things were, particularly when they had to leave comments on their team members' maps. The Japanese team was particularly aware of how spread out their points were throughout the country because of the Japanese internments during World War II, and were eager to show this off to the others through zooming between different map scales.

By the fourth session, the students began to employ a wider range of representational choices, mostly the addition of lines to show movement from one place to the other, or to indicate a distant location. For example, in the Japanese team, Pengturt inserted a line linking Seattle and Texas to note the location of an internment camp where some Japanese from Seattle had been interned during World War II. Georgie also placed a pin in Idaho at the Minidoka National Historic Site, where she wrote, “Minidoka was once an incarceration camp. One of the people that we interviewed was interned in Minidoka as a teenager” (Fig. 2). In the first couple sessions, most symbols and related discussions were pitched at the neighborhood scale, with the historical cultural significance of the group articulated in very broad terms: for example, as a place where people in the group had lived, or sometimes even as simple as, “this is where Filipinos are.” By the latter map sessions, however, the content and related comments (such as the above) began to be much more complex and detailed, involving individual people, forms of resistance/activism, spatial processes like internment, socioeconomic transformations such as women’s entry into the industrial work force during World War II, gender stereotypes, and racial discrimination.

A main geographical connection was made on the penultimate day, when the student teams all gathered together to talk about their maps. One by one, each team’s map was projected onto a screen, and a student volunteer clicked on one of the map symbols, which caused a photograph, text, and the comment stream to pop up. After noting the location of the symbol, reading the text, and looking at the photo (or other graphic), one of the researchers led a discussion about themes common to many of the team maps. One of the first themes to emerge was the way that different groups had all been segregated or isolated spatially in different historical periods.

Beginning with the Filipino team’s map symbol at Port Townsend (a place used to quarantine 339 Filipino immigrants because of the threat of spinal meningitis—a threat later reported to be unfounded), the other groups then made connections with the ways that their own group had also been separated from the dominant culture at different historical moments. The value of collaborative research and interaction came through in these group discussions and also in the comments section of the Web platform. For example, when Bee mapped the quarantining of the Filipinos originally, she noted that it was conceivable that they were quarantined because of discrimination or other considerations, rather than the official rationale of the threat of contagion. She wrote, “It is even possible that the sailors wanted the Filipinos away so they quarantined them. At this time Seattle was segregated” (Fig. 3). Bee’s mapped line from Port Townsend to Seattle, and her interpretation of what had happened there to the Filipinos, provoked much further discussion and thought, both through a series of comments on the platform, as well as in the group forum. The students used her findings and explanation as an entry into a wider discussion of the concept of spatial discrimination as manifested in processes such as quarantining, internment, redlining, and legislation such as the Chinese Exclusion Act.

After looking at numerous different points, areas, and lines on the maps, the students discussed how groups might end up in a spatial cluster for a number of different reasons. Some girls in the women’s group noted the importance of social groups advocating for their political rights as part of a committee or organization; others talked about the importance of

sociocultural feelings of membership achieved through the formation of local ethnic societies. On her mapped point (Fig. 4), Nonnie indicated how the Filipino Community Center is still an active and important organization in the city, with spelling bees and drill teams for children.

In the final session of the two weeks, the researchers facilitated a group discussion concerning what the students felt they had learned through the digital mapping project. We asked them to confer in pairs and small groups first, before opening it up to the class as a whole. What follows is a collective reflection on the learning process as explained by the students themselves:

Bee: I learned things happen where they happen and why specific places have specific functions. I started to see history where it happens as opposed to when it happens.

Maxchow: I learned that a lot of things were close to each other and to me.

Funnygummi: I learned how the Filipinos had to go to work but they lived very far from where they worked... this was because of the restrictions on where they lived.

SSEdgar: I learned to visualize redlining because we outlined it spatially.

Nonnie: I could see that lots of non-profit and community organizations have persisted in the neighborhoods for a long time.

Bufanda: I see how everyday places are part of history. I see familiar places and know how they have changed over time.

Spiggy: Before this I knew what happened but not where, like the Boeing women lived all together, but it was quite far from where they worked... how did they get to their worksite?

Spongebob: I knew that the internment camps were far away, but now know exactly how far away they were, and how isolated the Japanese Americans were. They had very little space for such a big population.

On the final day the students were given a civic engagement worksheet to help us determine what links had been made between the students' historical learning and their present day civic awareness. The questions involved problems that had been faced by their group, what members of the community had done to resolve those problems or change the situation, how these events and processes had or hadn't been represented on their map, and finally, whether the student or the class might get involved in solving any remaining issues that their group was facing.

Students noted early problems faced by their group such as redlining, discrimination, segregation, and racism, and many also answered positively to the question of whether any of these problems still existed in Seattle. Nonnie, the girl who had become interested in the story of Mariano Guiang, and who mapped the Filipino Community Center, wrote "Racism" as a continuing problem in the city. She answered the final question, "How might you or your class get involved in solving [these problems]?" in the following way: "By taking part in some organizations and volunteer to help kids or old people. Help kids in Philippines"

(Fig. 5). Bufanda, Bambi, and SSEdgar, from the African American team, wrote, “Stalk the police and keep a tally of what races are pulled over and for what. Join the non-profit organizations.” Beyoncé and Cat, from one of the women’s teams, wrote, “Inform people that everybody has equal rights; commercials; write an article; advertise; stop objectification.” Seaboo, Bubbles, and Spiggy, from the other women’s team, wrote, “We can help by raising people’s awareness about the topic (like the video documentary/pay it forward).”

After the two-week mapping component was finished, the students completed their video documentaries on the cultural histories of ethnic groups and women in Seattle. They then showed them one evening to a large audience of parents, teachers, community activists, writers, and other members of the Seattle community. In addition to screening the documentaries, each of which was approximately 7–10 minutes long, the students answered questions posed by the audience. Many members of the audience asked the students about what they had learned during the course of making the video. Several students spoke passionately about the discrimination faced by their group in Seattle, their surprise in learning this history, their admiration of those who resisted it, and their determination to educate people—including the audience itself, about what had happened in their own home town.

CONNECTING GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY, AND CITIZENSHIP

Looking at the past geographically requires that attention be given to the beliefs and attitudes of the peoples of bygone times regarding the environment, human migration, land use, and especially their own rights and privileges versus those of others. (Geography Education Standards Project 1994, 103)

Efforts to link history, geography, and civics go back a long way. In an article in the *Journal of Geography*, Oliver Nolan (1928, 77) discussed the important “correlation of geography, history, civics, and economics.” In it he expounded his pedagogic beliefs, which rested largely on the value of hands-on learning and engaging the personal interests, ethics, and motivations of the eighth grade boys he was teaching. Beginning with shop activities related to tool making and electricity, Nolan taught about every item and process that the students encountered, and from those beginnings—such as the “Copper Project,” he made links to resources and resource extraction, history, international trade, geopolitics, and citizenship. All of these were grounded in basic geographic knowledge, but were enlivened and enlarged through his ability to help students make the relevant connections to other areas of learning and to the ethical issues underpinning them all. His article ends with a final section entitled, “training for democracy at its best” (Nolan 1928, 82).

In the contemporary period, the “nugget of copper from the Calumet and Hecla mines” with which Nolan began his teaching has been replaced by electronic devices. The pedagogic insights he developed, however, remain the same. It is still helpful to draw young teens in through appealing to their personal and social lives and building on their everyday geographical understandings and incipient political interests. The new digital technologies can play an important role in this as they involve the social networks and means of communication most favored by early adolescents in the contemporary era (Bennett 2008;

Wells 2010). They can also be adapted easily and effectively into interactive and participatory forms of teaching and research, as demonstrated in our Web-based geovisualization project with thae students. Interactive, student-centered teaching is generally heralded by educational practitioners as critical to the development of democratic learners and active citizens (Beane 2002, 2006) Our own participatory research explored these connections through an examination of how contemporary geovisualization technologies can be used in a collaborative learning environment to develop critical knowledge about local history and spur greater interest in civic involvement.

The research documented here indicates how increased knowledge and awareness about local places can serve as a basis for the development of young people's commitment to some form of democratic action. This type of learning doesn't just record cultural histories and spatial relationships; it also shows why they matter. An awareness of our neighborhoods, our community histories, and their connections to larger forces can help create world citizens—those concerned about the local, but always in relation to wider forces and events. As Schmidt (2011, 107) writes:

Geographic education prepares students to think about places and the people who occupy and give meaning to these places. In doing so, geographic education asks students to think about themselves and others in the world, particularly how our identification with places affects how we understand people and places, far and near, as familiar or foreign. Citizenship is one sense of self attached to places and how we teach about places has implications for how students conceive of themselves as citizens.

It is the interdependencies between the places of local history and global processes which Web-based mapping projects can help students to visualize and better comprehend. We believe that understanding these forms of articulation encourages students to feel more directly connected to the histories and geographies they are studying. It also gives them a chance to perceive their communities and the individuals and groups who were active in forming and defending them, as important actors in the historical record. Finally, it allows young people the space to imagine themselves as members of an ongoing community, and as citizens and agents of change both different and similar to those who came before them.

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Figure 1.
Students map the Black Panthers headquarters and note their contributions to the local African American community.

Figure 2.
Georgie places a pin at the Minidoka National Historic Site and discusses an interview with a former Japanese internment survivor.

Figure 3.
Bee draws a line between Port Townsend and Seattle.

Figure 4.
Nonnie maps the Filipino Community Center and discusses its ongoing importance for children.

Wednesday Worksheet
March 9, 2011

SECRET NAME: NONNIE Group Lens: Filipino Lens

1. Describe some of the problems your group faced in Seattle.
they were discriminated against because of the way they talked the kinds of food they ate and the way they dressed

2. What did members of the community do to solve these problems or change the situation?
After many problems they came to a solution and celebrated their freedom to be who they wanted to be.

3. Who took those actions? (This might be an individual person, an organization, or a group of people). the community its self.
(Filipino community center)
★ Bob Santos
(Uncle Bob)

4. Did any of these actions or processes make it onto your map? Which ones?
Yes, like ★ Filipino community center
★ Seward park
(★ ect...)

5. Look back to question 1. Do any of these problems remain in Seattle today?
♥ Racism

6. How might you or your class get involved in solving them?
★ By taking part in some organization and volunteer to help kids or old people.

help kids in Philippines

Figure 5.
Civic engagement worksheet completed by two students investigating the Filipino community.