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CAYDO: Connecting the Gaps of Community Youth Assessments

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CAYDO: Connecting the Gaps of Community Youth Assessments

Abstract

Community-based assessments can be strategies that aim to work in partnership with individuals and organizations to empower communities. Often identified as a comparable alternative to needs assessments, Community YouthMapping has been developed to include youth in the community youth development process. However, the authors note significant gaps in Community YouthMapping and offer a new assessment technique that includes an adapted youth mapping process, Comprehensive Assessment of Youth Development Opportunities (CAYDO). This article takes an investigative look at the relevance of including this procedure as a needs assessment tool in the program planning and community development process.

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Introduction

Community assessments have long been an active practice of the Cooperative Extension Service (Sofranko & Khan, 1988). Needs assessments, the most popular method, have been used to identify and address local problems through educational programs. However, some researchers have argued that typical needs assessments tend to pose a number of disadvantages, such as cost, inability to articulate needs, inaccurate translation and evaluation of needs by outsiders, and, often, a focus entirely on community deficiencies (Israel & Ilvento, 1995; Sofranko & Khan, 1988; Etling, 1995; Nieto, Schaffner, & Henderson, 1997). Sofranko and Khan (1988) recommended pursuing methods of assessing needs from a plethora of informative sources, one being local citizens.

Moreover, others have acknowledged the importance of strengthening communities by building upon existing assets (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1990; Dorfman, 1998; Roberts, Dedrick & Mitchell, 1998). Today, with limited resources, it is imperative to harness the capacity of individuals and organizations within the community to address community needs. One major resource that often goes unnoticed is young people, who can provide significant contributions if allowed to participate in the community development process.

Indeed, the energy of youth should be incorporated by providing them with real opportunities to contribute in meaningful ways. Involving youth in the community enhances youth decision-making skills while building solid adult-youth partnerships (Kurth-Schai, 1988). Scholars have also documented that, through community involvement, young people can develop skills to become more responsible and capable of addressing civic issues relating to social, economic, and environmental problems (Israel & Ilvento, 1995; Rennekamp, 1993). Furthermore, young people foster their own development through "mattering"--the positive youth-centered engagement in communities (Eccles & Gootman, 2002).

Identifying and connecting local assets through an assessment serves as a catalyst for effective neighborhood revitalization (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1990). Community YouthMapping is one way

to collect assessment information that empowers youth within communities (Academy for Educational Development, 2001). However, the purpose of this article is to note significant gaps in Community YouthMapping. The authors address these gaps by presenting a new assessment technique that includes, in part, an adapted youth mapping process. In presenting more comprehensive procedures, the authors do not seek to discredit community youth assessments, but to acknowledge alternatives that may potentially lead to more positive youth development opportunities.

What Is Community YouthMapping?

Community YouthMapping is a form of what researchers have described as participatory evaluation (Niето, Schaffner, & Henderson, 1997), which aims to solicit practical, useful, and empowering methodologies. The goal of Community YouthMapping is to canvass communities in search of positive resources and opportunities for young people and their families. Community YouthMapping, unlike most needs assessments, engages young people at specific stages of the assessment process. In addition, whereas a traditional needs assessment would focus more on deficits (e.g., crime, vacant buildings), Community YouthMapping targets positive assets (e.g., parks, YMCA's, youth club meeting facilities).

Community YouthMapping, developed by the Academy for Educational Development's (AED) Center for Youth Development and Policy Research (Academy for Educational Development, 2001), allows a community to gather an accurate picture of what local youth need by first seeking the advice of the youth. With Community YouthMapping, young people visit areas of the community and caring adults, who have a vested interest in serving youth and the community, respectively.

Upon collection and analysis of the data, the information is mapped using Geographic Information System (GIS) software. The mapped information provides a powerful resource for youth service providers and others concerned about the well-being of young people. Many communities either do not have such information readily available, or the data will often sit untouched, becoming outdated (Academy for Educational Development, 2001).

The practice of Community YouthMapping has occurred in over 30 sites across the country within the past decade. A number of organizations, such as the National 4-H Council, National Urban League, and United Way, have partnered with AED in carrying out the process.

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee's Center for Urban Initiatives and Research (1999) reported a Community YouthMapping project that occurred in the city during the summers of 1997 and 1998. Teenagers in 10 Milwaukee neighborhoods conducted block-by-block inventories identifying local youth resources. The participants made recommendations to improve the community and were later invited to share the success of the project with interested parties in Miami, Florida, and Washington, DC. The project has gained critical acclaim and financial support from the public and private sectors.

Extension has also participated in similar youth mapping processes with very productive results. Iowa State University Extension, Polk County (1999) worked with youth to survey over 3,000 businesses and organizations. The findings resulted in a Web site for the public to search and access available resources. A teen community service club was also organized at a local YMCA after the need was identified through youth mapping. The youth participants reported that the most important skills learned from the process was how to communicate with community organizations and to accept responsibility for doing a job.

Pinellas County, Florida Extension (1999) also has a Web site, created by 4-H youth, to post a list of places for their peers to go for recreational activities and volunteer opportunities. Local businesses can also be added to a database by contacting the county Extension office with the services the business or organization provides. Open forums are also held periodically to analyze and interpret data collected.

The first step of Community YouthMapping is to identify a group of individuals or an organization with an interest in coordinating the process. This organization's responsibility should include organizing an advisory group, presenting the youth mapping concept to interested parties, and fundraising, if necessary. The lead organization is not necessarily the convening organization, but rather one with a strong youth-development component (such as Extension). This organization is most suitable to manage and implement the project, in addition to creating a community work group that supervises the mapping activities.

Second, an asset mapping team is recruited to design, plan, and implement the mapping activity. After training, youth conduct the fieldwork of collecting data, listing assets within the community. The mappers, consisting of youth and adult field supervisors, walk throughout the community in search of places to go and things to do, while mapping positive resources. Youth will also conduct surveys (developed by the work group and youth mappers) with local residents to identify opportunities.

The next step involves the analysis of information to determine what resources are available to young people through various venues. Youth participate in the presentation of the findings to local leadership (school districts, legislators, etc.) to increase their awareness on community resources and needs. Participants then evaluate the process to recognize strengths and identify areas for

improvement.

Comprehensive Assessment of Youth Development Opportunities

As indicated in the AED process, Community YouthMapping is most often utilized to conduct an assessment of the opportunities for youth in terms of resources (e.g., parks, youth centers). However, by ignoring the negative resources, Community YouthMapping is missing half the picture, that is, negative resources of the neighborhood that have been linked to youth's engagement in risk behaviors.

Perkins and Jones (2002) have developed a more comprehensive assessment, *Comprehensive Assessment of Youth Development Opportunities* (CAYDO). This assessment model utilizes multiple techniques, including a modified version of youth community mapping. The goal of CAYDO is to conduct a community planning process with the desired outcome of a community mobilization plan to implement the needed positive youth development opportunities (both school-based and community-based) during out-of-school time. Perkins and Jones (2002) proposed strategies that were aimed at achieving results pertinent to the diverse issues facing a wide array of communities.

The major strategies involved in the CAYDO process are:

1. Creating a community taskforce and youth action team (YAT);
2. Utilizing Global Positioning System (GPS) and GIS to conduct a youth mapping assessment of the opportunities for youth in terms of skill development, recreation, and engagement in risk behaviors;
3. Identifying the needs and desires of youth, parents, and youth professionals in terms of enhancing existing positive youth development opportunities and the creation of new ones; and
4. Employing the information gathered from strategies two and three, used in conjunction with Concept Mapping, to develop a community mobilization plan to address the identified needs. Table 1 lists the major between Community YouthMapping and CAYDO.

Table 1.

Differences Between Community YouthMapping and the Perkins-Jones CAYDO Model

Community YouthMapping	CAYDO
Community advisory group (comprised of adults only) helps to identify goals and objectives of the project	Community taskforce, comprised of youth and adults, identifies goals, manages mapping process and assists in the development of a mobilization plan
Work group manages mapping process	Youth Action Team (YAT; a subgroup consisting of youth only) carry out mapping process, surveys and presentations
Data analyses includes compiling asset-only information, using GIS to map community resources	Data analyses includes GPS, GIS, and photography in mapping assets, as well as deficits
Information on what assets lie within community are presented to local leadership by youth participants	Information on assets and deficits effecting youth are presented to groups of stakeholders by Taskforce and YAT
No Concept <i>Mapping</i> process is conducted to create community mobilization plan	YAT and Taskforce members work with stakeholder groups and use <i>Concept Mapping</i> to develop a community mobilization plan
No mobilization plan is presented or implemented	The community mobilization plan and information relating to assets and deficits effecting youth are presented to local leadership by YAT

Evaluation conducted to determine needed improvements	Evaluation conducted to determine needed improvements
Post evaluation conducted to document impact process had on participating youth	Post evaluation conducted to document impact process had on participating youth

In the Perkins-Jones CAYDO model, a community taskforce acts as the board of directors. Their major function is to assist the Youth Action Team (YAT) in identifying goals/objectives, interpretation of data, presenting data, and developing the community mobilization plan. The taskforce members composed of representatives from local youth service organizations, school personnel, parents, and youth (at least two YAT members), meet monthly.

An assessment of the opportunities for youth in terms of skill development, recreation, and engagement in risk behaviors is collected through youth mapping the community. The following procedures are utilized:

- YAT members conduct surveys and interviews while mapping all areas of their community to identify positive resources (programs, safe places, social service centers, caring adults).
- Youth map negative resources in the neighborhoods (beer and liquor stores, vacant or abandoned buildings, and street corners used for loitering/drug sales).
- Youth (with the assistance of trained adults) develop, coordinate, implement, and analyze surveys used to interview parents and other young people. (Parental surveys explore parents' needs in terms of structured out-of-school opportunities for youth, in addition to investigating the barriers that prohibit their child's participation in these opportunities. Youth are surveyed to discover what opportunities they would like to see provided.)
- YAT conduct semi-structured interviews of a representative from every youth-service organization identified from the mapping process to assess what that organization provides.

The CAYDO youth mapping methodology is conducted utilizing GPS, GIS, and photography. The youth, traveling in pairs, are given a section of the community to map, walking street-by-street, while identifying positive and negative resources. Then, one youth employs a hand-held GPS tool to enter the exact location of the resource, while the other youth documents the type of resources. Pictures are taken to make community maps more visual and realistic.

Youth transfer the data from GPS into a computer, creating GIS maps that identify geographical gaps in opportunities for youth in terms of skill development and recreation. Additionally, those locations identified as potential risks to youth (e.g., abandoned buildings, street corners used for selling drugs, etc.) are displayed. The pictures are placed on a display that is linked with the maps.

Utilizing the data and the technique of Concept Mapping (Trochim, 1989), the taskforce and YAT work together to develop a community mobilization plan within the positive youth development framework. Concept Mapping is a process that requires the participants to brainstorm a large set of statements relevant to the topic of interest, individually sort these statements into piles of similar ones, and rate each statement on a particular scale.

Concept Mapping helps groups manage complexity without trivializing or losing focus and assists them in reaching objective outcomes (Trochim, 1989). The analyses typically include multidimensional scaling (MDS) of the unstructured sorted data, a hierarchical cluster analysis of the MDS coordinates, and the computation of average ratings for each statement and cluster of statements.

Maps are displayed on a computer monitor or printed to show the individual statements in two-dimensional (x, y) spaces. Those statements (of the participants) that are similar are located nearer to each other, while the more varied responses are spaced or scattered accordingly (Trochim, 1989). The software also produces maps that group the similar statements into clusters. This allows participants to determine which issues (individually and collectively, based on their rating of the brainstormed ideas) are most important to the community.

Members of the YAT and the taskforce present the findings from the GIS maps, pictures, youth-conducted interviews, and the surveys to 10 groups of 10-30 stakeholders who take part in the Concept Mapping process. The data from GPS/GIS and the surveys provide unique information for the stakeholder groups as they work with the YAT to develop a community mobilization plan.

The stakeholder groups address the following question through Concept Mapping: "Given the information from the youth community mapping, youth-conducted interviews, and surveys, what five things should the community do in the next three to five years to enhance the lives of youth?" Stakeholder groups are broken down into three categories: youth (six groups), parents (two groups), and youth-service providers (two groups).

Members of the YAT and the taskforce then use the information from the concept maps to develop and prioritize a community mobilization plan. Members of the YAT and the taskforce present the plan to local leaders at organized seminars and community meetings. They present a database of all the newly discovered assets throughout the community, which, in turn, provides a valuable

resource for future community development efforts.

Potential Benefits

The purpose of assessing the community for youth opportunities is to raise awareness of what is available and to improve accessibility by increasing the number of positive youth development programs (Butler & Bowman, 1998). CAYDO provides this type of information in a clear and visual way and also engages youth in the process of community change. Through mapping, the youth have the chance to improve their skills in job readiness, data collection, and communication (AED, 2001). Young people also learn to be proactive citizens through serving their community (Israel & Ilvento, 1995).

CAYDO provides youth and adult participants with the benefit of gaining an understanding of advanced technology (e.g., GPS, GIS), collecting data and using it in community planning, as well as discovering new things about their neighborhood. Using the technology and having to walk through their own communities to collect and analyze data promotes youths' sense of mastery. Because the youth personally conduct the interviews while mapping the area, there is, in most cases, a much higher response rate on completed surveys than on those that are normally mailed (Babbie, 2001; Dillman, 2000). Youth interpreting and then presenting findings to local leaders can boost their confidence, which, in turn, encourages further involvement in the mobilization process.

The use of Concept Mapping also increases the likelihood of a community-owned plan, resulting in a stronger commitment to the plan by the stakeholders. Having local citizens discover ways to build their neighborhood also promotes community pride, encouraging residents to become dedicated to nurturing their living environment. Community building, through coalitions such as adult-youth partnerships, is one of the few interventions that promote collaborations from whole communities (having every individual and organization involved) to create and analyze community change (Wolff, 2001). CAYDO taps the strengths of all local citizens while encouraging activism for the transformation and, ultimately, the preservation of neighborhoods.

CAYDO works best when local stakeholders are identified and willing to commit to making key decisions in carrying out the procedures. Youth participating in developing ideas on the CAYDO and needs assessment methods are encouraged to serve on planning committees (i.e., taskforce). However, this does not occur on a routine basis, often due to overpowering adults (Camino, 2000). There is also a risk of creating an instrument that does not capture all that is to be measured, due to inexperienced researchers (local youth and adults). Another concern, similar to needs assessments in general, is the related costs. However, the benefits and potential for community mobilization far outweigh the limitations.

Conclusion

Extension professionals and other youth service providers should become more aware of alternative methods of assessing communities. If properly administered, CAYDO has the potential to bridge the gap between a community's needs and the actual resources provided. This type of assessment strongly encourages youth and adults to take ownership of their communities by looking internally to search for strategies that increase the positive opportunities for young people, reduce crime, increase job opportunities, and raise awareness. This, in turn, encourages social action.

Researchers have identified that youth participation in civic affairs can augment a community's response to emerging needs (Israel & Ilvento, 1995). Additionally, youth and adults have expressed the ability to more adequately address communication barriers after participating as partners (AED, 2001).

As most human service agencies, such as Extension, have moved to evaluation methods that demonstrate accountability and program impact, Extension agents and other youth workers need to have more instructional opportunities about how to improve their communities. New Extension agents must be properly trained in identifying needs as well as assets, while more experienced Extension agents must embrace innovative ways of providing service to new audiences. CAYDO and Community YouthMapping are both flexible processes that can serve as guides to deciding the overall purpose of a community assessment. Despite the methods chosen, empowering communities should be the ultimate goal, if we desire to witness positive changes.

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