

## RESEARCH ROUNDUP

The Research Roundup column highlights recent research findings commissioned or generated by CIRCLE. Also included is an update on new CIRCLE products such as Fact Sheets, Research Articles, Research Abstracts, Bibliographies, and Datasets.

### CIRCLE HELPS PILOT NEW YOUTH MAPPING SOFTWARE

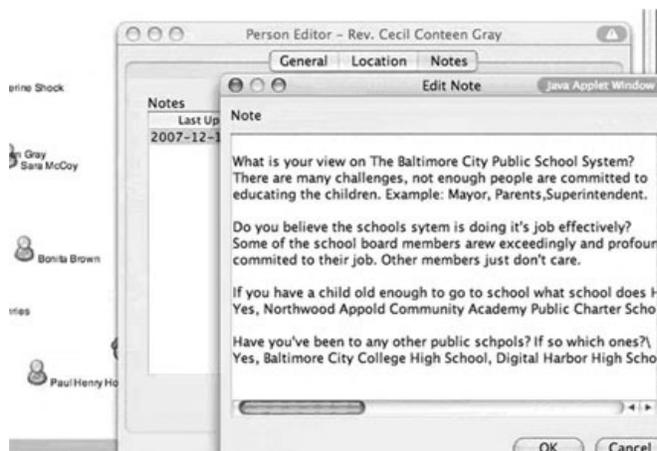
From November through January 2008, CIRCLE piloted new software for community-based research and service-learning in a Baltimore city public high school. The development of this software, called YouthMap, is funded by a Small Business Innovation Research contract with the Institute of Education Sciences of the U.S. Department of Education through a grant to Community Knowledgebase, LLP, a firm created at the University of Wisconsin (UW) by Professor Lewis A. Friedland. There is a related curriculum called CivNet created by Professor Friedland and Professor David Williamson Shaffer. CivNet can be used in social studies, service-learning courses, and classes on topics such as ecology. Both YouthMap and CivNet are in early stages of development.

#### BALTIMORE CITY STUDENTS DEMONSTRATE HOW YOUTHMAP WORKS

CIRCLE is collaborating with UW to test the software and curriculum, including a planned experiment with treatment and control groups. The first stage of testing took place in a Baltimore city public high school. In the Baltimore pilot test, students in American government selected an issue: poverty in their neighborhood. They conducted interviews (thus learning from formal and informal experts in their community) and quickly created a database consisting of hundreds of relevant organizations, issues, and individuals in Baltimore (see graphic

below).

These items are represented as icons on a diagram that the software generated. Links on the diagram show actual connections. (For example, any two nonprofits that are partners are shown as linked.) Clicking on an icon or a link reveals detailed information that the students collected, including the addresses of organizations, the functions and purposes of organizations, and even (as in the below example) whole



interviews.

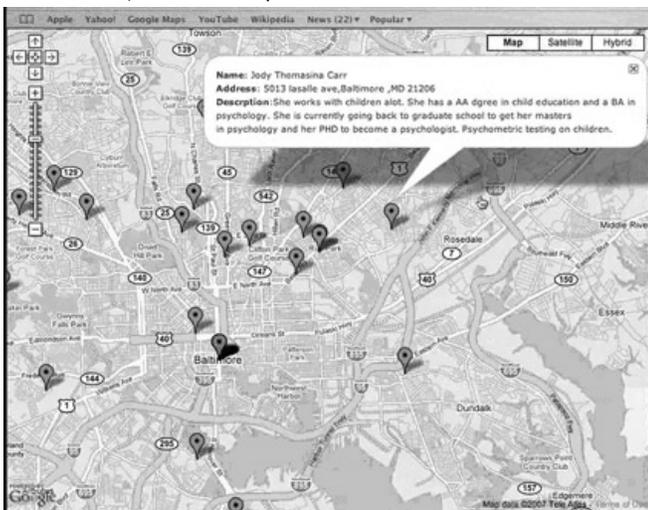
Students can use the map that they created to find out which organizations and individuals in any area work on a problem, what local experts say about each issue, how different problems are linked empirically and conceptually (e.g. high school dropout rates are linked to unemployment), which networks of civic organizations already exist, and where there is a lack of networking and coordination. The software helps students to make sense of the complex diagram they create by identifying clusters and patterns. They can also see the data on a geographical map onto which various data (such as crime statistics) can be layered (see graphic below).

At the end of the unit, students developed action plans for addressing the issue that concerned them in concert with local stakeholders. In a service-learning class, the next stage could involve implementing their action plans.

### INITIAL EVALUATION SUGGESTS YOUTHMAP INCREASES STUDENTS' CIVIC COMMITMENTS

Before and after they worked with YouthMap, the Baltimore students were given four survey items regarding their civic commitments. These questions formed a scale that had been tested by Joseph Kahne and Susan Spote for a study on the Chicago Public Schools. The mean score rose by a statistically significant amount from the pretest to the posttest.

In questionnaires, about one quarter of the students offered that



they will use what they learned in CivNet to address a problem or get more people involved. Examples of students responses included:

- "I will be more aware of how problems are connected and understand better what it's like to try to solve them."
- "I'll probably get more involved in my community by volunteering at an outreach center."
- "I will put more effort into trying to help stop gang violence by talking to peers."
- "I will know more about the issues around Baltimore, and I will try to not contribute to the problems."
- "I will use these techniques to stay informed about community issues."
- "I could use the youthmap to look at common problems with the city and I could use the information for future assignments."
- "This whole project made me more interested in helping the community so I will do that."

### CIRCLE TO CONDUCT RANDOMIZED EXPERIMENT TO TEST EFFECTS OF YOUTH MAP

CIRCLE has an agreement with the Hillsborough County, Florida (Tampa) Public Schools to conduct a randomized field experiment of CivNet, using an improved version of the software piloted in Baltimore. For more information on the project, please contact CIRCLE Outreach Coordinator and Researcher, Abby Kiesa at [Abby.Kiesa@Tufts.edu](mailto:Abby.Kiesa@Tufts.edu).