

Cultural Mapping with Youth
Chaired by Sheila Knox, Head of Education, Bata Shoe Museum;
Reporter, Jackie Armstrong

Section 1	
Summary	In the summer of 2010, the Bata Shoe Museum undertook a youth-driven community mapping project called ‘A Shoe In’. Through Young Canada Works, we hired Maia Rowan, who at age 19 had already had previous experience with community mapping and youth in Vancouver. Maia recruited and worked with seven young people over the summer. They met regularly over the summer.
Background	The Bata Shoe Museum is an international centre for footwear research with a collection of over 12,500 shoes and related items. A varied selection is displayed in time-limited or semi-permanent exhibitions. http://www.batashoemuseum.ca/index.html
Challenges	Our motivation was to explore a new audience, or at least an underserved one – youth.
Approach	Maia introduced the group to the concept of community mapping. This term refers to a process used to find out and record on a map the resources available in a community. For the A Shoe In project, the determination was to ‘map’ a portion of downtown Toronto, seeking out anything and everything about shoes and other information relevant for young people. The group divided up the territory and went out in pairs to see what they could find. They ventured into all of the establishments along their route, and if they chose it for the map, they enquired about hours, and other relevant information. They chose to sort their data in five categories: shoe shopping, shoe repair, museums and galleries, food, and youth hotspots. The map was posted on the blog, and printed in a small, well-designed publication.
Intended outcomes	The group agreed to the following statement of purpose, as found on their blog (http://ashoein.blogspot.com/): “We are youth ages 15-25 who are passionate about shoes, design, art and community. We are determined to explore and unveil what interests youth, and how community and arts organizations can serve youth better”. The blog was created to record their experiences over the summer.
Intended output	Blog
Section 2	
Obstacles and issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants were interested in shoes but primarily wanted to hang out together
Actual outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blog • A launch event was held at the end of the summer. The

	<p>participants invited family and friends, as well as any people they had met along the way.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They prepared an exhibition for the launch – each participant displayed shoes that were special to them, and spoke eloquently about them. • The map publication was explained and distributed. • Finally, they each gave a tour to their family/friends of the shoes they had studied in All About Shoes .
Actual outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Map • Exhibit • Event
Section 3	
Lessons learned	<p>This pilot project was a great learning experience to understand the joys and challenges of working with this age group. From the group’s project evaluation sheets it is obvious they had a wonderful time, learning a lot about the museum collection, the nearby community, the shoe industry, and how objects (such as their own shoes) can tell compelling stories. They connected instantly with Maia, and with her leadership they achieved all of their goals. They all said wanted to stay involved with the museum. However, once Maia left and they went back to school, the considerably older museum program staff were unable to get them to commit to attend a brainstorming session to explore where to go from here. If, for example, the Museum wanted to pursue establishing a Youth Council, I expect that the museum would need to devote more resources, including hiring a young person to establish and help it thrive.</p>
Next steps	<p>In their evaluations, several of the participants mentioned, “Have a sneaker exhibition.” The Museum recently embarked upon a project to learn about, document and potentially create exhibitions and programs around sneaker culture. One of the older participants in A Shoe In, a self-professed ‘sneakerhead’, has already given input into this project, and we expect to continue involving him as we go forward.</p>

Questions and answers are drawn from two sessions, each with 10 participants.

Question: In order to get youth working, do you need a young leader?

Sheila & Group – I supported Maia and she lead the group. It’s partly about choosing the right youth to participate. You want to attract people who are motivated to test their skills and develop themselves.

Question: How did you persuade your director to take part?

Sheila – It wasn't difficult to they the director involved. Mrs. Bata herself came to the launch.

Question: How did you find youth participants for the project?

Sheila – Maia recruited by word of mouth and from March Break volunteers.

Question: What were the rewards of the projects for you?

Sheila – Fascinating to see what was interesting to the group e.g. places to eat, "Little Italy."

Question: Tell us what happened after the project ended, is there a difference between project management and project retention?

Sheila – It was difficult to keep the youth involved in the museum. We hope to bring them back with the sneaker project, if that gets off the ground. We are constantly exploring other ways to welcome youth into the museum. Teachers do encourage students to use the museum but this can be challenging because of the cost to them of admission. We do participate in the Community Access Program, which provides free passes. The archives are free. There are even free nights.

Question: What about the map created by project participants? Are you still using it?

Sheila – No, we see the map as particular to that project. It's not complete and we didn't check it for accuracy so we don't distribute it. Sometimes the process is more important than the product.

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Sheila Knox is Head of Education at the Bata Shoe Museum. She holds a degree in Art History, and has been working in the field of Museum Education for nearly 30 years. She has worked at Royal Ontario Museum, Canadian Museum of Civilization, and Parks Canada, and has been with the Bata Shoe Museum since 1992. She has worked on a number of special audience projects over the years, including school kits, virtual exhibitions, and most recently, a touchscreen project that will allow visitors to design their own shoe using elements from the shoes in the collection.