

MAP MAKING

Useless Maps

The following exercise will demonstrate some characteristics of a useless map. Hopefully your students know enough U.S. geography to pick up the fact that this map does not reflect the territory.

On the blackboard print the name Boston, Massachusetts at the top, and print Miami, Florida below it and near the bottom of the board. Now draw an irregular line connecting the two cities and call it Route I-95. You might remind the students that this is not really Route I-95, but only a line on a map.

Now start writing in cities along the route, in the following order, starting at the top:

Philadelphia PA

Trenton NJ

New York City

Atlanta GA

Washington DC

Providence RI

Now ask the students if they see anything amiss with this map. Hopefully you will get a chorus of answers telling you that you have the cities wrong. Point out that the students are correct, the map does not reflect the territory.

Now, next to one of the cities, scribble in some information, and ask for comments. If one cannot read the information, what good is it? We need clarity.

Ask, "If I went out on the parking lot and redrew this map in large scale, put the cities in the correct order and had you start where I marked Boston, and told you to follow Route I-95 to the end, where would you be?" You might get the answer "Miami" or "The parking lot." The second answer is correct. This was only a map and not the territory.

Let me give you another example. Someone gives you a map for secret buried treasure. What real value can we attribute this map? (The value of the paper on which it is drawn) What would make it valuable? (Use it to find the treasure.) Again the map is not the territory. The map can lead you through the territory to the treasure.