

# Mind Mapping



A step by step guide to connect children to  
the natural world and cultivate a  
connection to place.

Collaboration. Engagement. Belonging. Curiosity

# Mind Mapping with Children



Learning Outcomes for children from this Experience

- Observation skills • Spatial Awareness • Geography • Literacy • Numeracy • Indigenous Perspectives • Place Based Learning • • Measurement • Data Handling • Retelling Stories • Representation • Seriating • Problem Solving • Fine Motor Skills • Classifying •

“Orient to the compass directions and perceive the landscape from a bird’s eye view. Draw maps to locate features of the landscape or tell stories that map your explorations. A natural routine familiar to anyone who’s ever driven in a big city, mapping orients us and shows us the gaps in what we notice. It creates a need for people to know what bird that was by the swamp, or where that creek goes. It also brings the landscape to life as the diversity of natural signposts emerges through the connections between birds and berry bushes, between coyote scat and volefilled meadows, between bodies of water and the daily movements of animals” (Core Routines of Nature Connection, 2010, Jon Young).

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## Why is Observation Important?

The Springboard for all our curriculum and experiences that we create for and with children.

Observation is the foundation of all great child lead early learning programs. This is where the magic is found. If we believe that children are competent and capable learners and communicators, then we believe that children's learning should be listened to and recorded.

As play pedagogues, we then use this information as DATA to reflect upon, ask questions about, and inspire us to plan further. An interesting perspective that is offered from the Reggio Emilia approach is valuing teachers as researchers. This philosophy puts value on the teacher as a researcher of young children and their play. When considering this; how does this change the way we view our roles when observing children at play? What should we be attuned to and how do we use that to drive our pedagogy and programs further?



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## Observation of Learning-What is that?

This is where we can use our observation skills. Some may be wondering...what should I be observing. Like all skills in life-this is another skill that will sharpen over time. The more time you spend intentionally observing children during play, the better this skill set will improve. Whether you think you are a great observer right now or not- we can use rituals and routines to sharpen this invaluable skillset.

Some great places to start:

- Noticing what the children are drawn to; maybe they are recognizing the words on a map and making their own meaning of the pictures/words/colours -What are they not noticing or paying attention to? Grow curious about why...are these materials open ended and novel?
- What connections are they communicating (Verbally or non-verbally)? (Are they making connections to their own life experiences such as travelling or visiting grandma?)
- How are the children using the materials? (Remember... even if it's not how you intended the materials to be used-observe and record this.) Sometimes this is where true child lead innovation and learning happens! Try not to impose your preconceived ideas about how a child should be using these tools...as hard as this can be for all of us : )
- Find your own balance and system that will allow you to engage meaningfully with your children and be there the way your child needs you to be and documenting important quotes.

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- For beginners, a helpful tool may be video or voice recording which will allow you to revisit the learning experience later.
- Other ideas include writing direct quotes that your child expresses during play. Remember, they can be a part of this process. Play based learning is a reciprocal process and children are more than happy to repeat their profound thoughts if you just ask!





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## Intentional Curated Materials

- Observation tools (Binoculars, Magnifying glasses)
- Clipboards and paper
- Measuring tapes
- Paper and a variety of drawing utensils such as pens, pencils, markers, pencil crayons. Consider thinking of materials your child is naturally drawn to using already or something novel and new you would like to introduce to your child such as watercolor paints or pastels.
- MAPS! Something as simple as a floorplan of your house is a map! Think outside the box. We use mapping to represent more than you may first think
- Internet- How can we intentionally use resources such as google maps to support us through this experience?
- Artifacts that represent the space or experience you are going to map out. Some acorns from your favourite tree in your neighbourhood or your plane tickets from your trip to Ireland!
- Consider other items that may be associated with maps such as directional tools, compasses, or passports.
- ANYTHING THAT INSPIRES YOU OR YOUR CHILDREN. You know your child's learning best-what do you know they already associate with maps and travel? Possibly a picture of grandma and grandpa or maybe you could set up the tent you use every time you go camping. This is the amazingly beautiful thing about PLAY BASED LEARNING. Anything is possible!

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Remember, the quality and value of the materials we offer children will have a direct link to the quality of work they are able to complete. Mapping is an intricate and detail orientated process that will require drawing materials that allow children to express these intricate, tiny details. In my experience, using language to express the value of these materials leads to children to respect them greatly. We have coined the term “delicate markers” and we have had one package of fine tip sharpies last us for 7 months!



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## Facilitation prompts

The ideas offered previously are BIG ideas to consider. While you mull those over; here are some helpful facilitation prompts that could drive your research as you observe your child engaging in this experience. You could start with one or two questions written on a piece of paper and categorize your observations from there OR you could ask these questions sequentially. Again, the wonderful thing about play based, child lead learning is the educator is valued as a co-learner. You get to use each experience observing children to discern which strategies and systems work best for you and the children that you are observing.

- What do you notice about these maps?
- What do you know about maps?
- How have you used maps in your life?
- What do you think the colors mean?
- What do you think these words mean?
- What do you remember seeing when you were there?
- How do you want to draw/represent that?
- What does this line mean?
- Is there anything you want me to write down or add to your work?



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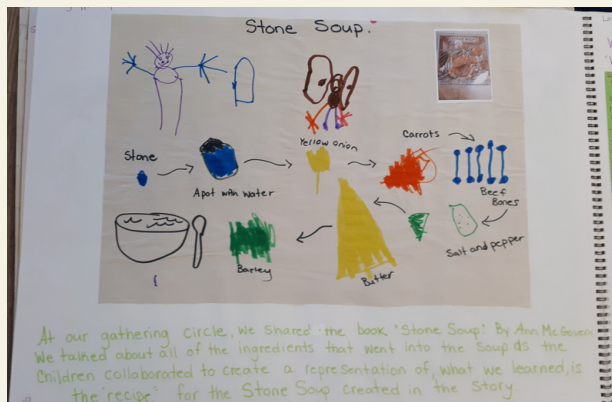
Making meaning of this experience:

Using documentation to show children that their work has VALUE

Now that you have collected data on your work during this experience, you can begin to ask yourself and your children: How do we want to display this and represent the learning and experience? I'm sure we are all used to the bulletin boards that lined the walls of our classrooms. These systems have evolved and acknowledge there are many ways to represent children's learning in meaningful and impactful ways. The most important thing to consider is what will allow the highest level of fulfillment and engagement from yourself and the children.

Some ideas include:

- Blogs/Social Media
- Floorbooks
- Scrapbooks
- Kitchen fridge
- Picture Frames



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Some Important points for consideration:

- Who is this work for? (Will it be accessible for children and adult feedback?)
- Do you want children to reflect on it and revisit it later?
- Do you want to inspire feedback and collaboration from fellow educators/family members/community members?
- What do you intend to do with the work later?
- How can you keep this work for an extended period?

Although these questions may seem unimportant, remember children are naturally curious and notice many details about their environments. Especially when it is in relation to the work they have completed. Our image of children is communicated to them by how, where, and when we give value to their work.

In a preschool classroom of 24 children aged 2.5-5 we have accessible drawings, and work of children on the walls of our classrooms that are VERY rarely destroyed intentionally. Children are far more respectful than we give them credit.

# Learning Opportunity #47

We introduced the children to a collection of Inuit art that was compiled in a calendar. We talked about how Inuit people are indigenous people who live in the Northern Regions of Canada. (It's seen as Arctic and has snow) (Inuit means "the people") If we could put the "Spring Caribou" piece by Gaudin Monique on our easel...



Sept 21/21

## Spring Caribou By Gaudin Monique

- "I notice that it has legs" - Matthew
- "I notice it has orange antlers" - Norah
- "I notice it has green hair" - Connor
- "I notice it has some grey fur" - Matthew
- "I wonder why the antlers are orange and the fur is green" - Logan
- "It's nose is not the same as people's" - William
- "It makes me happy because it's different than other Caribou" - Norah
- "It looks like it has nails" - Rhys
- "He looks like he is doing ballet" - Lila
- "I think he is going to lay on his back" - Connor
- "He's trying to turn over but he can't" - Connor
- "He looks sad because of his eyes" - William
- "I think he's trying to go but it's not comfortable" - Rhys
- "I think he's eyes look muddy" - Matthew

We read the books "The Eagle Feather" by Kevin Locke and "Trudy's Healing Stone" by Trudy Spiller. The children related the Eagles Virtues to some of our class values: Being Kind, Being Courageous and Telling The Truth.

# Learning Opportunity #48



"Field of Owls"  
Norah 2021



The children decided that they would take turns choosing an art piece to display. Norah chose "Field of Owls". Aurora created a representation of this work with paint.

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Responsive Planning:

What can you do next to enrich or extend this learning?

Responsive planning allows us to think, discuss, collaborate with, and revisit the work from an experience or activity. This experience is where we can take documentation, dissect the learning, and enrich it to create further learning experiences. This is where you get to ask any question of the work that you or the children would like and understand articulate: WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT and WHERE ARE WE GOING TO GO NEXT? When relating this to a mapping experience here are some questions you can ask of the data that you collected from your time engaging with your children.

- How can we connect this learning to our community and invite their participation?
- How can we reuse and revisit this map in new and complex ways?
- Could we use a legend to teach children how to use symbols to represent their ideas?
- How could we integrate new layers to the map such as sound, smell, or memories? (ie. A map of your backyard could be revisited to map the different birds you see during a bird watching session)
- How has this place/lands map or ecology evolved over time? Could we find maps of this land from 10-100 years ago?
- What may this land look like or the map of this land look like in the future?

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These questions can be connected to your curiosities and most certainly should be connected to the observations and the curiosities of your children. These questions can be used to enrich and extend literally hundreds of new activities and experiences for your young children.

This cycle of inquiry is perpetual and will continue to evolve with experience and the frequency that you offer new experiences to your children. Some may lead nowhere and others may lead you to some of the most profound theories, ideas, and experiences with young children that will not only shape the way they think and learn about the world but the way YOU think and learn about the world.

