

## Map Exploration

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**Skyfire** is one of five preschool programs operated by SFU Childcare Society, a nonprofit society that has been nestled on Burnaby Mountain for 49 years. SFU Childcare Society values children as the heart of a respectful, collaborative, and reflective community by providing them with an environment to develop their potential through freedom to explore and engage the world around them. The philosophy of SFU Childcare Society is based on the Reggio Emilia approach with a focus on long-term project work that involves exploring and building relationships with peers, the community, and the natural environment.

### It started from our usual library visits...

In summer 2015, Skyfire children started to visit the SFU Bennett Library in the mornings in a small group. The children were excited to go to the library because, until then, we would just walk past the library as we went for walks on campus. Only a few of the children had been inside the library before. Each day, different children became the leaders of the group and led their peers to the library.

Because we visited the library often, we developed a routine in our library visits: going to the children's book section and choosing books, reading one or two books together with the educator, each child reading their own choice of book by themselves, drinking water at the water fountain, and coming back to Skyfire. Sometimes we met up with our Skyfire parents who work at the library.

### Maps! We found maps!

There was a huge section of maps near the children's book section. In the beginning, it seemed to be fun to hide between the big pieces of paper.

*Adam: Hey, this is a map!*

Adam pointed out that the big pieces of paper were maps. Soon the children were excited to flip through the papers and find different maps.



### Looking at the maps more closely

Seeing the children excited with the maps, I found a big book containing various maps and put it on the floor. The children soon sat down around the book and started to investigate diverse maps from all around the world.

*Rahima: Why are there so many words?*

*Eddie: There's pictures, too.*

*Ziri: Look! This is a bridge. One, two, three, four. Four bridges!*

The children were excited to find places meaningful to them and share their stories with each other.

*Milo: My grandpa and grandma are from China.*

*Emily: This is Chinese! My dad bought me a fan and it has some Chinese on it. It looks like this!*

*Kevin: I used to live here. In China!*

*Dongryun: The title of this book is Mapping the World. Why do you think people map the world?*

*Kevin: Because if they only map one city, only one city can know it. But if they map the whole world, the whole world can know it.*

### Is a globe a map, too?

In the corner of the library was a big globe which attracted children's attention. All the children gathered around the globe and started to talk about it.

*Milo: This is Earth.*

*Bella: I live on Earth.*

*Eddie: Me, too. I live on Earth, too.*

*Dongryun: Do you think this is a map, too? It looks a little different from the maps that we saw earlier.*

*Kevin: Yeah, it's a map.*

*Emily: It's not a map.*

*Dongryun: Why do you think it's not a map?*

*Emily: It's a planet because it has blue and the world, so it's a planet. If it's round, it's not a map. A map is flat.*

*Kevin: It's a map because it has pictures of the whole world. It's a map of the earth. Earth is a planet and it's round. That's why this map is round.*



### Why do people make maps?

On the way back to Skyfire, the children pointed out the big campus map. We decided to study the route we had taken that day. Some children already knew that the red dot on the map shows where you are. They also discussed where Skyfire was and which route we should take to go back to Skyfire.

*Dongryun: Why do you think they put this map here? Why do people make maps?*

*Rahima: Because when you don't know how to find a place, you can look at the map. Like when you want to go to a store to buy food, you can use the map and it'll show you how to get there.*

*Bella: To get to every place they want. They can't find where they're going if they don't have any map.*

*Minnie: And people don't get lost.*

### Exploring maps in Skyfire

To encourage children's map explorations, I borrowed the map book from the library and presented it to the children at Skyfire. The beautiful and somewhat mysterious images of the ancient maps provoked children's imaginations.

*Adam: Maps are magical. They can take you to the places where you wanna go.*

*Pindy: Look! This must be the map that pirates used. This is a treasure map.*

Sometimes they engaged in heated discussions.

*Kevin: I see a lot of McDonald's.*

*Pindy: What McDonald's? It's not McDonald's.*

*Kevin: Yes.*

*Pindy: No.*

*Dongryun: Why do you think these ones are McDonald's?*

*Kevin: Because they're red and yellow.*



The children were also provided with different maps. They explored the maps, interpreting them in their own ways and connecting to their own experiences.

*Dongryun: I see some lines. What are they?*

*James: The red line is really bad traffic. The green line means no traffic. The yellow line means there's a little bit of bad traffic.*

*Emily: Maps help you go anywhere you want.*

*Dongryun: How?*

*Emily: Because there's a far place, and I didn't know how to get there. A map helped me get there. But sometimes Siri helps, too.*

*Mina: My mom doesn't use it much because we don't go to far places. Yeah, because we don't have a map on airplanes.*

*James: My mama's friend used our map to show us where he went the other day. It was the Canada map.*

### Getting familiar with maps in different settings

As the map exploration was going on, quite a few children showed interest in maps and explored them. However, there were still many children who did not engage in the map exploration, nor had they shown any interest. As I was contemplating how to encourage these children to participate in the map exploration, we received a big donation of maps from James's mom, who works at the library. This seemed to be a good opportunity to help children better familiarize themselves with maps. I started to use those maps as daily props for children's art experiences. As they were drawing, painting, and building on different maps, they started to notice some of the things on the maps.

*Sophie: There are lots of lines. Green lines are roads and wiggly lines are sidewalks.*

*Melody: This is a river and this is a mountain. This is the ocean.*

### Using maps for our daily walks on campus

To connect children's daily walks around the campus with the map exploration, I prepared several copies of the campus map and started to use them during our walks. After leaving Skyfire, we usually had a short meeting to discuss where to go, which route to take, and what to look for on our walks. The children shared the maps with their partners and studied the maps intently. An atmosphere of anticipation and excitement vibrated around the children every time!

With a map in their hands, the children went to various places on campus: the fish pond, the elementary school playground, Nester's Market, and all the way to Verdant, one of SFU Childcare Society's infant and toddler programs.

*Natasha: I don't know where Verdant is.*

*Sophie: It's okay. We have the campus map!*

*Dongryun: Yes, this map will guide us to Verdant.*

After a long walk, the children finally found Verdant and were excited to see where Tomi used to go and to meet up with Andrew again!

*Pindy: It really did! We followed the map and we could get to Verdant easily.*



### The children start to interpret the symbols on the map.

The children started to make meaningful connections between the things they found on their walks and the symbols on their maps (e.g., bus stops, tennis court, parking lots).

*Eddie: Here's Skyfire. This is the tennis court. We walk this way, all the way to the fish pond. See these green things? These are garbage cans.*

*Maki: Yeah, and raccoons go there to find stuff.*

As the children had more exposure to maps and used them often, they also began to notice different symbols on the campus map and interpret them.

*James: There's blue P and yellow P. All those Ps mean parking.*

*Anna: I think this fork and knife is a restaurant. We have a restaurant on campus. Maybe this is my mom's restaurant.*

*Maki: The green one means bus. It has a bus on it.*

*Eddie: There are five bus stops on campus.*

### Children's first maps

Mina and Kevin were inspired by the map exploration and created their own SFU campus maps. They were so proud to share their maps and introduce them to us. Both children visualized meaningful places in their lives on their maps.

### Introducing compasses

Some children noticed the compass rose on the maps and wondered what it was. Most of the children had heard the directional terms north, west, south, and east, and some children connected the letter N on the compass rose with the direction north.

*Dongryun: I see the compass and N on every map. Why do you think they always put this on maps?*

*Emily: It's because people want to know where places are. They want to know where their house is.*

*Hanna: Maybe it tells people where they need to go.*

*Dongryun: According to this map, now we're facing north. If we turn this map around, will it be north this way (pointing at a different direction)?*

*Elisa: Yes. Now this is north.*

*Kevin: Hmmm, I don't know. Maybe, maybe not.*

To help children understand the directional concept, I introduced them to compasses. The children were excited to use the compasses. They carefully adjusted the dial to set the magnetic needle on N. Some children seemed to understand that the red arrow always points to north and related it to real physical surroundings.

### Using compasses during walks

*Dongryun: What things do all the maps have in common? What do you see on all the maps?*

*Eddie: N. North, south, west, east.*

*James: Even in my Canada map, there's N.*

*Dongryun: Why? Why do you think all the maps have N on them?*

*Pindy: To see which way you're going.*

*Jean: Also a compass will show you where you want to go and where north, west, east is. And south.*

With the introduction of compasses, the children started to use more directional terms and they always remembered to take the compasses for our walks along with the maps. Sometimes, they would stop and adjust the magnetic needle to the orienting arrow and double-check their directions.

*Emily: We're still walking east. That's good.*

*Sophie: Yes, we don't want to get lost.*



### Reflections

Skyfire children have been exploring maps for about two months so far. Maps, especially the SFU campus map, have been an important part of their daily experiences and personal lives. Whenever we go for a walk, we look at the map to check the route and where we are. Some children talk about looking at maps with their family at home. Their interest, knowledge, and ideas about maps have developed,

from locating some places on the map to interpreting symbols and directions on the map. As an educator, I am especially thrilled to see the children starting to make meaningful connections between the symbols they see on the SFU campus map and the real world around them. The children have always been passing by the parking lots, the tennis court, the library, the fish pond, and many other places on the campus during their walks. Now I see those places bearing more meaning to them. The children are looking at them from different perspectives, paying more attention to their locations, relationships, orders, sizes, and shapes while comparing the images from their first-person views with the images on the maps. I believe this will also help the children develop their spatial skills and geographic knowledge, both of which are essential to understand and interact with the world around them.

This map exploration is an ongoing project which still has numerous possibilities. I am excited to see how the project will unfold in the children's learning journey.

### **Educator's wonderings**

What are some ways to make the map exploration more meaningful to the children? How can I broaden the children's interest in the SFU campus map to include more varieties of maps? How can I support the children to collaborate and connect with each other's ideas and curiosity?

### **Connecting to the BC Early Learning Framework**

Learning area: Well-being and Belonging

Learning goal: Build healthy relationships with both adults and children

The children were curious about where other children and educators live, and where their parents work on the campus. They marked them on the map and shared them with other children. They also built meaningful relationships through their campus walks and shared their ideas and thoughts about the maps.

Learning area: Exploration and Creativity

Learning goal: Explore the world using their bodies and all their senses

The children actively explored by walking around the campus using maps and compasses and comparing the images on the map with the real world. This firsthand experience gave a strong motivation to further exploration and helped them understand the maps.

Learning area: Languages and Literacies

Learning goal: Be curious about vocabulary, concepts, and written language

The children showed great interest in the symbols and letters on the map and learned them in a meaningful context. The children were also introduced to new vocabulary describing the spatial world and the concept of directions.

