

Curriculum Creation: Responding to Conditions Through Collective Map-Making

Authored By: Frances Smyth & Pippa Bowley

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Photo Credit: F. Smyth, Pedagogist

*Note: Throughout, italicized wording is drawn from Conversations V Pt. 1 presentation which took place October 28, 2021.

We—Frances as an ECPN pedagogist and Pippa as an early childhood educator running a licensed in-home childcare program—began working together last fall [in the midst of COVID-19](#), which meant growing our pedagogical relationship and engagements mostly online. Every two weeks Frances observed for an hour using Zoom, followed by a meeting the next day when we'd share our observations and talk about our project work and where to go next. We began our collaboration by reading and thinking together about what education was (and could be) for, and what was important to us in our work with children. We took our time (at least a month or so) to create our shared pedagogical commitments.

Our work with children is not just about having fun or entertaining children. It also requires us to think about what we want, not only for these children but for the world.

Early on we noticed the children often drawing maps, and we decided to take mapmaking with the children seriously. This project, which lasted from December 2020 to June 2021, was not intended to just follow the children's interests. When you follow everything, you follow nothing, and we didn't want to do this. Rather, as we noticed the children's interest in mapmaking, we thought this could be something we pay attention to and contribute to the route it would go and the learning that would happen. We wanted to balance openness to the children's ways of knowing with intention, to take the children's ideas and ways of knowing seriously and challenge them to think about new things in new ways.

The idea of emerging curriculum seems to imply that the educator shouldn't be making many decisions and working hard to create curriculum, but this was not the case.

In the first month of the project, we took the time to observe how mapmaking was already taking place in order to set clear intentions for the curriculum creation. We also returned to our shared pedagogical commitments to narrow down a focus that made sense and was possible for the medium of mapping. By observing what was happening in the classroom before starting our project, we realized that the children rarely had the opportunity to draw together. We wondered what it would do to create a daily space for us to think and draw together, and so we chose to do

mapmaking in a collaborative way. We wanted to [disrupt the idea that drawings are always owned by one person](#), to be drawn and put in the cubby to go home. The maps we made belonged to the classroom. We showed that we valued the maps and the process of mapping by holding onto the maps, taking photos of them, and returning to them on later days to think more about them. Within our collaborative mapmaking, we committed to carefully notice place and [see children and ourselves as part of the world](#), not above it or immune to its issues but deeply connected, and to think about how children could work together and see one child's problem as a problem of the whole group. Having this framework helped us start and allowed our project to be meaningful in ways beyond following the children's interests.

We wanted to have curriculum that was meaningful to ourselves and the children, that was embedded in our context and responsive to the conditions of our world today, and this took time and effort but was also inspiring and energizing.

Mapping together became part of the culture of the classroom. It didn't take up the entire day, but it was not relegated only to drawing together. We read books about maps with the children and to inspire our own thinking, to enrich our interpretations and [open up what we imagined mapping could be](#). [Resources outside of our own perspectives](#), careful documentation, and our discussions helped us decide where to move to next in the project. Both Pippa and the children carefully observed and drew what they saw outside, created maps and routes in the yard, took photos, and got to know the birds and the trees. Because of COVID, Frances observed and documented from afar by "Zooming in" and picked up maps that Pippa and the children had created to have a better look at them. She documented the maps and at times created something new from them to share back to the children in the hopes of prompting new questions or extending current thinking. We both put our egos aside. Neither of us assumed the role of expert, and instead we were open about our questions and doubts and willing to try things out without knowing what would happen. We came into the process with curiosity and found ourselves more attuned to children's moments of thinking and struggling together.

What made this possible?

Noticing made this project possible. Noticing the interest in maps, in birds, in archways. Videoing and writing observations made noticing possible. The choice to explore one area together over several months made this project possible. The choice to explore even when we had doubts made this project possible. Our willingness to expand our ideas of what mapmaking could be, of what drawing could be, made this project possible. Six amazing, creative 4- and 5-year-old experimenters made this possible. Having each other to talk to, to share inspirations, doubts, fears, questions and curiosities with helped us stay with the process when either of us felt unsure or discouraged. The importance of the work we were doing—making meaningful, pedagogically significant curriculum—pushed us to figure out our way through challenges. And although the project has come to an end, it continues to influence the classroom.

For more information about this project, a recording of Frances and Pippa's sharing at [ECPN Conversations V: Part 1](#) can be found on the ECPN website.