

# Enhancing the Classroom Environment Through the Imaginarium and TERC Internship

Hannah Johnston, Charis Law, and Valerie Groccia

## Abstract

The classroom environment is a critical component to a student’s success. We all want to create an environment where students feel accommodated and comfortable to learn and grow. While we continue to navigate an ever-changing world of education, it has become apparent that the way we organize our classroom to reach out to students needs to evolve, as well. Throughout our time as interns, we have recognized similarities when trying to reach out to members of the School of Education (SOE). The Imaginarium and Teacher Education Resource Center (TERC) interns have spent the 2021-2022 academic year researching and developing ways to cultivate an inclusive classroom environment for students in the SOE to help future teachers grow both as a student and as a future educator. While promoting this space, we can all learn how to connect students with one another and encourage accessibility and collaboration.

**Objective:** For SOE students and faculty, as well as community members to be able to utilize the Imaginarium and TERC autonomously by interacting with materials and resources provided within the two spaces.

## Materials

### Imaginarium

- Anchor chart paper
- Crayons
- Bulletin board
- Colored paper
- Die cut and Cricut machines
- Tables for group work
- Expo markers
- Glue
- Popsicle sticks

### Teacher Education Resource Center

- Children’s and young adult books
- Textbooks and curriculum books
- Teaching manipulatives
- Stuffed animals
- Toys
- Musical instruments
- Puzzles
- Games

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to Becky Leathersich for giving us the opportunity to have the ability to bring back these vital resources. We are so grateful for all your support and guidance throughout. We could not have done this without you. Thank you to Dr. Balajthy for providing such supportive feedback and historical insight when we first started creating these spaces. Thank you to Dr. Galbraith for exposing us to the Reggio Emilia Approach and inspiring the thinking behind this research.

## Methods



Here” with paper flowers created using the materials in the Imaginarium. The inspiration behind these decorations were typical brightly-colored doors seen in elementary schools that display positive messages as well as examples of student work that can be made in each of the spaces. We strived to have the spaces feel like a classroom to appeal to members of the SOE. We know that a classroom environment will thrive not only based on the quality of projects alone but with the resources and guidance that are provided for students. We made it a point to talk to every Imaginarium and TERC visitor and ask how we can help cater to their needs. We discovered what students liked to use when they were in the spaces and were able to adjust and organize the spaces to appeal to their needs.

A second component of a successful classroom environment is that students will feel comfortable and confident to ask for help. We understand that reaching out for help with a project or trying to find a book in the TERC can be daunting. Therefore, we need to make sure that the presence of the Imaginarium and TERC are known to students and faculty. We began to create awareness of the spaces by creating flyers to hang up around the College Union, as well as the academic buildings, and distributing a flyer specifically for the SOE faculty. Once the faculty members received the flyers, they were able to talk to their students about the spaces. Our next step was to create advertisements for the SOE-affiliated social media. We created posts that were shared on the SOE social media accounts, as well as the Young Children’s Council and the Council for Exceptional Children. We are continuing to increase awareness of the spaces and are currently in the process of having an article written about them in *The Lamron*.

We want the TERC and Imaginarium to be spaces where students can discuss and seek guidance from an intern, but we also feel that it is important to have students feel comfortable enough to explore and create on their own. As a result, we have created multiple demonstrations on how to utilize each space. For example, we used the puppets, math manipulatives, as well as children’s literature to show visitors how we used the materials to put together engaging lessons. We have also created similar demonstrations with the Imaginarium where we show step by step how to create lesson materials and how a teacher can implement them in the classroom. There are a variety of examples in both spaces to represent math, English, social studies, and science.



A welcoming aesthetic can be critical for creating a successful classroom environment. We began our work by creating our first door decoration that stated “Imagination Grows

## Results

In the 2021-22 academic year, we had over 50 visitors, primarily SOE students and faculty. Our goal for the Spring 2022 semester is to have 25 percent more visitors than last semester by implementing our marketing strategy and continuously increasing awareness of the two spaces that are available for all. While the two spaces are being reintroduced in new locations and to a new group of students and faculty, we hope to increase this number and hopefully gain visitors to the same or similar level of pre-COVID and in our past location in Milne Library.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the TERC and Imaginarium hold the potential to be an environment for students and faculty alike. Having them come in and experience a space that not only is there to serve their needs but also instruct their wonders and communicate through the materials shown on the walls and tables. In connection to the Reggio Emilia Approach, we found it most beneficial to align the design of our spaces to follow the third teacher. Reggio Emilia identifies a third teacher between child, teacher, and parent: the environment. Its attention to how space can be thoughtfully arranged inspired us to reconceptualize our own space as a key source of educational provocation and insight. Huyssen (2003) explains, “Lived memory is active, alive, embodied in the social,” (p. 28). Strong-Wilson and Ellis (2007) add, “Documentation is a living testimony to interactions that happen within a social space. Their story can be told through children’s portfolios, drawings, three-dimensional structures, words, photographs, videos, and documentation panels,” (p. 42).

Creating a third teacher environment in the Imaginarium and TERC spaces made the most sense. The layout of these spaces should promote relationships, communication, collaboration, and exploration through living works. Being mindful of the components of a classroom environment, being the third teacher. We had to go deeper than what is merely seen at eye level and develop a deep understanding of the underlying thinking and curiosities of our school community. The Imaginarium and TERC spaces were designed to become living environments that are active in the learning and growing of others. As learners grow, so do these spaces; they adapt to the needs of the student body and reflect the learnings and wonders of the community stored within its walls.

“What children learn does not follow as an automatic result from what is taught, rather, it is in large part due to the children’s own doing, as a consequence of their activities and our resources.”

- Loris Malaguzzi, The Hundred Languages of Children (1993)



## References

Edwards, C., Gandini, L., & Forman, G. (1993). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia Experience in Transformation*. Alblex.

Huyssen, A. (2003). *Present pasts: Urban palimpsests and the politics of memory*. Stanford University Press.

Strong-Wilson, T., & Ellis, J. (2007). Children and place: Reggio Emilia's environment as a third teacher. *Theory Into Practice*, 46(1), 40-47. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00405840709336547>