

February 10, 2022

That very night in Max's room a forest grew/ and grew/ and grew until his ceiling hung with vines

And so sets the scene for one of the most fabled children's stories, as Max meets the Wild Things in a far-off land. Only it isn't far-off – and the walls became the world all around, the story proceeds – it's right in his bedroom the whole time. Like Max, we lean on the transformative power of creativity in our classrooms. I often use this quote, “the walls became the world all around”, when working with teachers on curriculum.

As a [Reggio-inspired school](#), we employ an emergent curriculum – our topics of study emerge from the children's passions. We do this because, qualitatively, we believe that children should be shown the power of their ideas reflected back to them and because, developmentally and psychologically, we know that intrinsic motivation is a far more powerful educational vehicle than us telling children (extrinsically) what they should be doing and learning.

Sigalot, our youngest two year old class, has been playing “nursery” for several weeks – coddling and feeding their baby dolls. The teachers act as curators, intentionally tweaking the physical environment to provide optimal conditions for the children's learning as they play. They've added infant milk bottles, diapers, and swaddles to deepen the play; they've stay involved in the play with the children so they can add new vocabulary and concepts to enrich the learning.

Significantly, they've followed Max and transformed the classroom into a nursery – this is their Wild Rumpus. The teachers brought into the classroom the largest cardboard box I've ever seen and invited the children to turn it into the walls for their nursery. The students used Goodnight Moon as inspiration, investigating what the walls of a nursery should look like. They then opened one side of the box – which is taller than they are – and begin painting to brighten their new nursery.

What's happening here is that the children are experiencing the power of being active citizens in the formation of local community. They are being shown that when they take interest in something – caring for the baby dolls – their more experienced co-citizens (the teachers) will work with them to push the project along. They are experiencing the power of collaboration, as they work with their peers to accomplish something that they could not take on by themselves. They are learning that their actions matter and that they can accomplish large-scale projects when working together. The Reggio-classroom, in this sense, is a microcosm of a democracy.

Noah's Notes

Learning is not something that happens internally, within the isolated child. Our pedagogy leans on socioconstructive learning – together, within our relationships, we actively shape the world and along the way teach each other and learn about that world that we are shaping. What this requires is the actual transformation of the space – the walls becoming the world around.

And all *that* requires is a bit of creativity and an enormous cardboard box.

Shabbat shalom and happy new year,

Noah