Eight a.m. Monday morning. The students stumble groggily to the 4th floor of TC – and stop as they walk in the classroom. The node chairs (desk chairs on wheels) are centered around a collection of natural and up-cycled items on the floor: tubes, wooden rings, paper, netting, pinecones, cardboard, yarn, driftwood. The students warily take their seats, less groggy than only moments before. When the instructor invites the students to play with the items displayed, about half of the class inches forward to sit on the floor.

The students begin to quietly explore the materials, occasionally making a quiet comment to another student. After a few minutes, there is happy, excited laughter along with encouragement shared throughout the group. As the group on the floor plays, the students in the node chairs use mini-huddle boards (portable whiteboards) to take note of the play behaviors they observe. The instructor gradually brings the play to a close and asks for reflective feedback. The students share their experiences as active participants and observers. The instructor guides the discussion, relating the classroom experience to infant and toddler development. Then the instructor invites the students to switch roles and the play begins again.

This is one of the experiences the students in FCFC 265 Infant and Toddler Development and Education participated in the Interactive Learning Space (ILS). The ILS, through the Office of Educational Excellence, provides instructors with the resources to examine and refine their pedagogy. Far different from the traditional lecture classroom, the ILS offers the latest technology combined with innovative classroom design. But the core of the ILS experience is the focus on student learning. Instructors are prompted, mentored and supported in examining their pedagogy and measuring the effectiveness of student learning. Providing learning centered problem solving and innovative teaching strategies, instructors are able to not only enhance student learning but excite students about the learning process. In this course, students engaged in group work, peer review, small group discussion, reflected observations and classroom discussion to gain a better understanding of infant development.

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