

# Imagine

## *Afterschool Space That Works*

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New Jersey Department of Education, Office of Program Services  
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and New Jersey School-Age Care Coalition  
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## Terminology

There are a number of terms used to describe programs serving school-age children before and after the hours of their school day and/or during vacation time:

Afterschool Care

Before School Care

Extended Day

Out of School Time Program

School Age Care or School Age Child Care (SAC or SACC)

Sometimes the terms are hyphenated; other times they are not. For the sake of consistency, we will use *“afterschool care”* throughout the paper.

## INTRODUCTION

Years ago, while visiting afterschool programs, I was struck by the number of times I was directed to the back of the school and the door by the trash cans to find the entrance to the program. I wondered what kind of message we were sending to the children, staff and parents who were part of those programs. At that time, care for children before and after-school almost always took place in borrowed and barely visible spaces – in the school cafeteria or gym, in shared classrooms in which no evidence of the program could remain after six o'clock or in other equally challenging areas in schools, community or recreation buildings, or child care centers.

Since then, afterschool programs have expanded in size and in reach – but most continue to operate in makeshift spaces. Now there is growing interest, and in some cases increased investment, in afterschool care. To some extent this trend is tied to the new emphasis on education reform and high-stakes testing, but it also finally recognizes that millions of school children spend hundreds of hours each year in afterschool care. Those programs and the time children spend during those hours matter a great deal.

We've written this paper to encourage afterschool professionals to "think different" about the spaces in which they work and to invest time and resources in creating attractive, exciting and more effective afterschool environments.

## WHY SPACE MATTERS

The layout and design of afterschool space offer children important cues about what happens in the program. They arrive at afterschool from different classrooms, sometimes from different schools – and they've already had a long day. Some children will be tired, hungry, cranky or lonely. Others will be excited, happy and full of energy. Some walked first to school and then to afterschool. Others traveled by van, bus, car-pool or a combination of methods. Their expectations as they approach the afterschool program have been influenced by the rules and culture of their school classrooms and their experiences earlier in the day.

An immediate goal in planning the afterschool space is to offer children a sense of place and an understanding of the values and customs in the program. The environment can exert a powerful influence on their experience and attitudes. In considering the impact of the environment, consider the following:

- Does the space welcome children of all abilities?
- Is it clean, bright and well organized?
- Is there evidence and appreciation of children's work?
- Are there images of children with their friends and with the staff?
- Is their home culture reflected in the classroom display?
- Is the space easy to interpret, so that children know where to go?
- Does the space support their growing independence and autonomy?
- Is there a safe place to store personal belongings?
- Is there a place for doing homework?
- Is there a place to relax?
- Is there space to be alone?
- Are healthy snacks and drinks available on a self-scheduled basis?
- Does it look like a place where it's fun to spend time?

The schools of Reggio Emilia in Italy have concentrated on developing the layout and mood of their school buildings to such an extent that they refer to the environment as the "third teacher." <sup>i</sup> American educators who visit those schools consistently comment on the remarkable care and attention focused on preparing the environment and the reflection of staff and children's values in all aspects of the space. It can be seen in the use of color and lighting, the layout of activity areas and materials, the display and documentation of children's work and the attention to detail that create a unique look and feel for each school.

The importance of the environment in supporting children's learning was further emphasized in a recent paper, **Child Care Facilities: Quality by Design**. The paper described a study in Connecticut that provided concrete evidence on the importance of the environment as a critical element in program quality:

*Inadequate or poorly designed space isn't just unattractive or inconvenient, it actually reduces the effectiveness of the program – even when other factors are first-rate. . . . Researchers observing adult-child interactions during children's free play activities found, to their surprise, that a change in the center's spatial arrangements, led by itself to a seven-fold increase in the percentage of time children spent interacting with adults – a key indicator of program quality.<sup>ii</sup>*

A long-time proponent for the importance of space was Anita Rui Olds, a well-known designer of children's environments and author of a book called **Child Care Design**, listed in the resources section. In an article published in 1989, Ms. Olds wrote:

*Environments always affect people in two ways: they suggest a range of activities that can or cannot occur, and they evoke feelings. . . . The beauty of a facility affects children's emotions and conveys messages about their safety, self-worth and freedom to be expressive. . . . Research documents that children remember places and sensation more than they remember people. They are probably more sensitive to their surroundings than are adults, and are often affected deeply by details of which adults are unaware.<sup>iii</sup>*

The process of developing a good afterschool environment requires attention to the needs of children and staff, and an understanding of the elements of a good program, as well as some basic principles of design. We will examine the crucial role of a well-designed environment in supporting positive behavior, more engagement in activities, and superior educational outcomes. We will also look at how a good environment can support health, safety and hygiene practices and can facilitate better relationships among staff and children.

*“Children need access to other adults beyond their parents, and access to other children; and the situations in which they meet these other adults and children need to be highly complex, subtle, full of the same complexities and intensities as family life – not merely “schools” and “play grounds.” iv”*

## WHAT SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN NEED

Afterschool programs are sometimes referred to as “the new neighborhood” because of the role they play in families’ lives. Instead of going home and taking part in informal and experiential learning with children and adults who live near their homes, increasing numbers of children attend afterschool care. Because children often attend the same programs year-round for five or more years, they may spend more time and have closer relationships with the staff at afterschool than with their elementary or middle school teachers.

Children attending afterschool care can range in age from 5 to 14 – a nine-year age span in which children undergo dramatic levels of physical, social, emotional and cognitive growth. Since each child develops on an individual timetable, even programs serving a narrower age range will face a wide range in development. While patterns of development vary, a school-age child has a completely different set of interests and characteristics than a preschooler. Each age group has its own cognitive, social, physical, and emotional characteristics. Remember also that age is not a good predictor of maturity, and that within each age group there will be different levels of maturity and skill among children of the same age.

The afterschool program should be a place where children can be themselves and where the staff creates an environment that welcomes children of varied ages, abilities, personalities and interests. At the most basic level, the environment should be a safe, child-friendly space that is well organized and easy for children to interpret. Use signs, symbols and colors to help children understand the organization of the space. Post visual reminders of the daily schedule, reminders on behavior and getting along with others, picture and word labels for activity areas and materials and any mottos or phrases that have special meaning for your group.

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## **Characteristics of School-Age Children<sup>U</sup>**

### **Cognitive**

Rule-bound; may spend more time debating the rules than playing the game  
Learn quickly, memorize easily  
Can concentrate for long periods of time on activities that interest them  
Need time and space to explore ideas, develop interests  
Have lots of enthusiasm for learning, but may be turned off by school  
Enjoy playing games; surprising capacity to memorize and strategize  
Need to categorize and classify everything  
Not particularly interested in abstract symbols or ideas  
Music is a major part of their development

### **Social**

Influenced more and more by peer groups  
Have strong desire to make and keep friends  
Often form intimate attachments to one or two best friends  
Attribute increasing importance to adults other than parents  
Develop greater sensitivity to the needs and desires of others  
Desire increasing responsibility and opportunities to try out adult roles  
May have strong likes and dislikes, ideas about whom they want to be with and what they are interested in doing

### **Physical**

Have lots of energy  
Like physical challenges  
Need to build skills  
Gain a sense of independence from physical prowess  
Practice and develop new skills to build self-esteem

### **Emotional**

Are usually resilient; get upset easily and get over it just as readily  
Need to feel that adults are in control  
Become increasingly self-conscious and self-critical  
May have difficulty verbalizing feelings  
Are very concerned with fairness and have strong sense of justice and morality  
See right and wrong as absolutes  
Gain self-confidence through successful completion of concrete tasks  
Gain self-esteem by being good at something; need to build skills  
Tend to work out anxieties, fears and feelings by "acting out" or withdrawing  
Often honestly respond "I don't know" when asked why they did something  
Need to be valued as special, accepted as part of a group  
Need adult support, nurturing, reassurance, encouragement and limit-setting to help them feel safe and secure

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In addition to the basics, an afterschool program meeting the needs of children from 5 to 14 should offer:

- Access to beautiful and inviting materials
- Exposure to natural materials and a connection to outdoors and nature
- Reasonable accommodation to the needs of children with disabilities
- Space that accommodates the following activities:
  - A place where children are encouraged to take reasonable risks
  - A place where children can work alone with focused attention
  - A place for productive group work
  - A place to set aside or store projects
  - A place for physical activity and exuberant play
  - A place for quiet relaxation and some degree of privacy
  - A place for preparing and eating snacks
- Music and a pleasing acoustic environment
- Varied types and levels of lighting

These will be discussed in more detail in the section on activity areas.

## **WHAT STAFF NEED**

The staff is the foundation of a good program, and staff needs should be given priority in planning the environment. Since so many afterschool programs operate in shared space, meeting those needs can be a challenge. However, even the shortest list should include:

- Storage in the classroom, including shelves for curriculum materials and catalogs
- Storage for bulk supplies, seasonal equipment and recycled materials
- Locked storage for personal belongings and confidential records
- Adult-height work surfaces in the classroom and comfortable adult seating
- Work space where staff can prepare materials, make copies and plan curriculum
- Access to a telephone and computer
- Space for conferences, relaxation and breaks
- Adult lavatory separate from the children's lavatory

Whenever possible, arrange the adult spaces to support cross-team communication and collaboration, to reduce isolation and to promote a sense of community.

## WHERE TO BEGIN

Before beginning to plan your environment, consult the relevant state and local afterschool licensing regulations to ensure that your space will meet the basic requirements for physical space, even if your space is exempt from licensing. Review the section on Indoor Environment in the **NSACA Standards for Quality School Age Care**.<sup>vi</sup> Strive to create a space that is more like a large, comfortable and well-equipped family room than a schoolroom.

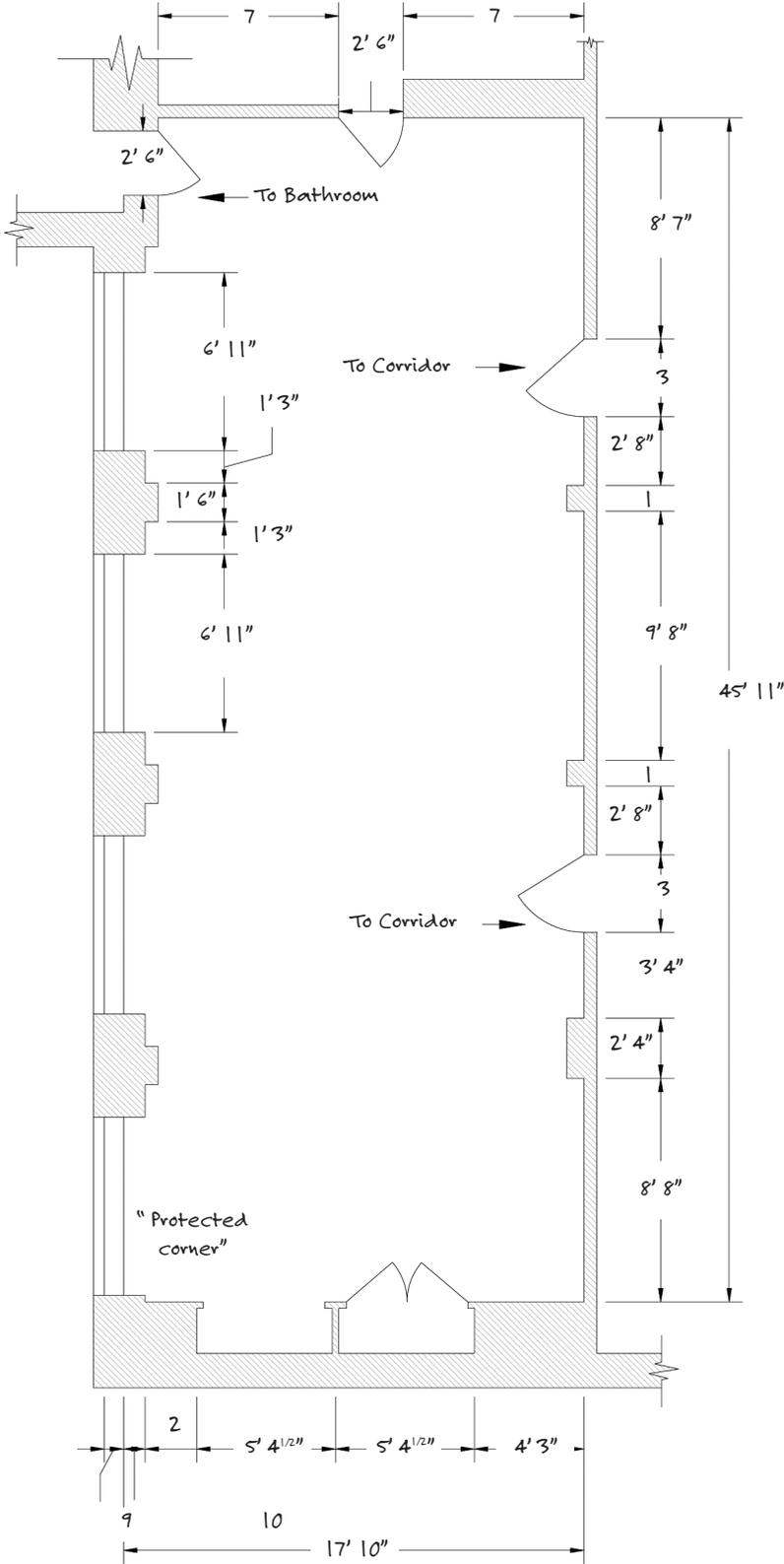
Begin your planning by examining the size and shape of the space, noting the locations of fixed features, such as windows and doors, closets or built-in counters, electrical outlets, plumbing fixtures and heating units. If you are in a gym or cafeteria space, you may have large amounts of space filled with bleachers, folding cafeteria tables or a stage.

Develop a simple scale drawing of each room you are planning. Measure the length and width of the room with a steel tape measure and make a preliminary sketch of the space, noting those dimensions. Next, plot the dimensions and the location of the fixed features mentioned above. Note whether the doors open into or out of the space and indicate the direction on your sketch.

When you have all the measurements on your preliminary sketch, draw your room to scale on a piece of 1/4-inch graph paper. (1/4 inch = 1 foot). Measure the windows and doors and draw them in the appropriate locations. If the space is partially carpeted, note where the floor surface is tile and where it is carpet. Label the features in a manner that reminds you what each feature in the sketch represents.

Make several photocopies of the scale drawing. Using the photocopies, you can experiment with laying out activity areas without having to recreate the basic floor plan each time.

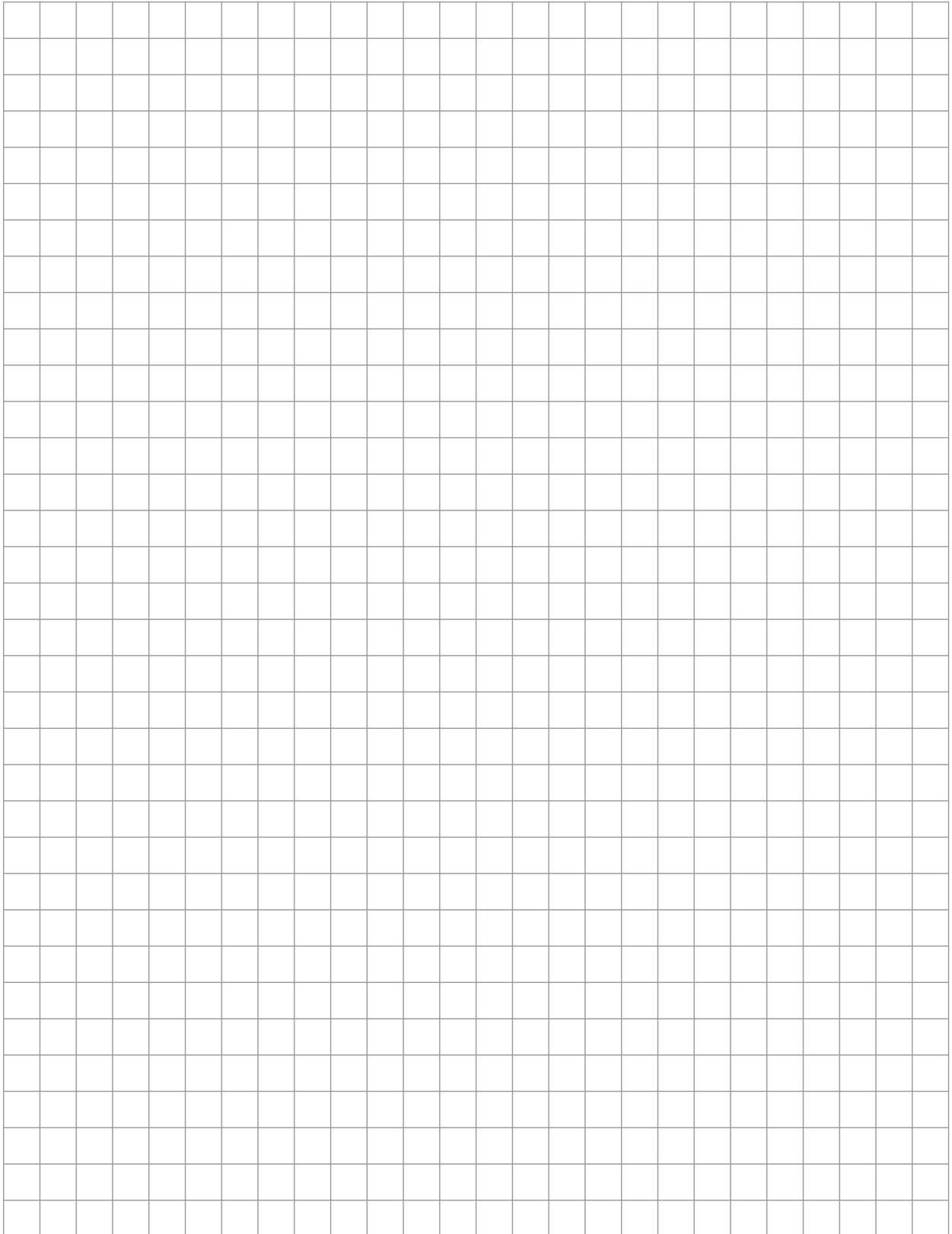
# Sample Floor Plan



Imagine Afterschool Space That Works

# Create Your Own Sample Floor Plan

$1/4$  inch = 1 foot



## HOW TO MAKE A PLAN

Once you have multiple copies of the floor plan, begin planning the space on paper.

Look at the location of doors into and out of the space. At a minimum, you should have 2 doors – the main classroom door and your emergency exit. Create circulation patterns or pathways that allow children and adults to move comfortably through the space. Draw in the pathways so you don't forget them when you add equipment and furnishings.

Establish zones:

- A zone for wet and/or messy activities
- A zone for active play
- A zone for quiet activities and relaxation

Think about how fixed features will affect the location of various activities. Look for a water source and tile floor to determine where to place wet or messy activities. Note the location of electrical outlets to determine where to place activities that require electricity – a lamp for the reading area, a surge protector for the computer equipment or a connection for the aquarium.

Identify what the designer Anita Rui Olds called the “protected corner”, which is most often the corner furthest from the entry door. That may be the most desirable location for an activity area where you want children to engage in quiet concentration.

Next, create furniture templates to move around the scale drawing as you try out locations for activity areas. Using another sheet of graph paper, cut out rectangles, squares and circles that indicate the shape and approximate dimensions of the furnishings you plan to use. Dimensions are noted in the equipment catalogs or you can measure the furniture and convert it to the 1/4-inch scale. A simple alternative may be purchasing a designer's plastic furniture template that provides shapes and common architectural elements in one plastic stencil. Be sure to get a template of the appropriate scale. These templates are widely available online or at office supply stores for less than ten dollars.

If you don't want to make templates, sketch different layouts in pencil on the photocopies of the floor plan, maintaining the approximate scale of the different types of furniture. Community Playthings, ([www.communityproducts.com](http://www.communityproducts.com)) a manufacturer of furnishings for the early childhood and afterschool markets, offers a Room Planner Kit that includes a 1/2-inch scale grid and movable static cling vinyl furniture templates with instructions on creating a floor plan. Note that all the templates are for their products.

### TIP:

Given a choice, children will spend 2/3 of their time standing, sitting or lying on the floor and 1/3 of their time sitting on a chair doing table work. viii

“Children’s play is their way of dealing with the issues of their growth, of relieving tensions and exploring the future. It reflects directly the problems and joys of their social reality. Children come to terms with the world, wrestle with their pictures of it and reform those pictures constantly through the adventures of imagination we call play.”<sup>vii</sup>

## WHERE TO PLACE ACTIVITIES

In planning the activity areas within an afterschool space, consider the number of children and teachers who will occupy the space, the size of the space, the ages of the children in the group and the staff-to-child ratios. Calculate the maximum number of children per room based on the square footage required. The net floor area is measured after furniture is placed, by deducting the floor area covered by fixed furnishings from the gross floor area. Try to allow more generous square footage than licensing requires – remember that those are the minimum requirements, not necessarily the recommended amount of space.

Children’s response to the environment in a classroom is predictable. They exhibit better behavior in smaller classrooms, or in large rooms subdivided into smaller spaces, where they can interact with smaller groups of children. Many will choose to spend time alone or with a friend if comfortable, secluded spaces are made available. Spaces that are divided with low barriers, clear boundaries and well-defined pathways encourage more positive behavior, more interaction with peers and more sustained activity. Well-planned larger multipurpose spaces supplied with a good range of materials and attentive staff will support creative play, experimentation and social interaction.

On the other hand, a large open space with little definition and few cues about the proper use of space or materials has been designated “dead space” by Elizabeth Prescott, a professor of education at Pacific Oaks College in California. In her work on classroom environments and children’s behavior, she noted that this type of undefined space was frequently the spot where aimless wandering took place or where conflict, shoving or squabbles broke out between children.

Children will congregate in and will gravitate toward spaces with abundant natural light. They are also attracted to areas with pools of full spectrum artificial lighting directed over a table, a reading area or another activity area. This task lighting can be achieved using full spectrum incandescent bulbs, halogen light or “warm” rather than “cool” fluorescent lights. Use extreme caution with halogen bulbs, however, since they get quite hot and can pose a fire hazard if they come into contact with paper, cloth or other flammable materials. Some people suggest that full spectrum lighting reduces negative behaviors and produces better health, even in spaces without windows.

For children with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), lighting is especially important. One expert suggests offering varied types of lighting in the environment: "If fluorescent lights are present, supplement the lighting with table or floor lamps, which helps reduce glare and the 'hum' of the fluorescent lights."<sup>x</sup>

In addition, there is increasing attention paid to Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), a type of winter blues brought on by shorter days and lack of sunlight in the winter months. While most people reporting symptoms of SAD are adults, it has been noted in small numbers of children as they approach puberty. One study concluded that 2 to 5 percent of children between the ages 9 and 19 years may have symptoms of SAD.<sup>xi</sup> Children with SAD may suffer from fatigue and irritability, but not necessarily depression. They are generally aware that something is wrong, and may blame their problem on external factors, perhaps feeling that others are "picking on" them. Afterschool staff should be sensitive to the possibility of SAD in children who experience a significant seasonal decline in academic achievement, activity level or mood. If they have concerns about a child, they should consult with his/her parents. Children suffering from SAD are treated with light therapy and positive results are achieved within several days after exposure to appropriate levels of light.

*“In a building with uniform light levels, there are few places which function as effective settings for human events. This happens because to a large extent, the places that make effective settings are defined by light.”<sup>ix</sup>*

## HOW TO DEVELOP AN ENVIRONMENT

### Entry Area

The entry area and the functions that take place near the entry to the afterschool program are critical parts of the program. There should be provisions for:

- Signing children in and out
- Storing children's personal belongings
- Communicating with parents
- Posting notices and display
- Directing children, parents and visitors to the right location

In addition to the practical functions, the entry also sets the tone for the program, so make an effort to personalize the space and create an identity for your program beginning at the front door. If you're in shared space, it may just be an attractive sign or banner that is hung every day. In dedicated space, there is an opportunity to make a more permanent statement about your program, to acknowledge the cultures of your families, staff and community, to display children's work and to feature staff biographies and photos to help parents get to know the staff. Make it fun and make it welcoming.

Think about designating different doors for entering and exiting the space if traffic flow or congestion is a problem. Use signs to help children and others navigate through your space, and be consistent in indicating pathways into, out of and through the space. Be sure to consider any architectural barriers that will affect children with physical handicaps and use pictures as well as words in directional signs for children who can't yet read.

Pathways can be defined using furniture, colored tape on the floor, small rugs or runners. If you are in dedicated space, a more permanent pathway can be highlighted with different colored floor tile or with paint. The solution will depend on your space and budget.

### Children's Personal Storage

Children will adapt to whatever storage system is set up for their personal belongings, but some type of system is important. In small programs, personal storage can be located near the entry area, but in larger programs, personal storage might be located near each group's home base. Provide labeled individual storage areas for backpacks, musical instruments, sports gear, outer wear, books and lunch boxes as well as a place to store projects and works-in-progress. Many programs separate

storage for personal effects from clothing, and provide rows of hooks for coats or backpacks, boot trays for shoes or boots, and bins, plastic milk crates or shelves for children's other belongings. Homework can be stored in folders near (or inside) school bags and backpacks so that it goes home with children at the end of the day.

Traditional cubbies may be perceived as too babyish by children over age six or seven, but for younger children, cubbies may still be a good option. Provide one cubby per child – some licensing agencies require it, but it also makes sense. It cuts down on clutter and cubby overflow, and also helps limit the transmission of head lice if the program has an outbreak. According to the National Pediculosis Association (see organizational resources in the appendix), children's hats should be tucked into coat sleeves and children's coats should not be piled up. Coats should be hung so that they do not touch, since lice do not hop, jump or fly and cannot crawl between coats if spacing is adequate.<sup>xii</sup>

Some manufacturers offer stacking wooden or metal lockers that might be more suitable for older children. Metal lockers are available in double-tier units with doors, but will require professional installation. Stacking wooden lockers can be purchased with or without doors, depending on your needs, budget and space constraints. See information on lockers in the products list in the appendix.

Make sure that each cubby or locker is sufficiently deep and wide to hold a backpack. In most cases, cubbies or lockers must be securely fastened to the wall so they are not a tipping hazard, so placement of these units should take that into account.

## **Rest or Nap Area**

Many programs schedule a rest or naptime for younger children. In that case, children need labeled mats or blankets that can be stored easily. If children use small blankets, towels or quilts, they should be stored in individual draw sacks or duffel bags and sent home frequently for laundering. Vinyl-covered mats can be folded, stacked or hung according to the mat design and the space available.

If lights are dimmed or turned off at naptime, provide small battery-operated lanterns for children who do not nap, but are resting and reading books. Information on lanterns is included in the products list in the appendix.

### **TIP:**

Compatible height furniture can provide more workspace for children and more flexibility in room arrangement.

## **Home Base**

In afterschool programs serving large (25+ per day) numbers of children and a wide age range, it makes sense to designate a home base for small groups of children. In most programs, the home base serves a number of functions. A home base:

- Creates a more intimate and age-matched group
- Facilitates relationships between children and their primary staff
- Provides a location for storage of children's belongings
- Provides a place for meetings and small group discussions
- Allows for planning activities targeted to children's development levels
- Can offer a comfortable place for completing homework

Children should be involved in the development and planning of their home base areas. Their ability to rearrange furniture, select colors, create displays and take part in "nesting behavior" is important to developing an emotionally supportive climate in the program.

If space is tight, some programs create home bases that also serve as interest areas, but it's important to be sure that the soft, cozy aspects of a home base are maintained with area rugs, cushions or pillows, carpeted risers or other means that identify a gathering place. Choose a range of seating options to include: chairs with arms, soft seating and options for sitting on the floor that offer support for weak trunk and back muscles if you have children with orthopedic impairments. A flexible and comfortable seating option can be carpeted large hollow blocks that come in lengths from 2 to 6 feet – they are sturdy, attractive and easily moved or stacked. See more information on the product page.

## **Meal Area**

Think about how to create a unique setting for snacks and meals. It may be set up as The Kids' Café or a homey kitchen. Mealtime during the school day may have been noisy, rushed and chaotic, so aim for a more relaxed, less institutional feeling.

- Arrange tables for 4 to 6 children rather than larger groups – if you have a kitchen-style counter, purchase stools and recreate a diner as the place for snack
- Post a menu on a small chalk or white board
- Cover tables with vinyl oilcloth, which is bright and attractive, creates a homelike feeling and can be easily sanitized. It covers scarred or damaged tabletops and is a quick, inexpensive way to brighten and unify a space. Information on oilcloth is listed under products in the appendix.

Offer children healthy food choices and create displays about good nutrition and food from different cultures. Food choices have become a serious issue in children's health. By the time they enter school, about 15% of American children are overweight, and every day 30% of American children eat fast food laden with sugar, fat, starch and calories.<sup>xiv</sup>

Observe precautions for handling food safely. If children help plan and serve snacks, be sure that hands are washed well before and after food preparation and that children only prepare food that will be used that day. Children cannot be expected to observe safe food handling practices well enough to protect against misuse or contamination of food that is being stored for longer periods. Note that some health departments may prohibit children from preparing food for others.

### **Interest Areas**

Development of the interest areas is the place where an afterschool program can best support children's multiple intelligences and ensure that there are activities that serve all children. If you have children with disabilities in the program, be sure to ask each child's parents about strategies for working with their child, and ask their help in identifying modifications that may be needed in your space. Parents and other specialists working with the child will have specific guidance on adaptive equipment to help the child succeed in your program.

School-age children have a range of interests and talents and their time in afterschool care should support their existing interests as well as exposing them to new opportunities and challenges.

**TIP:**  
An orderly arrangement of materials leads to better behavior and higher quality work.<sup>xv</sup>

***Poster at an afterschool program:***  
*Our program focuses on children's multiple intelligences:*  
*Linguistic – Word Smart*  
*Logical – Number Smart*  
*Spatial – Picture Smart*  
*Kinesthetic – Body Smart*  
*Musical – Music Smart*  
*Interpersonal – People Smart*  
*Intrapersonal – Self Smart*  
*Naturalist – Nature Smart*

### **TIP:**

During free choice time, children will spend more time in soft, cozy spaces than in hard ones.<sup>xiii</sup>

In afterschool programs with a wide age range, the environment should be planned to encourage some interaction across age groups, but still allow for separation by ages for other activities and interests. Pre-adolescents and young adolescents need to feel that they are not part of a program that serves only “little kids”. Given the differing rates of maturation, it’s important to provide children with natural and face-saving opportunities to select activities appropriate to their different levels of development – physical, social, emotional and intellectual – so they can find their own comfort level if they’re on a development timetable that differs from their peers.

Developing activity areas offers practical as well as educational advantages. It contributes to using space efficiently and creates a way to organize children’s presence in different parts of the space, which helps reduce over-crowding and competition for resources. As discussed earlier, well-defined activity areas help regulate behavior and help children find and select materials, use them appropriately and put them away after use. It promotes children’s independence and “ownership” of the afterschool space, thereby freeing staff to engage in building relationships with children and encouraging their interest and activities, rather than spending all their time doling out toys and materials.

Anita Rui Olds identified five attributes that contribute to development of effective activity areas<sup>xvi</sup>:

- A specific physical location suited to the activity
- Visible boundaries
- Play and sitting surfaces
- Provision for storage and display specific to the area’s function
- A mood that distinguishes it from contiguous spaces

Determining the placement of activity areas recalls the preliminary planning process described earlier and the establishment of messy, quiet and active zones within the space.

Look for the protected corner and determine which activities are sufficiently compatible in terms of noise level, movement, the level of concentration required and storage or resource needs. Remember also that given the choice, children spend most of their time sitting, standing or lying on the floor rather than seated in chairs. Equip activity areas accordingly.

The following section offers a format for thinking about the space and furnishings required for various interest areas – use them as a catalyst for rethinking development or enhancement of the areas in your program.

### **Furnishings for Quiet Activities:**

Quiet activities are best located in the protected corner of your space – away from the entry door and outside the circulation area. Depending on the amount of space, different quiet activities can be placed adjacent to each other. These include spaces for quiet reading, the homework center and secluded spaces for one or two children. The following are features of the quiet area:

- Soft, comfortable seating and pillows
- Carpet or area rugs, carpeted risers or platforms
- Upholstered furniture that meets fire code
- Places to stretch out
- Some privacy or seclusion – think about using small canopies or pop up tents
- Books and resource materials – copies of school textbooks for use, folders and school supplies, a clock so children can pace themselves
- Workspaces that support different learning styles. Offer:
  - ♦ Clipboards or low tables that can be used while seated on the floor
  - ♦ Table and chairs for children who want to use them, and so adults can sit with children for tutoring or homework support
  - ♦ Small table-top partitions to create study carrels to reduce distractions or study cubicles built with moveable partitions
  - ♦ Large poster displaying the daily schedule
  - ♦ Tips for breaking down an assignment into manageable steps
  - ♦ Checklist to help children track progress and monitor their work habits
- Computer area with table, counter and appropriate seating
- Soft lighting for relaxation, task lighting for homework
- Music to help with concentration – use of headphones will reduce distractions to other children and allow children to select their own music
- Baskets of quiet toys or “fidgets” that can be used for relaxation or during study breaks

Activity choices for a high-quality learning environment:

Arts and crafts  
Computer activities  
Drama  
Games  
Language arts  
Math  
Music  
Science  
Service learning  
Social skills  
Special projects  
Sports and fitness  
Tutorial help and homework

From the National Institute  
for Out of School Time

“Children try to make special places for themselves and their friends – most of the world about them is “adult space” and they are trying to carve out a place that is kid size. Wherever children play – around the house, in the neighborhood, in schools, make small “caves” for them.<sup>xviii</sup>”

For children with ADHD, some additional modifications to the space may be helpful:<sup>xvii</sup>

- Provide brightly colored mats for children to work on to help them stay focused
- Provide brightly colored pens, pencils and file folders and/or binders
- Provide some type of background music, preferably using headphones – music can mask distractions, reduce tension and stimulate children to remain alert
- Post homework questions, reminders and suggestions for organizing and checking work
- Use posters that display positive messages – “Stay cool,” “Relax,” “Think before you act” – that can help children who respond better to visual cues than to spoken reminders
- Provide timers and/or a stopwatch to help children stay on task and set realistic goals for how long homework assignments will take

One beneficial use for the concept of a private space is as a “respite retreat.”<sup>xix</sup> Respite retreats are small areas where individual children can go to have quiet, private time to regain focus and composure. Be sure to include soft items, color and some type of partition to define the area. Some providers use small pop up tents sold for children’s rooms – they are lightweight, reasonably priced and easily assembled. Provide a basket or small shelf of quiet games, puzzles and other soothing, tactile materials for use by one child. Explain the purpose of the area and involve children in helping to create it. It sets a much more positive tone than calling such an area a “time out zone.”

Let children modify and reconfigure the shape of activity areas on a regular basis as they make the space their own. They may have ideas about how to use moveable partitions, low shelves on casters, tables and chairs, cushions and other seating to make the space more comfortable. Given permission and some help, children will change the shape and size of the activity areas to make them suitable for their own interests and projects.

## Active Play

For school-age children, it's especially important to have a large open space or gym for vigorous physical play. Many children need active play to help them wind down from the school day and make the transition to afterschool care. Others just naturally enjoy running and jumping, intense physical activity or working on physical skills or control.

All children need daily physical activity, and they need to develop active habits to counteract our increasingly sedentary lifestyle. Recess, physical education and outdoor play have been reduced or eliminated in many schools. Television and computer games take up a large portion of children's time both in and out of school. As a result, too many school children are overweight.

Afterschool programs have a unique opportunity to build active play into their schedule and can create an environment that offers a range of activities that are fun and keep children moving. If your program has access to a large gym or cafeteria space, these activities can be offered as a regular choice during the program day. If your space is more limited, find opportunities using indoor space – many programs convert a hallway for games with soft balls or foam rubber hoops for part of the day. If suitable facilities are not available onsite or in a playground adjacent to your space, it's important to identify nearby parks and playing fields and arrange to use them daily. Depending on the space available, the following are furnishings for active play:

- Balance beams and balance boards
- Bikes and riding toys (with helmets)
- Climbing structures, with appropriate safety surface
- Low plastic saucer-scooters to use alone or connected with others
- Hopping balls and large bouncing or exercise balls
- Hula hoops, jump ropes, pogo balls
- Parachutes for cooperative games
- Swings, slides and other play equipment, with appropriate safety surface
- Gym mats

For children with ADD/ADHD, active play and sports take on even more importance. These children may have struggled to get through the school day and look forward to engaging in an activity that they enjoy and in which they excel. Roberta Newman's fine manual, **Helping Children and Youth with Attention Deficit Disorder Succeed in After-School Programs**, lists a number of activities with a good explanation for why each may be especially suitable for a child with ADD/ADHD.<sup>xxi</sup>

“If children do not have space to release a tremendous amount of energy when they need to, they will drive themselves and everybody else up the wall.”<sup>xx</sup>

## Drama

Children in afterschool programs still like to take part in different types of creative or dramatic play – for younger children, it may be playing dress up and engaging in house play. For others it is play with small plastic building sets and figures, doll houses, little animal characters and similar toys that can spill over into block play and arts and crafts if children begin building items to extend and expand their play. It can also be puppets and puppet stages and eventually theatrical productions, beginning with acting out stories and expanding into scriptwriting, developing costumes and performances. Depending on the age range in your program, you may have to develop several independent and age-appropriate areas for dramatic play.

For the younger children:

- Props that can be manipulated by the children to represent different settings: a home, a doctor's office, a pet store or whatever, along with materials and props that help the area take shape
- Try to include real props rather than plastic replicas, and make the area rich and representative of the diverse cultures in your program

For children interested in figurines, forts and dollhouses:

- Sets of Legos, Playmobil or other collections of small figures and their paraphernalia
- A protected and comfortable area with a suitable play surface and a clearly labeled and accessible storage system. Ideally this is an area where elaborate constructions can be developed and left standing for several days.

For children interested in puppet shows and drama:

- Costumes, props and makeup
- Supplies for making puppets and props
- Puppets and a puppet theatre. An interesting puppet theatre with 16 multicultural adult and child characters and a range of backdrops and costumes is made by PlayStages. For more information see the products page.
- Lighting and a sound system
- A platform or stage

## Creative Arts

Art is another activity often squeezed out of the school day schedule because of academic pressures. The afterschool program can devote a great deal of time and space to supporting children's exploration of various art media.

- Set aside an area where the floors, walls and tables can be easily cleaned
- Consider lighting – natural light is best, but if that is not available, add task lighting
- Provide a range of work surfaces: tables, easels, floor space
- Be sure that there are spaces for children of different ages and abilities to engage in creative activities at their own level
- Provide a wide range of art materials, including recycled stuff and natural materials
- Provide for storage of works in progress
- Provide appropriate display

## Games

Children in afterschool are often “rule-bound” so they may spend as much time working out the rules as playing the game. They enjoy games requiring skill or strategy. Be sure to provide:

- Playing surfaces: tables and chairs, carpeted floor or area rug, loft space or low tables where children can sit on the floor
- Games of varied types and levels: board games, card games, puzzles
- Timers for chess or Scrabble tournaments
- Manipulative materials with levels of increasing difficulty
- Easily accessed but well-organized storage for games
- Space for active larger games like pool or foosball and appropriate equipment – often these are best placed in a corner or alcove since they require space to move and can get noisy

### **TIP:**

Children will use  
open-ended materials more  
than closed ones.

## Science and Nature

Children have too little opportunity to interact with the natural world. Their lives are busy and often over-scheduled, so there is rarely time to explore materials and figure out how things work. An "exploratorium" or "inventors station" in the afterschool space can lead to great hands-on learning.

Begin with:

- Storage and display for collections and materials
- Access to water and natural light
- A work counter or table and chairs
- Display area for children's work
- An array of natural materials, objects and loose parts from nature
- A light table for working with color, light and shadows

Let the children – particularly those over 10 – set the direction for scientific inquiry and then build activities and provide resources to extend the learning in a meaningful and enjoyable direction. A company called American Science & Surplus has a catalog of unusual, inexpensive and interesting materials that may help inspire staff and children. It's listed on the products page.

## HOW TO PLAN AND ORGANIZE STORAGE

One key to creating an attractive and functional space is figuring out where to store all the stuff used in operating an afterschool program. According to Anita Rui Olds, 10 % of a program's square footage should be allocated to storage – that's 10% of the space in each room if you have several rooms, and should add up to 10% of your overall square footage.<sup>xxii</sup> Few programs have anywhere near that amount of storage space, which may be one reason that so many afterschool programs look cluttered and chaotic, even if the staff believe they know where things can be found.

Consider the full range of storage needed and create a master storage plan, even if it takes a couple of months to implement it. Go through the program creating an inventory of the types of materials and equipment that you need to store. Then identify existing storage units and closets.

Develop a storage system based on the layout of your space. List all the functional areas, which may include all or most of the following: entry, staff space, office, children's spaces subdivided into interest areas, central shared storage, lavatories, kitchen, hallways, gym, multipurpose rooms and other spaces.

Next, consider the major activities that take place in each of those areas, and the supplies, materials and furnishings that you use for each area. Then create a list of the storage units or closets you have or need for that area. A form for conducting a storage inventory is included in the appendix.

When you have finished with the master storage plan, there will undoubtedly be items that fit in no functional category. Some of those items can be thrown away or given to another program. Some will require a separate functional heading – seasonal equipment, emergency preparedness, fundraising activities, etc. Apply the same inventory process and incorporate those functions into the master storage plan.

Remember the acronym  
**SPACE** as you tackle  
storage problems:

**S**ort items by type

**P**urge and throw out

**A**ssign a home for every item

**C**ontain and organize

**E**stablish responsibility for  
maintaining the system

Use your imagination when organizing items for open storage or display:

Asian dishes  
Bamboo steamer baskets  
Baskets of all sizes  
Clear plastic bins  
Clear plastic shoe bags  
Clothesline and clothespins  
Fabric purses and scraps  
Galvanized pails  
Glass jars and bottles  
Lacquer ware  
Magazine file boxes  
Net bags  
Pegboard and hooks  
Plastic tubs or dishpans  
Shaker pegs  
Small parts sorter  
Stacking in and out boxes  
Terra cotta flowerpots  
Trays of different shapes  
Wooden puzzle storage units  
Wooden bowls  
Wooden cutting boards

## Types of Storage

**Open Storage** should be attractive, well organized and inviting. It is more akin to a display area than a closed cupboard. Open storage is most often used for presenting materials to children in the program, so requirements for this storage should include easy access by children. Use labels and a child-friendly system to guide in selecting and returning materials to their appropriate place.

Arrange and present materials in attractive containers. Open storage should be uncluttered with "a place for everything and everything in its place." It should be located in or very near each interest area. Smaller items may be stored in bins or other containers – in each case, sort objects of similar shapes, colors or uses carefully and devise an easily interpreted system for storing the items.

Some programs prefer clear bins, with or without covers. Others use flat baskets and containers made of natural materials, nice boxes or trays. Get the children involved and cover small boxes with wallpaper or contact paper. Some programs use color to help organize materials for a particular interest area – the area rug is blue and all containers in the area are coordinated in shades of blue. Used this way, color can help children maintain the storage system. However, avoid combining too many multi-colored bins in one area because it can look chaotic and undermine your system.

**Closed Storage** is hidden from public view, but still requires organization and a commitment to maintaining order. Assign each item a "home." Labeling is critical so that sufficient space is maintained even for items that have been rotated into use. If items have no home they will get shoved into the storage unit or closet, and things go downhill fast. Large items should be measured and a simple sketch or blueprint made to show what goes where in each storage unit. Using shelf dividers will help hold space for items. Information on storage units is listed on the products page.

If you use small plastic or wooden dressers, be sure that the drawers are labeled outside and divided inside with small bins and boxes so that items in each drawer can be sorted by size or type. Without dividers, drawers quickly get overstuffed and turn into junk drawers.

**Adjustable Open Storage** offers flexibility because it can be reconfigured to meet changing needs. One type can be built from brackets and standards mounted on the wall. If you use this type of storage, make sure it is mounted properly and don't overload the shelves. Some units come with vinyl-covered wire shelves, or you can purchase the brackets and standards and use them with wood or laminate shelves. Look for shelves with a raised edge at each end so that materials don't fall off the sides of the shelf.

Another type of adjustable shelves are made from wood veneer or laminate and can be assembled pretty easily. Most have a fixed top and bottom and one fixed shelf in the middle, a cardboard or fiberboard back and several shelves that can be placed on support studs in predrilled holes in the sides of the shelf unit. Select individual units only after you have determined how they will be used. They come in many sizes from about 12 to 30 inches wide, and from 18 to 72 inches high. Your space will look more unified if you choose one style for the shelf units and use it throughout the space.

**Portable Storage** may be the best or only option for programs using shared space. Portable storage needs to be light enough for staff to carry, or it should be on wheels or casters. There is a wide array of containers and storage units, once you have determined what you need. Choose the storage units only after deciding what you plan to store in different areas. Information on manufacturers and some units are listed on the products page.

**Offsite Storage** should be considered if there is insufficient storage space at the program site. In some cases, a storage shed can be erected somewhere on the property. Sometimes a staff member or family has garage, basement or attic space they are willing to lend or rent. Other times it will be necessary to rent a small unit in a commercial self-storage facility. In any of those scenarios, it will be critical to provide utility shelves to hold boxes and bulky items. Label all boxes and maintain a detailed inventory of everything stored offsite.

### **Making the Storage Plan Work**

While disorganization and visual chaos affect everyone in the program – staff, children and parents – no one wants to own the problem, even after the space has been organized. Try to take before-and-after photos to document the process and to remind everyone how great the space looks when it's neat and organized. Be sure to establish regular goals and habits for maintaining the system with:

- Daily cleanup – this doesn't take long when everything has a home. Children can help.
- Weekly tune-ups – staff should designate a time each week to make sure the storage system is working and to address any problems. The most common problem is likely to be that someone is not taking care of daily cleanup. Deal with it early or the whole system will unravel.
- Periodic follow-up – figure out what's working and what's not. Living with the system will help identify whether things need to be moved or changed. Purge stuff as it gets broken or worn out. If something has been waiting for repair since the last follow-up session, either fix it now or pitch it out. Add new containers or get more storage units. Make the follow-up session fun and be sure it is a team effort.

A lasting commitment to organized storage will require some equipment as well. Be sure the program has a good portable vacuum cleaner with all the attachments. Have a step stool and toolbox with a set of basic tools: a steel measuring tape, a hammer, pliers, a rechargeable screwdriver with different heads, a utility knife, staple gun, hand drill, and a supply of nails and tacks, screws, masking and duct tape, glue sticks and adhesives, fine wire, nylon fishing line and bungee cords. These will be helpful in creating displays, making minor repairs and maintaining the storage system.

## HOW TO MANAGE IN SHARED SPACE

One of the hardest challenges for afterschool programs is the fact that so many continue to operate in space that is shared with schools, recreation centers or other organizations. To make it even more challenging, the program is often restricted to using the cafeteria and/or gym – space which could never be described as homelike or comfortable. They are large spaces, with vast expanses of tile floors, tile or painted walls and other hard surfaces. To complicate matters, there are often folding cafeteria tables or bleachers that can be moved but not removed.

The daily ritual of having to “set-up, take-down-and-disappear”<sup>xxiii</sup> makes the task of creating an environment a baffling or daunting one. To begin, it is important to break the work into manageable steps and concentrate on developing one area at a time. Be sure to create a welcoming entry area. Hang or place a colorful clipboard for signing in and out. Frame the entry area with a portable partition that displays children's work and sets a tone. Hang a banner or pretty dried wreath on or near the entry door, especially if there are multiple doors into the space.

Even though the space is shared, you want to ensure that each interest area includes the attributes mentioned earlier: a specific location, boundaries to define the area, play and sitting surfaces, storage and a unique mood or identity.

### Location

Put those activities requiring quiet concentration in the most protected corner of the space. Once that is decided, develop the other activity areas as described earlier. Be sure children can differentiate one activity area from another.

### Portable Boundaries

There are a number of different options for creating boundaries:

- Folding screens and mobile partitions
- Mobile shelf units
- Rolling chalk boards or bulletin boards
- Posters mounted on foam core. Two pieces can be connected in the shape of sandwich board; three can be connected to form a folding screen. Use plastic cable ties laced through holes punched in the foam core.
- Decorated foam core can also be used as inexpensive, light-weight table-top dividers for creating study carrels to help children concentrate. Let each child decorate the inside of his/her carrel with photos, color and other materials.

**TIP:**

Using varied textures will encourage differentiated uses of the entire facility

- Artwork or display on free-standing easels
- Banners and wall hangings

If you must configure the space using cafeteria tables, cover them with tablecloths that identify different activity areas. Some providers recommend setting tables on the diagonal to add interest and to break up the straight lines and right angles of the space.

Folding mobile partitions can be purchased in various heights and widths. They are an expensive but well-made and sturdy product. Each panel is upholstered with a sound-absorbing and tackable fabric surface, so they help reduce noise and offer a good display surface. Each mobile partition unit has stable wheels that lock into place, and the partitions can be formed into straight lines, curves, circles, squares or rectangles to divide your space. See more information on the products page.

### **Play and Sitting Surfaces**

For many activities, children prefer playing on the floor or stretching out on rugs, risers or pillows. In choosing area rugs, use solid colors or subdued tones rather than the too bright and over-patterned "educational" carpets, which can detract from rather than enhance the environment.

Carpeted platforms work well, but unless left in place can prove challenging to deploy every day. They can be made to fit a particular space, and even an elevation of 4 to 6 inches helps define a separate area. If you can't arrange to build a platform, consider the carpeted hollow blocks described on the products page.

Other options include pop-up nylon tents, gym mats, futons, folding nylon chairs (sometimes called "soccer mom chairs") or wood and canvas sling chairs. Many inexpensive, lightweight portable chairs and tables designed for use at the beach can be used in afterschool programs. If these items are purchased at the end of the summer season, they can also be real bargains.

If you move all your materials twice a day, it makes sense to develop well-equipped activity boxes for each interest area. Many programs use large plastic storage totes with lids and handles. Materials for each activity are collected and stored in one place. Staff and children can put the activity boxes in each activity area during set-up; at the end of the day, all materials are repacked and stored away.<sup>xxiv</sup> Purchase the plastic storage totes after you know whether you have closets or will be using storage cabinets. Most of the storage cabinets are only 18 or 24 inches deep, so you want to be sure that the tote boxes fit into the cabinets.

## Storage

If your site does not offer sufficient permanent storage, think about how to create secure portable or mobile storage. Read the earlier section on storage before purchasing storage containers and cabinets.

Use sturdy mobile book towers, display units, big book holder or mobile easels — all available from library suppliers. They are not secure, so would have to be rolled into a locking closet. See more information on the products page.

Consider lighter-weight and less expensive storage containers such as galvanized tubs, rolling toy trolleys, folding mesh cubes and 8 or 12-drawer mobile storage chests made of translucent plastic. Again, these containers would need to be part of a storage solution that includes lockable cabinets or closets.

For locking storage units, you can either choose lightweight molded plastic or heavier steel storage units. Some of the steel storage units are available on wheels, but may not be very mobile once they are fully loaded. The plastic units are widely available and reasonably priced, but they have some limitations: the shelf height is not adjustable and shelves may be unstable if heavily loaded. The units come in a box and snap together with very few tools. They might be best for storing bulky lightweight items like sports equipment, mats, rolled up rugs, etc. The metal storage cabinets are significantly heavier and stronger. Surprisingly, they are not significantly more expensive. They have adjustable metal shelves that can support 100 lbs. or more. For more information, see the products page.

## Unique mood

Creating a unique and identifiable mood for each interest area requires attention to aesthetics, lighting, acoustics and the other elements that go into creating a space that welcomes children. The following are a number of suggestions that will help create an identity for each interest area and will help transform an institutional space into one that is softer and more appealing. Consider allergies or special needs of any staff or children as you focus on “creating a mood” in the space.

*“Adequate and convenient storage space for equipment, materials and personal possessions of children and staff” is one of the standards of excellence for afterschool programs according to the National Association of Elementary School Principals. xxv*

**Natural Elements:**

Add plants. If you describe the light levels and growing conditions to a nursery professional, he/she can recommend low maintenance plants. Start with a few simple, hearty plants with different types of leaves. Group them – the varied size, form and color will add visual interest and makes routine maintenance easier. If you can't set up a plant area permanently in the space, check on whether you can put some plants on a rolling cart and store it in the office or a classroom during the day. If you don't want to spend much on plants, try a wooden planter with several herbs – mint, rosemary, lavender and others; they add scent and greenery and can be used in cooking, art and dramatic play.

Arrange interesting twigs, shells and smooth stones on a wicker tray to display at the entry to your program – rotate beach glass, leaves, pinecones, gourds, acorns and other natural elements to keep the display interesting. Encourage the children to arrange the materials and add their own found elements.

Mount several large seasonal nature posters on foam core – hang them on the wall or display on easels. Rotate them with the change of seasons. Add the color green and subdued earth tones in fabrics and other materials in the space. Wrap strings of small lights around twigs or wreaths of grapevine and hang them with pushpins.

Hang paper mobiles from air vents to create a sense of air movement or a breeze in the space.

**Aromas & Scent**

Sometimes when a program uses a cafeteria space or gym, the air is stale or has lingering odors. Open the windows for fresh air if you can. If not, the aromas in the space can be changed using essential oils. Good scents for use with children are cinnamon, lavender or sweet orange. Small electric scent diffusers are available in natural food and cosmetic stores. There are other aroma

dispersal systems that use a few drops of scented oil in a terra cotta halo that sits on a light bulb. The heat from the bulb is the only energy needed. Another option — but only if it can be set up safely — is to put a handful of apple cider spices (cinnamon, cloves and allspice) in a crock-pot with water. Using a small fan to move the air in the space will help your efforts. Remember that “less may be more” so do not create an unpleasant environment with overpowering aromas.

## **Lighting**

Think of fun and creative ways to lighten and light up your space. Use clip-on lights or portable lamps to vary lighting levels in different parts of the room. Turn off half the fluorescent lights — if your building has newer electric service, you may be able to dim the fluorescents. Place acrylic mirrors in some areas to reflect light and add sparkle. Frame doorways or bulletin boards with small white lights or any of the novelty shapes — chili peppers, boots and cowboy hats, animals, etc.

## **Sound**

To create a soothing sound, use a small recirculating fountain in a quiet area. There are many tabletop models — look for them in garden shops and catalogs. Play tapes or CDs of nature sounds in the science area — the ocean, bird songs, etc. Hang wind chimes by the window or near an air vent. Provide plenty of rhythmic ethnic music when you want to raise the energy level — Putumayo is a good source. See more information on the products page.

## **Window Coverings**

Consider installing an attractive fabric valance at the top of windows — negotiate leaving it in place if the program purchases and installs it. Another alternative is put up temporary curtains using tension rods or to drape fabric swags or cascades to create a softer, homelike look in part of the space. All fabric will need to meet fire code. If windows are covered with grates, decorate the inside of the grates with artificial flowers or butterflies in the springtime, colored artificial leaves in the fall, and evergreens in the winter.

## Color

Even if you can't repaint the shared space, think about how you use color in your choice of furnishings and materials. Consider the location of windows in the space as you decide on a color scheme. If the windows face south or west, use blue, blue-green or blue-violet tones to make the space calmer and more relaxing. If the windows face north or east, you can warm up the space with reds, soft orange or yellow and melon tones. If your space has no windows and you are in fluorescent light, add a few lamps with incandescent bulbs for a warmer more natural light and mix in touches of red, yellow or orange as mentioned above.

The floor makes up about 30% of what you see, so the color of the floor should be considered when choosing other colors. Choose area rugs and other materials to create a harmonious color scheme, which is more restful and relaxing.

Use washable tablecloths on tables, especially if you are using the school cafeteria tables. This may be the cheapest, quickest and highest-impact change you can make in the space.

## WHEN TO START

Changing practice, changing attitudes and changing the afterschool environment will be a challenge. We are so accustomed to “making do” and accepting the status quo on makeshift space that even the most committed and impassioned professionals – not to mention skeptics or pessimists – may be reluctant to tackle their space.

However, it is a project that can begin as soon as you make it a priority. Addressing the look and feel of your afterschool space can be undertaken in manageable chunks – one area at a time if need be. Small changes can be made every week. Larger and more substantial changes require planning and resources.

The results are worth the effort. Staff will feel new energy and excitement about their work. Children will get excited and may surprise you with their thoughtful suggestions about transforming the space. Parents will notice, and if asked, will offer ideas and resources. The initial goal may be an afterschool space that functions better for everyone who inhabits it, but in striving for better space, you can create an environment that tells the story of your program and the lives of those who work and play there every day.

## PRODUCT LIST

*Sometimes not knowing where to find resources becomes a barrier to action, so the following list of products and sources is offered as a starting point. You may find similar products locally or available from your usual vendors. Inclusion on the list is not an endorsement of any product by NJSACC or the author. All prices are approximate.*

### **Carpeted Blocks**

Carpeted plywood block structures come in lengths from 1 foot to 6 feet. One manufacturer is Bear Blocks from Mansfield, MA. All are 1 foot wide and either 5 or 10 inches high. The blocks are open on one side and carpeted with light brown residential pile carpeting on three sides. The top has an extra layer of padding so that they make comfortable seats for meeting time or hanging out. The blocks can be purchased individually or in sets of 2, 4, 9, 13, 18 or 24 blocks. A pair of 5-foot blocks is about \$380; a set of four is \$699. For a brochure, call 800-424-BEAR. No website.

### **Lanterns**

Both Fisher Price and Rayovac make a number of battery-operated plastic lanterns that work well as book lights for non-nappers. The Fisher Price Nature Sounds Lantern (\$15) chirps like a cricket and makes several other night sounds – which could be interesting or irritating, depending on how many are chirping at the same time. Rayovac has a plastic lantern, plain as well as in Hello Kitty and Barbie motifs for \$12, a Kids Adventure Headlight on a strap that looks like an old time miner's lamp for \$8, and a Barbie book light for \$12. Look for them at discount stores like Target, at large toy stores or online.

### **Lockers**

One supplier of metal lockers is Cisco-Eagle in Dallas, TX. Double tier lockers can be purchased in units of 6 (Each locker space is 12 x 12 x 30; the whole unit is 60 inches tall and 36 inches wide. Cost with base is about \$325 for six lockers, or \$54 per child storage unit. For more information, go to the website, [www.cisco-eagle.com](http://www.cisco-eagle.com), or call 888-877-3861.

A supplier for stackable birch veneer plywood lockers is Wood Designs in Monroe, NC. Open stacking lockers are sold in sections of four. Each locker space is 12 x 12 x 20; the whole unit is 20 inches high and 46 inches wide, but can be stacked 3 high for a unit of 12 lockers. Cost is about \$190 for 4 lockers, or \$47.50 per child storage unit. For units with doors, the cost rises to \$285, or \$71.25 per child storage unit. For more information, go to the website, [www.edumart.com/wooddesigns](http://www.edumart.com/wooddesigns) or call 800-247-8465.

Another supplier of both metal and wood lockers is Adirondack School Supply in Long Island City, NY. Go to their website at [www.adirondack.com](http://www.adirondack.com) or call 800-221-2444.

If you want metal lockers, check also with local public schools regarding suppliers, pricing and the availability of second-hand products.

### **Locking Storage Units**

Molded plastic storage sheds are available in a good range of sizes and styles. A standing shed (56 x 32 x 77) with two doors and two vinyl-covered wire shelves is available for less than \$250. A vertical deck box (24 x 24 x 42) with a lid that lifts up costs about \$80. One of the best-known manufacturers is Rubbermaid. These units are sturdy and weatherproof. They come unassembled in cartons and can be assembled with very few tools. Note that some have molded supports for shelves but require that you purchase wood or plastic shelves. They can be locked with a padlock. Look for them at Lowes or Home Depot, hardware stores and online.

Steel storage cabinets are available in various sizes, colors and designs. Most are only 18 to 24 inches deep, but can be purchased in varied heights and widths. Prices range from \$180 to \$450. Some mobile steel cabinets can be purchased with locking casters.

One vendor with an extensive catalog for storage units and other school furnishings is Adirondack from Long Island City, NY. Their website is [www.adirondack.com](http://www.adirondack.com), or call 800-221-2444.

## **Lightweight and Mobile Storage Containers**

The Container Store is a national chain, based in Dallas, TX. It's a source of all kinds of storage containers: open bins and baskets, stacking shelves, totes with covers, lightweight crates and rolling containers of various kinds. Even if you don't shop there, the website is a great resource for researching the wide range of containers available. The website is [www.containerstore.com](http://www.containerstore.com).

## **Modular Partitions**

Lightweight modular partitions in two sizes (24 x 24 or 24 x 49) are available from Wesco in Princeville, QC, in Canada. The partitions can be ordered with translucent rigid panels, washable fabric panels, display panels with pockets, curtains or several screen-printed patterns. Individual partitions can stand on weighted feet, or several can be joined together with clips to create a 3-part folding partition. Small partitions range in price from \$33 to \$41, depending on the choice of panels. Large partitions range in price from \$43 to \$61. The feet are \$20 per set and clips are sold in pairs for \$5. For more information, contact the company at [www.wesco-group.com](http://www.wesco-group.com) or call 888-364-2644.

## **Music**

Putumayo Music has a series of children's world music CDs and activity kits, as well as an extensive collection of music for all ages. They also offer training on cultural diversity through music and art. The CDs are widely available in music stores, catalogs, and large chain bookstores like Barnes & Noble, or can be purchased on their website at [www.putumayo.com](http://www.putumayo.com). For more information on the training, contact Putumayo at 212-625-1400, ext 250.

## **Oilcloth**

Child-friendly, durable and washable vinyl oilcloth is imported from Mexico. It's available in beautiful colors and patterns, can be cut with ordinary scissors and used without hemming. You can see colors and patterns at [www.oilcloth.com](http://www.oilcloth.com) (click on "swatches"). It can be purchased online, or to find a retail source in your area, contact Oilcloth International in Los Angeles. Telephone 323-344-3967 or email [info@oilcloth.com](mailto:info@oilcloth.com). Oilcloth is 47" wide and costs about \$8 per yard.

## **Puppet Theatre**

The portable theatre, props and attractive cast of molded-plastic Minikins (16 diverse men, women, boys and girls with individual faces) will enhance dramatic play at any afterschool program. PlayStages, the small company that created the sets is in Boston, MA. The Minikins have a number of costumes, they are easy to use and the backdrops include school scenes, urban scenes, country life and various home interiors. The props include a wheelchair that will fit an adult or child Minikin. The education package is about \$450 and includes curriculum and activity guides. Call 866-MINIKIN for a catalog or visit the website at [www.playstages.com](http://www.playstages.com).

## **Science Materials**

A source of inexpensive materials and ideas is American Science & Surplus. The website is [www.sciplus.com](http://www.sciplus.com) or call for a catalog; 847-647-0011.

## **Upholstered Furniture**

One of the challenges in providing soft or upholstered furniture is finding items that are both affordable and that meet fire code. Library furnishings catalogs are a good source. Two catalogs are Highsmith at [www.highsmith.com](http://www.highsmith.com) or 800-558-2110, and Brodart Contract Furniture at [www.brodart.com](http://www.brodart.com) or 888-521-1184. Examples of items are stools with upholstered seats that range in price from \$135 to \$182. A 52-inch-wide love seat is \$463. Beanbag chairs are \$50 to \$60 apiece; a beanbag-style armchair is \$100. Child-friendly "Puff Chairs" are \$335, and Scoop Chairs are \$170.

## ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCES

### **National Pediculosis Association**

50 Kearney Road  
Needham, MA 02494  
281-499-NITS  
www.headlice.org

This is a non-profit organization with up-to-date and accurate information on managing and preventing outbreaks of head lice in schools and child care programs.

### **Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Online Resource Library**

www.lisc.org

To download a copy of the study, *Child Care by Design*, go to the resources section of the website.

### **National Institute on Out-of-School Time (NIOST)**

www.niost.org

The National Institute on Out-of-School Time focuses national attention on the importance of children's out-of-school time. NIOST's varied initiatives have moved the field forward using three paths:

- Research, evaluation and consultation
- Policy development and public awareness
- Training and curriculum development

### **National AfterSchool Association (NAA)**

www.naaweb.org

NAA (formerly the National School-Age Care Alliance) is a professional association with a membership of more than 7,000 practitioners, policy makers, and administrators representing all sectors of after-school and out-of-school time programs. Watch their website for state-specific links to affiliate organizations, resources and information on afterschool care.

### **New Jersey School-Age Care Coalition**

(NJSACC)

Located at 170 Elm Street  
Westfield, NJ 07090  
in the bell tower of the First Baptist Church of Westfield  
Mailing address:  
231 North Avenue West, #363  
Westfield, NJ 07090  
908-789-0259  
www.njsacc.org

The mission of the New Jersey School-Age Care Coalition is to promote and support the development, continuity and expansion of quality programs for children and youth during out-of-school time.

NJSACC has a series of technical assistance papers and other resources on all aspects of afterschool care on its website. NJSACC published and distributes *Imagine: Afterschool Space That Works*.

## PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF AN AFTERSCHOOL SPACE

*Before beginning to plan your space, collect information about existing conditions in each classroom or area in your larger space. Note the condition of all furnishings and create a list of additional furnishings or equipment needed.*

**Staff names** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Group/Class** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ # of children \_\_\_\_\_ # of staff \_\_\_\_\_ # of volunteers using the space regularly

What are the best qualities of the space? How can these be enhanced?

What are the three most pressing space problems you would like to address? In which order should they be addressed?

<b>Most pressing problem:</b>	<b>Possible solutions:</b>
<b>Second problem:</b>	
<b>Third problem:</b>	

	<b>List existing furnishings:</b>	<b>List additional furnishings needed:</b>
<p><b>Number of tables</b> List with their functions</p>		
<p><b>Number of chairs of all kinds</b> Include sofas, love seats, etc. Note where children spend the most time</p>		
<p><b>Mobile partitions that are not shelf or storage units</b></p>		
<p><b>Storage units</b> List number &amp; type (open shelves, cabinets, closets, etc.)</p> <p>A. Classroom</p> <p>B. Hallway and entry</p> <p>C. Staff personal storage</p> <p>D. Child personal storage</p> <p>E. Bulky equipment and/or seasonal</p> <p>F. Food and supplies</p> <p>G. Other</p>		
<p><b>List special equipment used in interest areas</b> <i>(Do not repeat anything listed earlier)</i></p>		

	<b>List existing equipment:</b>	<b>List additional equipment needed:</b>
Art Area Book/Reading Area Computer Area Cozy/Quiet Space Drama/Dramatic Play Games & Manipulative Materials Home Base/Meeting Area Music Respite Retreat Science & Discovery Sports & Active Play Tutorial & Homework Additional Areas		

**List equipment and furnishings used by the administrative and teaching staff.**

**List those people who might help with the planning or redesign of your space.**

*Consider some or all of the following: staff, parents, school personnel, your landlord, children in the program, members of your Board, architects and/or consultant, your licensor or funding source)*

## DEVELOPING A STORAGE INVENTORY

*Storage in an afterschool program requires more planning than is usually given to the task. To develop a program-wide approach to storage, it's helpful to identify all the items that require storage and where those items are used most often. Begin by doing an inventory, using this form.*

<b>Functional Area</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Furnishings/Materials</b>	<b>Storage Unit or Activity Area</b>
<i>(Example)</i> Entry	Sign in sheet Children's storage	Hook & Clipboard	Cubbies, Partitions

# CHECKLIST FOR PURCHASING FURNITURE

*Consider the following as you evaluate the purchase of new equipment for your program:*

## **Aesthetics:**

- Does the piece appeal to your sense of design and beauty?
- Do you like the colors and materials?
- Will it contribute to the harmony of the environment you are creating?

## **Durability:**

- Will the furniture last with daily use by school-aged children?

## **Ease of Maintenance:**

- Can it be cleaned and sanitized?
- Will it be easy to maintain and repair?
- Does the manufacturer provide replacement parts?

## **Economics:**

- What is the initial cost vs. the "lifetime" cost of the piece?
- How often will you have to replace cheaper furniture rather than purchasing better and longer lasting pieces?
- Have you calculated shipping costs when comparing prices?
- Have you asked for a discount?
- Do you understand the purchasing volume that qualifies for a discount and have you developed a strategy for qualifying?

## **Ergonomics:**

- Will the furniture be comfortable for staff and children to use?
- Is the furniture appropriate for its proposed use?
- Are adults using furniture designed for adult 's use?

## **Quality:**

- Is the furniture built with high-quality materials and finishes?
- What does the warranty cover and how long is it in effect?

## **Safety:**

- Is the furniture stable and will it resist tipping?
- Will any of the materials in the piece splinter or shatter?
- Are there protrusions, pinch hazards, hard edges or sharp corners?
- Does it meet applicable fire codes, product liability, and licensing regulations?

## **Scale:**

- Does the furniture fit the space?
- Is it the correct size for the children in the program?
- Does it support children's developing skills and independence?

## **Suitability:**

- Is it suitable for the planned use?



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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>i</sup> *Authentic Childhood: Exploring Reggio Emilia in the Classroom*, by Susan Fraser and Carol Gestwicki, Delmar, Thomson Learning, 2000, p 99.
- <sup>ii</sup> *Child Care Facilities: Quality by Design* by Tony Proscio, Carl Sussman and Amy Gillman, Local Initiatives Support Corporation, May 2004, p 1 and 2.
- <sup>iii</sup> "Psychological and Physiological Harmony in Child Care Center Design" by Anita Rui Olds, *Children's Environments Quarterly*, 1989.
- <sup>iv</sup> *A Pattern Language*, by Christopher Alexander et al, p 294, 1977.
- <sup>v</sup> "The Qualities of Excellent School-Age Care," Technical Assistance Paper Number 1, NJSACC website at [www.njsacc.org](http://www.njsacc.org). p 2.
- <sup>vi</sup> *The NSACA Standards for Quality School-Age Care*, Roman, Janette, ed. National School-Age Care Alliance, 1998.
- <sup>vii</sup> <sup>viii</sup> Alexander et al, p 368.
- <sup>ix</sup> All the tips and some other content in this section come from a course handout (EDU 316 G) by Dr. Ronald Linder, University of South Florida, 1989.
- <sup>x</sup> Alexander et al, p 645.
- <sup>xi</sup> *Helping Children and Youth with Attention Deficit Disorder Succeed in After-School Programs*, by Roberta L. Newman, p 69, 2002.
- <sup>xii</sup> Study on Seasonal Affective Disorder, Kaiser Permanente Health Care information taken from [www.holisticonline.com](http://www.holisticonline.com) .
- <sup>xiii</sup> "Child Care Provider's Guide to Controlling Head Lice", from the website of the National Pediculosis Association, [www.headlice.org](http://www.headlice.org), p 3, 2004.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>xv</sup> "The Way We Eat Now" by Craig Lambert, *Harvard Magazine*, p 52, May-June 2004.

- xvi Tips come from a course handout (EDU 316 G) by Dr. Ronald Linder, University of South Florida, 1989.
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- xxi Alexander et al, p 652.
- xxii xxiii Newman, p 80-82.
- xxiv Olds, p 74.
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