CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

SPACES FOR
SCHOOL-AGE CHILDREN

There was a child went forth every day,
And the first object he looked upon, that object he became,
And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day,
Or for many years or stretching cycles of years.
—WALT WHITMAN

School-age groups often span a wide and developmentally diverse range of ages. This chapter focuses on the activity and care needs of children six to ten years old who come to the child care center either before (6-8 a.m.) or after (2-6 p.m.) attending elementary school. (Five- to six-year-olds may also come to the center for the half-day—morning or afternoon—when they are not attending kindergarten.) The chapter does not address the design of elementary school classrooms for child care centers that are incorporating grades 1-6 into their programs. To create spaces that will challenge and support school-age children, use the questions and guidelines outlined here in conjunction with the zoning recommendations in Chapter 7, the activity-area design suggestions in Chapter 15, and for half-day kindergartens, the issues addressed in Chapter 17 for preschool kindergartens.

In the summer, a school-age program can become a day camp for the children who attend the center before or after school during the school year, especially if the size, location, and outfitting of the school-age space is designed with this use in mind at the outset.

Types of Programs

Programs for school-age children consist of three types: before-school, half-day for kindergarteners, and after-school.

Before-School Programs

Children whose parents start work early or have a long commute to work often need care before the school day begins. Increasingly, centers that are open early for full-day care are also responding to this before-school demand. A pleasant, sunny place to eat breakfast; cozy chairs and couches to nestle into; places to play games, read, do homework, or talk are reassuring and comforting to children who may have to rise early and hurry out of the house before their schools open. The child care center can help to set the tone for the child's entire day.

Half-Day Programs for Kindergarteners

Sometimes half-day kindergarteners come to the child care center for the entire morning or afternoon when they are not in school. The recommendations for kindergarteners in Chapter 17 can apply for these children as well. In addition, coordination with the child's kindergarten teacher can help the center provide activities that complement rather than repeat what occurs in school. Children who attend the center as toddlers and preschoolers for full-day care but who are assigned to afternoon kindergarten may be energetic in the morning and wish to maintain some sense of continuity with their previous child care experience. Those who arrive at the center following a half day at
school usually need a chance to switch gears (and pants!) by letting off steam or having some quiet "down" time.

After-School Programs

Children who have spent five to seven hours seated at desks in a large group, focusing on symbolic material, with little time outdoors, need real contrasts in experience, activity level, and environment during at least a portion of the after-school program. For the first part of the session, children generally prefer one of two opposites: vigorous physical activity outdoors or quiet, passive, retreat activity inside. After this initial change of pace, school-age children especially enjoy cooking, games, crafts, music, and theatrical experiences. Intimate, relaxed time with sympathetic adults who can listen to the day's successes and failures is also very important. Some children may want to do homework. Children this age also enjoy taking responsibility for the care and maintenance of plants and animals, provided this is not overly burdensome or difficult. Experiences with farming, gardens and orchards, animal and pet care, and field trips to nature areas are invaluable. Because after-school programs involve the broadest range of activities, this chapter emphasizes the needs of these programs.

School-age children welcome sharing quiet, intimate moments with an adult.

Program-Specific Decisions

In designing activity areas to support your school-age program, the following basics need to be considered:

- Arranging the entry zone to provide transition and support.
- Facilitating interaction between child and caregiver.
- Providing for rest.
- Handling toileting/bathroom functions.
- Providing for cooking/eating/snacking.
- Developing spaces that support a rich range of child-focused activities.

Furniture Dimensions

Recommended dimensions for school-age furniture are outlined in Table 18.1.

Entry Zone

See Chapter 7 for a discussion of the importance of transitions to children and the general functions of the entry zone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 18.1 Recommended Furniture Dimensions: School-age Children</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-6 years</td>
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<td>6-8 years</td>
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<td>8-10 years</td>
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<td>Adult</td>
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</tbody>
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Child Personal Storage

School-age children need a place to store their outer clothing and boots, school books and homework, and any objects and projects they create during the after-school program. Standard preschool cubbies, open or closed lockers, coat hooks, and personal bins are all options for fulfilling these needs. Since school-age children are in communal situations a large part of the day, having some protected, secure, private storage is very important.

 QUESTIONS: CHILD PERSONAL STORAGE

1. Do you wish to separate children's clothing cubbies from storage for personal effects?
2. What design of cubby/storage unit/bin do you prefer for each type of storage?
3. Where might these be located in the room?
4. What size is best for these storage units and how much space will be needed for the entire group?

GUIDELINES: CHILD PERSONAL STORAGE

- Provide sufficiently large cubbies for the heavy and overstuffed book bags and backpacks many school-age children carry.
- If your program offers extensive craft and music options, be certain to provide enough storage space in cubbies and/or in the work area, for works-in-progress, completed projects, and instruments.

Staff Personal Storage

Supervising staff will need storage for their coats, purses, and personal belongings. Staff may include full-timers, part-timers, and specialists who come on occasion. In addition, staff may need a work or preparation station; storage for resources, files, and other records, and a telephone.

 QUESTIONS: STAFF PERSONAL STORAGE

1. What space do staff want specifically in the school-age space? Elsewhere?
2. How many staff and specialists may be involved? How much storage space will they require?

GUIDELINES: STAFF PERSONAL STORAGE

- The personal storage requirements of school-age staff are similar to those of staff for other ages. See the same guidelines in Chapter 16 and the general guidelines in Chapter 19.
- Allow enough space for locked storage of special personal items and equipment staff may bring for specific projects.

Parent/Staff Communication

Parents of school-age children still require and appreciate contact with the adults who work with their children. Staff also benefit from the input and perspective of parents on issues that arise. Because parent/staff contact is apt to occur at the end of a long day, when people are hurried and tired, it is important that the design of the space and its informality foster this interaction as much as possible.

 QUESTIONS: PARENT/STAFF COMMUNICATION

1. How/where do you envision parents and staff meeting and making contact with each other on a daily basis?
2. What supports do you wish to have for this—i.e., parent mail boxes, notice board, coffee area, comfortable seating, etc.?
3. How might you encourage parents from different families to meet?
4. What environmental supports can make parents feel more a part of the program—i.e., large display walls of children's work, shelves with children's projects near the door, a plate of cookies or snacks inside the room, etc.!
GUIDELINES: PARENT/STAFF COMMUNICATION

- See the same Guidelines, Chapter 16.
- Consider providing drinks and snacks (which children help to prepare) on a handy counter or table to refresh parents and encourage them to linger at the end of the day.

Rest

Children who have been at school all day need a change of pace. Sometimes this involves vigorous play outdoors, sometimes a quiet place to stretch out, daydream, do nothing, and just watch the world go by. While children this age do not generally nap, the opportunity to lie down informally, to curl up on a couch or pile of pillows, even to take a few winks without being noticed, is desirable, especially for children who are not feeling well. Provide one or more places of retreat, on a carpeted floor, loft, or platform, with pillows, comfortable seats, pleasant views, tranquil things to watch, security and comfort.

Questions: Rest

1. What images do you have of ways to give tired, cranky children the opportunity to rest and rejuvenate after a day at school?
2. What supports will you require?

Questions: Bathrooms

1. How many toilets will your school-age program need? Where would be the best location in relation to the school-age space (in the room, outside the room, down the hall)? Do you need hand sinks inside or outside the bathrooms?
2. What amenities, if any, do you wish for these bathroom areas?

Guidelines: Bathrooms

- See the Facilities List and toileting Guidelines in Chapter 17 with the fixture height modifications noted below.
- To make the room more child-friendly, keep the scale of fixtures and partitions somewhat lower than standard adult height.

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Questions: Eating/Snacking

1. What images do you have of a home-like setting for eating and snacking?
2. How many children will the area need to accommodate, at how many tables and chairs?
3. Can you identify the types and sizes of all equipment, storage, and work surfaces you will need?
4. What special touches and features do you wish for this area, such as flowers on the table, placemats, cloth napkins?

Facilities List for Eating/Snacking Area

- Tables and chairs
- Sink and counter space
- Cabinets for storing food and dishes
- Stove (or equivalent)
- Refrigerator
- Blenders, juicers, toaster ovens, popcorn poppers, etc.

Guidelines: Eating/Snacking

- See similar Guidelines, Chapter 17 and the Messy Area for Cooking/Arts and Crafts below.
**Typical School-Age Activities**

School-age children are capable of practicing and perfecting skills in a wide range of areas: art, science, mechanics, sports, gymnastics, dance, music, drama, animal husbandry, computer science, etc. A well-designed environment gives them the opportunity to seriously explore these areas in depth by providing music and practice rooms; crafts, woodworking and photography studios; a hardwood floor gymnasium for dance movement and sports; a stage and small theatre; game and computer areas, etc. However, more modest facilities can also be satisfying, especially if flexible enough to respond to the varying interests of different ages and groups.

The discussions below provide suggestions for the types of activities children especially enjoy after school. In addition, this is the age when apprenticeship to people with unique skills, and hands-on learning of how to do things, is very important. Bringing in skilled volunteers, speakers, and unique equipment for children to work on, or conducting field trips and excursions to places of interest can deeply enrich the program. The possibilities are limitless and largely dependent upon both the space and the adults available to offer their skills and experience. Take advantage of community resources. Where space is tight in the school-age room, go beyond it.

Since children this age can get supplies on their own, there will be many people accessing and handling things. The efficiency of storage systems is therefore important, as well as security for costly equipment not easily replaced. Staff may also bring personal equipment and supplies to supplement the program’s offerings.

Where the age spread is wide, the environment needs to both encourage interaction of younger and older children and be sensitive to the possibility for age-segregation at certain times and places.

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**QUESTIONS: SCHOOL-AGE ACTIVITIES**

1. What images do you have of the school-age room and outside territory? What mood/feeling do you want? Indoor and outdoor space to convey?

2. Why will you ensure an atmosphere that brings staff and children close to one another, makes children feel secure to reveal their feelings about events at school, allows children to relax and let go, gives them privacy and quiet time alone?

3. Can you provide sufficient space outdoors and indoors for vigorous physical activity and sports?

4. How would you like children to be involved in the running and maintenance of the indoor and outdoor space? What chores and responsibilities might they be given as part of the curriculum? Is there room for raising plants, animals, ecological projects?

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**GUIDELINES: TYPICAL SCHOOL-AGE ACTIVITIES**

- See similar Guidelines in Chapter 17.
- Depending upon staff and space available, the home base room might be a quiet place for snacks, resting, and homework while awealth of activities take place elsewhere in the building or community.
- At this age, it is important that staff know the population of children, well, and find creative ways to complement their experiences at school and at home.
- Unlike preschool children, who experience continuity of care throughout the day, children in before-school, half-day,
or after-school programs may experience stress due to the long day and many changes of personnel and location. The child care environment needs to simultaneously offer opportunities for nurturance, recreation, and challenge.

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**Messy Area for Cooking/Arts and Crafts**

Meals, snacks, and cooking can provide much comfort and enjoyment for school-age children. This is also an activity in which children of different ages can participate easily. Having a minkitchen is ideal, but portable appliances, along with a small refrigerator and sink, can work well.

All kinds of arts and crafts activities are popular at these ages, including serious painting and clay work (ideally with a wheel and kiln), beading, leather craft, jewelry making, graphic arts projects, sewing, knitting, video, and photography. The availability of knowledgeable adults with the skills to guide these explorations, as well as the availability of equipment, will determine what options you can offer and how you design the space to support them. (See also "Additional Supports for the Messy Zone" in Chapter 7 and "Typical Preschool and Kindergarten Activity Areas: Messy Play" in Chapter 17.)

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**QUESTIONS: COOKING/ARTS AND CRAFTS**

1. Will you have a minkitchen in the school-age room or elsewhere? How would you like to handle cooking and snacks?
2. What are your images of the craft area(s) in this room?
3. What craft activities do you definitely want to provide now? In the future? What specific supports are needed for the craft activities you wish to feature?
4. How many tables and seats will you need? What design and height would be best?
5. What types of storage and display will you want for bulk materials, equipment, children’s works-in-progress, display?
Learning to use a sewing machine.

Using familiar media in new ways.

Facilities List for Cooking/Arts and Crafts
- Sink and counter for preparation and cleanup
- Stove, refrigerator, blender, oven, toaster, etc.
- Storage/display of supplies for snacks and cooking
- Child-accessible storage for crafts materials
- Non-child-accessible storage for bulk supplies and equipment
- Washable floor surface
- Tables for crafts, snacks, cooking activities
- Separate snack table
- Chairs or stools
- Storage for children's works-in-progress
- Wall-mounted or freestanding easels
- Places to dry children's paintings and artwork
- Wall-mounted display surfaces for children's artwork and other visual images
- Smocks, paper storage tubes, trash baskets
- Sand and water troughs
- Painting: temperas, acrylics, oils, watercolors
- Clay: lilin, oven, potter's wheel
- Drawing and sketching supplies; drafting table for drawing/sketching
- Papier-mâché supplies
- Woodworking: workbench, hand and power tools, etching, sculpture
- Photography: cameras, darkroom, developing and printing supplies
- Jewelry-making supplies
- Bead and shell work supplies
- Leather craft supplies

Guidelines: Cooking/Arts and Crafts
- A complete residential kitchen with a heavy table and chairs nearby is ideal for cooking and snacks. Alternatively, school-age children can use the cooking facilities in the residential core, if the center has one.
- If a wide range of ages is present, tables and chairs of different heights may be needed. See Table 18.1 for recommendations.
- For a basic list of craft activities also appropriate for school-age children, see Box 7.4 and The West Region, Chapter 7.
- Provide a sink with above- and below-counter cabinets for staff food preparation and storage. If possible, provide a sink at 24" high within the room for child use.

Quiet Play/Homework
School-age children often like the opportunity to lounge around together—chatting, playing games, watching a video. At the same time, many become overwhelmed by being with peers all day and need some time and space to be alone or to pursue solitary activities. Lofts, niches, or platforms designed for one or two complement a quiet area furnished with armchairs, couches, carpet, and large pillows for a small group. (See also the examples of quiet spaces in Chapters 15 and 17.)

Questions: Quiet Play/Homework
1. What mood do you want the quiet play area to have?
2. What supports will it need?

A freestanding loft provides 8 places to spend quiet time alone or with a friend.
Large pillows convert a carpeted platform into a place to lounge and play cards.

3. How will you provide additional private areas and places of retreat in the school-age room? (See Chapter 15, Creating Boundaries for Quiet Spaces for suggestions.)

**Facilities List for Quiet Play/Homework**
- Soft seating and pillows
- Carpet
- Places to stretch out
- Pleasant views
- Some privacy and seclusion
- Books
- Fish, animals, plants, and views to watch passively
- Table and chairs or other supports for doing homework
- Computer(s)

**Guidelines: Quiet Play/Homework**
- See Typical Preschool and Kindergarten Activity Areas: Quiet Play and Guidelines for Reading/Group Meeting in Chapter 17 for activities and facilities that may also be appropriate at the school-age level.
- Provide some comfortable space large enough for the entire school-age group to meet once or twice a day. Recess, couches, armchairs, and carpeted areas are appropriate.
- Consider the homework needs of older children. These photos illustrate various options for collaborative and independent study.

**Science and Nature Activities**
School-age children learn important skills of independence and responsibility, as well as appreciation for nature, by being able to grow and care for plants and animals. In addition to opportunities for raising plants and other living things indoors, consider an organic garden and a small animal shed outside, especially for use during summer camp. School-age children also love to take apart and repair gadgets and build and
make things related to scientific inquiry. Flexible areas allow the program to be responsive to individual interests as they arise.

**QUESTIONS: SCIENCE AND NATURE**

1. What types and number of items do you wish to have in the science/nature area?
2. What amount and type of storage space will you need? What amount and type of display and work surface space do you desire?
3. What animals do you hope to have in each room? How and where would you like to raise these animals?
4. What other ideas would you like to incorporate?

**FACILITIES LIST FOR SCIENCE AND NATURE**

- Storage and display shelves for collections, plants, and animals
- Child counter-height surfaces for working with materials
- A table and seats for 4–6 for group activities
- Good light, preferably natural
- Nearby sink
- Teacher storage for items not currently on display
- Notice or bulletin board
- Black or white board for sketching

**GUIDELINES: SCIENCE AND NATURE**

- Locate the science/nature area near a sink and include extensive counter/work space; storage for seeds, tools, supplies; display walls and shelves for collections of rocks, leaves, shells; places to leave machines and gadgets being worked on.
- Give the area plenty of natural light and provide tables for all-round viewing.
- Consider locating cages for gerbils, mice, fish, birds, snakes, etc., in the midst of the group room, rather than in a designated science area. This needs to be weighed against children's capacities to care for and protect the animals.

**QUESTIONS: ACTIVE PLAY**

1. How will you ensure sufficient space indoors for vigorous physical activity?
2. How will you ensure sufficient space outdoors for vigorous physical activity?
3. Can you specify all the activities you want to provide, the equipment required, and where and how it will be stored?

**FACILITIES LIST FOR ACTIVE PLAY**

- Climbing structures (indoors and outdoors)
- Swinging and hanging equipment
- Slides
- Tree houses, forts, hideaways
- Small-structure construction projects
- Bikes
- Skateboarding, ice skating, and roller skating facilities (onsite or in the community)
- Spaces for movement and dancing (outdoors and indoors)
- Tobogganing and sledding hills

**GUIDELINES: ACTIVE PLAY**

- A separate room or gymnasium for games, exercise, strength and skill building, movement, and dance is ideal.
- Where space is not available in the child care center, consider sharing such a space with a local school or community organization.
- Provide a range of force props that can be suspended (with appropriate ceiling and wall mounts), and sufficient storage for these items, to offer varied experiences in limited space.

**Sports Activities**

Many school-age children enjoy competitive and group sports, especially as an antidote to sedentary school activities. Since this is an age when children are building skills and establishing control of their bodies, encouraging these activities on- or offsite is important.

**QUESTIONS: SPORTS ACTIVITIES**

1. What outdoor playing space is available to your program, either on-site or nearby? Can you transport children to sites at a distance?
2. What sports options do you wish to feature?
3. What are the storage, use, maintenance requirements associated with these sports?
4. What indoor playing space for group sports is available at the center or nearby?

**FACILITIES LISTS FOR SPORTS**
- Outdoor fields for soccer, basketball, volleyball, baseball, tennis, etc.
- Swimming pool
- Indoor gymnasium or large space for basketball, volleyball, dancing, movement

**GUIDELINES: SPORTS ACTIVITIES**
- Where outdoor space for sports is limited, children may need to be transported to local parks and playing fields.
- Facilities do not need to be full-scale at this age. A basketball hoop outside, and some open field space can permit many sports and games.

**Dramatic Play**

Participation in theatrical productions is extremely satisfying for school-age children, especially if they can help to write the script, handle the lighting, costumes, music, etc. They get to express nascent talents, learn new skills and ways of working in groups, and try on different roles and personalities. Under proper supervision, they are also capable of helping to build sets and props to suit whatever space is available. As in the case with preschoolers, smaller-scale exploration with puppets and role playing is still appropriate. (See pages 392–393.)

**QUESTIONS: DRAMATIC PLAY**

1. What are the best ways of supporting theatrical experiences for school-age children? Is there a large multipurpose room where they can rehearse and perform, or a corner of the school-age space?
2. What props, equipment, storage will be needed for your program?
3. What other forms of dramatic play do you wish to offer?

**FACILITIES LIST FOR DRAMATIC PLAY**
- Stage for rehearsing and performing theatricals
- Costumes

**GUIDELINES: DRAMATIC PLAY**
- For basic ideas, see Dramatic Play and Miniatures Guidelines, Chapter 17.
- More elaborate theatrical and musical productions, under the guidance of a skilled director, have enormous appeal at this age. A set of rearrangeable wooden platforms, boxes, and planks can be used to form a stage and props. Alternatively, a school or community center theater can be used for performances. Children often become completely absorbed in building and making all that is needed for a production, including the script, music, props, etc.
- Building forts, tree-houses, and hideaways of scrounged materials is another extremely popular form of dramatic play at these ages.

**Music**

Music is the glue that cements social exchange for school-age children. CD or tape players with headphones, or a separate listening room are the best ways for them to enjoy music without disturbing other aspects of the program. Children at this age are also beginning to learn how to play instruments, making one or more practice rooms very desirable.

**QUESTIONS: MUSIC**

1. How will you provide options for children to listen to music in groups and individually?
2. Do you want to make it possible for children to study and practice instruments? Are separate rooms for this purpose possible?
3. What safeguards are needed for storing electronic and other music-related equipment?

**GUIDELINES: MUSIC**
- See the Guidelines for Listening (under Quiet Play) in Chapter 17.
- Strive to create at least one small, acoustically shielded room that can be used for instrument practice.

**Games**

School-age children love games with rules and those requiring skill, whether solitary or involving two or more players. Computer games may also be appropriate under some circumstances. Board games call for small, low (10 in. high) or standard-height tables that can seat four to six, or the use of the floor. Many electronic games (foosball) and pool tables need a great deal of space for the equipment and the players around them. A separate area, alcove, or niche is beneficial for noisy and active games, so they do not disturb other activities.

**QUESTIONS: GAMES**

1. Can you specify all the games you hope to provide and the types of playing surfaces, supports, and amount of space they will need?
2. Where should these different types of games be located in the room?

**FACILITIES LIST FOR GAMES**
- Board games for 2-6 players
- Card games
- Electronic games
- Rhythm and movement games
- Markable space for 4-square, hopscotch, tag, etc. (ideally outdoors)

**GUIDELINES: GAMES**
- It may be helpful to categorize the games you will provide according to size and use: floor, table top, counter top, large surface (pool and electronic games), outdoor area. Carpet and 10-inch-high tables work well on the floor. Some games are best played at counter height (approximately 26–32 inches) rather than table height.
- For large jigsaw puzzles and games that may be played over a number of days, provide a protected niche or corner so the pieces and board can remain accessible.

**Storage**

Extensive storage is needed for the wide range of equipment and materials used in school-age programs. Some equipment is apt to be bulky, and some will need to be locked up. Many items may be seasonal, especially if the program becomes a summer day camp. It is important to identify and thoroughly think through all storage requirements.

**QUESTIONS: STORAGE**

1. Can you specify all your storage needs for equipment, supplies, activities, display? Determining the size of items is critical. As is specification of open versus locked storage, shelves versus closets, with or without doors, etc.
2. Can you predict future and summertime storage needs so that provision can be made for them now?

**ITEMS REQUIRING STORAGE**
- Crafts equipment and supplies
- Audiovisual equipment
- Sports equipment
- Games
- Tools
- Works-in-progress

**GUIDELINES: STORAGE**
- See considerations for Storage in Chapter 4 under Key Secondary Space Requirements.
Illustrative Floor Plan

The floor plan for the school-age room of the Copper House is shown in Figure 18.1, along with some illustrative photographs of the space. This room is used by up to sixteen 5- to 10-year-olds in the morning, by 5- to 10-year-olds in the afternoon, and by similar ages during a summer camp. Programs that serve more children, and that can devote multiple rooms to the school-age group, benefit from assigning one or two separate functions to each room and developing the allotted room areas as activity areas, as explained in Chapter 15.

Notes

1. An atelier, a key space used in the Reggio Emilia schools, is a large "studio" equipped with a wide array of materials for children to explore different media in depth. In Reggio, the atelier is staffed by a full time facilitator called an antenista.

1. An overview showing the art and staff prep areas (left), the door to the play yard (rear center), the quiet area (rear right), and dramatic play area (front right).

2. An area for blocks and miniatures.

3. The quiet area for games, manipulatives, reading, and resting.

4. Exploring computers alone and in groups.

5. A stone front/puppet theater complete with mirrored face painting station inside and an Indian mirror cloth tent roof.