

School Age Observation

Sample Paper

## **Background**

On Monday, July 30, 2012 I conducted a naturalistic observation of a school age girl who was attending Steve and Kate's summer camp. The camp took place in Mulberry School at 222 Belgatos Road in Los Gatos, California. I contacted several summer school and summer camp programs requesting the opportunity to observe and I spoke with the regional camp director, Ben, on my first phone call. Ben required that I complete a wavier and submit copies of a previous background check that was conducted for my prior job. After a couple of emails, we set up a time for me to spend an hour observing the campers.

## **The Setting**

Mulberry School served as a location for multiple camps and Steve and Kate's Camp was housed in a wing of the school that included the gymnasium and had access to an outdoor play area. I arrived at the camp a little before 10:00 a.m. and took a tour of the various rooms the children use during the day. The children were outside playing and were scheduled to spend the next couple of hours participating in a type of "free play" called Studio Time. There were approximately 100 children at the camp and the Studio Time allowed the children to move from room to room partaking in the different activities offered at each location.

The inside area of the camp consisted of multiple rooms sectioned off with white tarps. The areas included a Style Studio (also referred to as the Sewing Room), the Game Studio, the Lounge, the Filmmaking Studio and the Performing Arts Stage (See Appendix A). The Game Room contained two large screen televisions set up with gaming systems, an air hockey table and a ping pong table and the Filmmaking Studio contained multiple hand-held video cameras, televisions and computers that allowed the children to watch and edit videos.

I began my observation in the Style Studio because the Camp Director informed me this room would probably have the most traffic during the time the children would be exploring. The Style Studio is an artistic play room focused on sewing and knitting. There were three tables in the middle of the room to provide work space for the campers. The tables were surrounded by black buckets turned upside down to act as chairs and each table included a pencil cup containing scissors, markers, tape, glue and pencils. The walls of the room were lined with sewing machines, a drafting table, student mailboxes, shelves full of art supplies and two large black couches. Bean bags were clustered in the corner beside the couches (See Appendix B).

I positioned myself in a chair directly next to the couches, the supply shelf, a pile of bean bag chairs and a working table. The children entered the room and quickly dispersed, grabbing supplies and beginning various sewing projects. The counselors put on soft music in the background and quickly spread out around the room to assist the campers. The Style Studio offered the campers a variety of materials including multicolored yarn and string, wooden skewers, knitting needles, sewing needles, buttons, scissors, pens, markers, pencils, glue, sewing machines, cloth, felt, rulers, cross stitch supplies and a graphing table. During my time in the Style Studio the number of students fluctuated between 40 and 50 children with 4-6 counselors. About 95% of the campers in the Style Studio were female and only one of the counselors was male. The children and counselors moved from room to room as they pleased during the Studio Time, so the ratio of campers to counselors was constantly changing. The noise level was moderate with some campers talking to each other and others working quietly and the lights were florescent bulbs seen in most classrooms.

### **Observation of School Age Child**

I observed a Caucasian girl seven years of age who will enter second grade in the fall. She was approximately four feet tall and appeared a bit taller than the rest of the female campers. She had long

blonde hair that was pulled into a ponytail and her bangs were secured back off her forehead with a green clip, but pieces of her hair still swept over her blue eyes. She was wearing a blue and yellow striped skirt that fell to about her knees with a blue hooded sweatshirt that was zipped up. On her feet were silver strappy sandals and her toenails were painted red with a white flower stenciled on her big toe.

Time	Observation of Activity
10:00	The subject walks into the Style Studio and goes over to a shelf that contains saved sewing projects. She picks up a ball of green yarn and the beginning of a stocking stitch. She walks over to a bean bag directly in front of the chair in which I am sitting. She folds her legs under her and begins to use both hands to untangle the ball of yarn. She is concentrating very hard on the task, head down, her lips pressed in a tight line.
10:05	The subject shifts her weight on the bean bag. She continues to use both hands to pull the yarn over and under the existing weave in an attempt to free the beginning of the yarn. The subject remains still with her head down in concentration.
10:10	The subject stands easily and walks a couple of feet to stand next to a counselor. Other children are swarming the counselor asking for assistance. The subject stands still, waiting her turn. The counselor turns her attention to the subject and she holds up her tangled project, not saying anything. The counselor tells the subject, "I am helping someone else but I will help you next." The subject stands next to the counselor for another minute then turns around and examines the supply shelf. The subject walks back over to the bean bag chair and sits down. She continues to try and untangle the yarn with her fingers.
10:15	The counselor approaches the subject and kneels down next to the bean bag. The counselor says, "Let me see your ball of yarn." The subject hands the counselor the tangle of yarn. The counselor says, "It's really important to keep the ball rolled up and only let loose the small amount you need to stitch so it doesn't get tangled." The subject looks at the counselor but doesn't respond. The counselor finishes untangling the yarn, hands it back to the subject and asks, "What are you making?" The subject takes the yarn from the counselor, and while looking down speaks very softly, "I don't know."
10:20	The subject begins finger knitting with the green yarn. She weaves the string back and forth between the fingers on her right hand using her left hand to guide the yarn. She moves her fingers quickly and weaves the yarn across her fingers two times with her palm facing her body. Next she picks up the bottom string on one finger and lifts it over the top of that finger and places it behind her hand. She repeats the process of lifting the yarn over the tops of each finger including her thumb until she has completed the process on all fingers. Next she pushes the remaining yarn on each finger down closer to her palm. The subject repeats the process of weaving the string between her fingers. In response to hearing other children conversing loudly the subject lifts her head and watches the other campers while continuing to finger knit.

10:25	Another child approaches the counselor seated directly behind the subject and begins asking her a question. The subject turns her head and watches the interaction. She appears to be listening to the conversation. The subject successfully continues the pattern of weaving the yarn between her fingers with her head turned, not looking at what her hands are doing. The subject bites her left thumbnail momentarily and goes back to knitting with her head down. Her face remains relaxed but unsmiling. The subject examines the completed stocking stick by touching it with her fingers. The subject reaches down and scratches her leg. She pulls more yarn from the ball and continues finger knitting.
10:30	The subject hears girls talking to each other on the couch. She looks over but does not interact with the other campers and continues weaving while her attention is elsewhere. She scratches her head with her left hand. She stretches her back, sitting up straight and pushing her shoulders back and forth. The subject watches the other children in the room while knitting. She pulls more string from the ball of yarn. The subject leans forward at the waist and looks up at a boy working at the table next to her. She moves her neck and looks over both shoulders. She shakes her right hand to untangle the yarn and weaves the yarn between her fingers with increasing speed and accuracy.
10:35	The subject shifts her weight in the bean bag. She turns and looks at a girl sitting in the bean bag next to her who is knitting with two wooden skewers as needles. Another child walks between the subject and a table and the subject leans forward to make room for the child. The girl next to her sneezes and the subject says very quietly, "Bless you." The counselor working behind her is getting interviewed by another camper on camera. The subject continues knitting but looks over her shoulder to watch the interview. The subject scratches her face with her left hand.
10:40	The counselor behind the subject is giving a small group of girls a lesson on how to make a friendship bracelet. The subject watches the demonstration while still knitting. Her face is serious. The subject unravels the rest of the ball of yarn using both hands. She turns her head from left to right observing the room while she knits around her fingers. She leans back on the bean bag and begins to bounce her left foot up and down on the ground for about ten seconds. The subject has come to the end of the yarn and rises from the bean bag.
10:45	The subject stands next to the counselor who is sitting on the ground helping another child with her knitting in her hand. The subject walks around the counselor and moves closer. She wraps the finished knitting project around her neck and pulls it back and forth across her shoulders. The counselor says, "Are you done?" The subject nods yes and looks down at the floor. She hands her project to the counselor. The counselor ties a knot in the end of the stocking stitch and hands the project back to the subject. The subject turns and leaves the room. She walks down the hall to a set of cubbies and places the knitting project in a bag. The subject enters the Lounge (See Appendix C) and walks behind a counselor sitting on the floor. She leans on the counselor's back and puts her arms around her neck. The subject is smiling. She straightens and places her hands on the counselor's shoulders. She pushes the counselor back and forth, from left to right while smiling. She lowers herself to the floor next to the counselor.
10:50	The subject points to a pair of girls playing a game of Mancala (Hubpages.com, 2012) and says to the counselor, "I want to play that." The counselor gets up and picks up another Mancala board and hands it to the subject. The subject places the board on

	<p>the floor, rises and crosses the room to a large plastic bin full of Legos. On her way to the bin she leaps over a maze on the floor. The subject bends at the waist and leans into the bin and gathers more small Legos. The subject kneels next to the Mancala board and begins using her left hand to place a few Legos in each recessed hole of the board. The girls shifts and sits on the floor with her legs crossed. Another child approaches the subject and points to a group of Legos that are snapped together and asks the subject, "What are you making?" The subject looks up at the child and says "A rainbow thing." The subject leans forward and places her hands on her chin while resting her elbows on her knees. The counselor and the subject take turns playing the game. On her turn, the subject picks up all the Legos in one hole with her left hand and disperses the Legos one at a time into the other holes around the board. The subject smiles up at the counselor and sticks her tongue out playfully.</p>
10:55	<p>The subject and the counselor continue to take turns moving the Legos around the board. The subject says to the counselor, "I like to play these," and laughs. The subject puts her hands on her cheeks and says to the counselor, "Your turn." They continue to take turns moving the Legos around the board. The subject says to the counselor, "Go." Once they have cleared the board the subject counts the beads in her "store" at the end of the game board. She says, "I have 26." The game is over. The subject picks up all the Legos and begins to evenly distribute them in the holes again.</p>
11:00	<p>The subject and the counselor begin another game, moving the Legos in the same fashion around the board. The counselor tells the subject, "I have to leave in two minutes and go to the playground." The subject lays down on her right side with her right hand on her head and uses her left hand to move the Legos in the holes. They finish the game and again count the Legos in the "stores." The subject says to the counselor, "Please don't put it away, I'm going to play by myself." The counselor gets up and leaves and the subject continues moving the Legos among the holes.</p>

### Physical/Motor Development

During the observation the subject spent the majority of the time finger knitting, demonstrating her fine motor skills. The subject's dominant hand appeared to be her left and she began knitting with the yarn on her right hand. The motion used in finger knitting requires the subject to use her dominant hand to weave the yarn in between the fingers of her non-dominant hand, alternating the yarn in the front and back of the fingers. The subject appeared to master this skill as her accuracy and speed increased during the observation. In addition there were several instances where the subject conducted this weaving maneuver without looking at what she was doing, with her head turned and her attention elsewhere. The second part of the finger knitting process requires the subject to pick up the yarn with her dominant

hand and move it over top of the finger on her non-dominant hand. The subject dedicated a bit more focus to this action and rarely conducted the movement without watching what she was doing, but still operated these fine motor skills easily.

When the subject moved into The Lounge she further demonstrated the refined use of fine motor skills in her play of the game with the Legos. The subject would take a number of Legos in her dominant hand and disperse a single Lego from that bunch into each hole. Immediately following the placement of the final Lego the subject would pick up the group of Legos in another hole and repeat the process. The subject manipulated the Legos easily and smoothly. In the examples of both the finger knitting and the Mancala game it could be inferred the subject practiced these skills and developed them over time in order to master them because she was not observed learning either activity.

The subject was stationary during the majority of the observation, so an analysis of her gross motor skills is challenging. The subject appeared to rise from a sitting position easily and in one instance (10:50) the subject leapt over an obstacle on the floor. Her gross motor skills in these instances appeared to be consistent with what would be considered typical for a girl in middle childhood with smoother movements and coordination.

### **Cognitive Development**

The subject engaged in finger knitting for about 45 minutes. When she entered the Style Studio the subject went straight to the supply shelf with the intention of finishing a project on which she had previously been working. Before beginning the subject faced an obstacle, the tangled yarn, and she concentrated on the task at hand and used problem solving skills to complete the task. She tried to untangle the yarn herself, and then asked for the help of an adult to finish the undertaking when she realized she could not complete it. The ability to problem solve in this way demonstrated the subject is in the concrete operational stage of cognitive development. According to Piaget, this stage occurs

roughly between ages seven and twelve when the child's "mental activities become more logical with respect to actual objects and materials (Steinberg, Vandell, & Bornstein, 2011, p. 303)."

The subject remained focused on the task of finger knitting for a significant period of time demonstrating attention and persistence. Her level of engagement was moderate as she steadily knitted the entire time she was in the Style Studio while also paying attention to the other conversations and interactions taking place in the room. The tempo of the activity was physically slow in that she was seated and did not invest a great deal of energy in the activity, however her cognitive state of repeating the intricate pattern and manipulating the yarn displayed her long-term memory. The skill of knitting is a form of procedural memory, "a memory of complex motor skills (Steinberg, Vandell, & Bornstein, 2011, p. 309). Both tasks the subject engaged in were initiated by the child and appeared to reflect her interests.

### **Social Emotional Development**

In analyzing the subject's social emotional development I discovered areas of strength and weakness. The subject fell within the norm of gender differences in middle childhood for a female. She did not engage in instrumentality or rough-and-tumble play which is typical of boys but instead engaged in expressivity, "focused on communication, collaboration and conciliation (Steinberg, Vandell, & Bornstein, 2011, p. 340)" which is typical for girls. She decided to participate in stereotypical "girly" activities of sewing and playing board games. Also the subject did not appear to be exuding self confidence, she played alone for the most part, rarely addressed others and when she did spoke softly with her head down. Boys tend to have slightly higher self-esteem than girls in middle childhood.

While peers are an important part of middle childhood, the subject demonstrated a lack of social development. During the hour long observation the subject did not approach any other campers, girls or boys. The counselor addressed the subject when she approached the woman for assistance but the



subject rarely responded when spoken to. In one instance she nodded her head and in another she answered an open ended question by saying, "I don't know." The lack of friendship and peer interactions appears abnormal for a seven year old girl but may be explained by shyness or abnormal behavior due to my presence. The first time I witnessed the subject smiling was when she transitioned to The Lounge and acted playfully with a different counselor. It was obvious the subject and this counselor developed a bond and the subject's self confidence increased in her presence. The subject showed the first signs of verbal communication when playing with the counselor and even spoke to another child when addressed. She smiled, laughed and took a more relaxed stance. The subject did not appear to be rejected by her peers and may be an "average child" as described on page 359 of the text.

### **Conclusion**

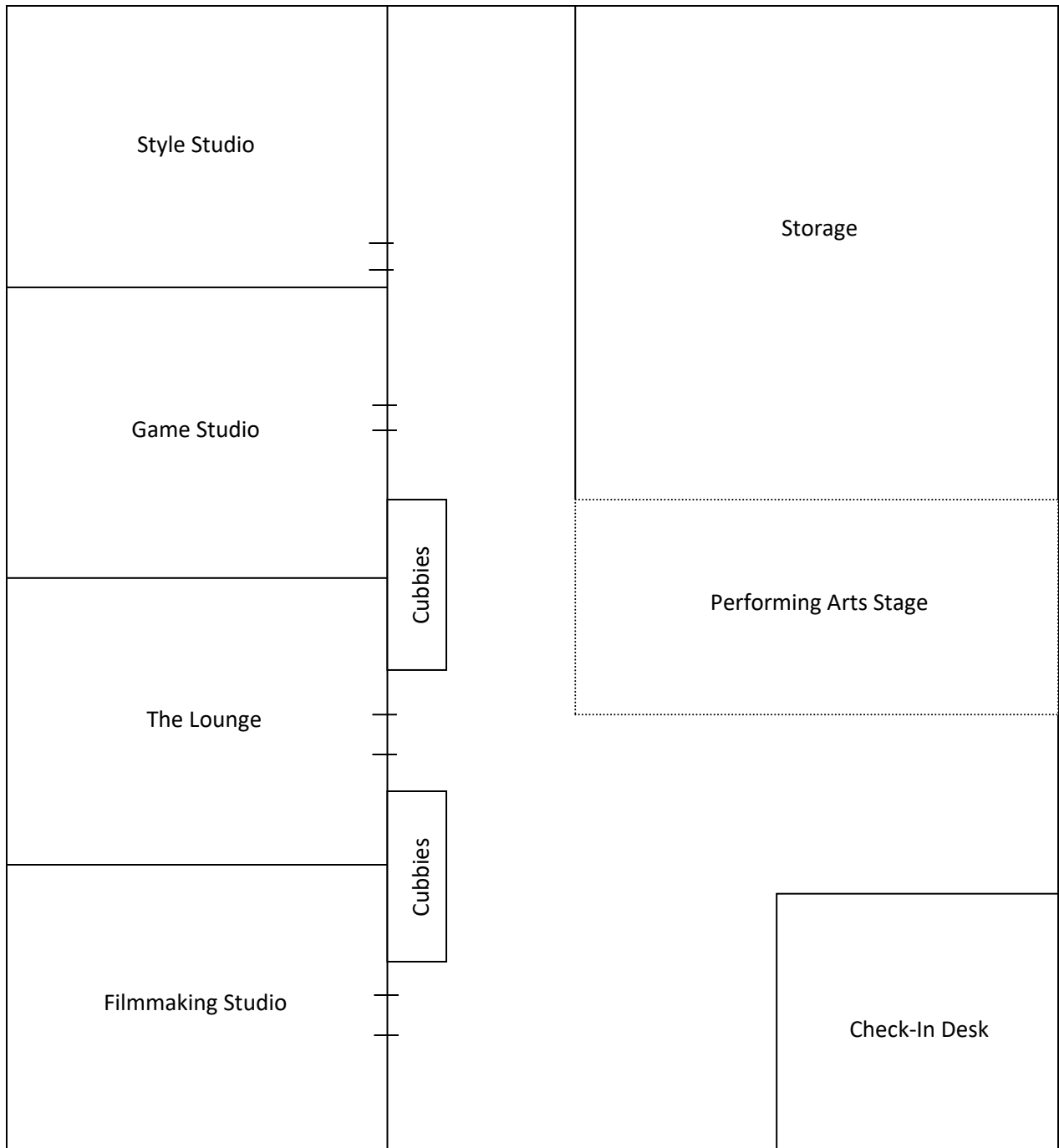
In summation, the analysis of the observation revealed the subject mastered impressive fine motor skills and evidence of long-term memory in her ability to finger knit and seamlessly play the game Mancala. Cognitively the subject showed extreme focus and initiative in the activities that were observed. Finally the subject lacked in social emotional development with the absence of peer interactions and what appears to be lower self-confidence.

## References

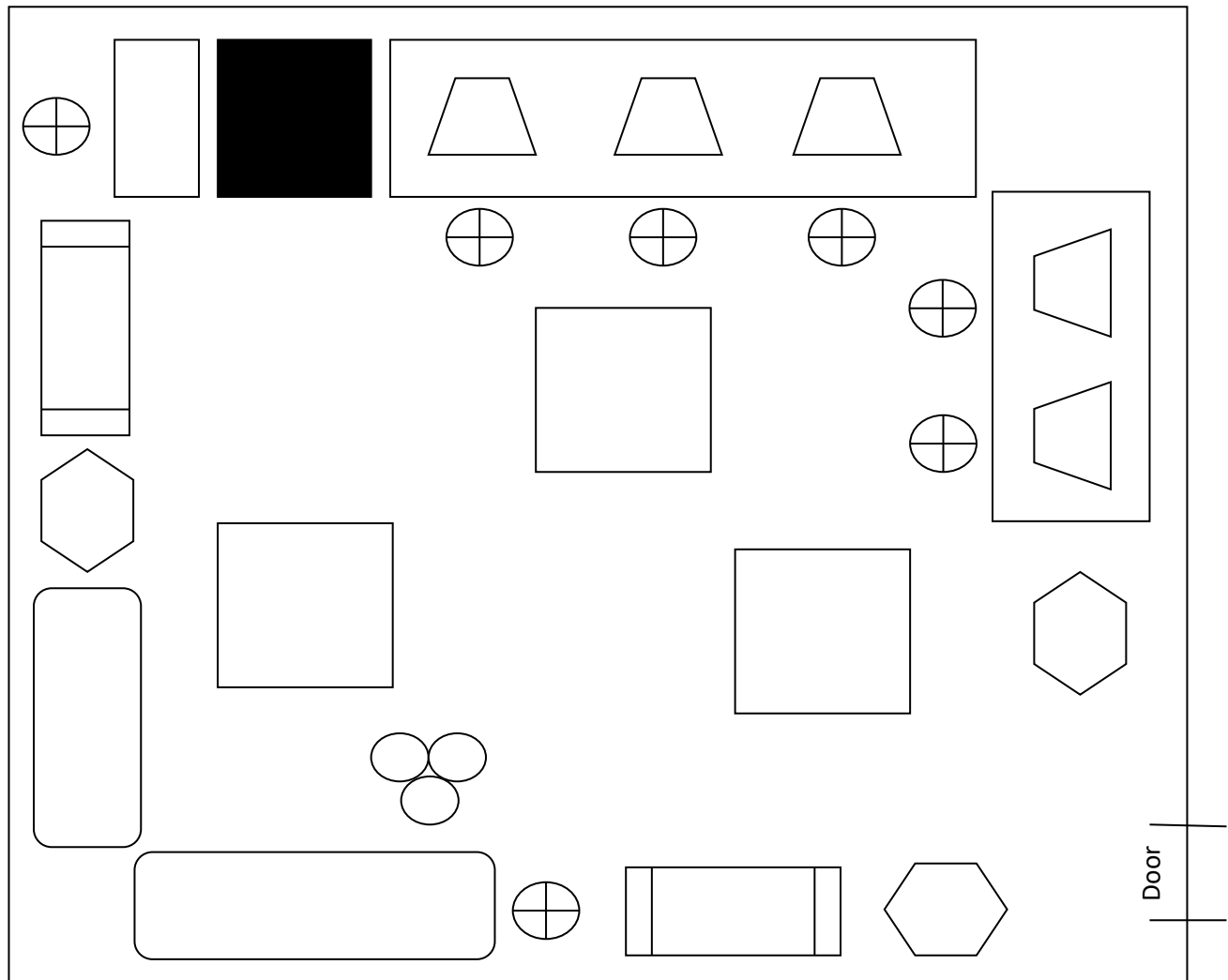
Hubpages.com. *How to Play Mancala Games, Discover an Ancient Game*. (2012). Retrieved from [http://viryabo.hubpages.com/hub/play\\_mancala-games\\_discover-this-ancient-game](http://viryabo.hubpages.com/hub/play_mancala-games_discover-this-ancient-game).




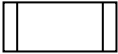




Steinberg, Vandell, & Bornstein. (2011). *Development: Infancy Through Adolescence 1<sup>st</sup> Edition*.

**Appendix A-Camp Floor Plan**



**Appendix B-Style Studio Floor Plan**



 = Chair	 = Mailboxes	 = Drafting Table
 = Shelf	 = Bean Bag Chair	 = Couch
 = Table	 = Sewing Machine	<b><i>LEGEND</i></b>

**Appendix C-Lounge Floor Plan**

