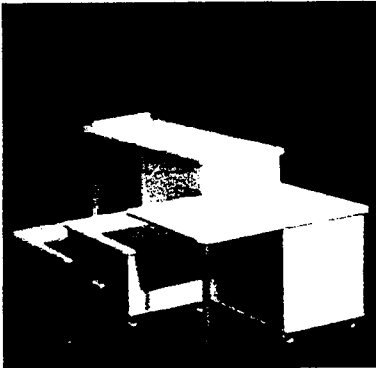


**Chapter 4**  
**The Practicum**



## Synopsis

The previous chapter established the role that the physical setting plays in any therapeutic milieu serving the cognitively impaired and the key issues such settings should address specifically in regard to adult day care. These issues were addressed in a form of applied research focusing on training.

In the best spirit of applied research/ action research, training is a critical component of such endeavors. Often care professionals are thought of as being nurses, resident assistants, social workers and the like. However, architects and environmental designers are critical players in the development of therapeutic milieux that are all too often overlooked in regard to the need for training. This project conducted a practicum for professional degree architectural design students in the design of adult day care centers for those with dementia. This practicum (called a studio) presented a real-life adult day care as the problem to be addressed and involved:

- education in regard to issues of aging and the environment;
- active participation/collaboration from care providers and administrators in soliciting their input regarding issues of the physical setting;
- development of discrete design interventions that address core issues of dementia day care yet can be utilized in a variety of settings.

## Methodology

The design of this research was community empowering action research. Action research addresses directly the issue of application being understood as "disciplined inquiry which seeks focused efforts to improve the quality of people's organizational, community and family lives" (Calhoun, 1993: 62). Community-based action research is a more democratic and empowering approach to inquiry. Such inquiry commences with an interest in the problems of a given community. In this case at issue is the desire to develop more therapeutically beneficial physical environments within the financial, regulatory and operational realities found in dementia day care.

In addressing this issue, action research assumes that all stakeholders should be engaged in the investigation. In this

case that would include adult day care operators, day care staff and (future) architects. "Collaborative exploration helps practitioners, agency workers, client groups, and other stakeholding parties to develop increasingly sophisticated understandings of the problems and issues that confront them...and formulate more constructive analyses of their situation" (Stringer, 1996:10).

This research project addressed a specific real-life problem, namely, the design of a local adult day care center. This problem was defined through a cooperative, dialogical process involving all the stakeholders identified above. This involved the gathering of information through the use of interviews, presented case studies, participant observation and guided group inquiry. Creating interpretations was the second phase wherein stakeholders, through a process of dialogue constructed mutually acceptable accounts of the situation and underlying "theories" of how/why things are as they are. Stakeholders then identified goals and objectives and the tasks necessary to achieve those goals. With the action being taken focusing on physical environment interventions, the architectural students worked through their design processes with all stakeholders evaluating their endeavors at specific intervals. Comments are incorporated at that time and the process moves forward iteratively. The principal investigator acted primarily as a facilitator for the process.

### **Hypotheses/Goals/Objectives**

This project stems from the observation that most of us, particularly care providers, do not take an activist approach to adapting our environmental conditions. We often accept the physical setting as a given. However, in the Designing a Better Day daycare project (funded by the Helen Bader Foundation), the investigators have found "jewels" in almost every adult day care center where the care professionals or their architects dreamed up a wonderful, discrete design intervention that produces/enhances wonderful therapeutic benefit. It is our belief that these remain "jewels" and are not "best practices" because they are not known and therefore not critically considered. Nor is the process by which they were created understood.

The hypothesis underlying the practicum was that a two-fold educational process of exposure to both environmental issues

associated with dementia and best environmental design practices that address those issues (as we know them) and a dialogical exchange with care professionals will - result in

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creative discrete design solutions that can be developed/replicated in many other care settings (thereby enhancing the quality of life of dementia day care participants).

The goals of this project were three-fold:

*1) to enable future architectural practitioners to develop appropriate designs which respond to issues associated with aging, and dementia -- specifically in the adult day care context.*

*2) to create a dialogue between architectural students and professional adult day care providers in an effort to enhance the applicability of the design interventions developed by students and provide these day care operators with experience talking with architects, empowering them in their real life endeavors; and*

*3) to enhance the environmental competence of day care providers and thereby empower them to maximize the therapeutic benefit of their physical settings*

Objectives of the study were related to the above goals.

*Objective 1* : That the students in the practicum can identify the key issues related to aging and dementia relating to environmental design.

*Objective 2*: That students can link such issues in their rationale for their discrete design solutions

*Objective 3*: That professional care providers can understand the linkage between such environmental issues and the students' solutions

*Objective 4*: That such solutions shall be ascertained by care professionals as applicable in the "real world"

*Objective 5*: That such solutions will address real issues which adult day care professionals face.

## **The Practicum**

The practicum was offered in the fall semester of the 1999-2000 academic year at the Interdisciplinary Design Institute of Washington State University. The course has 21 students

from a variety of design disciplines – architects, interior designers and landscape architects. This rendered a wide range of solutions to the problem at hand.

The site for the project was Southcrest Convalescent Center, a skilled nursing facility owned by Extendicare, Inc. This site offered numerous challenges to the addition of an adult day care center. First, the scale of the existing facility is quite large and is situated on a steep and narrow site. Second, the facility is designed in a very typical 1960's institutional style. Third, the site did not have much buildable land, causing students to explore the possibility of utilizing the existing but underutilized physical therapy room in the skilled nursing facility.

The practicum was temporally organized as follows. First, the research and design recommendation literature regarding universal design and the aging was reviewed and analyzed. This led to the development by each student of a set of five patterns for design which are holistic systems of relationships bundling together numerous hypotheses regarding how the physical setting can maximize autonomy of the elderly. Second, site visits to several adult day cares in the Spokane, Washington area occurred. These site visits lasted several hours and offered students the opportunities to interview staff and administration regarding adult day care and, more importantly, actually observe how they work in real life. Marie Raschko, CEO, of Holy Family Adult Day Centers was instrumental in this effort. Third, Mary Kuvo, Administrator, of Southcrest Convalescent Center provided as-built drawings for the studio to use and also conducted a walking tour through the existing Extendicare skilled nursing facility that was to serve as the site for the project. Fourth, students developed schematic drawings documenting how they would incorporate an adult day care into such a context. Several care professionals including Marie Raschko of Holy Family and Cala Kirkwood of Kirkwood/Rodell Architects were able to render their insight at specific points during this process.

The final step in this process resulted in the products that will be presented in the following chapter. This assignment, entitled "The devil is in the details – considering the micro-environment," challenged students to develop a specific micro-intervention (i.e. lighting, furniture, millwork) in drawings and model which addresses the four issues raised in the previous chapter: Social Legibility, Socio-physical Aspects of Group Size, and Universal Design.