

# Gateway to a Brighter Future

Ball State faculty member helps expand Motivate Our Minds

Jonathan Spodek

Motivate Our Minds needed more room. The 2,840 square feet provided by the tutoring and enrichment program's headquarters—a former butcher shop on Highland Avenue—did not offer enough space for the approximately 50 children who gather there each day after school and in the summer.

When the Motivate Our Minds (MOM) staff approached Ball State for help in designing an addition, Jonathan Spodek, faculty member in the Department of Architecture, accepted the task and set out on a course that would triple the available space.

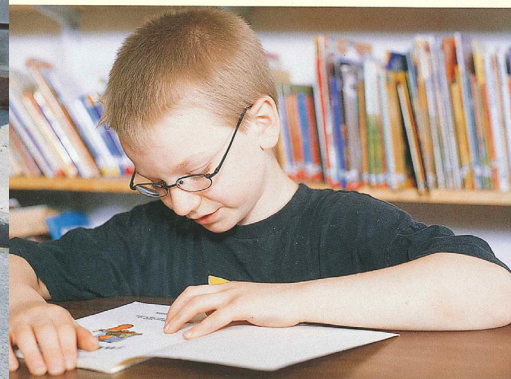
A community forum kicked off the project and helped Spodek gain direction. “We broke into small groups—we even had a group for the kids. We talked about: ‘What do you want? What are your visions? What are the strengths and weaknesses of this program?’” explains Spodek, whose involvement was partially funded by MOM. “From that, we were able to articulate what programs they wanted to have now, as well as 10 or 20 years down the line.”

Security was one of the key issues and needs. A strong desire to provide a facility without windows created a unique design quandary for Spodek. How could he design an environment that encouraged growth and learning without windows and still invite light into rooms, giving those inside a sense of connection with their outdoor surroundings? His solution: an enclosed courtyard accessed through glass doors from anywhere in the building.

“The whole concept revolves around the courtyard,” Spodek says. “It creates another classroom—outside. Kids can go out and build a snowman. They can read at a picnic table. They can sit outside with tutors.”

Spodek believes the courtyard provides excitement in a design focused mostly on function. At its center, gardens and an imperial locust tree, dubbed “the learning tree,” offer further investigative, learning, and enrichment opportunities. Its interior counterparts include a library, a computer classroom, three large, multifunction classrooms equipped for cooking and other activities, administrative and staff offices, an inviting reception area, and a staff workshop.

The expansion has benefited not only the MOM program, but also Spodek and his students. “For me to be a good teacher, I need to be engaged in the design and construction process on a regular basis,” he says. “When I come back to the classroom, I bring those experiences. I think the students appreciate that engagement.”



*The expanded Motivate Our Minds headquarters provides young learners and their Ball State student tutors with much-needed additional space for a wide range of educational activities, including reading, math, computer skills, and crafts.*