DOCUMENT RESUME

EF 001 947

ED 022 351

By-Ramsey, Robert

RESUME AND REPORT OF VISITATIONS TO SCHOOLS EMPLOYING THE OPEN-SPACE CONCEPT OF SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION ("SCHOOLS-WITHOUT-WALLS").

Note-11p.
EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC-$0.52
Descriptors-ACOUSTICS, CARPETING, CLASSROOM DESIGN, FIELD TRIPS, *FLEXIBLE CLASSROOMS, *INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS, LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION, MULTIPURPOSE CLASSROOMS, NONGRADED SYSTEM, *SCHOOL DESIGN, SPACE DIVIDERS, *STUDENT GROUPING, TEAM TEACHING
Identifiers-Kentucky, Lexington, Missouri, St. Louis

Four schools were visited in an attempt to assess the merits of combining several classrooms in a large space as a method of school construction. Interviews with students and teachers as well as personal impressions form the basis for evaluation. Satisfactory results were found for schools-without-walls, school carpeting, acoustic control, team teaching, and nongraded systems. Special considerations include minimum use of space dividers, isolation of office and foreign language areas, hard floor surfaces for wet construction areas, and inclusion of gymnasium and instructional movement center. Report includes detailed analysis of four open plan schools and description of a typical nongraded program. (MM)

Memo to: Dr. Knox, H. C. Stuart, Bob Lowther, and Participants in the Elementary and Junior High School Educational Specifications Workshops

From: Dr. Robert Ramsey, Assistant Superintendent

Subject: RESUME' AND REPORT OF VISITATIONS TO SCHOOLS EMPLOYING THE OPEN-SPACE CONCEPT OF SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION ("SCHOOLS-WITHOUT-WALLS")

On January 10-11, Dr. Knox and I visited schools in Lexington, Kentucky and St. Louis, Missouri which have adopted the concept of "opening up space" and combining several class-rooms together in a large space with wide employment of portable sight dividers. Our purposes were to see actual programs of instructions being conducted in such settings, to determine for ourselves whether or not such facilities really work, to answer the question of whether or not the noise level and acoustical interference is a problem of consequence in these facilities, and to get the reaction of professional personnel who have worked with these structures over a period of time. On most of the trip, we were accompanied by Dr. John Gilliland, professor of education at the University of Tennessee and consultant for the Southeastern Regional Center of the Educational Facilities Laboratory housed at Knoxville, Tennessee. Dr. Gilliland is recognized nationally as an authority on school construction trends. Dr. Gilliland is committed to the "open space" concept. He has reviewed our preliminary plans for the Broken Arrow schools and feels they are sound, workable, and provide the necessary flexibility for the school oriented to the future. His only two comments of caution were that, perhaps, some spaces for foreign language at the junior high school should be closed off to a greater extent and that selection of staff and administrative leadership is crucial in developing a program to utilize such facilities to the optimum.

Below are my personal, subjective reactions and impressions derived from our visitation:

I.) Lexington, Kentucky

A.) Background

1.) In Lexington, we visited Beaumont Junior High School and Garden Springs Elementary Schools. Both encompass a great deal of open-space. The buildings are carpeted, but not air-conditioned. The buildings were designed entirely by local architects. The school district is involved in a continuing building program and is committed to furthering the adoption of open spaces in all new constructions. We visited with an administrative assistant from the central office, the principals of both schools, and a number of teachers. The central office staff reflects that there has been no problems with the buildings except that parents and students who transfer out of the school district are disappointed in leaving this kind of educational environment. There has been no problems of public acceptance.

B.) Impressions

1.) All teachers and administrators with whom we visited are "sold" on "schools-without-walls" and are enthusiastic. They particularly emphasize the advantages of flexible grouping, team-teaching and working closely with other adult professionals. Every teacher indicated that they would prefer to work in open spaces than in a regular "walled-in" classroom. One teacher related that she

had recently substituted in a traditional classroom and "about went crazy" with a feeling of being hemmed-in.

2.) We saw many evidences of cooperative planning among teachers. In many instances, two teachers had pulled their desks together and were really functioning as a team. We saw examples of a single music teacher teaching two or three class groups at once and a single teacher reading a story to two classes at once. Teachers reported that they had more time for planning and preparation because of the flexible grouping possible within the "open-space" arrangement.

3.) We saw many varied activities occurring among different groups within the open space. There apparently was no significant interference from one group to another. We noticed the background of different noises, but the students and teachers did not seem to be aware of it.

4.) The junior high school had combined 7 classroom spaces together. Their experience has indicated that this may be "too much." They are planning to limit the open spaces to the equivalent of 5 classrooms in future constructions. Their judgment is that the amount of "open space" should be determined by the number of teachers working together at a particular grade level or by the size of the teams that are involved in the school's program.

5.) After 3 years of use, the carpeting was holding up well. Everyone was enthusiastic about the acoustical and esthetic values of carpeting. Teachers reported they felt much less fatigue in working

on carpeted surfaces. It was reported that even spilled paint is easily cleaned from the carpet.

6.) The teachers at Garden Springs Elementary School indicated that they felt that "open space" facility enabled them to do a much better job of individualizing instruction. At the primary levels, a team of 4 teachers work together. Each teacher prepares for 3 reading level groups. By using the team approach and flexible grouping, however, the 4 teachers prepare for 3 entirely different reading groups and, thus, they actually operate with 12 reading levels. (A brief description of the Garden Springs program extracted from the school handbook is attached at the end of this report).

II.) St. Louis, Missouri

A.) Background

1.) In St. Louis, we visited the well-known Valley Winds Elementary School (the "snail school") and a similar construction, the Lewis and Clark Elementary School. Both schools are in the Riverview School District. Valley Winds was designed by John Shaver. Valley Winds is completely air-conditioned and carpeted. We talked with the superintendent, a number of teachers, and a few students.

B.) Impressions at Valley Winds

1.) We were aware that there had been some severe problems related to the Valley Winds School since its opening. We have learned

previously that the program has been entirely re-vamped since the building first opened and that almost a total staff turn-over had occurred from the superintendent to the principal to the teaching staff. Only two of the original teachers remain at Valley Winds. Consequently, we anticipated to hear a great deal of criticism of the "open space" concept. We learned, however, that the dissatisfaction has been with the initial program in the school and not with the physical plant. Apparently, the school first opened with an extreme program of individualized instruction and student freedom. There were no basic textbooks and few limits set on student activity.

2.) Valley Winds has several suites of rooms thrown together in a single open space. One area includes the equivalent of 5 regular classrooms. Here again, all teachers were convinced of the advantages of the "open space" concept and would not want to work in a conventional facility.

3.) Teachers made minimum use of sight-dividers between groups. They did not seem concerned or interested in visually "blocking out" one group from another.

4.) We viewed a myriad of activities occurring simultaneously within the large open space (i.e., finger-painting, a movie, a film-strip presentation, individual seat work, and a teacher-led group discussion). There was no apparent problem of noise interference.

5.) All staff-members were "sold" on the centrally located, open, easily-accessible materials resource center. Utilization of

library materials is enhanced by this kind of facility.

6.) There was a slight problem of water leakage in the library area which we should question the architect about.

7.) The staff felt that the administrative offices should not be entirely open.

8.) The only two real complaints about the physical plant were that there was no gymnasium facility and no music room. (Our present plans call for both).

9.) One student reported that what he really liked about the facility was the freedom of movement, "you're not always bumping into people in the halls." The students related that they were not bothered by other groups working in the same open area.

C.) Impressions of Lewis and Clark

1.) Lewis and Clark has the identical design to Valley Winds except that they have reduced the amount of open space and have walled-off several regular classrooms. The office also embodies more privacy. The school is not carpeted. School was not in session during this visitation.

2.) We were struck by the limitations of the facility. Any team-work would be handicapped in this setting. The only advantage of this facility over most older buildings would appear to be accessibility to the library.

III.) Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on our study, thus far, and re-enforced by our experience during these

visitations, my personal conclusions and recommendations appear below:

A.) The "open space" concept will work.

B.) A traditional program of instruction can be conducted within a "school-without-walls."

C.) The greatest advantages of the "open space" concept lie in the potential for flexible grouping (large group-small group-individual work), team-teaching, and individualized instruction.

D.) I would recommend the following considerations in regard to the schematic drawings for the Broken Arrow Schools:

1.) We should review the plans to insure we are providing sufficient privacy for the office area.

2.) Some space should be closed-in in the junior high school for foreign language instruction.

3.) All "wet areas" should be hard-surfaced.

E.) With the above considerations, I would recommend the adoption of the plans submitted by the architect.

F.) The inclusion of a gymnasium and "IMCs" in our plans will give us a superior, more flexible, and more educationally desirable plant than any of the other facilities which we have seen.

G.) Selection and orientation of a staff willing and interested in working in these kinds of settings will be crucial to effective utilization of these facilities.

IV.) A Brief Description of the Non-Graded Program of Garden View Elementary School, Lexington, Kentucky

Garden Springs Elementary School, a non-graded school, is the result of many months of planning on the part of the administration, school board, staff

school planning laboratory consultants, and the architect. The curriculum and its flexibility was used by the architect to construct the plant.

This term, nongraded is applied to many different concepts. We use the term to de-emphasize the traditional idea of grade-level expectations for youngsters that happen to be at the same (or nearly the same) chronological age. We believe nongrading implies a focus on the individual and his mental maturity rather than on grade-level material to be mastered at a predetermined year. Nongrading to us is synonymous with giving up fixed standards for a philosophy of continuous growth and progress.

The responsibility of allowing each child to set his own learning pace and to provide him with valuable learning experiences at whatever "grade level" or phase of the elementary school this maturity happens to occur is our responsibility. We must also provide experiences that the child can grasp and thus succeed and move on to other levels of difficulty. Thus it is our obligation to provide the opportunity to move or re-phase the child when the need arises to a new level of materials. Garden Springs must offer the same child an opportunity to work at one level in one area and at another level in a different area if he demonstrates he possesses different levels of maturity for these different tasks.

These challenges have long been recognized and discussed. The Garden Springs School is attempting to meet these challenges. How we plan to do this involves an explanation of organization, physical arrangement, staff, materials, etc.

The building has two major divisions of classroom areas, the primary section of classrooms and the intermediate section of classrooms. Instead of the traditional single classrooms for primary youngsters this school has combined two classrooms to make one large area. This "double classroom" shares a commons

area with another "double classroom". The commons area is over one-half the size of a standard classroom and serves as space for small group and independent work. The intermediate section of the school has combined the equivalent of four single classrooms, plus the commons areas, into one large area. These multiple classrooms do not have any dividing partitions.

Team teaching is an important part of our program. Team teaching has been defined as--"an arrangement whereby two or more teachers, cooperatively plan, instruct and evaluate one or more groups in an appropriate instructional space and given length of time, so as to take advantage of the special competencies of the team members."[1]

The value of team teaching results from individual differences. If teacher A has outstanding knowledge and skill in science and teacher B has unusual knowledge and skill in music, then with both sharing their strengths with each other, the 60 children assigned to them will have, we believe, a much stronger science and music program than if they had had only one teacher in a self-contained instructional situation.

Another advantage of the areas of learning and the team of teachers is that it more easily allows mixed age grouping and nongrading. If one teacher in the intermediate team has children assigned to her that are known as "fourth graders" and two remaining team members have "sixth graders", hence you will find an instructional area with a total of 120 children not as fourth, fifth, and sixth graders, but as 120 children with a wide range of mental maturity that necessitates

---

[1]Singer, Ira, Team Teaching, Unified College Press, Inc., Indianapolis, 1964.

a wide range of instructional levels. With four teachers, each preparing for three reading groups each day (no more than if she were teaching in a single classroom). there will be 12 different levels or phases of instruction that the children in this area may have the advantage of receiving.

Regardless of where a student is or should be, he will be placed at whatever level he needs and will move into other levels or phases according to his own learning pace. In such a team, if each teacher prepares two arithmetic groups a day, the children in this area may have the advantage of eight different levels of arithmetic instruction, regardless of his grade or chronological age. This same flexibility holds true on the primary level except on this level we do not expect to find the span of differences in maturity as great as in the intermediate level--hence, a team of two teachers could provide six reading groups and four arithmetic groups, etc. The entire operation is based upon the fact that there is no such thing as a class of "fourth graders". In a class of 35 children, we expect that only about five will be working on grade level, and all the others will be somewhere below or somewhere above. This school, we hope, will make it possible for the "fourth grader" who is slow in reading to have instruction on a third or second grade level, and at the same time, it will allow him to work on a fifth grade level of instruction if his maturity is such in another area. In this instructional area, the child will have four or more teachers instead of one, and his maturity in a subject area will determine which level of instruction he receives--not his grade. We believe, for example that there may be a reading group working on an "eighth grade level" in reading--studying author, style, character analysis, etc.

Teachers will emphasize basic skills and then lead the students toward independent study or quest groups. The program will be characterized by small groups formed on the basis of similar interests and needs. The intermediate "teachers" are seen as consultants in the learning process rather than as teachers.

At the end of the school year, the teachers who have students who will be attending Garden Springs next year evaluate each child's maturity in several different areas and indicate on a card the levels at which they feel that child should be working next September. The Department of Instruction provides assistance in calculating, on the basis of the cards filled out on each youngster, the number of materials at the different instructional levels. In other words materials are ordered according to need rather than according to enrollment at each grade level.