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## ABSTRACT

The proper understanding and effective use of space in open space schools requires teacher, administrator, and student participation and involvement. Open plan schools can improve instruction because teachers are all visible. As a result, instructional improvements can be observed and encouraged, and weaker teachers tend to become stronger as they identify the traits of stronger teachers. Open plan schools can also encourage individualized learning situations, more student-teacher multi-activity, and interdisciplinary programs based on central themes. (Author/MLF)

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# OPEN SPACE SCHOOLS AND HOW TO USE THEM

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My remarks are specifically directed to:

- 1) Administrators with open spaces
- 2) Administrators who expect to have open spaces
- 3) Administrators who are wondering if their schools might be different if the buildings were open

Open space schools are schools where instructional areas are without traditional walls. I have to assume your instructional areas have carpeting to deaden the sound and furniture of the moveable type.

Open space schools are not new - remember the one-room school house? Open space schools necessitate re-examination of the instructional process classroom use by administrators and staff.

May I offer some specific directions to administrators? There will be a few hesitant teachers; there will be some puzzled parents; and, there will be some raised eyebrows by visitors when you operate open space schools. You will find students adjust easily. You should notice a reduction in disciplinary incidents. Teachers will be nervous about exposure to other teachers. Audio-visual users will noticeably upset quiet instruction located in adjacent areas. Space will be used by a greater variety of teachers, forcing closer cooperation.

I offer three constructive guidelines - guidelines to assist in a better understanding of open space use.

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| First:  | Joint staff and administrative participation |
| Second: | Instructional improvement potentials         |
| Third:  | Practical staff suggestions                  |

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First, there must be joint staff and administrative participation concerning use. Open space will restrict the instructional process unless "openness" exists among the staff and administration. Openness is described as a personal relationship among staff that is honest and direct. Administrators must carefully prepare the initial stage for open space usage, for unless the administrators can be open, there is little hope for a successful open space school. The successful development of staff openness will not be achieved without available preparation time, i.e., workshops, seminars or professionally directed study groups.

The day to day confrontations using open areas demand staff openness first. Perhaps the relationship might be compared with the institution of marriage: marriage seems to require a "dealing" relationship - because the partners are visible they must be honest in their everyday relationship, to endure. You undoubtedly will ask how the staff can accomplish this! The answer seems to be only when there is a commitment to do so. Therefore, building an open space school without personnel preparation to use it may impede use, or, force the construction of walls (or personality conflict barriers).

Second, when using open spaces, you can gain certain benefits; you can encourage certain activities; you can observe certain instructional improvements.

No wall rooms permit flexibility in class size.

Teachers can combine classes, separate small groups, and multiple teachers can share supervision of larger groups.

Style of instruction can be varied concurrently, permitting individual and group activity, quiet and verbal activity, all of which can take place concurrently.

Strong instructors can teach large groups (team teaching), giving other teachers an opportunity to observe instructional effectiveness. Because teachers are all visible, weaker teachers tend to become stronger as they identify the traits of the better teacher. Believe it or not!

Third, I would like to share with you several ideas my staff offered this fall. I offer these ideas to schools with a population of 500 to 1500 (not intended to limit, but to identify the extent of my personal knowledge; therefore, there may be many advantages for larger schools).

OPEN SPACE:

- helps to create and promote individualized learning-teaching situations,
- allows more student-teacher multi-activity,
- encourages and develops basic understanding of student-teacher roles and levels of responsibility,
- tends to emphasize individual instruction rather than group instruction (from observation, fewer students can hang back as non-participants; all around them is visible student classroom activity),
- encourages meaningful interdisciplinary programs around central themes,
- increases student interest in other subject areas and teaching styles (an interesting teacher, class or subject can distract the student in a positive way),

--allows for more open movement (this can be most positive in media center use or open laboratory use. The free movement becomes less distractive as students move in to accomplish tasks, and disruptiveness becomes a peer group problem).

Even as I present several options, you may still leave here with certain questions and doubts related to how to use open spaces!

Let me emphasize some MUSTS:

- 1) Staff and student involvement is necessary; indeed, you must have staff and student involvement. You must accept uncertainty - and a great need to work out problems through group interaction.
- 2) You need a commitment to use the open area. You must have a commitment to use open areas! The change will cause the teachers' anxiety level to rise - it would be easier not to change!
- 3) The open areas need to be prepared and constructed for use. The areas must be usable (carpeting and acoustical ceilings are a must; moveable furniture is a must; chalkboard, visual display areas, good lighting and excellent ventilation are critical!
- 4) There must be active staff participation in special laboratory setups to maximize safety and student use. A poorly located door, light, electrical outlet, fixed equipment or passageway, can foul up any chance of good space use.

- 5) Administrators and supervisors need to react positively to open space use. They must encourage teachers, allowing for negative feedback and sharing the steps towards better use.
- 6) The administrator must have respect, appreciation and knowledge for open space education. He must be a believer, and he must be honest in dealing with problems.

Areas are used more casually, and responsibility must be developed in such ways as:

- returning items to points of origin
- keeping passageways open
- constantly supervising in a low key fashion
- suggesting repairs, redesign or change when necessary

I offer the following suggestions for use of equipment in open areas:

Equipment must be durable, easy to clean (such as chrome), stackable or easily piled.

Files must be locking type.

Barriers (used sparingly) offer best results if 6' tall, (4' wide) with acoustical tackboard material, on casters (some need to have chalkboards).

Laboratories need locking cabinets to permit personal territory for students.

If departments are separated, such as Industrial Arts, Home Economics, Arts/Crafts, Music, Physical Education, or Business Education, develop goals for entire lab use (staff in department must share greater mutual responsibility).

An open space school is hectic, demanding the most from everyone. Open space staffs become constant observers. The administrators and staff are a part of the action 100% of the time. It is difficult to hide; students have more verbal interaction with peer group and adults, and more tolerance for others. There appears to be more consideration for everyone; a concern for people's feelings, as well as mutual understanding and caring for others.

Do not neglect a total awareness of the fact that using open space is in itself a learning objective for a school - helping students understand freedom and responsibility as they use space. Open space does require close participation with custodial staff to assist in meeting daily goals. You must continually be aware and concerned for others in every facet of the function of your buildings.

An open space school seems to be sensitive to better human relationships, perhaps because we are more visible, we speak to more people, smile at more people, "touch" more people and encourage a more friendly, helpful school atmosphere.

If open space use gives us a greater sensitivity to human needs - then how to use the space becomes a must for the administrator.

I have attempted to anticipate some of the questions you might have asked, therefore, I am prepared to attempt to answer those questions I may have failed to anticipate.

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