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ABSTRACT

Open space schools will lead to coordination by teachers in more exciting ventures in education, such as joint teaching, individualized instruction, and crossgrouping of students. "Open space schools," denotes a type or architectural design and not an instructional program. Many teachers, though, are frustrated by open space and are inadequately prepared to function in the new architectural environment. Teachers successful in open space schools have stressed that their key strategy is coordination. Their suggestions have been organized into five basic categories to help teachers survive in an open space atmosphere. First, it is easier to enforce a few basic rules rather than numerous detailed ones. Rules and standards are most effective when they are organized into school-wide and individual pod rules. Secondly, careful consideration must be given to the patterns of student movement in the open space school. Again, agreeing on student movement patterns must be done both on a school-wide basis and within each pod. Thirdly, it is essential that teachers working within the same pod take every precaution to minimize distracting noise. Fourthly, teachers in a pod must jointly plan where to locate furniture, equipment and supplies, and should agree on decorations for their open areas. Lastly, it is essential to inform parents about open space as early and thoroughly as possible. Successful coordination in these areas will not only allow teachers to survive in open spaces but will lead to more coordination in implementing new programs. (SK)

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HOW TO SURVIVE IN THE OPEN-SPACE SCHOOL

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Introductory Statement

The mission of the Stanford Center for Research and Development in Teaching is to improve teaching in American schools. Current major operations include three research and development programs--Teaching Effectiveness, The Environment for Teaching, and Teaching and Linguistic Pluralism--and two programs combining research and technical assistance, the Stanford Urban/Rural Leadership Training Institute and the Hoover/Stanford Teacher Corps Project. The ERIC Clearinghouse on Information Resources is also a part of the Center. A program of exploratory and related studies provides for smaller studies not part of the major programs.

This paper is based on part of the work of the Teacher Corps Project funded by the Office of Education and jointly sponsored by Stanford University and Herbert Hoover Junior High School in San Jose, California. The job of the Stanford members of the Open-Space Work Study Team in the project has been to help prepare the staff, students, and parents at Hoover School for moving into a new open-space facility. This paper describes five areas of teacher coordination that are essential for survival in open space: establishing common standards of student behavior; developing procedures for student movement; scheduling noisy and quiet activities; arranging furniture, equipment, and supplies; and involving parents. It is addressed to teachers and administrators in or about to move into open-space schools, as well as to pre- and in-service educators concerned with preparing teachers for functioning effectively in the open-space environment.

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Any strengths in this paper can be attributed to our colleagues at Hoover Junior High School and Stanford University. Responsibility for all errors and omissions is ours alone.

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HOW TO SURVIVE IN THE OPEN-SPACE SCHOOL

Susan Stavert Roper and Robert R. Nolan

Teachers have to believe they can live with an innovation before they can learn to like it or, more important, to make the most of it. This is particularly true in the case of a move to an open-space school, because many teachers are convinced that their relationships with students, their instructional programs, their friendships with other teachers, and even their "sanity" are at stake. They see practically unlimited possibilities for chaos in open-space schools.

It is important to note that open space denotes a type of architectural design (i.e., large instructional areas undivided by interior walls and equivalent in size to two or more standard classrooms) and not an instructional program. In fact almost any instructional approach from traditional to "open classroom" can be implemented in an open-space school. Open-space architecture, however, greatly facilitates joint teaching with a common group of students. Teachers in the same pod can assign all students according to activity areas with different teachers supervising each area. With proper planning, several activities can take place simultaneously. Teachers can supervise the activity in which they have the most competence and interest. Ideally, students will benefit from interaction with more than one adult, a greater variety of activities, and more thorough evaluation. Teachers will benefit from collegial support, an increased pool of materials and resources, and a greater opportunity to do those things they do best.

Unfortunately, this glowing picture is a mirage to many teachers who have been unable to exploit the potential of open space. It is to these teachers frustrated by open space, and to those preparing to move into new open-space facilities that this paper is addressed.

We began to gather information on open-space schools when we were appointed as part of the university staff of a project sponsored

by the Teacher Corps of the U. S. Office of Education and carried out jointly by Stanford University and Herbert Hoover Junior High School in San Jose, California. Our job has been to work with teachers, instructional aides, administrators, Teacher Corps interns, community members, and students to help prepare them to move into a new open-space building.

We consulted many different sources of information. In addition to visits to open-space schools, we conducted a search of the literature on open space and team teaching through the Educational Resources Information Center. We also met with university faculty and school district staff. We interviewed teachers who were functioning effectively in open space and those who had reverted to self-contained classrooms. We also interviewed principals and vice-principals and some students. In addition, we attended conferences on open space and corresponded with teachers and administrators in open-space schools across the country. The faculty, aides, and administrators at Hoover Junior High School openly shared with us their concerns about moving into their new open-space building. Their honest and thorough appraisal of the problems they anticipated helped us decide what information was needed to help them and other teachers new to open-space schools.

In our discussions with these faculties scheduled to move into open-space schools, their guiding assumption seemed to be, "if anything can go wrong, it will." They told us: "Noise levels will be intolerable." "Teachers will have to outshout one another to be heard." "Students will be constantly milling around the large area preventing careful supervision." "Quiet and shy kids will get lost in a crowd of a hundred or more." "It will be impossible to give a test when another group a few feet away is having a movie." "Lively debates or panel discussions will have to be canceled to avoid disturbing other teachers and students in the same area."

This is a small but typical sample of the doleful predictions we heard. The teachers who voiced these fears are, by and large, competent, experienced, and committed professionals. Their concerns are based in part on the opinions of fellow teachers working in open-

space schools. Although the negative aspects of open space may have been overemphasized by these teachers, we think their concerns are warranted. In our visits to a wide range of open-space schools in the San Francisco Bay Area, we repeatedly saw open-space areas closed off with portable walls, curtains, coatracks, bookcases, or whatever was handy.[1] Many of these schools are now so like conventional self-contained classroom schools that they are frustrating the original hopes for open space, i.e., providing more flexible student grouping, ending the professional isolation of the classroom teacher, permitting more effective use of individual teacher skills and interest, and allowing a greater variety of instructional approaches.

A major explanation for "the walls going up" in many open-space schools is that teachers are inadequately prepared to function in the new architectural environment. There are a few exceptions where teachers have spent a year or even more meeting together to get ready for their new building. Some of these efforts are really inspirational. Teachers have devoted summer vacations, late afternoons, evenings, and weekends to carefully building a new and varied instructional program. They have taken field trips to other open-space schools, met with the best teaching teams in the area, talked with university and state department consultants on open space, and read everything available that applied to open-space schools.

These activities, however, are not typical. Most teachers are given a token in-service program that is usually poorly planned, too short, and introduced too late to have any impact. There is a Pollyannaish quality to many of these in-service programs which teachers find very annoying. They are told how lucky they are to have such a new and impressive facility (although they had no voice in what that facility would look like), how exciting and innovative their program

[1] For an interesting description of "walls" going up in one junior high school, see Bill Truesdell and Jeff Newman, "Can Jr. Highs Make It with the Wide Open Spaces?," Learning, 4 (November 1975), No. 3, pp. 74-77.

will be (although specifics of that program are rarely elaborated), and how confident the district is that the new school will be a showpiece of the state (although little released time is allowed for teachers to plan that showpiece.) During our field visits we found that faculties so poorly prepared for open space were usually the first to put up walls.

Teachers can benefit from specific guidelines and suggestions to help them prepare for teaching in open-space schools. The purpose of this paper is to describe the types of teacher coordination that are necessary for survival in open space. It is intended to help teachers systematically plan to prevent chaos. If teachers agree to coordinate on the issues presented here and to follow some of the suggestions offered, they can learn to live comfortably in the open-space school. Coordination on these issues will also help prepare teachers to coordinate instructional activities in order to fully exploit the potential of open space.

Teachers successful in open-space schools have provided the best and most useful information on how to survive in open space.[2] Their key point is that teachers must coordinate their efforts. We have organized their suggestions into five basic categories: (1) developing and enforcing standards for student behavior; (2) agreeing on student movement patterns; (3) scheduling activities to minimize noise; (4) arranging furniture, equipment, and supplies; and (5) involving parents.

1. Developing and Enforcing Standards for Student Behavior

In the open-space school, the unruly student is potentially more disruptive than in the traditionally designed school. Such a student

[2] In addition, teachers preparing for open-space schools are more interested in hearing from their colleagues experienced in open-space schools than from non-practitioner experts. See Paul S. George, "Ten Years of Open Space Schools: A Review of the Research" (Gainesville, Florida: Florida Educational Research and Development Council, 1975), p. 36.

can now disturb not just one teacher and 35 students but up to six teachers and 210 students! Two guidelines we repeatedly heard from teachers discussing their standards for student behavior in open space were to keep the number of rules small and to enforce these rules consistently. They said that it was easier to enforce a few basic rules rather than numerous detailed ones.

Rules and standards are most effectively organized into two basic categories: school-wide and individual pod (i.e., an open-space area equivalent to two or more standard sized classrooms). School-wide rules should be developed and enforced by all the teachers in an open-space school. A typical list of school-wide rules would cover class dismissal procedures, student access to central facilities such as the media center, and safety regulations. Individual pod rules should be developed and enforced by all the teachers working in that pod. Clearly, individual pod rules must not contradict or subvert the school-wide rules.

Teachers who successfully work together in the same open-space area do not speak of "my students" or "your students." They refer to students within their pod as "our" students and feel responsible for enforcing standards of behavior for all the students in the pod. Here are some examples of pod rules from the language arts pod at Herbert Hoover Junior High School.

--Be in your seat with all your materials when the bell rings (or you are tardy).

--Teachers are not to allow more than one student at a time to leave the room to go to their lockers, lavatories, etc.

--Students cannot move to another teacher's area without permission.

It cannot be overemphasized that school-wide and pod rules must be uniformly enforced. Failure to do so explains a lot of teacher dissatisfaction in open space and has even accounted for the disintegration of some otherwise viable teaching teams. Students under the supervision of a teacher who consistently enforces regulations feel unfairly treated if they can see other students being allowed to bypass the rules.

Teachers in each pod must coordinate with teachers in other pods to avoid conflicts in rules and regulations for student behavior. For example, if students are allowed to chew gum in math class but not allowed to chew gum in social studies, the problem of enforcement is much more difficult for the social studies teachers.

At Herbert Hoover Junior High an open-space committee composed of teachers and aides from each of the subject areas developed common standards for the entire school before meeting by their subject areas to work out standards for their particular pods. The overall school standards were distributed to faculty, aides, parents, and students. Feedback was elicited from all groups and used to revise the suggestions of the open-space committee. Just before the move into the new building a list of recommendations for student behavior which incorporated ideas from students and parents as well as faculty was submitted to the faculty for final approval. These recommendations will be reviewed at the end of the school year for possible revisions.

Students should become familiar with both the school-wide rules and the regulations for each of the pods before moving into the new building. Equally important, they ought to have some input into formulating these rules. Many teachers find it easier to enforce rules that students have helped develop, and students often have excellent suggestions about what regulations are needed in the open-space setting. This was particularly true at Hoover, where three-fourths of the students had attended open-space elementary schools. In order to obtain student input into the standards of behavior, we met with each of the social studies classes prior to the move. We asked students how they would solve specific problems such as too much noise, theft from the media center, students who were making a poor adjustment to open space, etc. We took notes on their suggestions and made a long list of their ideas for faculty consideration. We also asked parents some of the same specific questions and summarized their responses for the faculty to review. The final recommendations approved by faculty for implementation were thus the composite of student, parent, and faculty ideas.

After faculty approval, students were informed of the school-wide standards for behavior in the open-space school before moving into the new building. Teachers within each pod explained the regulations for their particular open-space area either on the first day of the move or on the tour of the building a few days prior to the move. A good strategy for acquainting students with the new standards is to gather all of them together in a central area of the pod facing all the teachers who will work together there. Teachers explain that all students in that area will be expected to abide by the few specific regulations. The first week in their new building, Hoover language arts teachers taught a unit on school pride which included further discussion of open space and its use. As part of this unit all students were tested on the new school rules (e.g., no cutting across the library-media center to get to a class) and were required to retake the test until they scored 100 percent.

In the Hoover social studies area, the teachers asked the students to fill in the following checklist monitoring their own behavior each day of the first week after the move into the new open-space building.

Behavior Checklist:

1. _____ I came in the correct door quietly.
2. _____ I remembered to pick up my folder.
3. _____ I completed my dictionary work.
4. _____ I found my seat easily.
5. _____ I quietly cleaned up my area.
6. _____ I was in my seat at dismissal time.
7. _____ I remembered to put my chair in (up).
8. _____ I turned this checklist in at the correct door when leaving.

This checklist was designed to insure that all students would review the rules daily, monitor their own compliance, and receive a measure of their behavior in the form of a daily behavior grade. This checklist also minimizes the number of students who claim not to know the new procedures.

2. Agreeing on Student Movement Patterns

In the open-space school, a student's movement is less constrained by the architecture than in the traditionally designed school. A student's movement can also be more visually distracting to teachers and other students. Thus careful consideration must be given to the patterns of student movement in the open-space school.

As in the case of developing regulations for student behavior, agreeing on student movement patterns must be done both school-wide and within each pod. School-wide practices include going to restrooms, the media center or library, lockers, outside the building, and emergency drills (e.g., fire). At many open-space schools, student movement to and within the media center received special attention. Some common procedures were that an individual teacher could send only a limited number of students to the media center at any one time and that all students using the media center during class time had to submit a teacher-signed form outlining their assignment.

Many open-space pods are divided into separate areas according to function. In a pod there may be a few carrels for individual study. There may also be an area with comfortable couches and bean bag chairs where students are free to relax and read. In the same pod, an area where chairs are arranged in rows or concentric semicircles may be set aside for large group instruction. A few portable dividers can be used to differentiate these areas. Teachers may feel that different standards are appropriate for these different areas. For example, students may be encouraged to move around a project's area to get equipment or to view other students' work, while in the large group area they need permission to leave their seats. As long as teachers agree on the acceptable standards of movement for each area, effectively communicate them to students, and uniformly enforce them, problems will be minimized.

Students need the opportunity to practice movement patterns and regulations as much as possible before the move to the new building.

During our orientation sessions with students, we used a wooden model of the open-space building which was constructed in shop classes, and we asked students to trace their pattern of movement as they went through a typical day. This helped them understand why it was important to use a specific door to their classroom, to avoid crossing the media center, and, at times, to go the long way around in order to avoid distracting other students. If possible, students should be given a tour of the new open-space building before the move to practice movement patterns.

3. Scheduling Activities to Minimize Noise

Both students and teachers in open-space schools have told us that noise is the single biggest problem. It was also the number one concern of Hoover teachers in anticipating the move into their new building. In addition to the obvious distraction noise can cause to a lesson, noise can also strain professional relationships and hurt staff morale. It is therefore essential that teachers working within the same pod take every precaution to minimize distracting noise. Once again, the key strategy is teacher coordination. Teachers in open-space classrooms must meet periodically to coordinate their noisy and quiet activities. In some pods teachers agree that the same periods every week will be set aside for quiet activities while other periods each week will be reserved for noisy activities. Teachers are thereby assured that certain times are safe for testing, reading, and other quiet lessons. They also have leeway to conduct noisier activities such as debates or plays without worrying about distracting another teacher's test. Some teachers feel that this system is too constraining and prefer to coordinate activities at the beginning of each week. Although this requires more time, it does allow greater flexibility in weekly planning. Implicit in either method of coordinating schedules is that each individual teacher has a tentative weekly lesson plan and some idea of the noise level of each of the daily activities.

One excellent method of controlling noise levels in open space is to use self-contained rooms for particularly noisy or distracting activities. Usually schools have cafeterias, project rooms, a large corridor, or even a space outside that can be used occasionally for very noisy activities. A weekly or bimonthly sign-up sheet can be posted for each facility. Although the availability of self-contained space is a good safety valve for teachers in open space, we have seen several different activities including films, small group work, and a lecture taking place in the same pod at the same time with very little distraction. This was in large part a result of good teacher coordination, the superior acoustical design of most open-space buildings (e.g., carpeting and acoustical ceiling tile), and better voice control by both teachers and students.

Another technique for minimizing noise disruptions is to divide the pod into different areas with different acceptable noise levels. The acceptable noise level will be determined by the activity which takes place in that area of the pod. For example, a pod could be divided into a reading area, a large group instruction area, and a projects area each with a different acceptable noise level.

Noise varies not only by type of activity but by the time of day or period. The first few minutes after the students are seated are usually the noisiest. To control this problem some faculties have agreed to start each period with a five-to-ten-minute activity that each student can do quietly at his or her seat. Teachers in each subject area shared their ideas for "quiet" lessons and developed a list of activities that not only settle students down but also are part of the instructional program.

One of the touchiest aspects of the potential noise problem is how to tell other teachers that they or the students under their supervision are being too noisy. This is particularly a problem for teachers who have been isolated from one another behind closed classroom doors for so long. They have little experience in the kind of criticism that is often necessary in the open-space environment. One means of establishing a climate where this kind of criticism is

acceptable is to have a short time at each teachers' meeting to discuss such items as distracting noise and other irritations.[3] Agreed-upon signals are also used to indicate that the noise level is too high. Some teachers use nonverbal signals such as a peace sign or the flicking of a light switch, while others send a student with a "please keep it down" note. Many teachers find that walking over to a colleague and asking him or her to lower the noise level is the easiest way to control disruptions. Other teachers, however, feel that complaints about noise should be held until the end of the period. Whatever method teachers agree upon to monitor noise in their pod, the important point is to be neither fearful of letting each other know when they are being distracted, nor hostile if asked to quiet down.

4. Arranging Furniture, Equipment, and Supplies

A major adjustment in an open-space school is to begin thinking in terms of "our room" rather than "my room." No longer can one individual teacher decorate all the bulletin boards or move chairs and tables around at will. Teachers in a pod must jointly plan where to locate furniture, equipment, and supplies and should agree on decorations for their open-space area. It is helpful to have a model of the open-space areas (complete with paper cutouts of all the furniture) to allow teachers to experiment with various furniture arrangements before moving into the new building. Once teachers have agreed on the initial location of furniture and other materials, they can set a date to evaluate these arrangements. Before that date no changes in the location of furniture, equipment, or supplies will be made without consulting all the teachers in the pod. Nothing will fray tempers more than to return from the weekend to find one's instructional area shortened by a few yards. It is probably a good idea to plan to review physical arrangements in the pod every month or so and agree on changes at that time.

[3] Sheila Molnar, "Life in Teams," unpublished paper.

In planning the location of furniture and equipment, teachers should keep in mind the kind of instructional program to be implemented. They will probably want to have areas within their pod for small group instruction, large group instruction, and individualized learning. Research indicates that noise increases with pupil density,[4] so teachers should avoid crowding pupils into small spaces.

5. Involving Parents

When a new educational practice is introduced, parents are often resistant to the change. This is frequently caused by their having been given inadequate information and their anger at not having been properly consulted before the innovation was adopted. Resistance is usually greater when parents fear that the innovation will be a departure from the "basics." Parents often confuse the instructional concepts of "open classrooms" or "open schools" with the architectural design, "open space." It is therefore essential to inform parents about open space as early and as thoroughly as possible.

Parents should be consulted on the initial decision to build or not to build an open-space school. They should also be involved in meetings with architects to help plan the new facility. Parents at Hoover insisted on windows in the media center, and both students and faculty are now happy to have some natural light in their new building.

P.T.A. meetings, parent advisory groups, and home and school committees are good places to begin involving parents. A brief introduction to open-space schools and how they affect student attitudes and achievement was presented to the Hoover Parent Advisory Council. Once construction of the new facility was under way, the parents requested a workshop on open space for a more thorough description of the building and discussion of the instructional program.

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[4] Frank A. Brunetti, "Noise, Distraction and Privacy in Conventional and Open School Environments," paper prepared for the Third Annual Environmental Design Research Association Conference, University of California, Los Angeles, January 1972.

All parents were invited to this workshop and were contacted both by telephone and by mail. At the evening workshop, the potential advantages and disadvantages of open-space schools were outlined. The physical layout of the new building was explained by means of slides and a wooden model of the facility. Teachers in each subject area described the instructional program they planned to implement in the new building. Based on questions raised at this workshop, written questions and answers on open space were included in the regular newsletter sent to all parents.

When a school staff is beginning to feel somewhat comfortable in their new enviornment, a special parents' night can be held to show parents and community members the new building. Once the program is in operation, parents should be encouraged to visit the school or telephone with their questions. An information booklet anticipating common concerns can be distributed to all parents.

Finally, parents should be integrated into the instructional program of an open-space school. An effective use of parent volunteers makes sense pedagogically as well as politically. Since individualization of instruction and small-group work is usually more common in open space than in self-contained areas, parents can be of invaluable assistance both in tutoring individuals and in supervising group projects. The media center is often used more in open-space schools than in conventional ones, and parents are needed to help with clerical and instructional tasks. If parents share the responsibility for implementing an innovation, more of their energy will be directed toward making that innovation work than toward resisting it.

Summary

Saranson, in The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change,[5] assesses the impact of innovation in schools and concludes, "the more things change, the more they remain the same." This seems to be an

[5] Seymour B. Saranson, The Culture of the School and the Problem of Change (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971).

accurate description of many open-space schools. They often end up looking like the same old self-contained classroom schools we all know so well. As Saranson points out, the failure of many educational innovations is in large part the result of inadequate preparation for those who must make the innovations work--the teachers.

This paper was written to help teachers learn to survive in the open-space environment. The main requirements are time and effort to coordinate with one another before, during, and after the move to open space. We have described the five areas where coordination is essential to survival--common standards of student behavior, student movement, scheduling activities to minimize noise, arranging furniture, equipment, and supplies, and parents' involvement. These are the bare minimum. We feel that successful coordination in these areas will not only allow teachers to survive in open space, but will lead to coordination in more exciting ventures such as joint teaching, individualized instruction, and cross-grouping of students. Simply put, teachers must survive before they can excel in open space.