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ABSTRACT

A two page checklist was developed to assist educators in predicting the success or failure of children in open classrooms. The checklist was based on the results of a survey of ninety-one open classroom teachers who were asked to list the characteristics of successful and unsuccessful children in open classrooms. Content validity was established by having a second group of classroom teachers determine the observability of selected classroom behaviors and having faculty members match observable behaviors to children's characteristics. Concurrent validity is being established by comparing observer results to teacher ratings. Observations in the first trial run showed that teacher and researcher checklist results disagreed on an average of only seven percent of the items per child; however, each researcher checked only those behaviors that were clearly observable during the observation period. Initial data analysis to establish interrater reliability showed observer agreement to be 85 percent. (Author/BW)

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Characteristics of Children in the Open Classroom
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In recent years a movement has developed toward open education for American children (Rothwell, 1973; Silberman, 1970; Spodek, 1970; Walberg & Thomas, 1972). Much of the impetus for such a movement in this country can be attributed to Britain's Plowden Report (1967), the documentary results of a government sponsored study to examine primary education in England (English primary schools include roughly the same age ranges as our elementary schools). Although it was basically a status report, the document included suggestions for educational reform. Included also were favorable comments on new infant school programs which incorporated such innovations as informal classroom procedures, an integrated day, vertical groupings, and process learning. Implications from the Plowden Report were soon felt in this country through the open school movement.

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Within the movement, open education has been seen as the "answer" for all children (Silberman, 1970). This assumption raises several questions: Is open education appropriate for all children? Will open education allow all children to succeed? As Ellis D. Evans (1971) notes, "The issue is whether informal (or formal) education is more or less suitable for all children, regardless of their circumstances, stage of development, and educational needs (p. 304)."

Little research has been done to determine if open education is, indeed, appropriate for all children. Other aspects of the open classroom have been looked at, such as the teacher's role

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and training (Resnick, 1972; Schwartz, 1974; Scriven & Scriven, 1974), the environment (Barr, 1974; Gump, 1974; Proshansky & Wolfe, 1974), and the curriculum (Randazzo & Arnold, 1972; Rathbone, 1972; Yeomans, 1969).

Sullivan (1974) examined two fifth grade classes, one open and one traditional, looking for differences between the groups in creative thinking, creative writing, independent decision-making in performing tasks, and self-confidence when facing new situations. Significant differences were found between the two groups on the last two variables only, leading Sullivan to conclude the children in an open classroom were independent and self-confident significantly more than they were creative. She also noted that, in general, children in the open classroom were more flexible, more spontaneous, and less self-conscious than their traditional counterparts. Although Sullivan's study examined children's characteristics, the author made no attempt to link success or failure with the characteristics in either the open or the traditional setting.

A study to determine the characteristics of elementary children who succeed and those who do not succeed in an open classroom has been undertaken. For the purposes of this study an open classroom was defined operationally.

An open classroom is one in which children learn through discovery; one in which each child is allowed to learn at his or her own pace. The teacher in an open classroom acts as a catalyst, a manager, a facilitator--providing learning experiences and a rich environment. The

organization is flexible, both in the physical and curricular sense. The open classroom does not require open spaces, although open spaces may be a part of an open classroom. Children in an open classroom function independently or in small groups, choosing from available activities.

The present study has been divided into three phases. It was felt that an appropriate point of departure would be the teachers who interact with children daily over long periods of time and who play a large part in judging children's classroom success or failure. Therefore, ninety-one open elementary teachers from eight graduate education classes at Georgia State University and from seven public schools were administered the researcher-constructed Student Characteristics Questionnaire. Teachers were asked to list characteristics of successful and unsuccessful children in an open classroom, as well as to define successful and unsuccessful. Responses were coded and categorized. Twenty-one kinds of characteristics were listed for successful children, while twenty-five kinds of characteristics were listed for unsuccessful children. Only those responses listed by 19% or more of the respondents are reported here.

Table 1

Characteristics of Successful Children in an Open Classroom

Characteristic	Number of Teachers Citing Characteristic	Percent of Teachers Citing Characteristic
Self-motivated	46	51
Independent Worker	39	43
Cooperative	32	35

Table 1 (Continued)

Characteristics of Successful Children in an Open Classroom

Characteristic	Number of Teachers Citing Characteristic	Percent of Teachers Citing Characteristic
Responsible	21	23
Self-disciplined	21	23
Curious	20	22
Independent	18	20
Flexible	17	19
Mature	17	19

Note. n = 91

Table 2

Characteristics of Unsuccessful Children in an Open Classroom

Characteristic	Number of Teachers Citing Characteristic	Percent of Teachers Citing Characteristic
Easily Distracted	31	34
Has Emotional Problems	28	31
Immature	27	30
Slow or Disabled Learner	26	29
Hard to Motivate	25	27
Dependent	25	27
Needs Teacher Supervision	23	25
Hyperactive	18	20

Table 2 (Continued)

Characteristics of Unsuccessful Children in an Open Classroom

Characteristic	Number of Teachers Citing Characteristic	Percent of Teachers Citing Characteristic
Has Little Self-discipline	18	20
Disruptive	17	19

Note. n = 91

Definitions of success and lack of success in an open classroom appeared to be restatements of the lists of characteristics, with success most often defined in terms of a child's achievement through independent work or a child's ability to achieve according to his or her own rate, abilities, and interests. Lack of success was most often defined in terms of a child's dependence on resources other than himself in order to achieve.

Table 3

Definitions of Successful Children in an Open Classroom

Definition	Number of Teachers Citing Definition	Percent of Teachers Citing Definition
Child has ability to work independently.	38	42
Child is able to achieve at own rate, abilities, and interests.	27	30

Note. n = 91

Table 4

Definitions of Unsuccessful Children in an Open Classroom

Definition	Number of Teachers Citing Definition	Percent of Teachers Citing Definition
Child depends on resources other than self for achievement.	41	45

Note. n = 91

Phase two of the study included the construction and content validation of an observation instrument to measure those characteristics identified by 19% or more of the teachers. Items for the instrument consisted of children's classroom behaviors. One hundred five behaviors were generated by researchers after conducting a literature search, brainstorming with colleagues, and examining already existing instruments.

Content validation proceeded in two parts. Teachers in a graduate education class at Georgia State University were given the list of 105 behaviors and were asked to indicate those behaviors that were observable. Fourteen teachers participated in this process; only those behaviors agreed upon as observable by ten or more of the teachers were used for the instrument. At the same time, six faculty members from the Departments of Educational Curriculum and Instruction, Early Childhood Education, and Educational Foundations were asked to match each characteristic to one or more of the behaviors to determine a consensus as to which behaviors were indicative of a specific characteristic. Only those

observable behaviors were used for the instrument on which three out of five faculty members agreed upon the characteristic for those behaviors. The outcome of these two processes was the tentatively titled Campbell-Newman Checklist consisting of thirty-eight items indicating nine characteristics.

A checklist format, with a forced choice yes or no for each behavior, was chosen so that clear distinctions could be made during actual classroom observations in phase three, the current phase of the study. During this phase, researchers will be in open classrooms observing one child at a time, a child selected by the teacher, for a thirty minute period using the checklist. After each observation, the child's teacher will indicate whether the child is considered successful or not successful and comparisons will be made between researcher and teacher results. Researchers and teacher will have to agree on results for the checklist to have concurrent validity. In other words, the checklist will be concurrently valid with the teacher's opinion if its use allows a child to be classified as successful or not successful and that classification is the same as the teacher's.

One half day of observations has already occurred in which the checklist was used with seven primary children. The researcher and teacher agreement on the child's success or not success was so complete that the teacher was asked to complete a checklist on each child independently. Teacher and researcher checklists disagreed on an average of 2.6 items per child (roughly 7% of the cases)--tremendous agreement for a first trial run. However, these results must be qualified.

The researcher checked only those behaviors that were clearly observable during the thirty minute observation period. Those behaviors not checked were omitted from the comparisons. The difficulty of seeing all the behaviors in a short period of time became evident. Future observations may need to be conducted over longer time periods.

The teacher in this case indicated some difficulty with the dichotomous response mode. She felt that a Likert type scale with choices (always...often...sometimes...never) would be more appropriate and give a more accurate picture of the child. The final instrument probably will include such a response mode because its use will be directed toward teachers who have interacted with the children over long time periods and are qualified to make such fine distinctions about classroom behaviors. Researchers were flattered by the teacher's request to use the checklist as part of her end of the year evaluation process. It was noted that the checklist is flexible enough to be used in a formative or a summative evaluation procedure, as well as in its intended role as a predictor of success or failure in an open classroom.

Researchers will continue classroom observations throughout the summer and fall obtaining more concurrent validity data and establishing the checklist's reliability. Inter-rater reliability will be determined by correlating researcher's independent observation results over the same children and time. Test-retest reliability will be determined by correlating a researcher's observation results of the same children over specific time periods-- one week, one month, three months.

The checklist's internal consistency will be established with a split-halves correlation. Items will be divided into odd-even categories and scores on all even items will be correlated with scores on all odd items. The higher the correlation, the more consistently the items are measuring the same thing--success or failure in the open classroom.

At completion, the study will have several major outcomes. One facet of the open classroom, previously overlooked, will have been examined through the documentation of those characteristics distinctive to successful and unsuccessful children in the open classroom. More importantly, the appropriateness of open education for all children will have been examined and tentatively confirmed or disconfirmed.

The most useful outcome of the study will be an observation checklist to aid educators in predicting success or failure for children in an open classroom. Such an instrument will facilitate the selection of children for whom an open classroom experience would be advantageous. Conversely, educators will be able to predict a child's lack of success in an open classroom setting and place such a child in a more structured situation, preventing the growth of a frustrating school experience.

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Appendix A

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS QUESTIONNAIRE

Grade Taught _____

For the purposes of this study an open classroom will be defined operationally as one in which children learn through discovery. Each child is allowed to learn at his or her own pace. The teacher acts as a catalyst, a manager, a facilitator--providing experiences and a rich environment. The open classroom organization is flexible, both in the physical and curricular sense. Open spaces are not required, although open spaces may be part of an open classroom. Children function independently or in small groups, choosing from available activities.

A. Please complete the following sentences.

1. To be successful in an open classroom means _____

2. To be unsuccessful in an open classroom means _____

B. Please list five (5) characteristics of children who are successful in an open classroom.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

C. Please list five (5) characteristics of children who are unsuccessful in an open classroom.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Appendix B
CAMPBELL-NEWMAN CHECKLIST

	YES	NO
I. OVERLY DEPENDENT ON TEACHER FOR SUPERVISION		
The Child		
A. relies on teacher for explicit directions.	_____	_____
B. tries to get teacher's attention.	_____	_____
C. physically clings to teacher.	_____	_____
D. does not attend to task when teacher's attention is elsewhere.	_____	_____
II. RESPONSIBLE AND MATURE		
The Child		
A. respects others' possessions.	_____	_____
B. tells the truth.	_____	_____
C. works for improvement in deficient areas.	_____	_____
III. CURIOUS		
The Child		
A. asks questions.	_____	_____
B. enjoys self-discovery tasks.	_____	_____
C. enjoys taking things apart to see how they work.	_____	_____
D. enjoys explorative activities.	_____	_____
E. appears eager to try something new.	_____	_____
IV. COOPERATIVE		
The Child		
A. incorporates others' suggestions into activity.	_____	_____
B. works well with others.	_____	_____
C. tutors other children.	_____	_____
D. volunteers help to others.	_____	_____
E. completes task without complaining.	_____	_____

V. RESPONSIBLE

The Child

YES

NO

- A. is prepared with assignment.
- B. takes credit for own action.
- C. has appropriate materials on hand.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

VI. MATURE

- A. enjoys working puzzles.
- E. expresses emotion freely.
- C. asks for help when needed.
- D. shows concern for others.
- E. accepts help gracefully.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

VII. DISRUPTIVE

The Child

- A. bothers other children.
- B. demands attention by "acting out."
- C. quarrels with other children.
- D. interrupts others.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

VIII. INDEPENDENT

The Child

- A. completes task without teacher guidance.
- B. organizes own task.
- C. completes task acceptably while working alone.
- D. uses references other than teacher.
- E. suggests activities to do.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

IX. EASILY DISTRACTED

The Child

- A. appears to be easily distracted.
- B. attends to things other than task.
- C. is not attentive to task.
- D. does not stick to task.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____