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Research Brief

Open Schools

Question:

- What is the information about Open Schools across the country?
- What are the principles or themes or beliefs or ideals of these other Open Schools?

Summary of Findings: Almost all that is written about Open Schools comes from the early 1970s. “Open Schools” can take on different definitions, including open concept schools (classrooms without walls), and schools with open enrollment, but the particular Open School movement, or philosophy, discussed here is defined by principal Ruth Pechmann of the St. Paul (MN) Open School as “K-12 schools encouraging and engaged in individual growth and self-directed learning from each other and the world around us.” These are schools sharing a common goal: the desire for students and teachers together to discuss, explore, investigate, and learn. “The basic theory of open education is that children learn in different ways at different times from things around them [that] interest them. Ideally, the teacher acts as a guide and resource person and encourages pupils to proceed at their own pace and develop independence of thought. The goal is to develop in children initiative, creativity, and critical thinking” (Bader & Blackmon, 1978).

Despite the fact that most of the literature comes from the 1970’s, Open Schools are still in operation in the United States, England, Canada, India, Latvia, Slovenia, and Poland. Many of the schools are elementary schools but several are K-12 or secondary. Southwest Open School (CO) states their goals as redefining high school these ways:

- Respect for all
- A safe, diverse campus
- Caring staff
- Small classes
- Service learning
- Student health clinic
- Daycare for infants
- Outdoor education trips
- Music and art
- Meaningful and challenging classes based on Colorado content standards
- Students have a voice and staff listens

Research results indicate that students attending Open Schools view schools and teachers more positively. Also, “On the whole, results for open classrooms tend to indicate improvement in cognitive areas. However, little statistically significant difference was found in other test areas. The data appear to indicate that the success of the open school is largely dependent on the individuals in the school who plan, organize and implement curriculum” (Bader & Blackmon, 1978). Some schools indicate that they have had challenges similar to Moore’s Creek Open School: “Moore’s Creek has built positive, mutually supportive relationships with the community and has had numerous parent and faculty advocates. However, curriculum and instruction has been pulled toward the conventional by district and state pressures (standardized tests, end-of-



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year testing, and direct instruction), staff-related pressures (lack of exposure to student-centered education, philosophical incompatibilities, faculty overload, and school size), and an increase in the number of students experiencing difficulty with self-directed learning.”

But as Downing relates: “The problem with implementing open education in American schools is that American educators try to do in three months what it took the British a twenty-five or thirty year period to do. Open education is a philosophy, not a facility. Attention should be turned away from the naive concept of open space buildings and toward how to implement the philosophy and principles of open education.” And “Open School and the Teacher” states “Requirements of an "open schools" program include the open behavior of a teacher, which will come voluntarily or not at all, and informed, involved, and supportive parents.... But open classroom cannot simply be transplanted from one setting to another; they must be original efforts.”

Online Resources:

(Note: ERIC documents can be found by going to <http://www.eric.ed.gov/> and entering the ERIC ID#)

Open Education: A Review of the Literature.

Bader, Carol H.; Blackmon, C. Robert;

Research Report; v8 n1 Jan 1978.

This report reviews the history of open education, the philosophy supporting it, and some conclusions drawn from testing children who have been exposed to it. The basic theory of open education is that children learn in different ways at different times from things around them that interest them. Ideally, the teacher acts as a guide and resource person and encourages pupils to proceed at their own pace and develop independence of thought. The goal is to develop in children initiative, creativity, and critical thinking. In comparative testing of open classroom and traditional classroom experiences, the number and complexity of variables involved almost preclude definite conclusions. On the whole, results for open classrooms tend to indicate improvement in cognitive areas. However, little statistically significant difference was found in other test areas. The data appear to indicate that the success of the open school is largely dependent on the individuals in the school who plan, organize and implement curriculum.

ERIC #: ED148830

Language Arts in the Open School.

Downing, John;

Four principles of language arts teaching in the open school are, first, "school" becomes "workshop," where emphasis is on giving students opportunities for self-discovery, self-discipline, and self-control. Second, "teachers" become "learning facilitators," so that instead of thinking about what he wants to teach, the teacher focuses on the child's learning. Third, the child's approach is always the starting point. Every activity is planned to begin at the point where the child is when he is ready for it. Fourth, the educated life is for here and now; we can never be certain that tomorrow will come for any of our students. Therefore, we must be



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accountable to them each day of their lives in our schools and classrooms. The problem with implementing open education in American schools is that American educators try to do in three months what it took the British a twenty-five or thirty year period to do. Open education is a philosophy, not a facility. Attention should be turned away from the naive concept of open space buildings and toward how to implement the philosophy and principles of open education.

ERIC #: ED094420

Open Schools and the Teacher.

A necessary consequence of openness in schools is the abandonment of rigidly prescribed curricular programs. Requirements of an "open schools" program include the open behavior of a teacher, which will come voluntarily or not at all, and informed, involved, and supportive parents. The limited research to date indicates that student goals, motivation, enthusiasm, and independence are enlarged in an open setting. But open classroom cannot simply be transplanted from one setting to another; they must be original efforts. The National Education Association supports the efforts of any teacher attempting to incorporate, within school policy, open school behavior and activities in his classroom.

ERIC #: ED076560

Open Schooling: A Listing Of Key Texts.

<http://www.infed.org/schooling/b-open.htm>

A Principal with a New Outlook Is Needed for the Open School

Sartore, Richard L.;

Clearing House: 47, 3, 131-4, Nov 72

After analyzing factors needed for the operation of an open school," the author lists nine areas of administration in which the principal should exert leadership.

ERIC #: EJ067444

The Open School: Freewheeling But Effective

Pirsig, Nancy A.;

Clearing House: 46, 7, 405-8, Mar 72

The adherents of the 'open school' concept enthusiastically proclaim the virtues of this system, emphasizing that the removal of traditional restraints increases the zest for learning.

ERIC #: EJ055245

The Open School: A Different Perspective

Diamond, Stanley C.

Contemporary Education: 46, 4, 278-81, Sum 75

This article presents three key aspects of school management that are essential to the establishment of human aims.

ERIC #: EJ133614



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Pupil Self-Concept in an "Open" School and in a "Traditional" School

Ruedi, Jane; West, Charles K.;

Psychology in the Schools: 10, 1, 48-53, Jan 73

The idea that students in an open-environment school would be higher in self-concept and in the factors Interpersonal Adequacy, Autonomy and Academic Adequacy was not demonstrated in this study. However, students in the open-environment classroom view school and teachers more positively.

ERIC #: EJ073730

Lessons from a Survivor: 25 Years of Open Education in a Public Alternative School.

Dunn, Mary Anna;

Moore's Creek Open Elementary school, located in a quiet African-American neighborhood in a sun-belt city, has operated as a progressive school of choice since 1973, despite the low survival rate of public alternative schools. This study identifies forces that have affected curriculum and instruction at Moore's Creek over the past quarter century. A combination of opportunities, initiatives, and attitudes has contributed to the school's survival and success. Certain city characteristics created favorable conditions for establishing and fostering this open school, including a strong economy, commitment to education and school reform, and importation of new ideas. Moore's Creek has built positive, mutually supportive relationships with the community and has had numerous parent and faculty advocates. However, curriculum and instruction has been pulled toward the conventional by district and state pressures (standardized tests, end-of-year testing, and direct instruction), staff-related pressures (lack of exposure to student-centered education, philosophical incompatibilities, faculty overload, and school size), and an increase in the number of students experiencing difficulty with self-directed learning. Faculty have initiated measures to mitigate these effects.

ERIC #: ED422615

The Selling of the Open School

Duke, Daniel Linden;

Journal of Educational Thought: 7, 1, 36-47, Apr 73

Essay surveys some of the current philosophical research-based, and practical arguments for informal education and attempts to delineate its essential characteristics.

ERIC #: EJ078617

Making High School Work: Lessons from the Open School.

Gregory, Tom;

Adolescents have a strong need to feel that they belong. This book relates the story of a nontraditional high school, at which the author was a part-time staff member during the 1987-88 academic year. Data were gathered from participant observation and from interviews with 23 teachers and staff members, 42 students, and 6 educational professionals. The Jefferson County (Colorado) Open High School was unique in several ways: a small study body; students accepted regardless of their motivation, ability, or past school history; nongraded, self-evaluation; active, involved students; and individualized curriculum organized around six "passages" that embodied student challenges: Adventure, Career Exploration, Creativity, Global



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Awareness/Volunteer Service, Logical Inquiry, and Practical Skills. Trips throughout North and Central America were an important part of the school's educational program. Methodological notes are included in the appendix.

ERIC #: ED401608

Resistance to Change in an Alternative Secondary School.

Pendergraft, Margot Jenkins;

This report examines the efforts of a secondary school to develop comparable alternatives to those implemented at the elementary level in one Chicago school. Specifically, it examines the decision-making process of the staff to develop a 9-12 open school within the high school. The report traces the history of innovation in the high school and identifies the organizational and cultural constraints on educational change. Some problems of the secondary school staff are examined. These include problems of definition, loyalties to the existing subject-matter departments and administrative constraints.

ERIC #: ED139868

King Open School

850 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA 02141

Phone: (617) 349-6540

<http://www.cpsd.us/kingopen/>

Jefferson County Open School

"Because kids just want to know."

<http://jeffcoweb.jeffco.k12.co.us/high/jcos/>

Marcy Open School

15 4th Avenue SE, Minneapolis, MN 55414

Phone: (612) 668-1020

<http://marcy.mpls.k12.mn.us/>

Metropolitan Open School

3381 Gorham Avenue Suite 207, St Louis Park, MN 55426-0554

Phone: (952)926-5552

http://www.privateschoolreview.com/school_ov/school_id/15007

Kohl Open School

4115 N. Crown, Stockton, CA, 95207

Phone: (209) 933-7235

<http://www.stockton.k12.ca.us/schools/sch-html/kohl.html>



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Southwest Open School

P.O. Box DD

401 North Dolores Road, Cortez, CO 81321

Phone 970-565-1150

<http://www.ruralschools.net/sitepages/pid161.php>

Peeler Open School for the Performing Arts

2200 Randall Street, Greensboro, NC 27401

Phone: 336-370-8270

<http://schools.guilford.k12.nc.us/spages/plr/Homepage.html>

Saint Paul Open School

90 Western Ave. S., St. Paul, MN 55102

phone 651-293-8670

<http://www.open.spps.org>

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