Space: How Organized, K-12

TODAY as never before teachers and administrators are faced with the important problem of space utilization. A continuous search goes on for better use of current space and finding more space for increasing numbers of students in our classrooms. The problem becomes more significant as we continue to have an increase in the number of children without a corresponding increase in the number of classrooms. This is an ever-present struggle that teachers must overcome if our schools are to function properly in a modern society.

No matter how well the school plants are planned and built, the role of the classroom teacher cannot be overlooked in the organization of the classroom space. The classroom teacher is the most important person in the school organization. Also, the educational philosophy of the individual teacher plays an important part in how the classroom is organized. Whether the teacher is traditional or progressive will determine to a great extent how the space in the classroom is used.

A traditional teacher usually will prefer a regimented situation with "fastened-down" desks with very little movement and attention to individual differences. These conventional teachers usually do not teach youngsters at their basic levels of ability so the organization of space does not seem so important. In the regimented classroom, the opportunities for communication and learning are not as plentiful as they should be. Often the traditional teacher sees movement in class as a source of disciplinary problems.

A progressive teacher will try to improve the space situation in his classroom. This teacher usually sees the relationship between the activity being carried on and the space needed and available. Although many classrooms have become crowded and have moved far from the ideal conditions, the progressive teacher still tries to seek activi-

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ties and procedures that provide for a greater opportunity for group learning and movement. Rather than give up completely, the teachers will try although they have to modify their program to improve their space situations. It is hoped that most of our teachers continue to grow and to seek improvement to meet the changes that confront us today.

This is not to say that some traditional teachers cannot do an effective job of teaching. No single method of space arrangement will meet the needs of everyone. Good teaching is going on in many classrooms with traditional teachers, but it may be possible that more meaningful learning will take place with better instructional techniques and space control. The importance of the "working" philosophy of the teacher and the school cannot be overlooked as attention is focused on space utilization.

Elementary Classrooms

Since a majority of the elementary schools have self-contained classrooms, the teacher must arrange his room so that the space can be used to its best advantage. In the modern classroom, the teacher should have a variety of activities for identifying and meeting individual and group needs. Flexibility and livability seem to be the key words in the utilization of space. Careful planning by the teacher and pupils must take place in order to assure freedom of movement and flexibility of arrangement in the elementary classroom.

The following activity areas should be set up to permit the classroom to serve a variety of activities:

1. An art corner having wall easels; a working table with a waterproof top; and clay, paper, paints, brushes, and other art materials which should be available at all times for both formal lessons and free time.

2. A science corner with an aquarium, terrarium, ample space for exhibits of nature and science materials, equipment for simple science experiments, and adequate storage space for science materials.

3. A library corner located near the window with chairs, table, bookcases with low, open book shelves suitable for the large books of the elementary school.

4. A music center with a record player, records, radio, T.V., or small piano.

5. A work area which should include a sink with hot and cold water; work benches of desired height, wood, other materials; and ample storage space.

6. A teacher's area with a desk and a chair, additional chairs for adult visitors and conferences, and filing cabinets for pupils' records and teaching material.

7. A teaching area designed for individual and group instruction with a teacher's chair and several chairs for the pupils, a chalkboard, a hinged chart board, and a hinged bulletin board.

8. A main activity area for games, indoor play, rhythms, and projects which should be created by moving the chairs and desks. As indoor equipment, large blocks and boxes to be used in this area for the kindergarten.

All of these areas should be flexible and movable with the possibility of adding or deleting if necessary. A refrigerator, recessed in the wall, a small stove, a sink, and cupboards, especially if a central cafeteria is not available, are desirable for the kindergarten.

Supplementary Spaces

1. A cloakroom near the door with open compartments.

2. Toilets and lavatory rooms accessible from the classroom and the playground.

3. Space for resting or napping in the classroom or adjacent to the classroom. Fold-
ing cots, blankets, or rugs that may be stored and brought in.

4. A door opening directly from the classroom to the outside playground.

5. Storage space in the classroom, including space under window seats; work counters; tool cabinets; extra drawers for games, toys and materials; an exhibit case, and flat drawers for paper. An outside shelter for storage of garden tools, sand toys, wheel toys, and physical education equipment is desirable.

Secondary School Classrooms

The conventional classroom of the secondary school has changed greatly in the past few years. For many years the secondary classrooms were small, barren, bleak, gloomy, box-like rooms. In this drab cultural environment, a harassed teacher was trying to teach students under the handicaps of inadequate lighting, poor ventilation, and distracting noises. These inadequate classrooms for mathematics, language arts, and social studies penalized the students a great deal.

The philosophy of the secondary school is also reflected in the utilization of space. Whether the needs and interests of the students are recognized determines the types of classrooms needed. Many high schools have a comprehensive program including courses in general and vocational education. The various practices of grade, age, and interest grouping make it impossible to describe classrooms for all organizational patterns. It will be assumed that a comprehensive educational program with a departmentalized organization for instruction will be used by a majority of schools.

Usually in the secondary school we find two distinct types of classrooms—the recitation or academic room and the specialized laboratories and shops. Attention in this article will be focused on the instructional rooms.

Academic Instruction Rooms

Today as the secondary schools begin to have a closer look at individual differences, interests and needs, the academic classrooms have become learning laboratories with special features to provide a variety of activities. The modern classroom has been lengthened to provide more “working area” for directed study. Provisions are also being made for group activities by obtaining movable tables and chairs and more space is being made available for storing materials and supplies to improve instructional practices. Reference books have been placed in movable bookcases to help with utilization of space. Many of the situations described under elementary classrooms are also being used to provide more flexible and livable situations in the secondary school classrooms.

Specialized Laboratories and Shops

Usually a large secondary school provides for six specialized laboratories and shops in science, music, art, homemaking, business education, and special shops. These special classrooms must be built with the purpose of each room carefully planned.

Many schools have remedied the situation by building more space or making better use of the current space. One school improved its science classrooms by removing the “fastened-down” furniture and designing a flexible laboratory with stationary science tables around the walls of the room and using movable furniture that could be arranged in many different ways. Other schools are using...
museums, school gardens, and the school's mechanical installations for teaching space.

In business education, multipurpose rooms are planned in which drop-head typewriter desks are used so that other subjects may be taught in the room. Machines on casters that can be locked in a stationary position are also being used to conserve space. Other examples of space utilization in specialized laboratories and shops could be described that make teaching at the secondary level more effective.

What Can Be Done

Ideal conditions and theory are easy to describe. Many teachers would cherish the idea of a modern classroom with all the areas just described, but chances are they will never teach under such favorable conditions. Most teachers must teach in old buildings and make the most of what they have. Some of our best teaching is found in outmoded school buildings. The key person, the teacher, has faced the problem of space and has done something about it. These teachers have not been afraid to experiment and find new ways of using extra space.

In the Wahl-Coates Laboratory School in Greenville, North Carolina, some of the teachers met the problem of the increasing number of students through the use of the adjoining storage room as a teaching area for a small group of students for reading. By moving part of the group out of the room, the teachers were able to have more space for movement and learning. Ingenuity and creativeness helped these teachers to find needed space for the teaching of basic skills.

A unique solution to the problem of space has been offered by a first grade teacher in Nashville, Tennessee. She has removed all the standard furniture from her room except about 10 desks. The group is constantly involved in several different types of activities so that she needs only about 10 places for children to sit and write. The rest of the time they are busy with other types of activities in the library corner, the science center, or the work area. It is quite likely that one reason we have too little space in classrooms is that, on the assumption that all children need to have a place to sit and do the same thing at the same time, we have too much of the standard furniture.

Another solution that has been offered suggests the use of the top six feet of space in most classrooms. It may be that around the walls could be located storage space for materials with a movable ladder, much like that which is used in hardware stores.

Outside space may help to solve the problem especially in the warmer sections of the country. Teachers can set up teacher "corners" outside under the trees. For economic reasons, the air conditioning of schoolrooms is out of the question at the present time for most schools. Since heat often becomes unbearable indoors, the child will be more comfortable outside and will be able to learn more easily. Outside corridors are built in many schools and may be used as a small learning area. Necessity for gaining space will force many teachers to move part of their groups outside but close enough for careful supervision. Privacy may be obtained by having a hedge or wall about four feet high around the teaching area.

In many of our schools we have much wasted space in the corridors in elementary schools. The space above

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proach. It deals with dynamics rather than mechanics or statistics. I warmed up to its significant handling of the inner values which are the soul of the curriculum in action. In my opinion the author used a fresh, creative approach in developing an organization which deals with basic ideas without becoming mired down in details. It gives the reader credit for bringing something to the book before he takes it up and yet keeps him comfortable by permitting him to "act within his limitations," as one section puts it. For me the book was new and different for the very reasons your reviewer found it lacking. No doubt both viewpoints can be justified and this is why I am writing to present mine.

Sincerely,
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Space

the wainscoting could be used as attractive teaching spaces. Similar space on the walls of the cafeteria, auditorium, and other parts of the building could be used as teaching space. In Central Elementary School in Albemarle, North Carolina, each room assumes responsibility for a section of the wall in the cafeteria for a display of art which serves not only as a teaching area but also does much to enhance the beauty and livability of the cafeteria. Both teachers and children take pride in the art exhibits. Also, hanging in the halls are picture frames for the children’s art work which is changed periodically. Beautiful art work done by the children adds much to a school building.

The Task Ahead

As we look at the task ahead in education, the problem of space utilization will not be lessened. Instead, with our increasing enrollment, more teachers must strive to find better ways of using present space. As we see how some creative teachers are improving their classrooms, it should inspire others to experiment and discover new ways of their own. Only through boldness and persistence on the part of school personnel will the quality of education continue to improve. It is the hope of all, especially the parents, that the challenge will be met in the most effective way possible.

References


