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Photos by Bill Genzel

The world of school and education can include bubble gum - if you're free.



Floors and paper and fingers (above and left) are sometimes more important than books.

Open schools try to revamp system

By Jacquin Sanders
Newsweek Feature Service

Every September, the U.S. school system produces a melancholy miracle. It takes millions of eager, excited children into its classrooms and transforms them into bored, apathetic—and not very well-educated—little prisoners grimly serving out their daily six-hour sentences.

But this year, as in the past two or three, some hopeful changes are being made. In hundreds of schools across the country, in suburbs and ghettos, in rural areas and in plush private institutions, a new form of elementary education has appeared.

It is called the "open school"—a bold and bewildering melange of the new and the old, combining the latest (and not completely tested) educational theories with what in a way amounts to a return to the one-room schoolhouse of earlier times.

FOR MOST children, the open school (also called "informal education," "open classrooms" or "free school") is a delightful innovation. For their parents, however, the concept takes a good deal of getting used to.

Open schools vary almost as much as the children who study in them. Some school systems are instituting them gradually. They may have one or two open classrooms for selected pupils while the balance of the student population remains in traditional schoolrooms. In other cases, entire schools have been converted.

Nationally, more than half of all new elementary school construction is for open schools. And virtually all new California elementary schools conform to the new pattern although they do not conform with one another.

SOME OF THE NEW open schools are traditional in appearance from the outside. Only the interiors are different, with large unwall'd "learning centers," rather than a multiplicity of classrooms.

But other new schools really look new. The Rincon School in Livermore, Calif., for example, is

shaped roughly like an angelfood cake pan. The round library is at the center and pie-shaped classrooms open from the library.

Usually, the transformation from the old to the new system in existing buildings begins with the

The revolution is spreading to Nebraska. As explained by Jacquin Sanders of the Newsweek Feature Service in today's *Daily Nebraskan* the revolution is a nation-wide one in elementary classrooms.

Square rooms filled with straight rows of bored, quiet children are being replaced by "active" classrooms, where children sit on the floor to read, or pound, or build, or play—bedlam to the outside observer, but calculated, individualized learning to elementary educators of the new breed.

In Lincoln, reporter Steve Kadel looks at the latest open classroom experiment, the Lincoln Free School. He also takes a look at UNL's Training Teachers of Teachers program, perhaps the first program to push active classrooms in Lincoln.

Included is an interview with UNL's new Teachers College Dean Robert Egbert, who has taken the helm of a college which in the past has shown some hostility to activist projects like TTT's.

knocking down of walls between two or three old-style schoolrooms. Teachers then come together as a team and the classes contain pupils from not one but several grades.

THOUGH THE open-school system has been sifting into U.S. education since the mid-1960s, it is still available to only a fraction of the country's 32

million elementary-school pupils. But it has been spreading rapidly, especially in the past two years, and seems certain to dominate U.S. schools by the end of the decade just as it already dominates British schools.

Of course, the open schools have their detractors. Many parents equate a quiet school with a good school. Others confuse the new methods with discredited theories of permissive education. And conservative political groups, including the John Birch Society, have organized against, and in some cases succeeded in stopping, proposed open-school programs.

BUT THE DETRACTORS seem doomed to failure principally because their opposition must entail some support of the status quo which, in the case of most U.S. elementary education, is difficult to defend. Indeed, open schools are in a very real sense a product not so much of progress as of desperation.

For many years, "the crisis in education" was thought to consist primarily of the troubles in ghetto schools. But lately, it has become uncomfortably clear that the crisis is all-pervading; that if slum schools are impossible, the once-vaunted smalltown and suburban school systems are almost as bad and getting worse.

In his celebrated book, "Crisis in the Classroom," journalist and former Columbia University professor Charles Silberman was, after all, only stating what most educators and concerned parents already knew, when he wrote:

"IT IS NOT possible to spend any prolonged period visiting public-school classrooms without being appalled by the mutilation visible everywhere—mutilation of spontaneity, of joy in learning, of pleasure in creating, of sense of self... Because adults take the schools so much for granted, they fail to appreciate what grim, joyless places most American schools are."

It is this bleak picture that the open schools seek to change.

Lincoln Free School - totally different concept

by Steve Kadel

Walk through the doors of the Lincoln Free School and you enter a totally different concept of education.

At first glance it looks like one big messy room. Chairs are overturned, crayons, papers

Pre-registration begins Oct. 18

Pre-registration for the second semester begins Oct. 18.

Pre-registration packets will be distributed in the Nebraska Union, living units and the information counter in the Administration building beginning Oct. 13.

and magazines cover the floor, and a small black cat wanders lazily amidst it all—leaving its unmistakable odor in the air.

From a cheap record player in the back of the room you hear the familiar sound of Carol King's "Tapestry" and start wondering if you've stepped into the wrong building. Then you see the children and your doubts vanish.

They sit on cushions on the floor, on benches, and stand against the wall, talking in pairs. There are no straight rows of desks pointing toward an authoritarian teacher in the front.

Instead, each student sits where he wants, and, more

importantly, does what he wants. That's the philosophy behind the Lincoln Free School.

Bob Frangenberg, a 25-year-old graduate of the University of Nebraska Teachers College, started the school, which opened its doors for the first time Sept. 9. He said he did it to provide an alternative to public schools.

"Sometimes public schools are very traumatic places for certain children," he said. "They are impersonal in dealing with people and don't take into account psychological growth at all."

No two open classrooms are alike, but all are based on the belief that children learn best

by studying what they want and doing it at their own pace.

Frangenberg wears his hair moderately long and looks out at the world through wire-rim glasses, causing some educators to dismiss him and his philosophies as idealistic pipe dreams. But looking at the children of the Lincoln Free School for awhile you get the impression they're serious about learning and have found a way to make it a pleasant experience.

The 14 students currently attending the Free School range in age from 3 to 21 and only pay what tuition they can afford. Frangenberg says this usually comes to a total of \$400 a month, which

constitutes the school's entire budget unless it is lucky enough to receive a donation from someone.

Unlike the structured public schools, the Lincoln Free School lets each child determine his interests and pursue them in his own way. Students tell Frangenberg what they want to learn and he finds books for them, or arranges part-time teachers to come and tutor.

On one wall of the school is a sheet of paper which students can sign and list the courses they want to study. Guitar, flute, geometry, trigonometry, typing, biology, ancient

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