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AUTHOR	Cassidy, Jack; Sanders, Jana
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ABSTRACT

This chapter is part of a book that recounts the year's work at the Early Childhood Development Center (ECDC) at Texas A & M University-Corpus Christi. Rather than an "elitist" laboratory school for the children of university faculty, the ECDC is a collaboration between the Corpus Christi Independent School District and the university with an enrollment representative of Corpus Christi's population. The chapter delineates the rise and fall of university laboratory schools in the United States and then describes the ECDC, including its facility, school population, faculty, principal/director, dual-language curriculum, health center, counseling center, training mission, and positive student results on the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). The chapter suggests that the ECDC addresses some of the problems of older campus laboratory schools, and at the same time, grapples with some of the major concerns of educators and legislators in the 21st century. (Contains 24 references.) (EV)

Chapter 1

A University Lab School for the 21st Century: The Early Childhood Development Center

Jack Cassidy
Jana Sanders

The Evolution of Laboratory Schools

Laboratory schools situated on university and college campuses were long a staple of institutions that provided training for preservice teachers. The concept was simple. Bring PreK-12 students on campus, provide them with an education, and at the same time provide preservice teachers an opportunity to practice some of the methods they were learning in their pedagogy classes. These campus lab schools would also enable faculty and graduate students to experiment with new educational ideas and methods and to conduct the research needed to validate those ideas or methods. Furthermore, although never acknowledged in their mission statements, these campus lab schools often provided university faculty with a convenient place to educate their own children. Children from the local community were also invited to attend, but usually their parents would have to provide transportation.

This chapter will delineate the rise and fall of the university laboratory school in the United States and then describe a new laboratory school, the Early Childhood Development Center on the campus of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. This facility addresses some of the problems of the older campus laboratory schools, and at the same time, grapples with some of the major concerns of educators and legislators in the 21st century.

The Rise of Lab Schools & Child Development Centers

Laboratory schools have been part of the university milieu in Europe and America for at least 200 years; some documents even date their origins to the 1600s. As early as the 1820s, reports of normal schools in the United States indicated that they were providing teaching opportunities for their preservice teachers in controlled teaching environments. Europe and America were not the only continents to have laboratory schools. In Japan, laboratory schools were and are called "attached schools." (Hayo, 1993).

From 1850 to 1950, laboratory schools thrived. An 1874 report from the U.S. Commissioner of Education indicated that 47 of the nation's 67 state normal schools provided laboratory or training schools in connection with their teacher education programs (Hendrick, 1980). By 1920, virtually every major teacher training institution in the country had a campus laboratory school. Often, the

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lab schools were small because institutions had limited space and were reluctant to invest a great deal of money in faculties and facilities for these campus schools. The University of Chicago School was one of the premier sites. John Dewey started the school and he was its director from 1896 until 1904. He articulated the purposes of the laboratory school (Hendrick, 1980, p. 58):

> *It bears the same relation to the work of pedagogy that a laboratory bears to biology, physics, or dentistry. Like any such laboratory it has two main purposes (1) to exhibit, test, verify and criticize theoretical statements and principles, and (2) to add to sum of facts and principles in its special line.*

Dewey believed that research was the primary mission of laboratory schools, and he did not believe that they should serve as training vehicles for prospective teachers (Provenzo, 1979). Although Dewey had a deep concern for economically deprived populations, the University of Chicago lab school had to charge tuition in order to survive. For the most part, students attending the school came from very affluent families.

Starting in the 1920s, many universities also began to develop child development laboratory programs or centers (Osborn, 1991). These were essentially laboratory schools for very young children. Like the earlier laboratory schools, these centers also had a three-fold mission: to serve as a practicum site for training preservice and inservice teachers in early childhood education and child development, to serve as a site for research on various aspects of child development, and to provide model programs in early childhood education for the national and local educational communities (McBride, 1996). Some also served as daycare centers for university students and faculty. Significant research emerged from these child development centers, including: norms for child development (Gesell at Yale), intelligence tests (Kuhlman at Minnesota), and studies of child play (Paten at Minnesota). Ironically, teacher educators conducted few of these significant studies; nor did they have direct application to the early childhood classroom.

The Fall of Lab Schools & Child Development Centers

After World War II, the number of lab schools in the United States declined precipitously, and few new lab schools were opened. A 1964 survey counted 212 lab schools, which declined to 166 by 1973. By the start of the 21st century, John R. Johnson, Executive Director of the National Association of Laboratory Schools, estimated that there were about only 100 lab schools in the United States (personal communication, July 28, 2001).

Some of the same factors that initially contributed to the success of the lab school concept also contributed to its decline. However, the reasons for the decline were many (Goodlad, 1980; Hendrick, 1980; Dishner & Boothby, 1986). Critics maintained that some of the methods, materials, and philosophies that were so successful in the lab schools could not thrive outside the rarefied atmosphere of a campus school. Often, the students were the progeny of university faculty, and they lived in an atmosphere that actively promoted learning and school. Many of the non-faculty children came from affluent homes in which families could fill their shelves with books and could provide transportation to and from school. In other words, they were serving an elitist population – not typical of the population at large (MacNaughton & Johns, 1993; Hayo, 1993). Thus, even faculty in schools of education began to complain that lab schools were not providing preservice teachers with authentic field experiences.

John Goodlad (1980), one of the premier educators in the United States, was director of a laboratory school for 18 years. While at the University of California, Los Angeles, the site of one of the country's premier lab schools, he clearly identified four other problems of lab schools. First was the problem of functions. He identified five major functions of lab schools: education of the children enrolled, development of new and innovative practices, research and inquiry, preservice education, and inservice education. He concluded that two of those functions, inservice and preservice education, would best be left to the local schools surrounding universities. These surrounding schools, or professional development schools, as they came to be called, would form new partnerships with the university (Goodlad, 1990). Most of the field-based teacher preparation, particularly the junior year experience and student teaching, would take place in these schools. The concept of professional development schools became one of the cornerstones of the reforms of teacher education proposed in the

late eighties and early nineties (Goodlad, 1990; Holmes Group, 1990). Some argued, however, that the laboratory school could also become a professional development school (Smith, 1991).

The second major problem identified by Goodlad (1980) was one of differing values. Many of the stakeholders in lab schools have very differing values. The lab schoolteachers, or clinical faculty, want to demonstrate teaching expertise, preferably with methods and materials with which they are comfortable. The inservice teachers visiting the school want a technique or lesson they can use tomorrow; the preservice teacher wants a job; university professors want a hassle-free environment where they can do research; and the director of the school wants all of those things simultaneously. Because Goodlad would relegate the preservice and inservice education responsibilities to surrounding schools, he goes on to note that the conflict between the university professors and the lab schoolteachers can be a major concern. He states that each group fails to recognize the strengths of the other. The university professor has knowledge of research and specialized content whereas the lab schoolteacher has expertise in working with groups of children.

The third and fourth problems identified by Goodlad (1980) were the problem of resources and the problem of external and internal support. The problem of adequate resources has plagued lab schools since their inception. Most campus lab schools are small, having no more than one or two classrooms per grade level. However, when all schools were required to offer all of the specialized services of the larger schools (e.g. special education, speech therapists, music, physical education, teachers of the gifted, nutrition, etc.), lab schools were particularly hard hit (McConnaha, 1996). Many universities began to question their financial commitment to lab schools particularly with the growth of professional development schools.

In summary, Goodlad (1980) stated that unless the professional faculty are actively involved in doing research with the children and clinical faculty in the lab schools, and unless the lab schools maintain a "questioning ambience," the schools are doomed to failure. The schools themselves, the professional faculty, and the clinical faculty must always be receptive to change, experimentation, and research.

Another problem of lab schools only briefly alluded to by Goodlad (1980) was their failure to disseminate information about the research and program development being conducted on site. In an interview, John Haefner (Hepburn, 1995), a prominent social studies

educator and former President of the National Council of Social Studies, after bemoaning the closing of the University of Iowa lab school which was known for its innovative curriculum and teaching methods, supported the proposition that campus laboratory schools had failed in their dissemination mission:

> *"Why was it closed? We simply did not publish enough about the high school. We defeated ourselves by not making greater efforts to get the results out to other educators" (p.454).*

The Early Childhood Development Center

The $7.8 million Early Childhood Development Center (ECDC) on the campus of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMUCC) is one of the few university lab schools to open in the nineties. Like the lab schools and child development centers of old, this school has four interrelated missions: to do research, to train teachers, to provide model programs, and to educate the children attending the school. The facility was funded by the 73rd Texas Legislature in the 1994-95 Biennial Budget for TAMUCC. The on-campus elementary school opened in August 1996 and is still in operation. Today, it serves children age three through grade three. The school opened in 1996 with only four classrooms (age three through grade one). In 1997, the second-grade classroom was added, and in 1998, the third-grade classroom was added. The Center was developed through a collaborative effort between Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and the Corpus Christi Independent School District (CCISD). Like earlier lab schools and child development centers, the ECDC emphasizes a developmentally appropriate multi-cultural curriculum, instructional excellence, and team teaching.

However, several major focal points of the ECDC, different from those historically accepted, are emphasized as well. They include:

- A dual language curriculum.
- Fulltime publicly supported schooling for three- and four-year-olds.
- A school student population from low-income families, many of who have English as their second language.
- State-of-the-art technology.
- A heavy emphasis on parent involvement and education.

Collaborative research between lab schoolteachers and College of Education faculty, often the overlooked mission in lab schools of the past, is another major emphasis of the ECDC.

The Facility

The two-story facility contains six classrooms for the three-year-olds through third graders as well as offices for faculty and classrooms for college students. Each of the six classrooms for children has a collapsible wall, which can be opened for large multi-age groupings or closed for single class instruction and activities. In addition, each classroom has approximately eleven computers. On the second floor, above each classroom, there is an observation deck with one-way glass and auditory capability. This provides university students with opportunities to observe unobtrusively the young children below in their classroom setting. The ECDC also houses the Center for Educational Development, Evaluation and Research (CEDER), the research and development center for the College of Education. In general, the professional faculty members housed at the ECDC are committed to involving their students and themselves with research in the center.

School Population

The student population in the Early Childhood Development Center is selected from the Corpus Christi Independent School District, and selection criteria are based upon demographics of that district. Guidelines for the composition of the ECDC school population are in accordance with recommendations of the Consultative Group on Early Childhood Care and Development, an interagency group dedicated to improving the condition of young children at risk (Evans & Meyers, 1994). The school population includes approximately 132 children: 63% of the children qualify for free or reduced lunch, 50% of the children come from Spanish-dominant families, and 50% from English-dominant homes. Thus, there are four groups from which stratified selections are made. Fifty percent (11) of the children come from Spanish-dominant homes; of those, sixty-three percent come from low-income homes (approximately 7), and thirty-seven percent come from non-low income families (approximately 4). The same percentages apply to the

children from English-dominant homes. The local school district conducts a lottery during the month of April from which the 22 three-year-old children for the three-year-old classroom are selected. It is hoped that these three-year-olds will continue at the ECDC through third grade. However, if students drop out or transfer, they are replaced with other children from the original pool. (See Chapter 2 for a detailed discussion of selection procedures.) Thus the school population of the ECDC is, for the most part, representative of the population of South Texas. Unlike many of the lab school populations of the past, the children are not, for the most part, the progeny of affluent well-educated parents.

Faculty

The clinical faculty for the six classrooms in the ECDC are master teachers, all employed by the school district. A part-time itinerant special education teacher also serves the children and is employed by the school district. Because the intent was to make the ECDC concept reproducible in other schools, not all the faculty are bilingual. For the first five years of its operation, two of the clinical faculty were not bilingual. Because fifty percent of the instruction for all children was to be in Spanish, this necessitated team teaching. Turnover of the clinical faculty, although not encouraged, is not discouraged. At the start of 2001, three of the original clinical faculty remain, but two of those have switched grade levels.

In choosing the clinical faculty for the ECDC, particular concern was directed toward the selection of the teachers of the three- and four-year-olds. These teachers were and are an integral part of the school and, as such, were to have impeccable academic credentials. The original teacher of the three-year-olds had her doctorate in early childhood education and, at the time, was one of the few Texas teachers certified by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. The present teacher of three-year-olds has a master's degree in early childhood education with many graduate hours in the teaching of reading. The teacher for the four-year-old classroom has a doctorate in bilingual education and has published several articles in that field.

In 2001, a new position was added to the ECDC – a part-time research liaison. His position is to work with the clinical faculty and

the professional faculty to ensure that the research agreed upon is carried out in the most efficient manner.

ECDC Principal/Director

The roles of the principal and the director of the ECDC have been evolving constantly. In the year prior to the opening of the laboratory school (1995-96), a fulltime director was hired to oversee the planning. He continued in that role during the first year of the ECDC's operation, and his entire salary was paid by the University. In 1997, the role of the director was changed to a half-time position and remained that way for the next three years; however, during the same period, the position was elevated to the rank of assistant dean. Starting in 1996, (the first year in which children attended) and for the first three years of it's the school's operation, a principal, who was a doctoral student in the University's educational leadership program, was added to the roster of ECDC staff. The principal/doctoral student's stipend was again paid by the university. In 1999, the school district assumed responsibility for the salary of the principal although the university supplemented that salary for additional responsibilities related to the university. In the fall of 2001, the principal's and director's positions were combined. Again the principal's salary is paid by the school district while the university continues to provide an additional supplement for university-related responsibilities. The principal/director of the laboratory school functions as a department chair within the College of Education together with the six other departments: counseling, curriculum & instruction, educational administration & research, kinesiology, special services, and teacher education. The faculty members in the ECDC Department consist of the teachers in the laboratory school – the clinical faculty.

Center Curriculum

The original curriculum for the ECDC was written during the fall of 1995 by a cadre of CCISD teachers and the early childhood education faculty from TAMUCC. However, changes in curriculum for the Corpus Christi Independent School District have also influenced the curriculum at the ECDC. That curriculum has as its focus dual language instruction, and that instruction begins with the three-year-olds. The hope is that the children from the Spanish-dominant homes will learn English, and the children from the English-dominant homes will learn Spanish. About 50% of the instructional time is devoted to each language. (See Chapter 2.) Although dual language facility is particularly important in South Texas, a recent headline in USA Today proclaimed "Si usted no habla español puede quedarse rezagado" (If you don't speak Spanish, you might be left behind") (Sharp, 2001). The article went on to state that everyone from feedlot managers in Nebraska to stockbrokers in New York are realizing the importance of speaking Spanish.

In addition to the focus on dual language instruction, the curriculum at the ECDC includes the use of age appropriate multi-age/cross grade groupings, and team teaching. Each room has approximately eleven computers, so children are introduced to technology at a very young age. A technology curriculum for very young children has been developed by faculty and graduate students in educational technology. (See Chapter 12.)

Health Center

The nursing program on the campus of TAMUCC has a health care facility in the ECDC building to train school nursing students. Students in the nursing program are required to do a clinical rotation through the facility to work with the children. Thus, the children enrolled at the ECDC receive quality preventive health care within the school environment, and the nursing students receive valuable practicum experiences through their interaction with young children. The presence of the Health Center also guarantees that another college within the university also has a vested interest in the laboratory school. (See Chapter 13.)

Counseling Center

Also located in the ECDC building are counseling faculty and graduate students. The graduate students gain experience working with the ECDC children and their families. Faculty in the Department of Counseling have developed an active research agenda, much of it based on their work with the ECDC children and teachers. The school, in turn, receives free counseling for its students and families. (See chapter 14.)

Training Mission

Because the ECDC is on the campus, various groups of undergraduate and graduate students are able to observe and interact with young children. The early childhood majors probably make the most use of the ECDC for observation and practicum experiences because the early childhood classes are taught on site and all early childhood faculty are housed there. Early childhood students have a chance to observe and practice various developmentally appropriate strategies and techniques as well as to examine age appropriate materials. Graduate students in the school; counseling program have opportunities to interact not only with the young children but also with their families. In addition, both graduate and undergraduate students in various curriculum areas and in school nursing have an opportunity to interact with children and teachers in the center.

Results

At the close of its fifth year of operation and with the arrival of a new dean of the College of Education, the clinical and professional faculty had an opportunity to reexamine the results of this five year multi-million dollar experiment. Are the children in the ECDC learning? Would some of the problems faced by past laboratory schools be solved? Could the work done at the ECDC make a contribution to the educational knowledge base? Could this preschool dual language model be replicated in a neighborhood public school?

Quantitative Results

One of the great concerns of everyone associated with the development of the ECDC was the emphasis on high stakes testing in Texas. All public schools in Texas are required to administer the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) on an annual basis. The TAAS consists of criterion-referenced tests in reading, mathematics, and writing. The TAAS reading and mathematics tests are administered to all eligible public school students in grades three through eight and ten. The writing test is administered only at grades four, eight, and ten (Texas Education Agency, 2001).

The TAAS test is designed to measure a list of standards called the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The TEKS were developed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) to provide public school districts with guidelines for a state-required foundation curriculum. Schools receive a rating of "exemplary," "recognized," "acceptable," or "low performing" on the basis of TAAS results and attendance rates. In order for a school to receive an exemplary rating, at least 90% of the students must receive a passing score on the TAAS. In order to pass the test, students must achieve a standard score of 70, which is roughly equivalent to answering correctly 70% of the items (TEA, 2001b).

Thus, the ECDC, which is a public school in the Corpus Christi Independent School District, was required to give this test in 1999, at the end of its third year of operation, and the year the first group of students completed third grade. Unlike most other lab school populations, most of these children did not come from homes where stellar results were the norm. Furthermore, half of the instruction for these children was in Spanish, and the TAAS was in English. Would the ECDC children be able to pass the dreaded test? Professional and clinical faculty hoped the school would be exempt because of its experimental nature. Unfortunately, no such exemptions were available.

When the 1999 results came in, all students had passed the reading portion of the TAAS and most had passed the mathematics section (TEA, 1999). The school was rated "recognized." A banner was hoisted in the school lobby and everyone breathed a sigh of relief. In 2000, the TAAS results came in, and the ECDC was rated "exemplary" (TEA, 2000). Jubilation! 2001 – "exemplary" again! More jubilation (TEA, 2001a)!!!

Replication

One measure of the validity of any program developed in a lab school setting is successful replication in a regular public school. In January 2001, the Zavala Special Emphasis School in the Corpus Christi Independent School District began a fulltime publicly supported preschool for three- and four-year-olds modeled after the ECDC and supported by a congressional grant. Like the ECDC, dual language acquisition is a major point of the curriculum. Also, like the ECDC, not all the teachers are bilingual; one is bilingual, and one speaks only English. As in the ECDC, this situation necessitates team teaching. Both of the new Zavala teachers are recent graduates of Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi's elementary and bilingual education programs. For the most part, the student population of the Zavala Special Emphasis School comes from one of the lowest socio-economic areas of Corpus Christi. (See Chapter 3.)

Overcoming Problems

In 1980, Goodlad succinctly identified numerous problems of lab schools. The first was the many different functions expected of lab schools: education of children, preservice education, inservice education research, and program development. The ECDC has all of those functions, but research and program development have become priorities, along with the education of the children. The professional development schools in the surrounding area have become the major venues for student teaching and other field-based experiences; these experiences have become of secondary importance at the ECDC.

The fact that the clinical faculty and the principal are employed by the local school district alleviates another of the major problems of older lab schools--the problem of resources. No longer is the lab school a drain on the resources of the university or the college of education. Also, the Early Childhood Development Center is addressing two educational problems that have been identified as priorities for the 21st century. Specifically, those problems are Spanish language acquisition (Sharp, 2001) and preschool literacy and learning (Cassidy & Cassidy, 2000/2001; McQuillan, 2001). In fact, because of this unique focus, the ECDC has been able to garnish over a million dollars in external grants. Also, because other colleges and faculty

within the University are involved in the ECDC, there is a broad-based support for this facility.

Another problem of past university laboratory schools has been the failure to disseminate the findings of their research and program development. Although some studies based at the Early Childhood Education Center have been published (Montague & Meza-Zaragosa, 1999), the publication and distribution of the CEDER Yearbook, Early Childhood Literacy: Programs & Strategies to Develop Cultural, Linguistic, Scientific and Healthcare Literacy for Very Young Children & Their Families (Cassidy & Garrett, 2001) should provide a unified compendium of research and innovative programming for individuals interested in laboratory schools, dual language acquisition and preschool instruction.

Some Observational Comments

Over thirty years ago William Van Til (1969), a distinguished educator, laboratory advocate and writer, delivered a speech about laboratory schools at the annual conference for the American Association for Colleges of Teacher Education (AACTE). The speech was later published and widely quoted. Somewhat tongue in cheek, he painted a picture of what a campus laboratory school should be:

> *Within a shining new building on the campus at an institution of higher learning, children and youth who were representative of the American population would experience the finest possible education. Their learning experiences would be derived from the application of the tested best already established, and from experimentation with the newest and most venturesome approaches to education.*
>
> *The laboratory school facility would be made up of master teachers demonstrating their skills in the art and science of teaching, carrying forward research and experimentation with children and youth, and adroitly inducting observers, participants, and student teachers into the best of all possible educational theory and practice. Their partners in the school would be the college and university professors. The professors would artfully interweave their classroom instruction with extensive*

observation, participation, and student teaching in the demonstration school by teachers-to-be. The professors also would share in the development of significant research with the experimental school faculty.

To this center of educational enlightenment would journey educators from far and near to observe the best in education. They would then return to their schools to put new ideas into practice, thus raising the level of American education. The laboratory school would be the pride of the college and university administration, the joy of parents fortunate enough to have young people enrolled therein, and the darling of state legislators, boards of trustees, and philanthropists.

To a large extent, the Early Childhood Development Center at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi fulfills Van Til's dream of the last century. True, there are still university professors who grumble about the attention devoted to the campus school; the lab school teachers complain that more is expected of them than their counterparts in public schools; the administration occasionally sees the ECDC as just another of the myriad problems which must be addressed; and there are occasional curriculum conflicts between the School District and the University. But.... the facility is "a shining new building on the campus of an institution of higher learning" and the student body is "representative of the American population" of South Texas. The dual language curriculum and the fulltime publicly supported program for three- and four-year-olds represent "experimentation with the newest and most venturesome approaches to education." VanTil's statement that "the laboratory school would be the pride of the college and university administration" is brought to life each semester by the President of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi when he proudly cites the ECDC in his opening remarks to faculty. To some extent, the laboratory school has also become "the darling of state legislators, boards of trustees and philanthropists" because they realize that the school is willing to address some of the problems facing public education in the 21st century (1969)

The Future

The problems encountered by the older university lab schools as they entered the last half of the twentieth century have, to some extent, been addressed and overcome by the Early Childhood Development Center on the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi campus. Undoubtedly, these problems will continue to exist and new ones will arise. It is the hope of all who are involved in the ECDC that this unique facility will continue to develop and change with the needs and demands of a changing society.

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Author(s): Cassidy, Jack and Garrett, Sherrye (eds.)

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