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AUTHOR	Canales, JoAnn; Duron, Susan
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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. This chapter focuses on the process of collaboration between faculty at the ECDC and the Zavala Special Emphasis School (SES). The collaboration was an effort to replicate the regular education 3-year-old program at the ECDC and expand early start opportunities to an additional 44 low-income children in the school district. More specifically, the chapter addresses how collaboration served to develop and implement an early childhood program, the Zavala Early Childhood Development Center, to: (1) advance early childhood education through comprehensive high-quality teaching and research efforts specifically designed to meet the needs of 3-year-old children in the Zavala SES attendance zone; (2) provide professional development opportunities for inservice and preservice teachers; (3) promote literacy and community health initiatives; and (4) promote dual-language literacy development. (Contains 26 references.) (EV)

Chapter 3

University/Public School Partnership Provides A Jump Start for Three-Year-Olds

JoAnn Canales
Susan Durón

"Collaboration is an unnatural act among consenting adults."
-Author Unknown

Introduction

While public school education offers students an important avenue for achievement and success in today's marketplace, the home and the community provide equally important influences on student learning. Collaboration serves as the bridge between the home, school, and community to prepare students for the complex issues they face and the multitude of decisions that they must make as they interact with their environment. These complex societal issues call for comprehensive services that respond to the entire family unit.

Approximately ten years ago, the National School Boards' Association called for joint action to address the growing concern for the measures schools and other systems could take to help battle the increase in student drop out rates, crime, drug abuse, and suicide (Levy, Kagan, & Copple, 1992). Since that time, changes in the ways that effective teaching, learning, and school organization are perceived have led to changes in educators' thinking about collaboration. The shift from top-down leadership to shared decision making has greatly affected the role of collaboration.

This chapter will focus on the process of collaboration between the faculty at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMUCC), who were involved in the Early Childhood Development Center (See Chapter 1), and the Zavala Special Emphasis School (SES). More specifically, it will address how collaboration served to develop and implement an early childhood program, the Zavala Early Childhood Development Center (Zavala ECDC), to:

1. Advance early childhood education through comprehensive high quality teaching and research efforts specifically designed to meet the needs of three-year-old children in the Zavala SES attendance zone
2. Provide professional development opportunities for in-service and pre-service teachers
3. Promote literacy and community health initiatives
4. Promote dual-language literacy development.

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Prior to the spring of 2001, the Zavala SES offered a dual language program to four-year-old children and a special education program for three- and four- year-olds. The collaboration was an effort to replicate the regular education three-year-old program at the Early Childhood Development Center (ECDC) situated on the Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMUCC) campus and expand the early start opportunities to an additional forty-four children in the Corpus Christi Independent School District (CCISD).

Background on Collaboration

The current trend of collaboration among educators, families, and communities has an impact on the way educational services are delivered. Educational partnerships connect schools to community and social service agencies, cultural institutions, businesses, industries, and institutions of higher education to pursue joint activities (Tushnet, 1993). No one-way has emerged to ensure successful partnerships. Wynn (1998) proposes that there be formalized partnership agreements, collaborative staff development, simplified systems of entry, outreach initiatives to increase access to comprehensive services, sharing of funding sources' resources, and the use of validated information to enhance quality.

The difficulties in creating structures that support collaboration between schools, communities, and universities are well documented (Kot & Bruner, 1999; Rosenblum, DiCecco, Taylor & Adelmann, 1995; Clark, 1994; Schlessman-Frost, 1994; Fradd, 1992). These researchers note that collaborating often raises issues of power, influence, identity, territoriality, and integrity and requires ongoing communication and negotiation among stakeholders. Austin and Baldwin (1992) posit that each collaborative team goes through four steps: choosing colleagues or team members, dividing the labor, establishing work guidelines, and terminating the collaboration or seeing it through to the next level. In addition, successful collaborations acknowledge and confront problems, using them as an opportunity to build relationships among partners (Tushnet, 1993).

Collaboration is attractive as a construct because of the benefits perceived by stakeholders, including increased productivity (Austin & Baldwin, 1992; Fox & Faver, 1984); reduced fragmentation of services that better target increasingly scarce resources (Lugg &

Boyd, 1993); broadened partnerships to provide more direct services (Clark, 1994); synergy producing the best ideas and best instruction (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000; Maeroff, 1988); and strong working relationships among partners (Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, 1994; Hubbard, Kennedy, Sutton & Trefny, 1991).

Leadership is a critical variable to help build commitment and gather resources for collaboration (Wagner, 1994; Tushnet, 1993; Lugg & Boyd, 1993). Effective leadership helps facilitate comprehensive planning and informed decision-making, and ensures that power and resources are appropriately distributed. Strong, collaborative leaders also ensure that partners no longer run parallel programs at a common site, but have created a new program that offers participants more than the individual agencies can offer separately (Dillworth, 1996). Kuo (1999) found that a successful way to integrate organizational change is to build support for collaboration starting at the top.

An added benefit of collaboration is organizational change. Hubbard et. al. (1991) focused on the iterative nature of the collaborative planning process, stating that "collaborations are fundamental to reform" (p. 15). Current trends in educational reform emphasize strengthening and transforming school relations with parents and the community to make them more collaborative (Adler & Seppanen, 1993). Further, Fradd (1992) posited that as administrators, teachers, and parents learn to collaborate, they increase learning opportunities for themselves and for their children/students.

In order for leaders to build new ways of working together, it is important to develop and implement support systems which include time to plan, staff development/training, and technical and logistical support. Liontos (1990) outlined steps to take in order to work together collaboratively:

1. Study community, state, and national demographics
2. Go to joint conferences where structured dialogue between agencies is encouraged
3. Set up joint committee meetings such as between education and health
4. Note successful collaborative examples

5. Involve key officials for inspiration and organizational backing and key stakeholders, such as staff who work directly with the children
6. Encourage information sharing among systems about children and families, and reward staff for working with others outside their own sector
7. Stress prevention and early intervention
8. Use effective team building for shared control and decision making
9. Establish common goals to be implemented across agencies, spelling out accountability
10. Focus on process, stressing that collaboration is a means, not an end
11. Commit the necessary resources recognizing that collaboration takes time and energy (p. 2).

In 1988, a survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics found that 40% of the nation's public schools had some kind of formal partnerships with an external institution (Clark, 1994). Ten years after the study was conducted, the figure had increased as schools, community organizations, universities, and the community of parents routinely collaborated to promote student success and achievement. Clark (1994) stated that the "Integrated delivery of services to children, youth, and their families will increase the likelihood that young Americans will become healthy, educated, and responsible adult citizens" (p.5). This position was supported by Boyer (1991) who said, "It is my conviction that you cannot have an island of academic excellence in a sea of community indifference" (p.5).

Although home/school/community partnerships have been in existence for much longer, universities as partners with the home, school, and community is a more recent phenomenon. Austin and Baldwin (1992) noted that faculty collaboration has grown over the last 100 years. Maeroff (1998) reported that as recently as 15 years ago, "Voices calling for closer ties between schools and colleges reverberated across a landscape in which often few ears were attuned to hearing them" (p.9).

García (1998) addressed the involvement of universities, communities, and schools in the education of children who come from

diverse families. He wrote that the university has a broader outreach mission, as part of its public service role, to engage with and assist in the improvement of the quality of pre/k-12 education, particularly in underrepresented communities. He challenged universities to address the issue by broadening the mission of university collaboration and outreach. Maeroff (1998) concurred, stating that to improve the education of children who are educationally disadvantaged requires the collaboration of many schools, agencies, and departments of the university. These groups must forge programs that deal with the whole child and his or her family. Rowe (1998) simply called for the integration of research and pedagogy in collaborative partnerships between schools and universities.

Collaborative partnerships need to be based on an aligned view of the elements of high quality service delivery and the outcomes participants wish to achieve (Melaville & Blank, 1991). To plan for implementing activities that rely on collaboration, and to measure the resulting outcomes, evaluation of the objectives and programs is essential. Flynn and Hargin (1987) reported that the evaluation of interagency collaboration requires a broad perspective because of its multidimensional concept. They posit that the evaluation should occur at those points where the dimensions of collaboration interact with one another and it should proceed through developmental stages. Hubbard et. al.(1991) calls for both the collection and reporting of both quantitative and qualitative data as important evidence of the success of the collaboration.

Organizing collaborative partnerships that are pro-family requires flexibility and outcome-oriented planning. Kunesch and Farley (1993) caution innovators to remember that change begins with individuals, not institutions, and that establishing communication and decision-making processes is critical. Because pro-family solutions to overcoming complex barriers that interfere with student learning require access to interrelated systems, collaboration is the best hope for success. More systematic research on collaboration is essential, as well, with carefully crafted studies being undertaken to enhance opportunities for successful collaborations.

The University/School Partnership

One such opportunity for study and collaboration was and is the Zavala ECDC. The focus of the partnership was to afford three-year-old children of primarily low socio-economic backgrounds an early start in their academic preparation. The program, a replication of the early childhood dual language program at the ECDC on the TAMUCC campus, was initiated in part from a congressional appropriation facilitated through the efforts of early childhood advocate Texas Senator Kay B. Hutchison. The congressional appropriation is managed by the Federal Improvement Program for Secondary Education (FIPSE). This appropriation was supplemented by the CCISD and TAMUCC.

Funds from the congressional appropriation provided for two teachers and paraprofessionals to staff each of the three-year-old classrooms. Additional funding was allocated to provide:

1. Professional enrichment support services
2. Instructional support (instructors in the arts/music/motor development)
3. Nurse/health services
4. Partial security and custodial services
5. Furniture;
6. Equipment including computers, printers, VCRs, and TVs
7. Instructional software
8. Materials and supplies
9. Utilities;
10. Transportation including field trips
11. Meals.

The CCISD funded the construction of two classrooms. In-kind contributions were provided in the form of CCISD staff that worked closely with the Interim Director of the TAMUCC ECDC to develop and implement the three-year-old program. The staff included the Interim Executive Director for Instruction, the Coordinator of Early Childhood Education, the Title VII Bilingual Director and two staff members, the Director of Technology, staff from the Finance

Department, and the principals of the Zavala SES and the university Early Childhood Development Center.

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi provided funding for substitutes to release TAMUCC, ECDC, and Zavala teachers to meet with the new faculty and provide guidance in planning and materials selection. Zavala ECDC personnel were also included in staff development provided to the university ECDC teachers, including such topics as art, theater arts, literacy, and bilingual instruction. In-kind contributions were provided in the form of the university ECDC's Director's time, a bilingual faculty member's time, as well as a physical education faculty member's time. The Interim Director of the Early Childhood Development Center served as the project director for the congressional appropriation. The project director's responsibilities included convening meetings to monitor construction progress, planning and implementing the program, recruiting and selecting the personnel, orchestrating the purchase of materials and equipment, and recruiting and selecting the students.

Planning for the Zavala ECDC began in early Fall of 2000. All planning meetings included personnel from TAMUCC and CCISD and, at times, additional personnel as necessary, such as the Assistant Dean for the College of Education, CCISD's Executive Director for Finance, and staff from transportation and food services. Among the planning activities were:

1. Identifying criteria for the teachers and paraprofessionals
2. Reviewing applicant files and interviewing and selecting the teachers and staff
3. Identifying criteria for the selection of the students
4. Scheduling and providing orientations for parents
5. Establishing a timeline to ensure that staff and students were identified, materials and equipment were ordered and personnel had appropriate time to organize the classroom and plan for instruction
6. Refining the budget
7. Orchestrating a press conference highlighting the collaboration between TAMUCC and CCISD.

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During the fall, parent orientations were also held at the Zavala SES to explain the program and recruit students. Presentations were made in English and Spanish and parents were informed that the program was a full academic preparation program that required daily attendance and parental involvement. Because many families had already placed their children in other programs, such as Head Start, the decision was made to expand the pool for identifying students to a neighboring school, Garcia Elementary School. That school was also providing a full day dual language program to four-year-olds, which would provide a transition opportunity for those beginning the three-year-old dual language program at the Zavala ECDC. Parent orientations were also held at Garcia Elementary School.

Parents were asked to submit applications and children were identified on the basis of meeting the following criteria:

1. Three-fourths of the children had to qualify for free and reduced lunch (this would reflect the demographics of the CCISD as well as the ECDC located on the TAMUCC campus).
2. One-half of the children had to be dominant speakers of Spanish and one-half had to be dominant speakers of English to ensure the success of the dual language component of the program.
3. Additionally, they all had to be "potty trained."

Once the children were identified, they were assessed for readiness and language proficiency. CCISD personnel and TAMUCC students and the principal of the TAMUCC ECDC assisted with the assessments. Staff from the Nueces County Health Department were available to provide the necessary inoculations and staff from CCISD's food services to collect the necessary information. An orientation for parents and students was held prior to the opening of school to familiarize the children and their parents with the facility and the procedures for dropping off and picking up the children.

The Zavala ECDC opened its doors to the students in the Zavala attendance area on Tuesday, January 16, 2001 and students in the Garcia attendance area began two weeks later on January 29, 2001. A total of forty-two students participated in the program at the Zavala ECDC.

In the spring of 2001, additional support was also contracted for the Zavala ECDC. This included a part-time paraprofessional to provide motor development activities for the children. It also provided additional planning time for the teachers. A theatre arts faculty member was also hired part-time to work with the teachers and the children on Fridays. Title VII staff from CCISD provided parental involvement and staff development opportunities that included the parents, teachers, and paraprofessionals of the Zavala ECDC.

Central to the success of the collaboration, in addition to the key factors mentioned at the onset of this paper, was the unwavering commitment to providing services to this particular population of children. All stakeholders gave above and beyond their commitment to their professional roles to ensure the effective implementation of this early childhood program. For example, the principal of the Zavala SES facilitated additional help from paraprofessionals on his campus to assist the first-year teachers and paraprofessionals in setting up the classrooms. Both of the teachers were December graduates of TAMUCC. One was an early childhood specialist and one was a bilingual education specialist. The university ECDC principal donated evenings and daytime to meet with parents and assess the children. The CCISD staff, already overtaxed with responsibilities, were very willing to meet regularly and in the evenings to plan, meet with teachers and parents, or assess children. The bilingual faculty member met regularly with the TAMUCC ECDC teachers and principals in addition to his administrative and teaching responsibilities. The director, as "chief worrier" for the project, also made regular visits to ensure the progress of the construction and worked with university and school district budget personnel to administer the complex grant, in addition to her role as Assistant Dean and Interim Director of the TAMUCC ECDC, and Coordinator of Teacher Education and the Center for Professional Development of Teachers.

Conclusions

The Zavala Early Childhood Development Center clearly reflects a partnership that models the key ingredients required for successful collaboration — all key players were involved and shared ownership; a realistic strategy was used that reflected a joint vision, goals, and responsibility for outcomes; and change was institutionalized.

Final Thoughts

No words can capture the transformation in the teachers and the children by mid-February. The teachers were calm, self-assured, and smiling at their newfound skills and confidence. The students were orderly, attentive in whole group activities, sharing in centers, and competent during independent seatwork. These students will have a major jump-start in their academic journey because of the early socialization opportunity made possible by the commitment of Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and the Corpus Christi Independent School District to collaborate in a university/public school partnership.

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