The Campus School at New Paltz: A Preliminary Study in the Different Experiences of Campus Schools and Child Development Laboratories

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Laboratory, demonstration, and practice schools have traditionally been operated under two very different philosophical and departmental auspices. On one hand are those institutions which are now being generally referred to as child development laboratories. These are on-campus institutions attended by children, usually five years of age and younger, which serve a number of different purposes and provide: 1) observational sites for adult students; 2) practicum placements for student program participation; 3) pools of subjects for educational and psychological experimentation and research; 4) model examples for students and others; and 5) service to the community, as defined in various ways. These child development laboratories, or CDLs, have usually been conducted under the auspices of departments of psychology, child development, or home economics.[1]

The other group of institutions where children have traditionally been found in colleges and universities are those campus schools[2] which developed as practice teaching sites for students in state normal schools throughout the country. In many cases, these institutions predated John Dewey's famous Laboratory School at the University of Chicago, and were practical rather than experimental in nature. State normal schools were often found in non-urban locations where the number of local institutions where students could practice their skills under the guidance of educational supervisors was limited. Campus schools filled this gap admirably.

Influence of CDLs

CDLs are monuments to the dreams of those who were heavily influenced by the Child Study Movement of the late nineteenth century. They also seem to have had somewhat checkered careers. The little data which has explored CDLs has shown them to have been: 1) elitist, 2) of minimal value as research sites, perhaps a causal result of their elitism, 3) unvalued by general campus administrators, and 4) perhaps most damning of all, lagging in implementation of innovative practices in the care and education of young children (Counselman, 1986).

In spite of these formidable difficulties, however, CDLs have had a remarkable influence on early childhood education. Although an extremely small number of programs serving no more than 2,000 children in the 1920s (Goodykoontz, Davis, & Gabbard, 1947), they provided the curriculum framework which most early childhood educators rely upon in their own practice to this day. They were truly the crucibles in which curriculum practice, at least with young children, was nurtured and codified. While present-day understanding of Vygotskian "scaffolding" and a greater interest and emphasis on the more directive teaching style of the Reggio Emilia schools may be combining to nudge the field away from the non-interfering, teacher-as facilitator model originated in child development laboratories, that model still remains paramount in early childhood education. It is common among many early childhood practical variants, including both Piagetian and Montessori-based programs, and finds an effective and influential codification in the guidelines for accreditation of the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, a division of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).[3]

Campus Schools

Much work remains to be done in constructing the history of the child development movement in this country including the role of CDLs. One way in which this history may be expanded, however, is by comparing CDLs with what seem to be kindred institutions--state normal school campus schools. Since CDLs and campus schools are both products of the academy, an obvious question is whether campus schools experienced many of the same successes and challenges as CDLs. Did they enjoy a similar influence on curriculum practice and were there significant numbers of classroom teachers and leaders in the field who followed the practices in those schools later in life? How many teachers actually attended institutions where training in the campus school was an integral part of teacher preparation?

On many campuses, the challenges faced by CDLs lead to their closure. As institutions of higher education grew and diversified and normal schools were transformed into modern state universities, were campus schools similarly discarded as a way of jettisoning a hot-house approach to teacher training in favor of increased contact for students with the "real world?" Were campus schools, like many CDLs, seen as expensive and backward luxuries whose demise had very little impact beyond the personal dislocation of people who worked in them? Or did ending them deprive educators of potentially significant sites in which to test theory and practice with children in schools?

Some of these larger issues are unanswerable in a short preliminary paper comparing one campus school with the body of literature available on CDLs. However, as information about these institutions, like that of CDLs, is scattered and fragmentary and located on individual campuses, the approach initially employed in this investigation is the one which has been successfully used with CDLs--the case study. By tracing the history of one of these institutions, a beginning may be made on investigating the phenomenon as a whole. This paper is one such beginning.

Early History of the Campus School at New Paltz

The campus school at New Paltz had a direct connection with the town and its citizens dating back to the seventeenth century. New Paltz was founded in 1678 on grant land owned by twelve men, later known as the Duzine, who were refugee French Huguenots. The town's name is a corruption of that of the German village of Pfalz, on the Rhine, which had offered these people sanctuary between 1660 and 1675. The Duzine, an institution which continued to function as the governing board of the city and also represented the heirs of the twelve original patentees, established a school in 1689. This eventually evolved into the New Paltz Academy, which offered free schooling to all children in the village (Lang and Lang, 1960).

When the New Paltz State Normal and Training School was founded on February 15, 1886, education of all New Paltz children was turned over to this new teacher training institution (Ryan, 1982a). The teachers of the Academy became "critics" or teachers in the new school. Twenty-eight children were originally enrolled in 1886 and this figure rose quickly to 76 in 1887 (Vanni, 1958).

The only recorded complaint was from some parents who were unhappy with the new arrangement because fees were charged. In response to that complaint, the state legislature abolished all fees in 1891 and turned the campus school into a free elementary school and, in fact, the only elementary school in the town of New Paltz until 1953 (Catalog, 1951-52). In the process of abolishing tuition, the legislature also abolished the local school district "taking away the community's right to hold a local school meeting or to establish a second school." High school students were also educated at the Normal School from 1886 until 1929. At that point, on the grounds that the program at New Paltz was only for elementary teachers, the secondary education portion was discontinued and returned to local control and a central high school was built on South Manheim Boulevard (Ryan, 1982a).

Life and Work at the Campus School-Staffing

While administrative histories are often the most complete documentary residue remaining from both CDLs and campus schools, as historians of curriculum, it is often the daily life of children, families, and teachers connected with such institutions which is most interesting to us. Unfortunately, records of this daily life are also among those elements in schools which are most unsystematically recorded. Records at the campus school at New Paltz are similarly spotty, but some trends in curriculum change and staffing can be gleaned from the documents presently available.

One area of controversy between early childhood and elementary educators has long been the question of ratios, the number of children any one adult has responsibility for. While NAEYC accreditation guidelines allow up to twenty five-year-olds for every adult, this is seen by many early childhood professionals as stretching the ratios to the breaking point. Yet such practices are common in public school kindergartens. Anecdotal evidence indicates that elementary teachers today believe that two things would improve their lives in the classroom: time and an extra pair of hands (an aide). The campus school at New Paltz reflected this trend and, from the beginning, the issue of ratios and the number of properly qualified teachers there was a major issue.

> All early information suggests [that there was] an understaffed primary department, especially before model teachers were introduced to the system. The state staffed the practice school with the senior class practice teachers, [and] professional, experienced teachers on the faculty, though assigned to the grades, had little time to supervise, much less to teach the elementary students. Other negative references usually follow the same general pattern, suggesting that the practice teachers were overworked and found teaching young children to be unpleasant and difficult.
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> (Ryan, 1982a).

Lawrence H. van den Berg, fifth principal of the Normal School (1923-1943), was eventually faced with a staffing crisis, for by the 1930s under staffing was a major issue for the school. Supervising teachers were responsible for at least two full classes of children. Practice student teachers would be responsible for the actual day-to-day life of children in the school in one or both of those classes and the supervising teacher would go back and forth between rooms. Although it was recorded that children enjoyed working with the young student teachers and were not concerned with continuity as much as adults may have been, it is obvious that the one stable person in their lives, the supervising teacher, would have had her hands full. In addition to being expected to have a master's degree, teachers "were [also] expected to be able to handle a

classroom which combined a group of children requiring basic education [and to work] . . . with various groups of college students on different levels fulfilling different requirements for course work." In public education today, the only comparable teaching positions are those held by kindergarten teachers working with double sessions. There is no indication that this team teaching by the seat-of-the-pants method allowed any significant innovation, let alone research to intrude on the daily life of the school. Indeed, teachers reported that teaching methods would probably be considered to be very traditional, even by contemporary standards (Ryan, 1982b).

In 1940, the Board of Regents of the State of New York capped the number of New Paltz teaching positions at ten, one teacher for each grade, kindergarten through grade nine. However, at that point there were 499 children in the school and each grade had two classes and in 1944, Dr. William J. Haggerty, sixth principal, persuaded the voters of New Paltz to modify the system under which the school was operated (solely by the state, providing free tuition for all residents at little tax cost). Although his proposal increased the school tax rate by 26.3%, this was still only 11% of the total cost of elementary education of the children in the campus school. Dr. Haggerty proposed that a qualified, credentialed teacher be allotted to every grade and this idea was apparently attractive enough to the town that voters approved the new arrangement by a vote of almost three to one (New Paltz Independent and Times , 1945).

Unfortunately, this new arrangement introduced a two-tier system to the teaching staff. The new teachers hired were, henceforth, employed by the town at salaries (and with academic degrees) which were considerably inferior to those of the supervising teachers, who also retained their status as faculty members of the college. In a later interview, Mary Jane Jewett (1996), a teacher at the school during that time, criticized this new system and noted that, although relationships between the two groups of teachers was cordial, it was inevitable that there were some strains on such a faculty.

Life and Work at the Campus School--Curriculum Innovation

Some interesting curriculum innovations were introduced into the campus school in its early period. Myron Scudder, principal of the Normal School (and supervisor of the campus school), introduced industrial work to the curriculum at the end of the nineteenth century (Normal Review, 1901). Included were such things as clay modeling and paper cutting, "intended to develop the use of the hands and to provide the child with the knowledge of the power to do things for himself (Normal Review, 1900)." Scudder believed that "industrial work was introduced because traditional schools tend to unfit children to the bustling life of today--especially boys (Normal Review, 1901)." This pattern of education he described is certainly in keeping with Deweyian concepts and practices at the Laboratory School in Chicago. Furthermore, it followed early principles used later in child development laboratories--active involvement of children in their learning; use of real, meaningful materials; and a concept that there was more to education that simply being passive recipients of knowledge handed down by adults.

Other innovations followed, albeit slowly. In November of 1945, New Paltz became the first teachers college in the state to begin the development of a nursery-kindergarten program and a four-year-old group was added to the campus school, followed by a three-year-old group the following September (New Paltz Independent and Times, 1946). While reports of this nursery curriculum are limited, it was apparent that play was of primary importance and was "carefully planned to promote the children's physical well-being, their ability to get along with others, the growth of their language, and the growth of ideas (New Paltz Independent and Times, 1946b)." The addition of this nursery program, however, seems to have been less of an adoption of early childhood education as a curriculum innovation than a response to increased demand for child care and nursery school teachers following World War II.

The nursery classes were so popular with parents in the community that a lottery system was adopted at the school for the first time (New Paltz Independent and Times, 1946b) and continued at least until the 1970s (Kimberly Yess, 1996). This may have been the first time an element of elitism entered into the program as it was run at the campus school. While a lottery seems to be a superficially fair way of admitting children into a popular program, it can favor those who are particularly knowledgeable about regulations, enrollment dates, and other school priorities. Any new family entering into a community, or a family having only tenuous ties to school information could miss out on the opportunity to ever enter the lottery. After 1953, when the central school district was reconstituted because of crowding at the campus school, "the lottery was used whenever necessary to limit campus school class size on all levels (Ryan, 1982b)."

Life and Work at the School--Student Teaching Placements and Establishment of a Dual System of Public Education

As college and university enrollments in education increased, however, strains placed on the campus school to provide placements for all student teachers became intolerable. It is obvious that no similar campus school today could satisfactorily meet the needs of even a moderately sized institution such as SUNY, New Paltz (140 anticipated elementary student teaching

placements required by spring of 1997).

Although leaders of the campus school could not have foreseen such tremendous growth in the need for teachers, they must have realized that any sizable growth would have made it impossible for the school to continue serving as a placement site for all student teaching. In fact, in 1967 Clifford Rotton had found that those schools which had concentrated solely on student teaching as their primary function were precisely the ones which had been closed by college administrators while those listing observation as the primary goal had continued to be of use and service to the academic community (Rotton, 1967).

At the same time, the community was growing and the campus school experienced severe crowding. In the autumn of 1953, a new, intact public school system was established in New Paltz and, until the demise of the campus school in 1982, there was a dual system of public education in the town (A handbook and guide for teachers in the campus elementary school, 1953-1954, 1953). Parents were able to send their children, if admitted by lottery, to the campus school or they could choose to go to the new, albeit traditional town elementary school. This change seemed to liberate the campus school and it increasingly became identified with curriculum innovation.

While the school no longer served as the primary student teaching site for the burgeoning numbers of enrollees in the college's programs, it did provide an interesting, publicly-funded, alternative education route for many children and families. In the 1960s foreign languages were experimented with as early as kindergarten and new math was adopted with enthusiasm. IBM, through its large regional plant in Poughkeepsie, helped the campus school participate in early computer-assisted instruction with teachers writing programs in spelling, math, science, and social studies. Ecological field work took place at the college's Ashokan Field Camp and governmental studies featured yearly field trips to Washington, DC (Ryan, 1982b).

In the 1970s the open classrooms of the British infant schools were adopted with enthusiasm. Multi-age grouping and team teaching appeared and by the late 1970s the works of Jean Piaget had been adopted as new intellectual guides with "students [using] concrete articles and manipulatives in their daily lessons (Ryan, 1982b)." Former fourth grader at the school Kimberly Yess (1996) recalls with fondness her days at the campus school in the mid-1970s and reports that the classes were even smaller than enrollment figures would indicate. She says that there were no more than ten children in her classes in that period and documentary evidence supports her memories of studies of drama as being an important element of school life in the period. As the 1960s and 1970s progressed, however, Adelaide McKinley (1982), writing after the close of the campus school, maintained that such things as these very small classes had reinforced a certain reputation for elitism at the campus school.

> Going to Campus School was like going to a private school; it always was. There was a certain degree of snobbery attached to it. Saying 'My child attends Campus' was like bragging that your child went to Harvard or Bryn Mawr. I never had any of those feelings, but many local people did.
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> (Mckinley, 1982)

In addition, McKinley reported that since it seemed to be an experimental and innovative place, it was not overwhelmingly popular with all local families. Furthermore, preliminary research indicates that this innovation had less to do with the solid implementation of research and was motivated more by a desire to appear to be at the cutting edge of new fads in education. At the same time, social change in the larger society had a heavy impact on the campus and it became a major distribution point for drugs in the mid-Atlantic region. Combined with new general social unrest existing at the college, adoption of new practices could sometimes be interpreted as a mindless quest in search of change for change's sake.

End of the Campus School

While innovation and change, however uncontrolled and vague, were taking place at the campus school, other factors unrelated to this were working against it. Questions about the continued existence of campus schools in New York had been raised as early as 1974, at a time when there were still ten of those institutions located on college and university campuses throughout the state. In 1975 they were given a five-year period in which to complete a major self-study profile to be evaluated by the central administration of the State University of New York. By the time President Alice Chandler assumed leadership at New Paltz in 1980, it was clear that campus schools in the SUNY system were no longer considered to be viable parts of the modern university, primarily because of massive budget problems at the state level (Ryan, 1982b). In order to continue to exist, cuts were being required of all state agencies, including SUNY. As the number of campus schools dwindled, a local campaign joined forces with other groups throughout the state, in an effort to pass a bill in the legislature to prevent the closing of the last three lab schools (Plattsburgh, Cortland, and New Paltz). Although the bill passed in 1981, it was vetoed by Governor Hugh Carey in July of that year. While there were rumors that President Chandler had instructions from the state budget office to close the school, she maintains that it was a personal decision and, faced with the prospect of closing the

campus school or shutting down the whole college, she chose the former option and on June 3, 1982, the school closed (New Paltz News, 1982).

The subsequent lay-off of twenty-eight faculty members in the school has left a lingering malaise at New Paltz. At a faculty meeting held on March 29, 1996, at which the author was present, references were continually made to the earlier retrenchment decision in 1982 as the college once again faced severe system-wide budget cuts. President Chandler's concluding remarks at that faculty meeting were "It was an extremely painful decision. I regret it to this day."

The Experience of Campus Schools Compared with that of CDLs

The experience with this particular campus school does not necessarily match the general history of CDLs, as proposed at the beginning of this paper. While it was viewed as elitist by at least some members of the community, it attempted to alleviate some of this elitism by the establishment of a lottery system for admission and some parents were never interested in sending their children to the school in the first place because they viewed it as too experimental. Although references to research taking place in the school are few and far between, the faculty does seem to have been able to shake off a constrictive embrace of formerly innovative methods which had become outdated and, particularly in the 1960s and 1970s, they showed an openness to new methods and philosophies of instructional delivery.

In the end it was a combination of two things that contributed to the demise of the campus school and which continue to show up in the literature as stumbling blocks for similar institutions. The first was the expense of running a school, particularly when this expense was publicly funded and part of a dual system of education in the town of New Paltz.

Not withstanding President Chandler's regret at her decision to close the school, the second contributing factor in its failure was that it was not valued by administration as an integral part of campus life. From the data available, however, this does not seem to have been a one-sided lack of interest and understanding on the part of college leaders. While innovative practices did, indeed, take place at the school, it also seems to have operated remarkably apart from the general college life of the campus, at least from the latter part of the 1950s until its closure in 1982. While everyone seemed to like the availability of a campus school, it appears to have been under used by all except a few parents in town and occasional students doing observations and student teaching. A centrality of purpose and existence was lacking in the campus school.

In comparison to the experience of the campus school, those CDLs which have thrived do so not only because of the innovative practices and multiple research and observation opportunities they afford to students and faculty, but because their leadership is dynamic and dedicated and shows great energy in making the name of the CDL known and its mission understood throughout the entire campus community. As New Paltz, with the hiring of many new faculty members in the 1960s, became less of a college of education with a small liberal arts appendage, and more of a modern state university, it was precisely this energy and purpose which seemed to be missing from the school's leadership. As those who were intimately connected with the school were unsuccessful in spreading the message of the school's centrality of purpose to the greater campus community, it was almost inevitable that it would eventually be forced to close.

Conclusion

After all of this, a major question remains. Even if campus schools provided a modestly alternative education to that to be found in public elementary and secondary schools, could the time, energy, and expense involved in running them be justified even in times of easy money, let alone periods of severe budgetary constraint. Reasons I advance for continued interest in campus schools and CDLs relate more to their potential. While the specializations which are necessary to promote academic careers seem to preclude active interest and involvement with the lives of real children in real schools, on-campus children's programs have a way of keeping academic personnel honest. As long as they are located at the heart of institutions, both physically and programmatically, and are in the hands of competent administrators, the presence of campus schools can serve to remind us of our commitment to children and families. I would even propose that part of the teaching load of any professor of education be expanded to include those functions which are seen as normal and ordinary parts of the work of many early childhood academic personnel--on-going on-campus interaction with children, parents, guardians, and teachers. This is an excellent way of grounding faculty members in the realities and challenges faced in day-to-day life.

It can be argued that professional development schools provide these same sorts of experiences. In a professional development school, however, accountability can have a tendency to inordinately shift to keeping parents satisfied, which would be seen by many as quite appropriate. But isn't it the responsibility of education faculties to look beyond the needs of specific parents and children and to develop programs which can benefit all children and families? While a good lab school is obviously

not only responsive to and solicitous of its parent clientele, it also recognizes a responsibility to the future of the profession. If it does not, it and other similar schools become, as Francis Chase (1980) has put it, "less like laboratories for the study of education, and more like excellent preparatory schools for students." If they do not fulfill at the same time the functions of research, observation, demonstration, and participation, then not only does it become philosophically difficult to justify their continued maintenance, but they run other risks, as well. As John Goodlad (1980) wryly puts it, "Once a laboratory school comes to know what is 'best,' more than gentle persuasion is required to set it once more on the path of inquiry."

How do we achieve this balance? Perhaps a professional development school model will help reach some of these goals but if this historical experience has taught us anything, it is that innovation and change are fleeting and occur in regular non-campus settings only under inspired leadership and extraordinary circumstances. A commitment to campus schools and CDLs, like our commitment to laboratories and studio training in other fields, may not be as dramatic or singularly influential as what is occurring in professional development schools. However, such a commitment may at least provide the opportunity for faculty and students to test new ideas and practices in an environment where such experimentation is not seen as an aberration, but as the guiding purpose behind the establishment of such institutions.

Footnotes

[1]A separate group of institutions, day care centers which provide for the care and education of young children while their parents and guardians are either employees or students of the college or university, are usually located in offices of student services. While they may very well serve as much of an academic function as the other two groups of schools, historical patterns and trends are more difficult to discern due to the modernity of their founding dates.

[2]Although schools conducted by colleges and universities for children of elementary and high school age have a number of different names, campus school will be used in this paper to distinguish them from child development laboratories for younger children.

[3]Learning theory and behaviorism in general are the major theoretical constructs which never appeared to adopt this model. There is, of course, a wide gap between theory and practice and, in actuality, much more direct teaching probably goes on in institutions for young children than is commonly thought.

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