

# A Dynamic Duo: An Early Childhood Center and Teacher Education Program

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## ABOUT THE PRESCHOOL

Children's Learning Center

- ▶ Located on campus
- ▶ 10,000 square foot facility
- ▶ Celebrated it's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary
- ▶ Children from 6 weeks to 12 years
- ▶ Provides part-time and full-time care and employment with flexibility to meet needs of university students
- ▶ Child-centered learning environment with a focus on learning through play
  - *Learn Every Day*: 6wks-2
  - *Creative Curriculum*: 3 to 5

## ABOUT THE UNIVERSITY

Texas A & M-Commerce

- ▶ Established in 1889 as a teacher's college
  - The fifth oldest state university
- ▶ Main campus in a rural setting
  - spanning 2,094 acres
- ▶ More than 100 graduate and undergraduate degrees.
- ▶ A diverse student body
  - Approximately 6,000 undergraduate and 4,000 graduate students



## ABOUT OUR DEPARTMENT

Curriculum & Instruction

- ▶ Certification programs:
  - Bilingual/ESL (EC-12), Early Childhood EC-6th), Middle Level (4th-8th), Secondary (7th-12th)
- ▶ Our EC-6 and 4-8 graduates have an 86% retention rate after 5 years
  - national average is 50%
- ▶ The ECE academic program is nationally recognized

## PARTNERSHIP DEFINED

- ▶ committed, meaningful relationship with reciprocity of shared knowledge, experience, and ideas; benefits all participants (Walkington, 2007).



## BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIP

CLC and TAMUC

- ▶ Authentic, meaningful field experience for an early childhood course
- ▶ Flexibility and learning opportunities for both students and their children

## ABOUT THE COURSE

Early Childhood Curriculum

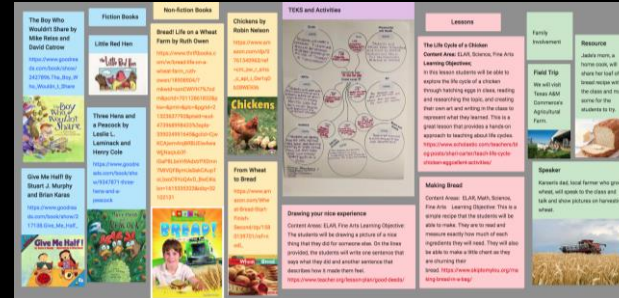
- ▶ A required course for students in the EC-6 certification program
- ▶ Learn how to organize DAP, meaningful experiences for young children through inquiry-based, integrated curriculum

## REFLECTIONS

Student Products

- ▶ Met assignment expectations
  - Engaging activities
  - Integrated subjects areas
  - Materials designed for hands-on learning experiences
  - Some groups put in more thought and effort than others
  - Presentations lead to discussions of additional topics like classroom management

- ▶ Still, this assignment seemed to elicit only a superficial grasp of the student learning outcomes for this course.
  - ▶ How could this assignment be adapted to cultivate a more meaningful

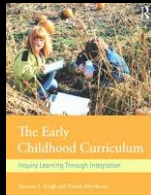


Example of a group's completed inquiry-based, integrated curriculum presentation (Little Red Hen, 1<sup>st</sup> grade)..

Opportunities to make connections to course content and real-life experiences promotes understanding of the complexity of teaching Yet, authentic, active learning experiences oftentimes do not begin until later. (Ryan et al., 2014).

## ASSIGNMENT

- ▶ Plan an inquiry-based, integrated curriculum
  - Worked in groups
  - Chose one grade level: PreK-6<sup>th</sup> grade
  - Design lessons
  - Prepare materials
  - Teach lesson to peers



Course Textbook

## Solution

Situated cognition

- ▶ building understandings through authentic, hands-on experiences with direct interactions with the environment (Brown, Collins, & Duguid, 1989; Resnick, Levine, & Behrend 1991)

- ▶ The CLC fit the criteria of a situated learning experience for this assignment.
  - A meeting was set up with the director to discuss logistics and goals for this project, beginning an extraordinary partnership.

## BENEFITS OF PARTNERSHIP

Between Course Instructor and CLC

- ▶ Instead using a fictitious class, students now planned and interacted with a classroom of 3 and 4-year olds
- Authentic, meaningful field experiences
- Engaged students in the many layers of pedagogy from planning to implementation



- ▶ Students planned and implemented an interactive read aloud and activity
- ▶ Students had to think about factors such as DAP and students strengths, needs, and interests and how to organize materials.
- ▶ Students completed "a planning sheet" placing the focus on the design of the lesson.



- ▶ After the students taught the lesson at the CLC, we would debrief and reflect on their experience.
- Student shared things that they noticed, things they found difficult, things they found humorous, things they found intriguing.
- Students made many connections from the content in this Early Childhood Curriculum course, as well as other education courses, to their experience at the Children's Learning Center

- ▶ Scaffolding: one student sat next to a child to help her cut.
- She noticed quickly the child wanted to cut without her help and the child actually had great fine motor skills as well.



- ▶ Questioning: a student noticed that when she asked a question, one child would raise their hand and then the rest would raise their hands. She stated, "I don't think some of them even knew what I asked but just raised their hands."
- This led to discussions on how to help the students listen to the question and think about their answer... "think time" which other groups utilized.



- ▶ Materials: A debate among students as they voiced their opinion and supported with reasons. In the end, students decided to give children the choice and bring both glue sticks and liquid glue.



- ▶ Child Guidance: One child kept working on his collage after the class had already transitioned to the next activity.
- Just as the teacher was about to step in, the student said to the child, "Choose three more items to glue on your collage and then I am going to pack the materials up and you can share your picture on the rug."



- ▶ Informal Observation: During an activity with paint, one student said providing one cup for each child did not cross her mind but the conversations that emerged as each child's water changed color was "so neat."



## EXPERIENCES THROUGH EMPLOYMENT

- ▶ Students exposed to more than teaching practices, but also the needs and strengths of children, families, and communities (Ryan et al., 2014).
- When one student learned a strategy, she utilized the strategy at the CLC.
- "I use to be nervous to talk to the parents, but now I feel comfortable, because I had lots of opportunities to talk to parents in a relaxed way."



## A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT FOR FAMILIES OF STUDENTS

- ▶ TAMUC enrolls many non-traditional college students with children, adding an additional need for high-quality childcare during class and after class to complete assignments or work.
- ▶ The CLC provides opportunities for family engagement including "make and take" activities, book clubs, trainings, among others.
- ▶ CLC's Facebook page provides parents of children with resources and information about child development, community events, and university events

## A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

- ▶ The CLC and the Curriculum & Instruction department collaborated and received the CCAMPIS grant from the U.S. Department of Education.
- ▶ These funds allow any students to enroll their own children in the CLC on a sliding fee scale.