

An Academic Vision for Child Care Education Services at UCSC

The Committee of Faculty Welfare, in consultation with various faculty, staff, and parents seeks to establish a new vision for Early Childhood Education/Childcare at UC Santa Cruz (UCSC) that better integrates the present Early Education Services (EES) within the academic mission of the university. EES has recently faced several challenges that Student Affairs VC Felicia McGinty, and her staff, has been working hard to overcome. We believe that the time is right to articulate a philosophical and pedagogical approach to early education services that takes advantage of the university's expertise in developmental psychology and education in order to better meet the needs of faculty, students, staff, parents, and most importantly the children, from infants to school-aged children, of the UCSC community.

Our vision for EES is based on important findings from ongoing research here at UCSC, and elsewhere, supporting two views of child development, as described in document written by Professors Maureen Callanan and Catherine Cooper, from the Psychology Department, back in 2005.

1. The view that children are “young scientists” (a term originally coined by Maria Montessori) who actively construct their understandings of their physical and social worlds as they engage in everyday activities and conversations with important people in their lives.
2. The view that children's diverse family backgrounds nurture many patterns of informal learning, all of which can be effective and can inform the design of more formal learning settings.

The children as “young scientists” view is based on the empirical studies showing that as children explore and interact with one another, they try to make sense of what they see and do. They develop early theories about why things are the way they are, act the way they do, and how they relate to one another. As their experiences broaden and their thinking develops, even young children's ideas and theories become more plausible and closer to current understandings in science. Children's discussions, their verbal and non-verbal expressions, their scientific and artistic creations, and their reflections on what they do provide critical insight into their developing minds. Most critically, children learn from each other, yet teachers have important roles and use particular strategies to actively support and guide their learning, and indeed their development as “scientific minds.”

The second view of children complements the first by demonstrating how different kinds of communities and family settings shape different ways for children to learn. Early childhood education experts have long recognized the view that young children are active and diverse learners. But public interpretation of these observations and research findings often has led to oversimplified policy where even pre-school children are taught in school-like academic settings and diverse family content is sporadically introduced (e.g., ethnic foods and holidays) to address issues of diversity and intergroup understanding. However, the research of psychology and education faculty at UCSC, and elsewhere, strongly suggests that children act as young scientists in their informal, everyday interactions with peers and caregivers. The best way to support young children's curiosity and developing knowledge is to provide open-ended opportunities for many forms of

informal learning of science topics across a range of cultural contexts. Research clearly shows that these informal experiences foster both community and academic skill development. At the same time, children must learn to interact in a respectful manner with each other, and adult teachers and caregivers. For this reason, we aim to create a diversity curriculum that is proactive, and not just reactive, in dealing with real-life issues of race and gender in the context of different informal leaning situations.

Our vision for EES at UCSC has as its core philosophy the focus on lifelong learning in meaningful interactions. We strongly believe that the best way to foster this view of EES is to explicitly integrate childcare with various ongoing research and teaching that have become a distinguishing mark of excellence in Psychology and Education here at UCSC. One model for the type of organization we favor to integrate academic research and teaching into EES is the “Center for Agroecology and Sustainable Food Systems” (and UCSC Farm and Garden), which as a Center within the Social Science Division enables faculty, students and the community to undertake projects in many academic disciplines that advance sustainable food and agricultural systems serving the needs of future generations. CASFS’s “work includes both theoretical and applied research; academic education and practical training; and community outreach and public service for audiences ranging from local school children to international agencies.”

In a manner similar to the organization and function of CADFS,, we envision EES at UCSC as a Center that not only serves the childcare needs of the campus community, but also provides opportunities for integrating children’s and family’s learning with ongoing scholarly research on these issues being conducted by UCSC faculty, postdoctoral scholars, graduate and undergraduate students here at UCSC.

For instance, many Psychology and Education faculty do research on cognitive, social, and cultural development with emphasize in children of all ages. The Education Department already has two centers, the “Center for Informal Learning and Schools” (CILS) and the “New Teacher Center” (NTC), both funded by extramural grants, whose focus is directly relevant to EES activities. Courses in developmental psychology, such as Psych 10 and Psych 100V have lab components that could easily make use of EES children interacting with others in their everyday childcare environments. Various Field Study students in Psychology have already worked within existing EES centers on campus engaging in different sorts of research on child development. The Education department has several MA courses (e.g., Education and Teaching Credential) that may create lab component making use of EES. Some Education faculty are especially interested in literacy learning through the discussions about the activities students engage in as scientists, and to bring in the idea of using multi-cultural children’s literature as a way to honor family backgrounds and culture. Ph.D students in Education at UCSC have particular research interests in three areas of specialization, Social Context and Policy Studies of Education, Language and Literacy Studies, and Mathematics and Science Education, and there is great hope that there can be greater ties between these students’ work and different leaning and teaching activities taking place within EES.

We also believe that EES at UCSC should explore developing other programs that benefit the broader Santa Cruz community, such as having summer camps, which have been demonstrated at other UC campuses to have significant community appeal, greatly enhancing town-gown relationships when these are opened to children not formally associated with UC, and which also generate additional funds to support EES.

Most generally, this new Center would have the following distinguishing features

- A focus on intergenerational learning in children's and families' cultural contexts
- An emphasis on how all the participants (children, teachers, parents, students, faculty) are mutually recognized as scientists engaged in discovery in cultural contexts.
- A focus on culture and diversity in terms of community and family practices, including attention to issues of class and gender, rather than in terms of content that stereotype cultural groups. Special attention will be given to the development of teamwork among students and teachers that will foster both individual learning and greater respect for peers and caregivers.
- A focus on incorporating science and math as part of these everyday cultural activities, including cooking, gardening, observing nature, dance, art, music, and theater.
- Establishing close links to existing programs on the UCSC campus and community where informal science learning is already a key emphasis, including possible collaborations with the "Center for Informal Learning and Schools" (CILS), "Seymour Marine Discovery Center" (and "Long Marine Lab"), CADFS, "Center for Adaptive Optics," "Lick Observatory," "Shakespeare Santa Cruz," and other emerging initiatives in Science, Math, and Technology on the UCSC campus.

Our proposal for a new vision of EES at UCSC is partly based on somewhat similar programs at other UC campuses. For example, UCLA Child Care has a "Pathways to Science" curriculum that has been developed from basic principles of human development, research into brain development and promising practices in early childhood education, some of which emerged from research by Psychology and Education faculty at UC Los Angeles. At UC Davis, the Department of Human and Community Development operates an Early Childhood Lab serving 70 children that also supports teaching and research activities. Child care at UC San Diego has several sites including one in which undergraduate students take specific courses focusing on teaching methods, day care ethics issues, interpersonal relationships in children, all explored within the context of their working at this center. Many other universities across the nation similarly structure their EES in close relation to teaching and research activities on their campuses.

Based on the success of several other EES programs at universities within California, and elsewhere, we believe there are good development opportunities that should be explored as part of this new vision for EES at UCSC. For instance, the "Packard Foundation" is most interested in supporting research and teaching work with preschool children as part of its "Preschool for California's Children" program. The "First Five Association of

California” also has different programs (e.g., “School Readiness”) that support young children’s physical, emotional, cognitive, and social development, which includes research and teaching activities in childcare centers at schools and universities. Beyond these more formal development opportunities, our vision for EES at UCSC, as noted above, also includes extending the scope of these services to support summer camps, special summer school courses, and having UCSC students engage in structured learning and research activities using EES children as part of their coursework (e.g., observational studies of children done in Psychology 10- “Intro. to Developmental Psychology”), which will generate “lab fees” from UCSC students taking these course. In summary, integrating EES with academics here at UCSC has the potential for important fund raising that would surely benefit EES and the greater UCSC community.

The time is again ripe for UCSC to take this new direction in how it conceives of EES on campus and to utilize existing faculty and student research, teaching, and learning resources to more closely align EES with the academic mission of this university. We believe that adopting this new vision of EES will greater benefit the campus and Santa Cruz community and look forward to feedback from others on how to make this vision a concrete reality.

Committee on Faculty Welfare
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