

University of Wisconsin--La Crosse

A History of the Campus School at the
University of Wisconsin-La Crosse
from 1909 to 1973

by

Troy Richter

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PREFACE

The Campus School. Why would I choose to write my seminar paper on this subject? When I first attended classes in Morris Hall, I felt that the building was different in some way, yet I couldn't put my finger on it. Then a teacher told me that it once was a laboratory school for teacher education. The odd feeling about the building came back to me. I began to realize what was different about Morris Hall. It was the ankle--high bubblers, the small chairs in the library, and yes, even the urinals that didn't seem to be at the proper height. Now, images of small children racing through the hallways filled my mind.

The visions of the children and my interest in education and history lead me to choose the Campus School as my subject. I could learn more about the building, the faculty, and an outdated mode of teacher education. The building that I attended classes in was about to come to life as I pursued my research.

I included several means of research for this paper. I interviewed a former teacher from the Campus School, a former director of the Campus School, and a Chancellor of the university to gain insight and information on my subject. I read various newspaper articles, books, and a Masters thesis about the Campus School. Lastly, I searched through four boxes of Campus School material. Throughout my research, I continued to visualize the children attending classes. My research was interesting, however I did not find any startling information. What I did find was an excellent school and a proud faculty.

I would like to thank the following people who made themselves available for interviews, Richard Rasmussen, Norman Schein, and Kenneth Lindner.

Model schools served an important function within the normal school, since the establishment of the normal school as an institution. Samuel Hall started the first private normal school in America. The school opened in Concord, Vermont in 1823. Hall admitted a few children to his school for demonstration and practice purposes. The first state normal school opened in Lexington, Massachusetts on 3 July 1839. The model school was an important demonstration tool for the normal school. Data from the United States Commissioner of Education reports showed that in 1873 71.4 percent of publically supported normal schools had laboratory schools; in 1883 there were 71 percent, and in 1893, 68.5 percent had a laboratory school.¹

The American Association of Teachers Colleges was established in 1917. The Association placed new emphasis on standards of teacher preparation, and adopted that each teachers college should maintain a training school for purposes of observation, demonstration, and supervised teaching by students. Laboratory experience in the training school became a requirement in teacher education programs. Educators of teachers saw the training school as a valuable experience to bridge the gap between theory and practice.²

The establishment of a normal school in La Crosse was not an easy task. Before the establishment of the school in 1909, there were two previous attempts to secure a normal school in La Crosse. Mayor Alexander McMillan made the first attempt in 1871. The mayor supported a resolution to approve the issuance of bonds to obtain a school site. The City of La Crosse offered to make the donation of twenty-five thousand dollars to the State in order to purchase land for a school. However, nothing came of this attempt.³

Mayor Frank Powell made a second attempt in 1893, when he appointed a special normal school committee made up of local politicians and businessmen.

Powell invited the Board of Regents of Normal Schools to visit La Crosse to pick a site for the school. During this attempt, La Crosse was in a three--way race with Superior and Stevens Point to gain one of the two normal schools for which the legislature had provided. The committee increased its efforts in the summer of 1893. The City Council appropriated thirty thousand dollars to purchase a site and erect a building. This attempt was also unsuccessful, and Superior and Stevens Point received the two normal schools.⁴

State Senator Thomas Morris made a third attempt in 1905, when he introduced a bill to secure a normal school for La Crosse. The legislature passed the bill into law in April 1905. The Board of Regents of Normal Schools appropriated ten thousand dollars for the purchase of a site, and the city council contributed an additional fifteen thousand dollars. A new era for education in La Crosse began.⁵

In 1907, the legislature appropriated two hundred and ten thousand dollars for the building, and added an additional sixty-five thousand dollars two years later for equipment. Construction of the normal school began in spring of 1907. The Normal School opened on 7 September 1909, although it was not completely finished. It stood three stories tall and spanned two hundred square feet. The building contained all classrooms, gymnasias, the training school, faculty and administrative offices, kitchen, lunchroom, heating plant, and library.⁶

An important part of the normal school was the model school. President Cotton described the rooms of the school as being large and splendidly equipped, absolutely clean, sanitary, and inviting. He felt that the school would appeal to parents. The kindergarten through eighth grade students of the model school were able to use the Normal School library, laboratories, and

gymnasium. The aim of the model school was to provide observation and actual practice for student teachers. This practice, represented as closely as possible, the actual problems and conditions that they would face as teachers. The student teachers were under the direction of the Supervisor of Practice and critic teachers. The model school was where theory and practice were joined.⁷

The first Bulletin of the State Normal School, La Crosse, Wisconsin outlined the purposes of the model school:

1. To educate children. Nothing will be tolerated in the model school that interferes with this, the supreme purpose of the school.
2. To serve as an example of a model school.
3. To give an opportunity to demonstrate and to observe model teaching.
4. To furnish a means for studying, testing, and applying educational theories.
5. To afford student teachers who have given evidence of a knowledge of subject matter and of educational theory an opportunity to gain a limited experience in teaching under careful supervision.

The purpose of the model school did not change much over the years. However, during the later years, the school started to stress pre-teaching, and actual student teaching took place in the La Crosse public schools and also in the surrounding communities.⁸

Students from all over La Crosse enrolled in the model school. From the beginning, enrollment was limited. The school had an initial capacity of forty-five kindergarten students and fifteen to twenty students for each of the eight grades. However, on 20 August 1909, school administrators announced that the number of students in the model school kindergarten was being reduced to twenty. The total enrollment for the model school was one hundred and

forty students. The limited number of openings filled rapidly, with all but one class having its maximum by 20 August 1909. The only enrollment requirement of the students was that they must be mentally and physically sound. Children between the ages of four and six entered the kindergarten. The kindergarten was a two--year program, and at age six, the student could enter the first grade. After the first year, the model school enrollment consisted of students who had previously attended the model school, children who had brothers or sisters currently enrolled in the model school, and children who had brothers or sisters attending the Normal School. Each parent paid an enrollment fee of twenty-five cents per week for each student in kindergarten and fifteen cents per week for each student in grades one through eight to send their children to the model school.⁹

By 1927, the enrollment increased to almost two hundred. Part of the increase was due to the addition of a ninth grade. During this period, enrollment continued to be limited to about twenty students per class. With the increased enrollment in the Normal School in the 1920s and early 1930s, President George Snodgrass and Model School Director Emery Leamer started making plans to build a new facility which would be primarily a training school. They submitted plans to the Board of Regents on three different occasions. Finally, in 1931, the board approved the proposal for a new building.¹⁰

The proposed site for the new building was at the corner of Sixteenth and State streets. The original estimated cost of the building was two hundred thousand dollars. Although the Board of Regents approved the plans in 1931, it was not until 1938 that the request for funding was submitted to Washington, along with other Federal Relief Projects. Finally, on 23

September 1938, the Board of Regents received notice that the federal government had approved the project. The federal government would provide forty-five percent of the funds, and the State of Wisconsin would provide the remaining fifty-five percent. The total amount of funding received was three hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars. The Board of Regents met in special session on 25 September 1938 and accepted the grant. The grant specified that construction had to begin by 1 January 1939.¹¹

The planning of the school proceeded rapidly since construction had to begin by 1 January 1939. The architectural firm of Brust and Brust designed the school, and submitted their plans on 10 November 1938. The State received bids and opened them on 22 December 1938. The W.M.C. Construction Company of Winona, Minnesota received the contract, and started work on 30 December 1938.¹²

The Training School was the fourth building on campus. The school was planned specifically for the students. On the ground floor, there was a three hundred and sixty-six seat auditorium, a gymnasium, a dark room, and general purpose rooms. On the first floor, there were classrooms, the kindergarten, the fourth grade rooms, and offices for the director of the school and the director of elementary education. On the second floor, there was the library, the fifth and sixth grade rooms, the junior high rooms, and a music room. The library contained four thousand volumes when the school opened. The building also included a sound system that was connected to every room except the auditorium and gymnasium. This system allowed the director to talk with any teacher or class or to listen to classroom procedures.¹³

The day finally came for the students to move into their new school. On 25 January 1940, the Training School students brought their sleds, wagons, and

bicycles to school to help move their equipment from Old Main to their new school. A reporter for the La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press wrote:

They made a gay procession as they carted their books, papers, sports equipment, and smaller furniture pieces to the new building.... The gaiety of the occasion was further enhanced by the sight of a serious second grader diligently trudging along under a light but bulky package, leaving a trail of water drawing and other school work in his wake.... While the occasion will undoubtedly be unforgettable to the youngsters, it is also a memorable day in the educational history of the city. For La Crosse the occasion marks another important step in the city's educational development. For the college the school provides a modern and complete laboratory for the training of teachers.

During the next few days, National Youth Administration workers moved the heavier pieces. The NYA was a division of the Works Progress Administration that Franklin D. Roosevelt established in 1935 to provide useful work for young people during the Depression. Classes began at the new training school on 30 January 1940.¹⁴

The enrollment of the Campus School continued to be limited. By 1959, there were 225 students attending the Campus School. The admission policy remained the same. Students who had attended the Campus School or had brothers or sisters at the Campus School received first priority. Norman Schein, teacher at the Campus School, remembered parents staying overnight in sleeping bags outside the Campus School in order to enroll their children. Administrators of the Campus School expected the students to remain through the nine grades, and attend summer school classes if asked to do so.¹⁵

The enrollment policy at the Campus School was the focus of some criticism. Some called it an elite school, made up of children whose parents would comprise a Who's Who of La Crosse business, educational, professional, and political figures. Norm Schein explained that the Campus School had a lot

of good students, but that it also had problem students too. Dr. Richard Rasmussen, former Director of the Campus School, stated that no student was ever kicked out of the Campus School.¹⁶

The curriculum of the model school paralleled the curriculum of the public schools. During the first thirty years of the model school, the curriculum included reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, history, geography, hygiene, and grammar. The individual teacher taught all of these courses. The students also spent an hour per week on music, manual arts, physical training, and gardening. The Normal School faculty taught these courses. The emphasis was on quality of student work rather than quantity. The aim was for the students to find pleasure in achievement.¹⁷

The curriculum at the Campus School continued to emphasize reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, and language. Two additions to the curriculum were social studies and science. Also included in the curriculum were art, music, literature, personal and community hygiene, and physical training.¹⁸

The students were able to help with the planning of their classes. Rasmussen explained that the junior high students designed forty percent of the content for their classes. The students learned responsibility. A variety of programs at the Campus School helped to expand student learning. A science symposium was held every year for grades two through nine. The students would present their projects to fellow students and answer questions dealing with the project which they presented. The students in the sixth, seventh, and eighth grades spent a week either at Camp Decorah, located on the Black River near Galesville or at Clam Lake, located in the Chequamegon National Forest in Wisconsin to learn about conservation and outdoor education. Those were some of the best weeks according to Schein. The

teachers each presented a topic dealing with environmental education or conservation at the camp. Another project that the students took great interest in was the spaceship that they built. It stayed on the roof of the Campus School for three or four years. The students connected communications into the spaceship, so they could be connected to every room in the school. One night, Schein stayed in his room overnight and simulated a flight to the moon for two students. His office was Mission Control. The students wrote and performed plays and operettas.19

The faculty began a three--day drug program in 1970. Regular classes shut down once a year, each teacher related their content area to drugs. Some examples included, drugs and music, drugs and literature, and drugs and math. All the subjects related the effects of drugs on culture. Rasmussen stated that everyone supported each other's program. All of these experiences had a positive effect on the students. Schein commented that you never saw such learning take place, and it was enjoyable. The curriculum offered a wide variety for the students.20

The students were able to advance as far as they could go. Some Campus School students enrolled in high school courses and some even enrolled in college classes. Students had the opportunity to attend a local high school if they were at that level. The administrators encouraged the students to strive for achievement, and did not hold the student back.21

A rural education department operated between 1948 and 1958 on the main floor at the Campus School. Alice Drake was the director of rural education. Except for the location, every part of the program was independent of the Campus School. The one--room school was an a**tempt to create, as much as possible, a rural school. Prior to this time, the Town of Shelby Boulevard

School, located at the five hundred block south on Losey Boulevard, was the demonstration school for the rural department. The rural school had an enrollment of between twenty-five and thirty students, which included grades one through six. The students were divided into three groups, primary, middle, and advanced. The primary group consisted of first, second, and lower third grade; the middle group consisted of upper third, fourth, and lower fifth grade; and the upper group consisted of upper fifth and sixth grade. The level at which the student worked depended on the ability of the student. One teacher was responsible for the instruction of all the students. The purpose of the school was to demonstrate that it was not necessary to teach twenty-eight or more classes per day. The rural room closed in 1958, and the Campus School phased out the department of rural education.²²

Beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, there was a move to close the campus schools throughout the State University system. The junior high of the Campus School faced elimination first. The Coordinating Council of Higher Education recommended that all junior high grades be closed by June 1971. The CCHE began in 1956 to study the problems of higher education, so that the State could continue to provide quality higher education in a reasonable economic matter. Both the university and the community in La Crosse opposed this decision. Bob Gowlland argued that the Campus School was needed for the proper preparation of teachers. The school was an integral part of the third year program in teacher education. It was where the students got their first exposure to actual classroom teaching. Dr. Bernard Young emphasized that it was a laboratory setting to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Everyone did not agree on the importance of the Campus School. Eugene McPhee felt that a better job of training could be done in the public schools. This

would give them experience in the environment which they would be teaching. He also argued that the public schools had more offerings than the Campus School. Kenneth Lindner stated that it was his decision to close the school. He felt that the resources could be spent better in other ways. The Parent--Teacher Association of the Campus School circulated petitions to ask that the school remain open. The petitions were given to parents, faculty, and students at the university. The Parent--Teacher Association presented the petitions to Samuel Gates on 22 October 1969. Ninety-four families, four hundred and one students, and fifty-six faculty members signed the petition. Despite the opposition, the Coordinating Council of Higher Education maintained its position.²³

The Coordinating Council of Higher Education stated that in order for the school to remain open, the faculty must show that they are doing significant research or have unique functions. Due to the opposition, the CCHE sent an educational consultant to visit the Campus School in La Crosse. After the visit, the consultant wrote in his report that the school was not exemplary because it lacked programs of home economics and industrial arts. He also wrote that the school did not have a professional guidance program. Schein commented that every teacher on staff was an expert in guidance. In response to the flaw of research, Rasmussen stated that the faculty was not hired to do research, nor was the school funded to do research. The CCHE went ahead with its action to close the school.²⁴

Since the closing of the school was inevitable, the task for the Campus School was to come up with a logical plan for the welfare of both the students and the faculty. A three--year phasing out of the Campus School began. Area schools received the former students of the Campus School. The faculty of the

Campus School also relocated. Some faculty members joined the College of Education, some went to other departments at the university, some took jobs elsewhere, and two retired. The Campus School held its last classes on 17 May 1973.25

After the closing of the Campus School, Chancellor Kenneth Lindner recommended that the regents rename the building. The regents renamed the building Thomas Morris Hall in honor of the first regent from La Crosse. The building later housed the elementary and secondary education offices. The building also contained several resource centers including, the English Education Resource Center, the Micro--Teaching Laboratory, and the Social Studies Resource Center.26

After the closing of the Campus School, the students in the College of Education began to use the area public schools for their clinical experiences. In this respect, the closing of the Campus School had a beneficial impact on teachers, and better relations were established between the university and the public schools. The closing of the campus schools in Wisconsin marked the end of the use of laboratory schools for teacher education. Future teachers would be trained in the public schools. The Campus School would no longer be an integral part of teacher education at the University of Wisconsin--La Crosse.27

APPENDIX

EXPLANATION OF TERMS

Model School

School used to provide practice and supervised observation for teacher training students. Model school is also referred to as training school, practice school, laboratory school, demonstration school, and campus school.

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse

University of Wisconsin-La Crosse is located in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The name of the institution has been changed several times. From 1909 to 1927, it was named La Crosse Normal School. From 1927 to 1951, it was named La Crosse State Teachers College. From 1951 to 1964, it was named Wisconsin State College at La Crosse. From 1964 to 1971, it was named Wisconsin State University at La Crosse. From 1971 to present, it has been named University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Edward Williams, The Actual and Potential Use of Laboratory Schools (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1942), 2-12.
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 George R. Gilkey, The First Seventy Years: A History of the University of Wisconsin La Crosse 1909-1979 (The University of Wisconsin-La Crosse Foundation, Inc., 1981), 9-10; Mary Seielstad, "A Chronological History of the Development of the Campus School Wisconsin State University at La Crosse 1871-1970." Masters Thesis, Wisconsin State University at La Crosse, 1970.
- 4 Gilkey, 10-11; Seielstad, 8.
- 5 Gilkey, 12; Seielstad, 9.
- 6 Gilkey, 13-15; Seielstad, 9-10.
- 7 La Crosse Tribune, 3 August 1909, 1; Seielstad, 11; Announcement I, State Normal School-La Crosse (15 June 1909); Announcement II, State Normal School-La Crosse (15 July 1909).
- 8 Bulletin of the State Normal School, La Crosse, Wisconsin, Volume 1, Number 1. (La Crosse, Wisconsin: Inland Publishing Company, June 1910), 37; Gilkey, 114.
- 9 La Crosse Tribune, 3 August 1909, 1; La Crosse Tribune, 20 August 1909, 9; Bulletin of the State Normal School, La Crosse, Wisconsin, Volume II, Number 1. (La Crosse, Wisconsin: Inland Publishing Company, June 1911), 7; Seielstad, 14-15.
- 10 La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press, 20 November 1927, 7; La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press, 1 January 1931, 15.
- 11 Ibid.; Seielstad, 29-30; Gilkey, 112.
- 12 Seielstad, 30.
- 13 La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press, 1 January 1941, 12.
- 14 La Crosse Tribune and Leader-Press, 26 January 1940, 2; Seielstad, 36.
- 15 Gilkey, 111; Richard Rasmussen and Norm Schein, interview by author, 12 April 1988, La Crosse, tape recording; PTA Handbook 1966-67 (Campus School collection, ARC, UWL).

- 16 La Crosse Tribune, "Campus School's End Near" (Campus School collection, ARC, UWL); Richard Rasmussen and Norm Schein interview.
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- 18 Seielstad, 42.
- 19 Richard Rasmussen and Norm Schein interview.
- 20 Richard Rasmussen and Norm Schein interview; Seielstad, 42; Drug Program (Campus School collection, ARC UWL).
- 21 Richard Rasmussen and Norm Schein interview.
- 22 Seielstad, 45-47; Gilkey, 117.
- 23 La Crosse Tribune, "Closing Campus Junior High In June is Recommended", (Campus School collection, ARC, UWL); Minutes of CCE, January 1956 to August 1957, 1-2, (ARC, UWL); La Crosse Tribune, 30 June 1970, 1-2; Eugene McPhee, "A Conversation With Eugene McPhee", interview by Howard Frederick, 1973:121; Kenneth Lindner, interview by author, 5 May 1988, La Crosse; Parent--Teacher Association Minutes 1969 (Campus School collection, ARC, UWL).
- 24 La Crosse Tribune, 30 June 1970, 1-2; Richard Rasmussen and Norm Schein interview; Gilkey, 120.
- 25 Richard Rasmussen and Norm Schein interview; Faculty Action (Campus School collection, ARC, UWL).
- 26 Gilkey, 112.
- 27 Richard Rasmussen and Norm Schein interview.

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