

ECE Committee Field Trip to Portland's Concordia University
and Faubion school 6 weeks through 8th grade
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Introduction

Once again, the committee found a true gem. This was the most impressive public school I have ever seen, and I first worked in a school in 1968, and have seen schools on every continent except Africa and Antarctica.

I will put down what I remember of the origin story, but I am sure there is a full and correct version available from Concordia. Concordia is Missouri Synod Lutheran, located in one of the lowest income areas of gentrified Portland, in the NE area near the airport. I believe they have about 5,200 enrolled, but more than half are online students. Our van drivers in both directions were administrators; this is not a school with as much wealth as SU. Around 8 (?) years ago, the Faubion elementary school, serving the low income and diverse neighborhood (in a very gerrymandered-looking long strip along the river) was failing, with the worst test scores and a dilapidated building. The 8 acre campus was adjacent to Concordia, which was looking to purchase the parcel. There were discussions at Concordia about approaching the district if the school closed. Then someone went over and met with the principal and asked what Concordia might do to help the school. This led to arts programs, and then to food backpacks. More and more of the students' required service hours were coming from work at Faubion. More and more students, faculty, and staff became involved. Meetings began to coordinate this, and to include the families served at the school.

In the beginning, there were three founding partners of what is now called "3 to PhD", (PhD stands for pursuing highest dream). These were the school and district, the families, and Concordia. The I Have a Dream Foundation joined next, but from the discussions, I sensed that their contributions turned out to be smaller than hoped. Next, Trillium joined. This is, as I understand it, a group that does a lot with counseling and behavioral issues in schools and clinics. They decided to run the counseling center in the school, but how this was funded and the extent to which Trillium donated services was not clear to me. Two more very important partners were the latest to join. These were Kaiser Permanente, which runs the medical and dental clinic, and the former CEO of Pacific brand soups, Chuck Eggert. The soup company was sold for hundreds of millions and Mr. Eggert's new focus is on providing food stores in food deserts. The Faubion catchment area is a food desert, and one of the new stores is in the school. I think he also supports the food backpacks.

The aforementioned needs assessments and planning meetings resulted in what I would consider a miracle: an agreement between a faith-based university and the Portland schools, and a passed levy for 32 million dollars to rebuild the school. Concordia, working through its foundation, is adding its share through 15.5-million-dollar campaign. This was needed because all of the College of Education rooms—offices, seminar space, observation rooms (with no one-way glass), and classrooms is now in Faubion school. The design work that went into the school was brilliant, and the resulting school—162 steps from Concordia—is truly amazing.

Impressions

Concordia, 3 to PhD.

As I said, Concordia is less affluent than SU. Towards the end of the long day, we began to talk in more detail about the money and people in 3 to PhD and the SUYI. Their 3 to PhD group has 6 FT people, and basically must be surviving on a lot of extra work from faculty and staff. There was a stunned silence when Rachel mentioned that, including grad assistants, the SUYI has 23 people.

One clear impression was the quality of the people involved. Everyone we met was impressive, in their educational and experience background, but especially in their very articulate and passionate support of the school and the joint work. This goes double for the principal, Jen McCalley.

Faubion school

I was impressed by South Shore Pre-8 school for a number of reasons, but one reason was adding the early childhood component. Faubion starts with an infant room—just one infant room with just nine babies, starting at age six weeks. Then there is one toddler room, with another nine children. Think about what good care these little ones are getting. Then think about parents being able to work, confident that their babies are being well cared for. I hope the school encourages other parents to observe, to leverage the room as part of their parent education offerings. I think there were five preschool classrooms, and they all looked to be high quality.

At South Shore (in a very short observation on one day only) I saw good ratios of adults, a warm and attractive environment, but every single child was in a group around an adult. At Faubion, I saw at least some children in every classroom working with materials on their own, as you would see in a Montessori school, or as the ECE committee group saw at the Vietnamese Community School. The transition from working in a small group with a teacher (being able to get instant help, questions answered, and so on) to working alone for long periods of time is a big part of being ready to succeed in an elementary classroom. There was even a “Native American Montessori” classroom! Apparently this program has been bouncing around the district for some time, and now they are very happy to have a permanent home at Faubion.

Principal Imel at Baily Gatzert was very clear in his praise for the preschool classroom in the school. In addition to all the well documented effects of a good preschool, there was the familiarity with the building, the people in the school, the district, and so on. He felt made a very noticeable boost to the children’s success in the elementary grades. I think that Faubion school takes this to a new level—not just a single preschool classroom, and starting with infants. I don’t remember if Mr. Imel mentioned the other reason for starting with preschool (and going through 8th grade): having such a large age range reduces the number of transitions that children and families have to make.

The building itself is amazing. Color-coding distinguishes space that is primarily for students and teachers from Concordia (blue), Faubion school (red), or common (purple). There is an immense amount of glass, with sweeping views of the outside, but also a clear view into every classroom as one walks by. There are the same wonderful common spaces at the heart of each pod of five or so classrooms. At this school, it is not just students, and school adults (parent, teachers, aides, visitors, administrators, etc.) but also Concordia students, student teachers, faculty, administrators, and so on that meet in these areas. We were told that when the

K-12 children were having lunch in the cafeteria, they could see Concordia students taking a class in a classroom that overlooked the cafeteria. The children were so concerned that the young adults were having to work when it was lunchtime, that they had to be reassured that they did get to eat later.

One theme that unifies a number of the unique things we saw on this trip, from both the Concordia side and the school side was a deep and thoughtful respect for all parties. A number of the ways in parents are treated shows that the school respects them and doesn't think they need to be fixed. Students taking beginning education classes are walking in school corridors and into rooms where real teaching with real problems is going on. Other students at other universities might not get to see this until their student teaching, at the very end of the program. But the setup at Faubion respects these college students, teaches them to dress and act professionally, and has very high expectations for them.

One of the ways in which the very strong team of 3 to PhD has made this school what it is, is the focus on school culture. Principal McCalley is leading here, with help from her staff and Concordia College of Education and 3 to PhD staff. An example is that all Faubion personnel are expected to know the name of each of the 730 Faubion students. A simple example is a focus on the whole child. Another example is the idea of "No wrong door": the example given was that a student is buying groceries in the school store (see below) and the adult in the store, seeing what the child is buying, suggests adding celery. The child says, "No, I don't like celery, it hurts my teeth when I eat it," The adult closes the store, invites the child to come with her, and takes the child across the hallway (!) to the dental clinic, and introduces them to the person there. Referrals to community agencies are the norm, but there may be many barriers between a family those community resources. Another example of the school culture: there is a large, well-furnished lobby which is for the parents to use. If the parents ask for a speaker or some other program, the school will try to provide it, but it is never scheduled by the school for them. Parents were meeting in the evenings the week we were there to decide on what they might want in terms of parent education.

Here are more examples. The staff lounge is for staff and teachers from both the University and Faubion. This is such a good example of a small change that will pay huge dividends. For one thing, it shows respect for the pre-8 teachers. Secondly, it says that each group can learn things from the other. Another aspect of this is how both student teachers from Concordia and beginning teachers in the school can meet informally with a college instructor for ideas, support, and so on. The Dean of the College of Education provides copies of the textbooks being used in Education classes to Faubion teachers and counseling staff. *Conscious Discipline* is one that has proved popular with Faubion staff and has influenced practice. The Concordia Education faculty offices are organized in a particular way throughout the school: there are two or three offices clustered around a small seminar room. A PE teacher noticed that some children were being dropped off very early, and began coming early and organizing PE activities. Home visits happen from kindergarten through 2nd or 3rd grade. The principal spent a good bit of time describing how this was possible in a unionized public school!

The school has a grocery store. It's one of the ones designed by Mr. Eggert's group to serve communities in food deserts. There are diapers and baby wipes, but no Doritos. On Fridays, older students are shopping there for food for the weekend or the week. The parents are adding recipes to a web page to share with the whole school community. This began during the old building days, and at one point was a wooden cart or wagon, which came to the school in the afternoons, and stayed until working parents could come. The school has a large number of pre-

diabetic children, so nutrition is crucially important. Children in the intermediate grades can win the privilege to work in the store for an hour. This last idea, especially, is so Montessori! Children are so drawn to real things, real work.

There are also food backpacks (Food Club) weekly, for families that need them. There are currently ~150 backpacks going out each week. This is an example of a great idea that can be scaled up, but will need more infrastructure as it does. It will need more food, more prep space, more space to sort and fill backpacks, transport them, and so on.

There is a shop. Imagine how contrarian this is. Shop classes have been being eliminated from middle schools and high schools for decades. We seem to have this idea that we cannot have high academic standards in math, science, and English, those seemingly all important test scores, and still teach children how to do things with their hands. We are humans. We have evolved to do things with our hands. We get strong satisfaction with success with things done with our hands—making an old car run again, creating a beautiful quilt, tying a perfect fishing fly, and so on. The shop has high tech things—a laser woodburner (!), 3-D printers, and so on, and old fashioned hand tools as well. There were popsicle stick catapults out on the table, and the whiteboard noted that competitions would be on distance, weight of the object throw, and so on.

The orientation of the counseling services provided, and for the special education programs at Faubion is on trauma informed care. This is a nice confirmation for the ECE committee since we have been seeing this as one of the best practices that we want to include in our report. There is a summer food program at the school, that is growing and will need increasing infrastructure as it grows. The Concordia people referenced the Children's Institute in Los Angeles as an important resource for the 3to PhD program. Other resources mentioned include Strive (Cincinnati), All Hands Raised (Portland), the Earl Boyes school in Portland, and Ties That Bind, on raising nonbiological children.