

## Fostering Individuality, Valuing Uniformity— Learning from the Past to Engage in Tomorrow

**Many of us remember** particular points at which our lives dramatically changed. For me, the first took place on the Sunday afternoon of December 7, 1941. I was an undergraduate at Iowa State College (later, ISU), and I sat in the student union enjoying a milkshake when I heard someone announce the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. The United States was at war the next day.

When I received my degree in March 1943, I joined the new United States Marine Corps Women's Reserve. With a degree in institution management, College of Home Economics, I was soon made a mess sergeant. Although there were positive aspects to this disciplined life, we were expected to

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conform to orders and procedures handed down from above. I found ways to express my individuality; I used some of the food supplies to create what may have been the first lunchtime salad bar.

When women left the base, we were required to wear a girdle and male guards patted our bottoms to make sure we conformed (I usually had a red taffeta petticoat under the forest green uniform). Growing up, I never had experienced an authoritarian system, and I soon determined that for the rest of my life I would work to help people think through their problems rather than simply applying established practices.

I grew up as an Illinois farm girl, born in 1922. Both my mother and my grandmother had been teachers trained in Froebelian progressive education methods, and both knew the value of building on children's interests. At about age 9, I became interested in butterflies and made my own museum, including rocks, butterflies, and insects I collected and labeled. My mother encouraged this kind of learning, following my lead toward increased levels of reading. I was in charge of my learning for those early years.

The teacher in my one-room schoolhouse, Mrs. Spencer, agreed with that form of self-directed learning and let me choose the books I wanted to read. She encouraged me to submit my review of *The Bobbsey Twins* to the local newspaper. It was my first publication in print. More than 80 years later, I am still writing . . . and being published.

Dorothy W. Hewes

**How did your childhood experiences reflect individuality, as emphasized by Friedrich Froebel in the nineteenth century and American progressive education in the early twentieth century?**

My mother and grandmother believed in individuality, that each child was different. I was the oldest of six, and each of us was very different. I learned to read before age 4. The others learned to read in school. But no one said that one way was better than the other. Our family fostered our learning by simply encouraging the things in which we were interested.

*I love how Dorothy drew on her professional background and used her food knowledge and thinking to start a salad bar. Within the boundaries of her job, she thought creatively and perked up a mundane routine.*

*We tend to want those who work for us to do things the way we want. The healthier process is to recognize and permit each person to contribute through his or her own individuality.*

—Becky Mazurek, 20-year director,  
Hays Hills Baptist Church  
preschool program, Buda, Texas

Based on my experiences with my mother and grandmother and Mrs. Spencer, a student of the progressive educator John Dewey, I assumed I would be a teacher. At Iowa State I was interested in preschool education but was told there were few jobs. That changed significantly with the proliferation of employer-sponsored and federally funded child care during World War II. In 1945 I was eligible for funds to go to college through the GI Bill, and I studied child development at the University of California at Berkeley. While taking an administration course, I went on a field trip to San Francisco to the 1947 Annual Conference of the then National Association for Nursery Education (NANE)—eventually to become NAEYC. I especially remember hearing two prominent speakers: Erik Erikson, the psychotherapist, and Ruth Benedict, the anthropologist.

**What was there about the NANE (NAEYC) conference that captured your interest?**

Most of all, I felt the togetherness of those attending. Since that 1947 NANE conference, I have been involved at every level of NAEYC, including serving as California AEYC legislative chair. One Friday afternoon in 1982, I had a call from the mother of a child who had attended my preschool. This now grown-

up preschooler, a secretary in Washington, D.C., had just typed a speech for President Reagan that contained his cost-cutting plan to close most of the federally funded preschool programs.

I phoned my NAEYC contacts around the country to alert them. Their outpouring of concern and protest went beyond letter writing and phone calls. The funding cuts were never carried out. It convinced me that NAEYC members really can make a difference!



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Until the 1960s, almost anyone could become a director of a preschool child care center. Concerned leaders at a meeting of the California AEYC discussed establishing requirements that included courses in administration. There were no published texts for administrators.

**Is this concern what prompted you and Barbara Hartman to write a workbook that combined management theories and recommended practices?**

Yes, and we also decided it should include a brief history of early childhood education. However, I could find nothing published since the early 1900s.

In my search for background information, it was clear that contemporary preschools are based on the principles and practices of kindergarten, pioneered by Froebel in Germany in the 1830s. That knowledge became the introduction to the first edition of *Early Childhood Education: A Workbook for Administrators* in 1972.



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## Managerial Qualifications for an Early Childhood Program Administrator

- **A real desire to manage**  
—not just eagerness to be paid more or to gain prestige, but an awareness of the satisfactions gained by furthering personal beliefs and value systems and seeing a job well done.
- **A willingness to take responsibility**  
—whether things turn out right or not, without watching the clock or the calendar too closely or worrying about being overworked.
- **An ability to analyze what is important**  
—to concentrate efforts on goals and objectives without being bogged down in “administrivia” or leaping from crisis to crisis pursued by a pack of problems.
- **An ability to use the time and talents of others**  
—including not only paid staff but also members of the community and the children themselves.
- **Proficiencies in the competencies necessary**  
—for working with children and families so that they can develop to their fullest potential and also to enable sympathetic understanding of the work done by staff and volunteers.
- **Recognition that every manager’s style is unique**  
—but [she] arrives on the job with self-awareness and self-confidence that allow openness to change and further learning.

Reprinted from the introduction, by Dorothy W. Hewes, editor, *Administration: Making Programs Work for Children and Families* (Washington, DC: NAEYC, 1979), 2.

Today’s early childhood programs are based on many management principles and education theories, but Froebel wrote in the 1840s that a school requires self-government, that what one tries to represent or to do is what one understands. Froebel’s approach was built on working together with his teachers and students to create both a school and an educated community.

Even more important, we’ve learned that scientific management advocates that school authority should flow in clear unbroken lines, from top to bottom. Kindergarten advocates like William Hailmann promoted self-activity. By the 1920s, Hailmann was supporting Patty Smith Hill, the laboratory school director at Teachers College, Columbia University (and founding leader of NANE/NAEYC), as she requested that her staff try their own ideas and let her know how they worked out.

Since that time, an active dialogue continues between those who believe in learning through self-activity and those who believe in learning through memorizing information that education experts consider important. I now believe educators should combine the two systems of practice—appropriate discipline, similar to what I experienced in the Marine Corps, and the

### Did your fascination with Froebel lead you to explore other educational thinkers?

Yes, I became especially interested in the Swiss-German immigrant and educator William Hailmann (1836–1920). I wrote my dissertation about his educational theories and published a book about him, *W.N. Hailmann: Defender of Froebel*.

Through his understanding of Froebel’s theories, Hailmann brought a fresh approach to Froebelian beliefs about early childhood. He added his own research findings and cited numerous research studies of the time.

self-directed learning all persons should determine for themselves.

The strength of a top-down approach is uniformity, using tried-and-true methods rather than individual ideas. Today, I think educators need a combination—a clear line of authority but with a demarcation of what can be done within that. Only a strong balance between these two will achieve true educational progress.

### Books by Dorothy W. Hewes

*Administration: Making Programs Work for Children and Families* (editor). Washington, DC: NAEYC, 1979.

*An Administrator’s Guidebook to Early Care and Education Programs*, with Jane M. Leatherman. Boston: Pearson, 2004.

*Early Childhood Education: A Workbook for Administrators*, 4th ed., with Barbara Hartman. Saratoga, CA: R & E Publishers, 1988.

*“It’s the Camaraderie:” A History of Parent Cooperative Preschools*. Davis, CA: University of California Press, 1998.

*W.N. Hailmann: Defender of Froebel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Froebel Foundation, 2001.



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