

## A Clear Vision for Early Childhood: NMAEYC’s Beginnings in the Late 60’s and 70’s by Nancy Thomas

**Founder: Catherine Loughlin**

**First President: Dorris Matthews Johnson**

The original “decade of the child” in New Mexico might be marked by the arrival of Catherine Loughlin at UNM in 1965. Harold Drummond, Chair of the Department of Education at UNM, hired her to put together the pieces that would culminate in the first Head Start programs in New Mexico, utilizing the Johnson administration’s War on Poverty funding. The work at UNM functioned alongside similar efforts by John-Julia McMann at NMSU.



*Catherine Loughlin*

before “DAP” became the watchword of the profession and ongoing research affirmed their work. Catherine’s own signature work with the environment (*The Learning Environment: An Instructional Strategy*, with Joseph Suina) profoundly affected how classrooms functioned.



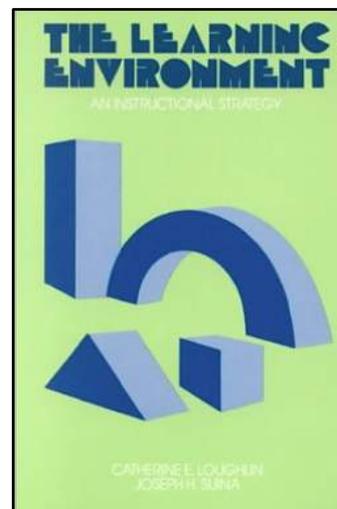
*Mary Ann Binford*

Upon her arrival in New Mexico, Catherine and seven teacher-educators, including Dorris Matthews Johnson, Lenore Wolfe, and Mary Ann Binford were given 48 hours to produce the teacher training that would launch Head Start in the state. Both Dorris and Lenore were to be future presidents of NMAEYC. Mary Ann also launched state-funded kindergarten in 1969. In June of 1965, this stalwart group trained over 150 Head Start teachers.

Early on, Catherine’s vision for early childhood work in New Mexico led her to seek an organization to support and encourage the work of teachers and to define quality. As she and Dorris Matthews Johnson traveled about the state visiting the fledgling Head Start programs, it became clear that a new understanding of learning experiences

appropriate for the development of young children was required. Also, Dorris Matthews Johnson’s background in Arkansas gave her a keen appreciation for the need for leadership in the local early childhood

Catherine was captivated by New Mexico and made a smooth transition from Rutgers. Her position at UNM became her beloved life’s work. Beliefs about how young children’s minds grow and develop through “playful modes of knowing” emerged into practice under the leadership and guidance of this early team of iconic childhood figures. These pioneers framed developmentally appropriate practice in New Mexico years



community—public, private, rural, urban.

Catherine and Dorris attended a national early childhood conference in Washington, DC. Mid-conference they agreed that this particular organization was not a good match as a professional organization for what was happening in New Mexico. They walked to the NAEYC Headquarters in DC and conveyed the urgency for the need for assistance. They received a warm and supportive response to their requests for help. Upon returning to Albuquerque, they wrote a demanding letter asking whether NAEYC could help them. The answer was, “Yes.” They asked, “Where do we sign up?”

“Catherine’s Group,” as they were called by NAEYC, recruited colleagues from Head Start, preschool, childcare, kindergartens, and primary teachers. The group organized in 1966 with Dorris as president, although there were not enough members to be an affiliate for two more years. NMAEYC was formally affiliated with NAEYC in October 1968. Catherine notes that actual affiliation was delayed because of the requirement that there be 10 paying members and an organized board. In the official letter of affiliation sent to Catherine in 1968, Milton Akers, executive director of NAEYC writes, “. . . it seems to me that your group has done quite a bit of getting along before . . . the official nod of approval.” He was extremely supportive and the organization provided books, journals, leaflets and other materials. But they also sent speakers such as James Hymes and Nancy Rambush. They were generous with time and friendship and visited frequently to assist with leadership training and coaching.

At the beginning, NMAEYC held conferences around the state: Las Cruces (1968); Albuquerque (1969); Gallup (1970); Roswell (1971); Santa Fe (1972) Albuquerque (1973) Gallup (1974) and Las Vegas (1975). After this, the annual conferences were housed in Albuquerque.

Early minutes of the NMAEYC board meetings record names of early childhood educators from throughout the state who played an active role in the organization and its work. Among them are:

*Catherine Loughlin, Dorris Matthews Johnson, John-Julia McMann, Phyllis Nye, Lenore Wolfe, Florence Schroeder, Jane Cunningham, Marge Hiltner, Penny Curfman, Madge Youngblood, Catherine Martell, Wayne Winterton, Sandra Gordon, Dorothy Wilson, Mary Ann Binford, Renee Coffelt, Roberta Kraus, Maureen McMillan, Barnell King, Claesia Montoya, Antonio Gonzales, Sara Romer, Jeanne Knight, Drake Moreno, Lucy Laughlin, Keith Auger, Marie Hughes, Jeri Winter, Dolores Cano, Coreta Carnes, Theodosia Smith, Peggy Lazarus, Jeri Winter, Lucille Echohawk, Berta Swain, Penny Murphy, Wendy Snelling, Joan Hatcher, Katherine Lowney, J. Carnes, Kathryn Holmes, Betty Mutch, Cheryl Dushane.*



*Phyllis Nye (left) and Polly Turner (right)*

Catherine Loughlin notes that Dorris Matthews Johnson led from within the group, encouraging members to listen to other viewpoints, state their own, and achieve consensus. Dorris and Catherine set the course for a 50-year history of presidents (see NMAEYC 2016 Conference Program) and boards passionate about young children. Minutes from Board meetings in the early 1970’s demonstrate the kinds of discussions,

activities and actions occurring. Many of these are still relevant.

- Phyllis Nye, child care specialist at Department of Human Services (later CYFD) raised concerns about revised child care regulations and the controversy over ratios and minimal safety standards; reported reimbursement raises from \$52 to \$92 a month; and conveyed that out of 552 centers and private homes providing day care and preschool, 425 were not complying with minimum health and safety
- Organizational features addressed: chapter work in Las Vegas, Farmington, Las Cruces, Gallup, Northern Mountain (Los Alamos); Week of the Young Child; attendance at the national conference in Seattle by Catherine Loughlin, Darline Wilson, and individuals from Acoma; non-profit status for bulk mailing; availability of books and pamphlets on early childhood from NAEYC; the “Let Them Be Themselves” theme of Las Vegas, NM, conference with \$5 cost for non-members and no cost for members; a questionnaire to membership asking for help with the organization
- Discussions recorded: the critical nature of art, music, and both large and small motor activities in programs; pay scales, teacher aide positions as part of state-funded kindergartens; effects on poor children, learning disabilities, birth defects and fears about under-immunization and shaken baby; a change in age designation to birth to 8 with continuity of experiences;
- Public policy activity cited: mini-workshops around the state with Lt. Gov. Roberto Mondragon; a position paper on state supported kindergartens; packets prepared for legislature following advocacy and public policy training by Frank Haberkorn from NAEYC; action to familiarize the State Department of

Education about the organization; a list of legislators for advocacy purposes

- Quotes: Terrence H. Bell, US Commissioner of Education, “The greatest thing parents can do is talk to their kids.” Frank Steiner, State Department of Education, calling for evaluation of programs on bases other than “narrowly conceived cognitive tasks.”

As state funded kindergarten emerged, NMAEYC served as the professional organization for the educators who pioneered these efforts. Four Model Cities kindergartens, funded by Title I, were established in Albuquerque in 1969 and expanded to 7. In 1973 the legislature mandated that all public schools provide half-day kindergartens by 1977. By the late 70’s the Albuquerque Kindergarten and Nursery School Association, a loose knit collaborative of private programs for training and networking, combined with NMAEYC.

#### **Developmentally Appropriate Practice: The Legacy from New Mexico’s Pioneers**

The pre-1980’s pioneers in the field of early childhood in New Mexico imbedded what we now know as Developmentally Appropriate Practice into all areas of their engagement with young children. They understood the minds of young children; designed and implemented appropriate curriculum; mentored teachers; and immersed themselves in the lives of children. Their approaches, verified by ongoing research across the decades, are a gift to all early childhood practitioners in the state who have followed in their footsteps.

CATHERINE LOUGHLIN, NMAEYC’s founder (SEE ABOVE), held that the authentic teacher operates in a rich, valued environment where children deal with feelings, concepts, and thinking processes. Her cycle of teacher activity in her early childhood classes at UNM espoused:

preparation of the physical environment, precise observation, brief assessment and analysis, situational response and in-depth response (not unlike *New Mexico Early Learning Guidelines*).

Her significant contributions to the functions of early childhood classroom environments are not incongruent with Reggio inspired practice which touts the environment as a third teacher.

MARIE HUGHES' Tucson Preschool Project was implemented in Albuquerque beginning in 1971 at the TTT Project at Old Town and was practiced at Manzanita lab school at UNM. It centered on the concept of "professional response" which was comprised of specific communicative behaviors utilized in engaging children: sensory awareness, labeling, recalling, comparing, projecting, classifying/categorizing, predicting, seeing a problem, reality testing, validating, imaging, wondering, variety of sentence patterns, mediating. These approaches resonate with the current call for teachers to be reflective and intentional, to scaffold, and to be "protagonists." Her profound influence on early childhood in the state led to the establishment of NMAEYC's Marie Hughes Lecture Series, which continued into the 1990's.

MARY ANN BINFORD was a leader in the first Title I kindergartens (1969) and "birthed" public kindergarten as the Albuquerque Public Schools Early Childhood Coordinator (1973 until her death in 1983). Her inspiring and passionate sense of mission was the impetus for *The Albuquerque Public Schools Early Childhood Education*



*Catherine Loughlin (left) and Sue Bredekamp (right)*

*Curriculum Guide* (the Blue Bible). It still defines what we term Developmentally Appropriate Practice. She was influenced by: Elizabeth Jones (Pacific Oaks), champion of emergent curriculum; Marie Hughes' Tucson Preschool Project (which she translated into practice as a demonstration teacher at UNM's Manzanita Center); and Catherine Loughlin's learning

environment strategies which shaped the way early childhood classrooms looked and functioned. The curriculum guide resulted from collaboration among teachers, administrators, New Mexico's higher education personnel, and national early childhood leaders. Early on her commitment to addressing the unique needs of diverse learners spanned the divide between regular and special education. She and Jolene Maes



*Marie Hughes*

developed a pilot Special Education Early Development (SEED) program as a model for integrating and mainstreaming young special needs children alongside typically developing kindergarten peers.

MARY ANN'S COLLEAGUES—JOLENE MAES, JORJA ARMIJO BRASHER, JON KNUDSEN, HUGH PRATHER, BRENDA DABNEY, BOB EVANS, PATRICIA

SALISBURY, DORELLA PEREA , KATHY DUDDY, BOBBIE BAILEY, are a few of those who followed Mary Ann’s “beacon of light” into classrooms. Mary Ann’s profound effect on this generation of teachers was recognized at the NMAEYC conference in March 2014, thirty years after her death. (See *Remembering Mary Ann* on the NMAEYC website.) They spoke of classrooms where theory became practice in kindergartens and other early childhood settings. She inspired a spirit of hope and pride and nudged them to explore the lives of children and to learn as much as they could about them. They were challenged to build experiences that are culturally important to children. Nationally known researchers and theorists came to New Mexico to train and affirm their work. Evidence of her impact is present in this group’s life-long commitment to young children, including many active roles in NMAEYC (i.e., past-presidents, board members, organizers of NMAEYC Mary Ann Binford Incentive\$ Fund)

HALENE WEAVER, a colleague of Marie Hughes, took the theoretical framework for the Tucson Preschool Project and translated it into classroom practice. She was a masterful trainer and interpreter of Marie Hughes’ “professional response” through the use of “intellectual kits.” Teachers were trained to utilize these collections of keys, buttons, shells, rocks, seeds, beads, jewelry, paper plates and napkins, lids, bolts, fabric scraps, etc., as tools to stimulate language and thinking



*Halene Weaver (left) and Lenore Wolfe (right)*

skills in children. Teachers became skilled at using their professional responses (wondering, predicting, comparing, recalling, labeling, modeling, etc.) as they engaged with children using the kits. A repertoire of rich open-ended questions, much like those used by Reggio-practice protagonists, grew out of this engagement. She was committed to NMAEYC and served as president 1981-82, when her living room became a hub for discussion of what was good for children.

KATHY DUDDY was a major contributor to the APS Early Childhood Curriculum alongside Mary Ann Binford. It grew out of the practices in the earliest kindergartens from 1969. During her graduate work at UNM, she was influenced by Catherine Loughlin, Keith Auger, Dr. Darling, Mary Ann Binford, Marie Hughes, and Halene Weaver. The guiding principle of her work was Mary Ann’s view that “the key to carrying out the complex work of early childhood education is to be a child watcher.” She is especially appreciative of the way Mary Ann Binford “knew programs, children, and families and kept all the pieces together.” She views their early work as “an east meets west powerhouse of good practice,” as it emerged from inservice opportunities by resource people who were brought in from Bank Street in New York and Pacific Oaks in California.

Kathy’s career-long mentoring and teaching informed a sizeable cross-section of early childhood teachers.

OLIVIA RIVERA helped transform early childhood practice as one of the teachers in the Model Cities programs that came into being in 1969. She taught alongside Mary Ann Binford, Dorella Perea, and Patricia Salisbury. As a key contributor to the development of the kindergarten curriculum, she mentored teachers who were entering

the growing early childhood profession in the “best practices” it represented. Early childhood students at UNM benefitted from observing her skillfully translate the work of Marie Hughes and Catherine Loughlin into practice at Manzanita lab school. Mary Ann Binford advised her to “develop your own shoes.” This led her follow Mary Ann as Early Childhood Coordinator for APS after her death and to sustain the work she had begun. Even after retirement from APS she guided more than 20 City of Albuquerque early childhood programs through NAEYC Accreditation.

POLLY TURNER brought her vigor and enthusiasm to UNM’s Home Economics Department (now Family Studies) in 1977, bringing clear expectations that regardless of what a program is called (preschool or day care or K-3), whether it is public or private, or what populations it serves, the expectations for and evidence of quality must be the same. She lived out these expectations in her work with UNM Child Care (with Rhodes Lockwood) and Manzanita lab school. She gave generously of her time to train and nudge teachers and administrators toward best practices throughout the community. She and Lenore Wolfe (also Marg Elliston and Mary Utley) “walked the halls of the legislature to talk day care and the well-being of young children,” addressing ALL indicators of quality and becoming legends at the Roundhouse. She assumed a strong role



*Polly Turner*

with NMAEYC as the organization sought to impact public policy and advocacy.



*Lenore Wolfe*

LENORE WOLFE played a pivotal role in the state’s early childhood education at all levels of involvement for her entire life, well past 90. She was there at the inception of Head Start in the mid-60’s, traveling throughout the state with Catherine Loughlin and Dorris Johnson, offering training to the Native American Head Start programs. Her work with tribal leaders and as the first Head Start director at Laguna Pueblo gave her keen insight into the cultural diversity of the state. She provided strategic expertise in the ongoing effort to offer culturally responsive programs for ALL young children in our multicultural state. Her presence and voice was inevitable at the Roundhouse. She mobilized early childhood efforts from her Duranes living room, which also served as headquarters for the work of NMAEYC (president, 1983-84). Her memory is sustained by the NMAEYC Lenore Wolfe T.E.A.C.H. Scholarship.



*Bobbie Bailey*

BOBBIE BAILEY was a kindergarten teacher at Alamosa, one of the pilot programs for state-funded kindergartens (1974). She

took Catherine Loughlin's environment course and her practice was transformed by it. "It made a lot of sense" to implement a curriculum driven by the environment rather than dittos. She also benefitted from Mary Ann Binford's frequent presence in her classroom, where she offered abiding support to the teachers she had brought on to teach in the new kindergartens. She joined NMAEYC in the 1970's, and her career and retirement have been devoted to carrying out its mission. Her work includes 30 plus NMAEYC annual conferences under her care. The result is over 30,000 opportunities for the profession to learn and grow and carry out the work of offering quality programs for young children and their families in New Mexico. Further, her invitations to participate with her in this work have resulted in hundreds of early childhood practitioners assuming leadership roles in the organization.

PENNY CURFMAN, NMAEYC President, 1978-79, was part of that cohort of teachers who implemented the pilot project kindergartens. Her colleague was Bobbie Bailey with whom she also shared a long-term professional engagement with NMAEYC. She recalls the frequent visits to her classroom by Mary Ann Binford and/or her associates. They observed, gave "pats on the back," offered suggestions, and asked "how can we help?" This included a willingness to do home visits with her when it was required. As a graduate student at UNM, Catherine Loughlin's views of the child and the

environment had a powerful influence on her classroom work. She considers it a gift that she had opportunities to observe people like Lenore Wolfe engaged with children.

ALBUQUERQUE NURSERY SCHOOL AND KINDERGARTEN ASSOCIATION (Jane Cunningham, Margaret Bartlett, Amy Parkman) pre-dated NMAEYC. It offered a context for community early childhood programs to host one another, provide training, and discuss appropriate curriculum for young children. The group maintained strong relationships with UNM's early childhood faculty, including (Catherine Loughlin and Keith Auger) and APS training opportunities. They were generous in sharing their expertise and vision for children. The theories and philosophies that forged the APS kindergarten curriculum strongly influenced these programs. By 1978 the organization had combined with NMAEYC.

PHYLLIS NYE'S contributions were summarized by Lynn Kelly as "raising the standards of early childcare from babysitting to quality care." Phyllis came to New Mexico in 1970 as child care specialist in the Department of Human Services (later CYFD). Her role included subsidies for child care for low income families under Title XX of the Social Security Act. Polly Turner

said, "She diligently spoke out about improving the quality of child care and the quality of caregivers and about ending the "bifurcation between 'early education' and 'day care.'" Phyllis's annual fall Child Care Conference drew as many as 1,000 participants from across the state. She championed creativity, play, and imagination over rote learning and a



*Phyllis Nye (left) and Melissa Williams (right)*

“tourist curriculum.” She was adamant that ALL teachers should be professional and familiar with Erickson, Dewey, Piaget, and Vygotsky.

MARY DUDLEY “got into early childhood education through the back door.” Her background was child rearing practices from an anthropological perspective. In 1970 she was one of Mary Ann Binford’s Model Cities kindergarten teachers at Los Padillas and later at Armijo. She salutes the continuum of work done in the tradition of Marie Hughes, who bluntly asked teachers whether they really liked young children and Mary Ann Binford, who noted that kindergarten is the child’s time to be 5. She considers the training offered in implementing the bilingual component of these developmentally appropriate programs highly significant. Her UNM doctoral work on language acquisition from a multi-disciplinary approach (beginning 1977) was centered around the work of a UNM clinic in the Los Padillas neighborhood. Her career-long (including director of UNM’s Family Development Program from 1990-2003) commitment to and insights into factors (especially language) that affect parent’s roles in raising children who can function successfully have had a powerful effect on the work of NMAEYC and its constituents.

JOSEPH SUINA from Cochiti Pueblo is Catherine Loughlin’s co-author of *The Learning Environment: An Instructional Strategy*. He taught “Education Across Cultures” while engaged in doctoral work at UNM in the late 70’s and early 80’s. He “entered education for the sake of a job.” But he quickly realized that he had “a lot of kid-skills” and “how near that was to what I most wanted to do with my life.” His early teaching at Laguna was “rows and columns and basal readers and strict discipline.” However, he knew from the way he “grew up that there was a whole other way of teaching . . . exploring and learning . . . in the context of real life as opposed to being removed from it

behind four walls, working with very abstract words.” As he was exposed to and read about different approaches he “broke out of the old-fashioned teacher-centered approach.”

Catherine Loughlin was on his dissertation committee, and she introduced him to the North Dakota Study Group, where he engaged with national names such as Courtney Cazden, Eleanor Duckwork, and Vito Perrone, who pulled him into “looking at culturally compatible settings and practices.”

#### **Acknowledgements and Sources:**

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