

**Book Review**

# The Hidden History of Early Childhood Education

Blythe Farb Hinitz, editor  
New York: Routledge, 2013

Reviewed by: Hongliang Fu  
University of Alberta

In *The Hidden History of Early Childhood Education*, editor Blythe Farb Hinitz aims to shed light on little-known aspects of the history of early childhood education (ECE) in the United States, which is referred to as “forgotten or hidden” (p. 1). The approach is to provide deeper understanding of select episodes in the history of ECE rather than a broad survey. Authors of individual chapters use primary sources to consider the contributions of figures “whose place in ECE history has rarely been studied” (p. 1). Some contributors, like Barbara Beatty, are historians of education, while others are leaders in the field of ECE in teacher education and administration. Most have worked as teachers of young children.

The content covers a variety of topics from the 1820s to the present day. The chapters look at homeschooling, the experiences of African American teachers, and schools in Japanese-American internment camps. Common to all of the chapters is a focus on the stories of people who have been marginalized or ignored in standard histories. For this reason alone the book deserves a wide readership, including by historians of education, as well as other scholars, students, and teachers interested in knowing more about historical developments in early childhood care and education in the United States.

Hinitz divides the book’s ten chapters into two sections, “Glimpses of Past Practice” and “Portraits of Early Childhood Education Leaders.” In the first section, five chapters explore a range of programs and practices in the period 1820 to 1960. The section is organized chronologically, beginning with a discussion of the education of young Quaker children between 1820 and 1860. Susan Anderson Miller draws our attention to Quaker religious activities, school settings, families, and social events. She illustrates how the various beliefs of Quakers “such as helpfulness, honesty, respectfulness of equality, the appreciation of simplicity, and their own resourcefulness” influenced children’s daily lives and education (p. 8). Quaker children’s daily lives are described primarily from gender and family perspectives. Next is Judy Williston’s history of homeschooling based on her memories of being taught at home by her mother in her kindergarten year. Williston reflects on her experience of homeschooling in the context of the history of compulsory education, considering its advantages and its response to social needs. Her history includes preschool artifacts selected from her personal collection, such as drawings and writing of numbers. She concludes that her homeschooling influenced her future choices, writing that: “I believe it created ... a wonderful beginning to a long educational career” (p. 48).

Phillip Wishon, Margaret Shaeffer, and Margaret Kyger’s chapter about nursery schools for

Japanese-American children interned in World War II examines the program's child centered curriculum while noting its essential contradiction: "All attempts at instilling the tenets of progressive education in the camp schools ... were confronted by the unblemished reality that what was being taught about life in America could be learned but not yet lived" (p.73). In the following chapter, Sue Grossman's contribution, *A Memoir of An Exemplary Education*, relates her experience as a student in a university laboratory school, from kindergarten to high school, starting in 1948. Her hope is that the education she experienced at the Campus School at Western Michigan College, now Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, could be "replicated for all children" (p. 96), particularly its approach to teaching based on the ideas of John Dewey. The last chapter in Part I is Edna Runnels Ranck's analysis of early care and education policy in the 1950s, a period which she notes is often ignored in the literature and in terms of the book, hidden from history. The review of policy is wide ranging, moving from the Eisenhower administration to touching on the present policies of the administration under President Obama. By reviewing all the events and public policies that the federal government had for early care and education, Ranck comes to a conclusion that: "the likelihood of the creation of a substantial, comprehensive, quality system of early care and education in the United States in the near future looks very slim" (p. 135).

Section two contains five chapters describing individuals who made significant contributions in the field of ECE in the United States in the twentieth century. W. Jean Simpson and Judith Lynne McConnell-Farmer depict the lives of three African American teachers: Evangeline Howlette Ward, Oneida Cockrell, and Lula Sadler Craig. The chapter draws on oral history interviews and relates a largely hidden history. The authors note that African American contributions are "routinely downplayed if not completely left out" (p. 144). The chapter by Elizabeth A. Sherwood and Amy Freshwater relates Patty Smith Hill's "unique approach to early childhood education and her subsequent contribution to the history of the field" (p. 160). The chapter highlights how Hill designed the enlarged building blocks called Hill Blocks under the influence of Dewey's ideas, along with original teaching materials created by Friedrich Froebel. Through the use of photographs, the authors describe the way the blocks were used by a kindergarten teacher starting in the 1930s.

Hinitz's chapter describes the life and career of educator Margaret Naumburg, focusing on the Walden School that she founded in New York City in 1914, and its history of curriculum experiments based on new education and psychoanalytic theory. James Lee Hymes, Jr. is profiled by Charlotte Jean Anderson, who describes his participation in key events in the history of twentieth-century ECE: the Works Progress Administration Nursery Schools and Parent Education formed in April 1935, the model wartime nurseries at the Kaiser Child Service Center opened in November 1943, and Project Head Start launched in 1965. In *Playing with Numbers*, Barbara Beatty explores the career of Constance Kamii and the evolution of her ideas on mathematics education based on Jean Piaget's developmental theory.

As a former kindergarten teacher and a current doctoral student and researcher, I found the second part of the book particularly valuable, not only because of its focus on the contributions of eminent educational figures but also because of the elaborate description and analysis of their professional career development. Moreover, I was struck by the way these leaders challenged the status quo under difficult circumstances. African American teacher Lula Craig opened her school with no materials, and Patty Smith Hill challenged Froebel's kindergarten concepts and practices. The dramatic stories of how they experienced difficult times to become pioneers in the field of ECE were inspiring, encouraging me to set my own goals high to make a difference for

children and families as I continue my career. Nowadays, the world requires innovation in education. Educational reforms are implemented in many countries in order to improve the quality of child care, and also to seek an ideal way of teaching young child within specific social context. The challenges and difficulties educators encountered in the process of reform will not be easier than the difficulties our pioneers dealt with decades ago. As long as educators keep seeking to improve education, they will, in turn, become historical pioneers from this era. Additionally, past beliefs about education and childhood are important for educators to know, even as we strive to re-conceptualize teaching and learning.

The book is largely successful in its aim in revealing little known or hidden aspects of history; however, as an edited collection it lacks unity and consistency in terms of writing style and quality of historical scholarly work. Chapters also vary in the extent of critical analysis and discussion of the implications for ECE in the current context. Moreover, because this volume is not concerned with presenting a comprehensive history, readers will come away with only a partial picture or understanding of the overall history of the field. I am also left with questions about the notion of “hidden history.” How are the stories selected for the volume considered hidden? It is evident in some cases, such as African American teachers, but less clear in others, like Quaker education. How did the contributors come to write about these particular people or events in U.S. ECE history? Why is there an essay with a profile of James Hymes and not his mentor, the psychologist Lois Meek Stolz? Finally, with reference to Part II of the book, although it is important to acknowledge the contributions of individuals, some profiles about the education leaders are highly subjective. Some chapters endeavor to retell the stories based on the actual facts such as Chapter 8 and Chapter 9, on the contrary, others (e.g., Chapter 10) are more likely to appraise the individuals through the lens of personal emotion and subjective interpretation which leaves limited room for readers to interpret.

In general, this book deepens our understanding of ECE history by sharing “previously untold or unheralded stories” (p. 3). In addition, one of the significant contributions the book makes in the field is to provide newly available sources, including photographs, letters, and interviews, that could be used for future research. In conclusion, editor Hinitz and the other contributors to *The Hidden History of Early Childhood Education* have provided a valuable and interesting resource in the history of American ECE.

---

*Hongliang Fu* is a Doctoral student at the University of Alberta. She was a preschool and kindergarten teacher in China. Her focus is in early childhood language and bilingual language acquisition.