



IN MEMORIAM

Millie Corinne Almy
Professor of Education, Emerita
Berkeley
1915-2001

Millie Almy, an internationally known expert in early childhood development and education, died at her home in Berkeley on August 15, 2001 at age 86. Professor Almy played a leading role in the early stages of preschool education in the United States. Professor Almy left no immediate survivors. She did, however, leave devoted and admiring friends and former graduate students, many of whom remained in close contact with her long after her retirement.

Millie Almy was born in 1915 in Clymer, New York. She received her B.A. from Vassar College in 1936. She taught young children at the Vassar Institute of Euthenics, the Guidance Nursery School at Yale University, Burke Memorial Day Nursery (New Jersey), and Chautauqua County Children's Agency (New York). She was the regional supervisor of the Works Progress Administration nursery schools. She entered graduate studies at Teachers College, Columbia University in 1944 and received an M.A. and Ph.D., graduating in 1948. From 1948 to 1952 she was associate professor at the University Of Cincinnati College of Home Economics, where she also directed the University Nursery School. She returned to Teachers College in 1952 and remained there as professor until 1971, when she was recruited to Berkeley's Graduate School of Education. In her years at Berkeley she was a leading voice for the training of teachers and administrators, through her work with doctoral students and through the founding and coordination of the Interdisciplinary Day Care and Child Development Project, for the preparation of personnel for key positions in day care and related child development services. She was assistant dean for graduate affairs from 1979 to 1980. Professor Almy retired from the Berkeley faculty in 1980. In 1981 she was a Fulbright Fellow at Macquarie University in Australia and a visiting professor at Mills College, Oakland, California.

Professor Almy had a distinguished scholarly career, publishing more than 80 books and journal articles. Professor Almy's important publications, some of which remain in print as classics in the field, include *Ways of Studying Children* (with Celia Genishi, 1979), *The Impact of Piagetian Theory on Education, Philosophy, Psychiatry, and Philosophy* (1979), *The Early Childhood Educator at Work* (1975), *Young Children's Thinking: Studies of Some Aspects of Piaget's Theory* (with Edward Chittenden and Paula Miller, 1966), and *Children's Experiences Prior to First Grade and Success In Beginning Reading* (1949).

Millie Almy was a leader in the movement to change the nature of care for preschool children and to conduct research in early childhood education settings, especially in the application of Piagetian theory to early childhood education. As Harvard professor Sheldon White wrote, "She was one of the small number of sophisticated interpreters of Piagetian theory. With her background in early education and developmental psychology, she could build bridges between theorists and practitioners in the early childhood area."

She started work at model programs for younger children at Vassar and Yale, and went on to direct a regional alliance of federally funded preschools in the area of Buffalo, New York, during the Works Progress Administration. Ironically, the preschool movement received a major impetus from the involvement of the U.S. in World War II. "It became increasingly clear that the United States would become involved in the war in Europe," Professor Almy said about this period in the early 1940s in her oral history prepared by The

Bancroft Library. "It also became evident that women would be needed in industry related to a war effort, and that they would need to have care for their children."

Professor Almy also served as president of the National Association of Nursery Educators (now called National Association for the Education of Young Children). Almy was a strong advocate for quality preschool education. Throughout her career, Almy's mission was to illuminate the inner world of early childhood and give adults the conceptual tools necessary to treat children with the respect they deserved.

Professor Almy was particularly devoted to her students and educated and nurtured hundreds. Patricia Nourot, Barbara Scales, Dorothy Stewart, and Judy Van Hoorn made up a "committee" of friends near Berkeley who were part of Millie's large extended family. "She made a conscious decision that her students would be her family, and we're all connected because of that. She cared not just about our intellectual life but about our personal lives. She made a point of getting to know our families," according to Dorothy Stewart.

"She had a rich life after retiring, and that was important to her," said a close friend Elizabeth Simons of Berkeley. "She was a docent at the Oakland Museum for Children and honorary grandmother for at least seven children I know, including two of my own." In her later years Millie Almy suffered from severe vision problems. She discovered books on tape and continued to maintain her intellectual interests through that medium.

"Millie Almy embodied all of the values and commitments that we try to promote here at the Graduate School of Education," said Graduate School of Education Dean P. David Pearson. "As a national leader in research, policy, and practice in early childhood education, she was highly respected by her peers throughout the nation and the world. But here on the Berkeley campus, she will be remembered as a revered teacher and mentor of graduate students. She will be missed — and remembered with great fondness."

Paul Ammon
Lily Wong Fillmore
Herbert D. Simons