

# Experimental Arts Program Recollections

## How Children Awakened My Enthusiasm for Teaching Creativity

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When I arrived at SMU as a freshman in the fall of 1970, I intended to major in graphic design. After a semester, I concluded that another career path might be more personally satisfying to me, and I walked through the Owen Fine Arts Building one Saturday in January of 1971 reflecting on my future options. On the second floor of the building I was very fortunate to run into an Arts Sampler Open House for the Experimental Arts Program. I was amazed by the large number of children, parents, and learning partners who were experiencing exciting projects related to art, music, and creative dramatics. The level of enthusiasm and high energy was contagious, and I decided on the spot that this was an enterprise I absolutely had to join. I had the wonderful opportunity to visit with Dr. Ann McGee-Cooper, and I was truly hooked on the adventure and excitement of EAP. From the beginning, I sensed that Ann had a wonderful blend of personal charisma, tremendous intelligence and creativity, and a nurturing spirit.

I signed up to be a learning partner in the “Puppetry and Other People” class for 7-9 year olds for the spring of 1971, and had a marvelous time learning about how the arts could be used in designing learning environments which helped children to be creative, successful, and confident learners in many different areas of knowledge. EAP also enabled future teachers to expand the boundaries of theory and practice, all the while having a wonderful time as partners in learning with children.

In the fall of 1971 I worked with Charley Helfert in a creative dramatics and video class, and by the spring of 1972 I became a Program Assistant for EAP and also joined the “Great Big and Itty Bitty “class for 4-6 year olds as a learning partner under Master Teacher Karen Crocombe. I can truly say that I have never worked with more imaginative, caring people than those I found in the Experimental Arts Program. Smell jars, feely boxes, blow plaster, and incredible edibles became part of my working vocabulary, and I had as much fun as the children with whom I worked. During my time as



assistant and learning partner for the program, I worked with highly creative individuals to design learning environments in on-campus classes and in off-campus programs such as Rhoads Terrace, the Classic School, Flower Mound New Town, and various church teacher training events which led to my career as a Diaconal Minister in the United Methodist Church, specializing in Christian education. I particularly enjoyed my work at Camp Mariposa, the



summer arts camp we set up in Flower Mound New Town in the summer of 1974. I remember that we borrowed the Hairy Man costume and created Sothlan (the Spirit of the Land), who spoke to the children at important moments.

The Experimental Arts Program was an early example of servant leadership which I tried to adopt in my work with a large volunteer organization in two United Methodist Churches. Over a period of nine years I served as Program and Christian Education Director for a mid-sized church, and later Elementary Director, Singles Minister, and Adult Education Coordinator for a 7,000 member church. During my Experimental Arts Program years, I had the opportunity to work on revising and adding to the Noah's Art handbook. This collection of projects in the arts adapted many of the EAP curriculum pieces to fit religious education, and motivated children to grow in their spiritual understanding and religious values. This experience gave me enthusiasm for writing a church-wide intergenerational study with my fellow church staff members which incorporated the arts to energize young congregation members to learn about spiritual concepts. I also incorporated the servant leadership concepts of Ann McGee-Cooper and the other wonderful people of EAP into all my work with many committees and volunteer leaders. I felt a tremendous responsibility to the people I served to help them grow in skills and confidence, so that they could tackle exciting new projects outside their comfort zones with great success, thereby serving the congregation and community. In my teacher training programs, I emphasized the arts in motivating children and young people to understand faith concepts and moral decision-making. I also stressed the importance of creative room environments, such as recreations of ancient marketplaces and lots of visually exciting backdrops, in helping children to get excited about religious concepts, as well as encouraging their creativity and problem-solving skills.

I owe a great debt of gratitude to Ann and the amazing, creative people of EAP. My life as a Diaconal Minister, teacher, and mother of two sons was tremendously enhanced by the valuable life lessons I learned from EAP and the servant leadership concept.

After many years of hearing about my reminiscences of the life lessons of EAP, my son Stephen, a senior at the Olin Business School of Washington University in St. Louis, became

intrigued by the idea of joining the AMCA team as an intern for the summer of 2012. He had an incredible experience learning about servant leadership from the creative and highly professional AMCA group. Stephen gained servant leadership expertise through work with clients; facilitated the digital conversion of the book *Being the Change*; taped, edited, and published video interviews explaining servant leadership and AMCA to potential clients; and digitalized about 1,500 slides to form a basis for the EAP History project. The concepts of servant leadership, creativity, and using the arts to awaken the genius and thirst for learning of young people have shaped two generations of our family!



John and Mary Hayes



Michael and Stephen Hayes