

# Early Education



*Volume 65 Spring / Summer 2019*

- Politics of funding for Playcentre
- Walking the talk: Leadership in ECE
- Te Whariki and inclusive practice
- Soft skills of collaborative reading
- Joining a Kahui Ako
- Quality in ECE in China



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Karyn Aspden, Claire McLachlan, Vijaya Tatineni

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## Contributions

Contributions of articles and photos are welcome from the early childhood community.

*Early Education* welcomes:

- Innovative practice papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words and up to five keywords.
- Research informed papers with a maximum of 3,500 words, plus an abstract or professional summary of 150 words, and up to five keywords.
- Think pieces with a maximum of 1500 words.
- Commentaries on management matters with a maximum of 1500 words.
- Book or resource reviews with a maximum of 1000 words.

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# For women and children

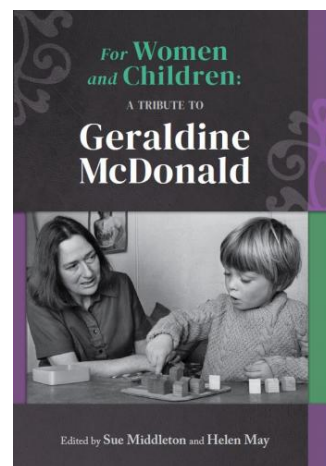
## A tribute to Geraldine McDonald

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Reviewer: Claire McLachlan

Middleton, S., & May, H. (2019). *For women and children: A tribute to Geraldine McDonald*. Wellington, New Zealand: NZCER Press. ISBN 9781988542782

Cost \$55 hard copy. Also available at NZCER Press.



I was privileged to hear the presentation about this book at the recent NZARE conference at University of Canterbury in November, 2019. I then purchased the book and read it on my flight home to Melbourne. I was delighted with my purchase and considered it money well spent!

Although I did not know Geraldine McDonald personally, she was someone I have known of my entire academic career. I had read her work as an undergraduate and postgraduate student, heard her speak at conferences, and knew of her contributions to education in New Zealand. I also knew of her work through supervision of Sue Stover's Ph.D thesis, which tracked the progress of the concept of play in ECE in New Zealand, to which Geraldine's work had contributed. I remember the announcement of her death in November 2018 and recall thinking about what a loss this was, not only to her family, but also to the ECE and wider education community. I applaud Sue Middleton and Helen May for pitching the proposal for this book to NZCER, to ensure that this marvelous women's work was properly recognised. It is a fascinating history and biography of a life well lived and a story of vision, determination and commitment to ECE, to women and to children.

In addition to the well-known Emeritus Professors—Sue Middleton and Helen May—who edited this work, the authors of the various chapters are a veritable “who's who” of ECE research in New

Zealand, along with a lovely contribution from Geraldine McDonald's three children. The book starts with a history by Middleton and May, which charts the decades of Geraldine's life and contributions to education from the 1930's onwards. It also provides an overview of the remaining chapters of the book. The second chapter enthralled me—as Middleton explains, “it provides a comprehensive feminist narrative of Geraldine's researching and activist life” (p. 19). The chapter draws on Geraldine's own writing, as well as interviews of her, so it feels like you are in the room with her as you read this chapter. I got so involved in reading this chapter that I barely grumbled when Qantas further delayed my flight! Middleton has done a superb job of bringing together the various sources to create this fabulous narrative, beautifully supported by photographs.

The third chapter by Sue Stover provides a history and analysis of the contributions of three Wellington women to the nature of ECE in New Zealand: Marie Bell, Beverly Morris and Geraldine McDonald. This chapter, no doubt informed by Sue's Ph.D, provides greater insights into how these three influential women worked collectively and separately to improve conditions for women and families. Beverly Morris sadly passed away on 12 November 2019, meaning that all of these extraordinary women, who gave so much to ECE, are now gone.

Chapter 4, written by Kerry Bethell, charts the kindergarten history that Geraldine researched, and which resulted in the 1975 NZCER publication, “An early Wellington Kindergarten: As described by Ted Scott”. Kerry draws on Geraldine’s archival materials, as well as other archival sources to tell a broader story of the early kindergarten movement. The following Chapter 5, written by Elizabeth Pakai, charts the contribution that Geraldine made to Māori preschool education, via her involvement with Playcentre, her Ph.D research into oral language development in Māori pre-schoolers and her support and mentoring of Māori women, who would go on to become influential in Māori ECE in the Department of Education. Elizabeth also reports on the links with her own Ph.D into the experiences of Māori kindergarten teachers, suggesting that the work contributed by Geraldine and supported by Māori ECE teachers and researchers must be an ongoing effort to counteract the effects of colonisation.

Chapter 6, written by Anne Meade, discusses Geraldine’s contributions to ECE policy and research, and in particular her leadership of research at NZCER. One of her key contributions was to promote the publication of accessible ECE literature through the 1980s, which I remember coming across in my postgraduate studies from 1989–1995. Noeline Alcorn, in Chapter 7 discusses Geraldine’s contributions to disputing the inequality between the sexes from the 1970s onwards. Geraldine is recorded as saying that women should stop thinking about barriers and instead focus on “what we as women educators do and how we do it” (p. 99); a concern that Noeline concludes is still valid in terms of removing all impediments to the equal participation of women in society. In a similar vein, Helen May describes Geraldine’s involvement in ECE advocacy via a Wellington “Sunday Club” in the 1970s–80s. This politically oriented group had worked tirelessly towards the ECE reforms that resulted in the integration of childcare and education into the Department of Education in 1986 and was the forerunner of the “Before Five” reforms.

Chapter 9 is a reproduction of Geraldine’s Herbison Lecture to the NZARE conference of 2006. The invitation to give this lecture is significant, as it is an honour conferred by the NZARE council on someone who has made a

significant contribution to education in New Zealand. In this presentation, Geraldine talks about the formation of the association itself and its importance to research in New Zealand, the relationships with its cousin AARE in Australia, and its importance to ECE and to women’s participation in research in New Zealand. Reflecting on my own career, I can only agree with how important NZARE has been to my own growth as an ECE researcher and I am grateful for her role in building this organisation.

In Chapter 10, Hilary Lapsey discusses interviewing Geraldine as part of a research project on how mentoring relationships impact on women’s development. Via interview data from an interview with Geraldine in her sixties, we gain insights into how she mentored many women at various stages of career. Linda Mitchell, in Chapter 11, describes the crucial role that Geraldine played politically in the development of ECE in New Zealand and the leadership roles that she held in the “Future Directions” project, advocating and working strategically with government. Linda comments on “the unfinished business” which is a result of the most recent Strategic Plan for ECE, which while well intentioned, fails to take the steps needed to back a public education system. The book concludes with a short, but poignant tribute to Geraldine by her children, Caroline, Mandy and Andrew McDonald, which shows that she was a loving and caring parent, as well as an ardent advocate and supporter of all matter’s education.

The key question for any review is who would use this book? I think it has three potential audiences. The first is an academic audience—it is a useful addition to our knowledge and understanding of the history of ECE in New Zealand. I know it will be an excellent further place to check my facts. Second, I think parts of it will be relevant for teacher educators to use, to help student teachers understand the social, political and cultural forces that underpin ECE in New Zealand. Finally, I think it would make a brilliant Mother’s Day or birthday present for any ECE teacher. I am sure that many will enjoy reading about the ECE struggles of an earlier time and reflecting on the commonalities with the sector today. Overall, a wonderful addition to the ECE literature.