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Media Release

Fresh perspectives on Sylvia Ashton-Warner

Thursday 11 June 2009

A new book offers a fascinating range of never-before published perspectives on the teacher and novelist Sylvia Ashton-Warner, and in particular her complex relationship with New Zealand.

The Kiss and the Ghost: Sylvia Ashton-Warner and New Zealand crosses boundaries of biography, fiction and educational theory in a fresh exploration of Sylvia Ashton-Warner's life and work. The book is edited by well-known New Zealand educationists Alison Jones and Sue Middleton and is being formally launched at the University of Waikato on Friday 12 June.

Sylvia Ashton-Warner was extraordinarily famous in the 1960s. Her novels won a huge international readership, and in 1963, her book *Teacher* was reviewed on the front page of the *New York Times Book Review*.

This book draws together new perspectives on one of New Zealand's unique characters. It is the first time since the 1960s that her famous teaching scheme has been drawn together and published. Ashton-Warner's eldest son, Elliot Henderson, has also published his recollections of his mother here for the first time.

The book includes a rare assessment of Ashton-Warner's teaching by Māori commentators. Merimeri Penfold reflects on Ashton-Warner's creative teaching of Māori children in the English language at Waiomatatini in 1945, while Iritana Tawhiwhirangi sees her mode of teaching as a seed for the kohanga reo movement.

The kiss and the ghost includes the transcript of a frank interview between CK Stead and Ashton-Warner's New York-based publisher, Robert Gottlieb, who was unaware that Ashton-Warner's work had been published in New Zealand. In other chapters, Sue Middleton and Geraldine McDonald challenge Ashton-Warner's insistence that she was rejected by New Zealand publishers, by showing how her work was published and praised widely here.

The title of the book refers to Sylvia Ashton-Warner's famous key vocabulary reading scheme. She argued that young children best learn to read and write when they produce their own vocabulary, especially sex words, like 'kiss', and fear words, like 'ghost'. The book is published by NZCER Press.

The authors are available for interview. Alison Jones can be contacted on 09 376-0207, or Sue Middleton on 07 855-5922. For further information contact NZCER Communications manager Sarah Boyd on 04 802-1468 or 027 231-4300.