

Chapter 1

Introduction

Sue Middleton and Helen May

The editors of this book met and became friends in Wellington in the late 1970s, when we were in our early thirties. We had a lot in common. We were taking time out from school-teaching, had preschool children in the Victoria University Crèche and, having gained our BA degrees in “other” subjects, were completing “bridging” courses required for entry to an MA by thesis in Education.¹ We bonded in a student-centred course facilitated by Jack Shallcrass, who encouraged us to work independently on philosophical questions that would inform our theses. In 1979 we each—albeit in different contexts—got to know Geraldine McDonald. And for the next 50 years, our lives, research, publishing, and political activities—sometimes individually and sometimes together—would, from time to time, intertwine with hers.

When Geraldine died in November 2018 at the age of 92, her adult children—Caroline, Mandy, and Andrew McDonald—hosted a memorial service at Wellington’s Karori Chapel. Several of the eulogies, including those by contributors to this book, highlighted how Geraldine had pioneered feminist research and political advocacy in early childhood and across the education sector and wider public

service sectors more broadly. She had begun this work in the mid-1960s, a time when, to quote Geraldine:

there were no courses on women's studies and there was so little recognition of the validity of research on women that women seldom appeared in the indexes of books on education or were distinguished in research samples.²

Her outspokenness on “women's issues” had often been met with resistance: “I have at times been ‘accused’ of being a feminist, generally with ‘radical’ attached to it because I have disagreed with some man's views.”³

Following the memorial service, friends and family gathered at a nearby café. Many of us were women who had been active in the “second wave” feminist movement of the late 1960s–70s. Now in our seventies and eighties, most of us were a decade or two younger than Geraldine. Clustered around a corner table, we shared stories of Geraldine as a “big sister” figure, inspiring our tentative steps into leadership positions and providing support as we battled for women's issues in male-dominated echelons of academic or other institutions. Having retired from full-time work, many of us had lost touch with one another. Geraldine's legacy, we discovered, continued to act as a hub, reactivating professional, feminist, and wider political networks of our past. As we reminisced over coffee and cake, the idea of this *festschrift* began to germinate.⁴

In the early months of 2019, Helen worked with the McDonald family to sort and catalogue the papers Geraldine had accumulated throughout her long and productive life. She had kept copious records, all piled into boxes that had lined the study of her Wellington apartment. Helen's excavations of what she called “the mountains” unearthed a treasure trove: drafts of work in progress, originals of manuscripts, employment and travel records, childhood writings and certificates, awards, correspondence, lectures and talks, minutes and agendas, letters, research data, photographs, and interview transcripts—including historical early childhood documents and photographs given to her over the years. Collectively these papers offer intimate insights into Geraldine's thinking, her travels, her political struggles, and her friendships, stretching from her childhood in the 1930s and into her old age.

Several of the chapters in this book have been enriched by these finds and offer a glimpse into the rich resource that Geraldine's papers will offer future scholars.⁵

This *festschrift* has four objectives. First, it engages with the main themes in her body of work with the aim of protecting it from becoming—as has been the case with the works of many creative women—fragmented, lost, or forgotten. Secondly, it showcases the originality of Geraldine's research. Thirdly, it illustrates how Geraldine's research informed her own and others' advocacy work for gender equality. Fourthly, it contributes a “generational legacy” of a cohort of feminists' engagements with education in New Zealand. The authors are women born during or shortly after the Second World War. In different ways, all have been deeply influenced by Geraldine; her story is part of our story. Some worked with her as colleagues, in research or writing projects, on committees, or in women's or educational networks more broadly. Others did not know her personally but were influenced by her writing. We exemplify how Geraldine mentored women by means of some personal stories.

The chapter that follows this one tells Geraldine's life story using her own words by piecing together snippets from interviews and autobiographical writings, some of which we knew about when the idea was first seeded at the memorial service, but more were discovered as her papers were unpacked. Geraldine's personal narrative takes readers on a “road trip” through the turbulent political, intellectual, and social events of the mid-20th century and into the first decades of the 21st. This brief introduction widens the lens by locating Geraldine's biography in the ideational landscape that enabled and constrained her thinking at particular times and places. Feminist writers have drawn attention to how 20th century social—including educational—policies were infused with contradictory notions of the role of women. On the one hand, we were offered the personal freedoms on which liberal/social democracies are based. On the other hand, we were conditioned by conservative assumptions that the primary role of women was domestic. Having experienced—and identified—this conflict in her schooling, as a mother, a university student, and in the workforce, Geraldine made it an object of her research. In Geraldine's words, “I am likely to write something about anything that I am involved in.”⁶

In this introductory chapter, we locate the biography that follows it in a wider historical frame. We begin by tracing connections between Geraldine's own education and the questions she later addressed in research.

The 'New Education', 1930s–40s

Educational theories are encountered directly (in academic textbooks or parenting manuals) and indirectly (in the course of classroom activities or parenting practices). The ways we are brought up, the school environments, and classroom activities we experience are all informed by assumptions about the “nature” of children, the objectives of learning, and the roles of men and women in society. In a lecture to early childhood students in 1991, Geraldine remarked, “I don't know whether my early life or subsequent life for that matter can tell you anything about why I did the things I describe but that will be for you to judge.”⁷ She goes on to identify the influences of the “New Education” movement. As a schoolgirl in the 1930s, she experienced this “indirectly”. Founded at this time, the playcentre movement sprang from the same ideational soil.⁸ During her training as a teacher in the 1940s, Geraldine came across New Education directly, through reading. In the mid-1950s, as a “playcentre mother”, Geraldine engaged with it both directly (in parent education) and indirectly (through the equipment and activities encouraged for the children). From the late 1960s and into the early-mid 1970s, Geraldine's sequence of research projects with playcentre mothers traced the circulation of New Education ideas, their compatibility with older conservative beliefs about women's roles, and their impact on women's lives.

In Chapter 2, Geraldine describes her enjoyment of an activity-based curriculum at Hataitai School. Daily activities included arts, crafts, drama, music, and outdoor play. This exemplified the New Education movement. Since the 1920s, a few innovative teachers⁹ had been putting into practice the ideas disseminated in global networks such as the New Education Fellowship (NEF), a London-based organisation founded shortly after the First World War. From its beginnings, NEF and its journal *New Era* had attracted New Zealand members.¹⁰ Crawford and Gwendoline Somerset, who ran an experimental community centre (including a nursery school) in Feilding, were among the early members

of this organisation. In 1936, with the support of America's Carnegie Foundation, the Somersets travelled to Britain, where they attended seminars run by Susan Isaacs (a psychoanalyst and early childhood educator) and participated in the NEF Conference.¹¹ In 1937, Isaacs was one of the speakers at the NEF Conference in New Zealand. Attracting thousands of delegates, it gained widespread attention in the media.¹² Susan Isaacs was immensely popular with the public. Three of her presentations were included in the weighty—and widely disseminated—volume of conference proceedings edited by A.R. Campbell.¹³ With the election of New Zealand's First Labour Government (1935–46), New Education became intrinsic to Government education policy.

Geraldine's first year at secondary school, Wellington East Girls' College, in 1939 coincided with the outbreak of the Second World War. During her 4 years there, the "Thomas Committee" was deliberating on policies for secondary education. Susan Isaacs, Geraldine noted, was cited in the Thomas Report, the First Labour Government's blueprint for secondary school education, which was published shortly after Geraldine left school.¹⁴ However, many of the ideas in it, about "ability" and "women's roles", were already in circulation. Secondary school pupils were allocated to courses—academic/ professional, commercial/technical, general, or homecraft—according to "ability" and "interests".

As a "bright girl", Geraldine was placed in the academic (Latin) stream and expected to perform well in examinations. On the one hand, secondary schools provided a common core of subjects (English, mathematics, etc). On the other hand, they distinguished certain technical and vocational subjects as boys' or girls' subjects. And although promising "bright students" that they could choose their elective courses freely (albeit on the basis of "ability"), it was assumed that "bright girls" would go on to specialise in humanities, and boys would specialise in mathematics and science. On leaving school, these "bright girls" would "naturally" gravitate to the "womanly" paid occupations (teaching, nursing, secretarial work), and after a few years, would settle happily into marriage, fulltime motherhood, and domestic life.¹⁵ In Helen May's words, women and men were "equal but different".¹⁶

To straddle the contradiction between professional and domestic expectations, motherhood would have the status of a career. Mothers

could be trained in domestic science and theories of child development. Accordingly, domestic science subjects would be compulsory for all girls, at least in their first years of secondary schooling.¹⁷ As Sue Stover's chapter (Chapter 3) illustrates, this was supported by the "maternal deprivation" theory of British doctor John Bowlby. In an interview with Helen,¹⁸ Geraldine explained:

Bowlby was a doctor, a medical doctor. His ideas were rapidly accepted by the medical profession. The 1930s were riddled with concerns about delinquency. The 1930s disapproved of working mothers. Delinquency in Bowlby's view was the fault of working mothers.

In 1941, Geraldine entered teacher training. Influenced by the Thomas Committee, the Labour Government was, as Geraldine put it, attempting "to raise the status of Home Economics" (basically cooking and sewing) by training young women as specialist teachers of the subject at the Dunedin Teachers' Training College. Teacher trainees were paid. So, with the added incentive of escaping unhappy home circumstances, it is hardly surprising that, at the tender age of 16, Geraldine moved to Dunedin to train as a teacher of "Clothing". She later wrote, "I first read the work of Susan Isaacs when I was a student at Dunedin Teachers' College. I certainly did not know about the free school movement or that Isaacs had visited New Zealand in 1937."¹⁹ While teaching Clothing at Hutt Valley Technical College, Geraldine completed a BA (in Philosophy) part-time. In 1948 she married and, on becoming a mother, joined the Kelburn Playcentre.

New Zealand's playcentre movement had been established during the Second World War with support from a trust fund set up by the NEF. While Gwen Somerset was not involved in the founding of playcentre, on shifting to Wellington from Feilding in the late 1940s she had a close association with one of the earliest playcentres, in Kelburn, the leafy Wellington suburb in which Geraldine resided for most of her life. Geraldine described Gwen as "important in that she supported the Susan Isaacs model" of learning and teaching.²⁰ Geraldine later commented that Isaacs's "articles were frequently reprinted in playcentre publications"²¹ and playcentre was "one of the chief agencies in keeping alive in New Zealand the aims and principles of the N.E.F."²²

Playcentre, she elaborated, “emphasised play, and it was characterised by dependence on a child’s motivation and the provision of opportunities for the child’s natural powers to develop.”²³

Co-existing with the ideal of children’s freedom were assumptions that their healthy emotional development was contingent on the mother’s constant presence. At playcentres, mothers were expected to stay with their children. Yet, in training mothers as parent helpers, credentialing and employing them as supervisors, playcentre was also enhancing their vocational competence. At Kelburn Playcentre, Geraldine gained confidence as a public speaker, learned to run meetings, and soon assumed leadership roles at national level. Twelve years later she wrote that, although “the playcentre movement provided certain organisational arrangements both for the care of children and the training of mothers as staff, these arrangements could not, of themselves, resolve the psychological conflict between duty as a mother and desire for status and recognition.”²⁴ She explained the movement’s success by the fact that “playcentres assist women with an established role (home) with an emerging role (work) and help women to find status in society.”²⁵

Becoming a researcher, 1950s–60s

When Geraldine was assistant principal of the Wellington Free Kindergarten Association Teachers College (in 1964), her discovery of its old records developed an interest in the history of kindergartens (see Bethell, Chapter 4).²⁶ She resigned to return to university, graduating with First Class Honours in Education in 1968. She now had three children. There were no university crèches in those days and Geraldine’s mother provided her with childcare. Childcare was regarded by the middle classes as a charitable necessity for the poor and desperate. There was, Geraldine later wrote, a class-based hierarchy between the preschool *education* provided in playcentres and kindergarten and the categorisation of childcare as “welfare”. In 1970, in her first academic publication, she wrote:

Preschool education became the preserve of the middle classes. They believe that women should be at home with their children, hence their preschool organisations tend to a pattern that will not assist women to leave their children in order to work outside the home. Day care in crèches and nurseries then becomes the pattern for

those who have insufficient money to be able to afford middleclass values, and private and public schemes of social welfare are apt therefore to concentrate on this type of institution.²⁷

Equating childcare, kindergartens, and playcentres as equal and educational became a major objective of feminist activism. And, on her appointment as founding director of NZCER's Early Childhood Unit in 1974, Geraldine would position these early childhood services equally in terms of research and campaigns for equitable funding and policy support.

When Geraldine enrolled as a master's student in 1969, educational research in New Zealand was still in its infancy.²⁸ There were no courses devoted to "research methodology". In 1960, there were only 22 academic staff spread across the country's four university education departments.²⁹ Few had doctorates or engaged in research. By the mid-1960s, the baby-boom birth cohort was beginning to progress into secondary schools and universities. The teacher shortage created unprecedented demand for teachers with degrees. By 1970 there were six university education departments, employing a total of 67 teaching staff. However, in the years in which Geraldine was a research student (1969–75), Victoria University's Education Department had yet to employ a female lecturer.

For her MA thesis, Geraldine studied playcentre mothers' experiences and perspectives in Wainuiomata.³⁰ There she developed a particular affinity with, and interest in, the Māori mothers involved. Supported by the Māori Education Foundation and a JR McKenzie Fellowship, and based at NZCER, Geraldine extended her thesis work with a study of the experiences and perspectives of Māori mothers in the Maori-run family preschools in remote parts of New Zealand. NZCER published her book, *Māori Mothers and Preschool Education*.³¹ Having won a QEII Postgraduate Fellowship, and again based at NZCER, Geraldine carried out fieldwork on the East Coast and in other centres where te reo Māori was still widely spoken. Her fieldwork visits were assisted by eminent kuia, including Iritana Tāwhiwhirangi and Rose Pere. Her PhD thesis focused on the language and thought of preschool Māori children.³² Leaving details of each of these projects to the following chapter, here we highlight the originality of their

contribution. These ethnographic studies were radical in three senses: substantive, methodological, and critical. Their substantive contribution was twofold. First, they legitimated early childhood organisations and women's participation in them as objects of academic inquiry. At the time Geraldine reviewed local literature on preschool education for her master's thesis, "only one paper on the subject had been written and published in a book about education in New Zealand."³³ Secondly, these studies were among New Zealand's first social science contributions to the field of women's studies, the first undergraduate courses in which were offered in 1974.³⁴ When Geraldine informed the Chair of Department (Professor Colin Bailey) of her intention to study playcentres as "community-building" and as women's organisations, her proposal was met with disbelief. "Women's organisations" were not a legitimate topic for academic study.

Bridging cracks between academic disciplines, Geraldine's research necessitated methodological invention.³⁵ She mined the archival resources of historians. For example, "in preparing for the field study I was doing in Wainuiomata playcentres, I started out looking at the history of Wainuiomata", a new suburb established after the war. She "went to the borough office and looked at old maps"³⁶ and paid "a lot of attention to going through the old records of the Wellington Playcentre Association."³⁷ Geraldine triggered what would become a career-long interest in demography by scrutinising census statistics on income, housing, and rural–urban (in particular Māori) migration. She followed up hunches from her own experience: "By that stage I had a sort of feeling about the differences between kindergarten and the playcentre. I don't think the historical interest suddenly hits you, I think it's something that grows with you."³⁸ Armed with this contextual information, Geraldine interviewed 103 mothers. This research became, she said, "mainly a thesis carried out in the tradition of social anthropology."³⁹ In her PhD, she added to this disciplinary mix a conceptual framework drawn from linguistics.⁴⁰

Finding supervisors proved elusive. At the start of her doctorate, Geraldine was advised by "a man called John Forster who was a New Zealander, but he'd been in America. He was actually very well trained—he was a genuine sociologist. However, unfortunately he

went overseas, and he never came back. So, I sort of went on, working away on it on my own.”⁴¹

Leaving Geraldine to overview this project in her life story chapter (see Chapter 2), here we illustrate its conceptual originality. What had appeared to be the most basic social science categories used by previous researchers to sample Māori populations did not fit the experiences and self-identifications of the Māori women she encountered. Accordingly, Geraldine wrote incisive critiques of previous work and invented new transdisciplinary vocabularies in hers. How best to define Māori and Pākehā?⁴² Data-gatherers had previously relied on the mathematical categories of “blood quantum” (“full-blooded”, “half-caste” and so on). However, people did not live their lives according to this formula. The concept of “‘blood’ keeps people in their place because they cannot escape it.”⁴³ Advocating the kinds of ethnic self-identification used by New Zealand authorities today, she argued that people “think of themselves as both Māori and Pakeha”.⁴⁴ She continued, “The methods chosen to elicit information about ethnic identity should seem proper to the persons in the research sample.”⁴⁵ Researchers who imposed external categories of “race” were guilty of institutional racism: “the research worker’s actions and his products are as much a part of New Zealand’s race relations as are the actions of landlords, employers, and law courts.”⁴⁶

Similarly, she attacked the application of the categories “rural” and “urban” to communities with high proportions of Māori residents.⁴⁷ “Rural” and “urban”, she argued, were categories suited to the way of life of European peoples and data-gatherers needed to explore the kinds of communities in which Māori people dwelled. Some lived in kin-based communities inhabiting tribal land. Kin-based communities fell into two types—separate communities centred around a marae, and communities that had been engulfed by urban settlement. She also distinguished between migrant communities in which Māori representation made up more or less than 10%. In a memoir on innovators in Māori education, eminent social anthropologist Joan Metge highlighted the usefulness of these contributions.⁴⁸

Feminism, research, and activism, 1970s

Interviewed in 1987, Geraldine summarised her feminist ethnographic work as follows:

There are three kinds of research on women. There's the kind in which women are the subjects but they are looked at exactly as if they were men, using research instruments and measures that fit the lives and experiences of men. Then there is research which is concerned with the basis of women's oppression and explanations for their role and status. The third kind of research in which women are the subjects and research methods are developed that capture the facts of their lives as they experience them—I think my research has been of the last kind.⁴⁹

As university staff numbers grew in the early 1970s, a few women of child-bearing age won academic positions, mainly in Humanities departments. Having been promised equality, but experiencing discrimination, some of these academic women embraced the “new wave” of feminism beginning to sweep across the Western world. Needing childcare, they challenged the stigma against it. Geraldine and her peers now had support from a mass movement. Geraldine's observation that there was a hierarchy between “education” and “welfare” in the early childhood sector became politicised. She commented that “the changeover came when the university was having women as academics. Many had young children. Phillida Bunkle was very influential at Victoria and Anne Smith at Otago. It got caught up in the women's movement. It turned childcare around. It became a cause.”

Geraldine joined the staff of NZCER in 1974 as a Research Officer. The following year, she was appointed to set up and direct its Early Childhood Unit and promoted to Senior Research Officer (see Chapter 6). Viewing the needs and interests of preschool children as the same, regardless of whether or not they were in childcare, playcentres, or kindergartens, Geraldine and the unit she founded worked tirelessly for the integration of the fragmented early childhood sector and the shift of childcare from the government departments of “Social welfare” to “Education”.

Geraldine's PhD was conferred in 1976. PhD degrees in Education awarded in New Zealand were still rare. The first, and for some time

the only woman with a New Zealand doctoral qualification was Marie Clay, whose degree was conferred by Auckland University in 1966. Between 1970 and 1974, 12 more students graduated with doctoral degrees, only one of whom was a woman! With the gradual influx of women into academia, numbers began to increase. Between 1975–79, 30 were awarded—23 men and seven women.⁵⁰

Early childhood staff in the Department of Education had a lowly status and early childhood and some women's organisations campaigned for this to be redressed. In 1977, W.E. (Bill) Renwick, the Director General of the Education Department, invited Geraldine to apply for a high-level appointment there as a Director of Early Childhood. Geraldine did apply but later withdrew her application after senior figures in the NZ Free Kindergarten Union wrote to the State Services Commission preferring another candidate with a kindergarten background. There was some nervousness from some Union members because Geraldine defined herself as a feminist and was an advocate for a supportive policy for childcare. The latter would inevitably mean changes for the flagship kindergarten movement. Geraldine's non-appointment was a huge loss and a male bureaucrat with no background in early childhood was eventually appointed.⁵¹

In 1977, Geraldine took on the position of Assistant Director of NZCER and would serve in that position until her retirement in 1992. Throughout, she worked tirelessly to legitimate the educational experiences of women and girls as research topics and to include sections on gender in projects on school populations as a whole. She became deeply involved with the insertion of "women's issues" into policy, including helping organise the Department of Education's conference on *Education and the Equality of the Sexes* in 1975, International Women's Year, and working on the implementation of its recommendations⁵² (see Chapter 7). From these conferences the lonely campaign by Sonja Davies for government support of childcare alongside the other early childhood services was now being waged at a higher political level (see Chapter 8). In 1978, Geraldine participated in the Ministerial Conference on Educational Research, organised under the auspices of Les Gandar, who held the Education portfolio from 1975–78 under a National Government.⁵³ One of the outcomes of this conference was to explore the feasibility of a New Zealand Association for Educational

Research (NZARE). Tasked with following up this proposal, Geraldine was elected NZARE's first president (see Chapter 9).

It was at this time that we (Sue and Helen) each got to know Geraldine. In 1979, Sue was writing her MA thesis on phenomenology, classroom teaching, and the education of women.⁵⁴ Her literature search located only one woman philosopher of education working in a compatible field—Maxine Greene at Teachers College, Columbia University, in New York.⁵⁵ That year, a new male lecturer was appointed to teach Victoria University's courses in the sociology of education, but was unable to move back to New Zealand until the following year. Sue was asked to "fill in" by teaching the 200-level course, and Geraldine by teaching one of the more advanced ones. The only women lecturing, Geraldine and Sue became firm friends, meeting weekly for drinks at the Staff Club near the top of the Rankine Brown building. Although she was 20 years older than Sue, Geraldine never spoke "down" to Sue, but always as an equal. Sue loved her wicked sense of humour. As Sue's thesis came to adopt a feminist perspective, Geraldine offered theoretical, political, and personal support. Feminist theory was almost invisible in Education as a subject—the study of women's everyday experiences in education almost unknown. We had to produce the feminist material we used in research and included in our teaching.

Towards the end of 1979, Geraldine encouraged Sue to attend NZARE's first conference. In the process of completing a philosophical thesis, Sue felt intimidated as she did not see herself as a "researcher". However, Geraldine insisted that both feminist and theoretical work were essential in a research organisation. In 1980, Sue took up a lectureship at the University of Waikato, where she was the first—and for years the only—woman lecturer in Education. Geraldine encouraged Sue's involvement in women's studies through their mutual involvement in the NZ Women's Studies Association.

Helen also met Geraldine in 1979, at a meeting of the Wellington Preschool Group, whose women members were engaged in collective advocacy around the politics of early childhood. This was Helen's introduction to the world of feminist activism, although not everyone would have been comfortable with that description. The story of this group is told in Chapter 8. At the time Helen was the newly appointed Co-ordinating Supervisor of the Victoria University Crèche and her

life was about to change, when later in the year she met Sonja Davies and became involved in establishing the Early Childhood Workers' Union. This was a different kind of political front for early childhood, and at times controversial. However, she knew that in the background there were mentors and supporters such as Geraldine, Beverley Morris, and Marie Bell, who modelled determined tenacity, inclusiveness and collective strategies to a younger generation.

During 1982, Helen researched and wrote her master's thesis on the Politics of Childcare.⁵⁶ Geraldine had presented a paper with the same name at the first Women's Studies Association Conference in 1978.⁵⁷ Geraldine shared her insights and views with Helen and was later appointed as examiner of her thesis. Geraldine was both generous and stern in her judgement. Thereafter across several decades, and as recently as 2017, Helen would fact check with Geraldine her various books on the history and politics of early years education. Publishers too would often ask her to review Helen's manuscripts. Geraldine's in-depth knowledge and scholarly precision, while salutary, was always appreciated. In 1984, Geraldine was an external, and the oral, examiner of Sue's PhD thesis, the first New Zealand feminist doctoral thesis in education⁵⁸ In her examiner's report, Geraldine wrote, "As a work of feminist scholarship, it presented me, as examiner, with a number of problems" including "what methods of evaluation are appropriate?" The five evaluation criteria she devised included "the consistency of the approach" with, and the "relevance of the conclusions" to, a feminist perspective.

Through the 1980s and 1990s, Geraldine provided Sue with opportunities to speak about her work, and introduced her to key people in her field, including Professor Maxine Greene, with whom she had become friends in 1981, during her visit to Teachers College, Columbia as a Fulbright Senior Scholar. In 1989 Maxine was keynote speaker at a seminar Geraldine organised for the Fulbright Foundation in Wellington. Knowing how Maxine's writing had influenced Sue's, Geraldine invited Sue to present a paper at the seminar and asked her to host Maxine for a short visit to Waikato. There, Maxine asked to read more of Sue's work, urged her to apply for a Fulbright Senior Scholar Award, and supported her application. In 1991, Sue spent a month with Maxine in New York, where she organised meetings with editors

at Teachers College Press, Columbia and critiqued drafts of Sue's book proposal. With Maxine's guidance, Sue wrote the first of her two books published by Teachers College Press.⁵⁹ Without Geraldine's mentoring, these would not have eventuated. Sue and Geraldine always kept in touch—through conferences, emails, visits, and publishing projects such as edited books.⁶⁰ These are just some of the ways in which Geraldine nurtured the careers of countless academic and professional women (see Chapter 10).

Critiquing neoliberal policies, 1980s–90s

From the mid-1980s, New Zealand's education policies were increasingly infused with the neoliberal and managerial ideology that permeated policies of many nations (see Chapter 11). Education was conceptualised primarily as "part of the economy", schools and universities as businesses in competition with one another.⁶¹ Policy-makers increasingly demanded "big" quantitative data, such as OECD's rankings of different countries according to children's performance in standardised tests.⁶² New Zealand's children were increasingly seen as "falling behind" and teachers were blamed for this. Geraldine's research became less ethnographic as she challenged what policymakers saw as "hard data". She commented, "the solution to problems in the outcomes of schooling have almost invariably been seen in the processes of teaching and learning. There has been little discussion of the education system itself."⁶³ Turning to her earlier interest in demography, Geraldine studied historical and statistical records of changes in school student populations in industrialised countries.

In the course of this work, Geraldine became interested in what was known as the "Flynn effect", an apparent rise in the average IQ score with subsequent generations. She noted "a popular acceptance of the idea, triggered by Flynn's findings, that children today are smarter than their parents."⁶⁴ By means of historical and demographic policy analysis, Geraldine argued that "Flynn's shifting link between IQ scores and the underlying trait of intelligence appears to be the consequence of a shift in children's ages at levels of schooling."⁶⁵ She continued, "Over the last 100 years, there has been a lowering of children's ages for grade in education systems in industrialised countries. As ages have fallen, IQs have risen."⁶⁶ Describing her argument as "logical and not statistical",⁶⁷

she asked to what extent could the Flynn effect “be explained by a scoring system that picks up changes in age at grade level?”⁶⁸ Although IQ tests normed children by age, “the weight of evidence is that children perform at the level at which they are placed.”⁶⁹ Younger children promoted early into higher class levels would score more highly than their older classmates. It was important to study the interaction between age in grade and the calculation of the IQ: “Children perform better when they are in higher classes and the procedures of test development pick up these class level effects.”⁷⁰ Policies of school entry and social promotion varied between countries.⁷¹

In this work, Geraldine continued her lifelong concern with social inequality within countries. Accordingly, her analyses explored gender and ethnic inequalities. In New Zealand schools, girls were often promoted out of the junior school classes sooner than boys and therefore scored higher on age-normed tests. There were also age inequalities between the rates of promotions between Māori and Pākehā boys and Māori and Pākehā girls. The Māori children tended to be “kept back” at higher rates in the junior classes. The higher incidence of family poverty amongst Māori families contributed to higher rates of school leaving amongst Māori, particularly the boys, and lower qualifications. Furthermore, the scaling systems used with external examinations in the senior school accorded a lower weighting to candidates’ marks in humanities subjects, weighting the mathematics and sciences more highly on the assumption that these subjects were more difficult. As a result, boys won more scholarships.⁷² Geraldine’s affinity with quantitative methods enabled her to engage with the language of policymakers through the final decades of the 20th century and into the 21st. She left uncompleted papers on the “Flynn effect” at the time of her death.

Chapter synopses

In Chapter 2, Sue Middleton crafts Geraldine’s life story by using her own words, piecing together extracts from interviews and snippets of her autobiographical writing. Friends and colleagues who knew Geraldine should recognise her pithy style of telling a story—this time her own. Chapters 3 to 6 exemplify recent work in early childhood education centred on, or inspired by, Geraldine’s work. Chapter 3, by Sue

Stover, traces the influence of three early 20th century early childhood activists (Susan Isaacs, Marie Bell, and Doreen Dolton), on Wellington playcentre activists of the 1950s: Marie Bell, Beverley Morris, and Geraldine McDonald. In Chapter 4, Kerry Bethell engages in a forensic investigation of the archival resources Geraldine used in her study *An Early Wellington Kindergarten*.⁷³ Inspired by Geraldine's work with Māori mothers and their preschool children, Elizabeth Pakai (Chapter 5) reflects on the legacy of the first wave of Māori women early childhood educators, using insights from her doctoral thesis on the first wave of Māori kindergarten teachers. Chapter 6, by Anne Meade, appraises the legacy of the research platform of NZCER's Early Childhood Unit of which Geraldine was Director. This established a firm foundation linking research, advocacy, and policy that has since characterised New Zealand's early childhood research community.⁷⁴

The next four chapters trace some of the political struggles of the later 20th century in which Geraldine was involved. Chapter 7, by Noeline Alcorn, explores Geraldine's role in the government-supported Education and the Equality of the Sexes Conference held in Wellington in 1975, United Nations International Women's Year and the feminist political activism that followed.⁷⁵ In Chapter 8, Helen May opens the "unseen" archives of the Wellington Preschool Group (1962–86), of which Geraldine was an active member across the 1970s and early 1980s. Many of the members were attendees at the 1975 conferences working to orchestrate a united constituency for early childhood issues within the political agendas of the women's movement. Chapter 9 reprints (with permission) Geraldine McDonald's Herbison Lecture to the 2006 NZARE Conference on the politics and history of the setting up of that organisation in 1979. Most of the authors have at some time been NZARE members and conference attendees and presenters. In Chapter 10, Hilary Lapsley discusses Geraldine's experience of mentoring: the difficulties she faced in her early career through lack of mentoring and the ways she mentored other women. Chapter 11, by Linda Mitchell, traces how some of the political struggles in early childhood that Geraldine was involved in during the 1990s have continued into the 21st century and into the current times of the Labour-led Government. We opened the book with Geraldine telling her life story in her own words. We conclude Chapter 12 with another

personal story, of Geraldine as seen by her adult children—Caroline, Mandy, and Andrew McDonald. What was it like growing up with a mother who was also a researcher?