

## References

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Bradburn, E.(1989). *Margaret McMillan: Portrait of a pioneer*. New York: Routledge, Chapman & Hall, 268 pp., \$69.50 (hardcover).

Elizabeth Bradburn has painted a vivid portrait of Margaret McMillan's life as an educator and humanitarian. She has brilliantly coordinated the work of previous writers to extend our understanding and knowledge of a great woman and pioneer. In short, this book provides a well-researched, chronological account of Margaret McMillan's social reforms, political activities, and educational innovations.

Margaret McMillan is probably best known for her struggle to establish nursery schools in England. Bradburn carefully illustrates that many of Ms. McMillan's educational reforms were rooted in her own schooling experiences. It is apparent that Margaret did *not* enjoy her high school days and had bad memories of strict teachers. These unpleasant memories remained with her for her entire life and provided the stimulation for creating a more compassionate learning environment for young children. Outraged by the social inequalities which existed, she established nursery schools in the poor, deprived areas of England. The major thrust of these programs was to improve children's health and general well-being. Good food, fresh air, and play were basic to her philosophy of education. When she established the *Rachel McMillan Open-Air Nursery School* in honor of her sister, it was her intention "to cut loose from current practices and produce a positive alternative to the existing order" (p. 175). For her the school was a way to support young children and their families. She saw the school as an extension of the home rather than as a substitute for it. Thus it is clear that Margaret McMillan's contributions to early childhood education were not confined to educational issues. She was also deeply concerned with the quality of life, nutrition, and health of the poor.

Margaret McMillan was a "dreamer." Closely linked to her vision of education for young children was her dream of a teachers' college. Her hard work and persuasive manner made this dream a reality. She viewed teachers as "inventors," "discoverers," and "improvers of methods." Thus she expected the teachers she trained to go beyond traditional views and to pioneer new practices. She said:

We desire to turn out teachers who will be true gardeners in real child gardens, and if these gardens are planted in poor areas so much the better. Education should make even the poorest district beautiful and create Edens in the heart of mean streets. (p. 215)

Bradburn describes Margaret McMillan as a social reformer first and an educator second. The desire for reforms often placed Margaret McMillan in a political arena. One of the most significant changes she fought for was the provision of school meals. "She thought that if the state compelled children to go to school, it should be obliged to feed them" (p.79). She maintained that many children did poorly at school because they were malnourished and ill. Once the battle for meals was won, Margaret pushed the politicians to implement a school medical inspections program. The government did not see the health of children as one of their priorities and were very resistant to her orations but, interestingly enough, the medical profession supported her. Her hard work in this area brought about school medical inspections and treatments as well as the establishment of health centers.

Margaret McMillan was not only a voice for children, she was also a leader of women. She was committed to the feminist movement and actively campaigned for women's rights. Bradburn notes that: "In working for women's emancipation she did not seek to embroil her sex in fierce competition with men; she aimed to enlist them in a fight for equality for all people and a struggle against injustice and discrimination" (p.145). Her battle in this area started with the fight to improve working conditions for women in industrial plants. From here she moved into the arenas of women's education and suffrage. She believed that women had the right to higher education and that they needed to be part of the political system and share in the shaping of laws.

Thus, the major theme of the book is that of leadership. As a leader and pioneer, Margaret McMillan influenced various professions and worked along side people from all walks of life. She could be found working with families in the slums or having tea at one of the Queen's receptions. She used her abilities as a writer and an orator to raise public awareness of humanitarian issues. Her goal was to help develop a more just and compassionate society. It is easy to understand why Margaret McMillan was described as a "practical visionary" and "disturbing element in human society."

This dramatic biography of Margaret McMillan's life is a major contribution not only to the field of early childhood education, but also to philosophy, sociology, and political science. Many of the issues which were a driving force behind Margaret McMillan's work over 100 years ago are still with us today.