



# Focus on Frances Slater

## Frances Slater

Emeritus Reader, University of London

Dr Frances Slater has written papers for, or been on the editorial panel of, *Geographical Education* from 1970 to 2000.

I was born in New Zealand in 1940 and started school as the Second World War ended. I write this in January 1993 when wars are still with us, and a little peace for some. I believe my academic pursuit of geography, always in severe competition with English literature and history, stemmed from holidays at an early age on my aunt's farm. I gave names for example, to all the little islands and promontories along the stream, which bounded part of the farm. An aerial photograph of the farm still hangs in the home of one of my sisters. Each one of its paddocks, gorse hedges, wire fences, the idiosyncrasies of its gates and the pattern of its sheep tracks was well known to me. A sense of space out there on the farm always went with a sense of excitement, freedom and adventure. On a mixed farm too, one easily appreciates that land use varies and changes. So perhaps the essence of my personal definition of geography: How is the world arranged? And why?

My childhood and teenage experiences were many: as feeder of kittens; cowherd; egg collector; separator washer; truck driver; haymaker; shearing shed hand. I recall too, early and frosty morning sledge rides driving Punch, an old draft horse, out to the lambing paddock; walks to collect the mail at the farm gate; playing in

the orchard; furnishing the cave; listening to the "Morepork" of owls as I read Dickens, secretly, by the light of a torch; watching the willows green each spring; finding a way over a flooding stream; holding a field mouse; playing in the barn; making small watermills for the stream; and sewing up bags of rich, golden, clover seed on the header harvester. Work and play were one. All contributed much to my emotional and psychological development. I believe my love for that farm led me to see as opportunity, the possibility of writing a thesis on the agricultural Geography of my home area, North Otago. English literature and history were put to one side and further studies in geography taken up.

I didn't particularly wish to be the conventional New Zealander taking a year out of teaching to have a working holiday in Britain so instead I decided to do a PhD at the University of Iowa after meeting H. H. McCarty in New Zealand in 1962. Iowa City was the right size for me, and graduate studies and new friends combined well with a Greyhound Bus ticket of 99 days for \$99 in the summer of 1966 and a year later a Eurail pass.

More studies, more travelling, more teaching and then in January 1974 I began teaching at the University of London Institute of Education.

Extracted from F. Slater (1993). Preface. *Learning through Geography*. (Pathways in Geography series No. 7), (p. viii). Indiana: Indiana University of Pennsylvania.