

Women's History Month

CELEBRATING REMARKABLE WOMEN WHO CHANGED THE WORLD OF EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

BY DARIA RYMARZAK

March has been officially declared Women's History Month. The first efforts to distinguish a special time focusing on the contributions of women to a variety of fields date back to President Carter recognizing the Week of March 8th, 1980, as National Women's History Week:

Too often, the women were unsung, and sometimes their contributions went unnoticed. But the achievements, leadership, courage, strength, and love of the women who built America were as vital as that of the men whose names we know so well.

Throughout the years, a series of proclamations were issued to designate the month of March as a national celebration of women. As we take this opportunity to highlight the critical role women played in shaping American history, culture, and society, we must also learn about the contributions women have made and still contribute to the field of early childhood education.

Here are just a few examples of great women who were, and are, dedicated and passionate about child development, early childhood leadership, child advocacy, and social justice. Please take a moment to read and learn about these inspirational professionals and their stories.

Paula Jorde Bloom

"What most people want more than anything is the chance to belong and make a difference in something they value."

Dr. Paula Jorde Bloom was the founder of the McCormick Center for Early Childhood Leadership and a distinguished author. She published several widely read books, including the Director's Toolbox management book series, as well as assessment tools, namely the Early Childhood Work Environment Survey (ECWES), the Program Administration Scale (PAS), and the Business Administration Scale for Family Child Care (BAS). Dr. Bloom was a professor in the Department of Early Childhood Education at National Louis University and the Michael W. Louis Endowed Chair. She spent her early years as a preschool and kindergarten teacher and later as a center director and administrator of a campus laboratory school, quickly realizing the vital role of early childhood leaders. She was a pioneer in developing early childhood leadership training and improving early childhood professional standards. Dr. Bloom's legacy lives on through the work of the McCormick Center and a scholarship in her name, which supports new leaders who, just like her, are devoted and passionate about building strong early childhood programs and systems.

Marian Wright Edelman

“Service is the rent we pay for being.”

Marian Wright Edelman is a founder and president emerita of the Children’s Defense Fund (CDF). She has used her voice to advocate for civil rights and then honed her focus on disadvantaged children and families. Her career began in the mid-1960s upon graduating from Spelman College and Yale Law School, becoming the first black woman admitted to the Mississippi Bar. She is also the first woman elected to the board of directors of Yale University. Her public policy efforts have been focused on securing funding for early childhood programs such as Head Start, improving the foster care system, supporting adoption services, or increasing Medicaid coverage. She has received the highest civilian award – the Presidential Medal of Freedom and has also been awarded the Robert F. Kennedy Lifetime Achievement Award.

Magda Gerber

“Having respect for the world is when you allow people to be what they are.”

Magda Gerber was a Hungarian early childhood education specializing in infant-toddler development. She is probably best known as a founder of the Resources for Infant Educators (RIE), which introduced a new approach in infant-toddler research and learning practices. The key principle of the RIE method is respect – viewing infants as individuals and unique human beings who are responsible for their own learning. Mrs. Gerber believed that by showing love and respect to infants, parents and caregivers demonstrate trust in their ability to become active learners. By carefully observing babies interacting with other people and their environments, we learn how to understand the infant’s communication and needs. Mrs. Gerber taught early development classes at the University of California, California State University, and Pacific Oaks College. She provided professional training classes at the RIE center in Los Angeles. She was a lecturer at early childhood conferences and an author, best known for her book, *Dear Parent: Caring for Infants With Respect*.

Frieda Mitchell

“I think one thing that we accomplished was the ability or the opportunity to speak and to be heard.”

Frieda Mitchell has received national and international recognition as a devoted child advocate and civil rights activist. Mrs. Mitchell served as Executive Director of United Communities for Child Development (UCCD), a first-of-its-kind program that advocated for utilizing state and federal funding to support community child care programs. As the UCCD approach was replicated in other states, including Alabama, Georgia, North Carolina, and Mississippi, Mrs. Mitchell became heavily involved in daycare policy discussions. She played a central role in integrating the county’s then racially segregated schools. Her efforts led her to be elected to the Beaufort County School Board, becoming one of its first black school board members. Among her numerous accolades are the prestigious John D. Rockefeller, III,

Public Service Award; the Marian Wright Edelman Award for Service to Children; and the Penn Center 1862 Circle. To celebrate Mrs. Mitchell's achievements, the Frieda R. Mitchell Early Childhood Development Student Award has been established at the Technical College of the Lowcountry (TCL).

Malala Yousafzai

"If we want to achieve our goal, then let us empower ourselves with the weapon of knowledge and let us shield ourselves with unity and togetherness."

Malala's story is truly inspiring – at the age of seventeen, she has become the world's youngest Nobel Prize laureate and only the second Pakistani to receive the award. She is a fierce advocate for human rights and has been prized for her fight "against the suppression of children and young people and for the right of all children to education." At the age of 11, Malala anonymously contributed to a blog on the Urdu language site of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). She used that opportunity to write about life under the Taliban's oppression and advocate for educational opportunities for children, young girls, and women. With the help of her father, she used other media outlets and started a public campaign to allow girls free access to education. She was nominated for the International Children's Peace Prize and was awarded Pakistan's National Youth Peace Prize in 2011. That made her a target, and one year later, on the bus home from school, the Taliban attempted to assassinate Malala. She has survived and now resides in the United Kingdom. Along with her father, she has founded Malala Fund, and her work continues.

The field of early childhood education is largely driven by women. Women have led and continue to guide our work – not only as committed early childhood educators but also as inspiring leaders, dedicated researchers, passionate authors, and outspoken advocates. Paula Jorde Bloom, Frieda Mitchell, Magda Gerber, Marian Wright Edelman, and Malala Yousafzai have shown us what determination, hard work, and devotion truly mean. Their impact and legacy are ever-present. As you celebrate Women's History Month, you show great respect by sharing their stories and stories of other great women with your staff, colleagues, and families in your program.

To learn more, please visit:

[Paula Jorde Bloom's Story](#)

[Marian Wright Edelman's Story](#)

[Magda Gerber's Story](#)

[Frieda Mitchell's Story](#)

[Malala Yousafzai's Story](#)

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a baccalaureate degree in psychology from Roosevelt University and a graduate degree in child development and early childhood administration from Erikson Institute. She is interested in supporting initiatives leading to integrated early learning and child development systems, connecting early childhood practice with policy and research, and the functioning and effectiveness of community-based coalitions addressing the importance of early years.