

# Nineteenth century early childhood institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand: Legacies of enlightenment and colonisation

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*Abstract:* The nineteenth century colonial setting of Aotearoa NZ is the most distant from the cradle of European Enlightenment that sparked new understandings of childhood, learning and education and spearheaded new approaches to the care and education of young children outside of the family home. The broader theme of the Enlightenment was about progress and the possibilities of the ongoing improvement of peoples and institutions. The young child was seen as a potent force in this transformation and a raft of childhood institutions, including the 19th century infant school, kindergarten, and crèche were a consequence. The colonisation and settlement of Aotearoa NZ by European settlers coincided with an era in which the potency of new aspirations for new kinds of institutions for young children seeded. It is useful in the 21st century to reframe the various waves of colonial endeavour and highlight the dynamic interfaces of being colonised for the indigenous populations; being a colonial for the settler populations; and the power and should be purposed of the colonising cultures of Europe. It can be argued that in the context of ECE neither the indigenous nor settler populations of Aotearoa NZ were passive recipients of European ECE ideas but, separately and together, forged new understandings of childhood and its institutions; enriched and shaped by the lessons learned in the colonial setting of Aotearoa NZ.

*Key words:* kindergarten, early childhood, colonisation, history of education, New Zealand.

## Introduction

The nineteenth century colonial setting of Aotearoa New Zealand is the most distant from the states and principalities of Europe, across which Age of Enlightenment ideals had burgeoned throughout an extended eighteenth century. In Britain, Enlightenment wonderings were integrally linked to exploration wanderings including the subsequent settlement of Antipodean lands and islands (Porter, 2000). Conversely, it was the peoples and places of the distant New World lands that became a key measure of the Enlightenment, as Outram (2006, p.10) argues:

However much they struggled to keep the word Enlightenment and its surrounding dialectics within the confines of European thinking, Europeans always had the rest of the world clutching at their elbow ... Drawings brought back from voyages to the Pacific ... persistently raised the question: who was the really Enlightened person?

Enlightenment energies, endeavours and ideas also sparked new understandings of childhood, learning and education, spearheading experimental approaches to the care and education of young children outside of the family home (Hilton & Shefrin, 2009). The broader theme of the Enlightenment was about progress and the possibilities of the improvement of peoples and reforming of Old World institutions. To effect the necessary change, new understandings concerning the nature of child welfare and education were in order. The young European child was perceived as a potent force for progress, and a raft of childhood institutions, including the nineteenth century infant school, kindergarten and crèche were a consequence.

The colonisation and settlement by Pākehā (non Māori) settlers coincided with an era in which the potency of aspirations for new kinds of institutions for children was realised. It is useful to view the fledgling European settlement of Aotearoa New Zealand as ripe for experiment although distance caused a tempering of idealism due to the pragmatic realities facing early missionaries and settlers. Thus, it is important to revisit these first institutions for the care and education of very young children. The story in this article provides a window into the dynamic interfaces of being colonised for the indigenous Māori populations, being a colonial for Pākehā and the outreach of the colonising cultures of Europe.

The nineteenth century story of early childhood institutions in Aotearoa New Zealand is still unfolding (May 2005, 2013), reframing earlier telling

of the story that traditionally began with the first kindergarten established in Dunedin in 1889. This was wrong. Previous ‘tellers’ had ‘forgotten’ the existence of earlier kindergartens and earlier institutions. The first European early childhood institutions comprised a network of infant schools for Māori children established by missionaries in the 1830-40s. These schools for children from as young as 18 months and up to seven years old were modeled on the most recent educational experiment in Britain, intended to remove young children from city streets (Donnachie, 2000). With the demise of missionary schooling the infant school story was lost, as were the presence of Māori children in this history. However, the colonial period of missionary work, settlement, war and land acquisition is integral to an understanding of the later history of Māori early childhood education institutions. Colonial society created both the need and the impetus for charitable and educational services for European children, but for Māori it brought about the loss of population, resources, land, and language. These factors are at the heart of early childhood institutions developed both for Māori and by Māori in the twentieth century.

## Civilizing indigenous children: Missionary infant schools

In 1828, the British Secretary for the Colonies reported that, “Wherever our Empire is acknowledged we have carried thither our language, our laws and our institutions...” (McCann 1988, p. 101). In a coincidence of politics and timing the first missionary foray to New Zealand, under the auspices of the Church Missionary Society (hereafter CMS), was underway amidst northern Māori tribes in the Bay of Islands. Schooling was a key institution to be “carried thither” and the ‘gift’ of literacy was a conduit to convert the children of ‘heathens’ (p. 101). While Māori keenly acquired literacy skills and the new tools of technology (Jones & Jenkins, 2011), there had been no baptisms. By another coincidence of timing the idea of infant schools for very young children was gaining vogue in Britain. First introduced in 1816 by Robert Owen at his mill in New Lanark Scotland, the infant school was intended to provide a kindly, playful and active place for the care and education of the young children of his mill workers (Donnachie, 2000). Owen’s experiment was newsworthy, attracting thousands of visitors. It was transformed into a more evangelical blueprint after the formation of the Infant School Society in London in 1824 which proclaimed that “Infant schools should give the children of the poor ‘principles of virtue’” and save them growing up into “the perpetrators of the most atrocious and injurious crimes” (McCann & Young, 1982, p. 66).

Samuel Wilderspin (1829) became the key exponent and architect of the infant school movement. In 1829 he speculated on the possibilities of infant schools in the burgeoning British Empire:

... the children of barbarous tribes...[might] raise up to cultivate and humanise their parents, and become the elements of a society that will soon be able to supply its own wants, advocate their own rights, and diffuse the blessings of civilisation among the tribes in the interior of Africa. (pp. 16–17)

By the early 1830s, missionaries, already schooling children across imperial sites around the globe, added to their repertoire the idea of infant schools for the youngest children (May et al., 2014). Likewise in New Zealand, between 1832 and 1845 most CMS missions across the upper North Island established an infant school alongside a suite of schools for Māori children and adults (May 2005, 2013).

At Paihia, Marianne Williams makes the first mention of the idea of an infant school in her journal entry on 31st October 1831: “Last night I heard nothing but the infant school. This morning, nothing but the French man-o-war working into the bay” (Fitzgerald, 2004, p. 201). Marianne was the wife of Henry Williams who headed the CMS mission. This was most likely a planning meeting, but the more momentous interest of the French presence halted further comment. The larger drama against which infant schools were positioned is a recurring situation, and provides context for the broader colonial backdrop to this story told in *Empire, Education and Indigenous Childhoods* (May et.al. 2014). The Paihia infant school was underway by 1832 and combined boys and girls, Māori and Pākehā children. The main teaching aids were Wilderspin’s manual of instruction, *Infant Education* (1829), combined with Dr. Isaac Watts’s *Catechisms and Prayers* (1797) for Sunday schools, translated into Māori. Captain W. Jacobs of the East India Company was a visitor to Paihia in 1833 and reported to the CMS:

The Infant School contains 26 little children... . The assiduous superintendence of the female members of the Mission appears evident, in the manner in which these little creatures go through their exercises; and there cannot be any doubt that the moral culture which the system engenders, no less than the mental improvement of the scholars, will make it a blessing to the Mission. (*Missionary Register*, 1834, p. 61)

The idea spread, and on a visit to the Puriri mission in 1835, Henry Williams reported to the CMS:

Most of the children were boys from seven years downwards. Each put on a blue frock upon entering the house, which gave a clean, uniform, and pleasing appearance. The children manifested much pleasure, and desire to learn, and went through their various evolutions with considerable precision. At the conclusion, some of the old ladies among the visitors, made a special request that the children might be marched around the flag-staff, in order that they might see them. Their wishes were complied with, to their great admiration. But one of the most important characters of the school was Tini, a lady of considerable note, and the wife of one of the principal Chiefs here. She came in a clean blue gown, and took the lead under Mrs. Fairburn, in pointing to the letters, and keeping order. She appeared quick and intelligent, and is, I understand, a very well behaved person. This is a highly important feature in this early Mission. Surely this moral wilderness shall soon *rejoice and blossom as the rose*, and this desert break forth into singing. To hear these children repeat their Catechism, and answer questions put to them, was very animating, and we could not but feel the assurance, that our labour was not in vain. (*Missionary Register*, 1836, p. 341, emphasis in original)

A showcase infant school was opened in 1843 at Waimate that included a Wilderspin gallery and teaching posts. Etchings of the infant school in action have survived as evidence,<sup>1</sup> as has the attendance register during 1844, revealing not only the pattern of attendance, but also the renaming of children through baptism or the simplifying of names.<sup>2</sup> In the missionary quest to remake and civilise indigenous children, they were often renamed, always reclothed, and at Waimate they were rehoused apart from their parents. Also surviving is a 'DIVISION OF TIME' listing a long day of activities divided into half-hour blocks beginning with "Washing under Supervision" "Cleaning Rooms" and "PRAYER".<sup>3</sup> The day was a mix of teaching the 3Rs (Reading, aRithmetic and wRiting), religious instruction, games, singing, sewing and household tasks. The emphasis was to impose order through time by minutely regulating daily life, a concept foreign to Māori, but for Europe-

<sup>1</sup> 'New Infant School' 18 September 1843, William Bambridge diaries 1819–1879, MS-0129-0132; Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington. (ATL); 'Mr Colenso teaching at the infant school' W. C. Cotton journals, MS 39/83, Dixon Library, Sydney (DL).

<sup>2</sup> Native infant school 1844', qms-1408-1413, ATL.

<sup>3</sup> 'Division of time for the infant school', W. C. Cotton journals, MS 39/127, DL.

ans a signifier of being civilised and enlightened (Ballantyne, 2014). William Bambridge taught singing at the infant school and in his diary of November 13th, 1843, he provides clues to their purpose:

I have been much pleased with the infant school today. In their singing I tried two girls alone with 'God Save the King' and they did it beautifully. The rest joined in the chorus and clapped their companions who succeeded well. I think the children who are remaining at this school will continue. Today they seemed to be almost weaned from their kain-gas [villages]. God bless all of them and may they grow up in the new faith and become useful in propagating that faith amongst them.

Further, in his entry on February 16th, 1944, he discusses the opening of a new school:

This afternoon I fixed upon for commencing school in the new pa [fortified site] belonging to Noa and Pirika. I was much pleased with the very small beginning. At first the little children fled from me with evident terror, but Noa brought them to me by force and as soon as I began to [undecipherable] them they sat down after giving me their right hand in a token of reconciliation. We spent some time with the English alphabet and then sang some Native hymns which the little creatures highly approved of and made such a noise in attempting to follow me that it was with difficulty I could maintain the air of the tune. I had only four scholars from 18 months to 2½ years. On Monday I expect a larger number washed nicely and with their hair combed. This is the promise. Who can tell but more good may come from this than I could expect.<sup>4</sup>

In the aftermath of the Treaty of Waitangi signed by the Crown and Māori chiefs in 1840 to give sovereignty to the British Crown and protect Māori lands and taonga (treasures and resources), the fragmentation of the old missionary order was underway. The decline in Māori interest in missionary education was caused by frustration with the limitations of biblical instruction in Māori, and European settlement gave Māori a wider horizon for contact. Inter-tribal warfare, ill feeling against European settler incursion and breaches of the Treaty caused missionary leader Henry Williams to report:

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<sup>4</sup> William Bambridge diaries.

The loss of life and property has been very considerable and our missionary work has been well nigh suspended. For many months a very jealous and turbulent feeling was exhibited among many tribes, owing to the evil workings of the wicked and designing men upon the minds of several Chiefs, instilling into their minds that the British Government had taken full and entire possession of the country and that the Chiefs were slaves ... the Treaty of Waitangi of 1840 was stated to have caused all the evil. (*Missionary Register* 1846, p. 329)

This was the larger drama of the rise and demise of the infant school experiment. Of interest is a story, constructed through missionary lens and agendas, when young Māori children at school, albeit “wild” and “indulged”, were seen as precocious learners, quicker than their European counterparts (May, 2005). It is also a one-sided story. There are no reports or sources giving clues as to Māori perception of the infant schools. The experiment is illustrative too of missionary educators’ adaptation of enlightened educational ideas in Europe, transported and applied in a new world context for the idealistic purposes of remaking indigenous children. Such aspirations were imbued with the intent of infant school educators in Britain, to remake the children of the poorer class, similarly perceived as savage and uncivilized. This pattern of experimentation with the latest ideas on early education and the adaptation to local circumstances, safely distant from the codes and rules of the originators, is a repeating pattern in the story of early education in Aotearoa NZ. In the aftermath of mission schooling, a Native School system across Māori settlements was established in 1867, to become the frontline of European education for the young Māori child (Simon & Tuhiwai Smith, 2001). The agenda was still to civilize behaviour and Europeanize habits, but the medium of teaching was secular and in English. It was not until the 1960s that educationalists and governments started to worry about the preschool-aged Māori child and introduced a raft of early childhood interventions to ‘compensate’ for their perceived inadequate home life (Ritchie & Skerrett, 2014).

## Opportunities for settlers: Colonial infant schools

The colony of New Zealand was on “the edges of the empire” and regarded as “Mother England’s ... most desirable of progeny” (Moon, 2009, p. 11). The New World of the Antipodes was not only about the geography of new lands that Europeans wrongly presumed were empty, but was imbued with dreams of opportunity and leaving the ills of the Britain and the Old World. Waves of settlers brought to New Zealand a utopian brand of imperialism

hoping that the, “healthy New Zealand environment” would “improve the British race” (Andrews, 2009, p. 64).

It was in the *New Zealand Gazette* (6 September 1839) that the Ladies Committee, wives of the New Zealand Company’s future landowners, announced their intention to establish an “Infant School for the benefit of the children of the Aborigines<sup>5</sup> and of the poorer class of settlers.” Land had been ‘purchased’ (which was not yet for sale) and a prefabricated infant school was loaded onto the *Adelaide*, one of the six ships due to depart England. More extraordinary was the news that James Buchanan, the first infant school teacher at New Lanark, had been offered a free passage to the new colony. It is noteworthy that the *Gazette*’s first article on education concerned the schooling of very young children. Also to be “carried thither” were “Literary, scientific and philanthropic institutions for the benefit of the British settlers and native inhabitants of the islands of New Zealand”. The Company founders shared

the belief that [for] a Colony to be prosperous [it] should be composed of a portion of an old Society, transferred complete in all its parts, and containing at least the rudiments of all those institutions which give the tone and character to civilization.<sup>6</sup>

An infant school was one such institution to promote the ideals of empire and progress.

Buchanan’s influence on early education in the new colony, if the plan had eventuated, can only be surmised, with the intended schools benefiting much from his expertise. Buchanan left the *Adelaide* in Cape Town at the behest of family members and the portable school was sold to become a landmark waterfront hotel. A more modest infant school was established and various private school ventures established. The story illustrates the pattern of grand plans from British entrepreneurs, politicians, church and military leaders going awry amid the realities of colonial life. On arrival the colonists found that with the limited infrastructure and only a small European population makeshift ‘do it yourself’ ventures were the only viable option (May, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> In the early nineteenth century the term Aborigine was generally applied to all indigenous peoples including Māori which was a term only used after European’s arrived; translated as ‘ordinary’ by comparison with pākehā who were ‘white and non Māori.’

<sup>6</sup> ‘The first colony of New Zealand’, G. S. Evans papers, 1800–1868, 90.313, ATL.



Each settlement had a different pattern of educational provision that often included infant schools or infant classes. The details are scanty, the ventures short-lived and the pedagogy undefined. Legislation to provide public schooling had to wait until the establishment of the first provincial governments in 1853, and remained piecemeal until the 1877 Education Act provided for free, secular public schooling, compulsory for children from seven years of age but free for children from aged five. In 1906 schooling was made compulsory for Māori children although free secular schooling in English was already available in many Māori communities.

Another extraordinary plan concerning the promise of infant schools also did not eventuate, but provides insight into the utopian element of colonial enterprise (Rockey, 1981). Infant school enthusiast, Robert Pemberton in his book *The Happy Colony*, published in 1854, announced an intention to build ten interconnecting towns across around Mt. Taranaki. 'Infant temples' in the centre of each town would provide for this first stage of learning for 3-month-old to 7-year-old children. The temples, alongside colleges for the second and third stages, were designed as a foundation institution of the 'new society', Pemberton placed an option on a tract of land in Taranaki but was unable to raise £200,000 for its purchase. The backdrop of Māori-pākehā land disputes in Taranaki (still unresolved) is a reason Pemberton's dreams faltered. Pemberton was a believer in the perfectibility of man and an admirer of Robert Owen's 'new view of society' in the New World (Owen, 1813). Pemberton, like Owen was influenced by Rousseau's views on education. They both believed that "Man was born free and everywhere is in chains"<sup>7</sup> and, in echo of Rousseau, to counter Church doctrine Pemberton promoted a doctrine of happiness:

I believe I am right in proposing the beautiful island of New Zealand to be the spot for the first stone of the temple of happiness ... it may be said to be in its infant state and uncontaminated by any large collection of people ... and kept free from the contamination of the offences from the mother country. (Pemberton, 1854, p. 25)

The town plans for the Happy Colony placed its institutions of learning at the centre, both physically and politically<sup>8</sup>. The environment was designed for children to learn by first-hand experience:

<sup>7</sup> Advertising in the appendices of Pemberton, 1854.

<sup>8</sup> 'View of the colleges for the Happy Colony'; 'Model town for the Happy Colony', *The Happy Colony*, c0363-08 and c0363-09, 1854, British Library.

Infants and children will never be taught by abstract ideas, rules, dogmas, creeds, they amount to nothing, they mean nothing, they accomplish nothing of value whatsoever. The Happy Colonists will very soon be able to see the contrast between their own children educated under the guidance of philosophy, than those children educated under the guidance of the priesthood and class system of Christian countries. (Pemberton, 1854, pp. 171–172)

Pemberton's unrealised dream captures the mood of optimism across the mix of ideals shaping both early childhood education and colonial settlement. While the colonists brought their dreams for a better world to New Zealand, the practical realities of settler life made the realisation of all their dreams impossible. Economic survival was the priority. The chief characteristic of infant schooling in the new colony was its diversity in such a distant place from its origins. Its history becomes more appropriately connected to that of schooling although the demarcation was never neat (May, 2005).

## **Rescuing street children: The idea of the free kindergarten**

The idea of kindergarten in the Old World coincided with planned settlement in the New World of Aotearoa New Zealand. This makes another example of the transformation of ideas and institutions across continents and cultural contexts. In 1837 Friedrich Froebel established a Play and Activity Institute in the village of Bad Blankenburg, in the rural state of Thuringia in Germany. This new institution recreated a home-like atmosphere that extended the possibilities for learning with a programme structured around play and self-activity. Froebel (1825, pp. 54–55) had earlier argued that:

Play is the highest expression of human development ... The child that plays thoroughly, with self active determination ... will surely be a thoroughly determined man ... The plays of childhood are the germinal seeds of all later life.

In 1840 Froebel renamed his institute a 'kindergarten'. This signified both a 'garden for children' where they could observe and interact with nature, but also a 'garden of children' that could develop freely, under the guidance of the 'gardeners of children', the kindergarten teachers. Froebel was promoting a view of childhood, idealistic and romantic maybe, which was playful and purposeful; that placed the early years at the forefront of any education system. His motto, "Let us live with and for our children" became the

rationale for a world-wide kindergarten movement engaged in educational and social reform intent on transforming the world of childhood.

Information about the kindergarten arrived in the colony during the 1870s via England and the United States (May, 2013). By then the German kindergarten was one of the institutions accompanying, what James Belich (2005) titled, *The Settler Revolution and the Rise of the Anglo-World*. New ideals of kindergarten childhood sat well in this mix of colonial-utopian endeavour for a “Better Britain” (Belich, 2005, p. 457). There are parallel elements of utopian endeavour in the Froebel kindergarten that had emerged during ‘new times’ in Germany in the 1840s. Froebel and others were challenging the suffering inherent in Lutheran Church orthodoxy, arguing instead (as did Pemberton, see above) for the pursuit of happiness. Froebel was concerned that childhood had become a ‘straight jacket’ and that the education of young children was repressive and wrote that: “The infant school ... only trains the memory, neglecting or insufficiently attending to the creative and expressive needs ...” (Froebel, 1844, p. 23). The kindergarten’s transportation and transformation beyond Germany began with the 1851 *Kindergarten Verbot* imposed in Prussia after the failure of the 1848-49 revolution. The liberal ideology of opportunity and social reform that sparked the ‘Anglo-World settler revolution’ similarly imbued the educational ideology of the kindergarten.

Despite the cultural and geographic relocation of the kindergarten, its Froebelian pedagogy remained significantly intact, except in schools where kindergarten activities were standardized for mass teaching. The Froebelian kindergarten itself had, however, changed. The idea of the free kindergarten had been demonstrated in England, and more fully realized in the United States. Its roots were in the German *Volkskindergarten* seeded after Froebel’s death. The *Volkskindergarten* for working class children had been established through the advocacy of Froebel’s patron and promoter, Baroness von Marenholtz-Bülow who claimed that, “until the mothers of the lower classes are a better educated race, the education of their children must be in the care of the educated class” (Taylor Allen, 1888, p. 329). This kindergarten blueprint was replicated in New Zealand’s four settlement cities. By the 1880s it was evident that a South Seas Antipodean utopia was hard to realize. A fragile institutional and economic infrastructure recreated Old World ills. This made a worthwhile project combining settler ‘do-it-yourself’ endeavour and the Froebelian kindergarten promise of a ‘new child’.

The first kindergarten ventures in New Zealand were established in Auckland, in 1887 and 1888 respectively. Details are sketchy and both kinder-

gartens were short-lived. Their intention was to “to rescue very young children of poor parents from the streets and prepare them for going to public schools”<sup>9</sup>. This was also the intention of the Dunedin Free Kindergarten Association (hereafter DFKA), a broader based endeavour established in 1889 by a group of settler citizens with well-connected links across church, media, education, political and philanthropic circles (Bethell, 2008). The Association celebrated its 125th Jubilee in 2014 (May, 2014). Their longevity fostered the myth that they established the first free kindergarten. More important was the commitment of the founders to Froebelian ideals.

Froebel is most remembered for the kindergarten *spielgaben*, a progression of geometric blocks of increasing complexity called ‘gifts’. The gifts were playthings for self-activity designed to stimulate and develop the child’s senses (Liebschner, 1992). In elaborating Froebel’s teachings Marenholtz-Bülöw (1872, p. XXV) wrote:

A child’s instinct of activity, if properly directed from the beginning, soon shows a marked tendency to artistic production. The plastic instinct is plainly visible in the tendency of a child to form and model. The brick-box meets this tendency as far as architecture is concerned.

Froebel’s block building child became a metaphor for the ‘new child’ of a new society, an endeavour never envisaged by Froebel as extending to the Antipodean lands.

Settler arrivals to the Otago Peninsula harbour from 1848 were intent on building the proposed town of Dunedin. Within months a First Church and School were operational. By the 1850s, a functioning wooden town had been built. In 1861 gold was discovered in the hinterland. The population boomed, and the wealth created a small Victorian city with ornate stone architecture. By the time the DFKA opened its first kindergarten in 1889 the gold was depleted and an economic depression had stalled progress. Behind the architectural facades were wooden slums overcrowded with a populace whose dreams had not been realised.

The kindergarten became one of a range of child-saving initiatives intended to transform the play of slums children. Karl Froebel, the brother of Friedrich (in Edinburgh, where he was a refugee), described:

<sup>9</sup> *The Leader*, 9 April 1887.

... dirty children screaming instead of singing, rolling in the mud or dust instead of dancing; ... playing with fragments of bottles and dishes and dirty pieces of wood, and disgusting bones, instead of bricks, coloured tablets, sticks and peas. (Brehony, 2003, p. 87)

In Edinburgh's colonial namesake, the location of the first kindergarten was known as the 'Devil's Half Acre' and described by Demspter (1986) as:

an overcrowded warren where whole families lived in a single room and for whom the adjacent alley was both bathroom and living room. Here too were opium dens, drinking parlours and houses of prostitution. (p. 6)

Lavinia Kelsey (DFKA, 1914, p. 12) recalled the day in 1889 when the DFKA 'planted the first kindergarten in Dunedin' with the intent of fulfilling the Froebelian promise of the new child:

Those of us who were present that day and watched the dullness and apathy of these children were astonished in visiting the school four months later at the wonderful change. There were the same children all clad in a uniform 'pinny' and yet how different. Their legs, hands, voices, brains, sympathies all were active in their appointed season. There seemed to be no abnormal growth but a quiet harmony of development.

At a meeting with the colony's Premier, Rt. Hon. Richard Seddon in 1903, DFKA president, Rachel Reynolds, described how kindergarten children:

... were trained in ways of industry and cleanliness which developed into habits which would remain with them for life. It was rescue work. The children were of the poorest order – Chinese, Assyrians, and so on – and the work being done was saving the colony thousands of pounds. Many of these children if left to develop in their own surroundings, would eventually be criminals, and the kindergartens were saving them by taking them at a pliant stage and putting them on the right track<sup>10</sup>.

Froebel's child builders in the "Devils Half-Acre", it was claimed, would make a useful contribution as future citizens of the new colony. From the

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<sup>10</sup> *Otago Daily Times*, 24 December 1903.

start kindergartens were successful in attracting political patronage. It was at this meeting that Dunedin Kindergarteners set in motion a successful petition for a government subsidy.

The growth of kindergartens was slow with each regional association providing a free charitable service mainly for the urban poor. Kindergartens remained independent of state education institutions. This protected their pedagogy from the inroads of schooling but constrained their expansion. In 1948 the government introduced new policies for preschool education that promoted the part day kindergarten as a positive experience for all children prior to school entry at aged five-years. A government supported programme for kindergarten expansion across all towns and suburbs ensued. Being a 'kiwi kindy kid' became an iconic cultural rite of passage for young children (Duncan, 2009).

## **A darker history: Crèches and the care of children**

Nineteenth century philanthropy concerns had various strands, stemming from a legacy of enlightened understandings about the care of neglected children and their lost potential to society. Educating the young children of the urban poor in kindergartens, was not only motivated by rationales of child rescue, but was also a demonstration of the intellectual potential of all children irrespective of class. There were concerns too about the fate of orphans, children whose mothers were employed and whose care was at best haphazard, and the practice of baby-farming, a hidden solution for the care of illegitimate children. From its earliest days the new colony had a problem with abandoned children. The fragility of early social, economic and religious systems made family stability difficult. There was a mismatch between the propaganda concerning the new colony and the reality for families. By the 1880s there were undercurrents of fear about "the dangers of a permanent pauper class emerging to pollute the new society" (Tennant, 1989, p. 23). This was a view espoused by Sir Robert Stout, who became New Zealand's premier (1884–87). Lady Anna Stout was a founding member of the DFKA, and the couple attended its annual meetings. The first annual report of the DFKA (1890) emphasised the benefits of kindergarten:

To guard the children of Dunedin from thriftlessness, disease, pauperism, and crime was the desire of those who first spoke of planning a kindergarten in this city. (p. 11)

Less known are attempts to establish European crèches or day nurseries, institutions established to care for the children of working mothers (May, 2013). Their success was less assured and unlike kindergartens, that attracted the patronage of politicians, crèches had a more shadowy existence.

Some of the same Dunedin citizens who successfully established a kindergarten in 1889 had, ten years earlier, attempted to establish crèche. In the aftermath of the gold rush boom there was a surfeit of abandoned women with children. A report in the *Otago Daily Times* (7th July 1879) reasoned that:

By opening houses where young children can be left by day, and from which they will be delivered to their parents, fed and cleaned at night, a great deal is done to render baby farming unnecessary.

The crèche did not eventuate. The first known crèches are linked to the two Auckland kindergartens noted in the previous section. There is only passing mention of the crèche side of their work. At Auckland West Kindergarten, it was reported that the “Committee are very particular in not allowing any child to be left at the crèche for frivolous pretext, as the aim is only to help working mothers” (*Auckland Star*, 8th August 1889). There was much debate about when it was appropriate for mothers to use the crèche. At the annual meeting of the Jubilee Kindergarten in 1890, Bishop of Auckland, William Cowie, noted with approval that, “he had seen in the crèche an infant whose parents were dead, and who was being raised by its sisters, they being thus enabled to work for a living” (*Auckland Star*, 21st June 1890). The idea of combined kindergarten - crèches did not survive. The educational component found a haven in separate kindergarten-only establishments, with the care component remaining hidden amidst private informal child-minding and baby-farming arrangements.

The first long term crèche successfully established in 1903 had its roots in a foundling home set up by a French Catholic nun Suzanne Aubert, in a remote location up the Whanganui River in 1890 (Munro, 1996). The home had none of the acclaim and patronage that occurred a year earlier with the establishment of the DFKA. It was instead a personal mission, under a cloak of secrecy, to deal with the evidence of the so-called immorality. Aubert sought a discreet alternative to baby farming:

The poor little illegitimate children are often entrusted to mercenary nurses, terrible ‘makers of Angels’ ... they neglect the poor little ones

whom they consider as a means of livelihood, as a speculation. They only half feed them, and they neglect much more the care of their soul and of their education. (Munro, 1996, p. 221)

In 1898 Aubert petitioned the government, but unlike the DFKA's successful petition to Premier Seddon in 1903, Aubert received the following response, also from Seddon:

We have nothing to say against mother Aubert's Home ... [which] it would seem has done good work in looking after a class of unfortunate children whose advent into the world was attended with the most adverse circumstances, and to judge from the evidence at a recent coroner's inquest, the children are well cared for and the institution well managed. It is, of course, open to question whether the cause of public morality is really helped by the concealment of illegitimate births and the provision of facilities for covering up the consequences of vice. (cited in Munro, 1996, p. 221)

It was this rebuff that caused Aubert to relocate her foundlings to Wellington, establish a crèche and confront the issues in more public manner. St Joseph's Crèche was established alongside a home for 'incurables' for the chronically ill or disabled, and a soup kitchen for the homeless: three charitable services all dealing with a darker aspect of life. The necessity for a crèche was first reported in the *Evening Post* (23rd October 1902). Aubert justified the idea by explaining that mothers were sometimes forced into unfortunate circumstances that required them to earn a living. A crèche would prevent them having to seek charitable assistance:

There are probably hundreds of working women in the city, who are tied to their homes during the daytime by the cares of maternity, and when the wolf appears at the door have to seek charity to drive it away. The crèche, or daylight home for babies, is intended to help them in their difficulty. It will open from 7 o'clock in the morning until 6 o'clock in the evening, and during those hours babes under three years whose parents find themselves hampered with the care of them, and are prevented from earning a livelihood, will be received and delivered back again.

The subsequent establishment of several crèches in the early 1900s moves beyond the timeframe of this article (May, 2013); evident is a societal view that applauded education institutions for young children, but was cautious



concerning institutions caring for the children of working mothers. The only acceptable model for childcare was as a discreet charitable service.

## Aftermath overview

The overall characteristic of nineteenth century infant schools, kindergartens and crèches in Aotearoa New Zealand appear as piecemeal 'do-it-yourself' endeavours. The ideas underpinning these institutions originated amidst Old World concerns and travelled to the New World with early missionaries and settlers. But the situation in the new colony was different and its new inhabitants were imbued with idealism that these experimental institutions could improve the chances of both settler and indigenous children in the New World setting. By the end of the nineteenth century, a blueprint had been established that shaped twentieth century early childhood initiatives and policies:

- Children could attend school in an infant classroom on their fifth birthday – the historical legacy of the infant school. The teachers became adept at adapting new ideas into their classroom settings that continued to prioritise the 3 R's, albeit in a more playful way.
- Early childhood institutions remained outside state control. Later institutions negotiated separate funding arrangements with respective governments. It was not until 1989 that these separate arrangements were reordered under a unified and more equal partnership with government.
- Throughout the twentieth century, kindergarten was the flagship pre-school institution, always with qualified teachers and eventually with buildings designed to showcase ideal environments for the plays of young children in a haven apart from the world of adults or older children.
- Childcare services were unrecognised until 1960 when the first regulations were introduced. In 1987 childcare services were transferred into the Department of Education, and thus began the process towards the integrated early childhood services that currently characterize Aotearoa New Zealand.
- By the end of the twentieth century the renamed, education and care centres, had become a preferred option by parents because they often catered for babies, offered more flexible hours; and increasingly with qualified teachers, many more provided quality care and education.
- In 1982 Māori established *Nga Kohanga Reo* – Māori immersion language nests framed around the ideals of *tino rangatiratanga* – self determination. They were intended to save a dying language which Māori children in earlier eras had not been allowed to speak at school. The ramifications of this, followed by initiatives within migrant Pacifica communities to establish bilingual early childhood centres, began to transform the cultural

landscape of early education in Aotearoa New Zealand and start a journey, still underway, to rethink and redress our colonial heritage.

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