

This vote of thanks was carried by a standing ovation.

In replying Mrs Downer expressed the gratitude of the Union and of herself personally for Mrs Elliott's wonderful work for the Union.

The President then wished all those present a safe journey home, happiness and success in the coming year and declared the 1965 Conference closed at 4.25 p.m.

MISS CHRISTISON - OFFICER FOR PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION

Miss Christison opened her remarks by saying how delighted she was to see so many present that she had known and worked with. She thanked delegates for the warmth of their welcome and for their good wishes on her appointment to her new position, which was a responsibility. It was not easy to follow any person who has been in that position for nineteen years, but she had been reassured and heartened by all the good wishes she had received.

"I am sure you will understand", said Miss Christison, "that it is with some diffidence that I address you, but I have been reassured by your personal kindness and by the professional co-operation of senior officers of the Department and look forward to that continued co-operation. All of us are here because we are all doing the same work for children. This is going to be a personal sort of talk of what I saw when I first came into the kindergarten movement. What have we still to do? Let us go back a little bit, until just after the first world war and its effect on the educational think of the time.

"The time following the second world war was a time of great educational ferment, too. It was a world where there were more chances and opportunity for all people, and particularly for all children. Here in New Zealand pre-school education was very much a matter for thought and comment and discussion and question and there was very much a recognition of the fact that even though pre-school education might never be part of the State provision it was definitely part of the education service for the children of the country. In 1949 recognition was given to the work of associations by the payment of salaries for staff and the increase of subsidies from £1 to £2 for £1. An officer for pre-school education was appointed in 1946.

"It was usual to divide children into age groups and careful preparation was made by the staff to provide suitable activities of all sorts. Afternoon children did not do anything very much, they just played. The programmes were carefully prepared, broken up into small bits and everything was very regimented. They were master-pieces of organisation. There was, of course, plenty of teacher-direction. It is easy just to sneer at that sort of programme, but it was not all bad. There was vigour and ordered routine for the children. They had a balance of activity and rest and the staff were very good at giving opportunities for stories, skills and activities. Housing varied a great deal. The greater number of kindergartens were in halls of one kind or another. What was given to the children depended much on the accommodation. If you had no room to store equipment you could not have equipment, and if you had no outside playground you could have no outdoor play.

"Parents were involved very much then as they are now. There were mother helpers then as there are now, but they were not as we know them now. We worked with parents as we worked with children. There were students who were more or less adult helpers. Their training was very much a practical affair. This was the kind of thinking that was going on, but much thought was being devoted to this kind of programme, this kind of staffing, this kind of organisation, that this knowledge of child development must be the thing that dictated our progress.

"In the late 1940's and early 50's much research was done on the nature of play and its importance to the child in his learning and growing. There was experimentation with programmes, with equipment, with activities. There was especially an awareness of the importance to the child of his own spontaneous play. So the kindergartens were beginning to give more attention to the child's play, to his spontaneous play, rather than to teacher-directed play. What must be done to give time for the child to find his own way? I have watched a child spend two hours twenty minutes making a cart. Another child spent one and a quarter hours at a water trough. It was realised that age groupings did not allow for individual variation in growth. All this led to a less formal organisation of the kindergarten, when there were groups that came together spontaneously because of what was being offered. Programmes became much more flexible.

"What happened when these programmes became more flexible. Understandably, some teachers and some children were pretty lost at first. There was some confusion and there were some cases where children were allowed more freedom than they could profitably cope with. Finally we got a balanced programme, balance between freedom and control. With the students there was more time for observation and theory. Teachers made their own programmes according to their own conditions.

"At the same time conditions were improving, housing was getting better. There was a tremendous rise in the number of permanent buildings; progress in this respect was spectacular. As accommodation improved staff were enabled to improve their programmes. The good work of the associations was being shown. There was much hard work to raise money for buildings and equipment. The actual figures should give associations great pride in the progress they have made down the years to provide these good conditions. You must have enough equipment for your just three year old and for your bright and intelligent nearly five year old to make a choice. Staff were doing their part in the arrangement of the day and the associations were doing their part in the provision of buildings and equipment and the Department was also doing its part.

"At the same time thought was being given to the knowledge of the parents in all this work. We began to realise that we do harm to a child if he is separated too early, too long or too abruptly from his mother. In our kindergartens we must take more account of the mother, the home and the family. If a child is to thrive he must have consistency with the adults in his home and outside his home. The child's mother is very important to him inside the kindergarten as well as out."

Miss Christison then told of a number of personal experiences where the appearance of the mother had completely changed the child. All these stories showed that it is to everybody's advantage for the mother to be there. To the child, to the staff and to the mother - advantage because she will see something of her child's developing understanding and of his attitude to his play life. Miss Christison outlined various ways in which staff work with children and parents. Parents should be developing an understanding of what the kindergarten is trying to do. There are ways in which this can be done, but she did not know of one Mothers' Club or Association or Committee taking advantage of the Adult Education Classes that are being offered. The ideal is to have parents and teachers working together.

One of the big problems in the early days was expansion and staffing. One third of all teachers were untrained. There were new kindergartens sitting idle because there were no teachers. There were girls aged nineteen being put in charge of 80 of other peoples' children, of committees and mothers' clubs because there were no more experienced staff to put into these jobs. Tied up with the problem of expansion was the question of how to cope with more children. There were experiments in schedules. People have thoughts now about three afternoon sessions. The question is if we have three afternoon sessions what happens to the important parent work afternoon. Another point is, is two hours long enough for most children? There is also a lot of maintenance to do, a good deal of administration

and clerical work as well. Are we reasonable in expecting staff to do all this in the rest of the time? Some variations have been tried but those tried have had severe disadvantages. The way is still open for more suggestions of what can be better for the children. The job is not only to extend services, but to do better what is already being done.

A change in pattern in Departmental supervision came about a year ago. Instead of having all staff in Wellington, supervisors were regionalised. Details were given of the spreading out and present locations of staff. This meant that regional people could be more personally involved with associations and with staff. Regional advisers could visit kindergartens more frequently and be an almost day-to-day contact with associations. In Head Office national matters are dealt with.

"So where are we now? We have good housing, good equipment, balanced and suitable programmes, enough staff, their basic qualifications are higher and they have more opportunity for improving their qualifications and they have a deeper and wider training. We still have questions of fuller work with parents, questions of the child with special needs, expansion in new areas. We have all these problems facing us and also the task of consolidating and improving what we are doing right now. All have a particular part to play. I believe we are doing the wise thing and the right thing if, always in working out our solutions and in the day-to-day working, all of us keep in the forefront of our minds that we are working for the child in the kindergarten, because it is for him that all of us are gathered here now."

Miss Christison concluded by wishing all those present a happy and successful conference and a fruitful year's work for their associations.