

DRAFT FOR THE MINISTER'S SPEECH TO THE KINDERGARTEN UNION  
CONFERENCE, NELSON, WEDNESDAY, 6 JULY 1977

Mrs Lockhart, Ladies and Gentlemen

A few weeks ago during Kindergarten Publicity week I had the opportunity to record my admiration for the work of the thousands of voluntary workers who give their unstinting efforts to provide early education for children in nearly 440 kindergartens throughout the country. Because I was unable to attend your Golden Jubilee Conference in Kaikohe last year it gives me particular pleasure to be with you today.

When the Kindergarten Union was forged in 1926 from the individual kindergarten associations (which had been working for young children for nearly three decades before that) a momentous step was taken. With hindsight it can be seen that the effect of that decision to form a national union was to bring into being an organisation which speaks effectively with one voice on matters of policy with an authority that the individual associations could not match. In addition the formation of the Union enabled a national service of uniformly high quality to be provided for young children and it provided the basis for the building up of a corps of teachers specially trained for work with children below 5 recognised all over New Zealand as having the most appropriate skills for teaching at this level.

The annual conference of any large organisation is always an important occasion but I venture to suggest that this conference of the Union may be one of the most important since that first one in 1926. The rapid social changes over the last few years have had a direct effect on all institutions that work with children and families. The two-parent, one income family which kindergartens have traditionally (though by no means exclusively) worked with can no longer be regarded as the typical New Zealand family as more women with young children return to the work force. The increase in family mobility has to a large extent broken the barriers between communities. Increased immigration



of Polynesian people and population shifts from country to town and from south to north have created an immediate demand for services of all kinds but particularly for services for children and young parents. These are but a few of the factors which all of us whose work lies in the social and educational field must face and respond to. For that reason I want now to raise with you some broad issues of direct concern to the kindergarten movement as indicating possible directions for change.

The first issue is that of the employer-employee relationship between the kindergarten associations and the kindergarten teachers. Traditionally this has been something of a family affair. Associations have appointed the teacher of their choice to work with the children of their members in the kindergarten which they established. But what of the teachers themselves? The teachers now in the service number well over one thousand. They entered their pre-service training with higher educational qualifications than their predecessors. They view themselves, with justification, as a professional body with expertise. Through the publicity given to statements made by teachers and by the Kindergarten Teachers Association you will be as aware as I am that there is a body of opinion among the teachers which sees a role for the teacher outside the kindergarten gates as well as inside them. You will also know that the teachers are concerned that they themselves have a direct interest in the decisions made at critical points in their careers - in appointments and promotions - and in their terms and conditions of service. I am equally well aware that the associations have a close and intimate knowledge of their own kindergartens and the children and parents they serve and, for this reason, see themselves as not only the legal employers of the teachers but also as those most fitted to take decisions concerning the kindergarten staff. [ I am not suggesting for a moment that there are irreconcilable differences between the teachers and the associations.] [ I am suggesting, [however], that the time is opportune for the Union to consider involving

I believe



the teachers in decisions which are of direct concern to both parties. I believe that there is nothing to lose and everything to gain in doing so.

Another issue facing us now is that of the unprecedented, but temporary, oversupply of teachers which has occurred over the last two years [~~but which is expected to be overcome by the middle of next year.~~] Most of you will be familiar with the circumstances which led to this situation - the increased intakes to kindergarten teacher training followed shortly afterwards by a greatly improved retention rate of both students in training and of teachers within the service; the general economic climate which has tightened the employment situation; the improvement in salary scales. You will also recall that two decisions were made to resolve the difficulties that ensued. The first was to give priority of appointment to those teachers already serving in kindergartens so as to reduce the number of supernumerary teachers as quickly as possible. Here I must speak of my appreciation that while you disliked this restriction on your freedom to appoint the most suitable applicant for some positions, you recognised and accepted the necessity for the decision. The other decision I mentioned was to set up a working party to look at employment opportunities for newly qualified teachers in the short term and for kindergarten teachers generally in the long term. I know that the negotiations which have taken place since have been (difficult) *complex?* and prolonged. Conflicting opinions have arisen about the best ways to use the services of trained teachers without permanent positions. They include:

- employing more teachers in all kindergartens;
- employing additional teachers to work in some selected kindergartens;
- having teachers attached to kindergartens but working partially or wholly outside them;
- employing teachers to work totally outside kindergartens in teaching and parent work of various kinds;

Each one of these suggestions has its difficulties and I must thank the Union and its representatives for their positive approach



to the issues involved. In its discussions on them at this conference I hope that the Union will consider its policy in relation to the Government's first priority of bringing early education within the reach of all who want it as soon as possible.

I would like to turn now to the whole question of buildings and accommodation. For the last twenty years the Union and the Government have given special attention to ensuring that children in kindergartens are accommodated in premises designed to promote the children's learning and together they have succeeded in doing so. I am in no way suggesting that the standards reached with so much effort should be lowered, but I am concerned that the capital outlay on sites and buildings which has risen so dramatically in the last eight years or so is justified by their full utilisation. Here are some questions that I invite you to consider. Are kindergarten buildings fully utilised during the week for children? I ask this because it has been suggested to me that one possible way of profitably employing teachers is to set up small groups for children in other buildings. This I see as possible in some circumstances but not when purpose-designed buildings are empty of children. Another point. I have seen some recent newspaper articles in which it is stated that the kindergartens should reach further out into the community. My own view is that kindergartens are very much part of the community but I ask whether there are ways in which buildings could be used for community purposes when the children are not there - ways of using them, that is, that do not adversely affect their character as kindergarten buildings. Another question I have already asked the Union to consider is whether it is realistic to build enough kindergartens to meet the known demand in areas of very rapid growth and high child population now, when it is clear that in, say, twenty years time, the demand will be only about half of what it is now. Finally, I believe that for the next few years it will not be financially possible to buy sites and construct buildings to keep up fully with the demand for



them. It could be profitable for the Union to consider whether existing buildings could be used, with appropriate modification, to meet kindergarten purposes. I would be loth to consider using premises which would provide an environment inferior to that of ordinary kindergarten buildings or premises which involve questions of rent which neither the associations nor the Government could control. But there may very well be suitable accommodation in schools and other educational institutions which could provide a good environment for young children. I realise, of course, that this suggestion involves more than merely housing the children and staff. The control of the premises used is of vital concern both to you and to those who own the buildings. But I think of the successful establishment of the Tairangi School Kindergarten in Porirua where the kindergarten runs very happily within a state primary school building and I believe that with goodwill on all sides solutions such as this one can be worked out. I hope, during your conference that you will give serious consideration to these questions I have raised.

Quite apart from these two issues of teachers and of buildings there are other points that have been brought to my attention in letters or in the news media that interest me very much and I should like to discuss some of them with you. Again, I do not propose to suggest what should be done but I do suggest that they are matters of concern to a number of people and I should like to discuss some of them with you. Again, I do not propose to suggest what should be done but I do suggest that they are matters of concern to a number of people and I should appreciate the Union's views. The first is the matter of waiting lists. I know that this is traditionally administered by the head teacher of the kindergarten who decides admissions on a general rule of first come, first served, save in exceptional cases of need. But what of the family who has only recently moved into the district from a place with no kindergarten and was not able to enter the child on the waiting list at the allowable age? Is there, in fact, enough consideration given to need rather than waiting list order? This leads me to the next point.



I have already mentioned publicity given to statements about the kindergarten's role in the community and to suggestions that some children not enrolled stand in more need of kindergarten education than some of those who are enrolled. I throw out to you the question - should the kindergarten attempt to assess need and provide or even reserve places for those most in need? If it should, who decides which children need prior admission, and on what basis? Perhaps this might be fully discussed with the teachers at local and national level with a view of framing a national but flexible policy. Perhaps, too, the age of admission to a kindergarten waiting list might also be discussed. I know that in some individual cases apparently conflicting statements have been made about the number of children seeking admission to a kindergarten. On enquiry, it has been found that one figure refers to all the children over 2 years entered on the waiting list and that the other figure refers to the number of children over 3 years on the waiting list - that is, those children who could be admitted immediately if a place was available. This can cause a good deal of confusion and it occurs to me that there could be some merit in examining the age of entry on waiting lists. I believe that, in fairness to the parents, a national policy should be adopted but that entry at the age of three years or even at any age from birth onwards might be a more clearly understood procedure.

While I am on the subject of the kindergarten and its place in the community let me make one more point. I am very conscious that in the last 30 years, since the Government became very fully involved in all aspects of kindergarten work, the movement and the Government together have been formulating aims, principles, standards and policies that could be adopted on a nationwide basis. During this formative period, the typical grade I kindergarten with 40 children in the morning and another 40 in the afternoon with two full-time trained teachers in an open plan building has been viewed as the most generally viable and economic unit. The great majority of kindergartens are of this type, and it may be that it will continue to be the type most usually favoured.



Nevertheless I believe that the time has come for the Union and my department together to consider kindergartens of different types in different places to suit different circumstances. The total number of children enrolled, the size of separate groups within that total, the length of the kindergarten day, possible linkage to other educational institutions are all aspects of kindergarten provision which open up exciting and challenging prospects for providing flexibility and diversity. And I believe that this diversity could come about without abandoning the traditional kindergarten characteristics.

I am especially interested in possible links with other educational bodies. Kindergarten associations play a large part in New Zealand's educational system and thus take their place alongside Education Boards, Secondary Schools, Tertiary Institutions and the department itself. I can appreciate that you might feel wary that too close a relationship with large, well organised educational organisations of long standing and considerable power might lead to your concern for very young children being swamped. But I believe that full knowledge and sympathetic understanding do come, in the long run, from good personal working relationships. I also believe that organisations which stick too closely and too long to the principles that motivated their work in the beginning run the risk of becoming less responsive to changing needs and so less effective.

*Omit?*  
~~Please do not think that when I say this I am implying that the~~  
 I know that the kindergarten movement is <sup>in no</sup> any danger of dying. Far from it.

The very fact that kindergartens are full, that there are children waiting for admission and that many groups are planning to establish new kindergartens proves that the kindergarten service suits the needs of thousands of families very well. What I am saying is that I admire the far sighted move that has led you to make this conference a forum for your own members to hammer out the answers to some of the questions I have raised and others which you realise must be answered for the future.



have thrown out to you some of the issues as I see them to act as sparks for discussion. Although I am a year late in saying this I hope that they will provide some light for the movement's path in the next fifty years. Especially do I look for discussion on a streamlined administration, possibly with associations joining forces, and especially on staffing matters; a working partnership with other educational services that exist now or might develop in the future; and the contribution of the parents now that the heavy burden of money raising has been almost entirely removed from them.

Madam President, I owe you my thanks for allowing me the opportunity to speak to you so frankly at this most important conference. I wish you animated and profitable discussion. You know how much I shall be interested in your decisions and I look forward to hearing from you after the conference to talk over your suggestions and proposals.



Registration  
Appointment  
Discipline

Kq - Dept - Adv.

DPSC usefulness - not wedded to PSI as ch.

Regis Status & professionalism of Kq tech.

Training - 3 yr.