

Rose Hanak

I first met Rose Hanak when, as a new lecturer at the Arney Road Kindergarten Training Centre, I was sent to observe in central city kindergartens which had large numbers of Pacific Island families with special needs in language. At Logan Campbell Kindergarten I met this woman of great spirit and energy, with high expectations of children, staff and parents – a woman who would say of the children in her Kindergarten, “Look at my children, they are so clever!” – no sign of the theories fashionable at the time about children who were ‘deprived’ or ‘disadvantaged’. And if they could not speak English? – give her six weeks with them and they would be talking – after all, as she frequently pointed out, she had to learn English herself.

Rose Hanak, born and trained in Czechoslovakia, has retained throughout her life her early grounding in the work of the great European philosophers. In the course of her career she attended every in-service course available to her, taking from them what she needed to refine her work but always with the children in mind.

Logan Campbell Kindergarten was a source of great pride to the Auckland Kindergarten Association. It had been specially designed with a separate room for committee and parent activities, a slide from the building to the playground and a ‘Wendy’ House’ built into the Kindergarten. This was two storey, a special feature being the balcony with its fancy railings. Very pretty. As Mrs Hanak pointed out it was also very easily adapted to the children’s games of ‘prison’ or ‘zoos’. It was not, one felt, to her taste in architecture!

Because Logan Campbell was very much part of the Freemans Bay community, some of the children also came from families who had chosen to live in that area because it was close to their jobs, including the University. Because, in general, these children had a strong English language background they added a special dimension to the programme, especially in their play.

Mrs Hanak soon discovered where parents’ particular talents lay. One mother told of her relief in discovering that she did not have to make cakes for fairs and stalls but could run what turned out to be a very high powered panel on some important issue of the day. It was no surprise to find a Cabinet Minister happily picking up onions and checking recipes for pickling them - he had, it seemed, developed some expertise in that direction.

In the kitchen one would find a Pacific Island mother who, having been in New Zealand some months had just discovered that carrots, unlike taro, were only scraped or thinly peeled before cutting them up for the children. Parent education of the most basic sort was always part of the deal for new parents.

Talk was basic to the programme at the Kindergarten - everybody talked to everybody. Students in training sent to the Kindergarten who did not talk were no use to the kindergarten, “Don’t send me students who won’t talk, they set my programme back weeks.” It wasn’t just talk for the sake of talk, every child was to be listened to, what they said was picked up and widely

discussed. As they left, each child and parent was farewelled individually and in a way that was relevant to that particular child. There were lots of poems, stories and songs throughout the sessions. Startled visitors were presented with a book and told to read it aloud to a group of children. It took me longer than I would like to admit to realise how important the constant repetition of structures in the books and songs were in the development of the children's fluency.

Morning tea sessions were an important part of the programme. Large mat-times were frowned on by the Association but Mrs Hanak believed that this was the right thing for her children. It was a time when the children learnt to socialise, to listen to each other, to pour drinks for each other and pass food carefully and to value each other's contribution. I don't think she ever changed this, despite the criticism. I treasure one particular memory. I had shown Rose Hanak my notes on a child who was making some interesting changes in the words of a song he was singing. She expressed surprise -as a result of trauma this child had not talked before. A few minutes later when the children gathered she sat young Philip next to her and announced "Philip is talking to us today - isn't that wonderful?" I am sure that some experts would not have approved but she knew her children. The children clapped and cheered, Philip beamed from ear to ear and for the first time I saw a child literally swell with pride. We all sang the song again and again, Philip loudest of all - still with the different word included - and was now talking like any other child. It was a magic moment.

It was not easy being a student at Logan Campbell - or indeed a visiting lecturer. This was Rose Hanak's kindergarten and students were expected to conform. Sometimes she could be fiercely protective of students - lecturers, she felt, should not come on Mondays (children unsettled after the weekend) and a windy day was not suitable (children restless). She would indicate very clearly to a lecturer if she thought they were making her student nervous. I think she felt that lecturers wasted their time - sometimes there were newsletters to be folded as one observed and I was once presented with a box of tangled embroidery threads to sort out.

For me knowing Rose Hanak has been a privilege. Her work in the community was recognised by the City Council and she received other high awards, but for her in many ways the highest tribute came from her own colleagues when she was made an Honorary Member of the now defunct Kindergarten Teachers Assn. Recently an officer from the Ministry of Education, once a student at Logan Campbell Kindergarten summed it all up when she said, "She was the best teacher I have ever known".

FOOTNOTE : Rose Hanak after her retirement worked for many years at Mangere Immigration Centre. Sadly she is now completely blind. She has mislaid an article she wrote many years ago for the KTA Journal "Pre-School Education". If any one has, by any chance a copy of it could they please send it to me, Joan Brockett, 21 Kingsview Road, Mt. Eden, telephone 638-8634, so that I can give it to her. She wants it for grandchildren and great grand children.