





# Introduction

**KINDERGARTEN IS EMBEDDED** into the cultural landscape of Aotearoa New Zealand. Judith Duncan, kindergarten teacher and scholar, claims that, “Kindergarten arguably is as ‘New Zealand’ as ‘kiwi fruit,’ ‘pavlova’ and ‘buzzy bee.’”<sup>1</sup> Being a ‘kiwi kindy kid’ has been a tradition for many generations of children, with the kindergarten a site of community and family endeavour; a support to parents; and a prelude of playful activity and learning for kindergarten children prior to the uniquely Kiwi rite of passage when they farewell kindergarten friends and teachers to start school on their 5th birthday.

Children from Fiordland  
Kindergarten by Lake Te Anau.  
KS



Fifth birthday celebration at Jonathan Rhodes Kindergarten, Dunedin, c 1990s.  
DK

The first kindergartens emerged as a few fledgling experiments in the 1870s–1880s, initiated by progressive citizens in the main settlement cities. The kindergartens traced their heritage and pedagogy to the German kindergarten movement established by Friedrich Froebel in the 1840s. The story of this relocation across continents and cultures to the New World colony of Aotearoa New Zealand is told in Chapter 1. From these small beginnings, New Zealand eventually created a national free kindergarten movement, outside of the school system, independent of—but in partnership with—government. This is the story of our book.

The New Zealand Free Kindergarten Union Inc. (NZFKU) was legally constituted in 1926 to co-ordinate the work of the five free kindergarten associations then in operation. In order of establishment, these were: Dunedin, Christchurch, Wellington, Auckland and Invercargill. The idea

of an umbrella organisation for kindergartens to provide a national voice and presence in the policy arena of education was initiated in 1912. In 1913, the NZFKU was established but the outbreak of World War I delayed its formal constitution. From the start, NZFKU took the lead in the co-ordination of kindergarten training across the four city regional associations and instigating funding negotiations with respective governments. In 1939, the Union was officially recognised by the government as representing the various regional associations' views regarding preschool policy. In the post-1946 era, the Union worked closely alongside the Department of Education: co-ordinating the rapid expansion of kindergartens across towns and suburbs, and improving standards in relation to kindergarten programmes, buildings, equipment, staffing and qualifications. By 1975, there were 75 associations affiliated to NZFKU operating a total of 384 kindergartens. Since that time the number of affiliated associations has reduced through merger, whilst the number of kindergartens has almost doubled. In the post 1990 era of education reform, several associations severed their affiliation. Four North Island kindergarten associations reunited as members of the Kindergarten Federation known as Early Childhood Leadership (ECL). In 2015 there was a combined total of 648 kindergartens. This book is the collective endeavour of both organisations, particularly across the years of joint NZFKU membership, but also acknowledging ongoing collaboration concerning kindergarten matters.

In 1994, NZFKU changed its name to the New Zealand Free Kindergarten Associations Inc. (NZFKA) after encountering discomfort with the term "Union". The name was again changed in 2004 to New Zealand Kindergartens Incorporated – Te Pūtahi Kura Pūhou o Aotearoa (NZK). Such debates began earlier. In 1972, Helen Downer (NZFKU president 1957–66) made an impassioned address to conference delegates as president of the Bay of Plenty Association, leading to the reversal of an earlier decision to replace Union with what was she described as the meaningless name Kindergarten Incorporated!<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, regardless of its name changes, few countries can boast, as New Zealand can, the existence of such a longstanding national kindergarten voice and place at the round tables of early childhood education (ECE) politics, provision and pedagogy.

In recent years, several kindergarten associations have begun to record and publish their history. These histories typically take as their focus the

contexts of the beginnings and the growth of kindergartens in regional settings, but are selective and partial.<sup>3</sup> A few individual kindergartens have published their own stories.<sup>4</sup> These studies usefully present the daily realities of the operations and/or management of kindergartens, but are mainly silent on national insights and considerations. NZFKU produced a first history pamphlet in 1928.<sup>5</sup> Later in 1964, and updated in 1975, NZFKU published booklets with a summary history of each kindergarten association including a very brief outline of its own history and role.<sup>6</sup> Myrtle Simpson's booklet, *The Free Kindergarten Movement in New Zealand* (1970) and the booklet by Beryl Hughes, *Flags and Building Blocks, Formality and Fun: One Hundred Years of Free Kindergarten in New Zealand* (1989) are slim introductions to the story of New Zealand's kindergarten movement.<sup>7</sup> It is timely, as NZFKU–NZK enters its centennial decade, for the organisation to present a more comprehensive appraisal of its own kindergarten story.

This story is:

- peopled with powerful personalities and commitment to the ideals of kindergarten
- highlighted by a string of campaigns to promote and provide kindergarten opportunities for children and training for teachers
- littered with the fall-out of the swings and roundabouts of shifting government policy interests and priorities
- occasioned by disputes and changing alliances across the at times unwieldy interests of individual kindergarten associations.

Amidst all this the organisation's story is about:

- surviving and/or harnessing the events of adversity and opportunity
- reinventing itself for different times and for different populations and places
- brokering strategic alliances as necessary across government agencies, education organisations and political party lines.

Throughout these roller coaster times, with varying mixes of caution, tenacity and stridency, the kindergarten collective voice has remained persistent and purposeful in promoting the interests of children within the social and educational infrastructure of Aotearoa New Zealand.

In 2016 NZK, in co-operation with ECL, launched the website: Kindergarten Heritage Collection of New Zealand ([www.kindergartenhistory.org.nz](http://www.kindergartenhistory.org.nz)) as a digital repository for kindergarten memorabilia, images, documents, biographies, events, stories, etc. The material was collected and collated by the authors and provided a significant resource for writing this book, some of it originating from the authors' extensive research into the history of kindergarten in this country.<sup>8</sup> NZFKU archives, media resources, government archives and a selection of regional association archives have also been trawled; and combined with oral history interviews, there has been a rich repository of resources for constructing the stories featured in the book. Spanning broad timeframes, the authors have selected and showcased some of the key events, people and campaigns, which collectively illustrate a kindergarten movement adapting its politics, purposes and its voices to changing times across centuries.

NZK nowadays shares the round table of early childhood politics with multiple early childhood voices, which sometimes act in consensus with and against government policy dictates, but can also be divided over policy directions. In the early years, NZFKU struggled to get its national voice noticed; in the postwar heyday decades, kindergartens were regarded as the 'flagship' for preschool education in terms of quality and funding support, but in the 1990s the kindergarten flagship was said to be 'sinking' amidst a torrent of policy changes favouring the private enterprise of early childhood provision.<sup>9</sup> Parents too were making choices that better aligned with their workplace needs, spurring the rapid growth of education and care (childcare) centres. Over the past decade many kindergartens have extended their age range and hours of opening, reappraised their programmes, and rebuilt and relocated their places amidst a mix of wondering and worrying from professionals and managers alike, about what is distinctive and valued about the New Zealand kindergarten. NZK as a national organisation has also been rejuvenating and positioning itself at the forefront of strategic development and cross-sector collaborations intended to promote and grow the flagship ideals of the kindergarten movement further into the 21st century. This is the story of the final chapter.



---

Myers Kindergarten, Auckland 1916.  
AKA, NZMS1275(27), GC

# CHAPTER 1

1870s–1910s:

## Fledgling kindergartens in the colonial education landscape

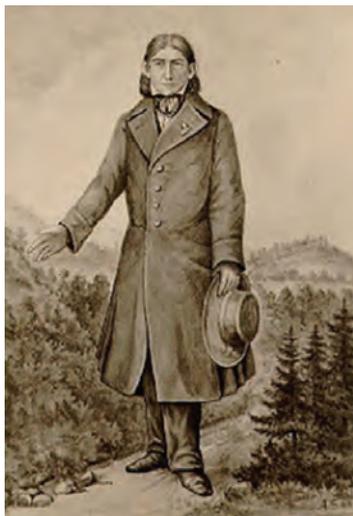
**A LOOSELY LINKED KINDERGARTEN MOVEMENT** emerged across the city settlements of colonial New Zealand in the late 19th century. It embraced a range of initiatives by individuals, schools and welfare societies and the first kindergarten organisations were established. Most of these ventures were shortlived, with the notable exception of the Dunedin Free Kindergarten Association (DFKA), established in 1889, and still operating. The links were not formal, but were fostered through interpersonal communication. This fledgling movement spearheaded various campaigns to establish a system of kindergarten education, separate to school, for young children up to 8 years. The timing of colonial settlement coincided with the emergence of the kindergarten in Germany. New ideals of kindergarten childhood sat well in the mix of colonial-utopian endeavour of a New World society.



Myers Kindergarten, Auckland, 1916.  
AKA, NZMS1275 (26), GC

However, by the 1880s a fragile institutional and economic infrastructure recreated many Old World ills. Moreover, a national education system established in 1877, and incorporating large numbers of young children in schooling, was under strain. This all encouraged the seeding of kindergarten ideas and kindergarten institutions: combining settler endeavour and the kindergarten promise of a ‘new child’.

The idea of kindergartens originated in the work of the German educational innovator, Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852). His motto “Come let us live with our children” became the rationale for a world-wide kindergarten movement engaged in educational and social reform intent on transforming the world of childhood. The motto was variously used by kindergarten organisations in New Zealand. The kindergarten’s transportation and transformation beyond Germany began with the 1851 *Kindergarten Verbot* (ban), imposed after the failure of the 1848–9 revolution. The liberal ideology of democracy,



Friedrich Froebel (1782–1852), metaphorically striding the hills of Thuringia, Germany, where he established the first kindergartens. Friedrich Fröbel Museum, Bad Blankenburg

opportunity and social reform imbued in the revolution was also evident in the educational ideology of the kindergarten. Henceforth, the idea of kindergarten spread across Europe and to Britain, Northern America, and by the 1870s across the Pacific to Japan, Australia and New Zealand. This global kindergarten movement was advanced by people disenchanted with prevailing school practices and committed to a more progressive model of learning for young children.<sup>1</sup> Froebel's ideas not only travelled the distance to New Zealand, but were transformed in response to the 'do-it-yourself' realities of a distant colonial setting. During the early 20th century, New Zealand kindergartners were also attuned to new education ideas championed, for example, by John Dewey, Maria Montessori and Susan Isaacs.<sup>2</sup>

This book tells the story of New Zealand's kindergarten movement. Chapter 1 outlines the fledgling kindergarten initiatives and traces how the informally linked kindergarten organisations moved towards the idea of a national body. Chapters 2–6, framed around five eras from the 1920s–2010s, situate the growing presence of NZFKU within the educational policy landscape of the times, amidst changing social values concerning childhood and increasing political interest in the education and health of young children. Throughout these times, NZFKU, as a national umbrella organisation for kindergarten, was buffeted by internal winds amongst its sometimes unruly member associations, and by the shifting political tides of education policy.



'The popularity of the kindergarten school with New Zealand's children. Our future citizens make their first start on the long road to knowledge', Logan Campbell Kindergarten, Auckland.  
*NZ Graphic*, 5 July 1911, NZG-19110705, GC



Morning tea at Logan Campbell Kindergarten, Auckland.  
*NZ Graphic*, 8 May 1912, NZG-19120508-30-2, GC

Yet there has been steadfastness by NZFKU in upholding its principles in good times and bad, and in its determination to advance the cause of kindergartens and promote the case for free ECE with trained teachers for all children. The seeds of these endeavours stem from the Froebelian roots of the kindergarten movement.

## The idea of kindergarten

As a young man, Froebel was disenchanted with the school system in Germany, with its harsh methods, narrow content and a pedagogy of rote learning. Influenced by the radical educational ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Froebel joined progressive reformers such as Johann Pestalozzi to call for a new more ‘natural’ education. Froebel spent 2 years with Pestalozzi in Switzerland gaining confidence to develop an alternative form of education for young children. One key principle was the belief that people are essentially productive and creative, and fulfilment comes through developing these in harmony with God and the world. In 1817 Froebel established an experimental family school and community at Keilhau in Thuringia. Here, children:

wore simple clothes, spent large amounts of time outside and studied as needs arose. Children designed their own building blocks which were then made by a local carpenter ... Rules were the same for adults and children.<sup>3</sup>

He 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.<sup>4</sup>

Froebel's "plays of childhood" became the future plays of kindergarten, still upheld in current times.

In 1837 Froebel, now in his 50s, opened a specialist institution for very young children in nearby Blankenburg.<sup>5</sup> The terminology of 'school' was rejected as it implied 'putting in' rather than fostered his belief in the unfolding of the child. Just as plants were nurtured and sheltered in a garden, so too children were to be nurtured and sheltered from harmful outside influences. In 1840 Froebel determined that the institution was to be called a kindergarten or literally, 'children's garden'. He created teaching resources, originally for mothers to use in the home, but later in kindergarten settings. The key elements of kindergarten pedagogy were developed: songs, circle games and movement; craft 'occupations'; building block activities with 'gifts'; gardening work and engaging with nature outdoors. These elements, although transformed in detail, are still evident in the kindergartens of today.

At a public meeting in Blankenburg in 1840, Froebel outlined his ideals for women:

The life and love of children, the life of children and the feelings of women, or speaking generally, the fostering of childhood and the womanly heart, are separated only by the reason. They are one in nature.<sup>6</sup>

This maternal connection, Froebel claimed, had been weakened over time and should be restored. The involvement of mothers in the life of the kindergarten became a hallmark of the New Zealand kindergarten that, over time, also involved fathers, and nowadays includes the wider whānau and family.

But maternal love alone was not enough. Concerned that mothers lacked knowledge, education and the pedagogic abilities to implement his teachings, Froebel believed that childrearing skills must be developed through training:



In the sandpit; and Montessori equipment and activities. Sunbeam Kindergarten, St Albans, Christchurch, 1915.

Photo CD 8, images 0077 and 0079, CCL





Only by effecting a connection between the outward womanly occupation, the common social duties, and the demands of child-nature can the original union of the lives of women and mothers with childhood be regained. This can only be secured by training fosterers (nurses, nursery maids, feminine guides and educators, and—for the somewhat more advanced age—masculine fosterers, guides and educators) for all the positions and according to the requirements of life.<sup>7</sup>

Froebel turned his attention to training women kindergarten teachers. This was a radical and often ridiculed move, in contrast to the German school systems staffed by men. The kindergarten was to be an institution for the cultivation of family life, in which kindergarten teachers would provide mothers, as well as children, with expert guidance. Froebel's demonstration of the idea of specialist teachers became a hallmark of the New Zealand kindergarten. Training kindergarten teachers was a task that the early kindergarten associations and later NZFKU had a key role in orchestrating. Even in current times when there are no longer separate kindergarten colleges, there are still specialist early childhood qualifications.



*Above and overleaf: Froebelian activities in early New Zealand kindergartens*

Kindergarten circle games at Walker Street Kindergarten, Dunedin.

*Otago Witness*, 16 July 1902, 515-514b, HC

Froebel could not envisage the outcome of this radical idea. According to Froebel, women were “to remain subservient to his ideal.”<sup>8</sup> However, in Germany, as in other European countries in the 19th century, women were uniting in campaigns to improve their position in society. German feminists embraced Froebel’s concept of motherhood as a vocation. Various women’s groups took up the cause of advocacy for kindergarten and went on to establish kindergartens and kindergarten training programmes.

The 1851 *Kindergarten Verbot* forced the closure of all kindergartens in Germany, and in the aftermath of the revolution, all political organisations by women were prohibited—a situation that was not repealed until 1908.<sup>9</sup> Froebel died in 1852, before the kindergarten ban was lifted in 1860. This caused disheartened supporters to migrate abroad. Kindergarten had become an icon of liberal progressive values, and increasingly viewed as a suitable vocation for women as teachers and/or advocates. Through formal and informal networks, kindergarten followers, including men, established discrete but linked sites of kindergarten activity in many places throughout the world.<sup>10</sup>



Planting gardens at Myers Kindergarten, Auckland, 1916.  
NZFKU, 1964



Teacher demonstrating Froebel's first block 'gift', Walker Street Kindergarten, Dunedin.  
*Otago Witness*, 16 July 1902, S15-514c, HC



'Free building in the youngest class', Hill Street School Kindergarten, Dunedin.  
*Otago Witness*, 24 December 1902. S12-525b, HC



Paper folding 'occupation', Hill Street School Kindergarten, Dunedin, 1906.  
S10-164g, HC



New Year family picnic for The Dunedin Kindergartens.  
*Otago Witness*, 1 January 1908, 513-159a, HC

While the impetus for the movement came from Froebel, the promotion and global implementation of his teachings became largely the work of women supporters.

The global transmission of kindergarten ideals and practices has been analysed by international kindergarten historians. Roberta Wollons described the cultural borrowings of kindergarten ideals as, “global in its identification, and ... local in its execution”.<sup>11</sup> Barbara Beatty identified “conflicting interest groups appropriated the term, kindergarten, adding to, and taking away from, the original meaning, moulding it to their own means”.<sup>12</sup> Each group had their own history of interpretation of Froebel’s teaching, adapted to meet local and global goals and changing beliefs. Accordingly, as Kristen Dombkowski (Nowrotski) explained, “no two of these admirable reform efforts looked alike. They were based on different assumptions about the purpose and form of child-centred early education.”<sup>13</sup> Further, those assumptions, to do with cultural needs, attitudes, and aspirations, changed over time. Women’s roles as both advocates and the personnel of kindergarten varied in different political settings.<sup>14</sup> This analysis is pertinent to the New Zealand context, where discussions and debates occurred across local settings. Amidst the growing unity there were outbreaks of dissension and discord between associations, and between associations and the national kindergarten union. These happenings weave throughout the chapters of this book.



## Colonial responses to the Froebelian kindergarten

By 1900, a small kindergarten movement was evident in New Zealand. Its interests were progressive and its educational aspirations realised in a mix of free kindergartens, kindergarten schools, and private kindergartens, as well as kindergarten programmes in the infant classes of both state and private primary schools. Its membership, drawn from across the education, political, religious, welfare and women's groups, included primary teachers, university academics, politicians and education reformists. Collectively, they supported progressive education ideals and practices that recognised children as active rather than passive learners. Their vision was to influence and shape the education of young children as democratic citizens, in particular using the teachings of Froebel, but also the newer ideas of John Dewey that were circulating amongst the educational elite.<sup>15</sup> These people were members of educational societies such as New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI), Women Teachers' Association and Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and frequently travelled to sites of new education in Britain, Europe and North America.<sup>16</sup> Educator Colin Knight provides a useful insight into the nature of such ideals to say:

Educational theories have been less important in the growth of humanity than the action of men and women who think hard and feel passionately about educating the young. Such people leave their mark through the force of their convictions and their power to fire other people with their enthusiasm.<sup>17</sup>

This statement is befitting of members of the early kindergarten movement. Through their joint efforts, commitment and persistence in face of opposition and significant difficulties, a kindergarten movement grew.

Piecemeal reform of the infant classroom had been underway since the 1877 Education Act that made schooling compulsory for all children from 7 years but allowed the enrolment of children from 5 years. There was the building of a few purpose-built infant schools and the employment of some teachers trained in kindergarten pedagogy. For example, Mrs Constance Francis was the headmistress of the new Mt Cook infant school in Wellington from 1878–1905. She not only demonstrated the possibilities of selected kindergarten activities in a large infant school but also ensured that the region's teachers received basic training in kindergarten pedagogy.<sup>18</sup>

In the early 1900s the Department of Education, under its new Inspector General of Schools, George Hogben, embarked more formally on reforming the infant curriculum, stating:



'Our training class' with Froebel's portrait on the wall, Dunedin, *DFKA Semi Jubilee 1889-1914*. DKA, MS1894/005, S13-553a, HC.



Kindergarten room at George Street Normal School, Dunedin Training College, with Froebel looking on.

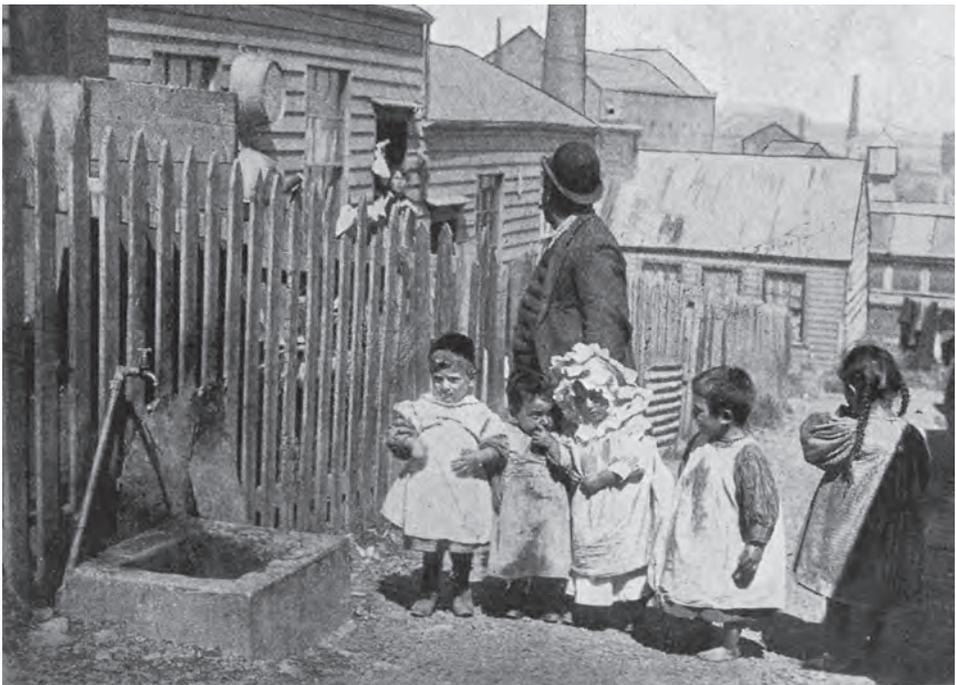
*Otago Witness*, 24 October 1910, S10-134a HC

We must believe with Froebel and others of the most enlightened of the world's educators, that the child will learn best, not so much by reading about things in books as by doing; that is exercising his natural activities by making things, by observing and testing things for himself; and then afterwards by reasoning about them and expressing thoughts about them.<sup>19</sup>

In 1908 kindergarten mistresses were appointed to run kindergarten classes including under-5s in the four “normal” schools attached to teacher training colleges. For a time, Froebelian ideas flourished in some urban infant classes. Froebel-qualified teachers were recruited from Britain and, less so, the US to meet the growing demand. Some infant teachers formed links with local kindergarten associations and sometimes held formal positions. Yet by 1928 such innovations were, if not lost, weakened by factors such as the downward force of the examination system, large class sizes, inappropriate buildings, insufficient specialist teachers and a lack of support for the idea of playful activities at school. While some kindergarten activities were introduced into all infant classes in the early years of the 20th century, it was left to private kindergartens and the free kindergarten associations to implement a fuller Froebelian programme.



Walker Street Kindergarten, Dunedin, 1895.  
*Otago Witness*, 19 December 1895, S10-164e, HC



Assyrian children playing nearby Walker Street Kindergarten.  
*Otago Witness*, 10 February 1904, S10-164g, HC

## Free kindergarten movement

The idea of the free kindergarten, which is a hallmark of many New Zealand kindergartens today, had its roots during Froebel's lifetime in several *Volkskindergarten* established in city slum districts. In 1854, Froebel's widow, Luise, became the director of a public free kindergarten in Hamburg. After the *verbot* was lifted, the free kindergarten in Germany and other countries became one of a range of child-saving initiatives intended to transform the play of slum children.<sup>20</sup> By 1912 the free kindergarten movement in New Zealand had, with the establishment of four free kindergarten associations, become a small but established part of the country's educational–charitable scene. Its origins lay in what NZFKU later referred to as “the humanitarian efforts of small, isolated groups in the nineteenth century.”<sup>21</sup>

The movement's first documented history was completed in 1928 by NZFKU stalwart, Wellington's Miss Maud England, who outlines this early work.

The work began in 1889. It had its origins in a ‘thought’. The Rev. Dr Waddell, passing up and down Walker Street, longed in some way to help the waifs and strays who played up and down in somewhat unsanitary conditions in that neighbourhood. He mentioned that matter to Mr Mark Cohen, who said immediately. ‘Have a Free Kindergarten!’ Mr Cohen had been reading about Mrs Sarah Cooper's wonderful work in San Francisco, and longed to see the same work in his own city. A correspondence was opened – Mr. Mark Cohen and Mrs W.H. Reynolds on this side with Mrs. Sarah Cooper of San Francisco ... [A] meeting was held, with Mr. (now Sir) James Allen as Chairman, and an Association was born on 2nd May, 1889 with Mrs. W.H. Reynolds as President, Miss Kelsey Hon. Secretary, Mr Mark Cohen and Sir James Allen amongst the Advisory Board. The first Kindergarten was opened in Walker Street Mission Hall, Dunedin, on Monday, 10th June, 1889, with 14 children. For some years Dunedin stood alone in its training of children under school age, but such a fine example could not for ever remain unheeded. In 1905 Miss Mary Richmond roused an enthusiastic group of women to collect funds, and Wellington's first Free Kindergarten was opened in 1906. Auckland, where two fine private kindergartens provided the necessary proof of the value of such training, formed an Association in 1908 to train students and

establish free kindergartens in the poorer parts of the City. The work in both North Island centres expanded rapidly, and in 1911 Christchurch women caught the enthusiasm, and under the able presidency of Mrs T.E. Taylor formed their Association and opened Kindergartens.<sup>22</sup>

Overlooked, or unknown by England, were the first free kindergartens established in Auckland under the auspices of the WCTU, an organisation active in kindergarten work in the US. The Jubilee Free Kindergarten (1887–1899) and the Auckland West Free Kindergarten (1888–c.1893) also included crèches and their alliances were primarily with welfare and church organisations.

As the national education system advanced, reformers embraced broader educational and social goals linking kindergarten and infant education in schools. Mary Richmond was a leading figure in initiatives to reform the education of young children across these settings. In 1895, she studied at the London-based Froebel Educational Institute (FEI). Following her return to New Zealand in 1898, Richmond opened the first of two kindergarten schools catering for older children. She established a Froebel Society in Wellington, similar to that operating in England, becoming its president.



Jubilee Free Kindergarten, Auckland, the oldest known New Zealand kindergarten image.

*NZ Graphic*, 23 May 1891 NZG18910523-7-2, GC



Mary Richmond with her class of primary school children at Richmond School, Wellington c. 1893.

PAColl-6317-01, ATL

In 1905, she undertook her biggest task yet: to establish a free kindergarten association to provide kindergarten education in the city to the children of the poor. Richmond was an outspoken advocate of Froebel's teachings. His ideas regarding women as virtuous mother/teachers fitted her desire to promote the distinctively female experience in bringing about a liberal reform of society through education.

Richmond argued that:

Education to be true education, may give not only knowledge but a notion of how to use it; not only power, but a sense of responsibility; not only learning, but a desire to use this learning nobly in the service of others.<sup>23</sup>

The expansion of women's organisations over this time provided women in kindergarten with a range of connected platforms from which to speak, such as the WCTU, the National Council of Women (NCW) as well as teachers' groups such as the Women Teachers' Association (WTA). Wellington and

Dunedin kindergarten associations supported the establishment of Froebel Societies providing a meeting ground for interested educators and promoting professional aspirations with a political dimension. Such networks provided a context for kindergarten endeavours.

Kindergarten may have been a women's organisation but, pragmatically, male support was required for financial and political advice. Commonly, the men involved included key figures from the education, legal, religious and political professions. For example, in 1908 the advisory group for DFKA included Mark Cohen, a journalist, and politician James Allen, along with D. Renfrew White, Head of the Dunedin Teachers' College and lecturer in education at Otago College. This support was critical to the growing movement. Cohen had long campaigned for the state to accept the kindergarten as the first rung of the education ladder. He was forceful in his quest to reform the infant curriculum in schools by "substituting individual teaching for class work, more liberty for the teacher and greater freedom for the pupil; reduction in the size of classes; the institution of open air classrooms."<sup>24</sup>

From the start the early New Zealand kindergartners brought a global perspective to their work. Typically this meant looking 'home' to Britain but also to the US, which, for example, involved DFKA in its early years seeking advice from Sarah Cooper at the successful Golden Gate Kindergarten Association in San Francisco and also joining the International Kindergarten Union in 1909, one of just six international groups to do so.<sup>25</sup> Educational travel abroad was common amongst leading kindergarten advocates, including Mrs Rachel (W. H.) Reynolds, founder and first president of DFKA, Cohen and Richmond, to name a few. This helped offset the sense of isolation common amongst the settlers in the new colony.

An opportunity for Froebelians to have a formal say about education reform came with the government's 1912 Education Commission chaired by Cohen. The task of the commission was to examine ways in which school instruction could be improved, including the career paths of teachers. Kindergartners and infant school teachers presented submissions to the commission as it travelled the country. Key themes in their submissions included the importance of kindergarten pedagogy for young children, both in infant classes and in preschool settings, the need for teachers with specialised training and improving vocational opportunities for women teachers. Miss Margaret Slingsby Newman, member of the executive of the women's branch of NZEI

in Auckland, argued that the children should have access to kindergarten as a right and not as a charity. Newman was the Kindergarten and Infant Mistress at the Auckland Training College, which, as with other colleges, had established a kindergarten. Other submissions advocated kindergarten work for children between the ages of 3 and 5 in connection with public schools, although views differed as to the nature of this connection and the role of the state. A submission from Mrs Martha Washington Myers from AFKA stated:

[Kindergarten] trains young women towards home-life—not away from it. It is a profession full of depth and dignity, far better and far more developing to their womanhood than an office, shop or tea room. It is the very heart and soul of woman's work. In making the profession of a kindergarten teacher possible to the young women of this Dominion, ... you are setting the keystone of a higher social and civic life.<sup>26</sup>

Lavinia Kelsey, secretary of DFKA, argued in favour of the need for specialised nature of teaching:

The training college in Dunedin already opens some of its classes to our trainees, but the purely kindergarten training has still to remain in our hands, for there is an educative atmosphere about our kindergartens which we would like to see in every school. For this reason, we are glad that our work is in the hands of a committee of women, and we should be sorry if the State ever takes our schools over as part of its machinery.<sup>27</sup>

In Wellington, Richmond also spoke against the state taking over the free kindergarten. Speaking in the same year, she said that “the sooner the government was able to take over, organise or reorganise the present Infant schools on a kindergarten basis the better”, but even then she did not:

think there would be any question of lowering the school age. Seven years was old enough for compulsory education to begin, and all the time before children should in the hands of the kindergarten.<sup>28</sup>

An early priority of each of the four associations was the establishment of a kindergarten training programme. Each association forged relations with their respective teacher training college. For example, Bert Milnes, Principal of the Auckland Training College and Wellington Training College Kindergarten Mistress, Miss Dorothy Fitch, served on their local association's council, as did Miss Winifred Maitland, Fitch's replacement when she resigned. Milnes also worked to support the admittance of kindergarten trainees to lectures at

the training college. In Christchurch, the kindergarten association and teachers' college also worked together advocating, amongst other things, the need to employ graduates versed in the Froebel system of education, preferably from kindergarten colleges in Britain and the US.<sup>29</sup> Overseas appointments were often made; for example, Miss Nettie Riley followed by Miss Constance Freeman in Wellington. Auckland Free Kindergarten Association's (AFKA's) first two kindergarten directors, Miss Margaret Gibson and Miss Alice Hopkinson, both held National Froebel Union certificates from England. The DFKA appointed New Zealand born but American trained Miss Dora Ensom as kindergarten supervisor twice; initially in 1909 on a 2-year contract and again briefly in 1916. While appreciative of the support of the training colleges, the respective kindergarten associations were firm in their resolve to be autonomous in the operation of their training. This balance of collaboration and independence remained in place until the 1970s and is the story of later chapters. Autonomy was a key factor in preserving the elements of Froebelian pedagogy.

## Creating a national kindergarten voice

Collaboration across the four associations remained sporadic but the presence of free kindergarten was cemented by government, acknowledged initially in 1904 with a £500 grant to be shared across the four associations. This was in response to a petition to government from DFKA. In 1902 its finances were so fragile Reynolds warned of the closure of its two kindergartens. In 1909 government support was a one-to-one subsidy for money raised and in 1914 this became a capitation subsidy per child which remained in place with some adjustment until 1949. While fundraising was necessary for survival, government recognition saw a shift in the fortunes of the respective associations. The rationale for support was in the context of charitable aid for children of the poor, although kindergartners themselves had broader educational aspirations for their work. Discussion about forming a national kindergarten body can be traced to 1908, when Richmond wrote:

It has been suggested from Dunedin that we should form a Froebel Union for the whole of New Zealand, and endeavour to start a Kindergarten training college of our own.<sup>30</sup>



'Kindergarten games in the fresh air', Logan Campbell Kindergarten, Auckland.  
*NZ Graphic*, 22 November 1911, NZG, 91111122-34-4, GC

It was several years later before the idea took shape.

Between 1912 and 1914 a series of meetings, both informal and formal, were held across the kindergarten associations. The first formal meeting was in Dunedin from 28 October to 1 November 1912. The delegates present included Mrs Susanna (G.) Joachim in the chair, and from Wellington, Mary Richmond and Mrs Mary (T. H.) Gill. Christchurch sent Miss Old and Mrs Elizabeth (T. E.) Taylor, and from Dunedin, DFKA president, Kelsey, Miss Nellie Dutton, along with other DFKA members. The Auckland association expressed:

great regret at being unable to be present, supporting the principle of the cooperation of the four Associations, and urging the desirability of a uniform scheme of training for teachers.<sup>31</sup>

In an opening address, Kelsey argued that,

the time had now arrived for the kindergarten to take a larger part in the education of our primary schools. They would therefore be asked to urge upon government the desirability of giving effect to the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Education concerning kindergartens.<sup>32</sup>

This was agreed in general terms.

Day one of the conference included two papers read by Kelsey and Richmond on the topic of “Women in Education”. The group’s first resolution was, “That this conference urges the women of the Dominion to seek representation on all local bodies.” In a second paper, Richmond expanded on her theme about women’s place in public life arguing that women and men were equal but different, and as such held different roles in public life. She argued that women’s special talent for the nurture of young children was as crucial in the public domain of education as it was in the domestic world. This maternalist message was shared amongst women progressives who attempted to create a separate female space in which to operate. Their strong commitment to social duty was combined with an agenda for the creation of a distinct women’s culture.

On day two, Kelsey introduced DFKA’s resolution regarding federation. The delegates acknowledged that the resolution, if passed, was provisional given the absence of AFKA. The conference minutes report that “Speeches in favour were made by Miss Richmond, Mrs Taylor, Miss Old, and others.” The resolution read, “That it is most desirable that steps be taken immediately to federate (within certain limits) the four Kindergarten Associations of the Dominion.”<sup>33</sup>

The conference then turned to the topic of teacher training and the remaining resolutions submitted by DFKA being:

Resolution 2. ‘That, while affirming the value of a uniform kindergarten syllabus in the training of future kindergartners, it is desirable that the free kindergarten associations should preserve their autonomy on the following points: (a) local finance, (b) appointment and method of training local teachers, and any other matters to be decided at a meeting of the adjourned conference.’

Resolution 3. ‘That we urged the government to give immediate effect to the recommendation of the Royal Commission on Education that children should be kept in kindergartens until at least the age of six years, and that they should be paid for at the present rate of capitation’.<sup>34</sup>

A fourth resolution submitted was not passed, but nor was it shelved. It stated:

That, in the opinion of this conference, it is highly desirable that the entrance age or pupils in the primary schools should be raised to six years, and that we ask kindred Associations to cooperate with us in bringing about this necessary reform.<sup>35</sup>

The view was that this could not be carried out in its entirety. “If this was so, then children in country districts where there are no kindergartens would be prohibited from going to school until 6 years of age.”<sup>36</sup> While the conference agreed, it did not curb ongoing concern around issues of the how 5- and 6-year-olds should be taught and who should teach them—these remained contentious issues. The most divisive discussion concerned a uniform syllabus for the training of kindergarten teachers. Each association valued the importance of qualified teachers with specialist knowledge. With no other kindergarten training provision available in the colony, the responsibility fell on the four associations that had established training centres, and appointed qualified principals to lead the programmes. The idea of a uniform syllabus was not resolved.

During the conference, delegates had the opportunity to listen to a range of talks and discussions and visit local kindergartens and health facilities including Karitane Hospital. The delegates were honoured with two social occasions. The first a large “At home” hosted by Mrs Mary (J.) Allen, and on the Friday a smaller “At home” hosted by Joachin. With plans to include delegates from Auckland, it was decided that the conference should adjourn to January and be held in Wellington.<sup>37</sup> A press release stated that the conference:

affirmed that it was most desirable that steps should be taken immediately to federate within certain limits the four kindergarten associations of the Dominion, the details to be left for consideration by the adjourned conference next January.<sup>38</sup>

In the interim, representatives met with Hon. J. Allen, Minister of Education (1912–15) to discuss, amongst other things, a systematic plan for training kindergarten teachers. Like Cohen, Allen and his wife were founding members of the DFKA and remained members of its advisory committee. The meeting was fruitful and agreement was reached that kindergarten teachers should be recognised by the state. It was an agreement that Allen upheld. The year 1912 thus ended with the associations in general agreement about the advantage of federation when approaching government. In 1913 Allen asked for the assistance of government in such a way that:

there would be a definite standard set which in the one case would be equal to the standard set at Home, and would in the other case would be the standard for New Zealand.<sup>39</sup>

In a speech given at the opening of the Rachel Reynolds Kindergarten in Dunedin, and reported in a local newspaper, Allen elaborated on the possibility of state examinations for kindergarten teachers saying that while:

... he could not make any definite statement that day in respect to State examinations that he did not think there would be any difficulties. He hoped that they would be able to do what the Kindergarten Association wanted—to be able to examine kindergarten teachers throughout New Zealand, and to say to them ‘we will put you on a footing equivalent to kindergarten teachers in Great Britain.’ ... More than that, he hoped it might be possible that the teachers with the government mark upon them would be able to drift into our public schools. (Applause).<sup>40</sup>

For a short while this was looking positive with Government interests and kindergarten interests seeming to align.

During these years too the first purpose-built kindergartens were designed, funded entirely by wealthy patrons. Most kindergartens continued to operate in makeshift buildings and/or with no permanent tenure.



Opening of Myers Kindergarten, Auckland, 1916.

AKA, NZMS1275 (28) GC



The opening of Rachel Reynolds Kindergarten, Dunedin 1914.  
DKA, MS-1149/006, S13-540i, HC



Logan Campbell Kindergarten, Auckland, opened in 1910. Note Froebel's missive  
"Come let us live with our children" and biblical verses on the wall.  
Photographer: Arthur Ninnis Breckon, PH NEG-158, AWMM

## Union established but not unified

In February 1913, delegates from the four associations met in Wellington to discuss the examining and granting of diplomas by the federal body. Delegates included the presidents of the four associations and three of the four teaching principals. The two resolutions passed at 1912 conference were confirmed.

1. That it is most desirable that steps be taken immediately to federate (within certain limits) the four Kindergarten Associations of the Dominion.
2. That whilst affirming the value of a uniform kindergarten syllabus for the future kindergartners, it is desirable that the free kindergarten associations should preserve their autonomy in the following points: local finances, and the appointment method of local teachers.<sup>41</sup>

This second resolution, whilst approved in principle, proved problematic in determining what this would mean in practice. The next day's session about developing a uniform syllabus while protecting association autonomy provoked much debate. A subcommittee was formed to examine the matter of the syllabus consisting of Richmond, Mrs Margaret Langford, Gibson, Kelsey, Gill, Riley and Fitch. The subcommittee outlined a proposal for the examining and granting of diplomas by a federation involving staff from the four centres and the training programmes, and the appointment of a secretary for the federation who, among other duties, would register all kindergartners who come to the country. The cost of the secretary's salary and expenses caused some disquiet. Milnes proposed that each association guarantee £50 per year, provided Auckland and Wellington both guaranteed the payment, and "the recommendation after some hesitation from the southern ladies was carried."<sup>42</sup>

And then there was resolution 3 concerning government recognition of diplomas which stated:

That this conference, recognizing the great importance of kindergarten training for young women, and the great need there is throughout the Dominion for well-trained kindergartners, urges upon the government the desirability of securing a lady director or supervisor of kindergartens for the Dominion, to be appointed by the Free Kindergarten Federal Council, and approved by the government, whose duties should include periodic visitation of both free kindergartens and kindergartens in training colleges,

inspection and the examination of kindergarten students for the granting of a diploma of efficiency, which shall be recognized by the government.<sup>43</sup>

While the associations agreed to the necessity of qualified teachers, agreement about the syllabus and delivery was not reached. Milnes argued that if each centre followed its own methods of training teachers, securing a uniform training course would be nullified. Kelsey disagreed saying that “though the methods might be slightly different, the spirit and results obtained would be the same.”<sup>44</sup> The issue of autonomy was unresolved.

Plans for federation were unravelling. In April 1913, in an action initiated by Kelsey, DFKA, positioning itself as the senior association, announced their withdrawal from the proposed federation.<sup>45</sup> They recommended that the association “should not *for the present* join the proposed federation on the basis of the constitution adopted at Wellington in February.”<sup>46</sup> The concerns were:

that the scheme of federation adopted was unworkable, that the financial obligations were too burdensome, and that the syllabus of instruction put forward was likely to prove too great a tax upon the students.<sup>47</sup>

DFKA issued a widely reported statement.<sup>48</sup> The decision was reaffirmed a month later in their 1913 annual report.<sup>49</sup> The influence of Cohen and Allen on the advisory committee is a clue to the Dunedin stance.

Meanwhile, WFKA and AFKA worked on drafting a constitution for the proposed Federation Union of Associations. Little is known of this exercise beyond a letter from Auckland to Wellington, dated 3 September 1913, said to have accompanied a copy of the draft constitution for consideration.<sup>50</sup> The letter recounts the process taken, including the communications across the three other associations, the intention to draft a constitution. Two matters are identified. The first was to reject Wellington and Christchurch associations’ proposed name: “National Froebel Union of New Zealand” in favour of the name “Kindergarten Union of New Zealand”. Three points were made for the change. The first that “we could not rightly take the identical title of the British society, even with the addition of the words—of New Zealand.” The second was that the term “Froebel” was less general than believed and that other systems may come into the education system, and thirdly, the new name “is on the same lines as the Unions of New South Wales and South Australia, whose object are the same as our own.”<sup>51</sup> The letter finished on a positive note:

hoping we may shortly be joint members of the Kindergarten Union of New Zealand start on a career of usefulness with regard to the Education of the rising generation of the Dominion.<sup>52</sup>

Little else is known about this communication.

In 1914, DFKA celebrated its 25th jubilee with the official opening of the model Rachel Reynolds Kindergarten, named after its founder member. The aspirations of kindergartners and the impact of Froebel's teachings were summed up by a speaker.

Froebel, the father and founder of these schools, died in 1852, and it is only since that date that the movement has spread throughout the civilised world, until today every school where infants are trained with care and skill is a living and abiding monument to the memory of the first great kindergartner. It is not only the establishment of kindergartens that we are aiming at, but also the spreading of the kindergarten spirit into our primary schools.<sup>53</sup>

A small but significant conference was hosted by DFKA, again emphasising their perceived senior status, which included Kelsey, Cohen, and representatives from several Education Boards and attended by Hogben. Topics for discussion included the interrelation of the kindergarten associations with the training colleges.<sup>54</sup> DFKA's 1914 annual report modified their split from the proposed federation, recording that "although as yet we have not joined in any federation we have *all* approached the government with a request for further recognition of kindergarten training." (emphasis added)<sup>55</sup> It was clear that the coordination of kindergarten teaching and the training of students required a united body.

There was more to celebrate in 1914—this time across all the associations. The government announced that the Department of Education would examine the students trained by the Free Kindergarten Union and grant nationally recognised certificates. The candidate was required to have completed, with examination, 2 years' training and service in a school under the direction of one of the kindergarten associations. For the kindergarten associations, the new certificate offered a means to greater uniformity of training as well as recognition of kindergarten pedagogy. Examiners included Gill, a former primary teacher and president of WFKA and married to Thomas Gill, a Wellington school inspector.<sup>56</sup>

## The consequences of war

The onset of the First World War in 1914 halted kindergarten plans for federation. A contributing factor was the departure of some key people. Richmond went to Britain for an extended period. In Christchurch Taylor stood aside allowing Mrs Monica (T. J.) Thacker to take on the leadership of the Christchurch Free Kindergarten Association (CFKA). Auckland's Milnes enlisted and in March 1916 was sent overseas. Sadly, in October 1917, he was killed.<sup>57</sup> Kelsey stood down as President of the DFKA although she remained on the association committee. Moreover, each of the four training directors resigned over this time to be replaced mainly by staff recruited from abroad in a bid to attract experienced Froebelian teachers.

There were more immediate problems caused by the war. Anti-German sentiment was causing controversy around the name 'kindergarten', in particular during the later period from 1916–18. The movement had cause to be concerned when accusations were levelled against key supporters such as Allen (now Minister of Defence) and Auckland's Arthur Mielziner Myers. Both men were publicly accused of being pro-German or German and thus unpatriotic and of abusing their positions of power. Charges came not only from men but, in particular, from the Women's Anti-German League (WAGL), an organisation formed in January 1916 with Anna Stout as its first president.<sup>58</sup> Stout was an active, if at times controversial, advocate for women and children, who with her husband Robert were founding members of DFKA. The WAGL promoted a strong ethnocentric stance towards those of German descent. "The hand of Germany is gripping New Zealand in its iron grasp ... to be truly British we must be anti-German" was one expression of their concerns.<sup>59</sup>

At this time, Myers was completing his development of Myers Park and the Myers Kindergarten buildings, both of which he had donated to the children of Auckland.<sup>60</sup> Concern as to anti-German sentiment was being discussed within the AFKA Council in regard to proposed signage displaying the German name 'kindergarten' on the exterior of the new Myers Kindergarten building. Arthur Myers consulted with AFKA members and the chairman of the Auckland Education Board who replied with a resounding, "No, keep the word kindergarten".<sup>61</sup> The installation of large lettering of the name 'Myers

Kindergarten' on the new building continued as planned.<sup>62</sup> The lettering remains today, free of the anti-German controversy and still with the same dominance as in 1916.

This wave of intolerance from anti-Germans groups continued throughout the war leading to regular (unnamed and often strongly worded) letters to the newspaper calling for a ban on the name "kindergarten". In February 1916, the new AFKA teaching principal, Miss Alice Hopkinson, put pen to paper with a letter to the *NZ Herald* countering the claims made, ending with the statement:

Does it not seem that by arbitrarily changing a name so long accepted we are offering less despite the Prussians who repudiated him than to the memory of this beloved teacher who has not only benefited generations of little children but has influenced the system of modern education.<sup>63</sup>

Bravely, Hopkinson signed her letter, "Alice Hopkinson, Kindergarten and Trainer, Auckland Kindergarten Association." A week later a reply was published. The writer using the unsigned name 'A Mother' addressed her reply directly to Miss Hopkinson:

[Why] should our children be so trained that they are compelled to remember their first lessons as 'made in Germany.' Many parents agree with me and think it ill becomes any portion of the British Empire, at present at war with the unprincipled Germans to use their language in preference to our own ... Is our fine language not sufficiently expressive to supply all our needs? <sup>64</sup>

Another letter writer signed "Anti-German" also opposed the name, stating:

In all our other colonies the name 'Kindergarten' has been eliminated, and yet in New Zealand it appears to be in general use allied to a German surname for a public institution, the passing of such a Hunnish title on to posterity reflects discredit on the Dominion.<sup>65</sup>

In July 1916, the editor of *Auckland Star* intervened to argue that the word "kindergarten—like thousands of other words of foreign derivation, is now embodied in our language as an ordinary English word, and may be found in any dictionary." He also said he had consulted a committee of Auckland's top educators who all agreed to the retention of the name.<sup>66</sup> Such editorial comments must have bought cheer to the kindergarten movement. The letters from opponents continued but then dwindled as war stretched to its end.

The consequences of this attack were in the event short term and selective. Kindergarten as a name was too deeply entrenched and its work broadly accepted. The kindergarten had already become its own iconic New Zealand institution and in the interwar years of the next chapter, the respective associations give attention again to the idea of a federated union.