

MOTHERS' PART IN KINDERGARTEN CONSIDERED "TERRIBLY IMPORTANT"

"In Kindergartens mothers are terribly important," Miss I. J. Christison, the assistant supervisor of pre-school services, said on Wednesday night in an address to mothers at the Richard Hudson Kindergarten. Inside the kindergarten the mother could play a part that no one else could.

A mother should not feel that her responsibility ended when she handed over her child at the kindergarten door. She should stay with him for as long as he needed her.

For the child grew and developed. At birth, the tiny helpless being was entirely dependent on his mother. She acted for him, fed him, clothed him, and developed in him a feeling of belonging, of love.

The baby learnt by exploring the world around him, by finding out about things, people and himself.

But the world he learnt about must be a safe one, a dependable place. Above all his mother must be someone he could trust, for she, at this stage, was, to all intents and purposes, his world. He must learn, too, trust in himself.

If mistrust were learnt, however, instead of trust, then anxiety, aggressions and other beginnings of a neurotic personality might develop. The quality of all his future relationships depended on the quality of his relationship in childhood.

MOTHER STANDS BY

As the child grew, he became more able to do things for himself, he could grasp objects, he learnt to eat, talk and crawl by himself. The mother no longer acted for him, but stood by to help him, help himself, to reassure him that she was still there to assist if the effort was too much for him, and to encourage him to try again.

Otherwise, the child might quite well feel that the effort was not worth while and so remain at an infantile level of behaviour.

NEED FOR PLAY

The other great need of the child in those early years was for play of all sorts, with all kinds of material, and with companions of his own age. He learnt by play—but play needs could not always be met at home.

And this was where kindergartens came in. There he could get com-

panionship, space, time. He could even get the opportunity to use material he could not easily have at home, such as expensive toys, and apparatus which took up a considerable amount of room.

FIRST STEP ALONE

Obviously, the child must, for the first time in his life, leave his home—a very big step, during which, as Miss Christison put it, he should have "adequate mothering."

If his mother was not there to support him and reassure him when he made his first crucial step alone in the outside world, "all sorts of things could happen." He might, for example, become clinging and infantile, sticking fast to the nearest adult in the kindergarten who resembled his mother.

But with his mother in the background he was more likely to venture forth and join in the play, developing the attitude "I'm a big boy now, I'm at kindergarten."

Even though there came a day when the child could stand by himself and say to his mother, "You can go home now," while he settled down to enjoy the other children, he must have the mother's continued support.

Crises arose from time to time, so "we ask each mother to visit the kindergarten still occasionally, so that her child remains quite sure she takes an interest," Miss Christison continued.

If other children's mothers came, and his did not, "the feeling that his mother no longer cared might easily prey upon a childish mind."

"Mothers are wanted at the kindergartens," Miss Christison concluded, "above all for the child's sake, but also for their own sakes, so that they may share in the growing up of their children and not feel they have sent them away behind closed doors."

There was the staff to think of, too. "Nobody knows Billy Brown as well as his own mother, and if the kindergarten staff are to do anything at all for Billy Brown they must know the pattern of his home life."



KINDERGARTEN EXPERTS MEET: Miss I. J. Christison, of Wellington (left), with the principal of the Dunedin Free Kindergarten Student Training Centre, Miss Elizabeth Hamilton.