

Miss Christison said it was always a very great pleasure for her to meet Conference and to address the Annual Meeting. She said she wished to speak on what kindergartens are doing for Maori children and what they could do to further this very important aspect of the kindergarten service.

The National Development Conference had expressed its appreciation of what was already being done in the area of Maori education, but there was one point in the education process where further action was especially urgent and that was in the pre-school period. Maori children are less prepared for school than their European playmates, and ten years of formal schooling does little to narrow the gap. The most significant problem in this gap was the language difficulty. She did not imply that every Maori child was so affected. "You know, and I know, that there are very many Maori children who are very well done by by both their parents and in their surroundings," said Miss Christison.

She wished to emphasise that when she said Maori children she did not mean that only Maori children have difficulties. There are Island children and many European children and poor New Zealand children as well. They also need experience and skills to build on when they get to school, but the Maori children do form the biggest single group. They are children in special need of the special kind of education a kindergarten can give them in order to make full use of what the school in its turn can offer them.

There are all sorts of factors in a Maori child's life which make their background entirely different and these are many and varied. One is the pattern of family living. In a Maori community it is common to find the Elders mix with the Elders, adults with adults, parents with parents and children with children. The Maori child's family is not parent and child but a different type of family pattern.

Recently there was a conference of teachers of young Maori children. At the conclusion they were invited to a hui. They were the most warmly hospitable hosts and some children were among the people there. The children were obviously loved and accepted, but nobody talked to them, and the children did not talk to the adults. There is no conversation between Maori children and Maori adults. The pattern then is -- Elders to Elders, parents to parents and children to children.

There is also a great deal of shifting from place to place. This is often the traditional occupation of the Maori people, shearing, crop picking and other occupations which mean living in many different places. The child then is taken away to a new place and to a new environment, just when he very much needs stability and continuity in his life.

This then forms the pattern of silence and lack of language and communication in the Maori child's life. A generation ago the use of the Maori language in schools was frowned upon, and today's parents, not being very fluent in either English or in their own language, are unable to communicate with their children in either language. For the Maori child, reading, on which all other academic subjects depends, suffers because of this lack of language ability and so they do not do well in other subjects because they do not understand the language.

Maori children are often unfamiliar with books. In many play centres there are books available for the children to take home. The Maori mother will read to her children from these books because she has more confidence in her own home. The life of the book is shortened, but this is a small price to pay for the benefit both the mother and the child receive.

The Maori child is not deficient in experience, but his experience is different from that of the great majority of children who go to school and on what the school builds. Some of the Maori child's experiences would have been very exciting to him. They

must make an impression on him, but it is different from what the pakeha child will talk about in the institutions that the pakeha child goes to. The Maori child also lacks the experience of the playing together with adults. The Maori family will work together, but they do not often play together because of the pattern of family life. This playing together of parent and child gives the child educational models on which to base his behaviour.

Miss Christison said she had always known that play is an absolute essential if talking is to be encouraged because you cannot talk if you do not have something to talk about. Not only do you have to have play in order to have language, but you have to have language in order to get good play and children who do not talk well do not play well either. Language and play go hand in hand, and if they have not experience in language they do not have the experience that play can give them either. They must be given them both.

Kindergarten does provide a service which goes far beyond the service which many children are receiving. What is going on, in some places, there are these wonderful facilities and in other places there are no facilities at all. There is no hall to start a play centre, there is no community available from which to form a committee. There is very little money because of home commitments. There just is not anything for them. We must all give our thought and energy to helping these areas.

The percentage of Maori children in our kindergartens is steadily growing -- in 1965 there were about 660, in 1966 - 798; 1967 - 920; 1968 - 1195, and this year there are 1246. Almost double in three years is pretty good going. But the fact that many Maori children are not attending kindergarten is not because parents are not interested. It is simply that they do not understand what is required to ensure that their children can attend. They do not understand that it is necessary to put the child's name down on the waiting list when he is two.

Miss Christison said she felt that there is a great deal of careless talk about the length of waiting lists. In South Auckland the average waiting list is 70, in Taranaki 39, Wanganui 37, Hawkes Bay 57, Wellington 55, Nelson 51, Canterbury 50, Otago 39 and Southland 72 and the national average is 61.8.

A kindergarten usually admits between 60 and 80 children a year and it is not impossible to get children into kindergartens, but some people are being frightened off by stories of terribly long waiting lists. It was very important that Maori parents do understand the procedure for enrolling their children.

There are children in New Zealand who have great needs and the Maori children form the largest single group. Kindergartens are excellent places in which to fulfil these needs. There is so much to be proud of in kindergartens and so much to offer these children whose need is just a little greater than the ordinary child from the ordinary family who has already what he needs.

Subject: ... on which all other academic