

Interviewee: Miss Moria Gallagher

Interviewer: Helen May (questions in italics)

Date: 1990

I understand you trained as an infant teacher, perhaps you could tell me about this?

I went to Wellington Teachers' College and I was one of the first that had a probationary assistant year. Up till that time you had two years' pupil teaching, two years in college, and then you were a trained teacher. In 1926 they changed that and I was in that first year. There was one year as a probationer, two years in college, and one year as a probationary assistant. And I went to Karori School and was given standard one with fifty-six children! There was a dear old gentle headmaster and my room was just near his office because I was just red raw and he probably didn't trust me too well. But there was in the school a wonderful woman called Isobel Little (a Scot) who had had a Froebel training, and she taught me more than anybody else. My whole understanding of children and how they learned and what I'd learned in college, didn't begin to touch what I learned from her. In those days (1930s) she was doing what came to be called "activity programmes".

So it was right back then that activity programmes were starting?

Well, **she** did. I can describe my classroom. I had three tables that were about five feet by about two and a half, that had folding legs and they were placed strategically around the room. We had coconut matting on the floor. We got on with our work in the morning and then after play time we had a sort of free choice of all sorts of things. During my time with her we changed over to having the activity, the free thing first thing in the morning on the principle that that the children were fresher, not only in terms of energy, but they were nearer to the time of sleep and that that was their more creative time.

What was the reaction of other people to this? Was there support from your head teacher?

He allowed it anyway; I don't know if there was ever any argument. But I got moved to Karori West School (I think it was 1929) and a number of children from Karori Main School went to Karori West School. In 1932, Karori West opened up a brand new school, and quite a lot of children from the Main School who lived in that area of Karori went to that school which reduced the roll number. It meant that we lost a teacher at Karori Main, and being the last one appointed, I had to be the first one to go. I was automatically transferred down to Karori West and I actually opened the school all by myself on the first day—only me and sixty kids, and a hundred and twenty parents I think! I can remember going across the road to a telephone (schools didn't run to telephones) to somebody's house, and rang up the Board. I was standing fairly well with the inspectorate at this stage, having been one year as a probationary assistant and being inspected, and they told me to send all the parents home and bring the children

inside. I had new entrants to standard six for a week—all by myself, until they sent a reliever and the school was cut in half and the headmaster took the top half and I took the bottom half. I made most of the decisions I might tell you, because I knew the children. Anyway, when the new infant mistress came (I was not eligible for the job—it was a grade 1A and I was only grade 1—if it had stayed a grade 1 job I could have been automatically transferred by right but the school had more children than that so the job became 1A which was one step up, so it had to be advertised) and that made it a three-teacher school. I was given standards one and two. The new appointee got the infant department. I went down and saw the inspectors and they said that they'd look out for the first infant job that came, and they transferred me to Wadestown. I kept going from A to B and B to C on transfer because of the changing in the schools and when I got up there I was with a dear old lady, an absolute old maid, but a warm sort of a person, and there were rows of desks and all sorts of things like that. But then I went to Australia and I was horrified at what I saw over there; it was very very regimented, not cruel, but very organised to the *n*th degree. And when I came home I just picked up with what dear old Miss Little had taught me and carried on from there.

Were there many people teaching in that kind of way?

No, there was a Miss Edwards at Te Aro, and Miss Little. They were the only people that I knew of anyway that were teaching in that kind of way. I was lucky to be exposed to it.

Were you creating your own ideas as you went?

Yes. The next room to me was all in little tables and chairs, but my room wasn't. I just carried on the way we were.

So, first thing in the morning you'd have your activities that children would choose until playtime, and then what after that?

Well a happy accident happened. I worked out that I had to hear everybody read every day and we had a word recognition sort of thing. For instance you took all the ways you could say a sound, it would be the double O one day; you'd say spoon, the children would tell you the words, and if they said flew, you'd say, no that's a different family. Word families, that's what they were called. Having written all the words with double O in, you did a funny little stick man illustration of them, and that had to be written down and their reading had to be heard. And also, when they'd done the two or three jobs that were to be done and they did it in a circulating motion because the ones that were going to read came and sat on the mat near me and others were going to use the table, so that they could draw a picture. Well, we had what would have been slates, only they were wooden, and there were a whole lot of them in the cupboard. One little bright spark one day got one of those boards and did a frame and did his picture in it. He wrote underneath, moon or sun or whatever his jolly picture was. So the fashion kind of developed, and it seemed to me a very sensible thing; their ideas, were much more easily expressed in drawing, which is a more natural thing for children than writing, in that they drew stories and they put words under it. That developed to the point where they did

this thing at the top, they'd do a whole blackboard of six sentences or something. You just built on it, you just sort of saw an idea and jumped on it and got on with it.

When you talk about your activity sessions, what kinds of things were you providing for the children?

We had templates, wooden things of all sorts of shapes and sizes, octagonal, hexagonal etc. with a little knob in the middle, a hangover of Montessori. They used to do template pictures; they could choose to do that first if they wanted to, and they became very elaborate and cleverly designed. They could then go to the reading table and look at picture books. They could have paper and crayons—we didn't have paint at that stage. And they could draw pictures or they could write stories. We made oven cloths out of sacking, sugar bags, and I used to tack them all round, do buttonholing all around the outside. There were about eight or ten different things you could do, and if somebody came up with a bright idea and said, can I do this, I'd say, yes, sure.

You didn't exactly have toys in the classroom as such at that point. These were activity sessions?

Yes, and I had a teacher's cupboard, but along the wall there were shelves with curtains hanging, and you could move those all back and the kids could get free access to anything that was on there. At that time we had the most marvellous library, a public library scheme whereby you could have children's book out and there was a Whitcombe's series, and there must have been a hundred titles they could read, they could do anything that I thought was helping them along.

Did you have any contact with what was happening in the kindergartens at that point of your career?

No. but later when I worked for the Department of Education I was the one pushing for the all the free activity in the kindergartens

After I had finished my probabationary assistant year I didn't have a job, and it was depression time, 1930. And I, who had great hankerings about children but no job at all, thought I would go and do kindergarten training. Didn't know too much about it but that's what I thought I was going to do. After about three weeks of having no job and having put in applications to kindergarten people I suddenly was sent to a country school, at Morrissville, out of Masterton, a two-teacher school. I had the infant department, and I carried on Miss Little's method up there. I was mainly relieving there. There was a job advertised at Petone Central for somebody with special ability in art and music and something else. But the headmistress in this little country school said to me, I hope you're going to apply for that job—if you don't I'll put in an application for you. I did apply for it and I got it. It was called a special opportunity class. I only had about ten children I think, might have had twelve. Part of them were accelerants, and the other half were retarded, more or less. They were the sort of children, some of whom

needed to do three years' work in two years, and some needed to do two years' work in three years. I had so few children that I could give each one individual attention. The depression of course had hit us, and after about six months with this special job for the more under-privileged children in Petone, the money was withdrawn and the job disappeared. And where do you think I was transferred to—Karori! When you ask about how the parents reacted, I don't remember there being any anti at all.

Did you explain what you were doing to parents?

Oh yes. You'd invite them in, sit them down, let them stay with me.

That would have been quite unusual in those days.

It was never heard of.

Had you got those ideas through Miss Little, or were these things that you were developing by yourself now.

Well I can't tell you that. I think that if I got an idea like that she used to agree and I don't remember whether she had parents in her room, maybe she did. I can't think that it was anything unusual. Anyhow, you asked how the parents reacted. Now when Miss Little retired, which she did while I was still at Karori, the inspectors came in the next Monday after she finished up. There was going to be no more of that nonsense.

Was there any support for her or what she was doing?

No I don't remember. We just knew that they had come in to "put things right". To get on with the more serious business of teaching. I still stayed on at Karori, and I still carried on my wicked ways. One day a guy came from the Teachers' College and there was a position going at the normal school, would I apply for it. I was very happy where I was, loved it, loved the kids, loved the parents. He even went so far as to say, I'll give you the stamp to put on the envelope if you need it. I went over to the Kelburn Normal School then, took a standard four for the last term of the year, started there at the beginning of the third term, while they reorganised the infant department to make room for me. Then I spent lovely years in Kelburn School. Meanwhile, I think 1944, we had a wonderful educational conference in New Zealand—has anyone told you about that?

I've heard about it but I don't know very much. You tell me.

Well that was 1944, I was at Kelburn Normal then. I was also on the New Zealand Educational Institute and probably now I'm talking about 1943. It was a wonderful thing, this conference. It was a brave new world. After all, the Education Act in England was 1944, and for a country on its knees, if that wasn't an act of faith, tell me. When we think of the state of England and yet they had a new Education Act. It must have been 1943 that I'm talking about, or 1942 when we first heard about it. The Hon HGR Mason was the Minister of Education by then and Peter Fraser was the Prime Minister. There were four main things at the conference: pre-school education, rural education, adult education, and believe it or not, religious schools.

A strange one at the end!

Well, I suppose they felt they wanted it aired. They asked everybody to that conference; the Plunket Society were, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guides, the kindergarten and the playcentre movement which was absolutely in its infancy, the first playcentres were only in about 1941/1942, somewhere around there, the Trade Unions, the private schools, the Catholic schools, the Presbyterian Church, the Catholic church, the Anglican church, the Maori people, 'Uncle Tom Cobbley' and all were there. These four main themes. On the Educational Institute it was decided that somebody would be in charge of each one of these things, and I was a sitter for pre-school, having not only the early childhood interest that I did have but also the new entrant. I was to have two off-siders. Someone else was in charge of adults and they were to have two off-siders. I was supposed to go off-sider on one of those others but I never saw the light of day. I worked like a beaver. I read up everything that I hadn't already read, and re-read everything I had read in terms of early childhood education.

And material was getting through to New Zealand by then?

Don't ask me what it all was. But the conference was to start on the Monday morning in Christchurch, it was to run from Monday to Friday, and we, the Institute people, went down on the previous Friday night, so that we would have time to get together and plot out, co-ordinate our effort. Professor Colin Bailey was the chairman, He was on the ship going to Christchurch and he told me on board (I knew Colin because he was a year ahead of me at college) that I was to be the main speaker on pre-school education. Well I can tell you that I neither slept nor ate. I had never spoken in public, ever! I got up enough courage to stand up at a meeting and say what I thought but that's as far as I had ever got.

Had you at that stage spent any time in the kindergartens at all?

Just what I got from Miss Little in Karori School. I never was in a kindergarten until I was in the early childhood job in the Department. Well, one of the outcomes of that conference was that there should be a consultative committee on preschool education set up.

That's where it started?

That's where it started. It came away from that meeting. This consultative committee was 1944. In 1945 I, for my sins, became infant adviser in Auckland.

By that time, were there other people throughout New Zealand that were thinking similarly to you?

I've no idea. I wasn't a bit self-conscious about the whole thing at all, I was just me. Yes, I'd become infant adviser in Auckland. The consultative committee was duly set up and for my sins I became the secretary. Colin Bailey, who was the secretary of the New World conference, was the chairman of that committee. I came backwards and forwards from Auckland now. We had a meeting on the day Japan succumbed. I didn't spend any peace celebrations at all because there was an awful man from Auckland who said he'd come down for the meeting and

he wasn't able to enjoy it with his family so the meeting would go on. So we just worked through it all while the rest of Wellington jumped up and down in the streets.

What was the brief of that committee? Obviously there were a lot of reforms happening in the other parts of the education system by then, but what was hoped to come out of it?

The work of the kindergarten movement and the playcentre movement was deemed to be of great value, but they were very limited in their resources of manpower and, in particular, money. And you can't go on a great developmental programme if you haven't got the personnel resources of courses, but also you've got to have something to make the donkey go. And the general thing was how to survey the needs of New Zealand (it's probably written down in that little red book—have you seen that?)

The Bailey Report? — yes.

I should think the aims are written down there. Well, we wanted to facilitate it so that it would be available for the children of parents who wanted it. I could almost tell you how many kindergartens there were in New Zealand at that time, and they were very limited. We worked out what was needed and how it could be done and so on, and we finally came up with a short term policy and a long term policy. One of the very early decisions was that there had to be an officer appointed to do this and every time we got into something that we didn't know enough about and had no means of finding out, it was going to be one of the jobs of this officer.

Did you have any idea at the time that it was going to be you?

No! None! The poor old pre-school officer was going to have to play the devil with the big stick, gather up all the information that was required, and plan ways of solving any problems that we did see, and also make plans for expansion. Forget about funding because it goes without saying. Expansion was the operative word.

Was there a consensus view on kinds of early childhood services? Was everybody in agreement that they were happy with the kindergarten movement as being the major one...?

Except the playcentre people. The playcentre people thought the kindergartens were much too regimented, and in any case they had lay volunteers. The kind of voluntary people that were on kindergarten committees and so on were not the same kind of people as were on the playcentre committees. There's a different kind of people. The playcentre people were (I can't say it without sounding snobby) —they were an educated kind of person. They were people of more education by and large. The others had their heart in the right place, they really did, and don't let anybody belittle them either. But, don't ever work for a voluntary body will you! Anyway, it all went into the too hard basket. I was up in Auckland throwing my hat in up there, because I was at the advanced age of 32, and I was dealing with infant mistresses of around 55. I had to tread very warily not to look like a little bumptious youngster coming and telling these experienced women where they got off!

As an adviser, what did you see happening in the infant schools that you really felt needed change?

It needed loosening up, that's all.

Did you see the infant classes as regimented or cruel?

Not cruel at all. I saw no indication of cruelty at all. Even regimented is too strong a word. Organised is the word. The teacher said what and when and how about everything.

Your ideas, which were child-centred, would be quite different wouldn't they?

Yes. And of course I had to go very very gingerly. I came down to one of the preschool consultative committee meetings. Mrs Beeby was on the committee and she said to me that the director wanted to see me. I immediately wondered what I had done because I was so aware of the fact that above all, I mustn't give offence up in this Auckland area. My youth was the thing that was so against me. I went to see Beeby. He had a big three-seater couch made with cane backs and sides and brown velvet cushions. I sat on that and he talked to me and suggested that I might take this job. I said I knew nothing about it. He said, "I know you don't, but you know more about it than anyone else I can think of". He finally said, "First of all, you don't need to give me a decision immediately; take a month to think about it. But if you will come down and do that job for a year I will undertake to keep your job in Auckland open for you and you can go back without prejudice". That was great. I neither ate nor slept that night—I stayed at the Midland Hotel. I went back to Auckland the next day. Some time later I got an urgent ring to say "What's keeping you?". I thought I had to wait to be told when to come! I said I would come, but there was a breakdown somewhere or other and somebody was meant to tell me. So I came down and started this job. I had nothing to go by at all, except the consultative committee report. I looked at the short term policy and wondered where to begin. I had to find out, so I put on my hat and coat and went around and visited all the kindergartens all over the country to see what was going on.

What was going on when you visited them?

All sorts of things. They were masterpieces of organisation. The Taranaki Street nursery school which had begun (as preschool education had all over the world and not only in New Zealand—the McMillan sisters speak for that alone) with the underprivileged. At the Taranaki Street nursery school there was a teacher, Miss Teddy Scott, who was a very charismatic person. The kids loved her and everybody thought Teddy Scott was tops. She had four or five students attached to her. The children were divided into four groups and each of the students had a little group. They had a morning talk, there was singing, there was lavatory, handwashing, morning tea (milk), there were finger plays, and all these things went in rotation so that not all the groups landed in the lavatories together! We all sat on the mats and sang "Good morning to you" and "Happy birthday". It was very relaxed. No children were crying or miserable. There was a birthday chair with a big bow on it. The first group had to go

straight to the toilet, and the next group went to plasticine or painting, another group went to play, another group went somewhere else. One of the awful parts was after mid break, a whole lot of stretchers were put out and they had to go down for a rest. What was the point? It was because someone had been to the nursery schools on the long day programme where they had a daytime sleep or something. I went to the only kindergarten in Ashburton—a half day programme, and they were having morning rests, too. There were three long-day programmes: the nursery school was the first. Ponsonby in Auckland was next, and finally the preschool centre in Dunedin which had a different reason for its existence altogether. In Ashburton they couldn't afford stretchers and they had sleeping bags made of sugar bags or cretonne or blanket covered with cretonne. They had a curtain ring sewn on the corner and they all hung along the walls. Each child knew its own sleeping bag and after they had got through half their morning's programme, these sleeping bags were put down on the floor and they would all have to lie there. It was such a waste of good playing, activity time. Still, everybody's hearts were in the right place. The conditions under which the kindergarten girls worked were terrible—it's a wonder they didn't have an occupational complaint of bad backs because most of them had to go early in the mornings to halls, and most of the stuff was stored under the stage and they had to get all that organised before kindergarten started in the morning, then pack it all up and put it away so that the halls could be used for other purposes.

At about this time you went overseas?

It was after this, in 1949. I started in August 1946 for the year that I was going to give it a fair trial. In late 1947 I was confirmed in the job and in 1949 I went overseas. That was because there was a Montessori conference on in Italy and someone, the Minister or the Director, thought it would be a good excuse to send me. But I never got to the Montessori conference—it fell through or something.

Were you able to use the time and see what was happening?

I was able to do what I liked. I was there from the end of February until some time in August. I made my own plans and New Zealand fostered me. All my letters, my itinerary, planning went out from New Zealand House over the signature of the secretary.

[Tape stopped here Helen reading extracts from a letter sent to Miss Gallagher from a school inspector:]

“From a morning in Miss Leamington's infant room, she was once my infant mistress at Hillcrest a long time ago, so I know a lot about her shortcomings and mediocre ability. Frankly, I soon wondered what had bitten her. On looking at her timetable and finding the first period to be a three quarter of an hour period of free play and activity period, I thought to myself and went straight to the point—had she got it from Miss Gallagher? She had. And I thought that in your labours in Wellington or thereabouts it might hearten you to know that here and I am sure in many other schools in the Auckland district, things are going extremely well as a result of your all-too-brief activity in these parts. That first period of Miss Wilkie's

where she had group painting, paper tearing, drawing, looking at picture books, playing with construction toys, as well as the free morning up to interval was a triumph for you. Equally interesting to me was the fact that when in the early afternoon she attempted more formalised methods, although the pupils worked, the atmosphere changed greatly. Socialisation suffered tremendously as of course it must and the fine happy serious purpose of the morning period seemed largely a faint memory. My colleagues and I thought we should be better equipped with copies of your timetable. They and Mrs Boyle I know join me in wishing you every success." ...Campbell Boyle.

[And another...]

Dear Miss Gallagher, Thank you so much for sending me the Readiness Test and also the catalogue of apparatus. I'll return the latter in case you need it with the directions for the test which I will take early next week. May I say how grateful we are to you for all the help and encouragement you gave me last Monday. I just wish you could see our rooms. You would hardly recognise them. I took your advice and got rid of half my tables, letting the two classes double bank. This leaves quite a lot of floor space at one side in which we have set up a fine shop and we have a community table, a Wendy house which arrived on Tuesday, and Miss Newey's room is arranged in a similar manner. I am thrilled with the improvement. We are going ahead with a lot of apparatus and cards. The children are having a lovely time collecting acorns, buttons etc. and bringing things in for the shop. After a lot of thought I have managed to rearrange the timetable to allow both to have their number lessons in the classroom. P2 thirty minutes, P1 twenty minutes. It makes a big difference and I hope by the end of this term that we shall all of the groups in full swing. Now if you could spare a day or a half a day to come and see it in action next term we would be very pleased but of course I know how very busy you are." ... D. Veale. That was 1946, the school at Henderson.

Takapuna 1946. "Dear Miss Gallagher, I was so busy this morning being a complete obstructionist about all your suggestions that I didn't even thank you for them. After a little calm reflection I decided you had banished all my problems in one short hour with the utmost diplomacy so I approached the headmaster [Mr Matthews] and had a lengthy discussion about group methods and he didn't raise even the slightest objection to my throwing out the desks. If anything, he approved. I spent two hours after school rearranging my room, pushing out tables, and having a perfectly gorgeous time. Incidentally my husband nearly pushed me out when I arrived home! However I do thank you most sincerely for coming over. I'm sure it's the best hour's work anyone has ever done for me. I feel a few years younger already as I feel I shan't have to listen to drawers banging in and out and I shan't have to fish out ancient apple cores from said drawers and I shall have room to move. Mr Matthews even found a key to my door so even that difficulty doesn't exist. I will write again later and let you know how I progress. I hope you aren't going to leave us altogether as we have a need for you. Yours sincerely, Irene Barnes."

Even then they focused on the less important reasons for the change and it was only when they got into it that they got the guts of it and they could observe the children and the progress. One of the objections that woman had when I suggested that she didn't need all these tables, the room was full of them, and she said "But where will they keep their blackboard dusters?". I suggested having a basket for them over here. At that stage they still had their own personal blackboard dusters that they had no doubt from home.

What were some of the things you saw in England that impressed you?

There were two women in a school in Doncaster. I went to a Nursery School Association conference near The Hague. I met a lot of English teachers who had been brought up in the nursery school tradition. Dorothy Alderson was the infant mistress at Doncaster who had what we would call primer up to standard 2 under her, with another person called Dorothy; and standard 3 upwards would be another school under a different headmaster altogether. The infant mistress was a head teacher, not just an infant mistress. These two Dorothys were marvellous. They had a full activity programme all day long which was something you couldn't begin to deal with over here at that point. I succeeded in getting it going for half the morning and eventually for the morning and doing the more formal things in the afternoon like word building and so on. One of the lovely things about Dorothy's Doncaster school was they could do anything they liked—not to wreck the place, but if they thought up anything to do they were free to do it.

(new tape)

Don't forget I wasn't in more than a week at this school. There was one boy I watched. Whether he was a child who at home was interested in maths by his parents, or whether he had a thing on his own, or whether, and this is more likely so, he was no able to socialise with the other kids very well. There was all sorts of arithmetic stuff they could help themselves to in the school: measuring, cutting and doing things and there were arithmetic little problems that they could do. Anyway, this boy spent most of his time doing these and one day he ventured out into the building area and he stayed out and he stayed out. Dorothy said to him after a couple of weeks, when are you going to do some more arithmetic for me, and he said I" will do you some soon". About a day or so after that he came in and he spent all morning doing whatever these little mathematic things were and he came and said, "Here you are". He offered her half. She said "what have you got there?", he said "No, that is for the next time you ask me to do something." Isn't that delightful? Oh, but then you would see him suddenly come alive with personal adjustment to a whole world. I don't remember much about going to Susan Isaac's School in Chelsea, except that I do remember that Marie Bell was there. Don't remember much about that at all.

Marie was working there at that stage but Susan Isaac's was dead and her successor Dorothy Gardener was in charge.

Yes, that's right. I got to know her quite well, Dorothy Gardener.

Did get a clearer view of what to do when you got back to New Zealand to make the changes that you needed to make?

Well I had already been in the job now for nearly three years and I decided, fair wrongly, that the first thing to be done was to think in terms of improving the lot of the teachers. How to improve the work that these very well intentioned Kindergarten Association were doing, the salaries that they were paid varied greatly. The principle of the Kindergarten College - of course the Principle of the College was also the Head of the Association, it was sort of a dual job - in Auckland got £350, in Wellington she got £500, in Christchurch got £300 and in Dunedin got £250 a year and they couldn't afford to do more. Miss Lawless, who was the only kindergarten teacher in four kindergartens in Invercargill, was getting £90 a year and in Wellington at that time, a Director would have been getting £145. I can remember this absolutely because I sweated over it so and in somewhere else they might have been getting £120 or something. At that time the Government was paying them a capitation subsidy and it was a subsidy of £2 for one, nothing to do with buildings at all, £2 for one with a limit of £5 per child and of course I don't need to tell you what that did. It immediately sent them up into sixty child kindergartens. But the thing was having sixty children they got £300 a year. Two for one subsidy with a limit of £5 per child.

Well I proceeded to go through their accounts for a start. Funny way to start an educational programme, but that is what I did. I went through their accounts to see where their money was coming from and what they were doing with it and so on. I applied every kind of subsidy rate within reason, three for one, four for one, to the accounts of each association. There were only eleven associations, so it wasn't all that big a job and I tried all sorts of limits, you know capitation rates and I couldn't match them with what they were paying. If I gave the Lower Hutt Association enough to get it out of financial trouble, I gave the Wellington Association strawberries and cream everyday, because their income was so much better. I was working on the salary scales and I was working on the capitation subsidy and I suddenly discovered by sheer accident that to pay all the staff the same salary as what they were paying in Wellington, was about the same total cost of any of the uneven capitation subsidies I

was working on. So I went and had a talk to the Director and persuaded him. He didn't take much persuading either, but he crossed examined me and carried on, and we put a story up for the Minister. Then I had to go around and break it gently to the associations that we were proposing to pay the salaries that the teachers instead of this capitation subsidy and the panic set in.

Why would that be?

Government take-over. Which it isn't to this day. Fifty years later, there was no intention of a Government take-over, but it was a way of solving their problems, their financial problems, in an equitable way and it was even for everybody. There was panic in the kindergartens. There was only one thing in the short term policy of the Bailey Report that we didn't put into operation and that was that there was supposed to be a Government appointee on each of the kindergarten associations. But Beeby decided, I told him that they were frightened of it. What they couldn't understand was that you wouldn't get a report back from them. I mean if somebody in Napier was appointed to be a Government representative - we don't want to hear from them. You wouldn't appoint them if they weren't the sort of person you thought would add something to the body. So that was never done.

I was interested in your comment that you can't expect people to pull their socks up until you actually have good conditions and reasonable pay and you can't address quality very well.

What I began to say was that, there is always a way of getting around the protective things that you are trying to do. There were Kindergarten Associations that had no trained teacher at all, and one of the conditions on which we were going to pay salary was that at least the Director was trained. They could get away with untrained assistants, but then you ran into the trouble that if they lost their Director, say she gets married, they lost their financial assistance so we almost gave them a terms grace. They could carry on with untrained staff at the end of the term to advertise, it had to be advertised in the gazette and all that sort of thing.

In Invercargill there were four kindergartens and there was only this Miss Lawless, and they moved Miss Lawless from kindergarten A to kindergarten B and her kindergarten got a months grace, I think it was a terms grace actually. Then they moved her back

again, then the other kindergarten got a terms grace. It took somebody bright to see that that is what you did. Then when we paid kindergarten student allowances a huge sum of £50 a year, it might have been £35, but I think it was £50.

It was quite a lot though in those days?

Well say it was £35, I am not too sure. Of course up until then only the daughters of the well to do could afford to do and further than that it was a passionable occupation, so that it was a thing to do, like Karitane afterwards became. With the payment of the student fee, girls who mightn't be able to do it before could now do it. It was a desirable occupation for young women of gentility too.

I have interviewed several women who had difficulty getting into kindergarten teaching in the 1940's because they hadn't gone to the right secondary school .

Oh yes, all sorts of funny things. But I remember one girl and they didn't take her, she was taken later, but they didn't take her because she had wet perspiration marks under her arms and she was probably scarred stiff at the interview. Can you imagine? It is not a case of values, it was a case of actually that girl she was clean, she was probably in a lather of anxiety. Can you imagine it, they told me that. More kindergarten students were going through and teachers were coming out in greater numbers and the idea was they were to be all trained staff, but they could get away with an untrained assistant in very special circumstances and so on, and from short periods. Well things then began to happen, the kindergarten movement began to expand all right.

It was the time of big waiting lists wasn't it.

Yes, they had waiting lists, but the number of associations proliferated and you had the Wellington Association and the Lower Hutt Association (I am jumping years), Upper Hutt, Tawa, Plimmerton, separate associations down the road from one another. As teachers became more readily available they did the "come hither" to somebody else's staff instead of us being able to build in a trained assistant all the way they would get a girl to come to them and be a director. That meant a new kindergarten and then we had to put the breaks on and say that there could only be so many new kindergartens a year at one stage. But, round the Bay of Plenty, there was the Rotorua Association with Helen Downer. She was long term President of the Union, and a great woman really,

she started Rotorua but in time there being Te Puke Tauranga, Matamata you name it, I can't think. They were all able to open by doing the "come hither" to somebody's assistant. As soon as they lost their Director, she got married or whatever, they were fairly attractive and marriageable young girls, it means that kindergartens were without staff. Then, in Helen Downer's time, they decided to amalgamate all those smaller associations and it became the Rotorua Kindergarten Association that ran all those kindergartens in the area. Helen would be the first person to see the importance of trained staff and, that they were able to control the movements of staff within reason and they were able to transfer the staff in the greater area, they were employed by the Rotorua Association, not the Edgecomb Association. So they could send a girl to Edgecomb to save the day there and keep all their kindergartens with at least member of trained staff and the whole thing became much more manageable. Anyway I brought the house down at a Kindergarten Conference at Wanganui, they had it at the Town Hall there, and it had become practise by now, I didn't mean it to become practice. At some stage I went to a Kindergarten Conference and told them what I as their problems. The next year probably I did the same and said some are better or whatever it was. So it came that I was part of the Kindergarten Union Conference every year and I gave a report to conference. Anyway, this particular year I gave them the works about the way they were treating their staff and they were young girls. They were being encouraged to go and be directors before they were really mature enough, they had lay committees to work under and nobody can be more bitchy than some of those women. Even if there were women of twenty-eight with two or three children dealing with a girl of nineteen or twenty and I can remember raising my voice in the end, "But as long as the kindergarten movement continues to send boys on men's errands you will be in that sort of trouble" and they stood, and of course I said a lot more, and they stood up and brought the house down. But that is the sort of relationship I had with them.

It was a tense one.

With the Associations themselves too. No wonder I have had coronary's. And you know you never knew from one day's end to another. I can remember working forty days on end, non-stop. I went down to Dunedin, I worked at the office, down to Dunedin to a Kindergarten course. Gwen Somerset offered that one and came I back, picked up the office, went up to Lopdell House. I used to teach courses as well as pre-school. Dear old Frank Lopdell used to drag me around to the In Service training.

Were you taking any of the In Service courses, because some woman mentioned about courses that you first started to set up, probably in the late 50's, in the 1950's ..

At Wallis House. That was a lovely ..

One women came from Dunedin and talked about how they were challenging the way teachers were working with children.

Who was she.

Geraldine Erkill

What was her maiden name.

Don't know.

Partington. Geraldine Partington.

She has just retired and I interview about her career in kindergarten and she talked about the inspiration of coming up to Wallis House, and then going back to Dunedin and trying out these ideas. It was support from the Head of the College for this. The Kindergarten College.

That would be Stewart Hamilton. She was trained in Wellington under Miss Riley I think. Miss Riley was the Principle in Wellington. She started a Lower Hutt Association on her own and personally. I would say that the voluntary side of the kindergarten movement hit great strengths but it also had a weakness that you have got a number of lay women making a professional judgments they weren't qualified to make.

What were some of the improvements you saw in the kindergartens through the 1950's, because from what I can gather there were kindergartens starting to try out new ideas, starting to have activity time. Do you feel that was so ?

I hope so otherwise all my efforts were lost. I can remember a girl called Margaret Just, she was in a kindergarten in Dunedin and these are all half day programmes. We

sat on the edge of the sandpit, all the afternoon, me trying to persuade her to stop this postage stamp kind of timetable that she had. But you see it was, I think it was very understandable and I had to be understanding about it, but it gave a certain kind of security to the children in that they knew what to expect and to do next,. But it gave the staff a greater security because it gave them a supportive arrangement. If one went at it bull headed you would knock the feet from under them. But you know, Leonie Shaw, I first met her in a kindergarten in Orana, in Auckland, in a scout hall I think. You know the sort of, like an army club that had been converted. She was a great girl Leonie.

And she had trained through kindergarten originally or not?

Well she trained in Auckland and then she came down to Hamilton and was a Director down there. Do you know there is a lot to be said for some teachers, ordinary old time, retired teachers who had a lot to do with the kindergarten movement and in Hamilton. I had forgotten about dear old Miss Jameson, she was on the kindergarten executive, and I think she was a Scott. But I went to Miss Jameson and told her I was badly in need of some extra staff and some applications were going to be called and would she mind if I buttered Leonie's paws to work for one. .

That happened because the Regional Offices were set up.

Regional Offices of Education.

And the first Regional Office was Auckland and it took in the Auckland Province and I suppose Gisborne was in, I am not sure about that. At that stage it was, you know what Auckland is like anyway, it was Auckland and the rest. Then the next thing was the Christchurch Regional Office was set up and so we had three main areas of the department. Each with its superintendent, and of course I had worked with half these men when they were either inspectors or even teachers and here they were around the country. Then the Wellington Regional Office was set up much, much later. Well when the Auckland Regional Office was set, I think I still worked my girls from here, I am not sure about that. Ismay Temple was teaching in Auckland and she was an English woman who had had a nursery school background and I put her on the staff. She was the first, I think I am right in saying she was the first pre-school officer. None of them were independent of me, but they also had their own special areas of to make of it. I think she was assistant to the Infant Advisor when I got .. I think, but the Infant

Advisor in the meantime got on to the Kindergarten Council and it wasn't too good for awhile.

What sort of relationship did you have with the Playcentre movement during these years?

In the beginning very good. Well you see Gwen Somerset became the sort of 'Doyonne' of the playcentre and got the doctorate from pre-school working on that type of thing. But she was not in the playcentre movement to start with at all. Her husband had this community centre which was one of the sort of experimental things that came out of the 1934 Conference, this community centre in Fielding. As the wife of the Head of the Community Centre ran a nursery school as a form of Parent Education. The nursery school wasn't there for its own sake, it was their Parent Education, and the nursery school was her demonstration centre and she was damn good. I am not belittling it at all, but Lex came into the picture much later and Lex. Well Lex would have taken over I think if he could have, I think, I don't know. But you see Lex got on the staff of the Teacher's College eventually, now what was he? University Extension I think, here in Wellington, I think that is what he was, you know sort of Adult Education. It was WEA, Adult Education and University Extension. You know it was a bit hard to say which was what and I think that was where Lex had his early interest here.

In many ways playcentre were operating kinds of child centre activity programmes that you were seeing as quite important for the kindergarten.

Yes they were. (I don't want you to record this) They were a breath of fresh air, they had a nursery school.

The Avon Side Girls High or the Rangiora?

The Rangiora. The Rangiora was the first one where they had this sort of a nursery school thing. It was one morning a week or something like that to give their domestic science girls the opportunity to handle children. It was the time of the mothercraft idea and Doreen Dolton was in on that and then she was at the Avon Side Girls High and I am not quite sure which it was of those two. I went there and do you know where she was heading her pre-school group? On the grand stand, on side of a football ground or

a race course. Well if you went there to see what they were doing you wouldn't think much of it. She also had been a student of Susan Isaac's. I don't know what they have, whether they had some rocking horses there and a few skipping ropes. There was nothing creative about it at all, and yet if you read about Doreen Dolton, I am not trying to say that she was a pretender, I am trying to say that somehow or other people have made it seem like that.

The philosophy sounded better than the practice.

Yes it was. Have you heard of Peggy Dalmer? Well Peggy Dalma was active in the Playcentre Association in Christchurch and there was another woman, whose name I have forgotten. I was doing the West Coast on a visit and Peggy Dalmrr, who is a friend of mine, (I still hear from her every Christmas), and this other little woman, were the President and the Secretary of the Christchurch Playcentre Association. It appears, I was doing the West Coast and I didn't inform anybody of my itineraries, I did if I was going into their centres. Anyway I got down there with Peggy and this other woman, I would have told the Association I was going I should say, because there was never any barging in, all courtesies were observed. The woman who was head of the Local Committee met me, and I was taken down to her place and I thought we were going to have a cup of tea or cup of coffee or something. She was very ill at ease, and finally I said "Well I must get down to the centre" that is what I had come for. There was Peggy and this other woman and they were there, and for some reason or other the locals had thought we had come to inspect. We still laugh about that and she kept ducking and darting and they took Peggy and the other woman off somewhere while I got in, and they took me off while they got in. It was a standing joke. But other than that, once anybody got to know you, you were all right. That must of been my first visit and they would think I was the inspector.]

Can you tell about being a woman in a Department of Education that was basically male dominated, how did you get on?

It never dawned on me. Had no problems whatsoever and when I was leaving, towards the end of my time I had two parties in the office. You know I had some beer and sandwiches and a few things, with men in the place that had helped me. There was Jimmy Mills who was the Head of Teachers Division and there was somebody from Ministry of Works and Beeb and he came over and there was a big old fashioned clock

that used to be part of the equipment of Government Offices in those days and he opened the face of the clock and turned it to 5 o'clock. So that we could get on with our party. I never had any question that I know of. I also said to Morrie Banks, who was at that time the Chief Accountant, he was an inspecting accountant when I first knew him, anyway I said "Well Morrie, one of the things nobody can say about me is that I never through my gender about" and he said "Go on!" But I did, I had nothing but help from everybody as far as I know. There was one chap called Mr Orange and he was Head of Teachers Division and when I wanted to know something about the finances, I used to do all the costing you know for the estimates and all that stuff, all the Ministerial papers, draft replies for the Minister, prepare papers for Cabinet, you name it. Anyway this chap Mr Orange, when I was in some sort of difficulty, wanting to know something or rather more information, how do I get out of it, I used to ring up Mr Orange. He was always a ton of support to me. I used to also go over to morning tea in the conference room, I was the only woman who went to the Director and all the Heads of different divisions, all went into the conference room for morning tea. Anyway there was a man I used to pass on the second floor going up and down the corridor. I used to say good morning to him every morning and was about six months before I found out it was my friend Mr Orange that used to be always helping me. Didn't know him in the flesh at all.

When did you retire?

1965, 31 March. That's why I didn't think I would be much use to you.

It has been very interesting.

There were some interesting people in education at that time. One of them was, I can't remember the name now, books Before Five by Dorothy White. She was by the way 'Beeb's' cousin.

There were things that we thought should have be done, that I thought anyway. We'd should have closed up all the child care places over night, but they were put into the care of child welfare. Well the whole thing was that it was the superintendent of child welfare who was the Chairman of the Committee I think. If he wasn't he was on the Committee, I think he was the chairman. But there were little kindergartens so called and groups all over the place and they couldn't have begun to meet anything like what you would have thought for basic requirements.

It was urgent that some basic requirements just had to come in for the children in appalling conditions.

I know but the thing was you couldn't close them down overnight. What I hoped was going to happen, was that we were going to go forward in progressive steps like we'd done with the kindergarten, but of course it just didn't happen and the fact it went under child welfare was a great, great mistake. Across the road here there is a house called City Kids, well that's a parent co-operative and I suppose it's about two years now and if I had have anything to do with it, that place would have been closed down overnight. The children were having a rest and the teachers were having their morning coffee and there was no supervision. Any fool knows, in fact in any kindergarten that I had anything to do with if they left the children unattended, if they wanted to go to the loo, they had to get somebody else to come in, or mother helper or somebody.

You see we could only do on that committee, and I said I was one of the architects of the policy and I am not a bit proud of it. The thing was we could only do as much as we were allowed to do and as much as we were able to do and it is absolutely right that if we had done as we had, put in even the minimum requirements, every little tin pot kindergarten down the road and up the hill would have been closed down immediately.

I read somewhere that when the regulations first came out, only two out of the forty one childcare centres actually met the standards,.

But you see you can't do it all at once, but there are certain things that you would be ashamed of. Really ashamed of, but there would have been an absolute riot if you had just closed them down which is what would have happened. But you know what I fought and fought, and it was through me that that A and B childcare licence came in. The thing was I gave in on that eventually by thinking at least we have got the people with A licenses and they can be advertising it, that the B licenses were going to be second rate and it won't be long. But you know I was out 25 years now before the B's would disappear altogether. There was no hope in the world of getting Government subsidy for child care at that time.

Well even in the 70's they got the subsidy but they only got it on parents fees you see. It wasn't until 1984/3 that childcare got a direct subsidy .

You see where I would have scored in the kindergartens compared with the child care places was that at least they were getting some form of Government subsidy. At the time when I started and that meant up to a point, although you had to apply it very gently, you did have a screw that you could turn a little bit. But you see with the child care they were all, I could tell you where some of them were, St Mary's Hall in Karori, further down the road there was another one up there, and these were all the better to do people that sent their children to those places. There was no kindergarten in Karori in my time and Karori was the biggest suburb like Remuera in Wellington. It is the same type of suburb although it has got a bit different trailing at the bottom of it that Remuera haven't got but it is one of the best suburbs of Wellington. I don't know whether it is the last five years or last eight years or what, because I don't take all that much notice of it these days, that they have had a free kindergarten there at all, and the word free doesn't operate. But it means it is part of the organisation. It is part of the kindergarten movement and of course the origin of the word free kindergarten was that no fee maybe charged and it was got over with the first ones in Taranaki Street, which was Haning Street area and they were all children fairly underprivileged and they would bring a shilling a week or something like that. No fee maybe charged meant that if the shilling didn't come you couldn't send the child home, that was the thinking behind it in the beginning. When I was still working they were having regular charges and you used to ask to see those books you know and I would say "Why is it everybody's go two and six a week here" or five shillings a week or ten shillings, whatever it was. You knew damn well that that was the charge.

Porirua called a kindergarten the Moira Gallagher Kindergarten? Well when the kindergarten centenary was coming on, this was 1989, 1889 was the first actual kindergarten operating in Dunedin, in 1988 I saw this coming. I thought now I would really like to remind them that this is coming up because this is quite likely that they might not know. Actually there was no celebration of any kind whatever. None at all. But I rang up and I asked to speak to the Director. I rang the Moira Gallagher Kindergarten, asked to speak to the Director, she was busy. I said "It was Moira Gallagher speaking", she was busy, and I said "Would you mind telling her that Moira Gallagher rang", I said "Have you ever hear of me?" The woman said "Yes I think I have." But the Director I tell you never rang me back. Whether she got the message I don't know you see.

It's a shame .

No, no not at all. Anyway what they did have here though on a Sunday, and I was invited to it and went, was Kindergarten Teachers Association celebration. The KTA, of course that is another story, delightful. Well the KTA had this thing and I went to it and it was, they had old Uncle Tom Cobblen, all the people that I hadn't seen for donkey's years. Fieldhouse, even he turned up at it. Well he turned up and we had a chitter chatter. All sorts of people like Joyce Barnes. She was the Director of Hudson Kindergarten in Dunedin and Stewart Hamilton who became the Principal in Dunedin was the first Director of the pre-school centre and Joyce Barnes was her assistant and took over from her. I persuaded Joyce Barnes to apply for the Head of the Nursery School here in Wellington when Ted Scott retired. She ultimately became the Principal and when the Kindergarten went into the Teachers College, she moved in with it. Yes, she lives in Khandallah.

Well that KTA meeting was really quite something, I thoroughly enjoyed it. Margaret Bennett talked at it, she was one of my girls. She was the Director of Titoe?? Kindergarten I think when I started, and then she moved to the Nursery School at Newtown, which was a long day job. By the way we had another English teacher there, Mrs McQuin, I think she probably was trained in London. Actually the house in which it was when I was there was the house that Edward VII built for Lilly Langtree and I stayed there, it was a live in residential college and I had what was Lilly Langtrees dressing room as my bedroom and it was the first time I had ever seen a bidet. I thought it was for bathing your feet I couldn't think what it was for.

Enid Wilson was the Principal of the College here and the most highly paid of the kindergarteners. She had done her training in Perth and they had imported her when they had the fallout with Miss Riley. She thought she was a sitter for the job I got when it was advertised, so did everybody else.

So it must have been hard for you coming in like ?

It was a disaster from the beginning, for her, but I had to tread very warily and make friends and when Miss Wilson retired she said to me, I think I already knew, that she resented my appointment very much indeed. She said "I now know it was for the best and I have no regrets".

