

Interviewee: Margaret Bennett

Interviewer: Helen May for the book: S. Middleton and H. May (1997) *Teachers Talk Teaching 1915-1995: Early childhood, school, teachers college*, Dunmore Press, Palmerston North.

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What was your own education like?

I was a kindergarten pupil myself in Hataitai. Miss Buchanan was the kindergarten teacher. I was born in 1926, so it would have been in 1929 or 1930. The kindergarten was up in the church hall. In those days when the kindergarten teacher trained most of them set up their own private kindergartens. I can remember my years there quite well, and some of the children who went there, too. We played circle games like Farmer in the Dell; we had Christmas parties and I remember the park that we played in where the Plunket Rooms were in Hataitai. The Christmas party was a feature because we performed. I kept in touch with the teacher over the years because she also visited our home. I had two weeks at Kilbirnie School and we shifted to Karori and then I went to Kelburn School for two years.

Do you have any memories of the primer classes and what they were doing there?

We were dominated by a teacher called Miss North. She had me up for talking too much in class. I remember her giving me the strap and I said, "that was good it's warmed my hand" so she gave me another one to shut me up. There was a Miss Burnett who was in charge of the infants. That was in the mid-thirties and then I shifted and went to Marsden for four years and left there in 1940 as most people were sending their daughters to boarding school because of the war. They wanted me to board at Marsden. I chose to go to Ngatawa but Dad couldn't get me in there because others had booked their daughters in earlier so I went to Solway in Masterton and had my secondary education there. I thoroughly enjoyed four years at boarding school. Then on leaving school what was I going to do? I was going to go home. The war was still on of course and there was talk that I should go to the School of Home Science but for some reason or other I applied for kindergarten teacher training.

Was that something you particularly wanted to do or did your family think it was a good idea?

It was my own choice. One of the girls at school suggested it. She was going to go to Home Science. I hadn't got University Entrance and she suggested kindergarten teacher training. My application to the Wellington Free Kindergarten Association was successful and I was interviewed. Everyone was quite happy that I was doing it. Friends of my family

said that was what they would choose for their daughter to be doing if they had a daughter. But it was my own choice.

What was your interview like?

It was good. The principal, Miss Wilson, interviewed me and said she remembered me as a baby! I have few recollections of that interview but I do recall one of the staff asking us as new trainees what we did in our spare time. I said I did some cooking and made ice cream (as far as I was concerned, for a child who had been at boarding school that was my vocation—getting home where we had an electric beater and things that other people didn't have) and I did preserving and helped in the house with domestic work and I enjoyed that. But I was a little bit insulted when this person laughed at me. We had great respect for Miss Wilson and she was a very good leader of people. She was supportive of us as trainees. She gave us good advice. She knew what we were doing. They were concerned for our welfare.

She had been overseas, I understand.

Miss Wilson would have travelled quite a bit but it was Teddy Scott who won a scholarship. She was running the Taranaki St. kindergarten nursery school because those were the war years. We had a nursery school there where children could stay all day and as part of our training we helped in the nursery school during the school vacations as part of the war effort. We volunteered and we all had a turn. That was a good training—we met people of different races and backgrounds, of different social groups. Because there were only about twelve or fifteen of us, and no more than twenty in any one group, we were a very close-knit group of people.

Describe the training and what date would it have been?

It was February 1945 when I started training. It was organised training. We went to kindergartens in the morning and had lectures in the afternoon. We did a bit of both. We were lectured on so-called handwork, but that was creative work in itself—it was skills. We learnt about the value of the jigsaw puzzles and the didactic material. We learnt about the development of the learning of reading and telling stories, as well writing stories, to be told to people, not read from a book. You knew the story and you showed it to the group and you had to highlight the learning of those stories so that it wasn't just telling a story that the children would like. We wrote down the things that we were going to ensure that the children could learn about. It was structured learning but there was a method to the structure. Also the facts about the ages of the children—we had tinies, middles and tops. Your work was geared to beginning children and as they progressed, to what was appropriate for those in the middle group and those in the tops ready for moving on to school. So it was structured learning but it was creative at the same time. That depended a

lot in my mind on the ability of the adults working with the children and also on the attitudes of the parents.

What were the best and worst scenarios of that?

We visited the children and met the parents before the children started. The worst part was to say to the parent "Well he'll be alright when you go". As I look back on those early years it was probably when we learned that the philosophies had changed—that the parents prefer to stay with the beginning children and that was to be expected of them. In later years the condition of the child starting kindergarten was that the parent *would* stay. So I suppose in a way could be considered to be a difficulty. Also we had fifteen minutes for music at the piano that was in that room and everyone had to have fifteen minutes of music, whether I was good or bad at music. If you couldn't play the piano you had a drum. You can keep a rhythm but often the children's songs were limited to what you could play. I recall now at the interview they asked if I could play the piano. I said "A little bit". "Have you learned the piano?" "Yes, I had learnt the piano". I had in fact learnt for three years but I hadn't played the piano for some years, so when I started my training I was directed to have an piano lessons so I became more proficient at it for singing purposes and also for movement. But we were able to improvise with the drum and percussion and we could have music without the piano anyway.

Did you do any child development at that stage?

Yes, we did. We had child development from a Mrs Grenville who lived in Karori who had a handicapped child and she taught child development, both about the normal child and the child who may have special needs. We also had Gwen Somerset who had done a trip overseas at one stage. In our second year of training she came in as a child development lecturer. We also had a kindergarten teacher who was the assistant at the training centre who took us for child development and kindergarten principles and practices and routines. So there was a lot of child development. We had the book by Susan Isaacs and the book by Bowlby and those were our reference books.

Describe to me at that early stage, around 1945-1946 how a kindergarten programme operated

When the children came in the morning they were greeted and ushered into the kindergarten in the appropriate way—made to feel welcome.

The parents left them at the gate?

No, the parents came in. They were encouraged to come in. They went into the locker room and if it was in a hall there was also an area where their coats and their possessions were placed and the children would in most cases have changed into slippers to be inside, and then there would be a welcome period when everyone came. The initial practice was

for the children to sit down and have a morning talk with everyone together—a sharing of information. Some kindergartens did that in a more regular way. Others did it more informally. During my training period there were the beginnings of informality but that depended on the building that you were in. Most of my early years as a trainee were at Newtown Kindergarten where Miriam Baucke was the director, who later became the principal. I had quite a lot of practice periods at Newtown and also at Petone Kindergarten, again a model kindergarten, purpose-built, as well as at Johnsonville Kindergarten which was in a Church Hall. The directors who were running those three kindergartens were experienced directors and one might say that they were talented teachers.

So you were seeing the best of kindergarten practice at the time?

Yes. During your training period you were formally assessed. You had reports written on you, but you were formally visited by the principal of the training centre. They would come in and see you conduct a morning session. So you just hoped that everybody responded and did what they should do!

What was the range of activities and how were these activities organised at that point?

Newtown Kindergarten, for argument's sake, had only opened the year before, in 1944 (they had their fiftieth anniversary last Saturday, which I went to). It was a model kindergarten and had two major classrooms with dividing doors and we had two separate cloakrooms, and another little room off there. At one stage we had the middle group there. Everyone was greeted in the cloakroom and then went to the respective classroom for a so-called handwork period, indoor activities, which also included block play, table activities and painting, dough and play, and story books. That was all set up. Then at a certain time during the morning everything was put away and one group would have music while another group went outside. Another group had stories in another room and then you would change over so that everyone had a quarter hour of music.

In that first period, did the children choose which of those activities they would like to do?

They did choose, but there was only room for four children to paint so some children would go to an activity of their own choice or would be directed to an activity where there was a space for that child to sit. They were reasonably free to choose what they did. But if Willy always went to dough or to painting and poor old Sarah missed out, we would guide those children into an alternative activity. But it wasn't wrong for that child always to go to dough, any more than it is today, as long as you knew what the children were doing and that they were introduced to a wide range of activities and that they were given the support to do it. The teachers and the trainee students sat with the children a lot and we worked with and talked with the children. In some respects, as they developed a more flexible programmes, it

was found that the teachers were giving too much advice to the children. But a year or two later, the pendulum swung too far over!

We all had morning tea together, and school milk was available in bottles. Everyone had a bottle of milk. There was singing of a song of grace, "Thank you for the world so sweet..."; then it was outside play for everyone and you bolted your milk down to get outside.

What was available outside?

Sandpits, water play in troughs, a paddling pool in summer time at Newtown, swings, jungle gyms, planks, ladders, trestles, good wooden slides. There was always a live animal around—we had a rabbit at Newtown.

Were there sleep times at Newtown?

Before you went home there was a rest so that the child could be relaxed and ready to go home after a rounded half day at kindergarten. The rest required great skill to get the children down to rest with their shoes off, going to the toilet first.

Did they want to rest at that time of day?

Some of them needed it, some of them wanted it, but they all did it and you sat with those who didn't want to do it. And of course they were nice and snug in the middle of winter and it would be time to get up now and go home and they wouldn't want to go home.

So after sleep time, that was going home time?

Yes, it was time to go into the cloakroom and get their possessions, sit on the mat and then go home. There was no afternoon kindergarten in those days. As students we worked in the kindergarten as teachers. We worked hard, we made equipment, we scrubbed up, we sorted out, and we did some home visiting. Visiting the homes of the children attending the kindergarten was an important part. Some days we would have staff meetings in the kindergarten and we would have staff meetings in Wellington with all the other teachers. They were staff meetings that were in part, if not in total, on the principles and practices of kindergarten teaching.

As trainees we would go into lectures in the afternoon. Some of the lectures were held up in Wellington Tech but as teachers we had staff meetings. I guess as trainees we did go to some staff meetings. Also in the afternoons we had Mothers' Club meetings. They were educational meetings for the mothers. Children came too and they were looked after in the other room. As kindergarten trainees we had to conduct a mothers' meeting. We also had to give a talk to the mothers. It was a nerve-wracking exercise, but I would say in reflection that it was a very worthwhile experience. As a trained kindergarten teacher, the head teacher was responsible for conducting and chairing the Mothers' Club meeting.

So they weren't social meetings?

They were social in the respect that the mothers got to know other mothers and the Mothers' Clubs also raised funds and gave it to the local committee to spend. Most of the local committee members in those days of the forties were definitely mainly men. The mothers also organised talent evenings and that was a great social event that brought all the mothers together. They were all very talented and it got so big in Wellington that where they used to have them in the Berhampore Kindergarten, they ended up having them in the Town Hall. Training in those early years was very informative and we accepted it and we believed that we were privileged in working with other people's children. Kindergarten in Wellington had a very high profile. We had people who were working for those who were less fortunate than themselves, the likes of Mrs Gibbons of the Colonial Motor Company and Mrs Peterson who was a close friend of our family. They didn't necessarily have kindergarten children of their own but were helping the less privileged and doing "good works" in the kindergarten movement. We had the likes of Maud England, a single woman and a very astute person on the Wellington Kindergarten Association and Mrs Didsbury who lived in The Terrace. When there was an annual meeting of the Wellington Association, the students and the staff attended. We were expected to be present because it was part of our job and our training to be with all these people. The Council members provided us with a Christmas party and thanked the staff for their work.

To what extent was the kindergarten in those years starting to change, though, from being run by people who saw it as a charity or philanthropic kind of thing?

I think it did but it always will have that element because it is voluntary work. In the mid to late 1940s when the government met the cost of the teachers' salaries, I was appointed to my first position in 1947 as assistant director at the Newtown Kindergarten. That was when the government started setting a capitation grant for kindergartens and increasing it. The student allowance that we got in 1945/1946 when I was a student was forty odd pounds a year which didn't pay anything except it helped you to buy stockings or shoes but indeed it was only an allowance. The Wellington Kindergarten Association paid our travel expenses. When the government met the cost of the teachers' salaries, the Kindergarten Association in Wellington did not pay us anything thereafter. When the government met our salaries there were more conditions imposed on the numbers of children that you had, and they set the standards, such as forty-odd children in that building although we might have had forty-five previously on our roll or up to fifty. If you had so many children you got a midyear capitation grant, so you boosted your rolls when the capitation grant was there. It started when they appointed Moira Gallagher as supervisor of preschool services. Then our work was being assessed on a broader basis. There was more discussion on the programmes that were being offered to children.

What sort of discussion was going on?

To make maximum use of the facilities so that the children got a broader training and loosening up of the formal timetable. That was done very gradually and very informally.

Who was driving that—Moira Gallagher or others?

Moira was the brains behind the scene. She had the subtlety and the ability and know how but it would have been our principal, Miriam Baucke who drove it. She was a Wellington-trained teacher who I had my trainee experiences with. Enid Wilson was there initially as a principal, and Miriam Baucke took over in the late forties I think. She got a scholarship and went to Australia. My first year was at Newtown Kindergarten as a beginning teacher and that was a privilege because it was THE model kindergarten, a showplace. I had Christine Bretherton (Christine Ashcroft) as my director and she was a good teacher and was helpful to me—she could also play the piano! Her relationships with people were good. The year after that I was transferred to Johnsonville Kindergarten in the church hall where everything had to be packed away, if not every night, at the end of every week and there was an outside toilet. I was a director there after one year as an assistant. Afternoon sessions were beginning to be talked about then.

As a director at a fairly young age, how were you running the kindergarten? Was there a way in which you were expected to run it or were the influences of making things more informal having an effect?

It had to be adapted to suit the building and the building didn't meet the needs. It was a big rattly hall and things had to be unpacked and set up. But we had a keen group of parents. We could have the use of one of the lower Sunday School rooms; we had a paddock, and we had an army hut for storing outside equipment. So we ran it very much as one group of children but we did segregate some. We were given latitude to develop our programme as we saw fit, within reason although we were supervised very closely because we had trainees. The principal and lecturers would come out to see us, but we were responsible for our programmes.

What were the things you enjoyed most at that stage? Where did you feel your strengths were?

Outside! I helped renovate the army hut. The chap who ran the local dairy came up and helped me decorate the hut which was used for storing work, and for carpentry and things like that. Afternoon sessions were being developed and playcentre sessions were starting then. If there weren't enough children for us to have an afternoon session in our locality or if for another reason we couldn't get the use of the hall we would then go down and help someone else.

That was in 1947. In 1949 I went to Miramar as the director and that was a promotion. You didn't apply for your jobs but were posted to places. If you were doing reasonably well and

there was a vacancy, you got a shift. Miss Wilson, as principal, controlled the placement of staff.

So she was in charge of the trainees and the staffing?

Yes, it was a big job. Miramar is where the afternoon sessions were actually started. I came back from Australia with two other kindergarten teachers the day the kindergartens reopened. We had to get off the boat and back to work after having lived it up for six weeks. So afternoon sessions started for me at the Miramar Kindergarten.

What were you going to do with these afternoon sessions? Were they going to be different to the morning sessions?

Yes, because they would be beginning children, younger children. Because we had more than eight children under three-years of age at afternoon sessions, we had an untrained assistant who would work with us. Her name was Mrs Munro who worked with us for those two afternoons a week for three hours and she would help us with the younger children. She was a godsend to us because we were young teachers and we were exhausted after our morning work and Mrs Munro came to us as a breath of fresh and she treated us as her children! She was an older woman.

How was that programme catering for younger children and babies?

They were all beginning children. We had a big waiting list at Miramar—it drew people from a large area. We had a very bossy local committee, as I remember, who thought they could tell me what to do. It wasn't what I was going to do, so I did have some conflict with them from time to time, with one particular woman who shall be nameless.

What was the conflict about?

The type of programme, because it wasn't run like that by the previous person—which always happens, but I hadn't experienced it before. The voluntary donations had to be ready to give to the treasurer. She always used to come at a certain time and expected me to have it ready but I wasn't always able to have it ready. But it was a matter of proving myself and we finished up by being very compatible. However, it was difficult having afternoon sessions. It was a new routine—it wasn't just beginning children, it was having them for that period of time. The government introduced that to make maximum use of the premises that were now being subsidised by the government and to make maximum use of the resources and the teachers' salaries.

Was there an increase in salary out of all this?

We had a national salary scale that was being developed. It was a sensible thing.

How much was Moira Gallagher responsible for that?

In my view, Moira Gallagher's ability was to see the good things of those changes in government involvement. The good things occurred through her ingenuity and relationships with people and being able to get government to see the benefits of putting that money into kindergarten. The kindergarten people, up to a point, didn't want any government involvement. I can remember when the announcement of her appointment was made. We didn't know her then but I remember thinking "Being paid by government—how humiliating" because we weren't going to be government servants—we were private enterprise people! It wasn't a profession for a person to be working in government.

Was this a sense of independence of philosophy?

Yes, and it was also, in recollection, that the presidents of all the associations weren't going to be taken over by government—the associations and the principals, over-reacted to the situation. They thought they would lose their position, their autonomy and the status of principal. It didn't happen; in fact it *gave* them status. It gave them standing in the community. At Newtown Kindergarten I was getting paid as much there as a teacher as the principal of the Dunedin training centre, so government involvement restructured the whole thing. When the government took over the teachers' salaries, we were offered the opportunity of joining the government superannuation fund. I discussed it with my father and he said "That money won't keep you in silk stockings. Anyway, you're going to get married, daughter dear!" So there was no point in having the five percent or whatever it was taken out of our salaries when they took over the teachers' salaries. But it did a lot for the kindergarten service and it was something that we were privileged to have and that was in the red book, the Bailey Report [1947]—which is very good reading, even today. One of the proposals was that we could have preschool classes in schools where there were classrooms available and where there were children in need of it. That was one of the things that was set up by the Department. It was a tremendous asset but it took her years to do, and now it's all gone.

What about the fact that Moira Gallagher at the time was a primary school teacher in her training and not a kindergarten teacher?

There were people with a kindergarten diploma who thought they would get the job. But I respected Moira Gallagher. In all my dealings as a kindergarten teacher with Moira, I found her very supportive and helpful, even when I went in on my own to see her and Arnold Campbell for discussions on behalf of the Kindergarten Teachers' Association. The president, Phyllis Varcoe, was in Dunedin and I was in Wellington and I was quite comfortable going in. She was always supportive and helpful. She never criticised you or made you feel at fault. But the kindergarten people were a little annoyed and wondered how she could know what to do with preschool children when she was never a kindergarten teacher. That was a naive and senseless attitude for people to have.

During that time in the late forties, early fifties, people talk about more creativity and more freedom in kindergartens—what was your own experience?

When did you suggest that was starting?

Well I have talked with people who suggest it was starting in the 1930s and Moira Gallagher was telling me about her classroom in the 1920s which was way ahead of the time.

Yes, that was in Karori. But that was her understanding of people; she was adaptable and resourceful and her manner allowed her to conduct her classes in that way. As far as I was concerned, this freedom was imposed upon *me* in 1950. I say that quite strongly. I was being told what to do and I felt I wasn't given enough reasons to comprehend why that might be a good idea.

Who was telling you?

I won't say! I had my reasons for what I was doing. One of the things I was told to do was to loosen up the programme to the extent that it was going to be chaos and it was going to be difficult. It wasn't what we were used to doing. They were doing this in Australia and in other countries.

What was this thing you were you being told to do?

They were having creative play going on from nine till twelve, indoor and outdoor play with little organisation of mat periods for the beginning and end. It was, in my opinion, something that was difficult to comprehend and I found it difficult to accept and I wasn't going to be told. So at the end of 1950 I retired from kindergarten teaching. I gave it away as a lot of people were giving it away to travel overseas, and I decided I would do something else in 1950. I was back at Newtown Kindergarten as the director. I was enjoying myself: I liked the people there and I had a good cleaner, Mrs Murphy, who had been there when I was a trainee.

These changes which people were wanting to impose, were they.....

...they were basically good educationally, but they were bringing them in too quickly and we were being talked **at**. The changes were being justified as informality and creative movement, but to the extreme. But, in retrospect, we didn't comprehend the value as teachers. Some of us didn't quite accept the way we were being told. It was a learning experience for me because I never forgot it. So whenever I impose my views on other people, I always put myself in their shoes and I still do.

So how long were you not a kindergarten teacher for, because you obviously came back again?

I had a year at home, playing tennis and socialising and having a good time. I was planning to go overseas and did so in January of 1952. Everyone went overseas then. But I had a good year at home. I missed the kindergarten but I did other things. People were getting married—I wasn't, but there were lots of parties and it was a great year. I had the family house to look after. My father and brother were overseas. Then they came back and I went overseas for eighteen months. I worked for six weeks in a residential school for children before I came back. I could have stayed there permanently—the Rachel MacMillan people asked me to stay on. Rachel MacMillan had a residential school down at Wrotham in Kent and it was called Margaret MacMillan House. They ran a training centre in Deptford [London] for the underprivileged children but as well had this rural place in Kent for deprived children. It was originally for children who needed a health camp. But after the war there were all these children born who didn't have parents who could look after them, servicemen's children and coloured children, and they were up for adoption. I relieved there on a six week contract. They asked what group I'd like to have and I said the older children. Little did I know the older children were the five and up to six-year-olds but never mind—I coped! Because we only had two years' training in New Zealand they wouldn't recognise our training, but then they did ask me to stay on permanently. By then I had booked my passage to come back after the Coronation in 1953. I thought I needed fresh air and sunshine, so I came back, although I immediately thought I would catch the next ship back to England! But I was rung to say there was a vacancy at Hataitai Kindergarten and would I help out there so they asked me to come back.

What did you find at Hataitai after you'd been away three years?

A church hall! Indeed Hataitai was where I was born and I was welcomed there, so I rolled up my sleeves and got on with it.

Had the changes you talked about happened?

They had kept on happening, but it wasn't much different really, to what I was practicing, except by then there was more organised advice for the students and the staff. I found it was good. The KTA was then being established. The first meeting was held down in Christchurch and I went to that as the Wellington representative. I was back "in" and I enjoyed it. There were no grudges.

Describe a typical programme in about the mid-fifties.

The church hall that was also a football club hall. It was a difficult hall because it was on two or three levels. We used everything on the upstairs level. We ran an organised programme because the parents in Hataitai and Roseneath expected it to be organised. I was

suitable for them. They had a good teacher before me and so I had to get to know the parents and they had to get to know me. I had an assistant who wasn't very confident or competent but we got on.

I presume you weren't organising a tinies, middles and tops?

You couldn't do that, we ran a single group. Rests had gone—there was no provision for rests. There was a mat time to see things started and to welcome everybody and there was a mat time for everybody to come together to say goodbye and that was expected of us. It was a good routine. Whether you have a mat time or not, you do need to welcome every child into the kindergarten so that you know who's there and you know who's there when they go home. The register must be marked on the day the children attend but they don't have to be marked by saying, "Johnny?"—"Here Miss Bennett". I don't need to get the register out to mark them in front of the children. Every child should be greeted when they come in and every child should be seen off the property. I also was expected to get the children down to the bus that went to Roseneath. One day we missed it, and was I told off!

In the mid fifties, what was being seen as the value of kindergarten for children?

You would send your child to kindergarten to meet other children, to learn skills that would be useful for them in their learning years when they got to school. The children would be busy and happy. For some parents it gave them relief from their children. For some parents it gave them an opportunity to socialise with other parents. It was an important thing, so see that parents were introduced to one another. Apparently that was something that I did very definitely—make sure the parents knew what their role was, and what was expected of them.

Which was?

To come in with the child and to see that the parent and the child knew where to hang his hat, that that peg was his, and what the routines of the day were. After I left that kindergarten five years later, one mother told me that she knew what she was meant to be doing because I told her what to do. She had the baby that went to kindergarten three or four years after I had left and she said they didn't even tell her to come inside. They didn't tell her where he was to hang his coat up. She noticed the difference five years later with a younger child, feeling out of the swim of things.

Were parents staying in the programme at that stage?

Yes, they were if they were willing to stay. We had a schedule of the days they were to visit. We had a duty list there. They were coming in to make the morning tea and to wash the dishes and help us tidy up because we had the afternoon session. It was more domestic help.

So you wouldn't at that stage have expected a parent to sit down and start reading stories with the children or playing with blocks.

No, but it was what we were suppose to be encouraging the parents to do, and we did encourage the parents to do that but it was difficult to get the mothers out of the kitchen. They felt secure there, and I was good at telling stories. They were hesitant to get in with the children and some of them indeed I wish they hadn't. But we did explain to the parents what they could be doing, and we explained what we were doing and that was the parent education and the change in practice during my last five years of kindergarten teaching in the fifties before I joined the Department. The parent involvement was an important part and took a lot of effort. I remember one hot day in the hall we had got everything ready for the afternoon session and I had a car, so we went to Evans Bay because one of the girls wanted a swim. When we got back, one of the mothers was waiting outside. I remember her saying "You girls! It's one o'clock—you're not ready for us!" Janet was still in her bathing suit with a dress over it. So I opened the door and told them to come in. She had already ticked us off at the door because she wanted to get into town early. The hall was all set up ready for the afternoon session. This mother had torn strips off me at the front door and when she saw everything ready she didn't know what to say. We were friends after that, but I had beaten her on that one. We did involve the parents in those days, and we did home visits. The parents expected us to home visit. One child, whose older sibling was already at kindergarten, never forgave me because I had to ring and say I couldn't make it for the home visit to confirm that the child would come to kindergarten because we had been detained. She was expecting Miss Bennett to come.

What about the range of activities—were they changing in any way from the late forties that you talked about earlier?

I was continuing to have morning tea all together in the middle of the morning. I felt that was appropriate. We had indoor and outdoor play and we all came inside for morning tea.

Did they choose whether they had indoor or outdoor play?

Yes. And they could choose whether they wanted to come inside for music. We all had a mat period at going home time. But morning tea all together I felt was important, and that was one of the last changes that I succumbed to.

In what sense?

Well I agreed to give it a go! But indeed I didn't. I wasn't happy with it because I felt the grace was important. I found it hard to accept that children had their breakfast at different times; I found it hard to accept that children had such different needs and I didn't see how children could have their morning tea like that and there was only one bottle of milk for every child. That was one of the things that was being "sold" as an idea to extend my

programme. My approach was to say that you would need to talk to the parents about it. This was Isabel Christison who was working on me at this stage because I didn't think they would like it. The parents said that if Miss Bennett doesn't like it, they wouldn't like it. But anyway we all reluctantly accepted it and gave it a go. And of course it didn't work. I was one of the last kindergartens to go for morning tea being voluntary. We had moved out of the hall to a new building at Hataitai and we had one table for milk by the kitchen and bathroom, so that it was handy for supervision and we would sit with the children and say an informal grace. The children didn't have milk when they arrived—they didn't need it. But we did need to keep an eye on who was having milk because children need to be encouraged. The mother on duty would help. I had a chart on the wall to make sure that everyone had their milk.

What about equipment at that stage? Were teachers still having to make all the equipment or was there more to buy?

We were still improvising with a lot of things—using cotton reels, threading, unthreading, carpentry. Another experience at Hataitai was that the money was raised for preschool purposes and there was a playcentre operating in a hall which wasn't very good. They wanted to use the building, so they had the kindergarten building two afternoons a week. The playcentre parents had chosen playcentre but then after a while the playcentre parents wanted to come to kindergarten and they couldn't come to both. It was an uneasy relationship. Then if the playcentre didn't want some of the children they had on their roll so they asked if I would have them.

Why—would they get straightened out at kindergarten!!?

They would need more regular sessions than two afternoons.

Were the differences in the programmes as distinctive as people talk about?

They were different. Playcentre was laissez-faire and adult direction and guidance was frowned upon to the extent that the supervisors were afraid, I think, to say too much in case they were too directive and too dominant—too much like a kindergarten. The children, in my opinion, didn't come often enough to playcentre to develop the routines. Afternoon sessions were seen in kindergarten to be inferior to mornings, but simply because children hadn't been coming as often. They weren't as familiar with things and they weren't as skilled with the equipment and their language and their friendship with other children weren't as developed. The differences were there and that was why parents waited eagerly for their children to come to the five morning sessions. Anyway, playcentre fizzled in the end because there weren't the numbers of children in Hataitai for both. Playcentre had their own equipment and kindergarten had their own equipment, so we had to pack our equipment away two afternoons a week and when I came in next morning my pictures would be off the

wall and the kitchen would be a mess. But some of the playcentre supervisors were good fun. I had five years at Hataitai and I was well respected. On my last day, a child asked me, "Miss Bennett, why are you leaving?" Why *was* I leaving?—glory only knows. I had been appointed to the Department of Education but it took me six months to leave Hataitai because I waited until they could get someone to replace me. There was a shortage of teachers. Eventually someone was transferred there.

Before we move into the Department years, tell me about the Kindergarten Teachers' Association and your involvement with that and what was it trying to do at that stage?

It was set up as a negotiating body for the teachers so that we could have conditions of employment for teachers, salary structures and be able to negotiate. Until then the principals negotiated for the staff. The principals were to be separate, to be in charge of the training and not of the daily running of kindergartens. There was to be a supervising teacher, I think, so that the training centres would be a separate entity. The principals had an inaugural meeting to set up the provisional committee for the KTA.

So that's how Phyllis Varcoe got involved?

Yes, she got involved then. But the principals did it as a group. We had the principals as part of the KTA because we had Nettie Burt as deputy principal in Auckland and Fay Cawkwell. This inaugural meeting was down in Christchurch and I went down as the Wellington representative. It was so that we could represent the kindergarten teachers. Phyllis Varcoe from Dunedin was there as well as Margaret Just. Liz Tonks in Auckland was the first secretary and she was at Ponsonby Kindergarten. We had to draw up conditions of employment and negotiate a salary scale for kindergarten teachers instead of the associations, our employers, doing it. There was a code of ethics for kindergarten teachers, which was pretty important. The KTA ran summer schools. We had them at Massey and at Lincoln.

On what subjects?

Everything. We had music with Nancy Martin taking inservice work for the week on creative music. She was a good lecturer in music. We had people from all over New Zealand coming to those inservice courses. Prior to that there were inservice courses run by the employing associations and one year it would be in Wellington and next time it would be somewhere else. If it was in Wellington, all the other teachers came and visited your kindergartens as it was during working time. That couldn't carry on, having inservice during working time. We had summer schools. That was a strengthening of the kindergarten teachers because we could socialise together as well as have professional work together. The young and old were together, from all over New Zealand. They stopped having them

though. As a Departmental officer I went to those too, so they did carry on for some time afterwards.

So you moved into the Department. What was your role there?

Moirra Gallagher was there. Isobel Christison was there. The work was expanding. The numbers of kindergartens were increasing to the extent that there weren't enough kindergarten teachers so there was restriction on the expansion. The teachers needed more professional help and support and the Department had a role to give that. The Department needed to obtain the information to give the support that kindergartens and preschool education would benefit from. We were to support of the teachers, the kindergartens, and likewise to visit playcentres which were a difficulty. We were to give professional advice and support when requested to the childcare centres. The licensing of childcare regulations had been introduced. Mabel Howard and Child Welfare did that, but we were to come in and give advice to them as requested.

Were you requested?

The cards were played so that through Child Welfare, which was a branch of the Education Department, was to do the licensing, the paper work, and we were to come in to give advice on the work with the children. I did that in Nelson with Sonja Davies. There was a private kindergarten in Nelson run by a Miss Worley, a woman in her late sixties who had been running a private kindergarten for years, who didn't want to have a licence and didn't want anything to do with an Education Department officer. But she had more than eight children and had to have a license. She resented it but in the end we became friends.

What sort of programme were places like that running?

Some of them were like schools—very teacher-dominated and very restricted. They didn't have the space or the equipment or the know how. They were being paid to look after children the way the parents wanted them to be looked after. Some were very laissez-faire to be insecure institutions or very much dominated and restricted.

What was the attitude in kindergartens to the Department's expanding role?

There was a resentment about Departmental people coming into the kindergartens. I didn't visit the Wellington kindergartens because Moira in her tactfulness realised it was better to work outside your own backyard. I didn't have the skills of visiting and I had to learn those, although I had been asked how I would conduct myself and of course you say one thing and probably do another!

How much were you advising and how much were you checking what they were supposed to be doing?

Well you couldn't give advice until you saw what they were doing. You had to see and understand what they were doing so you did have to ask leading questions and see their books and so forth. By seeing if the registers were up to date, you saw how many were on the roll. The Department required a daily register to be kept and a waiting list. So we recorded all that information in our notebooks. The Department got the end of term records from the Association, but they often came in too late. We made our personal notes. They were not reports but were notes which I wrote down in my notebook. Anyone could read the notes if they wanted to. I would formally write them up afterwards so that I had a summary of what I had seen and what I had said. People were amazed that I could remember what I said or did on the last visit. Little did they know that I read up my notes again in the car before I went in.

What was the relationship between the Department and playcentre at that stage—what kind of role did you have there?

It was difficult. Playcentre was anxious about the Department and wanted more money. We got some money for them from the Department. There were conditions for buildings and conditions on numbers of children being introduced. They didn't like that. They wanted the money but they didn't want any tags or any guidelines. They wanted nothing to do with the government. It was the kindergarten movement's kind of anxiety all over again but they weren't going to be like the kindergartens. They didn't want those buildings, they wanted to be themselves with the parents. In some areas it was worse than others. But it was the hierarchy I think that made the people in the field a little anxious. In one playcentre I remember them saying "Please be here promptly by nine o'clock, we have Miss Bennett, the inspector from the department, visiting and she always arrives promptly". On one other occasion I was there before, and I was helping the people get the furniture out and someone said "We've got to get this stuff out on time because we've got that person from the Department coming today!"

What was the Department looking for in the playcentres and the kindergartens?

The Department was looking to give the professional advice, to be supportive of the teachers, supportive of the committees, to help them. We were asked as field staff for our comments on things. Moira being the executive person wasn't able to do all the travelling because the numbers of kindergartens were increasing and they were struggling. Isobel Christensen and I did the whole of the country. Moira did some trips with us. She was supportive and we kept her informed. We were to be the eyes and ears of the Department which was a practical explanation of our role—the eyes and the ears, not the spokesperson for the Department.

So what where the eyes and the ears seeing and hearing?

When there were new policies, new monies available or not available, seeing what could be done. Helping with more money or redistribution of funds or whatever it was. Likewise, the book that Moira wrote, the kindergarten Sites Buildings and Equipment book was excellent. The revision was excellent, and the next revision was even better because we knew ways that it could be set out better for the committees, associations and teachers to follow. We advised about expanding the items of equipment to be eligible for subsidy. We were there to be supportive. As Departmental officers we were always well received in the rural areas. When we stayed at the hotel, they might have flowers or a bowl of fruit in the room. They would ring up and come down and host us in and out of the kindergartens. They would consult us and we were well used. In most places I found we had the confidence of the people concerned and were well respected. In one or two areas where the committees or the chairpersons might have had something to hide, they were defensive.

What were the programmes like out there by the late 1950s?

When I joined the Department my first trip was to Auckland and I was overwhelmed by that and I found it difficult. I was out of my depth. It was too much of a shock to my system. Isabel Christison was with me and we were staying in a pub. I had taken my car up but all I got was the equivalent of my train fare up. We were on 31 shillings a day and we had to stay in accommodation which was within our daily allowance and we were roughing it in not a very good hotel. Visiting the kindergartens was a strain. I had to talk to all those teachers and I had written my speech—that was the last time I wrote a speech because I lost my way. I was floored by all those people and I was out of my depth. The Auckland Kindergartens Association was a big place and the Auckland people had broken away from the union. They were dominant. There were some good teachers. Liz Tonks was there and she was friendly towards me and some other teachers were very welcoming—Nettie Burt was very welcoming on the social side but there was suspicion of anyone from Wellington. Chris and I were together and she was meant to be launching me into the big world of visiting the kindergartens. It was July, it was cold and damp and miserable. Betty Cosson, another ex-Wellington teacher, was up there. We were there for three weeks in those days that was good because you were living there and you were one of them, catching the bus or the tram. You could socialise on the weekends. We were well looked after but it was an eye-opener to me. Then back to Wellington for a few days and then down on the ferry, and on the train down to Dunedin for a couple of weeks. Chris went on to Invercargill. In Dunedin, Phyllis Varcoe and Margaret Just looked after me for the weekend. I still keep in touch with both of them. Both of them and their president at the time, Miss Chapman, were difficult clients of the Department. But there was the anxiety about the role government. It was a wonderful thing that the government did in those years but now [1994] over the last ten years they've thrown the whole lot out and undone all the good we had going in those earlier years.

When did you retire as a Department officer?

I retired in April 1986.

That was when childcare came under the Department of Education?

Childcare came in, yes. I was going to finish in December. I decided in June or July that I was going at the end of the year and I was told to advertise my vacancy in the Gazette. I was eligible to retire although I could have stayed on longer but I had had enough. At that stage I was responsible to the District Senior Inspector of Schools and I had had enough of all that. I had to keep on telling them what the work was and it was getting tedious with the third District Senior Inspector of Schools, although I had a good liaison inspector. Anyway, I was told to get the job in the Education Gazette. People were applying for the job but out of the blue they then cancelled that. In my stupidity I said I would stay on a bit longer until they got a bit further on with the reorganisation. I should never have done that; it was hard on me. So I finally left at Anzac Day

Can you identify some of the key changes that were happening during that time that you were in the Department?

The key change would have been the expansion, in all the services, but particularly the expansion of our preschool advisory services. From being in head office, we regionalised. We had Esme [Temple] in Auckland, me in Wellington, and Chris [Isobel Christison] went to Christchurch—there were three regions and that was good. Then we increased our staff in the regions. In 1965 Moira was going to retire and Chris came in to learn a bit more about the organisation (Chris was there before me and she was more senior, she had also had university study leave and was the possible successor to Moira) and to take over some of the responsibilities and ease Moira out of the job before her retirement which would leave a big gap in the Department. We then expanded further and Heather Turner and Leonie Shaw came. Eva Millen came and worked with me when Chris had time off for study leave. I was always helping them with administrative things. The expansion of our advisory services was a success and the expansion of the kindergarten services was a success. Setting up the equipment the kindergartens should have, the Sites, Building and Equipment book, and the procedures to be followed when starting a new kindergarten—to have the three public meetings so that everyone was well informed. All of this was helpful. We used the public meetings to explain to the parents what routines you would expect to have in kindergartens. It brought the teachers and us together. We went to the new kindergartens when a new building was opening and worked with the parents initially in helping them to select the equipment. We had the guidelines and we worked in very closely with the executive, with the local committee and with the newly appointed staff and we were available to work with the staff when the new kindergarten opened for a whole week. We sat on the sidelines, not to take over from the teacher but as a backstop when required. We

always started with just ten or fifteen children for the first two or three days and would then bring other children in gradually. We started with the children all inside. There were so few children they would be insecure in this great big new buildings. The parents were expected to stay with them on the first day. The first day would be a shorter session. We would be there to talk to the parents and support the staff.

Were you by this time being regarded with less suspicion?

Definitely. We were needed. We were now asked to come. If there were any difficulties we were asked to come, to settle an argument between association and staff, staff and local committee, to be supportive, and sometimes to help the teacher who was getting the rough end of the stick from somebody. A teacher was in trouble on one occasion when she left the kindergarten with no teacher in it because her assistant hadn't turned up. She had no mother helpers there and a child ran away. So she went out the gate to call the child back. She was found out and was in trouble, but she really couldn't have done anything else. Whatever she did do would have been in the wrong, but what she did under the circumstances was the best thing. But it was all sorted out. Later the kindergartens got their senior teacher in all associations, not just the big one, who was not attached to any one kindergarten. That might have taken a role away from us to a point but it really didn't.

What about programmes in the 1970s and 1980s—did the kindergartens change in terms of what they were doing for children or in ways they were operating?

They were not as noticeable. In the early days when I first joined the Department we used to say you could blindfold us and put us in a kindergarten and open our eye, we would look around and, without seeing the teacher, know where the teacher was trained! In Dunedin they were very good at manipulative indoor activities, jigsaw puzzles, didactic stuff they used to call it and they were very good with their table activities. In Christchurch their artwork was very good because Rene Wilkie had puppets and they did good drama work and story-telling. In Wellington we were good at rounders. I can't recall what they were good at in Auckland. Auckland was conservative I suppose. The programmes certainly have changed. The developmental programme, that might have been going on in the primary schools under the Playway had lost its stigma. They had learnt that it was a developmental programme of creative activities with development work of language, physical and social activities. People had learnt to express the learning mediums in an educative way. Children learn by example and teachers were regaining confidence of talking with parents, although I will say that teachers didn't always speak as much with their parents as they might have. It depends on the person but I wonder whether some teachers do know their children and parents as well as we used to know our children and parents. I've often asked people if they remember their kindergarten and their teacher and often they can't remember. That's such a shame. I can remember. Why do I remember? Because the kindergarten teacher came to

our house. My kindergarten children remember me. There was a child who rang me up from Christchurch because he couldn't get his child into kindergarten and he had heard that Miss Bennett had gone to the Department. He wanted me to pull some strings to get his child in. I was talking to his aunt the other day and this boy is now in his mid forties and runs a pig farm! I had a letter from a child who is now living in America and he asked if I remembered him. Of course I remember him. When I left the kindergarten to work in the Department he used to ring me up and his mother used to invite me to birthday parties. I remember most of the children. If I can't remember one who can remember me, I may ask them to identify which kindergarten it was and who else was there. If I can't remember them it would probably be because they weren't there very long or I didn't spend much time with them because they conformed! I remember the good ones or the ones that got under my nose.

Do you think children changed at all during the time you were kindergarten teaching?

I think the children have changed because the environment has changed. I started when the war was on. In the early days because the war was on the fathers were not around and also it was not long after the Depression. In Newtown it was a deprived area with people living in substandard housing with no running water in the house. Everything has changed. Children know a lot more now because of television, and because there's television there is a lot more going on. Life is quite different now. Generations go by. The next generation's children will be different—their upbringing and social contact will be different. But children still like to improvise. I save everything and recycle things.

I can see that! A good way for a kindergarten teacher to be.

My nieces come in and explore all the bits and pieces and ask me why I have all those things. We were brought up to save newspapers and brown paper bags. I recently gave a present to a young niece and had no wrapping paper so I got a brown paper bag to put it in and punched a couple of holes in it and made a carrier bag. My nephew who is six put it on his head and suggested to his mother that they cut more holes in it and make a mask! Children know a lot more now and talk a lot more about things to everybody because they have the medium of television. There are more things happening, there's not just the conversation of the household. Some things are good, some are bad. But parents have more responsibility than ever.