



Building Interests: A 1940s Story of Curriculum Innovation and Contemporary Connections

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ABSTRACT

The growth of interest in historical research into the everyday work of teachers provides opportunities to explore its complex and contextual nature. This paper draws upon recently acquired images from a photograph album compiled by Miss Audrey Newton, a New Zealand kindergarten teacher in the 1940s. These photographs, together with fragments of personal and institutional materials, provide an example of curriculum innovation and show the centrality of teachers' agency in pedagogical change. This work is examined first through contemporary lenses of the 1930s and 1940s which recognised progressivist ideals, and then re-analysed through contemporary lenses of the early 21st century which recognise the social, cultural and historical contexts of learning.

INTRODUCTION

The 1930s and 1940s was a period of widespread educational reform in New Zealand. At the forefront of these reforms were the progressive ideas which originated in the child-centred and democratic theories espoused by philosopher John Dewey. The impetus for progressive education was upheld by significant New Zealand educators of the time who advocated for child-centred approaches in early childhood and primary settings. These progressivist ideals remain important for educational reform today with the additional theoretical insights that recognise learning as embedded within its social, cultural and historical context (Moll, 2002; Rogoff, 1998).

This paper provides an overview of the historical context that saw progressivist thinking come to the fore in the 1930s and 1940s. We explore the work of a small but significant group of teachers from the Wellington Free Kindergarten Association (WFKA) who were committed to progressivist ideals and involved in the work at this time to establish and maintain pedagogical positions – Misses Enid Wilson, Edna (Ted) Scott, Elizabeth Stewart Hamilton and Council member, Miss Maude England. We foreground one kindergarten teacher – Miss Audrey Newton – and a building project (Figure 1) she initiated in her work with the children in 1940 through which to tell the story. Fragments of evidence – in particular, previously unknown photographs of this building project along with other primary sources – form the basis of our analysis and discussion.

These data were first analysed through contemporary lenses of the 20th century which recognised progressivist ideals, and then analysed through contemporary lenses of the early 21st century which recognise the social, cultural and historical contexts of learning.



Figure 1. Wellington South Kindergarten 1940

[Photos from Audrey Newton's collection (private ownership)]

The paper also highlights the agency of the teacher as part of the child's learning context and examines the complex role of teachers as pedagogical leaders and as change agents. We view teachers not as passive recipients of the ideas of policy-makers and theorists, but rather as 'creative strategists whose theories-in-practice are products of their own agency' (Middleton & May, 1997, p.10). This recognition of teachers as both supporters and resisters of change provide another lens to understand the complexity of educational reform (Beatty,

2009; Duncan, 2008; Munro, 1998; Weiler, 2001). Further, we emphasize the need to restore teachers' stories and their activities from historical invisibility and into our historical records. Such stories are important for they allow us to 'step out of our own time, place and culture into another world' (Lerner, 1997, p.117) and contribute to our understandings of how our present builds upon our collective past.

Miss Audrey Newton was 20 and in her second year of teaching at Wellington South Kindergarten when she initiated and organised the building project. As Assistant Director, she was a dedicated teacher, passionate about children and supporting their learning. The data indicated that Audrey's relationships with children and adults were characteristically warm, caring and respectful. Loma Jones, a kindergartener who in her teacher training had been taught by Audrey, later referred to her as being 'one of the most gifted people I know, she was gifted in her understanding of children, because she was such a sensitive person, she loved them and she understood them' (Figure 2).¹ Audrey's professional learning and experience of curriculum innovation in the historical past has relevance for teachers today. We show that the innovations she helped to create were shaped by a range of social, cultural and historical factors, in particular the mentoring by strong educational leaders of the time.



Figure 2. Audrey Newton at Ngaio Kindergarten with a child in arms

[Photos from Audrey Newton's collection (private ownership)]

¹ Interview with Loma Jones, 2002 by Kerry Bethell.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Progressive ideas and aspirations have been widely espoused and argued for in educational debates and campaigns in New Zealand, as in many other countries. From New Zealand's colonial days researchers, educators and policy makers of a reforming bent had expressed interest in progressive ideas. These reforms were a reaction to what the progressive reformers viewed as rigid and strict, unresponsive, punitive and subject-centered learning environments. Children, they argued, were inappropriately viewed as empty vessels into which knowledge was poured. Strict discipline and regimentation were common-place, making schools harsh, unfriendly places in which to learn. By contrast, the reformers promoted a child-centered pedagogy, in which the child's physical, mental, spiritual and social wellbeing became important. Progressivist thinking along the lines promoted by educational philosophers Rousseau, Pestalozzi and later Froebel were espoused. Debates for and against these different philosophies became a regular feature in the fiercely contested and evolving education system. Colonial resistance towards traditional ideals strengthened following the 1877 Education Act and the establishment of a universal education system. Education, the reformers argued, should be melded around the interests and needs of the child, rather than the child being reshaped to fit a preconceived model of schooling.

Reform of the infant school curriculum along the lines advanced by progressive educators such as Froebel was attempted over the later Victorian and early Edwardian years, especially in Wellington, Auckland, Christchurch and Dunedin. Overall, the scheme failed largely through the lack of teachers qualified in kindergarten teaching methods, large classes, and the tension between providing an engaging curriculum and meeting an existing examination system (Bethell, 2008; May, 2005). Progressive ideas re-emerged later in the 1920s partly in response to change in the prevailing views of children. Childhood was now being recognised as a distinct stage of development and valued less in economic terms, but in terms of emotional capital: children were 'socially priceless'.² Arising out of this shift in perception, the Labour-led Government elected in 1935 placed education at the centre of its plans for a just and moral society. Their intentions were outlined by Prime Minister, Peter Fraser in his legendary statement that 'Every person ... has a right to a free education of the kind to which he [sic] is best fitted and to the fullest extent of his powers'.³

Another focus for this spirit of a better society was the world-wide New Education Fellowship (NEF). The New Zealand branch adopted the key principles with particular emphasis on equality of opportunity, education programmes geared to the needs of the individual learner, creativity, co-operation rather than competition, and a belief in education as a means of achieving a just society. In July of 1937, overseas delegates travelled to New

² www.nzhistory.net.nz/culture/children-and-adolescents-1940-60/education. Retrieved on September 26, 2008.

³ Appendix to the Journal of the House of Representatives (AJHR), 1939: 2-3. Clarence Beeby, Director of Education is attributed as having crafted this statement.

Zealand for a week long NEF conference. Schools and kindergartens were closed to allow teachers to attend lectures given by international speakers including Susan Isaacs and the renowned educator Isaac Kandel from Columbia University, New York. The impact of the conference in New Zealand was great, producing a 'period of educational questioning and anticipated reform in the decade straddling 1940' (Abbiss, 1998, p.91). The belief in education was strengthened. Dr Clarence Beeby, a conference organiser, later explained the common conviction by saying, 'We were simpletons maybe but we really believed that the world could be altered by education'. When Beeby was appointed Director of Education in 1940 he was tasked with designing and managing a programme of educational reform in line with progressive ideals. A reform programme, that for the first time, recognised children under the compulsory school age (kindergarten) as part of its vision (Alcorn, 1999).

The progressive mood captured the spirit of the WFKA, and in particular, Misses Enid Wilson (principal of the teacher training programme and WFKA), Edna (Ted) Scott (kindergarten teacher), and Elizabeth Stewart Hamilton (Director of Wellington South Kindergarten at the time Audrey was teaching there). They were joined in this work by Miss Maude England (Council member and Head of WFKA). Dedicated proponents of progressive ideas, they travelled abroad regularly in the 1930s for periods of intensive study. Scott, Stewart Hamilton and Wilson each visited the Teachers College at Columbia University, New York where, like many others from around the world they studied Dewey's teachings with Patty Smith Hill (Cremin, Shannon & Townsend, 1954). Ted Scott, as the first recipient of the Carnegie travelling scholarship for kindergarten, stayed for two years of extended study. Later that decade they each studied with Dr Susan Isaacs enrolling at her pioneering child development programme at the Institute of Education, University of London. Isaacs' teaching methods with adults were 'just as innovative as her work with children, encouraging discussion, seminars, and active observation and inquiry as part of the task' (May, 1997, p.171).

In New Zealand, Wilson, Scott and Hamilton attended the highly popular 1937 NEF conference. They found the experience empowering and it inspired their ongoing reform work. Later, they joined the education-wide study groups that formed locally to see how far their new ideas could be incorporated in to the educational system. Enid Wilson, in her annual report for 1937, wrote of the impact of the conference:

We realised the need for ever seeking to explore new methods so that the child's needs may be more fully met. We felt, too, that we had come in touch with educationalists who stood for the very highest of ideals – ideals which were definitely related to life and its activities. Such an experience helped to give us a standard of comparison for our thought and work, and has made a background which was not there before.⁴

⁴ Principal's Report, WFKA Annual Report. Alexander Turnbull Library, MSS105, Folder 10, p.9.

Wilson, Scott and Hamilton's experiences abroad, along with their personal convictions, were important in the formulation of new ideas for new ventures in kindergarten pedagogy. They promoted and implemented changes in student training and curriculum along 'more modern lines' (WFKA Council Reports, 1934) and grew in confidence as they saw new practices emerge. Enid Wilson in her earlier report, wrote:

I feel we have found the happy medium between the old type of charitable institute and the modern scientific one. I've noticed that the more experienced Directors have succeeded in solving the problem of freedom and discipline hand in hand with the creating of a free and natural atmosphere and building up self discipline amongst children.⁵

These women were dedicated and inspiring proponents for kindergarten, full of passion, energy and determined to see educational reform. A glimpse of their influence is recounted by Dunedin kindergartener, Joyce Barns, who was later Principal of the Wellington Kindergarten College: 'Miss Hamilton inflamed everybody and everything! and down in Dunedin we used to hear about these people and their lively ideas' (May, 1997, p.181). Effective management was needed to cope with the tension which the new approach provoked. Within these tensions there were early pockets of innovative practice built around progressive ideals. We turn now to reflect on one such practice unrecorded in historical accounts and found only by chance in 2002.

THE BUILDING PROJECT

The discovery of Audrey Newton's photograph album showing a series of sequentially ordered images of kindergarten children, sparked researcher interest in their origins. This new found data was supplemented by Wellington Free Kindergarten Association (WFKA) records which identified Audrey as the teacher and Miss Hamilton as the Director of Wellington South Kindergarten. While these images and records provided fragments of evidence, their meaning expanded when used in conjunction with related evidence from personal and professional sources, but in particular from a small but significant selection of personal sources including letters and diary entries written to or by Audrey Newton.

The initial analysis of these fragments of evidence highlighted a story of curriculum innovation based upon progressive ideas in the 1940s. Our research journey took us further – to reveal how teachers at this time supported children's learning, how teachers were advocates for, or against, progressivist ideals, and how they struggled to make pedagogical changes. We are provided with a glimpse not only into the innovation of Audrey's teaching, but also into the wider

⁵ Principal's Report to Council, 1936. Alexander Turnbull Library, MSX2526.

struggle teachers at that time experienced as they attempted to implement progressive ideas.

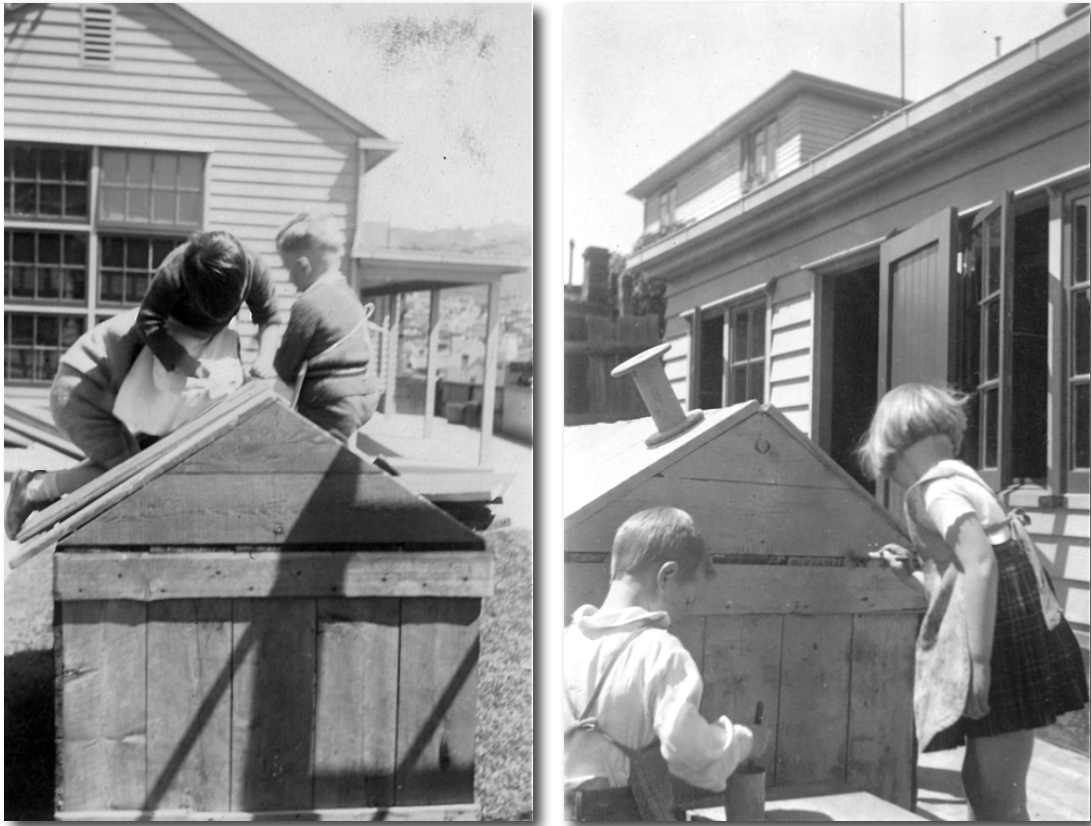
The photographs below (Figures 3-6) were taken in 1940 at the Wellington South Kindergarten in Owen Street, Newtown which was opened in 1936 as Wellington's first open air kindergarten.⁶ Miss Elizabeth Stewart Hamilton was its Director with Audrey in the role of Assistant Director. The images show children (about 4 years of age), building and painting a house made out of a large wooden packing case. The children can be seen nailing the pre-cut boards for a sloping roof to a frame attached to the packing case; two large cotton reels have been nailed to the roof as chimneys. The children are also shown painting the exterior walls of the completed house. Wearing protective aprons, the children use real tools of the trade – planks, hammers, nails, ladder, brushes and paint.



Figures 3 & 4. Wellington South Kindergarten April 1940

[Photos from Audrey Newton's collection (private ownership)]

⁶ A purpose built kindergarten with doors that open onto outside play areas.



Figures 5 & 6. Wellington South Kindergarten April 1940

[Photos from Audrey Newton's collection (private ownership)]

The event was recorded in Enid Wilson's monthly education report:

At Wellington South, the big children are carrying on an interesting piece of work creating a house out of a large packing case. It has a proper sloping roof (the boards of which have been nailed by the children), two very large cotton reels act as chimneys and are at present being painted. This interest arose from watching building operations next door where an additional room has been added to Mr [indecipherable] home. Miss Newton has shown interest and resourcefulness in developing the children's interest. Dramatic play is being stimulated and interest is always keenest in something the children have created for themselves.⁷

⁷ Enid Wilson Report to the WFKA Monthly meeting for November, 1940. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington Free Kindergarten Association, Minute Book MSY 1905.

ANALYSIS

The images tell a story of children working together in the construction and painting of a house. Immediately evident is their lack of self-consciousness and complete absorption in their work. This engagement is seen in their facial expressions and gestures, and in their failure to be distracted by the nearby photographer. A sense of connection is evident: while completely absorbed in their own part of the creative enterprise, the children seem alert to the activity of others, working harmoniously in close physical proximity to each other, and using their individual skills to complete the shared task. Their 'creative play' has become real – the children are engaged purposively and energetically in the occupations of building and painting. These ways of engaging in learning reflect what Dewey referred to as 'four natural and interconnected impulses in children' (Wolfe, 2002, p.176): social, constructive, investigative and expressive. The project provided children with the opportunity to work socially, to communicate ideas, and to investigate how to make a house.

Elements of this historical analysis remain relevant today. Our analysis of children's learning in the 1940s is deepened by looking at the images through contemporary lenses of the five learning dispositions (Carr, 2006) (taking an interest, being involved, persisting with uncertainty and challenge, expressing ideas and feelings, and taking responsibility) all of which align to the strands of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996). Evidence of the children *taking an interest* is seen in their fascination at the nearby building activity and in their subsequent focussed engagement in their own building activity. These children look to be in 'flow' – a state where their whole being is involved (Csikszentmihalyi, 1998). An indication of close *involvement* is provided by their unselfconscious participation in a creative project that requires multiple skills sets: aligning boards, hammering, balancing, painting, and collaborating. The children show *perseverance* as they sustain this interest and persist with the difficulties and challenges of this shared task. Each child takes *responsibility* for their contribution to this shared enterprise – a sense of responsibility that grew from being trusted to engage sensibly and capably as builders and painters. Their *feelings* of enjoyment and satisfaction in these roles are apparent in their complete absorption in the task. It is likely that as the children observed the nearby builders they *expressed their ideas* and interests about building – voices that the data show Audrey listened to and acted upon.

The more recently developed key competencies in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) provide another frame of reference from which to analyse the children's learning. The key competencies (thinking, relating to others, managing self, contributing and participating and using language symbols and texts), like the learning dispositions, describe how the children are participating in learning. Evidence of the children *relating to others* is seen in their sharing of the building space in close proximity to each other and in their acceptance of each other's contribution to the shared task. The children's *self management* is evident in their task persistence, social interaction and their

ability to handle potentially dangerous building tools. Their *thinking* is manifest in their task analysis and problem solving and as they work on the project. The children *participate* as builders and painters, each *contributing* skills to this mutual endeavour. While the children's use of *language, symbols and texts* is not visible in the images, Enid Wilson's report referred to their expression of interest in building operations next door, which no doubt would have sparked dialogue about the construction process. The children's learning is embedded in their use of these key competencies in the real activities of their community.

Carr (2006) maintains that the learning dispositions and key competencies closely align to the learning environments that encourage their development. An analysis of the features of the 1940s learning environment reveals rich opportunities for the children to learn. The *social* context included opportunities to work with other children in a range of roles to complete the project. Audrey's teaching role also formed part of this social context as she acted responsively to the children's interests. While Audrey is not seen in these photos, other photos of her teaching, and other primary sources, suggest her pedagogy as supporting real life learning (Bethell & Sewell, submitted)⁸. The *cultural* context included the nearby builders, to whom the children had first keenly observed, as well as the provision and arrangement of the building materials, which had been adapted to support the children's independent and collaborative work. The cultural context also included Audrey's beliefs about the competence of children and about the social and cultural nature of learning – beliefs held also by her mentors, the WFKA, and the national and international context. Audrey's work as a teacher is shown to be shaped by social activity (her relationships with mentors) and the cultural context (political and educational climate of the time), just as the children's learning was shown to be embedded in a social and cultural context.

Audrey's work as a teacher was also embedded in an historical context both within the kindergarten and the progressive movements. Forty years earlier, Dewey created his famous clubhouse where children, under guidance, took on the role of builders, architects, plumbers, and interior designers (Wolfe, 2002). This project inspired many teachers and it is possible that Audrey and her mentors knew of this work. These kinds of opportunities for children to engage collaboratively in real-life occupations have their roots in Dewey's progressive pedagogy, 'Where the child comes to school to do; to cook, to sew, to work with wood and tools and simple constructive acts' (Dewey, 1897, p.245). In this construction, children are finding out about the occupations of building and painting in a form of active community life, instead of in a place set apart in which lessons are taught. As Dewey's pedagogic creed conveys, education needs to be 'a process of living and not a preparation for future living' (Dewey, 1897, p.77). Proponents of progressive education, such as Dewey, saw the teachers' role as one of knowing the children, choosing stimulating problems for them to investigate and providing the opportunities for constructive and creative play. The social, cultural and historical features of learning evident at this time are still relevant to the early education of children (Rogoff, 1998). A sociocultural

⁸ This paper, which outlines Audrey Newton's life and work as a kindergarten teacher, is under review.

approach, known as a community of learners, advocates for instruction that 'builds on children's interests in a collaborative way, where learning activities are planned by children as well as adults, and adults learn from their own involvement as they help children learn' (Turkanis, Bartlett & Rogoff, 2001, p.226). The photographs and report about the building project show Audrey enacting this sociocultural principle. She had created instruction that: built on the children's interests, engaged them in a shared endeavour and brought them into the planning.

With reference to a recently published *Teacher Professional Learning and Development Best Evidence Synthesis* (Timperley, Wilson, Barrar & Fung, 2007), we can see the effectiveness of Audrey's professional learning. Extensive opportunities were provided for Audrey to learn in a community of professionals, who in turn engaged with external expertise. She taught alongside and engaged with a group of inspired mentors who, as noted above, had studied with international experts in progressive education. Audrey's two years of training and initial teaching experience in the 1940s was embedded within the advocacy for progressive ideals promoted within the Association and which were consistent with wider educational trends. The building initiative was kindergarten-based and supported by the professional learning opportunities led by the Director and Principal Elizabeth Stewart Hamilton and Enid Wilson.

TEACHER AGENCY

Beeby argued for progressive ideals seeing these as beacons of hope for moral development. He targeted both kindergarten and primary schools with a directive to 'free the kindergartens' and 'for infant classes to adopt free-choice play' (Middleton & May, 1997). Teachers were told that 'the child's needs and interests were more important than pre-determined subject matter, and that individual motivation for learning rather than external pressure should be the basis of schooling' (Boyd & Rawson, 1965, cited in Middleton & May, 1997, p. 24). How were teachers to build on children's interests and loosen up their programmes when these were typically, modelled around extensive routine and structure? Moira Gallagher, Supervisor of Pre-school Services, Department of Education describes the kindergartens as:

Masterpieces of organization ... the children were divided into groups ... they had morning talk and singing together, lavatory, handwashing, morning tea, finger play, painting or plasticine. All things went in rotation. So that all four groups didn't end up in the lavatories together, some had to start the day in the lavatory and then they all swapped. The children were not crying or miserable but you had turned them into parcels.

Middleton and May (1997, p.127)

Some teachers readily accepted the call to progressive ideals citing them to be 'more natural ... we let the big boys go out ... well they played outside, nearly all morning – and the difference in them!' (Joyce Barns, cited in Middleton & May, 1997, p.128). However, pockets of resistance prevailed. Some teachers resented the reforms believing they were being imposed, they were too rapid and for some, too difficult to comprehend. They wanted more order in the programme and more input and control over the changes. An unidentified kindergarten teacher recalls the dissonance and resentment she felt when she was told to introduce the new child-centred programme:

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 ... I found it difficult to accept and I wasn't going to be told.

Middleton and May (1997, p.130)

Another teacher, Loma Jones, expressed her frustration at not being allowed to teach in the way she had been trained to teach. Loma's interpretation of the progressivist reforms places her in the role of 'resister' (Munro, 1998). She believed that to loosen up the programme meant to remove all forms of teacher initiated activity:

I was horrified [about introducing free play] and we were very conventional group of young women, we had been brought up in a very conventional world and I suppose our reaction was to be expected and I also had a very high standard for my students ... I found it so hard ... I was convinced that the children did not get a lot of the support and input that children previously got, you weren't allowed to do it ... If you wanted them to have some story experience you took a book out and just sat on the steps and started to read it out loud and look at it, and children would gradually gather around and look as well, that was fine. But for those who didn't, there's no way you could insist they listen to a story ... A lot of the skills we had been taught, we could no longer really use, and I felt it was sad.⁹

While extensive research-based evidence *still* upholds the progressive ideals of the 1940s as promoting life-long learners, enacting these practices was clearly demanding and progress was variable. Reports suggest little change had occurred in kindergarten practice. For example, May (1997) notes that 'It is harder to find evidence of substantive changes to the daily kindergarten programme at this time' (p.181). A decade after the building project, Maude England reported a message from Dr Beeby to the WFKA. He says, she reported that 'We in New Zealand are badly over-organised and says that we must aim at more freedom of action for our children, and the training of our teaching staff on

⁹ Interview with Loma Jones, 2002 by Kerry Bethell.

these lines'.¹⁰ A mood of liberal, progressive optimism may have prevailed throughout education and ideas might have been inflamed in Wellington, as suggested earlier, but as earlier experiences of implementing progressive ideals showed such visions were and remain fragile. Herbert Kliebard (2004) writing of the American experience, warns that such pedagogical positions need to be seen as 'invariably far more ambitious and grandiose than one could possibly expect in practice' (p.243). The implementation of such dreams is and remains even harder to realise. Such change, as Miss Enid Wilson wrote 'are not easy'.¹¹

The struggle to change and to sustain change in education is well documented (Fullan, 2007; Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, & Manning, 2001). Timperley et al. (2007) claim that dissonance with existing values, beliefs and practices need to be created for teachers to learn new ways of practising (i.e., to change). The uncomfortable sense of disequilibrium that goes with this dissonance needs to be resolved for learning to occur – a process made more difficult due to teachers' unquestioned and intuitive knowledge developed in the experience of teaching. Duncan's (2001) study of eight New Zealand kindergarten teachers who were part of reforms between 1984 and 1996, also show the struggle to change although in this case their efforts were required to sustain earlier progressive innovations in the face of these reforms.

Changes in the composition of the community of practice and the political climate also contributed to the lack of ongoing progress. In Wellington alone, the departure of Misses Wilson, Scott, Hamilton, and England, who as pedagogical leaders had earlier fostered Audrey's agency, contributed to a decline in progressivist reform. Miss Elizabeth Stewart Hamilton was offered and accepted a position as director for the newly opened Dunedin Preschool Centre, the first Government supported preschool in 1941. Ted Scott and Enid Wilson both retired in 1948 and Maude England retired in 1950. Audrey herself left kindergarten teaching to take up a new career in occupational therapy in 1946. Also contributing to the decline in progressivist thinking were the conservative educational policies of the post World War Two period and Cold War era.

The principles and beliefs underpinning progressivist thinking remain relevant to teachers in the early childhood and primary sectors as shown in *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996); *Kei Tua o te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 2004, 2007, 2009) and *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007). These principles are not new; they have endured and evolved over many years despite the rise and fall of their transfer into practice. To re-inspire and sustain pedagogical changes of a progressivist nature, teachers need to work together in professional learning communities to share their theories-in-practice (Sewell, 2006), and to look to the ideas of past educators to challenge and support their thinking. It is in community that teachers might recognise 'how modern issues can gain new perspectives from other times, voices and places ... [and that with] patience, perseverance and creativity' (Wolfe, 2002, p.ix) they too can advocate for and bring about their ideals.

¹⁰ Memo from Miss England to WFKA Reference Committee, October 4, 1950. Alexander Turnbull Library, MS Papers 4105-01.

¹¹ Letter from Enid Wilson to Audrey Newton, May 29, 1946. Audrey Newton collection.

CONCLUSION

Our paper has highlighted the power of the personal, social, cultural, and historical contexts in understanding the possibilities for educational reform. We have shown how Audrey's initiative for change can be better understood by seeing it as nested within a complex contextual web. Firstly, Audrey's *personal* values and beliefs, her individual efforts and her new understandings played an important role in developing her practice. Audrey as an ordinary and everyday teacher acted to contribute to change – a role too often under-recognised in educational reform. Her participation in a community of practice developed trusted and respected *social* interactions which helped to shape the building innovation. A *culture* of innovation and change developed at this time – one that was embraced by educational policy-makers, leaders, researchers and highly influential and supportive teaching mentors. Finally, and most importantly for this paper, Audrey's initiative represents a moment in time in New Zealand's educational *history* when progressive ideals came to the fore in New Zealand and abroad.

The fragments of evidence, including the photographs, were analysed through the contemporary progressive educational theories of the day. Dewey's four 'impulses' (referred to as instincts) provided the first lens through which we explored the children's learning. We then used *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), *Kei Tua o te Pae* (Ministry of Education, 2004, 2007, 2009) and *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) to provide a contemporary 21st century analysis. The five early childhood dispositions and the five key competencies, both of which view the child in context, provided additional understandings, particularly of the contextual embeddedness of children's learning. We could see the ways in which children as learners took an interest, became engaged, participated and contributed, persisted with difficulty, related to others and managed themselves as they went about their learning. We also explored how the children's learning was supported by 'The people, places and things in the child's environment: the adults, the other children, the physical environment and the resources' (Ministry of Education, 1996, p.11). This narrative analysis of the images uncovered a new story from the past – one based around progressive pedagogy-in-action.

The paper also reflects upon the recurrence of teachers' struggle to change, and the difficulty and resistance known to be common in educational reform both today and in the past. We tell this story of curriculum reform with a key motive in mind – that of encouraging teachers to capture the spirit of the past and see its value in understanding the present and to help plan the future. We hope teachers will come to see their individual and collective efforts at curriculum innovation as being important, and as building on those made in earlier times by teachers who, like them, re-thought their theories and considered changing their practice.

Extensive research-based evidence still upholds the early progressive ideals which formed the foundation of New Zealand's education system. These

progressive ideas are still pedagogically sound having evolved into what we largely speak of today as a sociocultural approach to learning. We want teachers to see themselves as being 'part of a continuum' (Wolfe, 2002, p ix) – members of a community of practice spread out over time contributing to the ongoing discussion about children's learning. As teachers (and as researchers) we are together linked in a shared history that gives us a greater awareness of the multiple possibilities for reforming our practice. Again, Dewey (1916) provides us guidance when he said 'Knowledge of the past is the key to understanding of the present, history deals with the past, but this past is the history of the present' (Dewey, 1916, p.165).

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