

## CHAPTER FIVE

### EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE CONSTRUCTED AS SEPARATE EDUCATION

In Chapter Three, I discussed how contemporary ECEC in NSW is constructed as separate from education for older children and contended that this separation is potentially marginalising and oppressive. I argued, also, that the separation of ECEC from later education has become one of the taken-for-granted assumptions underlying the provision of contemporary ECEC in NSW. My aim in this chapter is to challenge this taken-for-granted assumption by addressing questions of when, why and how, ECEC came to be constructed as separate from education for older children. As illustrated in the diagram below (Figure 4), I contend that the separation between education for older and younger children in NSW was directly attributable to a shift in the ways in which early education was constructed within dominant economic discourses at the end of the nineteenth century.

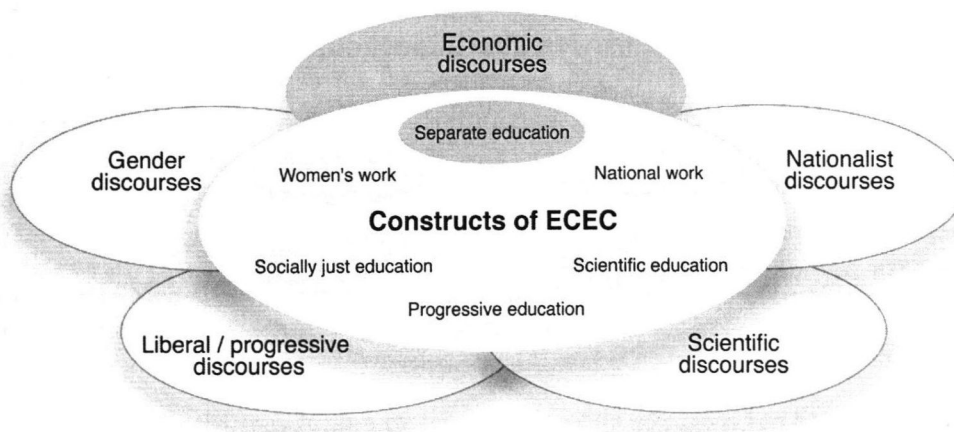


Figure 4: The construction of ECEC as separate education within economic discourses.

I begin by briefly outlining some developments in public education in NSW. In particular, I discuss the school attendance of children younger than six years of age in NSW, both prior to and after the introduction of compulsory education. I argue that

school attendance of children younger than six years had been a feature of NSW colonial society right up until 1893, when they were abruptly excluded from attending public schools.

Next, I focus on what led to the exclusion of young children from public schools. As with my analysis of present day constructions of ECEC in NSW, in Chapters Three and Four, my historical sources are texts, previously outlined in Chapter Two. I show how, in the mid 1890s, an economic depression resulted in economic discourses becoming dominant. I examine the debates surrounding the exclusion of young children from public schools, in Parliamentary records, *The Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Bulletin*. I show how within economic discourses, the value of public education came to be questioned. In particular, the education of young children was constructed as an unnecessary expense, on children too young to learn, and a danger to their health. Unlike education for older children, early education came to be constructed as outside the parameters of State provision, and instead the responsibility of parents, or failing that, philanthropic organisations. I argue throughout that the exclusion of young children from public schooling was particularly disadvantageous for two vulnerable groups — working-class children and their mothers. The chapter provides a contextual ‘backdrop’ for my identification of multiple historical constructs of ECEC.

### **Some Developments in Public Education in New South Wales**

For most of the first century of the NSW colony, the provision of education was primarily the responsibility of private enterprises or the church. The children of the colony received their education (if at all) at home with parents or a tutor, or within

private, fee-charging schools for wealthy colonists, or in one of a number of philanthropic and church establishments for children of less wealthy and poor families.<sup>1</sup>

The second half of the nineteenth century, however, was a period marked by intense lobbying from advocates for free, secular and universally available education.<sup>2</sup> Eventually, in 1880, the Public Instruction Act was passed in NSW, making it compulsory for children aged between six to fourteen years to attend school.<sup>3</sup> With the introduction of the Act, the Government committed to provide a publicly funded education system. It was to be free only for the poorest children, however.<sup>4</sup> According to Boyd, the introduction of compulsory public education marked a “revolutionary break in the history of thought”.<sup>5</sup> For the first time in NSW, the provision of education became the responsibility of the State.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A. Barcan, *A Short History of Education in New South Wales* (Sydney: Martindale Press, 1965); R. Harrison, *Sydney Kindergarten Teachers College 1897 – 1981* (Sydney: Sydney Teachers Kindergarten College Graduates Association, 1985); M. L. Walker, ‘The Development of Kindergartens in Australia.’ MEd thesis, University of Sydney, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Significantly Sir Charles Cowper, Sir Henry Parkes and the Reverend James Greenwood of the Education League. There appears to be some dissention as to who was ultimately responsible for the successful implementation of the Public Instruction Act. See debates between correspondents to *The Sydney Morning Herald*: Rock, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 July, 1895, p.7; Knapp, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 July, 1895, p.7; P., *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 July, 1895, p.4; Knapp, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 July, 1895, p.7.

<sup>3</sup> Walker, ‘The Development of Kindergartens in Australia’.

<sup>4</sup> The Labor Party was later to successfully fight for the provision of free education for the working-class on a platform of “ideological claims of social justice”. R. M. Gouttman, ‘A case of justice: The Labor Party of New South Wales’ free education plank, 1900 – 1900’, *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society*. 6 (1) (1977), 42 – 50, p.42.

<sup>5</sup> W. Boyd, *The History of Western Education* (7<sup>th</sup> ed.) (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1964), p.382.

<sup>6</sup> The reasons for the introduction of compulsory public education has been a contested subject amongst historians of education. Generally, within the literature, the introduction of public education is recognised as having served at least four different functions - teaching skills, reforming citizens, contributing to social equity and democracy. Boyd, *The History of Western Education*; P. Cook, I. Davey, & M. Vick, ‘Capitalism and working-class schooling in late nineteenth century South Australia’, *Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society Journal*. 8 (2) (1979), 36 – 48; I. Davey, ‘Capitalism, patriarchy and the origins of mass schooling’, *Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society Journal*, 16 (2) (1987), 1 – 12; A. Gregory, ‘The Fink Commission, the 1890s depression and Victorian state education’, *Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society Journal*. 11 (1) (1982), 34 – 49; A. Larson, ‘Who wants to go to school? The effects of free education and compulsory state education in nineteenth-century Victoria’, *History of Education Review*. 15 (1) (1986), 1 – 18.

## School Attendance of Young Children in New South Wales

Examination of histories of education in NSW reveals that the attendance of very young children had been a feature of early colonial schools.<sup>7</sup> For instance, although early colonial philanthropic and church schools were intended for children aged six years and above, there was a tradition of admitting children, particularly of the working-class, from as young as eighteen months. It was commonplace for students in these schools to have an age span from between three to twelve years.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, according to Snow, in

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The introduction of the Public Instruction Act is said to reflect a period of progressive idealism where education is interpreted as essential for social advancement - "a triumph for the forces of enlightenment and progress" (I. Davey, 'On school attendance', *Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society*, 6 (1) (1977), 1 – 11, p.1.); and an "agent of improvement" for the rising generation (J. Rickard, *Australia: A Cultural History* (London: Longman, 1988), p.89). But was it? Revisionist historians have suggested that, far from leading to freedom and ameliorating social disadvantage, the introduction of compulsory schooling was an essentially conservative move that perpetuated social control and differentiation. (For a critique of revisionist histories of mass education based on Marxist analysis see Davey, 'Capitalism, patriarchy and the origins of mass schooling'). That is, public education tended to reinforce, rather than change the societal structures, such as social differentiation between the classes, that led to inequalities (Cook *et al.*, 'Capitalism and working-class schooling in late nineteenth century South Australia'; Larson, 'Who wants to go to school?'). The introduction of compulsory schooling is also recognised as having had several consequences for families. For possibly the first time, the State intervened in the upbringing of children. As Steedman states, compulsory education meant that "children became the subjects of legislative attention and formed the basis of various accounts of social development as they had not done before" (C. Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan 1860 – 1931* (London: Virago, 1990), p.4). Whereas previously the state had been concerned principally with destitute or 'morally corrupt' children, compulsory education meant the state now intervened into the lives of all families (J. Kelly, 'Not Merely Minded: Care and Education for the Young Child of Working Women in Sydney: The Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association, 1905 – 1945.' PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1988). The introduction of compulsory education perhaps had the biggest impact on working-class families (Cook, *et al.*, 'Capitalism and working-class schooling in late nineteenth century South Australia'). The advent of compulsory schooling meant that families had to adopt strategies for paying fees, and balancing school and family responsibilities. Furthermore, children from working-class families, who were likely to have previously contributed to the family economy, now became an economic burden. There was a shift from the child being a contributor to the family economy, to that of a consumer — from an asset to a liability (Cook *et al.*, 'Capitalism and working-class schooling in late nineteenth century South Australia').

<sup>7</sup> Interestingly, the attendance of young children also seems to have been a feature of compulsory education in Britain (N. Whitbread, *The Evolution of the Nursery-Infant School: A History of Infant and Nursery Education in Britain, 1800 – 1970* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972).

<sup>8</sup> D. Snow, '“But they're only babies”: Policies and practices marginalising the very young from N.S.W state schools, 1788 – 1920', in N. J. Kyle (ed.), *Women as Educators in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Australia. Occasional Papers No.1.* (Wollongong: School of Learning, University of Wollongong, 1989); Walker, *The Development of Kindergartens in Australia*. Whether or not Aboriginal children attended these schools is unstated. But, given that there is no explicit mention of the attendance of Aboriginal children, it is highly unlikely that these schools catered for these children.

1869, forty per cent of children enrolled in NSW public schools were seven years or younger.<sup>9</sup>

There were attempts to accommodate the needs of the younger children. In particular, infant training schools and infant departments were established.<sup>10</sup> These 'early childhood' settings were, however, few and far between, as well as short lived. As a result, the general provision of education for young children was less than ideal. The younger children sat alongside their older peers and were subjected to the same instructional techniques, namely, rote learning and memorisation.<sup>11</sup>

When the Public Instruction Act was introduced in 1880, it did not reflect contemporary practices, in terms of the ages of children attending school. The Act made it compulsory only for children aged from six years to attend school. The Act did not *exclude* children younger than six years, however, and after its implementation many children below statutory age continued to attend public schools. The young age of school attendees is illustrated by figures produced in Parliamentary Debates by Sir Joseph Hector McNeil Carruthers. These figures showed that in 1893, 27 879 children under six years of age attended public schools in NSW, constituting one seventh of the total school population.<sup>12</sup> So the introduction of the Public Instruction Act, 1880 did little to change the tradition of younger children attending schools.

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<sup>9</sup> Snow, "But they're only babies".

<sup>10</sup> Kelly, 'Not Merely Minded'; Snow, "But they're only babies"; Walker, *The Development of Kindergartens in Australia*.

<sup>11</sup> Snow, "But they're only babies".

<sup>12</sup> J. H. M. Carruthers, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p.6729.

### ***Problematizing Six as the Lower Age of Attendance***

Given the history of young children attending school why was six years chosen as the age of compulsion? Snow argues that the setting of six as the age of compulsion probably reflects nineteenth century middle-class notions of childrearing held by the legislators — men from the middle and upper classes.<sup>13</sup> Middle-class men were likely to have educated their own children at home, possibly with a governess, until they turned seven years and only then sent them to school.<sup>14</sup> Snow suggests, therefore, that these men may possibly have determined that six was the youngest age at which children could be expected to learn in formal settings. Similarly, Weiss contends that the school starting age was constructed around a vision of the cosseted young middle-class child, unprepared to learn.<sup>15</sup>

If the age of compulsion was six, why did schools continue to accept younger children? Kelly suggests that there may have been an ethos of the 'earlier the better'. Larson, in her analysis of the age of beginning school in Victoria, supports this assertion, quoting a teacher's submission to the Royal Commission in that state which noted: "The importance of catching them young".<sup>16</sup> There were also pragmatic reasons for admitting younger children. Small rural schools were often reliant on their youngest children. Without them, enrollments could drop below sustainable numbers and threaten the

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<sup>13</sup> Snow, "But they're only babies". It may also reflect a construct of childhood that has both historical and cross cultural foundations in which the first six or seven years are considered an 'early childhood period'. See for instance: A. R. Colón, with P. A. Colón, *A History of Children: A Socio-Cultural Survey Across Millennia* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2001); W. A. Corsaro, *The Sociology of Childhood* (Thousand Oaks, California: Pine Forge Press, 1997); A. B. Kinney (ed.), *Chinese Views of Childhood* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995); V. C. Lascarides, & B. F. Hinitz, *History of Early Childhood Education* (New York: Falmer Press, 2000).

<sup>14</sup> Walker, 'The Development of Kindergartens in Australia'.

<sup>15</sup> G., Weiss, 'A very great nuisance': Young children and the construction of school entry in South Australia, 1851 – 1915', *History of Education Review*. 22 (2) (1993), 1 – 17.

<sup>16</sup> Larson, 'Who wants to go to school?', p.12.

schools with closure. There was also a recognition that the care of these younger children had previously been the responsibility of their older, school-age, siblings.<sup>17</sup> To have excluded the younger children may have threatened the attendance of the older children.

Lastly, why did parents send such young children, when they were not compelled by law to do so? Perhaps it was because they provided an important child-minding function. Indeed, Kelly asserts: "Mothers were all too willing to take advantage of any form of outside help to help ease the load of child rearing".<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Larson says: "All classes found advantages in sending children to school at a young age".<sup>19</sup> Yet it was the working-class child who may have benefited most from starting school early. Many working-class children had frequent absences from school in order to contribute to the family economy.<sup>20</sup> By starting their education earlier, this disruption to their school life could be counter balanced.<sup>21</sup> Whatever the reasons, up until the 1890s, young children below statutory age attended, and were accepted, into public schools. But this was soon to change.

The year 1893 marked a major shift in the practice of accepting young children into public schools. In April of that year the NSW Minister for Public Instruction, Sir Francis Bathurst Suttor stated to Parliament:

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<sup>17</sup> This fact was acknowledged in parliament. Carruthers, (1893) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p.6729; J. L. Fegan, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p.6762; J. L. Fegan, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXIX, 17 January to 28 February, 1894, p.1156.

<sup>18</sup> Kelly, 'Not Merely Minded', p.20.

<sup>19</sup> Larson, 'Who wants to go to school?', p.12.

<sup>20</sup> Cook *et al.*, 'Capitalism and working-class schooling in late nineteenth century South Australia', 1979.

<sup>21</sup> Larson, 'Who wants to go to school?', p.11.

It is intended to decline to receive into the schools children below the age of 6 years.<sup>22</sup>

Children younger than six years were now to be actively excluded from public schools.<sup>23</sup> Why did this exclusion occur? In the following section I argue that it was a result of a shift in the ways education was constructed within economic discourses during the economic depression of the 1890s.

### **Economic Discourses in Late Nineteenth Century New South Wales**

In the early 1890s, NSW was in the grips of a severe economic depression.<sup>24</sup> Reckless speculation had led to the failure of many financial institutions. Factories closed and businesses folded, resulting in the financial ruin and impoverishment of many families.<sup>25</sup> The depression affected all levels of society and many ordinary, hardworking people lost lifetime savings.<sup>26</sup> As a result, economic discourses were prevalent, especially in the media where, along with editorials on the economic crisis, numerous accounts of financial hardship were reported. The effects of the recession are perhaps most poignantly captured, however, by Lawson's poetry:

When you've tramped the Sydney pavements till you've counted all the  
flags,  
And your flapping boot-soles trip you, and your clothes are mostly rags,  
When you're called a city loafer, shunned, abused, moved on, despised –  
Fifty hungry beggars after every job that's advertised –

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<sup>22</sup> F. B. Suttor, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p.6282.

<sup>23</sup> The age was later lowered to five years (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 October, 1894, p.5; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 November, 1894, p.6). Similarly, in Victoria, there were a large number of children aged 2 – 5 years attending public school following the introduction of compulsory education there in 1872. Larson suggests that although these younger children were enrolled, they did not necessarily attend on a regular basis (Larson, 'Who wants to go to school?').

<sup>24</sup> See Cannon for a comprehensive discussion of the financial situation in late nineteenth century Victoria and New South Wales (M. Cannon, *The Land Boomers: The Complete History* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> Gregory, 'The Fink Commission, the 1890s depression and Victorian state education'. See also the numerous reports on 'the financial crisis' in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1893.

<sup>26</sup> C. M. H. Clarke, *A History of Australia, Volumes V & VI: From 1888 to 1935* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1981).

Don't be beaten! Hold your head up! To your wretched self be true;  
Set your pride to fight your hunger! Be a man in all you do!  
For it cannot last for ever — "I will rise again!" says you.<sup>27</sup>

Within these economic discourses the NSW Government had to determine the colony's fiscal policy. It is in such times of financial difficulties that reductions in public spending reveal government priorities, as only those services that are considered essential, or those which return immediate dividends, tend to be supported.<sup>28</sup> In the prosperous 1880s education had been seen as a priority for government spending. But during the economic depression, in a climate of fiscal restraint, Government spending in the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), the body responsible for providing public education, came under close scrutiny.

### **The Construction of Education within Economic Discourses**

Within economic debates surrounding the depression, the value of public spending on education came to be questioned. A prominent argument against public education was that expenditure on education was simply too great. For instance, one letter writer to the *Sydney Morning Herald* stated:

I have read with more than disgust of the expense the country is put to in the education of Public school children.<sup>29</sup>

Others feared escalating cost, or argued that universal education was an economic burden that the country could no longer afford.

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<sup>27</sup> H. Lawson, "'Sez You'" (First published in *The Bulletin*, March 3, 1894)', in C. Roderick, *Henry Lawson Collected Verse. Memorial Edition. Volume One 1885 – 1900* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1981 / 1894).

<sup>28</sup> Gregory, 'The Fink Commission, the 1890s depression and Victorian state education', p.34.

<sup>29</sup> Reform, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 January, 1895, p.3.

Class distinctions are clearly evident in the arguments about the benefits, or otherwise, of education. In particular, education for the poor came into question.<sup>30</sup> It was argued, for instance, that education of poor children was a wasted effort as:

The education given to these children is anything but practical or useful to them in after life; in most instances it is forgotten as soon as they leave school.<sup>31</sup>

Similarly, it was claimed that working-class people who had received education:

... shrink from unaccustomed manual labour, and from the use of tools which their unpractised hands find awkward to manage.<sup>32</sup>

One particularly strident letter stated:

The children of the working-classes get just enough instruction — we cannot call it education — to render them unfitted for, and dissatisfied with, the conditions of existence to which stern Fate has sentenced them. They are no longer willing to occupy their natural position in society, and consequently increase the roll of the unemployed, being no longer fit to go on the land. ... somebody must till the soil ... education like everything else in this imperfect world, is not an unmitigated blessing. To be so it must be suited to circumstances; at present it is unfitting the masses for the baser occupations of life, and raising a very numerous and rapidly increasing dissatisfied class of restless educated unemployed who will prove a most serious danger in the very near future to the stability of our present social conditions.<sup>33</sup>

The above arguments seem to suggest that mass education could result in social unrest.

Once educated, the poor would no longer be content with manual work, to which they had been 'condemned' by their birth. At best, there would be a deficit of manual labourers, on whose backs the prosperity of the nation was forged; at worst, was the possibility that the newly educated masses, unable to find 'suitable' employment, would rise up in revolution and threaten the dominant power structures.

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<sup>30</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 April, 1894, p. 7; E.R.G., *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 December, 1895, p.7.

<sup>31</sup> Reform, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 January, 1895, p.3.

<sup>32</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 January, 1895, p.4.

<sup>33</sup> F. Hall, The education fantasia, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 November, 1893, p.2.

The fight for public education had been hard won, however, and there was heightened sensitivity to threats to its integrity. In particular, concerns were voiced that reductions in funding of public schooling might be an attempt to maintain the dominant power structures. For instance, the Parliamentarian William Francis Schey argued, quite contentiously:

The conservative class [was] casting aspersions on the system, because it does not enable them to keep hold on the masses they formerly had.<sup>34</sup>

He seemed to be asserting that by weakening public education, the ruling class was attempting to retain control. A similar idea seems to underpin the following illustration in *The Bulletin* (Figure 5: page 173).<sup>35</sup> Here, the ‘Fatman’, Anderson, the Under-Secretary for Education in Queensland, is ridiculed for arguing that the colony would be in danger from an “educated proletariat”. Anderson is depicted snuffing out the light of education, implying that without education the white child would be reduced to being on equal footing with his ‘less civilised’ black bedmate — a reflection of the highly racist climate of the times.

Likewise, there were those who argued that adequate funding for public education was essential because it contributed to social equity. For instance, one letter to the editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald* claimed:

[education] makes a large a step towards producing that ‘equality of opportunity’ which so many demand.<sup>36</sup>

Expressing similar sentiments, John Lionel Fegan (Member of Parliament M. P.) stated in Parliament:

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<sup>34</sup> W. F. Schey, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p.6763.

<sup>35</sup> *The Bulletin*, 31 October, 1896, p.5. Reproduced by courtesy of *The Bulletin*.

<sup>36</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 December, 1893, p.4.

It behoves us in this age of enlightenment to take care that no ministry shall tamper with a system which has dispersed the ignorance and increased the intelligence of the great masses of the country.<sup>37</sup>

Others claimed public education was “the frontier fort of liberty” and necessary to ensure an “enlightened democracy.”<sup>38</sup> Such idealism can also be seen in a letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald*, stating:

No country that aspires to be truly great can neglect the education of its people ... Knowledge is power, and if directed aright, must be a power to the State, as well as individuals — dangerous only when possessed by the few.<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, Reginald James Black (M P) stated in Parliament:

An intelligent democracy must be founded on education, and no democracy can last which is not intelligent, and which is not founded on education. If you expect the people of this country to take advantage of the electoral privileges ... you must give them the fullest education first, that they may clearly understand the laws by which they are governed, that they may clearly see what are their rights, and, knowing exactly their positions as citizens.<sup>40</sup>

So threats to curtail the funding of public education were interpreted, by some, as threats both to equality and democracy. These ideas, which seem to reflect progressive idealism, are taken up more fully in the following chapter. Importantly, these liberal / progressive discourses were highly prevalent in Kindergarten Union documents. As I go on to discuss in Chapter Eight, within these documents Free Kindergartens were constructed as contributing both to social equity and the democratisation of Australia.

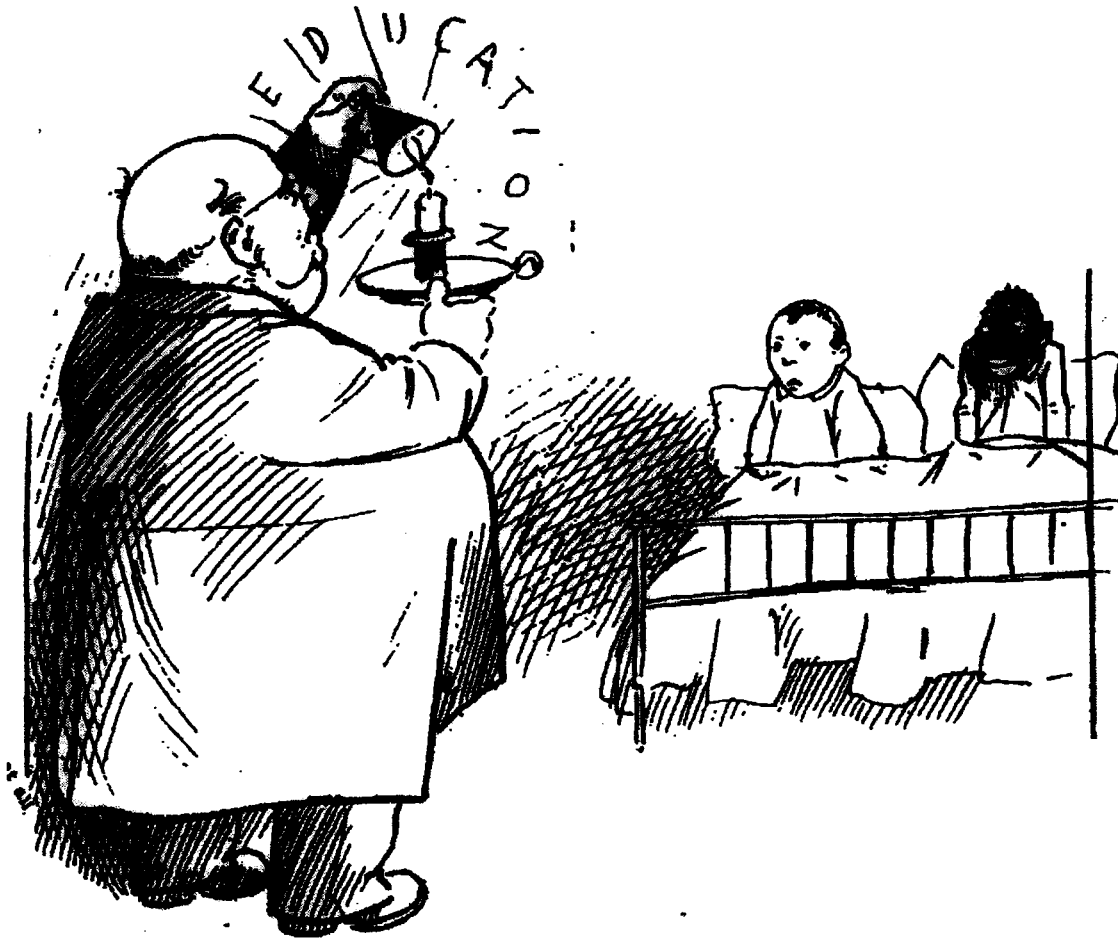
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<sup>37</sup> Fegan, (1893) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p.6761.

<sup>38</sup> E. W. O’Sullivan, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p.6771.

<sup>39</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 March, 1893, p.3.

<sup>40</sup> R. J. Black, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p.6750.



*THE FATMAN'S FAT-HEADED POLICY.*

*THERE! You see When I put out this light you will both be of the same Color and therefore are exactly equal fonting!*

Figure 5: The fatman's fat headed policy, 1896. Reproduced by courtesy of *The Bulletin*.

There were others who supported education, but only in so far as it prepared people for their place in society. For instance, it was argued:

University passes, &c, are something too ridiculous for the lower classes. ... It is fully time that this monstrous incubus was lifted from the shoulders of the taxpayers of New South Wales.<sup>41</sup>

Similarly, according to another correspondent, the working-class should be:

... taught only what would be useful to them in life.<sup>42</sup>

Education, it was argued, must be practical, focused on vocational training, and geared towards improving the prosperity of the colony. Perhaps, because of the increasing industrial sophistication of society, there was a growing recognition of the need for a skilled population. This need may have contributed to the acceptance of education for the poor, at least to a level at which they could operate effectively in the new technological workplace. After all:

Skilled, educated knowledge of the most economic and most effective means of doing work is indispensable. In pastoral pursuits, in farming, in dealing with timber or soils, in mining, in works of road-making, engineering, or other forms of improvement, there is ample scope for the application of educational acquirements and available knowledge. ... it is when knowledge brightens and enlightens labour that the best results are yielded.<sup>43</sup>

In this statement, it can be seen that education is constructed as a tool for producing a skilled workforce that might increase productivity, which in turn would have benefits for Australia; perhaps also leading to a more content workforce, happy in their position, and so unlikely to challenge the dominant power structures. There is a striking similarity between these arguments and those used to uphold ECEC as National Work in the contemporary context, discussed in the previous chapter. In Chapter Nine, I show how such nationalist discourses increased in dominance during the 1890s, and how

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<sup>41</sup> Public School Education, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 January, 1893, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Retrenchment, The State schools. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 January, 1893, p.6.

<sup>43</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 March, 1893, p.3.

within these discourses ECEC was constructed as means of producing productive and obedient future citizens.

There is little doubt that such debates about the value of public education put increased pressure on the Government to justify and rationalise its expenditure. The Public Instruction Act obliged the Government to provide school facilities, so that those children required by law to attend school could do so. Consequently, the DPI was faced with huge capital outlays as many new schools were built to accommodate children.<sup>44</sup> Under increased scrutiny, the DPI took a number of actions to reduce its spending. For instance, expenditure on school books was reduced.<sup>45</sup> Many teachers were retrenched and others, most especially the female infant school teachers, had their salaries cut.<sup>46</sup> Of particular concern here, was the decision to reduce expenditure in the DPI by strictly enforcing the age provisions of the Public Instruction Act and refusing to admit those children younger than six years of age.

### **The Construction of Education for Children Younger than Six Years Within Economic Discourses: An Unnecessary Expense**

In early 1893, under pressure to reduce public spending in the Department of Public Instruction, Suttor announced his intention to exclude from public schools children younger than the age of compulsion. It was reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

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<sup>44</sup> Suttor, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p.6721.

<sup>45</sup> Retrenchment in the Education Department, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 April, 1893, p.9; Retrenchment in the Education Department, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 April, 1893, p.6.

<sup>46</sup> It seems infant teachers were especially targeted. In parliament Suttor stated, "I maintain that teachers of a lower classification are capable of teaching children of immature age" (Suttor, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p.6723). Furthermore, one supporter of female infant teachers argued that they had been made the "Beasts of Burthen ... specially selected as a sort of chopping-block for the scheme of retrenchment" (Retrenchment in the Education Department, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 July, 1893, p.5).

In looking round to see in what direction he [Suttor] might be forced ultimately to make a further saving, he saw that it would be in the direction of refusing to admit to the school, children under 6 years of age. (Hear, hear.). Some of the schools were over-crowded owing to the attendance of children 5, 4, and even 3 years of age.<sup>47</sup>

In these difficult economic times, Sir Edmund Barton (M P) “submitted with confidence”:

It is not in any case right to spend a large amount of public money in keeping in the schools children who are only sent there to keep them out of the way elsewhere. ... The best way of promoting education is to spend money with economy, and spend it on the best objects, not indulging the fancies and whims ... by spending money in attempting to teach children who really cannot be taught much, and who, if they are to be taught anything, ought to be taught elsewhere.<sup>48</sup>

Savings could be made by excluding children under the age of compulsion as there would be no need to pay teachers to educate them or spend additional money on building larger schools. Indeed, when the 1893 Budget Estimates were reported in the newspaper, the financial rationale for this decision was clearly expounded:

Regarding the attendance at school, the department [DPI] has decided that in future it shall be bound by the provisions of the Act, which requires that children shall be educated between the ages of six years and 14 years. Henceforth, no child under the age of six years will be received into its public schools. The number of children below that age now in attendance is 22, 300 ... The rejection of these children will work to the good of the department in many ways. In the first place there will be more room for those remaining in school, and who are of “legal” age; and a large amount of money will be saved annually which is now spent on increasing the size of schools and providing for overcrowding.<sup>49</sup>

It was a win-win decision for the Government. By excluding young children, expenditure in the DPI could be:

... materially curtailed, yet every necessity for properly carrying on the great system of education could be provided.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 February, 1893, p.3.

<sup>48</sup> E. Barton, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p.6738.

<sup>49</sup> The Government and the Estimates, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 April, 1893, p.5.

<sup>50</sup> Visit of the Minister for education to North Sydney, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 April, 1893, p.3.

Not only could money be saved but at the same time the Government could be seen to uphold the principles of public education. Indeed, it must be acknowledged that even during the depression the provision of public education continued to expand in terms of the number of schools.<sup>51</sup> This expansion, however, came at the expense of education for the youngest children. Whilst the education of older children was enshrined in the legislation, the provision of education for the more than twenty thousand children under six years was “conditional on the availability of surplus resources in times of prosperity”.<sup>52</sup> The exclusion of young children was, then, tied to an economic rationale. In a time of economic hardship it was considered ‘irrational’ and ‘irresponsible’ for the Government to spend money on causes outside its jurisdiction.

Young children became the scapegoats. Children of “tender age” were constructed as taking-up limited spaces to the exclusion of children of compulsory age.<sup>53</sup> This idea became a dominant theme in following months. Barton (M P), for instance, argued in Parliament that the acceptance of children below the age of statutory compulsion resulted in the:

... crowding-out of children of school age by infants.<sup>54</sup>

Similar sentiments were expressed in *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

In numbers of small schools throughout the country, where there is only scanty accommodation, children of school age shall be shut out, or doomed to pass their time in crowded buildings, to save parents the trouble of taking care of them [children under compulsory school age].<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> There are numerous reports in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (1893 – 1895) of new schools being opened in both rural and urban areas. See for instance: Opening of New School at Albion Park, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 February, 1893, p.3; Opening of New Public School at Kiama, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 May, 1893, p.4; Dulwich Hill Public School, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 August, 1894, p.5; New Public School at Ashfield, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 December, 1894, p.10.

<sup>52</sup> Kelly, ‘Not Merely Minded’, p.21.

<sup>53</sup> Our Public Schools, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 April, 1893, p.9.

<sup>54</sup> Barton, (1893) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p.6736.

<sup>55</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 April, 1893, p.8.

Indeed, Suttor declared that some schools were so overcrowded that:

... the children were packed almost like herrings in a barrel.<sup>56</sup>

Of course, this overcrowding could have been remedied by building more commodious schools. But calls to enlarge schools in order to accommodate children below the age of compulsion were met with derision and ridicule by many Parliamentarians.<sup>57</sup> Within the dominant contemporaneous economic discourses any additional expenditure on buildings to accommodate children under the age of compulsion was constructed as money:

... lavishly squandered.<sup>58</sup>

And:

... a wasteful expenditure.<sup>59</sup>

No longer were young children seen as having a right to be at school. Instead, their presence was constructed as a threat to the attendance of older children:

There is only a choice between one or other of these evils ... excluding the infants, or incurring premature expense for enlargements.<sup>60</sup>

It is apparent that the 'evil' chosen was to exclude the youngest children.

### ***Problematising the Exclusion of Young Children***

The exclusion of young children was likely to have been most adverse for the children of the working-class poor. As previously noted, early education was particularly important for working-class children, as many working-class children's experience with

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<sup>56</sup> Suttor, (1893) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p.6723.

<sup>57</sup> See for instance: G. D. Clarke, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p.6765.

<sup>58</sup> N. Melville, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p.6745.

<sup>59</sup> Barton, (1893) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p.6737.

<sup>60</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 April, 1893, p.8.

education occurred primarily in the earliest years.<sup>61</sup> Working-class children of twelve and thirteen years were important contributors to the functioning and economy of the family. They were often required to assist with household chores or to seek paid employment.<sup>62</sup> Even after the introduction of compulsory instruction, school attendance for older working-class children tended to be sporadic, particularly for girls, and it was common for these children to leave school before age fourteen.<sup>63</sup> Their early departure from school placed increased importance on education in the early years. Excluding these children until the age of six was likely to have significantly reduced the amount of time they spent in school.

It was recognised at the time that the exclusion of young children was disadvantageous to the poor. Sir Henry Parkes (M P), who is often cited as the ‘father’ of public education, argued that the period from five to six years was one of:

... vital importance in the education of the children of the poor ... A year once lost in the education of a poor man’s child can never be fully regained.<sup>64</sup>

Parkes argued against the exclusion of young children on the grounds of social equity. He stated to Parliament that it was the intention of the Public Instruction Act, which he had drafted:

... that the men of the future in receiving while children the best primary education the state could give them should be placed on equal footing, without regard to any condition in life. ... An Act of Parliament providing for public instruction of our children in their early years ought to be placed above all other considerations. I cannot conceive of any act which so deeply concerns, which so intimately entwines itself with the true interests of the future nation.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Clarke, (1893) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p 6765. See also Larson, ‘Who wants to go to school?’.

<sup>62</sup> Davey, ‘Capitalism, patriarchy and the origins of mass schooling’.

<sup>63</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> H. Parkes, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p.6719.

<sup>65</sup> *ibid.*, pp.6716 – 6717.

Parkes considered the exclusion of young children from public education:

... a great blow at the cardinal principles of the Public Instruction Act [that] threatened its integrity.<sup>66</sup>

He lobbied for the continued acceptance of young children into public schools, but his efforts were lampooned in *The Bulletin* where he was depicted as trying to break down a school door in order to gain admittance for a group of waiting caricatured 'toddlers' (Figure 6: over page).<sup>67</sup>

Similarly, in a letter to *The Sydney Morning Herald* it was argued:

Our State schools are largely used by the working-classes, who cannot afford to have special guardians to teach and prevent the child at five straying away and getting into mischief.<sup>68</sup>

Here, the tone is more in keeping with preventing these working-class children from being a danger to the rest of society. The writer went on to say that boys were to be:

... found in the street listening to conversation of passers-by which is often a disgrace to our people. That boy would be far better at school if he only learned simple rhymes.<sup>69</sup>

Likewise, it was argued that cost cutting in the DPI was a false economy as it would lead to future civil disobedience. Carruthers (M P), for instance, stated:

If you enter upon this cheeseparing system in the education of your little ones, you will suffer when you come to deal with the manhood and womanhood of the country.<sup>70</sup>

It is significant that in order to advocate the provision of services for children, children had to be constructed as dangerous threats to society. Similar constructs were evident in

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<sup>66</sup> Parkes, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p.6719.

<sup>67</sup> *The Bulletin*, 6 May, 1893, p.10. Reproduced by courtesy of *The Bulletin*.

<sup>68</sup> T. Henly, Where should State education begin and end, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 October, 1894, p.10.

<sup>69</sup> *ibid*, p.10.

<sup>70</sup> Carruthers, (1893) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p.6729.



Figure 6: An interested party (Sir Henry Parkes attempting to gain school admittance for young children), 1893. Reproduced by courtesy of *The Bulletin*.

the contemporary texts discussed in Chapter Four, suggesting that this is a powerful construct and resistant to change. Indeed, the construction of ECEC as preventing crime became a dominant theme in Kindergarten Union documents at the turn of the nineteenth century, and will be taken up further in Chapter Nine.

### **The Construction of Education for Children Younger than Six Years within Economic Discourses: Too Young to Learn**

In order to reinforce and uphold the exclusion of children younger than six years from public schooling, the early childhood period was constructed as a time in the lifespan when children were too young to learn. For instance, Barton (M P) said:

Children below school age are incapable of receiving and retaining mental impressions of a definite kind.<sup>71</sup>

Similarly, Black (M.P.) maintained:

It is not very much use endeavouring to educate the infant.<sup>72</sup>

Likewise, Ninian Melville (M. P) asserted:

Those who watch children know it is only in exceptional cases that children take to education at all.<sup>73</sup>

Indeed, he went on to say that to force them into school was to:

... implant in them the disposition to play truant, so that later on when they are really fit to be educated you require an army of truant officers to look after them.<sup>74</sup>

Suttor, during his many Ministerial visits to public schools, frequently went out of his way to illustrate how young children were not yet ready to learn:

At each of the schools visited Mr. Suttor made a point of interrogating the pupils in the infant classes in a kindly way. In almost every instance

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<sup>71</sup> Barton, (1893) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p.6736.

<sup>72</sup> Black, (1893) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p.6734.

<sup>73</sup> Melville, (1893) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, 1893, p.6743.

<sup>74</sup> *ibid*, p.6743.

the replies were unsatisfactory. Many of the children were unaware of the fact that they had a second name, and were unable to inform the Minister of their birthdays. Mr. Suttor came to the determination that the investigations he made thoroughly justified the action which he had previously taken in ordering that children under six should not attend school.<sup>75</sup>

This statement suggests that, because these children were unable when questioned to say their surname or age, they were too young to learn.

### ***Problematising The Construction of Children as Too Young to Learn***

Contrary to Suttor's claims, such limited questioning hardly seems thorough justification for excluding children. Would knowledge of age have been common amongst working-class children, who may have never celebrated their birthday? Furthermore, they may have been unwilling to say their name, rather than unable. Would these children have felt confident to respond to this probably somewhat imposing gentleman, when deference to one's elders and 'betters' was typically required?

By making a public spectacle of this screening it seems that Suttor was attempting to highlight what he considered were these children's incapacities. The image one gets from the newspaper reports is of Suttor imperiously inspecting the local public schools with the expressed intention of making his point to the gathered media that children under six years had no business being there. By choosing an assessment that the children were likely to fail, it was relatively easy for Suttor to highlight these young children's 'unreadiness' for school. Suttor's comments seem to have hit their mark. For instance, in the same paper that reported Suttor's 'testing' of children, a piece in the

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<sup>75</sup>

*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 April 1893, p.4.

Fugitive Notes, a satirical column, followed up on the idea of children being too young to learn. The article stated:

Most reasonable people will agree that as a test of intellectual development it is not too much to require that pupils entering the State system of public instruction should be sufficiently matured to be acquainted with the fact that they bear a paternal name. As, however, a single test of this kind might lead to infantile cramming at the hands of affectionate mammas desirous of advancing the education of their offspring, the candidates might also be tested as to whether they knew their thumbs from their fingers, or their great toes from their little ones; and as to other knowledge of a practical and useful kind, such as need not necessarily be imparted by expensively trained teachers, who, with their elaborate school buildings, are maintained by the expenditure of public funds.<sup>76</sup>

This piece seems contemptuous towards both the capacities of young children, and those who teach them. Yet, this construct of the child as too young to learn did not reflect the lived reality of many working-class children. As Weiss points out, far from being 'incapable', these children were highly likely to have contributed to the family economy well before the age of six years.<sup>77</sup>

There were of course those who countered that young children were capable of learning.

For instance, Carruthers (M P) asserted in Parliament:

Some children are more precocious than others, and so it is perfectly safe to educate them at an early age.<sup>78</sup>

Similarly, Fegan (M P) stated:

It is absurd to say that children under 6 years of age are not capable of receiving instruction. I visited a public school not so long ago where the work done by children under that age quite astonished me.<sup>79</sup>

It is interesting to note, however, that even those who stated the benefits of education for young children were only concerned with children aged four and five years.

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<sup>76</sup> Fugitive Notes, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 April, 1893, p.3.

<sup>77</sup> Weiss, 'A very great nuisance'.

<sup>78</sup> Carruthers, (1893) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p.6732.

<sup>79</sup> Fegan, (1894) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p.1157.

Beliefs about the capacity, or otherwise, of young children to learn, became an important issue for the Kindergarten Union to address when advocating Free Kindergartens for young children. In this regard, scientific discourses, in particular those relating to child study, were used to legitimate Free Kindergartens. These ideas are taken up further in Chapter Seven.

### **The Construction of Education for Children Younger than Six Years Within Economic Discourses: A Danger to Their Health**

To further uphold the exclusion of young children, public schooling was constructed as harmful for young children, as in Parliamentary Melville's declaration:

To send it [a child aged 5 – 6 years] to school any earlier only interferes with the development of the mind.<sup>80</sup>

Similarly, Suttor, was reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald* as saying:

Sending young children to school does them no good, but that such a course is rather to their detriment ... owing to such close confinement the health of children of a tender age is injured.<sup>81</sup>

Perhaps Suttor was genuinely concerned that early school attendance might have a negative effect on children's health. He made several statements to this effect. For instance it was reported that:

He [Suttor] thought Parliament had done wisely in fixing the age when children must go to school at six years, but up to six he believed that the more a child was encouraged to play and grow physically strong, the better it would be able to learn when it went to school.<sup>82</sup>

Similarly, later that same year:

He [Suttor] had consulted many doctors and many mothers, and he was convinced that very young children were infinitely better out of school than cooped up in these rooms. If they wished to build up healthy

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<sup>80</sup> Melville, 1893 New South Wales Parliamentary Debates, p.6745.

<sup>81</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 April, 1893, p.5.

<sup>82</sup> Opening of New School at Albion Park, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 February, 1893, p.3.

children they must consider these matters, and they ought not to send children so young that, by doing so, they might be materially injuring their physical health.<sup>83</sup>

Yet, Suttor's stance also reflects an unwillingness to change existing educational practices in order to cater for these young children. If it were considered important for young children to attend school, then policies could have been put in place to ensure that schools were more accommodating to young children's needs. The fact that this was not even considered seems to suggest that economic debates took precedence.

The idea that education was damaging to children's health continued to be evident well into the new century. For instance, a piece in *The Dawn* in 1903 entitled "Too Much School" stated:

The very name "infant school" or "infant class" should be abolished from our vocabulary. Infants should not be at school. They should be at home. The mind matures later than the body, but in the craze for education, the altogether too early cultivation of the brain is begun to the injury of the body. In our States, in nearly every school of any size, wee toddlers of about five years of age can be seen in the infants' class. True, they are not there to learn much. They are sent to be taken care of — to be "out of mother's way". Unfortunate atoms! Stupid parents! Instead of healthy outdoor gambols, with their accompaniments of rosy cheeks, firm flesh, and sturdy bones, the child is daily mewed up for several hours, and forced to pay attention to lessons and adhere to discipline, against which its little soul energetically revolts. Better for the child in every way that it should revel in healthy ignorance for the first five or six years of its life. Which picture would true parents rather see? A sunburnt, dirty face, with sparkling eyes and laughing lips, or a bulging forehead and spectacles on their child? Medical authorities, generally, condemn early school going. Children grow rapidly during the first five years of their lives, and to force the immature brain during that period simply means that the future is being heavily taxed.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Dulwich Hill Public School, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 September, 1893, p.5.

<sup>84</sup> *The Dawn*, 1 May, 1903, p.4.

It is interesting how, in the 1890s, concerns with children's brain development were used to argue against institutionalised schooling, whereas today they are used to advocate ECEC.

***Problematifying The Construction of Education for Children Younger than Six Years as a Danger to Their Health***

The arguments for excluding young children from public education because schools were dangerous for children's health, and suggestions that they would be safer at home were probably based on a vision of the 'ideal' middle-class home, a supposedly safe and nurturing environment. But the home was not necessarily a safe place. Many working-class children, because of poor housing and lack of supervision, were constantly exposed to dangers in the home and surrounds.<sup>85</sup> Similarly, sentimental statements about 'outdoor gambols' may reflect a rural idyll of childhood, rather than the lived reality of poverty and hardship experienced by many city children.

A genuine concern for children's health is further brought into question in light of the fact that in cases where children's debarment would result in a school closing, children under six years were permitted to attend. In small rural schools it was granted that:

Whilst children under six years of age will not be considered to be of school age, they will not be debarred from attendance at school so long as there is room for them in the building, but if it becomes a question of spending more money and increasing the accommodation in any particular school, the masters or mistresses will decline to receive new pupils, or will if necessary turn those under age away.<sup>86</sup>

So arguments that the legislators excluded children on the basis that attending school was detrimental to their health cannot be sustained.

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<sup>85</sup> There were reports of numerous childhood deaths and injuries in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, I provide details in Chapter Seven.

<sup>86</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 July, 1893, p.5.

There were, however, counter arguments to the position that schools posed a danger to children. For instance, a correspondent to *The Sydney Morning Herald* wrote:

We are told that medical experts say that attendance at school of children under 6 years is injurious to their health. Much consideration these learned gentlemen must have given the matter, forsooth! Let them visit an infant school, and see if they will then opine that the interesting Kindergarten system practiced there can injure the happy-looking little scholars. Will they not then think that these children, having their infantile intellects suitably developed in a healthy moral atmosphere, are far more likely to benefit to the full by the system in years to come, and turn out better citizens, than if by having the school doors closed on them?<sup>87</sup>

Here is an early mention of how, if provided with suitable education, in this case Kindergarten, far from being damaged, young children could benefit from school. There was also awareness, amongst certain politicians, that some methods of education were more appropriate than others. For instance, Sir George Houston Reid declared:

The methods of educating the young have been so revolutionised within the last twenty or thirty years that it is possible now to teach children at the age of 4 or 5 the rudiments in such a way that, so far from being a strain on the intelligence of the average child of that age, it is simply a source of the keenest pleasure and delight.<sup>88</sup>

But, as will be discussed more fully in the following chapter, such arguments for the introduction of Kindergarten methods into public schools, were generally not heeded. As a consequence, the Kindergarten Union, which advocated Kindergarten methods, established its own schools, Free Kindergartens, in order to demonstrate how Kindergarten methods could be adapted to the needs of young children.

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<sup>87</sup> Attempted suppression of the Public Instruction Act, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 April, 1893, p.4.

<sup>88</sup> G. H. Reid, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p.6739.

## **The Construction of Education for Children Younger than Six Years within Economic Discourses: Outside the Parameters of State Provided Education**

The early 1890s saw a clear distinction made between education for older and younger children. The provision of education for children aged six to fourteen was part of the Government's legislative responsibility, whereas education for children younger than six years, was now constructed as outside the parameters of State responsibility. For instance, it was argued that government was required to provide schools — not crèches.

Money granted for a school is not money granted for a crèche, and when a school is made to resemble a crèche by being crowded with infants below school age, the genuineness of an application for more accommodation should be tested.<sup>89</sup>

The care and education of young children was constructed as the responsibility of parents, or failing this:

... a matter for the charitably-disposed ladies of their respective districts, rather than for the Minister of Public Instruction.<sup>90</sup>

Whereas once, the education of young children had been part of the public school system, within economic discourses the education of young children was now marginalised outside the parameters of state provision and constructed instead as a concern of philanthropic organisations.

There is some evidence of a counter argument — that schools provided an important function in caring for young children. A letter to the editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, for instance, claimed that schools were:

... a blessing to thousands of hard-working mothers.<sup>91</sup>

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*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 April, 1893, p.4.

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Fugitive Notes, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 August, 1894, p.5.

<sup>91</sup>

Citizen, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 August, 1893, p.3.

It was also argued that education should be provided for young children because the exclusion of young children would likely result in their elder siblings being forced to leave school to care for them. For instance, Carruthers (M P) said:

She [a poor mother] cannot leave it [a young child] at home to take care of itself, and she looks to one of the other children ... to take care of it and act as nursemaid to it.<sup>92</sup>

Similarly, Fegan (M P) claimed:

A poor mother who has to earn her own living will keep her eldest boy or girl at home to take care of the other children. Although the young children may be able to take care of themselves, yet the mother will be so fearful of the children being run over, or being hurt in some other way, that she will keep her eldest child at home, and that child will be robbed of the education which the state holds out to such children.<sup>93</sup>

But Suttor was less than sympathetic.

He [Suttor] did not think it wise that the Public schools should be turned into nurseries or crèches. (Laughter, and hear, hear). The objection raised to his proposal was that if they sent these babies home, their elder sisters would be kept at home to look after them, but even if the elder children were sometimes kept at home to look after the younger ones, it would be better than allowing the babies to occupy valuable space in Public schools. It would be cheaper to employ a lot of nurses to take the babies out in the public parks. (Laughter and hear, hear.)<sup>94</sup>.

***Problematizing The Construction of Education for Children Younger than Six as Outside the Parameters of State Provided Education***

Suttor's comment that schools should not be 'turned into' nurseries or crèches suggested that the education of young children was something new. It conveniently ignored the long history of young children attending public schools. More than this, it trivialised the effect that excluding young children might have had on families who

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<sup>92</sup> Carruthers, (1893) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p.6729.

<sup>93</sup> Fegan, (1893) *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, p.6762.

<sup>94</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 February, 1893, p.3.

were no longer able to send their young children to state funded schools. As in the following statement, the idea of government provided child care was typically mocked:

There appears to be some confusion ... between an infant school and a *crèche*. The function of the infant school ... seems to be to teach, but this correspondent appears to think that it has something to do with supplying a place where hard-working mothers may send their children during certain hours of the day to get them out of the way.<sup>95</sup>

The statement constructs the care and education of young children as the responsibility of parents, especially mothers. The exclusion of young children from public schools was likely to have had particularly significant effects on working-class mothers, a group who had little, if any, say in politics. Working-class mothers often relied on the child-care function provided by schools so that they could work.<sup>96</sup> It is likely, therefore, that exclusion of young children would have resulted in these mothers being forced to give up work and subsequently reducing their economic security. Or it might have meant them having to take their children to work with them, possibly endangering their lives, or that these children, who once went to school with their siblings, were now left unsupervised.<sup>97</sup> I argue later, in Chapter Ten, that within these dominant gender discourses that upheld the care and education of young children as women's responsibility, ECEC came to be constructed as work both *by* and *for* women, as it remains today.

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<sup>95</sup> Fugitive Notes, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 August, 1894, p.5 [italics in the original].

<sup>96</sup> Kelly, 'Not Merely Minded'; Larson, 'Who wants to go to school?'; E. Mellor, *Stepping Stones: The Development of Early Childhood Services in Australia* (Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990).

<sup>97</sup> Indeed, Anderson made mention several times in the Kindergarten Union documents, of working mothers who were forced to leave their children unsupervised.

## **The Construction of ECEC as Outside the Parameters of State Provision: A**

### **Critical Moment in the Construction of a Separate ECEC**

The exclusion of young children from public schools, and the subsequent construction of ECEC as outside the parameters of State provision, marked a critical moment in the construction of ECEC in NSW. It was the exclusion of these young children that created the exigency for separate educational spaces for young children. Moreover, it is likely that working-class parents, who had grown accustomed to sending their children to public school, would readily accept the care and education offered for their young children, first by Free Kindergartens and later by Sydney Day Nurseries. So the young children of the poor, newly excluded from the public school system, provided an ideal population on which the Kindergarten Union could launch their "little venture".<sup>98</sup> The dominant images of children and ECEC that had been constructed within the debates surrounding the exclusion of young children would, however, prove problematic for the establishment of ECEC. For instance, if young children were considered to be incapable of learning in school, then why would educational establishments be required for them? It will be shown in the following chapters how those advocating ECEC, operating within a particular discursive field, developed alternative constructs of ECEC to challenge these limiting constructs of children, and early education.

### **Conclusion to Chapter Five**

In summary, the school attendance of young children was a feature of NSW early school history. Significant numbers of children under the age of six years attended

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<sup>98</sup> M. Anderson, 'The Story of the Kindergarten Union of N.S.W', in Sydney Training College Kindergarten Society, *The Story of Kindergarten in New South Wales* (Sydney: Sydney Training College Kindergarten Society, 1911), 18 – 29, p.19.

schools both before and after the introduction of the Public Instruction Act (1880). But in 1893, children younger than six years were excluded from public schools. I argued above that this exclusion occurred because of the ways education for young children was constructed within economic discourses. In the prosperous 1880s, education included and even expanded to meet the needs of children younger than six years of age. But, in the economic depression of the 1890s, when there was reduction in public expenditure, the cost of education had to be curtailed. Within these economic discourses, education for young children was constructed as an unnecessary expense on children too young to learn, a danger to their health, and outside the parameters of State provision. As such, the exclusion of young children from public schools contributed to the disparity in the provision of education between older and younger children, which possibly disadvantaged poor children and their families, especially their mothers. As identified in Chapter Three, the disparity continues to this day.

## CHAPTER SIX

### FREE KINDERGARTEN CONSTRUCTED AS PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION

Although there are many forms of ECEC practice, contemporary ECEC pedagogies tend to share common underlying assumptions, in particular, about the importance of the individual, and the primacy of play in young children's learning and the evolutionary nature of ECEC. In Chapter Three, I labelled education based on these assumptions as 'progressive education'. These assumptions are the foundation of much that we do in early childhood education and care today. They have become so integral that it is difficult to think of an early childhood pedagogy without these principles at its core. But this has not always been the case.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, in the early days of Australia's colonial history, the education experienced by young children was based on rote learning, without regard to individual differences.<sup>1</sup> But in the late nineteenth century a group of educationalists condemned these educational practices as "deficient" and "misguided elementary education" and advocated educational reform.<sup>2</sup> These educationalists were influenced by the ideas of Fröebelian Kindergarten.

In contemporary Australia, the term 'kindergarten' is used to both label early childhood settings and to refer to a specific period of education. In NSW, in particular, kindergarten is the term used for the first year of state schooling; it is also occasionally used in the names of pre-schools. In the late nineteenth century, however, Kindergarten

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<sup>1</sup> D. Snow, '“But they're only babies”: Policies and practices marginalising the very young from N.S.W state schools, 1788 – 1920', in N. J. Kyle (ed.), *Women as Educators in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Century Australia. Occasional Papers No.1*. (Wollongong: School of Learning, University of Wollongong, 1989)

<sup>2</sup> M. Scheer. 'A scheme for the training of Kindergarten teachers, in order to improve elementary education', *The Australian Teacher*. 1 (7) (1894), p.5.

(and I use a capital here as was the custom of the Kindergarten Union) was used to refer to a particular pedagogy, based initially on Fröebel's methods, as well as to the settings in which this method was practiced. It did not necessarily refer to early education.

Fröebel first published his ideas about education in his *Education of Man* in the 1820s.<sup>3</sup> Yet it was not until the last decade of the nineteenth century that Kindergarten ideas became widely known and popular.<sup>4</sup> At that time, a number of advocates in NSW formed the Kindergarten Union in order to promote Kindergarten methods. They agitated to have Kindergarten principles instilled in public schools, but faced with opposition, they had to find an alternative educational site. The Kindergarten Union established 'Free Kindergartens', in poor areas of Sydney, as a:

... symbol of the new education ... [and] educational progress.<sup>5</sup>

The establishment of Free Kindergartens marked the beginning of the provision of a more systemic provision of 'progressive education', especially designed for young children, outside the state and secular school system.

As illustrated in the diagram below (Figure 7), in this chapter I argue that liberal / progressive discourses, dominant in the late nineteenth century, created a space where multiple constructions of Free Kindergarten as progressive education could emerge.

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<sup>3</sup> F. Fröebel, *The Education of Man* (W. N. Hailmann Trans.) (New York: Appleton-Century, 1826 / 1885).

<sup>4</sup> At this time there were a number of texts published, both overseas and in Australia, that either directly translated Fröebel's writing from German into English, or attempted to convey his ideas. See for instance: W. J. Colville, *The Value of Fröebel's Philosophy and Kindergarten System of Education* (Adelaide: Wood, 1900); S. Blow, *The Mottoes and Commentaries of Freidrich Fröebel's Mother Play* (H. R. Eliot & S. E. Blow Trans.) (New York: D. Appleton, 1895). Fröebel, *The Education of Man*; C. M. Nicol, *Practical Hints on the Kinder-garten System for the Use of Schools* (Melbourne: Melville, Mullen & Slade, 1893); K. D. Wigin, & N. A. Smith, *Fröebel's Occupations* (London: Gay & Hancock, 1896).

<sup>5</sup> Sydney Teachers College Kindergarten Society, *The Story of Kindergarten in New South Wales* (Sydney: Sydney Teachers College Kindergarten Society, 1911), p.1.

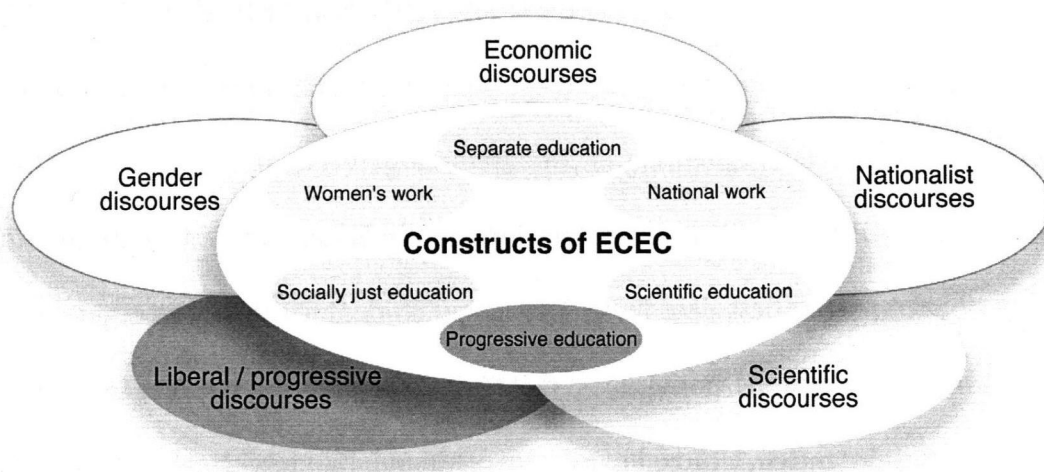


Figure 7: The construction of ECEC as progressive education within liberal / progressive discourses.

I begin by outlining how nineteenth century liberal / progressive discourses constructed humanity as on an ever-improving journey and showing how this new way of viewing the world led to an increasing interest in children and education. In particular, within these discourses, existing educational practices were criticised and Kindergarten education emerged as a reflection of progressive idealism. Within liberal / progressive discourses, Free Kindergartens were constructed as models of progressive educational principles. As they were established outside public education they catered mainly for children younger than six years. Consequently, Free Kindergartens became synonymous with early education. Below I show how Free Kindergarten was constructed within liberal / progressive discourses as: (i) preparation for later schooling; (ii) child-centred pedagogy; (iii) play-based education; and (iv) dynamic and continually evolving pedagogy. Throughout, I problematise these constructions.

## Liberal / Progressive Discourses

The late nineteenth century was an era of great scientific discovery and rapid technological advancement. The world was considered to be on a progressive march.<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, it was declared in *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

The evidence of progress are so many and so well known that it is not necessary to recapitulate them.<sup>7</sup>

Innovations such as telephones, mass transportation systems, electrical lighting and improved communication, held the promise of an easier life. As such, progress was, by and large viewed optimistically.

There were those, however, who became concerned with the gap widening between the rich and poor, which they recognised as socially unjust.<sup>8</sup> They determined to bring about social reform, ostensibly so that people might share in the benefits of progress, but, according to Davis, they also “sought to preserve humanistic and spiritual values in a world dominated by materialism and urban industrialism”.<sup>9</sup> The focus of these progressive reformers was on changing the individual, and their method for achieving this reform was through education. These two dominant progressive discourses, ‘progress’ and ‘reform’, referred to hereafter as liberal / progressive discourses, gave rise to new ways of viewing the child and education.

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<sup>6</sup> W. Reese, ‘The origins of progressive education’, *History of Education Quarterly*. 41 (1) (2001), 1 – 24.

<sup>7</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 July, 1897, p.8.

<sup>8</sup> M. Olssen, J. Codd, & A-M. O’Neill, *Education Policy: Globalization, Citizenship & Democracy* (London: Sage, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> A. F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890 – 1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.3.

## Liberal / Progressive Discourses and the Construction of the Child

New understandings about children emerged from within liberal / progressive discourses in the nineteenth century. The notion of progress had placed nineteenth century Western 'man' at the pinnacle of civilisation. Children's supposed growth from an irrational naivety and incapacity for self-governance, to a rational, abstract thinking, sophisticated, individuality, came to represent Western 'man's' ascendancy from primitive to civilised.<sup>10</sup> As such, there was an increased interest in children and their pursuits.

According to Rickard, children had a high profile in nineteenth century Australian society.<sup>11</sup> They were highly visible, even in middle-class families, and took an active role in family life.<sup>12</sup> Tiffin notes that it was a period when children were becoming increasingly recognised as "a distinct group whose interests were no longer identical with those of their parents or the greater community".<sup>13</sup> Children's interests were seen as peculiar to their immature stage in life, and were somewhat exoticised. Events such as picnics and pantomimes organised especially for children were reported in great detail in the press, and children's playthings and literature were also discussed at some length.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, one columnist stated:

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<sup>10</sup> J. J. Chambliss (ed), *Enlightenment and Social Progress: Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Minneapolis: Burgess, 1971); Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, *Education Policy*.

<sup>11</sup> J. Rickard, *Australia: A Cultural History* (London: Longman, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> It appears that children took their meals and were frequently in the company of adults. See for example L. Harrison, *Amie: Memories of an Australian childhood* (Melbourne: Black, 2002); Clever children, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 March, 1907, p.5. Rickard has suggested that children's high profile in Australia was due, in part, to the difficulty the middle-class had in retaining maids and nurses, which meant that children were often cared for by their parents (Rickard, *Australia*).

<sup>13</sup> S. Tiffin, *In Whose Best Interest?: Child Welfare Reform in the Progressive Era* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982), p.19.

<sup>14</sup> See for instance: Toys in council, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 March, 1893, p.8; An Australian child's series, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 December, 1895, p.8; Picnic at government house, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 December, 1895, p.7; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 December, 1897, p.4; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 September, 1898, p.8.

The intelligent nurture of children's literature is one of the conspicuous features of the progressive age.<sup>15</sup>

Children also featured in popular Australian literature. For instance, Ethel Turner's widely published Australian novel, *Seven Little Australians*, charmingly tells of the childhood exploits of Judy and her siblings.<sup>16</sup> This apparent shift to an interest in children led one correspondent to *The Sydney Morning Herald* to comment:

There are few changes in our own civilisation which are more creditable than the regard now shown for the feelings of children and the relaxation of those rigid forms which once compressed their natural and spontaneous exhibitions of affection.<sup>17</sup>

This remark seems to suggest that the writer regarded interest in children not only as positive in its own right, but also a feature of civilised society.

The increased interest in children was accompanied by an increased concern with their upbringing. There was a burgeoning of written advice on how to best care for and 'train' children.<sup>18</sup> To illustrate, a piece in the popular women's magazine *The Dawn*, entitled "The training of children", strongly advocated the importance of early 'training' in order to advance future generations:

Can there be too much said to bring about the desired result of having future generations evolve a higher life, and live on a more exalted plane, morally, mentally and physically, than their predecessors have ever enjoyed. The training cannot commence too early in life.<sup>19</sup>

Importantly, the article recognised the individuality of temperaments, and argued against corporal punishment:

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<sup>15</sup> Child literature, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 June, 1894, p.5.

<sup>16</sup> E. Turner, *Seven Little Australians* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1894 / 1988), p.7.

<sup>17</sup> Children's letters, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 November, 1893, p.5.

<sup>18</sup> See for instance: E. Ellis, *Advice to Australian Mothers: A Guide to the Care and Management of Children* (London: Ward, Lock and Co, 1902); C. P. B. Clubb, 'A lecture on some points in the feeding and nursing of infants and children: Delivered before the Australian Trained Nurse's Association at the Royal Society's Rooms', Sydney, 16 May, 1901; E. Aitken, *The Australian Mothers' Own Book: A Complete Treatise on the Rearing and Management of Australian Children* (Sydney: George B. Philip and Son, 1912).

<sup>19</sup> The training of children, *The Dawn*, 2 October, 1893, pp.16 – 17.

There can be no cast-iron rules by which to manage children, as different temperaments require different management. What is good for one child may not be beneficial to another. ... Never resort to corporal punishment, it accomplishes no other result than the degradation of the parent and the development of all the brutal instincts in human nature.<sup>20</sup>

Instead of punishing children's 'bad' behaviour, the article suggested that parents should provide positive role models, love and affection, and clear and rational explanations in order that children develop self-governance:

To make a child give up its will or desires, withholding the reason, is to take away its self-reliant spirit, making it a prey to stronger wills when away from parental care ... to be taught to govern itself very early in its life: and the power of self-government is one of the grandest characteristics of a human life. ... Children soon become reasonable beings.<sup>21</sup>

These beliefs, although perhaps not widely held, clearly demonstrated a 'child-centred' approach to child rearing. They focused on the need for the parent to 'know' the individual child and to help them develop into self-governing individuality. An important contributor to the increasing understanding of children was scientific knowledge; the ways ECEC was constructed within scientific discourses will be discussed in the following chapter. As well as creating 'new' understandings of the child, however, liberal / progressive discourses also created new ways of viewing education.

### **Liberal / Progressive Discourses and the Construction of Education**

Within late nineteenth century liberal / progressive discourses there was what Mann has referred to as a "consensus for reform".<sup>22</sup> Educational reform was part of this wider reform movement and reflected a "world-wide current in education" seeking to rethink

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<sup>20</sup> The training of children, *The Dawn*, 2 October, 1893, pp.16 – 17, p.16.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, p.17.

<sup>22</sup> A. Mann (ed.), *The Progressive Era: Liberal Renaissance or Liberal Failure?* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963).

the functions, values and nature of education.<sup>23</sup> Many types of reform were being advocated, prompting Reese to call educational reform in the late nineteenth century “an elusive concept”.<sup>24</sup> Here, I am concerned with the ideas of one particular group of progressive educationalists, a group that were convinced of the benefits of Fröebelian Kindergarten methods for reforming education. For these advocates, operating within liberal / progressive discourses, the old style of education was sorely lacking. In particular, Kindergarten advocates in NSW expressed concern with what they saw as:

... flaws in the foundation on which the structure of general education was based.<sup>25</sup>

These progressive educationalists were concerned that educational practices in public schools were ill-suited to the task of teaching children, particularly the youngest pupils.

To contemporary eyes, many nineteenth century educational practices in public schools seem less than ideal. Despite the attendance of many young children, schools were, by and large, ill equipped to cater for their needs. They were cramped and confined, with children from as young as eighteen months of age sitting alongside their twelve year old peers.<sup>26</sup> The curriculum, taught through the pupil system and based on learning the 3Rs, focused on rote learning and memorisation of dislocated facts, leading Maybanke Anderson (formerly Wolstenholme), one of the founders of the Kindergarten Union, to lament:

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<sup>23</sup> A. Barcan, *A Short History of Education in New South Wales* (Sydney: Martindale Press, 1965), p.201.

<sup>24</sup> W. J. Reese, ‘Grassroots movements during the progressive era’ in R. Lowe (ed.), *History of Education: Major Themes. Vol III Studies in Learning and Teaching* (London: Routledge, 1986 / 2000), 69 – 87.

<sup>25</sup> M. Anderson, ‘The Story of the Kindergarten Union of N.S.W’, in Sydney Teachers College Kindergarten Society, *The story of Kindergarten in New South Wales* (Sydney: Sydney Teachers College Kindergarten Society, 1911), 18 – 29.

<sup>26</sup> M. L. Walker ‘The Development of Kindergartens in Australia.’ MEd thesis, University of Sydney, 1964.

Boys and girls ... sat ... like wooden tubs, waiting for knowledge to be poured into them from other larger tubs.<sup>27</sup>

As twenty-first century educators looking back on these practices it is easy to agree with Anderson's comment that:

The schools were being carried on in a way which left much to be desired.<sup>28</sup>

Progressive educators argued education had to be reformed in order to reflect liberal / progressive ideals. That is, education had to focus on changing the individual by fostering their 'natural' tendency to develop and progress.<sup>29</sup> This meant, they argued, moving away from the teacher-directed, curriculum driven "fact cramming, and repression" typical in traditional schools, to a more child-centred pedagogy exemplified by Fröebelian Kindergarten.<sup>30</sup>

### **Liberal / Progressive Discourses and the Construction of Kindergarten as Progressive Education**

Dewey's name is often linked with progressive education, however, at least some of his ideas seem to have been predated by the work of Fröebel.<sup>31</sup> In particular,

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<sup>27</sup> M. Anderson, *The Free Kindergartens in Sydney: Commemoration Address in 1913* (Sydney: Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, 1914), p.1.

<sup>28</sup> A Free Kindergarten at Newtown: A successful inauguration, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 February, 1898, p.3. There had already been a number of attempts to establish schools in NSW, that were considered to better cater to young children. In the 1820s, for instance, infant schools began to be established (Reese, 'The origins of progressive education'). These infant schools were modelled on infant schools in the United Kingdom based on *Pestalozzian* principles (Scheer, 'A scheme for the training of Kindergarten teachers, in order to improve elementary education'). By the end of the 1880s there were infant departments in several public schools, as well as a number of model schools that had been established in order to train teachers in 'infant methods'. Notwithstanding the attempts of these schools to better meet the needs of young children, the dominant practice in public schools was to teach through drill.

<sup>29</sup> K. Dombkowski, 'Will the real kindergarten please stand up? Defining and redefining the twentieth-century US kindergarten', *History of Education*, 30 (6) (2001), 527 – 545.

<sup>30</sup> Sydney Teachers College Kindergarten Society, *The Story of Kindergarten in New South Wales* p.2.

<sup>31</sup> S. J. Braun, & E. P. Edwards, *History and Theory of Early Childhood Education* (Worthington, Ohio: Charles A. Jones, 1972).

Dewey's arguments that education should be child-centred and that children should develop their individual potential; his assertion that the child would be able to improve society; and his advocacy for education that fostered cooperation and participation are all evident in Fröebel's pedagogy.<sup>32</sup> It was Fröebel who first fully articulated an understanding of children and philosophical arguments about the role of education, into a distinct early childhood pedagogy — the Kindergarten method.<sup>33</sup>

Fröebel was committed to educational reform and for much of his life gave lectures on his method of teaching.<sup>34</sup> He believed all children were essential contributors to humanity's progressive march. For instance, he stated 'man' should:

... be looked upon not as perfectly developed, not as fixed and stationary, but as steadily and progressively growing, in a state of ever-living development, ever ascending from one stage of culture to another towards its aim which partakes of the infinite and eternal.<sup>35</sup>

For Fröebel, humanity was expressed in each person. But each person was wholly individual:

Each human being develops from within, self-active and free, in accordance with the eternal law.<sup>36</sup>

According to Fröebel, humanity developed with each successive generation; each child had a role to play — a destiny — for advancing humanity.

Fröebel also believed in the joy of childhood. He privileged children's play as:

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<sup>32</sup> J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to Philosophy of Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1916).

<sup>33</sup> For an explanation of Fröebel's pedagogy as it was understood at the turn of the twentieth century see Blow, *The Mottoes and Commentaries of Freidrich Fröebel's Mother Play*; H. C. Bowen, *Fröebel and Education by Self-Activity* (London: William Heinemann, 1903); Colville, *The Value of Fröebel's Philosophy and Kindergarten System of Education*; Fröebel, *The Education of Man*; Nicol, *Practical Hints on the Kinder-garten System for the Use of Schools*.

<sup>34</sup> Bowen, *Fröebel and Education by Self-Activity*.

<sup>35</sup> Fröebel, *The Education of Man*, p.17.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, p.13.

... the purest, most spiritual activity of man at this stage, and, at the same time, typical of human life as a whole — of the inner hidden natural life in man and all things.<sup>37</sup>

Through play, he claimed, children learnt for life:

The plays of childhood are the germinal leaves of all later life.<sup>38</sup>

According to Fröebel, without play children would be severely disadvantaged and their growth stunted.<sup>39</sup>

Importantly, for Fröebel, education was essential to assist 'man' attain spiritual enlightenment:

By education, then, the divine essence of man should be unfolded, bought out, lifted into consciousness, and man himself raised into free conscious obedience to the divine principle that lives in him, and to a free representation of this principle in his life.<sup>40</sup>

Fröebel argued that education had to provide an environment where children's natural tendencies to learn and develop could be nurtured and trained. He likened such an environment to a garden for children.

Fröebel's own attempts to establish Kindertages in his native Germany were continually thwarted.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, thanks to the efforts of dedicated followers, his

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<sup>37</sup> Fröebel, *The Education of Man*, p.55.

<sup>38</sup> *ibid*, p.55.

<sup>39</sup> Fröebel acknowledged that many other philosophers valued play including: Plato for whom play was important for learning the value and obedience of laws; Aristotle, who argued play was important for growth; Archytas who said learning should be playful; Luther who argued play in early childhood should not be curtailed and Locke for whom play should be left free and unrestrained. But Fröebel saw play as developmental — leading gradually to playful work. He recognised that play is intrinsically motivating and it is the process that is of concern, whereas in work it is the outcome which is important and rewarding. For Fröebel, just as play brings joy to the child — work can lead to fulfillment and joy (*ibid*).

<sup>40</sup> *ibid*, pp.4 – 5.

<sup>41</sup> Initially, in the early 1800s, Fröebel attempted to establish schools for children, aged seven years and above. But these were troubled times in German politics and his ideas, which were thought to be revolutionary, were met with distrust and apprehension (Fröebel was sometimes confused with his nephew, Karl Fröebel, who was a revolutionary and concerned with women's emancipation.) Poor patronage, rivalries and jealousies and general mismanagement of his institutions eventually led to their

ideas were to enjoy widespread circulation, and became an international movement, spreading first to Western Europe, Britain and the United States.<sup>42</sup> Sadly, Fröebel died not knowing the profound impact his ideas were to have on early childhood education.

Wollons claims that Fröebel's ideas "spread with astounding rapidity".<sup>43</sup> This, however, seems to be something of an exaggeration. In 1937, Raymont wrote that for many decades after Fröebel's death, despite the dedication of his 'disciples', his ideas were often "ignored or misunderstood" and early attempts at Kindergarten were often "a travesty upon Fröebel's ideas".<sup>44</sup> Free Kindertens that more accurately reflected Fröebel's ideas did not emerge in Australia until the late 1890s. Although his ideas might have spread, they did not have a significant impact on education here until the late nineteenth century.

As previously argued, Fröebelian Kindergarten focused on the individual and construed children's growth and development as a natural progression. As such, Kindergarten upheld late nineteenth century liberal / progressive understandings about the importance of the individual and the ascension of 'man'.<sup>45</sup> Kindergarten was constructed within liberal / progressive discourses, as providing an environment in which children's inner tendency to grow and blossom could be fostered in a 'natural' way:

The word "Kindergarten" suggests ... a children's garden, in which the children are human blossoms, to be tended and cherished, like nature's blossoms, not forced to grow and develope [sic] unnaturally by external

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failure (Bowen, *Fröebel and Education by Self-Activity*; L. Cole, *A History of Education: Socrates to Montessori* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1950).

<sup>42</sup> R. Wollons, 'The Black Forest in a bamboo garden: Missionary kindergartens in Japan, 1868 – 1912', *History of Education Quarterly*. 33 (1) (1993), 1 – 35; R. Wollons, *Kindergartens and Cultures. The Global Diffusion of an Idea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

<sup>43</sup> Wollons, *Kindergartens and Cultures*, p.3.

<sup>44</sup> T. Raymont, *A History of the Education of Young Children* (London: Longmans, 1937). Currently, there seems to be a revival of interest in Fröebelian teaching with an international conference being organised for 2006 by the Fröebel Society to re-examine his contribution.

<sup>45</sup> Chambliss, *Enlightenment and Social Progress*.

means, but by means of self-activity, which is to be guided into right channels. ... This institution was not to be a school, a place for instruction, but an educational institution, where free development was to be allowed and nothing to cramp or hinder the unfolding mind.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, Kindergartens appealed to the ideals of progressive reformers. Kindergarten, it was claimed, would be an antidote to nineteenth century materialism:

There is no doubt that the rightful practice of this new educational idea will more than anything else help to overcome crude materialism, to make way for a practical reality, which may be in accord with a corresponding ideality, and this will lead to harmony between real and ideal life.<sup>47</sup>

A small group of progressive educators and thinkers were so convinced of the benefits of Fröebel's methods, that in order to advocate Kindergarten, they formed the Kindergarten Union in Sydney in 1895. The principle objectives of the Kindergarten Union were:

To set forth Kindergarten Principles. To endeavour to get those principles introduced into every school in New South Wales. To open Free Kindertartens wherever possible in poor neighbourhoods.<sup>48</sup>

The first two of these objectives clearly articulate that the primary aim of the Kindergarten Union was to bring about educational reform by introducing Kindergarten methods into public schools. It was hoped that Kindergarten would become:

... an essential and integral part of a great educational scheme.<sup>49</sup>

The Kindergarten Union recognised, however, that to bring about educational reform within the public school system would be a difficult task.

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<sup>46</sup> M. Scheer, 'Some remarks on the Kindergarten system', *The Australian Teacher*. 1 (15) (1895), 5 – 8, p.5 [speech marks in the original].

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*, p.8.

<sup>48</sup> Anderson, 'The Story of the Kindergarten Union of N.S.W', p.19.

<sup>49</sup> F. Newton, 'Modern methods in the kindergarten,' *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 3 (2) (1912), 13 – 14, p.13.

## The 'Failure' of Kindergarten in Public Schools

There had been attempts made earlier than the 1890s to introduce Kindergarten methods into public schools. Some saw the introduction of these methods as a positive development. Several Parliamentarians even commented on the value of the Kindergarten in debates in the House. Sir George Houston Reid (M.P.), for instance, referred to Kindergarten as:

... a system ... of teaching children of the youngest ages which seems in no way to distress their young minds, but, on the contrary, to produce the best results.<sup>50</sup>

Similarly, Kindergarten was considered by Reid to have:

Converted what used to be a barbarous system of learning into a system of education which makes education a positive delight and a source of strength to those children who are taught by it.<sup>51</sup>

Likewise, Reginald James Black (M.P.) stated that, whereas the teaching practices of the 1870s and 1880s resulted in a "deadening of the intellect", within Kindergarten, children were:

... enabled there to attain a very high degree of development with a very slight strain.<sup>52</sup>

Support for Kindergarten seems to have continued well into the new century. For instance, it was claimed in the Women's Pages of *The Sydney Morning Herald* in 1907 that:

One of the great results of these lessons [Kindergarten] is to learn how to turn to account the imagination and budding intelligence of the little ones, and to provide food for their minds without undue cramming or detriment to their health or happiness.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> G. H. Reid, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p.6740.

<sup>51</sup> *ibid*, p.6740.

<sup>52</sup> R. J. Black, *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Volume LXV, 19 April to 17 May 1893, p.6725.

<sup>53</sup> Women's Pages, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 February, 1907, p.5.

Nevertheless, attempts to introduce Kindergarten classes in public schools in the early 1890s were, on the whole, considered unsuccessful by the Department of Public Instruction. Why, if Kindergarten appealed to liberal / progressive idealism, did these attempts to introduce Kindergarten into public schools fail? When reflecting on its history in 1914, advocates of Kindergarten gave several reasons for the failure of public schools to take up Kindergarten. I briefly outline these reasons below.

First, despite many educationalists appealing for educational reform, it seems that the provision of public education received strong public support, making it resistant to criticism and change. To illustrate, in a special feature on the history of education in *The Sydney Morning Herald* in 1897, it was claimed that public education in NSW resulted in:

... enormous intellectual advancement of the colony.<sup>54</sup>

There was evident pride in the NSW public school system. For instance, Jacob Garrard (then Minister for Public Instruction), claimed that the people:

... might be proud of having one of the best systems in the world.<sup>55</sup>

There was a sound basis for this pride. The advent of compulsory schooling in NSW had, for instance, resulted in a substantial increase in literacy levels.<sup>56</sup> For progressive educationalists who were trying to instigate educational change in public schools, strong public support meant they had to struggle against what they considered complacency and general apathy within the education system. There was what Maybanke Anderson

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<sup>54</sup> *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 June, 1897, p.9.

<sup>55</sup> Garrard, The education system of the colony, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 28 August, 1897, p.10.

<sup>56</sup> Barcan, *A Short History of Education in New South Wales*.

considered a “dull pool of unreflecting confidence”.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, according to Anderson, “Sydney was collectively, hopelessly self-satisfied” with its education system.<sup>58</sup>

Second, advocates argued that there was little public awareness of Kindergarten methods. According to Anderson:

To the general public at that time, kindergarten was a word with little meaning. It was German and had something to do with play and folding paper.<sup>59</sup>

Without public awareness about the methods it was difficult for the Kindergarten Union to gain public support for the introduction of Kindergarten methods into public schools.

Third, members of the Kindergarten Union claimed that Kindergarten methods in public schools failed to be widely taken up because they were often misunderstood. For instance, Mary Simpson, an advocate for Kindergarten teaching in public schools, argued that Kindergarten was not practiced in the ‘true spirit’ that Fröebel had intended.<sup>60</sup> The children’s engagement with materials, for example, was controlled by the teacher — rather than allowing them the opportunity to play freely.<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, it was argued that many teachers failed to appreciate the subtleties of Fröebel’s methods and materials. The teachers’ improper practice of Kindergarten methods was possibly due to poor training. There was apparently a lack of opportunity to observe the implementation of Kindergarten principles so, devoid of context, the pedagogy lost a great deal of its meaning; a problem no doubt compounded by the lack of Fröebelian

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<sup>57</sup> Anderson, *The Free Kindergartens in Sydney*, p.1.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*, p.1.

<sup>59</sup> Anderson, ‘The Story of the Kindergarten Union of N.S.W’, p.18.

<sup>60</sup> M. M. Simpson, ‘Recent development in Kindergarten in the state schools of New South Wales’, in Sydney Training College Kindergarten Society, *The story of Kindergarten in New South Wales* (Sydney: Sydney Training College Kindergarten Society, 1911), 12 – 17.

<sup>61</sup> *ibid*.

materials available at that time.<sup>62</sup> All in all, the poor practice of Kindergarten in public schools caused Scheer, the Director of the first Free Kindergarten, and a passionate follower of Fröebelian methods, to lament:

The word Kindergarten is now almost universally known, often misunderstood, and very often the mask for irrational methods of work, often totally in opposition to the principles of its founder.<sup>63</sup>

And Wolstenholme (Maybanke Anderson) commented:

In New South Wales the kindergarten system had been misunderstood. It had suffered from being adopted hastily, and from having been carried out mechanically, and without the spirit which should vitalise it in our schools.<sup>64</sup>

A final reason given for the failure of schools to take up Kindergarten methods was that they did not produce measurable outcomes for children in ways generally accepted or understood. For instance, the DPI considered Kindergarten classes a failure because they failed to produce measurable improvements in children's literacy and numeracy skills.<sup>65</sup> It seems also that advocates of Kindergarten, considered parents to have unrealistic expectations about their children's outcomes from attending Kindergarten, as is illustrated in the following statement by Scheer in *The Australian Teacher*:

They patiently wait ... for outward profits of its magic. But when nothing remarkable happens, when their children do not become prodigies of learning ... then the Kindergarten is condemned as a play-school, good for infants, who after all are not sent to it, because it would be waste [sic] of money, and because it would injure their darlings' health to be sent to *school* so early. They forget that good fruits ripen slowly and naturally, and that their children were either sent rather late, when much had to be undone, or that they were taken away too soon, when permanent influence would not be gained.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> E.M., 'Kindergarten in state schools: The work of Miss E. L. Banks', in Sydney Training College Kindergarten Society, *The story of Kindergarten in New South Wales* (Sydney: Sydney Training College Kindergarten Society, 1911), 6 – 11.

<sup>63</sup> Scheer, 'Some remarks on the Kindergarten system', p.5.

<sup>64</sup> Kindergarten Union, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 August, 1895, p.3.

<sup>65</sup> Walker, 'The Development of Kindergartens in Australia'.

<sup>66</sup> Scheer, 'Some remarks on the Kindergarten system', p.5 [emphasis in the original].

Notwithstanding the reasons given by Kindergarten advocates at the time, the reluctance of teachers to take up Kindergarten methods in public schools may have been due to other factors. For instance, teachers may have been unconvinced that Kindergarten methods worked. Or they may have felt disinclined to take on a 'new' way of teaching — especially considering the poor treatment they had received at the hands of the DPI during the depression of the 1890s, discussed in the previous chapter. Whatever the reason, although advocates working in the public school system persisted in trying to get Kindergarten methods implemented, they met with limited success and Fröebelian Kindergarten methods were never widely implemented within public schools. Later, Montessori's 'system', which was seen by Simpson as, "quite the most forward step in infant education since the days of Fröebel" was taken up much more broadly in public schools.<sup>67</sup>

It is also possible that the Kindergarten movement was looked upon with mistrust by members of the public, particularly by those from the conservative side of politics. The majority of those involved in the Kindergarten Union were female, so there were possibly some misogynistic attitudes towards these women. It is important to note that many of the women involved in the Kindergarten Union, including Maybanke Anderson, were also fighting for women's rights and Australian Federation.<sup>68</sup> They were truly radicals. They wanted to change fundamental laws and systems of Australian society; and here they were advocating a particular form of education. Perhaps, those in

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<sup>67</sup> An experiment in education, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 30 August, 1912, p.9; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 November, 1913, p.9; see also Simpson, 'Recent development in Kindergarten in the state schools of New South Wales'.

<sup>68</sup> J. Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson: Sex, Suffrage and Social Reform* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1993).

power were suspicious of these women's motives. The literature seems to suggest, however, that men were scornful of these women rather than fearful.

According to the Kindergarten Union, in the mid 1890s:

No one wanted to know about kindergarten. ... We were well-meaning enthusiasts. Could worse be said of anyone?<sup>69</sup>

Faced with the challenge of advocating Kindergarten principles to "an unsympathetic world"<sup>70</sup> and eager to see Kindergarten methods employed correctly, the Kindergarten Union considered that:

The best way to make the system known was to start a Kindergarten.<sup>71</sup>

The Kindergarten Union decided to establish a "concrete instance" of Kindergarten methods by establishing a Kindergarten under its own management.<sup>72</sup>

### **The Construction of Free Kindergartens within Liberal / Progressive Discourses:**

#### **Models of Kindergarten**

The Kindergarten Union established Kindergartens in poor areas of Sydney and provided Kindergarten education free of charge; hence their title Free Kindergarten. There were philanthropic reasons why the Kindergarten Union chose to establish Kindergartens in poor areas and these reasons will be taken up in Chapter Eight. The primary reason for establishing Free Kindergartens, however, was to model Kindergarten principles. According to a media report of the inauguration of Newtown Free Kindergarten, for instance, it was to be an "establishment for organising and

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<sup>69</sup> Anderson, *The Free Kindergartens in Sydney*, p.2.

<sup>70</sup> Anderson, 'The Story of the Kindergarten Union of N.S.W', p.19.

<sup>71</sup> M. Scheer, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1895 – 1896*, p.5.

<sup>72</sup> Anderson, *The Free Kindergartens in Sydney*, p.2.

propaganda” of Kindergarten methods.<sup>73</sup> That is, Free Kindergartens offered the Kindergarten Union an opportunity to demonstrate how Kindergarten should be practiced.

As noted previously, in the early days of Free Kindergartens the Kindergarten Union considered that few of the public understood the philosophy. According to Jeanie Dane, a founding member of the Kindergarten Union and the first volunteer assistant in Woolloomooloo Free Kindergarten:

The Kindergarten was an unknown quantity ... [so] every conceivable opportunity was sought to bring the movement under the notice of the public.<sup>74</sup>

There was an optimism that given time, and adequate opportunities to witness the ‘good works’ of Free Kindergartens, the public would come to recognise the benefits of Kindergarten education. For instance, Dane prophesised:

By the wise and practical interchange of a common work and interest, there is being bought about a broader knowledge, a keener sympathy, and the enlarged vision, which cannot fail in future years to carry the Kindergarten work in Australia to the highest levels of achievement.<sup>75</sup>

The Kindergarten Union worked tirelessly to advocate Kindergarten. Members gave public addresses, wrote articles in the press and lobbied government. Also, in order for visitors to observe Kindergarten methods, Free Kindergartens were “always open for inspection by visitors” during the Kindergarten sessions.<sup>76</sup> According to Elizabeth Jenkins (one of the several Kindergarten teachers to come from the United States to

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<sup>73</sup> A Free Kindergarten at Newtown: A successful inauguration, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 February, 1898, p.3.

<sup>74</sup> J. G. Dane, ‘A brief outline of the development of Kindergarten training work in Australia’, in Sydney Teachers College Kindergarten Society, *The story of Kindergarten in New South Wales* (Sydney: Sydney Teachers College Kindergarten Society, 1911), 30 – 38.

<sup>75</sup> *ibid*, p.38.

<sup>76</sup> M. Anderson, *The Story of the Free Kindergartens and Playgrounds* (Sydney: Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, circa 1912), p.13.

assist in the establishment of Kindergarten in NSW), there were “many visitors ... constantly coming to the Kindergartens”.<sup>77</sup> Moreover, ‘demonstrations’ of Kindergarten methods were held to try to make the work of the Free Kindergartens more broadly known.<sup>78</sup> For instance, at the NSW Agricultural Show it was noted that:

The Union had not only a little pavilion and some exhibits, children among them, but a modest stand, into which sympathisers might throw a coin.<sup>79</sup>

Similar demonstrations, but on a larger scale, were held at Sydney Town Hall in October 1912 and November 1914.<sup>80</sup> In the 1912 demonstration, for instance, 600 children were transported to Sydney Town Hall where they engaged with Kindergarten lessons.<sup>81</sup> Overleaf is a page from the programme describing the activities of Woolloomooloo, Newtown and Commonwealth Free Kindergartens during the demonstration (Figure 8 over page).<sup>82</sup>

### **Problematising The Construction of Free Kindergartens as Models of Kindergarten**

The construction of Free Kindergartens as models of Kindergarten methods is problematic. It meant that the children who attended Free Kindergartens were constantly under scrutiny. The demonstration at the Sydney Town Hall is a particularly powerful example of this scrutiny. One can imagine the children ‘playing’ in the mock Kindergarten sets whilst members of the public, who had paid for the privilege, walked around staring, pointing and commenting on their work and throwing coins. These

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<sup>77</sup> E. Jenkins, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1905 - 1906*, p.11.

<sup>78</sup> D. G., ‘The Kindergarten demonstration’, *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 3 (2) (1912), 5.

<sup>79</sup> Anderson, *The Story of the Free Kindergartens and Playgrounds*, p.12.

<sup>80</sup> D. G., ‘The Kindergarten demonstration’.

<sup>81</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Kindergarten Union of NSW, ‘Program of Demonstration of Free Kindergarten Work,’ (Sydney: Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, 1912), p.3.

## PROGRAMME IN DETAIL.

### Woolloomooloo. Opened 1896. 21 Dowling Street.

Colours—Red and Blue.

Director—Miss MAUD LIGHT.

SUBJECT.—*Workers in the Boats.**Morning Talk*—Story of the Argus.*Work Period*—Children of 6 years. Carpentering and Drawing.  
Making and Drawing of Boats.

**Note.**—Woolloomooloo children live close to wharves, and take great interest in the vessels there. This interest is used as the basis for much work. Lessons of bravery, carefulness, watchfulness are learnt while playing sailors. The power to observe correctly is developed, as well as power to think, reason, imagine and express, when talking about, playing and building boats.

5 years. Play with Gift II. Loading and unloading boats.

4½ years. Free drawing. Drawing pictures from the story told in the circle.

4 years. Odd material. Children play freely at "boats."

3½ years. Beadthreading. Ideas are gained of number, form and colour.

3 years. Beadthreading. Concentration is strengthened, and control gained over fingers.

### Newtown. Opened 1898. 37 Thomas St., Camperdown.

Colours—Yellow.

Director—Miss ELSIE McNEIL.

SUBJECT.—*The Dairy.**Morning Talk*—The Work of the Milkman.*Work Period*—

... Children of 6 years. Gift VI. Building Cow Bails.

**Note.**—Through these plays children learn the value of milk as food—the necessity for keeping utensils clean—to give fair measure for payment received. The older children become acquainted with measurement of quarts, pints and half pints.

5 years. Making Butter.

4 years. Clay-modelling. Modelling Milk Buckets.

3 years. Balls. Activity Play.

### Commonwealth. Opened 1900. 10 Bettington Street, Miller's Point.

Colour—Green.

Director—Miss GLADYS BROOKS.

SUBJECT.—*Mother's Care in the Home.**Morning Talk*—Talk on Mother's work during the day.*Work Period*—... Children of 6 years. Handwork and Drawing.  
Making Kettleholders for Mothers.

**Note.**—Love and respect, for Mother and Father is deepened and strengthened by such talks, occupations and games as these. At the same time, child is gaining power, physically and mentally, by participating in life experience.

5 years. Clay-modelling. Modelling kitchen utensils.

4 years. Odd material. Free Play, in which children work at their own ideas.

3 years. Domestic Period. Washing of tables and chairs at end of week.

PALING'S, Sole Agents for BECHSTEIN Pianos.

Figure 8: Program of Kindergarten Demonstration at Sydney Town Hall, 1912.  
From the Kindergarten Union archives, Mitchell Library. Reproduced by courtesy of  
Kindergarten Union.

children of the poor were exhibited for the entertainment of the gentry. They were exemplars of what could be achieved by the application of Kindergarten methods, used to entice subscriptions and monetary donations to further the Kindergarten Union's cause and a clear example of the objectification of children.

What of these children's parents? How did they feel about the education their children received within Free Kindergartens? In the Kindergarten Union documents, there is very little mention of parents' views on their children's education in Free Kindergartens. Perhaps this is indicative of the distinction that existed at the time between the middle-class and the poor, whose thoughts and ideas were not considered important enough to record. From what little was written, it seems that there was initially some concern amongst these parents. For instance, it was reported in the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

Mothers of some of the children had at first viewed with suspicion the (to them) new fangled notions of the Kindergarten, but with the proof before them of their little ones happily passing their time their minds and hearts have been won over.<sup>83</sup>

To contemporary eyes this statement seems patronising to say the least. We only have the Kindergarten Union's interpretation, that parents were "won over", to explain why parents sent their children to Free Kindergarten. This interpretation is possibly influenced by middle-class bias and wishful thinking. There is another, perhaps less passive, interpretation. Perhaps parents considered the benefits they and their children received from attending Free Kindergartens outweighed any potential costs. As previously noted, the poor had grown accustomed to sending their very young children to public school and had probably come to rely on the schools to care for their young

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<sup>83</sup> The Free Kindergarten, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 April, 1897, p.2.

children whilst they worked. It is likely, therefore, that when these children were excluded from public schools, their parents used Free Kindergartens as substitute educational and child minding facilities, irrespective of whether or not they believed in its philosophy.<sup>84</sup>

### **The Construction of Free Kindergarten within Liberal / Progressive Discourses:**

#### **Early Childhood Education and Care**

Fröebel had intended his educational methods to be used throughout childhood, although he placed particular emphasis on education in the early childhood period.<sup>85</sup> The establishment of Free Kindergartens outside the school system, however, meant that they attracted children younger than six years. The ages of the children who attended the first Free Kindergarten in Wollomooloo, for instance, ranged from eighteen months to six years.<sup>86</sup> The young age of the children can be witnessed in the photograph below of the first children and staff to attend Woolloomooloo Free Kindergarten (Figure 9 page 219).<sup>87</sup> Within a short while, Sydney Free Kindergartens were constructed as education and care for children younger than six years or early childhood education. Indeed, the *Sydney Morning Herald* declared:

The idea of the free kindergarten is to take under its care and direction children whose ages range from, say 2 to 6 years — a period when they are not recognised by the Public school system.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> J. Kelly, 'Not Merely Minded: Care and Education for the Young Child of Working Women in Sydney: The Sydney Day Nursery and Nursery Schools Association, 1905 – 1945.' PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1988.

<sup>85</sup> Fröebel, *The Education of Man*.

<sup>86</sup> Dane, 'A brief outline of the development of Kindergarten training work in Australia', p.30.

<sup>87</sup> Anderson, *The Free Kindergartens in Sydney*, p.3.

<sup>88</sup> A Free Kindergarten at Newtown: A successful inauguration, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 February, 1898, p.3.

It is likely that the young children of the poor were considered by the Kindergarten Union as an ideal population on which to model Kindergarten methods. The exclusion of children younger than six years from public schooling had meant that they were no longer the responsibility of the DPI, so Free Kindergartens could work with this group without threatening the established educational institutions and without fear of interference from the DPI. But, the establishment of Free Kindergartens as special spaces for children under school age had some negative consequences.

### **ProblematISING The Construction of Free Kindergarten as Early Childhood Education and Care**

By constructing Free Kindergartens outside the public school system, the Kindergarten Union reinforced the boundary between education for older and younger children imposed by the DPI during the 1890s depression. In so doing, the establishment of Free Kindergartens may have entrenched the ‘naturalness’ of a separate education for young children and contributed to the marginalisation of young children outside mainstream education. If the Kindergarten Union had continued to advocate Kindergarten methods in public schools, rather than establish Free Kindergartens, perhaps the history of a separate ECEC in Australia may have been otherwise.

The construction of Free Kindergartens as early education created a problem for the Kindergarten Union. As discussed in the previous chapter, education for children younger than six years had been constructed within economic discourses as a waste of money, on children too young to learn, and a danger to their health. How then could the Kindergarten Union uphold their work in Free Kindergartens? One way it did so was by constructing Free Kindergarten as preparation for later schooling.



Figure 9: Children and staff of Woolloomooloo Free Kindergarten, 1896. From the Kindergarten Union archives, Mitchell Library. Reproduced by courtesy of Kindergarten Union.

## **The Construction of Free Kindergarten within Liberal / Progressive Discourses:**

### **Preparation for Later Schooling**

The Kindergarten Union provided justification for its work by constructing Free Kindergarten as a foundation on which later schooling could be built:

It is simply a foundation for the work they do afterwards: we don't attempt to teach. In some of the older schools they teach how to read and write, but in the more progressive ones we only lead up to that in an indirect way. We teach the children how to learn. We lay the foundation for science, geography, history, literature, mathematics. We lay the foundation in geography by giving the children clay with which to model islands and other forms of the earth's surface: In mathematics by getting the children to use counters in their games, and so on. In science we give them the chance to watch germs growing, and so stimulate observation.<sup>89</sup>

In ways that would be familiar to today's early childhood teachers, Free Kindergarten was constructed as a means of channeling children's natural curiosity towards 'useful' activities as well as providing children with experiences that familiarised them with basic academic concepts. Kindergarten was not itself concerned with teaching facts, but rather about fostering in children an attitude towards learning:

The object of the system was to bring out those qualities that were good and to prepare the children for their subsequent instruction before entering on their course in life, whatever it might be — to start them on their way with some good principles and with something to hope for.<sup>90</sup>

Building on this preparatory construct, advocates argued that Free Kindergartens performed an important function by 'civilising' children for public school:

It has been found that kindergartens exercise a fostering care upon certain children who, but for its guidance, might learn in the gutter vicious habits which the teachers of the Public schools would never quite overcome or altogether suppress. Not only are the morals of the children looked after, but the intelligence is awakened, and habits of industry, tidiness, and cleanliness are inculcated, and thus when the time comes for the children to be sent on to the Public school the new teacher

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<sup>89</sup> Kindergarten schools: A chat with Miss Buckey, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 August, 1897, p. 5.

<sup>90</sup> A Free Kindergarten at Newtown: A successful inauguration, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 February, 1898, p.3.

realises that he or she, as the case may be, has an excellent foundation to build upon so far as the education of these children is concerned.<sup>91</sup>

This preparatory function became an important differentiation between Kindergarten and later schooling:

One of the essential differences between this and the ordinary school system is that it takes hold of young children even at the age of two years and by practical tuition prepares them for the ordinary course of public school instruction.<sup>92</sup>

The fact that the Kindergarten Union had to construct Kindergarten in relation to later schooling in order to justify its work, suggests that the education and care of young children was not widely valued.

### **ProblematISING The Construction of Free Kindergarten As Preparation for Later Schooling**

The construction of Free Kindergarten as preparation may have been necessary for providing justification for the Kindergarten Union's work, and Free Kindergartens may have indeed provided children with valuable 'pre-school' experiences that assisted in their preparation for schooling. But the construction of Kindergarten as preparation for later schooling might have mitigated against the primary aim of the Kindergarten Union — to establish Kindergarten as an integral part of the public education. In effect, by working outside the public school system, the Kindergarten Union may have further marginalised Kindergarten. It is sobering to consider, as I argued in Chapter Three, that the construction of ECEC as preparation continues to be used as a significant way of justifying ECEC today.

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<sup>91</sup> A Free Kindergarten at Newtown: A successful inauguration, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 February, 1898, p.3.

<sup>92</sup> Newtown Free Kindergarten school, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 October, 1898, p.3.

To summarise so far, within liberal / progressive discourses, Kindergarten was constructed as progressive education and Free Kindergartens were constructed as models of Kindergarten methods. In order to uphold their early childhood focus, the Kindergarten Union constructed Free Kindergarten as preparation for later education. Below I show how within liberal / progressive discourses, Free Kindergarten was constructed as child-centred, play-based education that was continually evolving.

### **The Construction of Free Kindergarten within Liberal / Progressive Discourses: Child-Centred Education**

As previously stated, Fröebelian Kindergarten pedagogy reflected liberal / progressive ideals of individual freedom and notions of self improvement, coupled with social responsibility. Teaching in Free Kindergartens reflected these ideals:

The nobler, saner ideals of which Kindergarten is the embodiment; ideals that recognize the child's right to himself and his happiness; the value of beauty as a factor in education, and the needs of opportunities for the child's self development.<sup>93</sup>

Freedom was considered an important aspect of Free Kindergarten. De Lissa (one of the first Kindergarten teachers trained by the Kindergarten Union who went on to help establish Kindergarten Union in South Australia) for instance, argued:

The child must be free to develop by himself from within.<sup>94</sup>

She asserted that Free Kindergartens gave children the freedom in which to develop their 'natural' potential:

He is conscious of the freedom at once, and, like a plant in the sunlight, begins to grow, and like the plant, to grow naturally — not dwarfed nor

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<sup>93</sup> Sydney Teachers College Kindergarten Society, *The Story of Kindergarten in New South Wales*, p.1.

<sup>94</sup> L. De Lissa, 'The social aspect of Montessori work', *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 4 (2) (1914), 3 – 6, p.3.

deformed as are the plants that man fashioned according to his will, but like those natural growths that are controlled only by the law within themselves — that wonderful, all-pervading law that makes all growth, all development possible.<sup>95</sup>

Further, Free Kindergartens focused on fostering the development of self reflective, thoughtful and active individuals. According to Jenkins:

Education to us is not the mere learning of facts, but rather a life-giving process, which develops the power to think, to do, and to be.<sup>96</sup>

As such, Free Kindergartens were considered by Professor Anderson (a member of the Kindergarten Union, husband of Maybanke Anderson and an academic at the University of Sydney), to be particularly useful as:

Whilst the ordinary methods of teaching were repulsive to children the kindergarten plan was interesting to them.<sup>97</sup>

Indeed, in *The Sydney Morning Herald* it was stated:

It has been found that children who are very indifferent to the ordinary book system of teaching, and who care nothing for the ordinary school lessons, can be taught to take great interest by the methods of instruction adopted in kindergarten life. Here no books are used, but the object aimed at, is to train the whole of the mental powers together, the eye, the ear, the hand, and the mind.<sup>98</sup>

Evident in the statement above is the Kindergarten Union's desire to develop the 'whole child'. Fröebel's notion of unity is important in this regard.

Unity was a key concept in Fröebel's Kindergarten. For Fröebel, unity meant the interconnectedness between 'man', God, nature, science and art.<sup>99</sup> Fröebel developed pedagogical materials — 'gifts' (balls, blocks, sticks, paper, pencils, and clay),

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<sup>95</sup> De Lissa, 'The social aspect of Montessori work', p.4.

<sup>96</sup> Jenkins, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1905 - 1906*, p.9.

<sup>97</sup> The Free Kindergarten, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 April, 1897, p.2.

<sup>98</sup> Newtown Free Kindergarten school, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 October, 1898, p.3.

<sup>99</sup> Fröebel, *The Education of Man*.

‘occupations’ and songs — to communicate this concept.<sup>100</sup> In order to witness this connection, children were encouraged to create nature forms from objects. For instance, a geometrically perfect sphere of clay (object) could be transformed into a kangaroo (nature). The notion of unity is particularly evident in Scheer’s writing:

The basis of all education should be inner connection with outer things; this is the law of development.<sup>101</sup>

And:

Education should be focused on the development of the ‘whole’ individual, whilst the individual recognizes his connection with the world and mankind.<sup>102</sup>

Unity became an important aspect of Free Kindergarten education. Margaret Newman (Kindergarten Union Council Member), in an article exploring unity, declared that it included a number of elements, namely, recognising the whole child — spiritual, intellectual and physical; acknowledging education as a continuous process; fostering cooperation between the home and school; involving the wider community; fostering cooperation between children; developing a close relationship between the child and teacher; recognising relationships between subject matters; and fostering cooperation between teachers and other social agencies.<sup>103</sup> These child- centred elements are very familiar to early childhood educators today.

Importantly, the development fostered in Free Kindergartens was aimed at preparing children for their future responsibility of being a self-supporting individual. For

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<sup>100</sup> See Fröebel, *The Education of Man*, for a discussion on how the gifts taught ‘unity’, and their relationship to modernist art and architecture, see Brosterman’s beautifully illustrated text (N. Brosterman, *Inventing Kindergarten* (New York: Harry N Abrams, 1997).

<sup>101</sup> Scheer, ‘A scheme for the training of Kindergarten teachers, in order to improve elementary education’.

<sup>102</sup> Scheer, ‘Some remarks on the Kindergarten system’.

<sup>103</sup> M. A. Newman, ‘The law of unity in relation to kindergarten and school practice’, *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 1 (2) (1910), 11 – 12. The importance of the home / school connection was seen as integral to the work of the kindergarten teacher (The home and the school, *The Dawn*, 1 September, 1904, p.29).

instance, Ridie Lee Buckey (the second Principal of Woolloomooloo Free Kindergarten and the first of the American Kindergarten teachers to work with the Kindergarten Union in NSW) asserted that Free Kindergarten would prepare children for future employment:

The true aim of all education should be a harmonious unfolding of the truest and best in each individual, and the preparation of each for *their maintenance by honest occupation*.<sup>104</sup>

Similarly, when reporting on the opening of Newtown Free Kindergarten it was claimed:

One of the principal advantages of the system was that it did not aim at teaching the children in the ordinary method that which they could not understand, but it sought to occupy their attention and to win their affection, and by that means to make them better, more industrious, more amenable to authority, and more humane.<sup>105</sup>

Constructions of Free Kindergarten as preparing children for responsible citizenry will be taken up further in Chapter Nine.

## **Problematizing The Construction of Free Kindergarten As Child-Centred Education**

As discussed in Chapters Three and Four, in recent years a number of writers, using Foucaultian analysis, have shown how ECEC has created institutions where children are regulated, controlled and disciplined.<sup>106</sup> Free Kindergartens were amongst the earliest of these “ordered spaces” where children were bought ‘under the gaze’.<sup>107</sup> From this

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<sup>104</sup> R. L. Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1898 - 1899*, p.17 [emphasis in the original].

<sup>105</sup> A Free Kindergarten at Newtown: A successful inauguration, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 February, 1898, p.3.

<sup>106</sup> See for example: G. S. Cannella, ‘The scientific discourse of education: Predetermining the lives of others — Foucault, education, and children’, *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 1 (1) (1999), 36 – 44; S. Grieshaber, & G. S. Cannella, ‘From identity to identities: Increasing possibilities in early childhood’, in S. Grieshaber, & G. S. Cannella (eds.), *Embracing Identities in Early Childhood Education: Diversity and Possibilities* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2001).

<sup>107</sup> Cannella, ‘The scientific discourse of education’, p.41; M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (A. Sheridan Trans) (New York: Vintage, 1979).

perspective, it could be argued that as children operated within the Free Kindergarten they would have begun to construct their identities and regulate their bodies to comply with the middle-class norms established by their middle-class teachers. Free Kindergartens were, then, possibly one of the first sites for the construction of institutionalised childhoods.

Were these ideals of individuality useful for the working-class child? It seems unlikely that within the wider, hierarchical and class-dominated, social context there would have been many opportunities for working-class children to express their individuality. Perhaps Free Kindergartens offered children an opportunity to experience alternative 'ways of being'. Conversely, far from preparing children for life, perhaps they merely set these children up for later disillusionment and failure. Furthermore, the values taught through Free Kindergarten reflected middle-class ideals and were likely to have been incongruent with those taught and valued in the working-class home and street. How children reconciled their experiences in these two diverse settings is unknown, however, because no-one thought to record their stories. Indeed, there are surprisingly few accounts, in the documents examined, about children's day-to-day life in the Free Kindergartens.

It must be acknowledged, however, that children had agency. They were not compelled to go to Free Kindergarten, so their continued attendance signals they must have found them to be rewarding in some way. One charming example of a child's agency in choosing to attend school is recounted by Jenkins:

It was here [Wentworth Free Kindergarten] that a four-year-old boy, whom we were obliged to send home because there was neither room nor chair for him (and we are more than sorry that this is a frequent necessity

in the different Kindergartens) soon returned dragging his own little chair, and triumphantly seated himself in our midst.<sup>108</sup>

Whilst it needs to be recognised that this report is probably a propaganda plea for more funding, it cannot be completely dismissed. It is a powerful example of the agency of the boy. In his choosing to attend Free Kindergarten, one must presume that it was seen, at least by him, as satisfying.

The influence of Free Kindergarten should also not be over-emphasised. Free Kindergartens constituted only one environment in which children operated. Indeed, initially they were only open for three hours a day, so any effects they may have had on children are likely to have been negligible. Further, whilst it must be acknowledged that Free Kindergartens might have regulated children, they shifted away from repetitive rote learning to what is today widely recognised as more appropriate, child-centred pedagogy. One important way that Free Kindergarten was said to be child-centred was in its focus on 'child-friendly' play-based learning, examined below.

### **The Construction of Free Kindergarten within Liberal / Progressive Discourses:**

#### **Play-Based Education**

Within liberal / progressive discourses, play was recognised as an important aspect of childhood and valorised as a natural mode of learning. Spence, for example, stated in a document written in 1908 to promote the work of the Labor party:

The first six years of a child life should be sacred to play.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> E. Jenkins, Annual report of the Kindergarten Training College. *Kindergarten Union Annual Report 1906 - 1907*, p.9.

<sup>109</sup> W. G. Spence, *The Child, the Home, and the State* (Sydney: The Worker Print, 1908).

Kindergarten advocates argued that traditional school practices failed to recognise the importance of play, and instead condemned it as a waste of time. Anderson for instance argued:

For hundreds of years ... children had been playing and working with their hands, beside their fathers and mothers, and the playing boy became the working man, and the girl who nursed her doll became a nursing mother. Labor [sic] was honourable, a child was a pleasure. But a new ideal of education was born, and men began to make schooling a fetish. For the worship of their idol, they built more and more schools, insisted on more and more subjects for study, and taught the child, if not directly, at least by inference, that the acquirement of knowledge contained in books, was the most important business of life; that labor [sic] with the hands was work to be ashamed of, and that play was a waste of time.<sup>110</sup>

Anderson claims above that play, once valued as an important means through which children learnt, was ignored by educators in the late nineteenth century. By contrast, in Free Kindergarten play was reinstated as the primary means through which children learnt and developed tendencies to work. Play, then, was not merely about having fun, but rather a useful tool for training the child. Fraser, for instance, in an article in the *Australian Journal of Education* argued:

The play instinct affords the teacher and parent a ready opportunity of training the child into right ways of living.<sup>111</sup>

As such, play was not free, it was ordered and structured by the environment and materials made available to children. As previously mentioned Fröebel's 'gifts', 'occupations' and songs were used purposefully, to communicate the concept of unity.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, the 'circle' was used as a visual representation of continuity, community and sharing.

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<sup>110</sup> Anderson, *The Free Kindergartens in Sydney*, p.5.

<sup>111</sup> D. H. Fraser, 'The place and power of play in child culture', *The Australian Journal of Education*. 8 (1) (1910), 7 – 9, p.7.

<sup>112</sup> See Fröebel, *The Education of Man*; Brosterman, *Inventing Kindergarten*.

The program of the 1912 Demonstration in Sydney Town Hall (referred to earlier) gives an insight into some of the ‘play’ activities, such as, washing and caring for dolls’ cloths, ‘carpentering’ and drawing, making kettleholders, and clay modeling, that children experienced in Free Kindergarten. It is not clear whether there was gender differentiation in the play activities provided for children. Interestingly, the program refers to the ages of the children engaged in each activity, but not their gender. Whether this means that Free Kindergarten did not differentiate between boys and girls, and either could participate, or whether it simply reflects an assumed understanding that certain activities were only open to boys or girls, is open to speculation. In the few photographs of children in Free Kindergartens in Kindergarten Union documents, there appears to be gender segregation. For instance, in the following photograph (Figure 10 page 231), girls are engaged with domestic chores such as cleaning and boys with woodwork.<sup>113</sup>

### **Problematising The Construction of Free Kindergarten As Play-Based Education**

As play was used as a tool for learning in Free Kindergartens, their establishment could be said to mark the beginning of the systematic colonisation of children’s play discussed in Chapter Three. In part, adults used play to control and manage children’s behaviour and instill particular values; what was once considered the domain of children, now became controlled by adults. Adults decided what materials children should play with and how that play should be conducted. Nevertheless, despite these criticisms, the shift to play-based learning was perhaps a positive step for the education

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<sup>113</sup> Anderson, *The Free Kindergartens in Sydney*, p.7.

of young children. Play-based learning constituted a move away from the likely monotony of rote learning to what Reese refers to as a more “gentler pedagogy.”<sup>114</sup>

### **The Construction of Free Kindergarten within Liberal / Progressive Discourses:**

#### **Dynamic and Shifting Education**

Liberal / progressive discourses suggest that ideas should continually evolve and be improved upon. Within the Kindergarten Union texts there is ample evidence of a desire in Free Kindergartens to modify and develop ideas. In the early days, the curriculum appears to have consisted mainly of Fröebel’s ‘occupations’, such as weaving, pricking and embossing.<sup>115</sup> But it seems these practices were soon modified or discarded. Dane saw the teaching of the ‘occupations’ as an initial step in the evolution of the Kindergarten in Australia. She wrote of these early days rather dismissively as:

... the old German method of training, and as such is interesting, in that it supplied one phase of the evolution of the Kindergarten ideal.<sup>116</sup>

Dane describes this work as both tiresome and frustrating for young children:

They were expected to perforate their own sewing cards, preparatory to outlining the designs, and these same designs were often so elaborate that days, and even weeks, were required for their completion. Small wonder, then, was it when a child, rebelling under the continuous strain, would suddenly tear his card in pieces, and trample it under foot. I can well remember the look of one child, a boy of four and a half years old, after an outburst of this kind. He sat and gazed vindictively at the ruins of his sewing-card for a few moments, and then, raising his head with a defiant look, exclaimed, “Gee! But I do wish my feet wus [sic] bigger, and that I had four of ‘em. So that I could kick that old tiger so hard that he’d bust all to pieces.” And he meant it too, poor little chap.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> Reese, ‘The origins of progressive education’, p.10.

<sup>115</sup> Dane, ‘A brief outline of the development of Kindergarten training work in Australia’.

<sup>116</sup> *ibid*, p.32.

<sup>117</sup> *ibid*, p.32.



Out of doors after eleven o'clock lunch. One group is washing up, another is busy at carpenter work, while that in the background is playing in the sand box.

Figure 10: Children playing in Golden Fleece Free Kindergarten, Chippendale, circa 1913.  
From the Kindergarten Union archives, Mitchell Library. Reproduced by courtesy of  
Kindergarten Union.

It seems Dane had little sentimentality for the “old German method”:<sup>118</sup>

It really seemed in those days as though all the occupations were devised and planned simply and solely with the one idea of testing the endurance of both teachers and children to the very utmost.<sup>119</sup>

Similarly, Newman, when reflecting on the changes in Kindergarten, wrote that at first the focus was on handiwork:

... of what we would now consider, a most impractical and useless character ... but the strain — un-necessary strain — must have been great on both teacher and children.<sup>120</sup>

She went on to say that the Kindergarten student teachers of 1911 should be grateful for the work that had gone on before:

She [the teacher] needs to remember, in all humility, that her path is cleared of obstacles only because other feet have previously traversed it, and in the hard, toilsome journey have worn away the inequalities and smoothed out all the rough places.<sup>121</sup>

Those working in Free Kindergartens had to be willing to change with the times. The treatment of Scheer, perhaps illustrates the fate of those unwilling to change their practices. Scheer was reported as having:

... severed her connection with the Kindergarten.<sup>122</sup>

This rather harsh description of Scheer's resignation, along with the fact that she left before a replacement had been identified, seems to suggest that her departure was acrimonious. Moreover, in an article for *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*, on the history of Wolloomooloo Free Kindergarten, Mc Kern gives a rather short account of Scheer's contribution:

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<sup>118</sup> Dane, 'A brief outline of the development of Kindergarten training work in Australia'. p.32.

<sup>119</sup> *ibid*, p.32.

<sup>120</sup> M. A. Newman, 'Some phases in Kindergarten history', *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 1 (4), (1911), 5 – 7, p.5.

<sup>121</sup> Dane, 'A brief outline of the development of Kindergarten training work in Australia', p.33.

<sup>122</sup> *ibid*, p.33.

Miss Scheer carried on the work of the kindergarten until the arrival of Miss Buckey, an American trainer. Work was now carried forward on a better basis, and kindergarten began to take on a brighter aspect.<sup>123</sup>

A willingness to try new ideas in the Free Kindergarten was evident when they experimented with implementing some of Montessori's 'methods':

At present the method of work in the Kindergartens is in a very transitory state. We have been influenced by Madame Montessori's books, in which she pleads for freedom for the little child, and in which she states very clearly what real freedom is. So we have departed in many instances from the formal morning programme, and the work is in consequence freer. Fröebel preached freedom and self discipline just as strongly, and Madame Montessori has helped us to see this more clearly. So far we are in accord with Montessori, but only so far. ... We shall then be able to judge fairly the advantage of the methods, and to introduce those we think well of into our Free Kindergarten.<sup>124</sup>

Although Montessori was initially seen as a potential threat to Kindergarten methods, Kindergarteners (the term used in Kindergarten Union documents for Kindergarten teachers) were reassured that this method was:

... akin to Kindergarten and not antagonistic to it, nor was it meant to supercede kindergarten.<sup>125</sup>

Montessori's ideas while somewhat influential, were never fully embraced by Free Kindergartens, however.<sup>126</sup>

The tendency of teachers to experiment and adapt Kindergarten methods in Free Kindergartens was due, in part, to their willingness to gather, share and disseminate information and ideas. In their quest to develop greater understanding of Kindergarten

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<sup>123</sup> M. Mc Kern, 'The history of Woolloomooloo Kindergarten', *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 1 (2) (1910), p. 8.

<sup>124</sup> H. Dumulo, *Kindergarten Union NSW Annual Report 1913 – 1914*, p.13.

<sup>125</sup> F.L.P., 'Miss Simpson on the Montessori system of education', *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 3 (2) (1912), p. 12.

<sup>126</sup> Petersen provides a comprehensive discussion of how Montessorian ideas were introduced into Australia, by exploring the lives and work of Martha Margaret Simpson (an important figure in NSW state school kindergarten and lecturer at SKTC) and Lillian de Lissa (who Petersen refers to as "the greatest of Australian kindergarteners" p.254). He argues that several prominent figures of Kindergarten Union, most especially Harriet Dumulo (principal of SKTC) were antagonistic to Montessorian methods

and its practice, these Australian women pioneers travelled widely, throughout Australia and overseas.<sup>127</sup> Travelling to Germany, or 'Fröebel Land' as it was called, was seen as particularly valuable by Zoe Benjamin, a significant figure in the development SKTC:

It is that man who comes back to his own land greater in mind and heart, with something that time can neither take away, nor dim. It will be in his spirit that the great majority of the kindergarteners and followers of Fröebel will leave America to go on this pilgrimage to Fröebel Land: their aim being not only to widen their knowledge of educational conditions abroad, but to enlarge their experience so as to enrich their work through their own enriched lives, and to try to get into closer and more intimate touch with the spirit of the great Kindergarten Father.<sup>128</sup>

There was a belief that those who travelled would:

... come back with renewed vigour and spiritual strength to fight the battles of ignorance, vice and squalour.<sup>129</sup>

Travelling, then, was constructed as hugely beneficial for the Kindergarten teacher. It is remarkable that these women travelled so far and wide, given the cost and time involved with such journeys.

As well as Australian Kindergarteners travelling abroad, 'foreign' experts were invited to Australia. For instance, several of the early principals of Sydney Kindergarten Training College (the training school for Kindergarten teachers established by the Kindergarten Union) were experts from the United States. These American women were seen as crucial for the development of the Kindergarten movement and Free Kindergartens in Australia and those in the Kindergarten Union were full of praise for them. Dane, for instance, when describing the work of Buckey, who replaced Scheer, stated that Buckey's engagement:

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and highly obstructive (R. C. Petersen, 'The Montessorians: M. M. Simpson and L. de Lissa', in C. Turney (ed), *Pioneers in Australian Education* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1983), 231 – 269).

<sup>127</sup> 'Kindergarten news', *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 4 (4) (1913), 5 – 6.

<sup>128</sup> Z. B., 'The Fröebel pilgrimage', *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 1 (3) (1911), 3 – 4, p.3.

<sup>129</sup> *ibid*, p.4.

Led to the laying of a very sure and lasting foundation of the movement which has since prospered so wonderfully. The teaching was at once systematised. Old methods were replaced by newer and better ones.<sup>130</sup>

There is evidence that the curriculum studied by student Kindergarten teachers in the training school changed considerably after these American principals arrived, in particular to include psychology and child study.<sup>131</sup> These new ways of understanding children had implications for the construction of Free Kindergartens. Indeed, as will be shown in the following chapter, there was a shift in the emphasis of teaching in Free Kindergartens, away from a purely Fröebelian Kindergarten pedagogy based on the gifts and occupations, to a curriculum informed by scientific understandings of the child.

There was, then, a belief that Free Kindergartens in Australia could learn from their overseas counterparts:

Although various forms of kindergarten work have been for some time in existence here, there is necessarily something to be learned by comparison with other countries. Some methods may be capable of improvement, and some may be practically obsolete. They do these things better in America.<sup>132</sup>

The United States, where the Kindergarten movement had been particularly successful, became an important source of new ideas and ways of thinking about ECEC for the Kindergarten Union in NSW. Very early in the development of Free Kindergartens in NSW, however, Kindergarten began to take on its own distinct Australian 'flavour'. As Anderson said:

Social conditions in other countries were unlike those of this young country.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Dane, 'A brief outline of the development of Kindergarten training work in Australia', p.33.

<sup>131</sup> 'Training and certificating of Kindergarten teachers', *The Australian Teacher*. 1 (36) (1899), 3 – 16.

<sup>132</sup> Free Kindergarten schools, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 September, 1893, p.4.

<sup>133</sup> Anderson, 'The Story of the Kindergarten Union of N.S.W', p.23.

Australia was an emerging nation with unique characteristics and concerns. Australia's distance from Europe meant there was little Fröbelian Kindergarten material available. Even if it had been available, there was little money with which to purchase it. So the teachers were compelled by necessity to use materials that were at hand, such as waste materials and materials from the environment, including, paper, cardboard, sticks, clay, grass, straw and wool.<sup>134</sup> Further, many of Fröbel's 'Mother Songs' did not make sense in the Australian context and so new songs that reflected Australian seasons and climate were written.<sup>135</sup>

### **Problematizing The Construction of Free Kindergarten As Dynamic and Shifting Education**

The story of the way Kindergarten education was taken up in Australia is a reflection of the wider international Kindergarten movement. Each country that took up Fröbel's Kindergarten modified his ideas and made them their own. Wollons has examined what she refers to as the global diffusion of Kindergarten. She states: "Borrowing nations did not assume a passive mimicry of the foreign institutions, nor did they accommodate themselves to the foreign kindergarten. Rather, all borrowing nations exerted a powerful and political agency over borrowed ideas".<sup>136</sup> In Australia, although Kindergarten ideas were 'borrowed' from Fröbel and later the United States, these were adapted to reflect the local conditions, and a distinctive Australian Kindergarten began to evolve.

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<sup>134</sup> Fröbelian student work books and the notes of teaching staff, held in the Institute of Early Childhood Collection Macquarie University, provide examples of the teaching practices and materials used.

<sup>135</sup> Blow, *The Mottoes and Commentaries of Friedrich Fröbel's Mother Play*.

<sup>136</sup> Woollons, 'The Black Forest in a bamboo garden', p.7.

The dynamic and shifting nature of Free Kindergarten can be interpreted as evidence of an innovative pedagogy, with advocates who were willing to take risks and who were open to the challenge of new ideas. On the other hand, it was in danger of seeming faddish and unstable. Perhaps, because Free Kindergarten was not seen as an inalienable right, the shifting nature is indicative of advocates attempts to reposition Free Kindergarten within the prevailing discourses, so that they remained viable and relevant in an ever-changing society.

### **Conclusion to Chapter Six**

In this chapter I explored how Free Kindergartens emerged within liberal / progressive discourses as a means for demonstrating Kindergarten methods but soon became synonymous with early education. I showed how Free Kindergarten was constructed in multiple ways as focused on the individual, play-based and dynamic and shifting. I problematised these constructs, highlighting how power operated through Kindergarten to contribute the objectification of children and their marginalisation outside public schooling, and how Free Kindergarten upheld middle-class notions that may have failed working-class children. Despite the concerns I have raised, I believe the construction of Free Kindergarten within liberal / progressive discourses was a positive development that led to an innovative education that suited the needs of young children. In the following chapter, I explore how Free Kindergartens were constructed within scientific discourses and how these discourses legitimated its practices.