

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### ECEC CONSTRUCTED AS SCIENTIFIC EDUCATION AND CARE

As discussed in Chapter Three, scientific discourses inform contemporary ECEC in many ways. Science influences our ideas about what a child 'is' or 'can be', the types of services and instruction we provide for children, and our evaluation of the efficacy of those services and practices. Scientific methods and knowledge have become inextricably linked to all we do. But science has not always been a dominant way of viewing the world. It was in the nineteenth century that scientific discourses became dominant and began to inform early education practices.

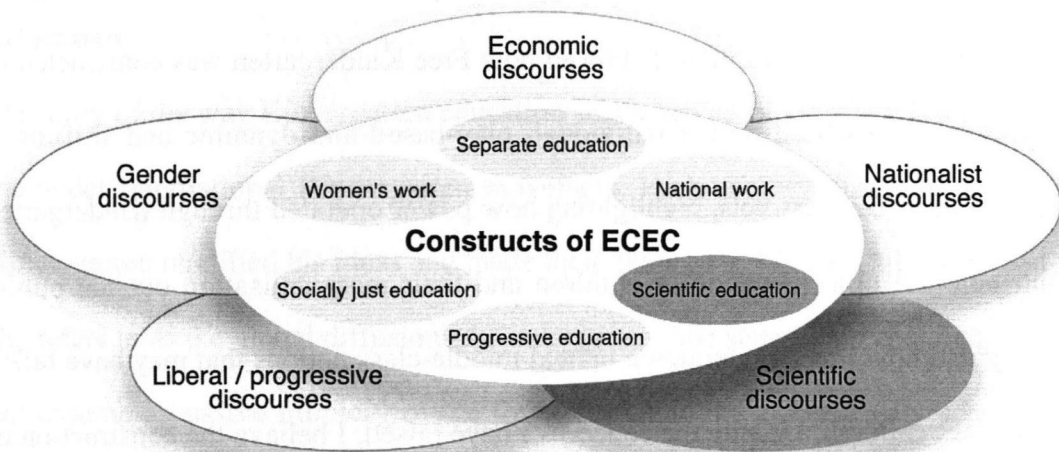


Figure 11: The construction of ECEC as scientific education and care within scientific discourses.

My aim in this chapter is to show how, as is illustrated in the diagram above (Figure 11), the construct of ECEC as 'scientific' emerged within scientific discourses, and how this relationship was problematic. I begin by briefly discussing the rise in dominance of scientific discourses in the nineteenth century. I then go on to describe how, towards the end of that century, within scientific discourses, children became objects of scientific enquiry and constructed as vulnerable and susceptible to the environments into which

they were born. Next, I show how constructs of scientific education and care emerged. Scientific education was considered to be education that either utilised scientific understandings to inform its practice, or education that used scientific methodology to study its practices. I argue that, within these scientific discourses in NSW, Kindergarten was constructed as: (i) education based on scientific knowledge; and (ii) scientific teaching. I contend power operated through constructs of scientific Free Kindergartens in several ways as they contributed to an understanding of a child's body as 'public', that is, subject to scrutiny, measurement, comparison, and transformation for the common good. I also acknowledge, however, the value of scientific constructs for those advocating ECEC.

### **The Rise of Scientific Discourses in the Nineteenth Century**

The nineteenth century was an era of great scientific discovery and rapid technological advancement. Advocates saw science as a way of contributing to humanity's understanding of, and dominance over, nature.<sup>1</sup> Previously dominant ways of seeing the world were challenged and religious explanations were replaced with rationalist interpretations. By the end of the century, in the West, science had become a dominant way of understanding the world.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> R. R. Gillespie, 'The early development of the scientific movement in Australian education — child study', *Journal of the Australian and New Zealand History of Education Society*. 2 (2) (1982), 1 – 14.

<sup>2</sup> W. R. Charlesworth, 'Darwin and developmental psychology: Past and present', *Developmental Psychology*. 28 (1) (1992), 5 – 16. There was great public interest in science and technology. This is shown for instance, in Sydney's hosting of an International Exhibition in 1879 – 80 to celebrate the advances in science and industry of the colony. A. Sharpe, *Pictorial History: City of Sydney* (Alexandria, Australia: Kingsclear, 2000).

In particular, the scientific method was hailed as a deliverer of objective and unquestionable truths. Faith in the scientific method is evident in the following statement in *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

Science is progressive. Each new generation of men born into the world is taught all that its father had to teach. ... Compared with us, they were but the children and babes of the race ... We are at the highest point of evolution. The progress of science often causes conflict. The new truth has to be correlated with all other known truths, or supposed truths. It has to struggle for its life, and that struggle results in the survival of the fittest, that is, of the really true. Sometimes the new truth is not really true, but only a fancy. It perishes in the struggle. But painful as the process may be, the progress of science must and cannot be hindered.<sup>3</sup>

Apparent in the above statement, especially in the phrase “survival of the fittest”, is the influence of Darwin’s evolutionary theory. Darwin’s ideas scientifically explained humanity’s progress; only the strongest and most adaptable would survive. As will be shown below, his ideas had a significant impact across many disciplines including child study and education.<sup>4</sup>

Science was also hailed as a means for improving the social condition. Advocates argued that knowledge from scientific discovery could be used to bring about technological changes and improve life chances, both of the ‘underprivileged’ individual, and the broader community. Science could thus make the world a better place in which to live, freeing people from drudgery, and enabling them to seek enlightenment.<sup>5</sup> Science did indeed lead to social improvements. For instance, a number of initiatives taken by the NSW Government to improve the health of the colony, such

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<sup>3</sup> Theology — A progressive science, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 August, 1894, p.7.

<sup>4</sup> E. Weber, *Ideas Influencing Early Childhood Education: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1984). Evolutionary theory clearly had a significant impact on the era but there have been some doubts raised about Darwin’s influence on psychology. Charlesworth, ‘Darwin and developmental psychology’).

<sup>5</sup> Gillespie, ‘The early development of the scientific movement in Australian education — child study’; A. Mann (ed.), *The Progressive Era: Liberal Renaissance or Liberal Failure?* (New York: Holt,

as the development of sewers, the building of hospitals, mass immunisation and the introduction of industrial legislation to protect employees and so on, were all made possible by new scientific understandings.<sup>6</sup> As a consequence, at the end of the nineteenth century science was, by and large, viewed optimistically.

Scientific discourses, then, were dominant and had a fundamental impact on the way the world was viewed. The imperative, from a scientific perspective, was to know the world rationally and objectively, and through this knowledge contribute to the 'improvement' of the social condition. Of particular significance here, were the ways children and education became known and constructed within scientific discourses.

### **Scientific Discourses and the Construction of the Child**

Within scientific discourses children become a focus of scientific enquiry. In particular, Darwin's evolutionary theory gave credence to the scientific examination of the human species and legitimated child development as an important area of scientific study.<sup>7</sup> His ideas gave renewed rigour to the age-old debates over whether nature or nurture was more significant for children's development. Darwin challenged the dominant view of biological determinism and opened the possibility for recognising intergenerational

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Rinehart & Winston, 1963; G. E. Mowry, *The Progressive Era, 1900 – 1920: The Reform Persuasion* (American Historical Association: Washington, D. C., 1972).

<sup>6</sup> Public concern with the water supply can be evidenced for instance in the weekly reporting of The Water and Sewage Board meeting in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (See for instance: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 May, 1893, p.8). For a discussion of health measures taken see: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 May, 1894, p. 4. Examples of legislation include for example Lead-poisoning regulations enacted in 1894 (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 October, 1894, p.5). In NSW, an examination of the working conditions in factories revealed the exploitation of the poor — called sweating. Despite a reticence to interfere with employment conditions, a recognition that the intolerable conditions might lead to social unrest, resulted in Factories Acts being passed in 1896, for the supervision and regulation of factories.

<sup>7</sup> C. Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favored Races in the Struggle for Life* (London: Ward, Lock & Co., 1901); A. Hulbert, 'The century of the child: A history of American scientific child rearing', *The Wilson Quarterly*. 23 (1) (1999), 14.

change.<sup>8</sup> In other words, according to Darwin's perspective, it was possible to view each generation as having the potential to improve on their forbears and contribute to social progress; rather than being destined to follow in their parents' footsteps. As such, Darwin spawned interest in identifying the factors that led to particular outcomes for children.

One of the first to scientifically examine child development, and whose ideas are particularly significant for ECEC, was G. Stanley Hall.<sup>9</sup> Hall's child study movement had its origins in the 1880s when the study of child development was conducted at several universities in the United States. Hall was interested in generating universal explanations of children's development. He carefully observed and measured children and was interested in their predispositions, their beliefs and habits and what types of objects they cared for. Hall posited a theory that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny. That is, he saw in each child's development evidence of the development of mankind — from primitive, to abstract, rational thinking intellectual. This view saw children as manifestations of 'man's' potential for progress.<sup>10</sup>

Although Hall's methods have been criticised as lacking scientific rigour, he nevertheless, provided valuable insights into children's growth and development.<sup>11</sup> Child study led to an understanding of childhood as a distinct period. It also drew attention to children's health and created an awareness of the importance of play for

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<sup>8</sup> Charlesworth, 'Darwin and developmental psychology'.

<sup>9</sup> S. White, 'Stanley Hall: From philosophy to developmental psychology: APA Centennial Series', *Developmental Psychology*. 28 (1) (1992), 25 – 34.

<sup>10</sup> No Author, 'Granville Stanley Hall. A reprint of an article first published in *The American Journal of Psychology*. 35 (3) (1924),' *The American Journal of Psychology*. 100 (3 – 4) (1987), 365 – 375; No Author, 'Stanley Hall: Founder of The Journal of Genetic Psychology', *The Journal of Genetic Psychology*. 152 (4) (1991), 397 – 403.

<sup>11</sup> White, 'Stanley Hall'.

children's development. These ideas upheld the progressive view, discussed in the previous chapter, and continue to be highly influential in contemporary ECEC. But perhaps most significantly, Hall's work, and that of his colleagues, highlighted the important role the environment played on children's development. For instance, like many of his time, Hall was interested in finding the root causes of moral degeneracy. From his observations, Hall argued that, contrary to popular belief, working-class children were not born 'inferior'; rather it was the circumstances of their birth — or their environment — that led to their disadvantage.<sup>12</sup>

Recognition of the importance of the environment focused attention onto the environments into which children were born. Children were considered vulnerable to the physical and economic conditions into which they were born, as well as susceptible to their moral surroundings. In particular, it was argued that children raised in a morally degenerate environment, interpreted as an environment that did not uphold middle-class ideals of cleanliness, order and discipline, would assimilate the morally degenerate ideals of those around them, thereby perpetuating degeneracy to the detriment of the whole society.<sup>13</sup> Such dominant ideas legitimated scrutiny of the parenting practices of those considered to be less morally upright — the working-class. The possible impact of this scrutiny on the working-class will be discussed in the following chapter.

Perhaps more positively, these new scientific understandings of children, and the impact the environment had on their development, made it possible to consider that the effects

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<sup>12</sup> White, 'Stanley Hall'.

<sup>13</sup> A. T. Allen, "'Let us live with our children': Kindergarten movements in Germany and the United States, 1840 – 1914', *History of Education Quarterly*. 28 (1) (1988), 23 – 48.

of disadvantage might be ameliorated.<sup>14</sup> It was argued, for instance, if the environment could be modified, and children shown alternative ways of being, then moral degeneracy could be eliminated and society could progress towards enlightenment.

In NSW, the importance of 'scientifically studying' children was reported in the public arena. For instance, in 1894 in a piece entitled 'Babies as subjects', *The Sydney Morning Herald* gave extensive coverage to a report on the child study of Millicent Shinn of the United States, explaining:

The evolutionists, who teach that the children before birth and after, lives through the history of the human race, were desirous of having some one begin to take accurate observation in the new field.<sup>15</sup>

*The Dawn* called for laboratories to be set up in NSW for the study of children in order to categorise them and intervene appropriately for the betterment of society:

It has been suggested that laboratories be established here ... for the scientific measuring and testing of children to discover their mental and physical calibre, so that they might be graded and classed according to their capabilities. Then when any abnormal condition is discovered, that the child be at once taken in hand, and by a special mode of training saved from falling into further degeneracy. Thus, as well as giving fair play to the child, lessening our percentage of criminals, inebriates, and other delinquents, by terminating at an early stage all tendencies that lead to these pernicious results.<sup>16</sup>

An opinion seems to have prevailed that child study could lead to greater knowledge about how best to intervene in the lives of children and thereby improve the social condition. This opinion is expressed in the following piece entitled 'The physical deviations of children', published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

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<sup>14</sup> S. Tiffin, *In Whose Best Interest?: Child Welfare Reform in the Progressive Era* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982).

<sup>15</sup> Babies as subjects, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 December, 1894, p.3. Millicent Shinn was later to be awarded a doctorate for her child study work. No mean task for a woman in male dominated academe. For a detailed examination of child study in Australia see Gillespie, 'The early development of the scientific movement in Australian education — child study'.

<sup>16</sup> Arks, Schools for defective or deficient children, *The Dawn*, 1 November, 1902, p.13.

It is hoped that the scientific classification of children and enumeration of conditions existing among them will lead to the adoption of means of social improvement.<sup>17</sup>

An interesting example of how the scientific examination and subsequent categorisation of children was thought to be valuable to society is evident in the following statement in *The Sydney Morning Herald*, on the importance of studying children's minds:

As association for studying the minds of children, so as to teach them individually to attain their highest possible development was founded some years ago in Sydney. Those who have interested themselves in the subject say that whatever faculty of brain power has developed at 13 years of age will be dominant at 40 years. The thirteenth year is regarded as the limit of child-life from a mental aspect. Children often do not take after their parents. If the child is traced back to his great-grand people — only three generations — one finds 100 persons whose cast of brains he may inherit. Many children inherit badly-balanced brain-power. They are then selfish or dull. There should, say the specialists, be mind inspectors, as well as health inspectors, and a child with a diseased brain should be isolated.<sup>18</sup>

This piece is advocating the controlling of children's bodies and minds. As such, the observation, measurement and testing of children was inexorably linked to the categorisation of children and intervention into their lives.

To summarise so far, within late nineteenth and early twentieth century scientific discourses, children came into "clearer prominence".<sup>19</sup> Not only were children constructed as interesting 'objects' for scrutiny; they were seen as important sites of intervention, and through them society itself might be transformed. So much were children the centre of study that early in the twentieth century it was claimed that this was to be the "century of the child":

It has often been said that whereas the nineteenth century was the century of the woman, the twentieth century is the century of the child.

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<sup>17</sup> The physical deviations of children, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 9 November, 1895, p. 6.

<sup>18</sup> Progressive proposals, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 August, 1906, p.5.

<sup>19</sup> D. H. Fraser, 'The place and power of play in child culture', *The Australian Journal of Education*. 8 (1) (1910), 7 – 9.



The child has been studied, considered, and developed just now to such an extent unknown before.<sup>20</sup>

A particularly valuable means of intervening in children's lives was through education.

As discussed below, education itself was being transformed by scientific discourses.

### **Scientific Discourses and the Construction of Education**

Within scientific discourses two dominant constructs of scientific education and care emerged. First, education was constructed as scientific in that it applied scientific knowledge directly to its practice.<sup>21</sup> In particular, the developing field of psychology was seen by many educationalists as a body of science highly relevant to their work; as is illustrated by Professor Anderson's lecture to the New South Wales Teachers' Association, entitled 'Psychology as applied to education'.<sup>22</sup> Moreover, Kindergarten teachers within the public school system, had instruction in psychology as part of their teacher preparation.<sup>23</sup>

Second, education was constructed as scientific if it exemplified the scientific method.<sup>24</sup>

As previously stated, Hall was one of the first to study children scientifically. He was also a pioneer in arguing for a scientific approach to education. Hall was concerned, not only that teachers had an understanding of the child, informed by child study, but also

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<sup>20</sup> Parental control, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 December, 1906, p.5.

<sup>21</sup> J. J. Chambliss (ed.), *Enlightenment and Social Progress: Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Minneapolis: Burgess, 1971); Gillespie, 'The early development of the scientific movement in Australian education — child study'; R. J. W., Selleck, 'The scientific educationalist, 1870 – 1914', in R. Lowe (ed.), *History of Education Major Themes. Volume III Studies in Learning and Teaching* (London: Routledge / Falmer, 1967 / 2000), 69 – 87.

<sup>22</sup> New South Wales Teachers' Association, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 June, 1895, p.7.

<sup>23</sup> Topics studied included, for instance, perception and apperception; memory and imagination; from inference to reason; thought and language. 'Training and certificating of Kindergarten teachers', *The Australian Teacher*. 1 (36) (1899), 3 – 16.

<sup>24</sup> Chambliss, *Enlightenment and Social Progress*; Gillespie, 'The early development of the scientific movement in Australian education — child study'; Selleck, 'The scientific educationalist, 1870 – 1914'.

that curriculum and methods of teaching be investigated scientifically in order to determine their effectiveness and appropriateness.<sup>25</sup> In other words, according to Hall, the study of the child should be central to pedagogy.<sup>26</sup> As such, educationalists were encouraged to use scientific methodology to observe and study children with the specific aim of modifying their teaching practices to be more effective.<sup>27</sup> As a result of such scientific investigations, behaviours that had been previously disparaged, such as play, curiosity and imagination, became recognised as promoting growth and considered essential to children's learning. Consequently, arguments were made to modify education in ways that reflected these 'new' understandings about the ways children learnt. These scientific ideas were particularly salient for those advocating Kindergarten.

Kindergarten came to be constructed as a scientific education: A pedagogy that used scientific methodology to modify teaching practices in ways considered as fostering children's development most effectively.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Professor Anderson wrote a series of articles in which he stated:

In the hands of properly-trained teachers, Kindergarten work is simply the best means of developing in a scientific way the powers and capacities of the little child.<sup>29</sup>

Free Kindergartens would exemplify these practices. The dominance of scientific discourses and the constructions of children and education described above, created a

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<sup>25</sup> No Author, 'Granville Stanley Hall'.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Chambliss, *Enlightenment and Social Progress*; Gillespie, 'The early development of the scientific movement in Australian education — child study'; Selleck, 'The scientific educationalist, 1870 – 1914'.

<sup>28</sup> M. Anderson, *The story of the Free Kindergartens and Playgrounds* (Sydney: Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, circa 1912).

<sup>29</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.28.

discursive environment within which ECEC could be constructed as scientific education and care.

### **The Construction of ECEC within Scientific Discourses: Education and Care Based on Scientific Knowledge**

One way in which ECEC was constructed as scientific education was in its utilisation of scientific knowledge, especially that of child study. For instance, child study, described as, “a study of what helps in the child’s development, physical, mental and moral”, formed an integral part of the *Sydney Kindergarten Training Course* offered by the Kindergarten Training Centre.<sup>30</sup> Kindergarteners thus became specialists in child development.

Before long, knowledge of child development was considered not just desirable but essential for those wishing to work with young children: No longer was traditional folk knowledge considered adequate for educating and socialising young children. Along with Kindergarteners, it was argued that those responsible for the care and education of very young children, that is children’s nurses, should also be informed by scientific knowledge. According to M. S. W. (most likely Maybanke Selfe Westenholme), in a piece about children’s nurses written for *The Sydney Morning Herald* in 1898:

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<sup>30</sup> Kindergarten Union of NSW, ‘The Sydney Kindergarten Training Course’ (Sydney: Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, 1911). Documents from the Institute of Early Childhood Collection, at Macquarie University, which archives extensive documents relating The Sydney Kindergarten Training (later Teachers’) College, show that the first teacher education program started in Wollomooloo Free Kindergarten, under Scheer. A training centre was established by the Kindergarten Union at 17 Roslyn Gardens, Rushcutters Bay, Sydney, in 1900 known firstly as the Kindergarten Training Centre and then Fröebel House. In 1903, it moved to 40 – 42 Roslyn Gardens and became the Sydney Kindergarten Training College. In 1913 it moved again to 278 Liverpool St, Darlinghurst and in 1925 to 44 Henrietta St, Waverley. J. G. Dane, ‘A brief outline of the development of Kindergarten training work in Australia’, in Sydney Training College Kindergarten Society, *The story of Kindergarten in New South Wales* (Sydney: Sydney Training College Kindergarten Society, 1911), 30 – 38.

She [the children's nurse] needs instruction in the cooking of such food as a small child needs, and in the chemistry of cooking. If these were effective she would never again make baby ill with a dirty feeding-bottle, for one glance through a microscope at a speck of decayed milk would impress her for life. She would learn some facts about simple sanitation, and after that would probably turn her mattresses into the sunshine a little oftener than she does now, and sweep more carefully under the beds. She would learn some simple physiology, and after seeing the effect of oxygen on the blood she would not cover the baby's mouth up close, and treat him generally as if he were a hot scone.<sup>31</sup>

Scientific knowledge, then, it was argued, would lead to more appropriate caring.

### **Problematising the Construction of Education and Care Based on Scientific Knowledge**

A problem with the Kindergarteners' and nurses' reliance on child study as an informant to practice was that this knowledge was probably flawed and unreliable. The studies were likely to have been influenced by the concerns, interests and opinions of those conducting the research. Selleck, for instance, argues that the child study movement was "saturated with naturalism", which in turn threatened its (supposed) objectivity.<sup>32</sup> Selleck believes that, as many of those conducting the research were particularly interested and committed to child centredness and play, it was likely that these perspectives influenced their views and biased their findings, although the Kindergarteners and nurses were unlikely to have recognised this bias at the time.

A further problem with the insistence on child development knowledge and skills is that, whilst it probably improved the quality of teaching and child care, it also increased the power of the middle-class. It was only they who had access to the special training.

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<sup>31</sup> M. S. W., Women workers: The children's nurse, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 December, 1898, p.4.

<sup>32</sup> Selleck, 'The scientific educationalist, 1870 – 1914', p.79.

Further, maternal instinct and the skills learned through female socialisation were now considered inadequate preparation for mothering. It was argued instead that mothers required expert advice on how to appropriately care for their children. The constructs of ECEC as professional training and mother education will be taken up more fully in Chapter Ten.

### **The Construction of Free Kindergarten within Scientific Discourses:**

#### **Scientific Teaching**

Within scientific discourses Free Kindergarten was constructed as scientific education, through the teachers' use of scientific methods of observation to assess children, and their development of teaching methods based on these understandings to foster children's growth.<sup>33</sup> From its earliest introduction into Australia, Fröbel's Kindergarten was constructed as a being based on the scientific observation of children. Fröbel himself was portrayed as a keen observer of children:

Fröbel [sic] penetrated the mysterious recesses of child-nature, the outcome of his study being the foundation of the Kindergarten system of education.<sup>34</sup>

Fröbel, it was argued, had advocated the close observation of children not only to understand their development, but also in order to identify how to most effectively promote growth by following children's 'natural tendencies':

Fröbel's principles, briefly summarized, demand that the child shall develop naturally, that his mental and physical, moral and spiritual life, shall each at the right time be given favourable conditions, in order that he may become a well-proportioned, healthy-minded, fully developed

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<sup>33</sup> M. Anderson, *The Free Kindergartens in Sydney: Commemoration Address in 1913* (Sydney: Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, 1914), p.16.

<sup>34</sup> What is the kindergarten? (Circa mid 1880s). From Kindergarten Union archives, Mitchell library.

individual. To this end, the innate tendencies of the child shall be studied, and made use of, rather than suppressed.<sup>35</sup>

In the “Scientific Kindergarten”, Kindergarteners would study and observe children.<sup>36</sup> It was, according to Buckey:

A place where the individuality of every child is studied, and the best possible conditions given for their mental, moral, and physical growth.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, student kindergarten teachers attending Sydney Kindergarten Training College were required to attend Free Kindergartens in order to learn how to closely observe children:

She [the student teacher] *must* be familiar not only with the programme work in all its details, but also know something of the character and environment of the children, in order to give advice as to their proper development.<sup>38</sup>

It was claimed that the Directors of Free Kindergartens became so skilled at observing children, that they were — “able to see into the mind of the child.”<sup>39</sup> As such, ‘she’ (all the Kindergarteners were female) would be able to identify areas requiring ‘remedy’:

All the moral peculiarities and possible deficiencies in the child’s character are carefully studied, and when necessary corrected, but not by corporal punishment.<sup>40</sup>

But also teachers would be able to identify the most effective methods for teaching children:

We are learning that many of the things that we prohibited are things of vital necessity to him if he is to fulfil his biological destiny.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Will yon [sic] help the Free Kindergartens? Formation not reformation. (Circa 1910). From Kindergarten Union archives, Mitchell library.

<sup>36</sup> R. Buckey, A plea for Kindergartens, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1897 - 1898*, p.21.

<sup>37</sup> Anderson, *The story of the Free Kindergartens and Playgrounds*, p.7.

<sup>38</sup> R. L Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1899 – 1900*, p.12, [emphasis in the original].

<sup>39</sup> Anderson, *The story of the Free Kindergartens and Playgrounds*, p.7.

<sup>40</sup> Newtown Free Kindergarten school, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 October, 1898, p.3.

<sup>41</sup> L. De Lissa, ‘The social aspect of Montessori work’, *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*, 4 (2) (1914), 3 – 6, p.4.

In this way, teachers modified their practices according to their observations. Teachers' active engagement in studying children's involvement with learning experiences and then modifying teaching practices according to these findings may seem obvious and even natural to us today, however, at the turn of the twentieth century this practice was in its infancy and those advocating Free Kindergartens were at the vanguard of this educational innovation.

The child study focus was particularly evident from the arrival of Ridie Lee Buckey as principal of Woolloomooloo Free Kindergarten. Buckey had been a student of child study in the United States (she was a graduate of Cook County Normal Training School of Chicago) and this experience and knowledge likely informed her practices in setting up Free Kindergartens in Australia.<sup>42</sup> Under Buckey's management, Free Kindergartens became heavily involved with facilitating the study of children. Buckey not only contributed to the establishment of a "Child Study Round Table", she permitted the examination of children whilst they attended Free Kindergartens. Visiting doctors and scientists came into the Free Kindergartens and measured children's growth and development on a variety of dimensions.<sup>43</sup> For instance, it was reported in the Kindergarten Union Annual Report 1898 - 99:

A Dr Carroll came to the Kindergarten and carried out anthropometric measuring and testing of the children. These measurements included weight, height, measurements of the head, chest and limbs, also the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch were tested.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Dane, 'A brief outline of the development of Kindergarten training work in Australia'.

<sup>43</sup> R. Buckey, Child Study, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1897 - 1898*, p.26. These 'round tables' were meetings of the Child Study Association where lectures were given, such as 'The earliest manifestations of intelligence in infants' by Mrs. A. Wilson. Child Study Association, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 October, 1898, p.8.

<sup>44</sup> Child Study Association, *Kindergarten Union NSW Annual Report, 1898 - 1899*, p.27.

Teachers were active participants in these examinations of children. They assisted in the measurement of children and were encouraged to identify children's interests and those factors which promoted their growth, such as play, diet, rest and exercise. By giving researchers access to children, Free Kindergartens were one of the first sites for child study in Australia.<sup>45</sup>

### **Problematising the Construction of Free Kindergarten as Scientific Teaching**

A concern with the construction of Free Kindergarten as scientific teaching is that it contributed to the objectification of children and the construction of children as public bodies. Within Free Kindergartens, children were subjected to the power of the middle-class as they were measured by doctors and teachers, and compared one to another. Child study, then, could be seen as a means of corporeal regulation, by exposing children of the working-class to public scrutiny; their bodies became public concerns as their condition was talked about and the best means of intervention were discussed. This construct of the public child underlies the construction of Free Kindergartens as 'saving children' and 'national work', explored in the next two chapters.

Moreover, these studies were perhaps of "negligible value".<sup>46</sup> Gillespie, for instance, raises concerns about the accuracy of the measurements taken, argues that the studies were often ill-conceived and poorly conducted and claims that, although a great deal of data was collected, there was little systematic analysis. In particular, Gillespie argues that the majority of the teachers responsible for taking the measurements were untrained and inexperienced in scientific methods. Gillespie's criticisms may, however, reflect a

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<sup>45</sup> The formation of the Child Study Association was proposed at the inaugural meeting of the Free Kindergarten Alumnæ Club, in 1898. *ibid*, p.26).

<sup>46</sup> Gillespie, 'The early development of the scientific movement in Australian education — child study', p.3.



patriarchal interpretation of the women teachers' capacity to engage with scientific rationalist research, rather than a true reflection of their skills. In any event, given that children were subjected to these measurement procedures, presumably without any prior consent, and possibly without any good use being made of the data collected, this research would today, to say the least, be considered highly unethical.

A further concern with the alliance between Free Kindergarten and child study is that whilst it might have contributed to the professionalisation of ECEC, it tended to exclude parents. The initial plan for the child study groups in Free Kindergarten was that they would contribute to collaboration between teachers and parents for the common good of the children. For instance, Buckey stated her aim was for the Child Study Association to be:

A nucleus for parents and teachers to discuss children's characteristics, and aid each other in interpreting and maturing these human plants, whose destinies lie almost entirely in their [the parents] hands.<sup>47</sup>

The above statement suggests that the child study within Free Kindergarten was intended to have been a process where knowledge could be shared between teaching staff and parents, and there is a sense that parents were considered important contributors to the development of their children. But the child study group developed into a rather more professionally based association, developing the knowledge of the professionals, but ultimately excluding the parents.

Lastly, the alliance between Free Kindergartens and child study suggests dubious links to eugenics. Whilst there is no direct mention of eugenics within Kindergarten Union documents the following are abstracts from a paper presented to the Sydney

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<sup>47</sup> R. L. Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1898 - 1899*, p.26.

Kindergarten Club, reported in the *Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. These abstracts show that eugenic ideas were certainly in circulation in materials likely to have been read by those involved in Free Kindergarten:<sup>48</sup>

Eugenics is the study of agencies under social control, that may improve or impair the racial qualities of future generations, either physically or mentally. ... the science of eugenics occupies itself with investigating the questions — how best the race can be produced — it is the science which deals with all influences that improve the inborn qualities of a race. ... Its ambition is, in a word, to prevent the birth of the incompetent. The birth of none but physically and mentally healthy children is the dream of the Eugenist.<sup>49</sup>

According to Rodwell, there was “a wide spectrum of eugenic views in Australia” at the turn of the twentieth century, and the eugenicists who voiced these ideas were “highly regarded professionals”.<sup>50</sup> Those who considered nurture to be the main factor in development tended to be optimistic, and argued that environments could be changed in order to foster children’s development and ameliorate the effects of disadvantage. Conversely, those who favoured hereditary factors as the main influence on development, tended to be rather more pessimistic arguing for birth control of “defectives” to prevent the promulgation of deformity.<sup>51</sup> According to Kirk and Twigg, it was the optimists, or positive, eugenicists’ view that “intimate and detailed quantitative knowledge of children’s bodies could provide a basis for medical and educational interventions which would significantly improve the physical, moral and social condition of the white race in Australia”.<sup>52</sup> As such, educational institutions

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<sup>48</sup> Eugenics was also discussed in the media. See for instance: Clever children, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 March, 1907, p.5; *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 24 April, 1907, p.5; For the mentally deficient, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 April, 1911, p.5.

<sup>49</sup> A. W. Weiham, ‘Eugenics or race culture’, *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 3 (2) (1912), 3 – 4, p.3.

<sup>50</sup> G. Rodwell, ‘Domestic science, race motherhood and eugenics in Australian state schools, 1900 – 1960’, *History of Education Review*. 29 (2) (2000), 67 – 83.

<sup>51</sup> Rodwell (*ibid*, p.74) refers to these two different perspectives respectively as “environmentalist eugenics and hereditarian-deterministic eugenics”.

<sup>52</sup> D. Kirk, & K. Twigg, ‘Regulating Australian bodies: Eugenics, anthropometrics and school medical inspection in Victoria, 1900 – 1940’, *History of Education Review*. 23 (1) (1994), 19 – 37, p.19.

offered ideal sites for monitoring, regulating and disciplining children into “compliant citizens and productive workers”.<sup>53</sup> Free Kindergartens were one such institution.

In Kindergarten Union documents, it seems it was the environment, rather than heredity, that was considered of central importance for changing children’s outcomes:

“But, how about heredity?” you will probably ask, and it is a most natural question, for it is a most potent force, but experience has proven that environment is a greater one.<sup>54</sup>

In particular, in Free Kindergarten the focus was on identifying medical conditions that could impede children’s development:

It is exceptional to find a child who has not some physical or mental weakness, and the education of to-day tends to correct, as far as possible, these defects, or at all events to give due consideration to them. Many children are called stupid who, on examination, are found to be deaf or short-sighted, but as intelligent as the average, perhaps far more so.<sup>55</sup>

These statements suggest a rather optimistic view about the role of education to remedy ‘defects’. It was those children described as “nervous and backward” who were thought to potentially benefit the most from the scientific Free Kindergarten:

The tendency to pronounce judgement immediate, and punishment in proportion, upon this type is growing less as scientific investigations begin to throw more light on the nature of mental processes and the physical conditions attending these.<sup>56</sup>

As such, if those advocating Free Kindergarten were to be accused of being involved with eugenics, then it is of the ‘positive’ sort. Eugenics debates were upheld by nationalist discourses and will be raised again briefly in Chapter Nine.

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<sup>53</sup> Kirk & Twigg, ‘Regulating Australian bodies: Eugenics, anthropometrics and school medical inspection in Victoria, 1900 – 1940’, p.21

<sup>54</sup> Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1897 - 1898*, p.22 [speech marks in the original]

<sup>55</sup> *Kindergarten Union NSW Annual Report, 1898 – 1899*, p.27.

<sup>56</sup> Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1897 - 1898*, p. 16.

I have raised a number of concerns about the construction of Free Kindergarten as scientific education and its association with child study. It is important to recognise, however, that criticisms were voiced also at the time about Free Kindergarten's heavy reliance on child study. In particular, Newman (who was later to become principal of the Sydney Kindergarten Training College) argued, in 1911, that the focus on scientific study of children had resulted in a movement away from a concern with real children, to the study of them:

During this time the student was fairly inundated with theories about the child. It often seemed to me that we were so busy studying and learning about "it," that we had little opportunity of becoming acquainted with real little children. ... In our strained intellectual effort at this time, to get nearer, we usually got further away from little children, and became confused in the attempt to apply elaborate theories and make them fit actual conditions. ... We were in danger at the time of losing the best thing in or about our work — its simple, sympathetic, human character.<sup>57</sup>

As a consequence of these concerns, Newman shifted the focus towards a more ecological model of understanding the child:

The study of the brain and nervous system has given way somewhat to the study of life as it affects and appeals to little children ... getting to the child's point of view, and so are getting nearer to their real interests, which are necessarily simple and centered in the life they live ... study of the conditions of life about us — social, economic, political etc. — and in recognizing the child, not only as the child of today, but as the citizen of to-morrow, who will either add to or take from the nation's strength, forward or retard its progress, according to the way in which it is educated and trained from the beginning.<sup>58</sup>

The above statements suggest a paradigm shift occurring, from Free Kindergarten being based on the scientific study of children's development in isolation, to a greater concern with the socio-political context within which that development occurred, as well as a greater concern with children's interests. This discord between those who advocate an

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<sup>57</sup> M. A. Newman, 'Some phases in Kindergarten history', *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 1 (4), (1911), 5 – 7.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*, p.7.

ECEC focused on science and those who focus on social concerns and children's interests is familiar to contemporary ECEC debates. It appears that the pendulum has swung between these two dominant positions since the very inception of ECEC.

Why were those within the Free Kindergartens so keen to be allied to child study? It is likely that child study was viewed positively by those in the Kindergarten Union, because it upheld the child-centred approach to learning advocated by Kindergarten methods. Further, because of their involvement with the measurement of children, teachers were given positions of power. According to Buckey:

The study of children is engrossing the attention of the most intelligent men and women of the day. Seldom, if ever, has any educational movement swept so great a number of people into its current, or inspired so many sincere and cultivated women to active co-operation.<sup>59</sup>

So it seems those advocating Free Kindergartens were able to capitalise on the public interest in the scientific study of children. But more than this, in a world that valued science, the construction of Free Kindergarten as scientific education legitimised its work.

Despite the concerns raised above, Free Kindergarten's close alliance with child study had many positive outcomes for ECEC. Not only did the study of children uphold the principles of progressive education on which Free Kindergartens were founded, it highlighted the importance of environmental influences on children's development. No longer were children's 'deficiencies' seen as hereditary. Without these scientific understandings about children's development and the potential to positively influence

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<sup>59</sup> Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1899 – 1900*, p.11.

their outcomes by intervening in their lives, the imperative to intervene might not have eventuated.

### **Conclusion to Chapter Seven**

My aim in this chapter has been to show how constructs of ECEC as scientific education and care emerged within dominant scientific discourses evident in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The rise of scientific discourses and the construction of children and education within these discourses created a space where Free Kindergarten could be constructed as education based on scientific knowledge and scientific teaching. Whilst the construction of Free Kindergarten as scientific education legitimated its work, it was also problematic in a number of ways, not least because it contributed to children becoming 'public bodies'. As 'public bodies', interventions could be put in place to improve children's outcomes, to benefit not just the individual, but also the nation: it is these ideas that are central to the constructs of ECEC explored in the following two chapters.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### ECEC CONSTRUCTED AS SOCIALLY JUST EDUCATION

One of the dominant contemporary constructs of ECEC identified in Chapter Four, is ‘socially just’ work. I argued that socially just constructs of ECEC construe early care and education as a means of rescuing children from the ‘dangers’ of society, as well as an important way of contributing to the amelioration of the effects of disadvantage, for example, by assisting individual children to develop the skills and knowledge required to operate ‘effectively’ within society. Socially just constructs of ECEC also include those that view early education and care as a way of contributing to social equity, for instance, by challenging and changing those practices that are considered to hinder social advancement. As such, socially just constructs of ECEC focus on the dual objectives of ‘improving’ the individual through education and, through this focus on the individual, improving society. I argue below that the construction of ECEC as socially just has been evident from its earliest days, as both philanthropy and social reform.

Free Kindergartens were constructed as philanthropic institutions aimed at rescuing poor children by providing them with early education. This idea is apparent in the following statement by Maybanke Anderson when reflecting on the early history of Free Kindergartens in 1911. Anderson said:

The policy which made philanthropy go hand in hand with education has been justified from the beginning.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</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.

Indeed, the philanthropic purpose of Free Kindergartens has been recognised in previous histories of ECEC in Australia.

Walker first drew attention to the philanthropy of Free Kindergartens in her 1964 thesis *The Development of Kindergartens in Australia*.<sup>2</sup> Since that time, a number of writers, often drawing heavily on Walker's work, have maintained this argument. For instance, Harrison argues that the philanthropic and educational goals of Free Kindergarten went "hand in hand".<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Mellor, states: "The joint educational and philanthropic aims were important";<sup>4</sup> a view echoed by Brennan: "The purposes of educational reform and philanthropy were thus closely intertwined".<sup>5</sup> But Free Kindergartens aimed to do more than merely rescue children and help them develop useful skills. They also aimed to reform society.

Spearitt argues Free Kindergartens were a "tool for urban social reform", and part of a widespread social reform movement in the late nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> The social reform agenda of the late nineteenth century has previously tended to be viewed as altruistic.<sup>7</sup> But critical historical analysis questions this perspective. Specifically in relation to ECEC in Australia, writers such as, Brennan, Clyde and Kelly, argue that Free Kindergartens upheld dominant middle-class ideals and thus benefited those who

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<sup>2</sup> M. L. Walker, 'The Development of Kindergartens in Australia.' MEd thesis, University of Sydney, 1964.

<sup>3</sup> R. Harrison, *Sydney Kindergarten Teachers College 1897 – 1981* (Sydney: Sydney Teachers Kindergarten College Graduates Association, 1985).

<sup>4</sup> E. Mellor, *Stepping Stones: The Development of Early Childhood Services in Australia* (Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), p.67.

<sup>5</sup> D. Brennan, *The Politics of Australian Child Care: Philanthropy to Feminism and Beyond* (rev. ed.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.16.

<sup>6</sup> P. Spearitt, 'Child care and kindergartens in Australia 1890 – 1975', in P. Langford, & P. Sebastian (eds.), *Early Education and Care in Australia* (Sydney: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), 10 – 38, p.10.

<sup>7</sup> S. Tiffin, *In Whose Best Interest?: Child Welfare Reform in the Progressive Era* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1982).



established ECEC.<sup>8</sup> Despite these critiques, the construct of ECEC as socially just remains dominant and natural today.

My purpose in this chapter is to denaturalise the contemporary construct of ECEC as socially just, by showing how this construct emerged within dominant discourses in the late nineteenth century. I also reply to some of the criticisms of the early provision of Free Kindergartens as socially just. I argue that, whilst Free Kindergartens upheld dominant middle-class power structures, they nevertheless offered valuable social institutions for poor children, their families and the wider community.

Many histories of ECEC have highlighted how ECEC emerged as a response to the impecunious living conditions experienced by the working-class poor in the late nineteenth century.<sup>9</sup> For example, Clyde says that Free Kindergartens were established because:

For some philanthropically minded people there was a strong urge to bring about social reform and to improve the qualities of life of the children and their mothers living in poverty in the deprived areas of Sydney.<sup>10</sup>

Clyde suggests that it was the economic and social conditions of the times that led to the establishment of Free Kindergartens as philanthropic institutions. Yet poverty had existed previously without having evoked the 'urge' for social reform that was so evident in the late nineteenth century. So what was particular about the nineteenth century that created the need to establish Free Kindergartens as social reform? I argue in

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<sup>8</sup> M. Clyde, 'The development of kindergartens in Australia at the turn of the twentieth century: A response to social pressures and educational influences', in R. Wollons (ed.), *Kindergartens and Cultures: The Global Diffusion of an Idea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 87-112.

<sup>9</sup> See for instance: Harrison, *Sydney Kindergarten Teachers College 1897 – 1981*; Mellor, *Stepping Stones*; Walker, 'The Development of Kindergartens in Australia.'

<sup>10</sup> Clyde, 'The development of kindergartens in Australia at the turn of the twentieth century', p.100.

this chapter that it was not the economic and social conditions, as such, but rather shifts in the ways poverty and children were constructed within liberal / progressive discourses that created a discursive space in which Free Kindergartens could emerge as socially just work, as is illustrated in Figure 12.

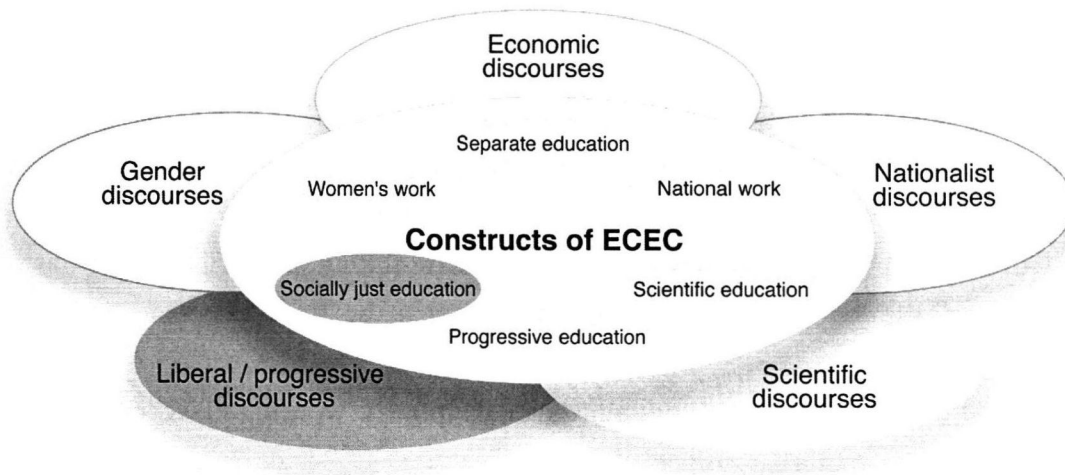


Figure 12: The construction of ECEC as socially just education within liberal / progressive discourses.

The chapter begins with a discussion of ways poverty was constructed within liberal / progressive discourses at the end of the nineteenth century. In particular, I argue that the increasing poverty evident in Sydney threatened progressive ideology. To uphold the notion of society on a progressive march, the problem of poverty had to be dealt with. The ‘new’ constructs of poverty gave rise to multiple philanthropic institutions, including Free Kindergartens, that not only rescued children but also aimed to improve their life chances by equipping them with the skills required to operate effectively within society. Further, I develop the argument, begun in Chapter Six, that within liberal / progressive discourses children were constructed as innocent yet vulnerable to moral corruption, and so created an imperative for rescuing these children.

Next, I discuss the construction of Free Kindergarten as philanthropy and identify multiple constructs of Free Kindergarten as socially just work evident within the historical texts. These constructs include Free Kindergarten as: (i) rescuing poor children; (ii) forming children; and (iii) reforming society. The focus of these early socially just constructs was on rescuing children from moral corruption; the concept of saving children from physical danger became more prominent later within nationalist discourses and will be explored in the following chapter.

I agree with previous critiques that power operated through the socially just constructs of ECEC as the middle-class Kindergarten reformers objectified the working-class as 'other' and tried to inculcate middle-class ideals into the working-class children, their families and communities. I suggest, however, that the construction of Free Kindergartens in these ways which 'othered' the working-class was possibly a necessary strategy for attracting funding for their work. Further, I argue that despite the power relations, the work of those in Free Kindergarten seems to have been a well-intentioned desire to assist young children and to improve the lives of the working-class.

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

The dominance of liberal / progressive discourses at the turn of the twentieth century was established in Chapter Six, where I argued that these discourses, by and large, constructed the world as on a progressive march. In the following section I discuss how rising poverty in late nineteenth century Sydney threatened this progressive idealism. Consequently, within liberal / progressive discourses, there were shifts in the ways poverty was constructed and new approaches to dealing with poverty emerged that

upheld the progressive view. My purpose here is both to establish the discursive environment that created a space for Free Kindergarten to emerge as socially just education, and also to show that such a response was not inevitable.

In the 1890s, the optimistic view of the world created within liberal / progressive discourses was challenged by the social conditions experienced by many Sydneysiders. There was a paradox evident between the advancement of technology and science on the one hand, and the abject poverty of a large proportion of the population on the other.<sup>11</sup> Technological and scientific discovery had led to increased industrialisation. Associated with industrialisation was rapid, and largely unplanned, urbanisation.<sup>12</sup> In the cities there was a shortage of accommodation resulting in overcrowding and its associated problems such as, endemic disease and insecure tenancy. These social changes brought an increasing disparity in the distribution of wealth, as the distinction widened between those who had benefited from the so called progress of Australia, and those who had not.<sup>13</sup> In short, the rich were getting richer, the poor poorer. A few amassed vast fortunes but very many more lived in 'squalor'.<sup>14</sup>

A letter from a doctor to the editor of *The Sydney Morning Herald*, vividly describes the living conditions in one of Sydney's 'poorer' areas. Although his description is perhaps tainted by middle-class bias, he writes that the homes of the poor were shoddily built with:

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<sup>11</sup> Tiffin, *In Whose Best Interest?*

<sup>12</sup> C. M. H. Clarke, *A History of Australia, Volumes V & VI: From 1888 to 1935* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1981).

<sup>13</sup> A. Mann (ed.), *The Progressive Era: Liberal Renaissance or Liberal Failure?* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1963).

<sup>14</sup> B. Dickey, 'The evolution of care for destitute children in New South Wales, 1875 – 1901', *Journal of Australian Studies*. 4 (1979), 38 – 57.

... awful odours (most abominable by night), streets built upon garbage with stagnant pools under the floorings, and grey mould creeping up the bedroom walls.<sup>15</sup>

If these were indeed the living conditions faced by the poor, it would be difficult to maintain an optimistic view of the world.

Coupled with the increased urbanisation was the economic depression of the 1890s that brought great economic hardship and resulted in a large proportion of the population of NSW becoming dependent on charity.<sup>16</sup> This depression affected all strata of society.<sup>17</sup> There was an increase in unemployment amongst the working-class, and many from the middle-class who had considered their employment secure, such as civil servants, were retrenched. Further, several financial institutions collapsed leaving many penniless as their life savings, and future financial security, disappeared overnight. It was evident that the high level of unemployment and poverty was a function of the economic system, and beyond the control of the individual. The widespread poverty that affected those previously considered hardworking, challenged old explanations of poverty, that had constructed poverty as the result of laziness or moral degeneracy of the individual.<sup>18</sup> It not only became possible to think about poverty in new ways, but created opportunities for new approaches to dealing with poverty to emerge.

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<sup>15</sup> M.D., *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 October, 1893, p.5.

<sup>16</sup> Numerous letters and reports in the *Sydney Morning Herald* refer to the economic situation and poverty in NSW, for instance:-Decimal, The depression and its causes, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 April, 1893, p.5; Relief of destitution in Woollahra and Paddington, 27 June, 1893, p.6; Increase of poverty in Sydney, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 September, 1893, p.5; Charities and charity, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 December, 1893, p.4; The city poor, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 23 January, 1895, p.8; Sad case of distress, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 May, 1895, p.5; Ball, The case of distress at Goulburn, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 May, 1895, p.3; Distress among the poor, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 May, 1895, p.6; Penfold, The destitute poor, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 August 1895, p.7.

<sup>17</sup> M. Cannon, *The Land Boomers: The Complete History* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1995); J. Rickard, *Australia: A Cultural History* (London: Longman, 1988).

<sup>18</sup> Dickey, 'The evolution of care for destitute children in New South Wales, 1875 – 1901'.

## Approaches to Poverty: A Moral Issue

The construction of poverty as a function of the social system created a moral imperative for dealing with poverty. If it were outside the control of the individual then society had to take some responsibility for the poverty of its people.<sup>19</sup> This position is clearly evident in a sermon by Reverend Dunston, entitled *Paupers and how we make them*, in which he argued:

The State should take a more direct responsibility than it now took ...  
Above all the State should protect the weakest – the little children,  
whose suffering was simply indescribable.<sup>20</sup>

State aid for the destitute poor was limited, however. Instead, it was left to the churches and other philanthropic organisations to minister to the poor. Despite the reluctance of the State to offer support for the poor, there seems to have been a genuine and widespread desire amongst many to improve the social conditions of the destitute. Both in Australia and overseas there was an increase in the number of philanthropic organisations established, of which the Kindergarten Union was one.<sup>21</sup> Not only was there growth in the number of philanthropic institutions, there was also a change in the ways established organisations operated in response to the 'new' way of viewing poverty.

There had been a long history of charitable institutions in Australia. When poverty had been constructed as the result of laziness, charitable work had focused on differentiating between the worthy poor, those who were sick, infirm, elderly or very young, and those

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<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> A sermon given by Reverend Dunston, of Pitt Street Congregational Church. *Paupers and how we make them*, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 September, 1895, p.6.

<sup>21</sup> Mann, *The Progressive Era*.

considered 'less worthy', and providing aid accordingly.<sup>22</sup> Charities had been conducted in this way without any expectations of reciprocity. But merely providing immediate relief for the poor only served to perpetuate poverty.<sup>23</sup> If society were to progress, as liberal / progressive discourses demanded, then poverty had to be eradicated; more direct intervention was required. As I argue below, there are at least two possible approaches that could have been taken to redress poverty; either changing the system or changing the individual to better adapt to the system. As will be shown below, systemic change did not occur. Instead attempts were made to assist individuals to operate more 'effectively' within the established system.

### **Approaches to Poverty: Changing the System**

In order to address the rising poverty, the existing capitalist economic system could have been changed to make the distribution of wealth more egalitarian rather than hierarchical. Such ideas were the basis of Marxist ideology, not unknown at the time. These ideas could have become more influential with the possibility of social revolution.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, it could be argued that late nineteenth century Australia was a period ripe for sedition and social uprising. Not only was there was an increasing disparity between the rich and the poor, there was also a great deal of political instability. The Labour movement was on the rise, the unions were fighting for an eight hour day, and strikes in the maritime industry and later the shearers' strike threatened civil unrest.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, prominent voices were being raised in dissent. A number of radical thinkers, whose writing was widely disseminated within the popular press,

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<sup>22</sup> A. F. Davis, *Spearheads for Reform: The Social Settlements and the Progressive Movement 1890 – 1914* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).

<sup>23</sup> Dickey, 'The evolution of care for destitute children in New South Wales, 1875 – 1901'.

<sup>24</sup> Marx's work, although perhaps not widely known at this time, was serialised in the *Worker* from September, 1893.

<sup>25</sup> Clarke, *A History of Australia, Volumes V & VI*.

openly called for revolution against suppression. For instance, Henry Lawson's poetry and bush ballads, which were published in *The Bulletin*, are replete with calls for revolution. *The Legend of Mammon Castle* tells of the splendour of the aristocracy and the suppression of the common people. It is an entreaty to the populace to rise up:

But a vassal preached sedition and in a gloomy hour  
Came the wild and haggard vassals to the gate of Mammon Tower;  
They asked for food and shelter and were answered with a blow,  
And, rising in their anger, soon they laid the castle low.<sup>26</sup>

But calls for revolution were not heeded. Why? Perhaps revolution was never really a possibility in Australia. Suffrage had been gained early in Australia's history — at least for males.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the distinction between the classes that is required for a class based revolution were not as clear cut in Australia as in other societies. Australia's history of successful convict and squatter settlement and the possibility of social mobility had blurred the boundaries between the classes and reduced the likelihood of rebellion. Furthermore, unlike citizens in many European countries, Australians often straddled the two classes of worker and landowner, as they realised the great Australian dream of owning land and home.<sup>28</sup> Such individualistic goals were incompatible with socialist revolution. Rather, changes sought by the Labour movement in Australia were more pragmatic than revolutionary. Moreover, to change the system would have been to acknowledge its failure and perhaps threaten the dominant idea that Western society was at the pinnacle of civilisation.

It seems that, despite the evident poverty, within liberal / progressive discourses there remained an optimism that the existing capitalist system could bring material benefit

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<sup>26</sup> *The Bulletin*, 21 December, 1989, p.6.

<sup>27</sup> Rickard, *Australia*.

<sup>28</sup> Clarke, *A History of Australia, Volumes V & VI*.



and wellbeing to all. It was, therefore, not the aim to overthrow the system, but rather to improve the equality of access to the wealth that capitalism promised. The general consensus was not of revolution, but of 'a fair go'. Rather than try to change the system, the focus of intervention became the individual and the emphasis of charitable institutions shifted to practical benevolence.

### **Approaches to Poverty: Changing the Individual**

The dominant approach taken to remedy poverty was to assist the poor to develop the skills necessary to operate more 'effectively' within the existing social system. This approach promised to improve the life chances of the individual, whilst at the same time, it upheld the dominant ideals of social progress.

The idea of changing the individual is clearly evident, for instance, in the changes in the NSW State Children's Relief Board policy towards destitute children. Originally the board offered institutional care for children:

... rescued from poverty-stricken hovels in unsanitary neighbourhoods.<sup>29</sup>

This practice changed to one of boarding-out children and providing them:

... with healthy comfortable homes in districts far removed from the evil influences and associations of their old homes, where the more generous influences of uncontaminated nature afford hope of their ultimately growing up into honest, healthy, industrious colonists. The utmost care is always taken to select foster parents from amongst the industrial classes where clean, healthy home life, and the industrial occupations of the guardians are likely to inculcate unconsciously those principles of self-help that are likely to prove so beneficial to the children in after life.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> New South Wales State Children's Relief Board, Report of the President, The Hon. Sir Arthur Renwick, 1894, p.3 & p.4.

<sup>30</sup> State Children's Relief Department, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 September, 1893, p.8.

This approach was considered to be:

... humane, charitable and economic.<sup>31</sup>

Clearly, the emphasis was not only on rescuing children from poverty, but also on helping them to develop the skills that they would require to function as contributing members of a future society. This approach to poverty was supposed to have benefits both for the child and for the wider community. The children, equipped with the necessary skills, would be redeemed from a life of poverty. But, at the same time, they would become agents of social reform. They would no longer be a 'burden on society' and threaten the dominant progressive discourse, but rather they would contribute to social improvement.<sup>32</sup>

In short, the construction of poverty within progressive discourses created an imperative for intervention. Whether or not one takes the opinion that the reformers were altruistic, or fearful that poverty threatened the progressive idealism of improvement, and the dominant social structure, the imperative was the same — intervention was needed, either to improve the life chances of the poor or to improve society and thereby uphold the dominant power structures. These ways of viewing poverty and its remedy created a discursive space in which Free Kindergarten could emerge as socially just education; that is, education based on moral concerns with the poor, that would assist the individual to develop necessary skills and contribute to the 'progress' of society. But at the same time, Free Kindergarten would maintain the dominant social structure. Fundamental to this intervention were dominant constructs of the child evident in the late nineteenth century.

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<sup>31</sup> Caring for homeless children in Australia, *The Dawn*, 1 October, 1894, p.10.

<sup>32</sup> Dickey, 'The evolution of care for destitute children in New South Wales, 1875 – 1901'.

## **Liberal / Progressive Discourses and the Construction of Children as Innocent and Vulnerable**

I began the discussion of the construction of children within liberal / progressive discourses in the late nineteenth century in Chapter Six, where I argued that within these discourses there was an increased interest with children's growth and development and a belief that children could be improved by appropriate intervention. Here, my discussion focuses on a further construct of children that emerged within liberal / progressive discourses — the child as innocent and vulnerable a construct I also identified and critiqued in my examination of the contemporary context in Chapter Four. This construct had particular implications for the ways Free Kindergartens were constituted.

The nineteenth century had seen a movement away from constructs of children as corrupted by original sin and requiring harsh and strict discipline, reflective of Calvinistic ideas, to more romantic notions of children as innocent and vulnerable.<sup>33</sup> These romantic images are evident in popular culture of the time. For instance, the innocent and vulnerable child is evident in Wordsworth's poems, such as *Alice Fall; or poverty* and in Dickensian novels such as the vulnerable Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* and the poignant Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol*.<sup>34</sup> This widely circulated English literature made audible the voices of the poor and the destitute and drew attention to the plight of poor children.

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<sup>33</sup> Tiffin, *In Whose Best Interest?*; C. Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain: Margaret McMillan 1860 – 1931* (London: Virago, 1990); 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>34</sup> N. C. Smith (ed.), *The Poems of William Wordsworth. Volume 1* (London: Methuen, 1908).

Australia also had its own romantic images of vulnerable children, in particular, the archetype of the child 'lost in the bush'.<sup>35</sup> There were only one or two reports a year of children lost in the bush in *The Sydney Morning Herald* during the period examined, but a great deal of space was taken to cover these events. For example, two columns were devoted to two separate incidents where children disappeared and were subsequently discovered.<sup>36</sup> This reportage is substantial, given that the death of a child through injury might only take up one or two lines.

The construction of the child as innocent yet vulnerable not only created a child 'in need' of protection but also a child who could be rescued, by removal from 'contaminating influences'. Indeed, there seems to have been an increase in concern with children's vulnerability and an imperative to remove and protect them, in late nineteenth century Australia.

The State had assumed responsibility for orphaned and abandoned children since the earliest colonial times, but in the late nineteenth century there was a growing recognition of the need to protect children.<sup>37</sup> For instance, practices such as 'baby farming' and child abuse had come under increasing scrutiny, and organisations to

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<sup>35</sup> For a comprehensive discussion on the development of the Australian icon of the child lost in the bush see: K. Torney, *Babes in the Bush: The Making of an Australian Image* (Freemantle: Curtin University Books, 2005).

<sup>36</sup> Lost in the bush, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 September, 1894, p.7. See also: A wandering child, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 October, 1894, p.5; A lost child, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 February, 1895, p.9; Lost in the bush, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 29 July, 1895, p.5; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 May, 1896, p.5; The missing children, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 3 September, 1897, p.5. This concern with lost children does seem to suggest that children were considered vulnerable. Kociumbus, however, has suggested that the child lost in the bush is an analogy for pioneering Australia's, often futile, attempt to control and manage its harsh environment. So perhaps the image of the child lost in the bush is more to do with White settlers coming to terms with the Australian landscape, rather than a concern with children's vulnerability, per se. J. Kociumbus, 'Lost in the bush: Searching for the Australian child', *History of Education Review*. 30 (2) (2001), 37 – 54.

<sup>37</sup> A. Burns, J. Goodnow, R. Chislom, & J. Murray, *Children and Families in Australia: Contemporary Issues and Problems: Studies in Society*: 5 (Sydney: George, Allen & Unwin, 1979); Tiffin, *In Whose Best Interest?*; Walker, 'The Development of Kindergartens in Australia.'

protect children were founded.<sup>38</sup> One such organisation was the Society for the Protection of Cruelty to Children, which was formed to lobby Government for the registration of those entrusted with the care of infants and young children and for restriction of child employment.<sup>39</sup> Eventually, legislation was enacted to protect children at risk, including the Children's Protection Act, 1892.<sup>40</sup> Institutions established to minister to destitute children included The Society for the Relief of Destitute Children, which had been established in the 1850s, and the Sydney Ragged schools established in 1860 to provide alternative education for very poor and neglected children — "who from the poverty of their clothing could not attend public school".<sup>41</sup> A number of infants' homes, such as the Infants' Home Ashfield, were also established. Their primary objective was to:

... provide shelter for unmarried girls with their first infants. The little ones were thus saved from the risk of encountering the horrors of the baby farms.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Baby farming was a process whereby mothers, usually unmarried, left their child in the care of a 'nurse' for payment. Some of these nurses did care for the child. Others it seems were thinly disguised means of disposing of a child, either through neglect, such as starvation, or murder. There were a number of Baby Farming cases which enjoyed public notoriety for the murders committed. Two such cases were the Makin and Knorr cases.

<sup>39</sup> See for example several reports in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21, January, 1893, p.10; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 June, 1893, p.5; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 June, 1894, p.4; *Sydney Morning Herald*, 4 November, 1894, p.4.

<sup>40</sup> The debates in Parliament surrounding the introduction of the Infants Protection Bill, indicate that it was introduced as a measure to prevent the deaths associated with the practice of baby farming. This Act made it compulsory for those caring for others' children, to register. See *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Vol. LII, 14 July to 20 August, 1891, pp.758 - 779; *New South Wales Parliamentary Debates*, First Series, Fifteenth Parliament, Fourth Session, Vol. LXIX, 17 Jan to 28 February, 1894, pp.1 - 1194. There does, however, appear to have been some difficulty in notifying child abuse and doubts about the ability of the officers enforcing the Act to adequately investigate acts of child abuse. Two cases that were reported are: Children's Protection Act, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 October, 1894, p.6; Cruelty to a child, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 June, 1897, p.7; The Children's Protection Act, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 August, 1898, p.6.

<sup>41</sup> Sydney ragged Schools, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 31 August, 1893, p.7. See also: Sydney Ragged Schools, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 October, 1893, p.7.

<sup>42</sup> Infants' Home, Ashfield, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 April, 1898, p.3. See also: New children's home, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 1 November, 1893, p.3; Orphanage for destitute children, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12 September, 1894, p.6; The Foundling Hospital, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 11 February, 1898, p.7; Foundling Hospital at Waitara, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 April, 1898, p.7; Central Mission Children's Home, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 November, 1898, p.6.

There was, then, evident concern for the vulnerability of young children and the need to protect them. Indeed, it was argued at the time that:

The keynote of the age was the devotion to work among the children.<sup>43</sup>

This is not to suggest that there was universal concern for the welfare of children. Indeed, in the following chapter I argue that in the early 1890s the dominant attitude towards children was apathy. Moreover, concerns did not extend to Indigenous Australian children, who were dealt with separately under the Aborigines Protection Board.<sup>44</sup> It was not until the early 1900s, within emerging nationalistic and economic discourses, that high infant mortality and morbidity was considered a threat to the national agenda, and greater attention was turned to improving children's well-being.<sup>45</sup> The establishment of institutions aimed at rescuing children in the early 1890s was the work of a select few and tended to be especially concerned with preventing children's moral corruption — by removing them from the 'contaminating influences' of their community, and instilling in them the 'right' morals and attitudes that would allow them to succeed in the wider society.

To summarise so far, within liberal / progressive discourses of the late nineteenth century, there was a shift in the way poverty was constructed, and an imperative to intervene to assist individuals develop skills, knowledge and attitudes that would enable them to function effectively in the existing economic system. Further, children were constructed as innocent and vulnerable and, as such, in need of protection from moral

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<sup>43</sup> National Council of Women, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 November, 1898, p.4.

<sup>44</sup> "The Aborigines Protection Board was established in 1883, but did not have legal powers until 1909, when the *Aborigines Protection Act* was passed. This gave the Board wide ranging control over the lives of Aboriginal people, including the power to remove children from families." Accessed on 1 June, 2005 from: <http://www.daa.nsw.gov.au/about/history.html>.

<sup>45</sup> This will be discussed in further detail in the chapter examining the construction of Free Kindergartens within Nationalist discourse.

corruption. Together, these discourses created a discursive space within which Free Kindergartens could emerge as philanthropic organisations providing ‘socially just’ education; that is education as: (i) rescuing poor children; (ii) forming children; and (iii) reforming society. These constructs of Free Kindergartens are explored and problematised below.

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

#### **Philanthropic Organisations**

The philanthropic nature of Free Kindergartens has long been recognised. The Kindergarten Union of NSW established Free Kindergartens in poor suburbs of Sydney, following the charitable model of Kindergarten Unions in the United States.<sup>46</sup> Children in these suburbs were considered most vulnerable to the adverse effects of the social conditions in which they lived:

The moral, physical, and intellectual benefit of true Kindergarten work was considered specially needful for the poor — those children of busy mothers, who have neither the necessary time nor training to look after their little ones, so that the children have often to spend the most valuable portion of their lives in the gutter or the streets.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Kindergarten Union also established a private Kindergarten at the Sydney Kindergarten Training College in 1904 to cater for “the richer classes” (Anderson, ‘The Story of the Kindergarten Union of N.S.W’, p.25). It was claimed this Kindergarten served several functions. The fees collected contributed much needed funds for upkeep of Free Kindergartens. The Kindergarten also served as a valuable site for student teachers to practice their teaching skills. Unlike Free Kindergartens, the Kindergarten at the College catered for older children. It therefore offered student teachers the opportunity to work with a variety of ages; a requirement for positions in many private settings. It also gave student teachers the experience of working with middle-class children, who were considered to be ‘different’ from their working-class ‘cousins’. But importantly, the private Kindergarten gave the Kindergarten Union the opportunity to show that Kindergarten methods were equally valuable for older and wealthy children, not just young poor children. Jenkins stated: “Not all our graduates will find positions in Free Kindergartens, and that demand for trained teachers for private schools is daily increasing, a demand which if fulfilled calls for those who have had experience in private schools. And again, we wish to wipe out from the minds of any who are yet ignorant of our aims, the idea that the Kindergarten is a philanthropy only. It is the first step in a rational system of education, and is suited to all ranks of child-life”. (E. Jenkins, Annual report of the Kindergarten Training College, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1905 – 1906*, 5 –11, p.8). So it seems that the Kindergarten Union was striving to advocate the universal benefits of early education and was itself struggling against the construct of early education as a deficit model — a struggle which continues to this day.

<sup>47</sup> M. Scheer, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1896 –1897*, p.5.

Consequently, children of the poor were a 'natural' population to whom to offer early compensatory education. There was perhaps more to this decision than just a desire to help poor children, however. The children of the poor offered the Kindergarten Union a convenient site to model Kindergarten methods. The middle-class Kindergarten teachers, it seems, had few reservations about practicing and modelling their new educational ideas on poor children. Further, the Kindergarten Union could capitalise on a concern with the poor, evident within liberal / progressive discourses. As Anderson put it, in 1911:

A cry for reform in education would have been at that time unheeded, but it was comparatively easy to arouse interest in the conditions of neglected children, and the imminent danger of larrikinism. To this day, of those who help to support the work of the Union, only a small minority understand kindergarten principles, while every casual visitor appreciates the happy intelligence of the children brought under their influence.<sup>48</sup>

The establishment of Kindergartens within poor suburbs could, then, also be considered a pragmatic decision.

The construction of Kindergartens in poor areas meant they were reliant on charitable donations. As such, the Kindergarten Union had to constantly battle with limited financial resources; as is reflected in the conditions in which the teachers and children operated. Dane described the first Free Kindergarten in Australia at Charles Street, Woolloomooloo as:

A small, two-storied house, devoid of veranda or balcony, with front door and window opening directly out on to a narrow and sordid street; two bare rooms, connecting with two similar ones overhead, by means of a step, uncompromising-looking flight of worn, wooden stairs, a dingy yard a few feet square, terminating in an alley which, from its unsavoury condition, might easily have been the neighbourhood tip! Crowd into these unattractive premises some seventy-five to eighty unwashed, uncared for little children, ranging in age from eighteen months to six years of age, and you will have, in brief, a description of

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<sup>48</sup>

Anderson, 'The Story of the Kindergarten Union of N.S.W', p.19.



the place which, in 1896, did duty for the first Free Kindergarten in Australia.<sup>49</sup>

Although this description is possibly an exaggeration, it would have been a struggle to create a safe and positive learning environment in these conditions.

It took a considerable amount of energy and creativity for the Kindergarten Union to raise charitable donations.<sup>50</sup> Amongst its various strategies, pathos was used to engender sympathy for the children of the poor:

When one thinks of the hundreds of misunderstood, ill-treated, beaten, starved, love-hungry little ones there would seem to be ample excuse for the citizens of Sydney to establish and support kindergartens in every quarter of the city.<sup>51</sup>

The Kindergarten Union even employed a “paid canvasser”.<sup>52</sup>

... a Lady Representative, whose business it is to arouse interest and practical sympathy in Kindergarten work.<sup>53</sup>

But it seems raising funds was a constant battle. Initially, the Kindergarten Union blamed their difficulty in attracting funding on a shortage of charitable monies:

That our work is so hampered, we realise, is because it is not yet generally and rightly understood ... and because there [sic] are so many demands upon the purse of the charitably inclined.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</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, p.30.

<sup>50</sup> Sydney Day Nursery Association (SDN) experienced similar financial hardships. An appeal for funds on the front cover of the SDN Annual report read: “An appeal is made to the public to support this work for the Babies of Sydney’s Working Mothers. Donations of every kind will be gratefully received by the Hon Secretary”. SDN had a ‘Circle of helpers’ who contributed to the upkeep of the nursery. Some provided clothes, others sponsored a cot, yet others worked on numerous fundraising activities, such as, jumble sales, bazaars, ‘at homes’, afternoon teas, and an annual ball. A comprehensive list of donations is included in every Annual Report until 1915. These donations vary from cash to food, toys and equipment. For instance, in 1908 Mrs Fairfax donated ‘children’s clothes (old), curtains and a pram (old)’. A government subsidy was not received until 1910, perhaps in recognition of the important work the SDN was doing in ‘saving’ children for the nation.

<sup>51</sup> F. Newton, Annual report of the Kindergarten Training College. *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1903 – 1904* [this was in fact an error it was 1904 – 1905], p.10.

<sup>52</sup> M. Anderson, Honorary organizing secretary’s report, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1912 – 1913*, p.7.

<sup>53</sup> E. Desailly, Report of the General Secretary, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1913 – 1914*, p.9. The woman appointed was Mrs. Fairfax Smyth.

<sup>54</sup> Jenkins, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1905 – 1906*, p.8.

But even when the financial conditions had improved, it was still difficult for the Kindergarten Union to attract funding:

The question of money interposed. Increased taxation and increased cost of living were not without effect on their [Kindergarten Union's] subscription list. On the other hand, while there was no doubt that wage earners were better paid than in the past a full purse did not ensure a better training for the children.<sup>55</sup>

Jenkins complained:

Because of lack of funds we are able to care for only a comparatively few of the hundreds who swarm certain sections of this fair city.<sup>56</sup>

The Kindergarten Union was, then, limited in what it could achieve.

The Kindergarten Union also appealed to the Government for financial assistance, but was turned down by successive Ministers for Education in 1897 and 1898. Various explanations were given for the Government's decision not to fund the Kindergarten Union. Ironically, it was argued that because Free Kindergartens were 'free' they could not be supported.

On account of the Kindergartens being free, he [the Minister for Public education] was powerless to recommend any subsidy; they, however, trust that, when the excellent results of the work be more fully demonstrated, some concession may yet be made.<sup>57</sup>

So, the construction of Free Kindergartens as charity may have worked against government support. It seems that until better known and publicly supported, the Government would not take the 'risk' of funding the Kindergarten Union:

An unsuccessful attempt had been made to obtain a subsidy from the Government, but the hope was expressed that when the results of kindergarten work were made more apparent the Government would extend the union a helping hand.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> The Kindergartens. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 August, 1911, p.2.

<sup>56</sup> Jenkins, Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1905 – 1906, p.8.

<sup>57</sup> E. Davenport, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1896 – 1897*, no page number.

<sup>58</sup> Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 5 August, 1897, p.3. See also the Kindergarten Union Annual Report for that year.

In other words, the Kindergarten Union had to provide proof of some kind that its work was valuable. Presumably, the government did not want to be seen supporting an unsuccessful venture. In 1899, the Government finally gave limited financial assistance to the Kindergarten Union. But the Kindergarten Union was compelled to continually agitate, cajole and persuade later Governments to support Free Kindergartens:

Does the State realise that if it be recognised, encouraged and fostered for the next few years it will gain such a momentum that its influence and protective power against internal and external evils in the generations to come will be greater than all the standing armies in the world? This may seem like a strong statement to some, but only he who does not know the power of an idea, whose historic knowledge and prophetic sense are lacking, will say “nay” to it.<sup>59</sup>

This construct of Free Kindergartens as producing future valuable citizens will be taken up further in the following chapter.

### **Problematising The Construction of Free Kindergartens as Philanthropic Organisations**

Philanthropy was the touchstone of the early Kindergarten movement. The establishment of Free Kindergartens as charitable education for the poor tended to construct ECEC as deficit education, especially needful for children disadvantaged by their life circumstances. This construct might have mitigated against the view of Free Kindergartens as a right for all. The deficit view seems to have been the dominant view of early education right up to the 1940s, and perhaps remains so today.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, the construction of ECEC as philanthropic work meant that the State could choose if, when, and how it funded ECEC institutions. As such, the support of early

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<sup>59</sup> Newton, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1903 – 1904*, p.9.  
<sup>60</sup> Mellor, *Stepping Stones*.

education was at the discretion of the powerful and subject to economic concerns; a precedent that continues to this day.

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

### **Rescuing Poor Children**

Free Kindergartens were constructed as institutions for rescuing poor children from “their sordid surroundings”:

From the lanes and by-ways of the crowded city districts little ones are being gathered in, and for a few hours each day are surrounded by the sweet, pure, happy influences, which are, in many cases, only too sadly lacking in their home environment.<sup>61</sup>

The streets of poor suburbs were painted as scenes of immorality and vice:

The loud, coarse language which fills the air, and the degrading scenes which occur only too often were surely never meant for the ears and eyes of little children. As one looks at the numberless mites of humanity, playing in the gutters, bareheaded, bare-footed, ragged and dirty, drawing in with every breath the evil of their surroundings, the wonder grows.<sup>62</sup>

On the streets, it was argued, innocent children would be corrupted and ruined:

Their wits are sharpened far beyond their baby years by contact with natures whose aim in life is the survival of the fittest in its lowest sense, at the time when the whole childish organism is mobile and plastic, and open to every impression.<sup>63</sup>

These statements reflect a concern with the loss of innocence of these children. The Free Kindergarten would rescue these poor innocent children from moral degeneracy and put them on the path to righteousness. Scheer, for instance, claimed:

To prevent the first germs of vice from taking root in the impressionable minds of these little ones, to inculcate good habits and desire for work, to awaken the first dim appreciation of the beautiful in

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<sup>61</sup> Kindergarten work in Sydney, *The Dawn*, 15 May, 1902, p.3.

<sup>62</sup> J. G. D., The Free Kindergarten in Sydney, *The Dawn*, 1 June, 16 – 17, 1899, p.16.

<sup>63</sup> R. Buckey, A plea for Kindergartens, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1897 – 1898*, p.21.

nature and art, was the wish of the Kindergarten Union when its Members decided to start a Free Kindergarten.<sup>64</sup>

Similarly, Anderson stated:

The Free Kindergartens save them [the children] from the pollution of the streets, and teach them to love truth and honour.<sup>65</sup>

Indeed, it was argued that for these poor children, vulnerable to corruption, Free Kindergartens were their only hope of salvation:

What chances has he unless the Kindergarten takes him into its fold and surrounds him with its pure, happy, refining influence?<sup>66</sup>

Moreover, Free Kindergartens, it was argued, would provide for children, regardless of their level of 'degradation':

No matter how degraded a child may be, the Kindergarten welcomes him and offers him his birthright of love, sympathy and courtesy.<sup>67</sup>

Free Kindergarten, it was claimed, could reclaim the life of even the most "degraded" child. As such, the work of the Kindergarten Union was a moral crusade.

In keeping with the new visions of dealing with poverty outlined earlier, however, an important priority of Free Kindergartens was to assist children develop useful skills that would enable them to engage effectively in the social world:

We deem no philanthropy worth while which pauperises the individual by an emotional and over-zealous generosity. We believe, rather, that he should be educated to a level of self-respect and of efficiency along some-chosen line of the world's work; and, therefore, while not neglecting immediate or imperative needs, all our efforts are directed to this end.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> M. Scheer, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1896 – 1897*, p.5.

<sup>65</sup> M. Anderson, 'What are you doing to help the little children', in M. Anderson, M. Atkinson, J. Dane, H. Dumulo, Z. Benjamin, & E. Desailly, *Articles on Kindergarten* (Sydney: Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, circa 1916), 5 – 6, p.5.

<sup>66</sup> R. Buckey, Report of the Woolloomooloo Kindergarten for the year 1898 - 1899, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1898 – 1899*, 11 – 18, p.10.

<sup>67</sup> *ibid*, p.10.

<sup>68</sup> Newton, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1903 – 1904*, p.7.

Advocates argued that in Free Kindergartens, children could develop skills and attitudes that would prepare them for future employment:

In every game they learn to practice kindness and courtesy: in every occupation their fingers are trained to deftness: while they learn to delight in patient industry. Justice and forbearance, charity and kindliness are the every-day virtues of the Kindergarten.<sup>69</sup>

Developing a work ethic seems to have been considered particularly important:

Children are unconsciously taught that work is not a curse but a blessing. Nurtured in this atmosphere of loving thought for the first five or six years of life, the impression can never be effaced and the children can never sink into the degradation possible for those who have been neglected.<sup>70</sup>

Although the work of the Free Kindergartens was philanthropic, it was also clearly constructed as practical benevolence — a means of developing work-related skills and attitudes that would help children to help themselves. This construct became particularly dominant with the rise of nationalistic discourses. I develop these ideas further in the following chapter.

### **Problematising The Construct of Free Kindergartens as Rescuing Children: Based on the Idea of the Vulnerable and Innocent Child**

As I discussed in Chapter Four, constructions of Free Kindergartens as rescuing children, based on the idea of the innocent and vulnerable child, were problematic. Constructing children as innocent and vulnerable may have devalued their knowledge and reinforced their dependency. Hendrick, for instance, referring to constructions of childhood in nineteenth century Britain, says that prior to the social reform movements there, which restricted the exploitation of children's labour, children may have been

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<sup>69</sup> Anderson 'What are you doing to help the little children', p.6.

<sup>70</sup> *The Dawn*, 1 March, 1898, p.12.

valued for their contribution to the economy of the family.<sup>71</sup> Hendrick argues that the restrictions placed on children in the mid to late nineteenth century, especially by the introduction of compulsory schooling may have led to them being viewed as economic burdens and made children's position more tenuous. It is not clear whether these criticisms are sustainable in the Australian context where, as established in Chapter Five, there was a history of young children attending school well before the introduction of compulsory schooling. Despite the seductiveness of the construct of the innocent and vulnerable child, it may also perhaps inadvertently have contributed to the powerlessness of children.

Further, when children's weaknesses become the focus of concern their strengths tend to be overlooked.<sup>72</sup> Restrictions are then placed on children which, although aimed at protecting them, also serve to limit their behaviours. Working-class children were most likely used to the freedom that playing in the streets offered. Moreover, street-life afforded valuable survival skills as suggested in the claim children had their "wits sharpened" (see page 281). However, it seems unlikely that children's previous street knowledge would have been recognised or valued within the Free Kindergarten or nursery. Rather, within the Free Kindergartens, run as they were by middle-class women, the skills these children brought with them would probably have been overlooked, dismissed as irrelevant, or even interpreted as harmful. Possibly only those characteristics and skills recognised as congruent with the dominant middle-class ideal would be valued, encouraged, fostered and rewarded. Consequently, children who were

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<sup>71</sup> H. Hendrick, 'Constructions and reconstructions of British childhood: An interpretative survey, 1800 to the present', in A. James, & A. Prout (eds.), *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London: The Falmer Press, 1997), 35 – 59.

<sup>72</sup> 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).

perhaps once considered highly competent within their own working-class culture, would likely be assessed on measures that inherently favoured the middle-class child. Under such circumstances, working-class children were likely to have been considered 'inferior'.

It seems the Kindergarten Union documents served to reinforce this boundary between the classes, by 'othering' the working-class. For instance, Anderson wrote:

Do you ever think of other people's children? I don't mean of your neighbour's children, who sit on pleasant verandahs, and grow like flowers in the gardens where they play, but the children who live in one room in a poor street, or play in a little shop upon a dusty by-way – the children of the women who works all day in a laundry, the children of the drunkard, or of the desolate women, the children of those whose only ideal centres in the public-house at the corner. Do YOU ever think of THEM?<sup>73</sup>

This rather embellished language was aimed at engendering sympathy for the child of the working-class in order to raise funds for the Kindergarten Union's philanthropic work, so a certain amount of hyperbole is perhaps to be expected. Nevertheless, the children of the poor are constructed as somehow 'alien' to the reader.

Although the construction of children as vulnerable may be problematic, to deny the vulnerability of these working-class poor children at the end of the nineteenth century would have been to continue to neglect them. These children were truly vulnerable to their environment. Many children died or were permanently incapacitated by illnesses, accidents and abuse. Perhaps without the construct of the child as vulnerable no action would have been taken to improve the life of poor children, perpetuating injustice and hardship.

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<sup>73</sup>

Anderson, 'What are you doing to help the little children', p.5 [emphasis in the original].



## **Problematising The Construct of Free Kindergarten as Rescuing Children: The Focus on Morality Rather than Physical Safety**

In its earliest days, the Kindergarten Union tended to be more concerned with rescuing children from moral rather than physical danger. This reveals something of a paradox. Whilst Kindergarteners were writing of their concern for children, there appears to have been little compunction about turning children back out onto the 'dangerous' streets, despite the very real dangers experienced by poor children, 'abandoned' whilst their mothers were forced to work. Free Kindergartens operated on a part time basis only, opening for a few hours in the morning. In the afternoon they closed their doors. Kelly is scathing in her assessment of the Kindergarten Union. She says:

[The Kindergarten Union] ignored glaring evidence of children's mal- and under-nourishment, physical abuse, disease and inadequate or inappropriate clothing, and placed its faith indomitably [sic] and implicitly in the belief that enough "right habits" could be soaked up in a few hours each day in the kindergarten atmosphere to combat the evil of disordered home conditions.<sup>74</sup>

I do not believe, however, that such harsh criticisms can be substantiated. As I discuss later in the chapter, there is ample evidence in the historical sources to suggest that those in the Kindergarten Union were both concerned with, and worked to improve, children's health and well-being.

The initial focus on morality may have been due to the middle-class reformers' lack of awareness of the conditions of the poor. In these early days the middle-class women who established Free Kindergartens would have had little experience of the daily lived reality of the poor of Sydney. The supposed moral degradation of the poor may have

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<sup>74</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.

been considered an innate deficiency in that population. But, with prolonged exposure, the Kindergarteners may have developed a better understanding of the local surroundings and conditions and, importantly, how these influenced children's lives. Indeed, it was the expressed intention that Kindergarteners enter the homes of the poor in order to come to better understand 'their' children:

It is only through a knowledge and appreciation of home influences and surroundings that the Kindergartener can hope to understand and deal with the varied temperaments and characteristics of the small individuals who come under her care. If the sympathy and interest of the mothers can be aroused (and it surely can) and if they can be bought to co-operate in the right training of their children, then the battle is more than half won.<sup>75</sup>

Although ostensibly the Kindergarteners' visits were to encourage the mothers to take up the values espoused by Free Kindergartens, home visits would also have exposed the Kindergarteners to the lived conditions of the poor children.

The following description of the surroundings of a Free Kindergarten illustrates that these environs were considered desperate:

The approach to both these places [the kindergartens in Woolloomooloo and Newtown] is along lanes and alleys lined with small, cramped terrace-houses, the front doors of which open clear on to the street. Refuse tins and boxes frequently adorn the sidewalk and make one unpleasantly conscious of their unsavory contents, while goats of all ages and sizes wander up and down at will and browse upon cast-off fragments of fruit and vegetables.<sup>76</sup>

By working in the area for long periods, and by entering the homes of the children and their families, the Kindergarteners would no doubt have gained intimate knowledge of the abject living conditions faced by many families and the circumstances which led to

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<sup>75</sup> J. Dane, Report of the Newtown Free Kindergarten, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1897 – 1898*, p.15.

<sup>76</sup> J. G. D., *The Dawn*, p.16.

these — and perhaps developed a much greater appreciation of the need to transform these areas. Perhaps familiarity bred concern.

It is important to recognise that, although the construct of Free Kindergartens as rescuing children was based on issues of morality, the assistance offered by the Kindergarten Union was secular. Considering the dominance of religious discourse at the time, it seems remarkable that there was only passing reference to a 'God', and no reference to any organised religion in the Kindergarten Union texts, although expressions of Christianity were evident. Why were Free Kindergartens non-secular? Perhaps the non-denominational nature of the Kindergarten Union reflects the Theosophical beliefs held by many of those who established Free Kindergartens, including Maybanke Anderson.<sup>77</sup> Or perhaps, the Kindergarteners wanted to remain 'outside' the established church organisations. If they had associated with a particular religious group they might have lost control over the Free Kindergarten.

Alternatively, the non-denominational nature of Free Kindergartens could be viewed as the Kindergarteners' deliberate attempt at inclusiveness. Women who worked in the Kindergarten Union were of multiple faiths. Visitors to Free Kindergarten also seem to have been from diverse backgrounds. For instance, Jenkins says the visitors to the Free Kindergartens were of different:

... nationality, social distinctions, religious creeds [and] educational bias.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> For further information on Maybanke Anderson's involvement with Theosophy see J. Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson: Sex, Suffrage and Social Reform* (Sydney: Hale & Iremonger, 1993).

<sup>78</sup> Jenkins, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1905 – 1906*, p.11.

As such, she felt it was:

... the most cosmopolitan place on earth.<sup>79</sup>

Anderson suggests that the non-denominational nature of the Kindergarten Union was in fact problematic. She claims it was a possible reason for the lack of public interest, arguing that it might have been difficult for people of a particular faith to identify with the non-denominational nature of the Kindergarten Union.<sup>80</sup>

But perhaps most importantly, even though based on issues of morality, it seems that Free Kindergartens were inclusive of children from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds:

There is no denominational teaching in a kindergarten, though true religion breaths in every word and action. The children and their parents may belong to any Christian sect, or may be, as they sometimes are, Hindoos, Mohammedans, or Chinese. The supporters of the kindergartens are also of many beliefs, and the religious belief of either supporter or pupil is never inquired into.<sup>81</sup>

Whilst it cannot be assumed that Free Kindergartens in reality welcomed diversity or that the practices were 'truly' non-denominational, this statement does suggest it was an intention of the Kindergarten Union that Free Kindergartens be inclusive. Given these were highly racist times, the significance of this intention must not be overlooked. It could be argued that the construction of Free Kindergartens as non-denominational set a precedence of inclusiveness that underpins many ECEC philosophies today.

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<sup>79</sup> Jenkins, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1905 – 1906*, p.11. There is, however, little evidence to support the contention that Free Kindergartens were 'cosmopolitan'. There are few records of the ethnic or religious background of the children for instance. There is also no mention of Aboriginal children attending the centres, although children attending Free Kindergartens were exposed to Aboriginal cultural artifacts. The photograph of children attending the Woolloomoo Free Kindergarten in 1896 does show at least one child with dark skin.

<sup>80</sup> Anderson, 'The Story of the Kindergarten Union of N.S.W'.

<sup>81</sup> M. Anderson, *The Story of the Free Kindergartens and Playgrounds* (Sydney: Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, circa 1912).

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

### **Forming Children**

An important aspect of the socially just construct is that Free Kindergartens would 'shape' or 'form' children into beings that reflected liberal / progressive ideals. Free Kindergartens, it was argued, would instill children with 'correct' values of:

... love truth and purity.<sup>82</sup>

It was claimed Free Kindergartens worked:

... in every possible way to arouse the spirit of gentleness, of loving kindness and thought for others.<sup>83</sup>

Strongly influenced by Fröebel, and possibly in an attempt to underscore the 'naturalness' of this process, the metaphor of the garden and nature was heavily used in the Kindergarten Union texts. For instance, the child was described as a flower and Free Kindergarten a garden:

The child-mind like an opening bud is susceptible to every influence that is brought to bear upon it, when every touch will either rub off some of the exquisite bloom and stunt the growth, or else will gently help it to unfold its petals one by one until it is the perfect blossom, shedding beauty and fragrance all around. In Kindergarten the children are treated just like flowers and are given all the sunshine, happiness and freedom that is so necessary for their development. They are taught the pleasure and satisfaction of cleanliness, of gentleness and unselfishness, and of helping to keep bright and clean.<sup>84</sup>

It was claimed that children would 'gently' learn through the curriculum. Stories of transformation were considered particularly salient:

In child dramatisation of the transformation of the caterpillar into the cocoon and the cocoon into the beautiful butterfly the pupils were made to realise that they had a brighter life before them. The same lesson was taught in the story of the bird and her eggs, and the springing of the plane from the seed.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Anderson, 'What are you doing to help the little children', p.6

<sup>83</sup> J. Dane, Report of the Newtown Free Kindergarten for the year ending 1899, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1898 – 1899*, 12 – 15, p.12.

<sup>84</sup> J. G. D., *The Dawn*, p.16.

<sup>85</sup> Kindergarten Easter celebrations, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 April, 1898, p.4.

Moreover, it was claimed that Free Kindergarten gave children the ‘freedom’ to develop as nature had intended:

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 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>86</sup>

It seems ironic, however, that to awaken children’s consciousness of freedom, they had to be enclosed in Free Kindergartens.

### **Problematising the Construction of Free Kindergarten as Forming Children:**

#### **Changing the Individual**

The construct of Free Kindergarten as forming children focused on shaping them into virtuous compliant bodies. In this regard, the use of the garden metaphor is particularly problematic. This metaphor suggests that the formation of children was a natural outcome of a nurturing environment. Such statements not only construct particular outcomes as natural and therefore correct, they hide the coercive nature of the forming environments and place little value on the struggle and dissent, necessary for structural social change.

As discussed in Chapter Three, a focus on the individual fails to challenge the structural forces that lead to poverty and disadvantage in the first place, and instead serves to uphold the dominant power structures.<sup>87</sup> For instance, when focusing on individuals, their ‘failures’ to succeed are considered to be due to their shortcomings, rather than to

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<sup>86</sup> L. De Lissa, ‘The social aspect of Montessori work’, *The Australian Kindergarten Magazine*. 4 (2) (1914), 3 – 6, p.4.

<sup>87</sup> See for instance: N. Alloway, ‘Early childhood education encounters the postmodern: What do we know? What can we count as ‘true’?’, *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. 22 (2) (1997), 1 – 5;

social political forces. So the focus on the individual tends to stifle any moves to challenge inequality in the system. Scholars have previously identified the controlling nature of reform campaigns in the late nineteenth century. Tiffin, for instance, points out that often these institutions maintained social relationships that upheld dominant power relations and allowed the middle-class to retain their position.<sup>88</sup> The humanitarian intentions of those involved in Free Kindergartens could be viewed as similarly controlling.

I argued earlier in this chapter that the late 1800s was a time of political upheaval, when the working-class were being urged to rise up and revolt. The middle-class of course had much to lose if the working-class were to rebel. Instead, the social reform practices put in place marginally improved the conditions of the poor and upheld the promise of progress. As such, the poor were placated; the capitalist system, which favoured the middle-class, was maintained; and the dominant social structure upheld. It could be said that Free Kindergartens contributed to the maintenance of a system which marginalised the disadvantaged.

But was the provision of ECEC necessarily a deliberate attempt by reformers to retain social stratification? It seems not. In Britain, for instance, according to Steedman, Margaret McMillan hoped that 'child rescue' there would raise political consciousness amongst the working-class and thus lead to changes in social stratification, rather than maintain the system. According to Steedman, McMillan, a socialist, hoped that "dirty diseased and malnourished children would be restored healthy, whole and beautiful to

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S. G. Goffin, 'Child development knowledge and early childhood teacher preparation: Assessing the relationship — a special collection', *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*. 11 (1996), 117 – 133.

<sup>88</sup> Tiffin, *In Whose Best Interest?*

their parents, who would then be roused to a consciousness of their exploitation and deprivation; who would then rise up, and demand their rights as full citizens".<sup>89</sup> In Australia, however, there is little evidence that Free Kindergartens were seen as a means of consciousness raising. Instead, their establishment seems to have been based on humanitarian concerns, rather than radical socialism. There is a sense that those who established Free Kindergartens believed it was the responsibility of the richer citizens to support their 'more needy', poorer neighbours. Many of the Free Kindergartens were supported by committees in wealthy suburbs on the basis that:

... a rich neighbourhood should take charge of a poor one.<sup>90</sup>

Although this approach seems paternalistic, whether or not the rich recognised the role of Free Kindergartens in maintaining social structures and used these deliberately to support the social stratification is open to debate.

In contrast to the paternalistic approach, there is also in the Kindergarten Union documents evidence of a desire to engage in what today might be called community capacity building.<sup>91</sup> Jenkins for instance wrote it was important to teach student

Kindergarten teachers about the value of neighbourliness:

It is this spirit of neighbourliness, of wishing to help others to help themselves, of simple kindness unfailingly productive of good understanding amongst those wide apart in thought and experience, it is the desire to make the most of one-self so as to be of such service. ... our work is of that humanitarian idea which is distinguishing education of this century from that of the last. Our emphasis has never been on externals, but on those deep-lying forces and the expression of which one must look for the growing womanliness of our students, the happiness and well-being of children, the spirit of mutual trust and good-will between the Kindergarteners and their Kindergarten

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<sup>89</sup> Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class in Britain*, p.57.

<sup>90</sup> M. Anderson, Organising secretary's report for year ending with July, 1907. *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1906 – 1907*, 3 – 5, p.3.

<sup>91</sup> J. Bowes (ed.), *Children, Families and Communities: Contexts and Consequences* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) (Sydney: Oxford University Press, 2004).



neighbours, and in the co-operation of all those who have a part in this great work.<sup>92</sup>

To build capacity requires recognising the strengths that already exist in the community and building on them.<sup>93</sup> So, far from being a deficit approach, perhaps Kindergarten was constructed as a strengths-based approach.

It is important to recognise the contradiction apparent between the desire of those in Free Kindergartens to ameliorate disadvantage, and their complicity in upholding inequitable social structures. And yet, as Tiffin points out, we cannot dismiss the humanitarian work of nineteenth century reformers.

This is not to say that the changes put forward under the banner of humanitarianism were necessarily conscious efforts to maintain existing social relationships, nor that the controlling element was the only meaning or even the main characteristic of such reforms. Calls for social justice cannot be seen as merely a hypocritical or self-delusive front for class interest. The visible zeal with which reformers acted on behalf of destitute and handicapped children cannot be dismissed as a cynical use of religion or humanitarianism to defend their own economic and political power. Ideals must be given real weight.<sup>94</sup>

Free Kindergartens may have done little to change poverty and disadvantage at a structural level and perhaps, by ameliorating the effects of poverty, may have served to dampen radical sedition and calls for reform. Nevertheless, it must also be acknowledged that whilst the focus on the individual might have regulated children, it also had positive outcomes in contributing to what today would be called “human capital”.<sup>95</sup> It is likely, for instance, that children who attended would have developed

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<sup>92</sup> E. Jenkins, The Sydney Kindergarten Training College, Annual Report 1909 – 1910, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1909 – 1910*, pp.6 – 7.

<sup>93</sup> Bowes, *Children, Families and Communities*.

<sup>94</sup> Tiffin, *In Whose Best Interest?*, p.10.

<sup>95</sup> J. Garbarino, ‘Raising children in a socially toxic environment’, *Family Matters*. 50 (1998), 53 – 55.

skills and knowledge useful for future education and employment, thus assisting them to contribute to, and engage more effectively with, the dominant capitalist society.

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

#### **Reforming Society**

The final socially just construct of Free Kindergarten evident in the historical sources was that of reforming society. Liberal / progressive discourses upheld the notion of social progress. Within these discourses Free Kindergartens were constructed as institutions that would not only form the individual child, but would also extend beyond the individual to the home and the community, and thereby contribute to the reform of society.

From its earliest days, the Kindergarten Union constructed Kindergarten education as essential to social improvement:

The decision has been arrived at ... on the expressed opinion of the promoters [of Kindergarten] that the renovation of society was largely dependent on moral reform, which was to be bought about by education, and especially by primary education in its most improved form.<sup>96</sup>

Several years later, and relying on 'scientific' discourses to uphold her argument, De Lissa similarly stated:

There is perhaps no bigger agency in social regeneration than education – for what can be more scientific than that correct formation which education seeks to bring about. It is more psychological and more economical than reformation, and far more humane.<sup>97</sup>

As such, Free Kindergartens were constructed as:

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<sup>96</sup> The Kindergarten Union. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 December, 1895, p.9.  
<sup>97</sup> L. De Lissa, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1913 - 1914*, p.3.

The greatest and grandest cause yet devised for uplifting humanity, and the true and harmonious development of child life.<sup>98</sup>

Consequently, although the primary focus may have been on children, Free Kindergartens were constructed as having far greater influence than on children alone:

The introduction into the slum districts of far-reaching elevating influences which do not end with the children but are carried into the homes and brighten and purify the lives of the parents, thus affecting the whole community. The work of the Union might truly be said to be of national importance.<sup>99</sup>

A Free Kindergarten, it was argued, could pervade the local environment and become:

... a centre for social work in the homes surrounding it.<sup>100</sup>

It was the poor and their communities who were considered in need of reform:

The fields of operations being confined in most instances to districts inhabited by the lowest strata of society, there is still a much higher object in view, that of redeeming lowest humanity through the children giving the world better, braver, and truer men and women.<sup>101</sup>

Calling on well established metaphors of light / good, dark / evil, a Free Kindergarten was often referred to in the Kindergarten Union documents as a beacon of light in the local community:

In a word, a Free Kindergarten is a little centre of light and purity in a place that would be gloomy indeed without it.<sup>102</sup>

Similarly:

The Kindergarten room is always a lamp in a dark place, and the social atmosphere of the neighbourhood is the brighter for its presence.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> R. L. Buckey, Report of the Woolloomooloo Kindergarten for the year, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1897 – 1898*, 7 – 11, p.7.

<sup>99</sup> E. Davenport, Report of the committee, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1898 – 1899*, 9 – 11, p.10.

<sup>100</sup> Will yon [sic] help the Free Kindergartens? Formation not reformation. (Circa 1910), p.3. From Kindergarten Union archives, Mitchell library.

<sup>101</sup> Newtown Free Kindergarten school, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 October, 1898, p.3.

<sup>102</sup> Anderson, *The Story of the Free Kindergartens and Playgrounds*, p.3

<sup>103</sup> M. Anderson, Report of the Honorary Organising Secretary for the year 1913 – 1914, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1914 – 1915*, p.7.

Into these 'dark' places that were the suburbs of the poor, Free Kindergarten would bring 'purifying' light.<sup>104</sup> But, more than merely enlighten the suburbs, it was argued they would also improve the 'sordid' surroundings of the poor and bring about social edification:

Our Kindergarten has become in reality a centre for the radiating of better and purer influences, not only in the neighbourhood, but also in more distant localities.<sup>105</sup>

Indeed, to support the construction of Free Kindergarten as a way of bringing about social improvement, Anderson often repeated the following anecdote:

Some years ago, the landlord of the old cottage in Bligh-street, Newtown, which was for many years the Newtown Kindergarten, gave us notice to quit. "It is time you went," he said; "this is a respectable street now. You have made the people keep decent. So you ought to move on and start in another slum."<sup>106</sup>

Such an endorsement of Free Kindergarten, whether or not true, was too good a public relations opportunity to miss and it is perhaps only to be expected that it was exploited as far as possible.

In what ways did the Kindergarten Union consider Free Kindergartens brought about social change? Home visits by teachers were considered one important way of spreading the 'Kindergarten message':

Homes of the children were visited by teachers, whose sympathy and interest inspired the mother's confidence, and she helped to draw the families of the district together in a neighbourly way. The trust inspired had the wholesome effect in creating a spirit of independence and self-respect and a desire to give more in return.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> For a discussion on the use of light as a metaphor for good see: C. Burke, 'Light: Metaphor and materiality in the history of schooling', in M. Lawn, & I. Grosvenor (eds), *Materialities of Schooling: Design – Technology – Object – Routines* (Oxford, Symposium Books, 2005), 125 – 143.

<sup>105</sup> Dane, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1898 – 1899*, p.12.

<sup>106</sup> M. Anderson, *The Free Kindergartens in Sydney: Commemoration Address in 1913* (Sydney: Kindergarten Union of New South Wales, 1914), p.14.

<sup>107</sup> The Kindergartens, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 17 August, 1911, p.2. Interestingly, when describing Settlement work the Women's page of *The Sydney Morning Herald* stated: "It is no part of the scheme that indiscriminate visiting should take place from the settlement. It is recognised that the rich

Through these home visits the Kindergarteners could enter the working-class homes and try to transform them into replicas of middle-class ideals. The Kindergarteners educated the working-class mothers on matters such as, home management, children's health issues and child development:

In order to do such work successfully a welcome *entre* to the homes is imperative, and it is beginning to be recognised that the door is opened to no one more quickly than to the Kindergartener, who often becomes confidante, advisor, and friend to every member of the family.<sup>108</sup>

So too were 'mother education' and 'mothers' meetings' deemed important for reforming society:

The mothers' meetings, which are held every Thursday from 2.30 to 4.30, have been well attended. Dr. Dagmar Byrne gave a talk to the mothers, in which she urged the importance of making the homes neat and attractive.<sup>109</sup>

Mother education will be discussed more fully in Chapter Ten where I examine ECEC as women's work.

It was the children, however, who offered Free Kindergarten one of the most important modes of entry into the homes and local community. Once inculcated with middle-class ideals, it was believed the working-class children who attended Free Kindergarten would take these ideals into their homes and local communities:

It appears that the influence of the Kindergarten makes itself felt in the homes. The children take there the songs they have learnt (and with them the sentiments embodied), and teach them to their mothers, sisters and brothers.<sup>110</sup>

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have no more right to visit the homes of the poor unasked, and inquire into the working of their lives, than the poor have to similarly molest the rich". (1906, 7 November, p.5).

<sup>108</sup> Newton, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1903 – 1904*, p.13 [emphasis in the original].

<sup>109</sup> Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1898 – 1899*, p.11.

<sup>110</sup> The Free Kindergarten, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 16 April, 1897, p.2.

Not only were the children attending Free Kindergarten considered to benefit, those benefits were thought to spread far and wide:

It is not only the children who benefit by the Kindergarten training and influence but all of those with whom they come in contact. When they return again to their play-ground of the street, and to the sordid home environment, they carry with them some of the sweetness, courtesy and refinement, and thus become truer little missionaries<sup>111</sup>

Indeed, children were frequently referred to as 'missionaries' who could go where others, that is, the middle-class reformers, could not:

The Kindergarten not only gives him the chance for himself, but the influence and atmosphere of it is carried by the children into their homes, where the missionaries or ministers would not be allowed to enter.<sup>112</sup>

It was considered exceedingly important that children's experience in Free Kindergarten would instill them with 'appropriate' values. As such, it was important that the Free Kindergartens create models of middle-class home-life:

We tried to make our very bare quarters more homelike and cheerful. We make every effort to have our children in pure, wholesome, and beautiful surroundings.<sup>113</sup>

A description of Woolloomooloo Free Kindergarten in *The Dawn* gives an indication of what this meant in practice:

Pictures hang upon the walls, fresh flowers fill the vases, and growing plants adorn the window sills. Then there is a kitten to be fed and cared for, some canaries to be tended, or maybe, some other pets which need daily thought and attention. The care of living things has a refining influence on children and leads them to be tender and considerate, and cultivate a love for animals and an interest in their habits and characteristic.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> J. G. D., *The Dawn*, p.17.

<sup>112</sup> Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1897 – 1898*, p.20.

<sup>113</sup> *ibid*, p.7

<sup>114</sup> J. G. D., *The Dawn*, p.16.

This description, a picture of late nineteenth century middle-class domesticity, suggests Free Kindergarten aimed to present an ideal homelife to which the children, their families and communities could aspire.

But perhaps nowhere is the attempt to bring about social reform more evident than in the Free Kindergarten teachers' 'fixation' with cleanliness. The frequency with which bathing was mentioned seems to suggest it took on an enormous significance in the Free Kindergarten.<sup>115</sup> One of Buckey's first requests, above curriculum materials, was for bathing equipment:

My first request was for a bath, for these little folk have a very limited acquaintance with soap and water, in many instances, and when Mrs. Davenport kindly responded to this need, the next difficulty was the objects to be bathed. They objected decidedly — many refused point blank to indulge in such a luxury — and it was only by making it a game of bathing that they were induced to try it. However, we succeeded not only in cultivating and enjoyment of these very necessary diversions, but the necessity for them grew gradually less, as this hint to the mothers had a most wholesome effect, and now it is unusual to have them come in a very untidy condition, even though they have to stay at home occasionally to have a dress or pinafore laundered [sic].<sup>116</sup>

Indeed, Anderson went so far as to say that:

... cleanliness and punctuality are two of the essential virtues of the kindergarten child.<sup>117</sup>

This is not to say that everybody appreciated the bathing parties however! Buckey, for instance, wrote that a number children were reluctant to bath:

The bathing parties are still popular with the many but very objectionable to the few. Penie, our "great unwashed," and "Henry the

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<sup>115</sup> Hardyment says that the bathing of children was a subject of much concern in childcare manuals for at least a hundred years before the establishment of Free Kindergartens. Some writers apparently argued for cold baths, others for warm — but nevertheless a bath was considered essential. Hardyment suggests that perhaps there is some religious element to this, and that bathing represented a kind of baptism. It might also have been a way of disciplining and controlling children. C. Hardyment, *Dream Babies: Child Care from Locke to Spock* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

<sup>116</sup> Buckey, Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1897 – 1898.

<sup>117</sup> Anderson, *The Story of the Free Kindergartens and Playgrounds*, p.5

Lesser,” are the least appreciate. Tiny flies at the mention of soap and water, and Henry prefers his familiar soot, and it requires the united energy of two people to keep him in the bath. The first effort is to get him well lathered, but the supreme effort is to hold him in. He slips through one’s hands like an eel and is out on the other side in an instant.<sup>118</sup>

Similarly, Dane complained:

It was difficult at first to induce some of the children to make close acquaintance with soap and water, and naturally these were the ones who need it most, but by degrees their objection was overcome, and they began to appreciate the comfort of cleanliness.<sup>119</sup>

A photograph included in the Kindergarten Union’s Annual report (Figure 13 page 303), however, seems to belie the interpretation that children appreciated the bathing experience, as it hardly seems to show the children enjoying themselves.<sup>120</sup>

As time went on, it was claimed the children, and their families, had learnt important lessons about bathing:

The necessity for baths is not nearly so frequent – rarely a dirty child enters Kindergarten. It has been hard work to get in touch with the parents, but evidently more is done than we think, from short talks with the children about their homes and visits to the same.<sup>121</sup>

But perhaps this willingness to bath was more to do with the fact that if they did not come to Free Kindergarten clean, they would be refused entry:

There is a marked improvement in the cleanliness of the children since they and their mothers learned that unduly soiled faces and hands kept them out of their heaven until they were clean.<sup>122</sup>

This coercive practice must evidently have worked for the above statement was the last mention of personal hygiene in the Kindergarten Union Annual Reports up to 1915. The

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<sup>118</sup> Buckey, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1898 – 1899*, p.16 [speech marks in the original].

<sup>119</sup> Dane, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1898 – 1899*, p.20.

<sup>120</sup> Report of the Woolloomooloo Kindergarten for the year, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1897 – 1898*, 7 – 11, p.9.

<sup>121</sup> M. F. Braun, Report of the Woolloomooloo Free Kindergarten, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1900 - 1901*, p.19.

<sup>122</sup> Newton, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1903 – 1904*, p.8.



fact that children were willing to sacrifice themselves to soap and water also suggests that they, or their parents, valued their attendance.

Although the statements about bathing may seem quaint and amusing to us today, such behaviour on the part of the Kindergartener, even if well intentioned, was nevertheless abusive in today's terms. What right did these women have to instill their values on the children, let alone physically handle them? This behaviour clearly indicates the positions of power these women had over the children who attended Free Kindergartens, and through the child, their influence on the practices of the family. I take up this issue of the middle-class women's power in Chapter Ten.

### **Problematising the Construct of Free Kindergarten as Reforming Society:**

#### **Colonising the Poor**

As has been shown above, the reform agenda of Free Kindergarten clearly extended beyond the child to their families and local communities. By attempting to change the ideas and practices of the working-class poor to more readily reflect middle-class norms, these reformers engaged in a form of colonisation. The reform agenda of the nineteenth century has been critiqued elsewhere. Reiger, for instance, has argued that the reform agenda was based upon a middle-class model of family life.<sup>123</sup> The reformers were mostly women from the newly established middle-class, with time on their hands to engage in philanthropic work.<sup>124</sup> Through their work with children, the women engaged in Free Kindergartens gained access to the working-class homes and attempted

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<sup>123</sup> K. M. Reiger, *The Disenchantment of the Home: Modernizing the Australian Family 1880 – 1940* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.154.

<sup>124</sup> This is not the case for all these women however. Maybanke Anderson, for instance, was a self supporting single mother (see Roberts, *Maybanke Anderson*).



Figure 13: A bathing party, 1898. From the Kindergarten Union archives, Mitchell Library.  
Reproduced by courtesy of Kindergarten Union.

to transform them into replicas of middle-class ideals. Kindergarteners were the conduits through which middle-class values could enter working-class homes.

The middle-class not only retained power by setting the expectations; they placed an enormous burden on the poor. For instance, rather than the State investing to improve the conditions in poor areas, the poor, engaged in the day to day struggle of living with poverty and disadvantage were expected to bring about this transformation themselves. Moreover, even if it were possible to inculcate middle-class ideals into the working-class, it is unlikely that even then they would have been considered equals by the middle-class.

But the community outreach of Free Kindergarten cannot be viewed merely as some sinister, hidden agenda to dominate the working-class. There seems to have been a genuine concern with children evident amongst these women. For instance, *The Dawn* is replete with articles, many written by women involved in Free Kindergarten, describing the plight of poor and disabused children and calling for action.<sup>125</sup> The work of these women was recognised at the time as being based both on a 'love' of children *and* a desire to prevent them developing immoral behaviour. For instance, in *The Sydney Morning Herald* their work was described as:

The embodiment of love and common sense – love that caused them to care for young children, and common sense which told them it was better to exercise a fostering direction over the children rather than allow them to learn vicious and criminal habits as gutter children.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> See for instance reports on the Sydney Ragged Schools and Boarding Out: *The Dawn*, 15 May, 1888; *The Dawn*, 1 October, 1890; *The Dawn*, 5 May; 1894.

<sup>126</sup> A Free Kindergarten at Newtown: A successful inauguration, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 February, 1898, p.3.

Furthermore, Free Kindergartens offered valuable assistance for the poor. They provided a place where the poor could readily access several services, such as doctors, dentists and a library. Free Kindergartens also worked closely with other organisations for the benefit of the poor such as the Fresh Air league, who organised holidays in the country for the 'needy' and the Sydney Needlework Guild who collected clothing for the poor. Free Kindergartens provided central locations where philanthropic ventures could be coordinated; or what Jenkins referred to as:

... neighbourhood centres where the needs of the people will be met as far as is within our power.<sup>127</sup>

It was claimed by Jenkins:

The Kindergarten is such a vital centre of human interest, when the director herself is a trusted friend of the neighbourhood, knowing its needs, its strength, its weaknesses, and holding out a helping hand to all. Not the help that weakens, but that which, wholesome and stimulating, arouses to self-effort and self-respect. Here in these neighbourhood centres, if anywhere, is there an influence at work which is quietly but surely hastening the coming of that brotherhood of man for which this century more than any other is consciously labouring.<sup>128</sup>

Whilst this statement may seem patronising to modern sensibilities, it nevertheless suggests there was a genuine desire to help young children and the community. This reading is further supported by the following statement:

It [Free Kindergarten] does claim, as the heart and core of its philosophy, those things which are fundamental to all education which really educates, viz., the right of every individual to the best preparation for "complete living" that home church and state, parents, townspeople and nation can give him: the right to that sort of training which will put him in command of all his powers at each stage of his existence, and adequately fit him for any place or station to which it may please God to call him, that so he may act acceptably to himself and to his fellow.<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> E. Jenkins, Annual report of the Kindergarten Training College, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report 1905 – 1906*, 5 – 11, p.10.

<sup>128</sup> *ibid*, p.11.

<sup>129</sup> F. Newton, *Kindergarten Union of NSW Annual Report, 1902 - 1903*, p.11.

It seems the type of assistance provided was based on liberal progressive ideals of the right of the individual to life improving education, as well as ideas of universal tolerance and a 'brotherhood of man'. The altruistic imperatives for establishing Free Kindergartens cannot, then, be dismissed.

### **Problematising the Construct of Free Kindergarten as Reforming Society: The Focus on Mothers**

Much of the focus of social reform was brought to bear on working-class mothers. One cannot help but wonder how these mothers were to possibly live up to the expectations of the middle-class Kindergarteners. How much work must it have been, for instance, for these mothers to keep their children clean, in homes without running water and only one set of clothes? How could they mimic the middle-class sensibilities of flowers on the table when they had difficulty securing food? It is likely that Free Kindergartens increased the burden on these women. It seems that the middle-class women who established Free Kindergartens were establishing positions of power for themselves in the only way they could — in relation to those who were even less powerful, that is, working-class women. These ideas will be more fully examined in Chapter Ten.

### **Conclusion to Chapter Eight**

In this chapter I began by establishing that within liberal / progressive discourses evident in the late nineteenth century, new ways of viewing poverty emerged which created an imperative for intervening in the lives of children. I argued that these discourses gave rise to the construction of Free Kindergarten as socially just education, as rescuing and forming children, and reforming society. I raised a number of concerns with these constructions. In particular, I emphasised how power operated through Free

Kindergartens to construct working-class children as vulnerable, and to 'other' them, their mothers, families and communities. I also argued that Free Kindergartens reinforced dominant, middle-class power structures. But, despite these concerns, I argued that those women who established Free Kindergartens seem to possess a genuine a desire to help children. Whilst Free Kindergartens might have upheld dominant social structures which ultimately disadvantaged the working-class poor, they also materially assisted vulnerable children and struggling families. As such, they performed a valuable function in society.

I also highlighted in this chapter how the construction of Free Kindergartens as socially just was not particularly successful in terms of raising money. Free Kindergartens could not rely solely on engendering sympathy as a way of attracting funding; more pragmatic arguments were required. As time moved on and the discursive landscape in Australia changed, nationalist discourses became more prominent. In the following chapter I show how, within nationalist discourses, those advocating ECEC struggled to maintain its relevance by constructing it as national work.