Pre-School Education Centre, Dunedin 1940s

With summary notes adapted from:

The idea for demonstration Pre-School Education Centre (PEC) came from Dr Helen Deem who had been appointed the new medical advisor to Plunket in 1939 after the death of Sir Truby King in 1938. Plunket wanted a more proactive role in the health of the preschool-aged child and an opportunity for Karitane nurses to train in a preschool setting. This became a partnership and joint venture between the Dunedin Free Kindergarten Association (DFKA) and the Plunket Society. Their submission to Government detailed how the health benefits of nursery schools had proved their worth in England and Australia. The reference to Australia was important, because the Commonwealth Government was in the midst of establishing a Lady Gowrie Centre in each state capital. The PEC opened in 1941 at the Truby King Harris [Karitane] Hospital at Andersons Bay. The building and grounds were not ideal, particularly in relation to outdoor play space, and a campaign for proper buildings began immediately. These eventuated in 1955.

[Link to: Helen Deem Centre for Pre-school Education 1950s]
Elizabeth Stewart Hamilton was appointed the foundation Director and remained in the position until 1951 when she became the Principal at the DFKA. Elizabeth Stewart Hamilton had trained as a kindergarten teacher in Wellington and in 1937 won a Carnegie Fellowship to undergo further training with Susan Isaacs at the Institute of Education at the University of London. She returned to New Zealand imbued with the latest ideas on progressive education.
The Centre integrated the two key strands of childrearing in the twentieth century: the scientific medical approach, and a progressive psychoanalytic pedagogy, with the excesses of both being avoided in the blend. Monthly reports reflect Hamilton’s skills in balancing new educational ideals with the more regimented daily health inspections and training requirements from Plunket. This can be seen in her careful moderation of Plunket requirements for clean plates, and children eating up their dinner, with her own knowledge of the fickleness of the preschool eater. There was a parent education programme with talks were given on such topics as dental decay, foot disabilities, personality. The centre initially operated from 9.15 a.m. until 2.30 p.m. with two ¾ hour periods of free play. There were daily routines of health inspection, sleep, lunch, milk and apples, toileting, group story time and rhythmic activity. Nevertheless, Hamilton’s reports indicate she placed emphasis on creating an environment that allowed choice and independence. The Centre was under scrutiny, set up by organisations that emphasised order and good habits in children. Hamilton was not going to risk promoting too much freedom.
American Child Psychology
New Zealand Teacher Finds Unique School

With new and interesting ideas from America on child psychology, Miss Stewart Hamilton, director of the Wellington South Free Kindergarten, recently returned to Wellington from a two years' absence abroad. The fundamental idea was to give children the ages of 11, 12 and 13 direct contact with very young children. In many cases the American family consisted of an only child, who knew little or nothing of the habits of the modern nursery. It is for these children that the nursery was incorporated. The idea was to give children the ages of 11, 12 and 13 direct contact with very young children. In many cases the American family consisted of an only child, who knew little or nothing of the habits of the modern nursery. It is for these children

An innovation in Chicago was the incorporating of the nursery and junior school. The fundamental idea was to give children the ages of 11, 12 and 13 direct contact with very young children. In many cases the American family consisted of an only child, who knew little or nothing of the habits of the modern nursery. It is for these children

Subjects include carpentry, weaving in a specially equipped room with miniature looms; finger-painting, a form of expression with the finger tips; and specially prepared paint as the medium; paper-molding; reading and studying of selected books and pictures; fancy dress designing dolls, for which ideas are drawn from the famous set of dolls of all nations; mural art, for which the students are equipped with step ladders and specially designed easels. A rigid rule of the school bars all visitors. People interested in the work are invited to see the school after school six o'clock when the children have been dismissed. A moving picture of the classes in action is then shown. Miss Pepper reasons that intruders spoil the atmosphere as children are apt to pantomime if given a suitable audience. The only person other than Mrs. Ford, a frequent and much loved visitor, to enter the school, is the chauffeur, who has proved her sincere understanding of the children and is therefore welcome to classes.

Of the school's success there is very little doubt. Miss Pepper is inundated with requests to lecture on child psychology all over the States. Through the summer holidays she visits refreshment camps and summer schools imparting her knowledge to other teachers. It is Miss Hamilton's earnest wish that through the medium of the Free Kindergartens some of these enlightening methods will be introduced to Wellington children.

BY BLUE DOMINO

Miss Stewart Hamilton: "I have come back to the Domino with fresh ideas and enthusiasm for kindergarten work." Miss Hamilton and Atkinson, who is assistant director, are teaching children at the nursery school in Chicago, which is the new Dominos district in Chicago, Illinois.

New Venture.

DUNEDIN gains by Wellington's loss, in the person of Stewart Hamilton, who has been director of the Newtown Free Kindergarten since her return to New Zealand from overseas. This clever girl is to direct an educational venture new to New Zealand, and is to have charge of the new pre-school educational centre to be opened in one of the cottages in the grounds of the Trudy King-Harris Hospital at Anderson's Bay. This centre which will be attended all day by children from two to six years, will form a link between Karitane and kindergarten training for the trainers. Miss Hamilton, who left Wellington last week, received her early kindergarten training here, afterwards going abroad and specializing in child development at London University under Dr. Susan Isla, with practical training and observation at the Isla's McMillan School at Deptford, besides other up-to-date nursery schools.

Travelling to America for further study, she attended Columbia University, the Iowa Research Centre for pre-school children and also studied in San Francisco under Dr. Louise Wagner.

MISST STEWART HAMILTON.

For the "New Domino" - London.

New Educational Venture

PRE-SCHOOL CENTRE AT ANDERSON'S BAY

Miss Stewart Hamilton, of Wellington, who arrived in Dunedin this week, is to have charge of the new pre-school educational centre to be opened in one of the cottages in the grounds of the Trudy King-Harris Hospital at Anderson's Bay. Twenty children from the ages of two to five years will attend and stay all day and have their midday meal in the centre.

In this way a link is to be formed between Karitane baby nursing and kindergarten training of the small child. The Karitane training will receive instruction in the school in progress.
Further information

- Archival records for the Pre-School Education Centre are held in the Hocken Collections – Uare Takoka o Hākena, University of Otago
  - Royal New Zealand Plunket Society Records, MS-2920/1436, ARC-2004
  - Dunedin Kindergarten Association Records, AG-287/037 and AG-287/031, ARC-0261
  - Margaret Just Scrapbooks, 85/153
  - Elizabeth Stewart Hamilton Scrapbooks, ARC-0512
  - Photographs of the Pre-School Education Centre are held in the collections of the Dunedin Kindergarten Association and the Royal NZ Plunket Society. Permission to reproduce must be sought from Hocken Collections – Uare Takoka o Hākena, University of Otago. Several digitised images are reproduced with permission.
Dr Helen Deem examining a child, RNZPS, AG-007-007/007/001, S12 624e, Hocken Collections – Uare Takoka o Hākena, University of Otago
The daily inspection of throats, tonsils and glands by Sister M. Shepherd, RNZPS, AG-007-007/007/001, S12 624c, Hocken Collections – Uare Takoka o Hākena, University of Otago
Karitane sister and kindergarten teacher assist ‘dinner is served’
RNZPS, AG-007-007/007/001, S12 624a
Hocken Collections – Uare Takoka o Hākena, University of Otago
‘Miss Preshaw assists a young pupil’
RNZPS, AG-007-007/007/001, S12 624d, Hocken Collections – Uare Takoka o Hākena, University of Otago
‘Giving expression to their creative impulses’
RNZPS, AG-007-007/007/001, S12 624b
Hocken Collections – Uare Takoka o Hākena, University of Otago