One of the things the children love about kindergarten is the wonderful play equipment. Left to right: John Zeira, Kay McKinnon, Hinerangi Te Maipi, Valerie Taylor.

LOVE IS WHAT COUNTS IN A KINDERGARTEN

by E. M. LANGFORD

At the age of 22 Missie Pukepuke, of Opotiki, is the only Maori director of a Free Kindergarten in New Zealand. In this Bay of Plenty district where almost fifty per cent of all school children are Maori, she has been instrumental in creating a real interest in the kindergarten among the Maori families and now, five months after it was opened, 20 of the 80 children on the roll are from these homes.

It was largely because of the concern of Mrs A. Hollard, president of the Opotiki kindergarten for the seven years of fund raising before the building could be commenced, that Miss Pukepuke was appointed. Mrs Hollard felt that such an organisation should cater for both races, and, in an endeavour to rouse the interest of the Maori population in the project she called and addressed a meeting last year which was attended by only eight Maori mothers. Their lack of numbers, however, was far outweighed by their enthusiasm. It was through them that she heard of Miss Pukepuke, a local girl then in her final term at the kindergarten training college in Auckland, whom she contacted and suggested that she apply for the position of director.

It is unusual for a girl to go straight from training college to a directorate but Miss Pukepuke had an excellent recommendation from Miss F. Carkwell, principal of the college, who gave additional help in her last few weeks when she knew of the responsibility she was to assume.

COMES FROM TRADITIONAL BACKGROUND

Missie herself had some misgivings at the task before her for she felt uncertain of her own capabilities and, although she loves her work with the children, says that she still feels indifferent when contacting parents.

Miss Pukapuke is showing an interest in the building activities.

Her understanding of the special problems facing Maori children at their first close contact with a pakeha world is a personal one for Missie herself spoke no English until she started school at the age of five. She is the eldest of the eight children—two of them adopted—of Mr and Mrs Te Haukainga Pukepuke, of the Tuhoe tribe. Her father was farming in Kutarere ten miles from Opotiki, when Missie was born, and is now a market gardener living at Kukumoa on the outskirts of that township. Missie is also fond of gardening. Maori is still the language used in her home, and she tries to help her small brother, who will become a pupil at the kindergarten next year, with his English.

After four years post primary education at the Opotiki College, Missie helped to care for the small children of a family near her home. "To earn a little money before I went away," she says with a smile. Apart from her interest in children and gardening Missie enjoys handwork although she admits that she has no aptitude for Maori crafts.

Her two years in training college were very happy ones and she made many friendships which she recalls with pleasure. She gained her diploma only one mark short of a merit. The college admits several Maori trainees each year and most of these girls are now kindergarten assistants in some of the 200 kindergartens throughout the Dominion. Muriel Herewini, another Opotiki girl, was director of the Lower Hutt Kindergarten until her marriage.

When the Opotiki kindergarten opened at the end of last February there were very few Maori pupils, but now a quarter of the roll are of that race with 24 Maori names on the waiting list. Mothers tell each other of the benefits and pleasures of kindy, and Missie and her assistant, Mrs E. Collier, also of the Tuhoe and daughter of the Reverend Kihoro Te Puawhe of Waimana, who has three daughters of her own, visit homes where there are known to be small children.

BUILDING UP THE MAORI ROLL

Although occasionally there are second thoughts when the time to attend kindergarten arrives, when the Maori children do arrive they settle down, on the whole, more quickly than their European contemporaries, and, although more

Pasting up pictures is another favourite activity. Mrs Collier, the teacher, is cutting them out.

shy are not so nervous. Only once, says Miss Pukepuke, has a little Maori girl burst into tears on her introduction to kindy, whereas this is quite a frequent occurrence with European children. They seem to apply themselves more closely to a project also and will spend a long time on one activity while the European child flits from one to another. There are, of course, always the exceptions in both races, but there appears to be little noticeable difference in their capabilities at this age.

Kindergarten helps all children to make social adjustments which benefit them when going on to primary school, and Miss Pukepuke feels that this is especially so with her Maori pupils. "Through this close contact with pakeha children they learn European social conduct and such things as table manners which help to smooth differences later at school," she says. At this age the children of both races mix without thought of any disparity, except very occasionally when it can be traced to remarks they have heard at home.

It is the policy of this type of kindergarten to include parents in the work as much as possible and every day one or two mothers remain to help. The Maori mothers are most willing and seem to see what needs doing without being asked, Miss Pukepuke says, hastening to add that many European mothers are equally thoughtful. She has found, however, that the Maori mothers are shy when it comes to the social life of the work, although the two Maori members of the mothers' committee take an active and pleasurable part in this work.

Sometimes there are special occasion days at the kindergarten like the recent birthday and farewell party to Ngaio and Lynette who, at the great age of five, are promoted to real school. One of the little girls lost her mother recently but the other mother brought cakes, the director baked scones in the kindergarten kitchen . . . not "pretend" ones this time . . . and everyone enjoyed the importance of the two graduates.

A friendship, unusual in this age group, has sprung up between two little girls, one Maori, one European, and bears the possible seeds of a lifelong attachment. They are inseparables in kindy, says Miss Pukepuke, and spend all their time in each other's company. Is it too much to suggest that such a friendship in childhood not only does something for the child but for New Zealand too, and indeed for the whole world.

It is obvious that all the children have a real affection for their director and her assistant, and the atmosphere in the delightfully spacious and gleaming kindergarten is one of peace and happiness. For the most part the children play contentedly alone or in small groups, but if a head is bumped, a knee grazed, a dispute arises over a toy, a story is wanted or hands need washing, there is Miss Pukepuke or Mrs Collier, capable, smiling, and most important of all, loving.

Rawinia Amoamo makes scones from bright green dough.