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**THE PIONEERS OF PARENTS' CENTRE: MOVERS AND  
SHAKERS FOR CHANGE IN THE PHILOSOPHIES AND  
PRACTICES OF CHILDBIRTH AND PARENT EDUCATION  
IN NEW ZEALAND**

by

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I dedicate this thesis to all the people  
who have contributed to my education



## Abstract

This thesis presents the voices of 17 pioneers of the organisation Parents' Centre, founded in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1952. They reflect on Parents' Centre's contribution to the welfare and happiness of young children and their parents, and the challenges and satisfactions for them as 'movers and shakers' of an entrenched system. The pioneers, 13 women and 3 men, were a group of professionals and parents educated in the progressive tradition who worked as volunteers to found and develop the organisation. They challenged the well-established and generally respected views of the policymakers of the 1950s about the management of childbirth and parent education for young children. They believed that the education and care of the child from birth to three needed to be brought into line with the progressive principles and practices which had been gaining ground in the schools and pre-schools of New Zealand since the 1920s and which emphasised holistic development, especially the psychological aspects.

Using Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory I set the study within the social climate of the 1950s to assess the contribution the changing times made to the success of the organisation. I identified the social and economic forces which brought change both in the institutions of society and within every day family life, particularly for young children and their parents.

As researcher, I added my voice to their reflections while also playing the role of analyst. The study used an oral history method to record the stories of the participants from a contemporary perspective. My involvement in the organisation over 50 years gave me insider knowledge and a rapport with the people interviewed. Using a loosely structured interview I adopted a collegial method of data gathering. A second interview, two years after the first, informed the pioneers about my use of the interview material and gave opportunities for critical comments on my analysis.

It became apparent that under the leadership of Helen Brew, Parents' Centre was able to influence change. Analyses of the background of the pioneers and of the educationalists who influenced them in training, career and parenthood show that key influences on the pioneers were lecturers at Wellington and Christchurch Training Colleges and Victoria

University of Wellington. The liberal thrust of these educational institutions reinforced similar philosophical elements in the child rearing practices experienced by the pioneers.

Overall, the pioneers expressed satisfaction with the philosophies and practice they advocated at that time, their achievements within Parent's Centre, and pride in founding a consumer organisation effective for New Zealand conditions. They saw Parents' Centre as having helped to shape change.

This study documents the strategies used by Parents' Centre to spread its message to parents, policy makers and the general public. At the end of the study the pioneers were in agreement that the change in the role of women, particularly as equal breadwinners with men, presented a challenge to the consumer and voluntary aspects of the organisation of Parents' Centre today. Some felt the organisation had lost its radical nature and was at risk of losing the consumer voice. Nonetheless, all the pioneers felt that Parents' Centre still had a part to play in providing effective ante-natal education 'by parents for parents' and a continuing role in working for change in the services in accordance with the needs of parents and children under three.

## Acknowledgements

Writing this thesis has felt like writing an overview of my life over the last 82 years. It has been both satisfying and challenging to reflect on the times I have lived through. I gave birth to my first child 60 years ago; this is like another birth except that I will not have to tend this infant and, it will not cause me any more sleepless nights (I hope). Bringing this thesis to a conclusion has been an exhilarating experience for me.

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It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child; it has taken the constituency mentioned above to produce this thesis from this 82 year old.

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## CHAPTER 1:

### Introduction

*We were part of New Zealand's history in a deep psychological sense: about troubled kids and all sorts of mental health issues<sup>1</sup>. (Helen Brew<sup>2</sup>, the founder of Parents' Centre)*

This thesis presents the voices of sixteen pioneers of the New Zealand Parents' Centre, as they spoke to me, 50 years on from the foundation of that organisation in 1952. Their voices speak alongside mine as I document our perceptions about the organisation, our involvement in it, our view of its effectiveness and the personal costs and satisfactions of working within it. Like my research participants I was involved in the organisation for many years. For this study I have adopted the roles of researcher and analyst as well as participant.

My main reason for undertaking this study was the belief that it would be useful to identify the factors that made it possible for the pioneers to establish the organisation from the viewpoint of those who played a major role in founding it 50 years ago. I have been involved in the training/education of teachers and parents for work in early childhood education, including Parents' Centre leaders, for over 50 years. At the end of my career as I reflected on the experiences that influenced my own life I thought it would be a useful exercise to assess the value of the style and content of the education the pioneers and I advocated and used in Parents' Centre, during the first ten years of the organisation's history between 1952 and 1962. That type of education met a need at the time and I was interested to discover through the pioneers' and my own reflections, opinions about its relevance in the 1950s and now in the 21st Century.

My long involvement and ongoing interest led me to consider also what the people who founded Parents' Centre believed, at a distance of 40-50 years, were the benefits and/or challenges of their involvement in the organisation to themselves, their families and the community generally.

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<sup>1</sup> Direct quotes from the pioneers will be printed in italics throughout this thesis

<sup>2</sup> In future references in this thesis, I will acknowledge the pioneers in the first instance in each paragraph by their full names, and thereafter use their first names only, unless there are several pioneers with the same first name, in which case I will add the initial of the surname.



I have called my study 'Movers and Shakers of Childbirth and Parenthood', because the pioneers of Parents' Centre challenged the well-established and generally respected views of the policy makers of the 1950s about the management of childbirth and the rearing of children under three. The phrase 'movers and shakers' has been taken from the poem 'Ode' by O'Shaughnessy (1844-1884). It reads:

We are the music-makers  
And we are the dreamers of dreams  
Wandering by lone sea-breakers  
And sitting by desolate streams  
World-movers and world foresakers  
On whom the pale moon beams  
Yet we are the movers and shakers of the  
World forever it seems

The Parents' Centre pioneers, for reasons I hoped to discover, were successful in turning their dream into reality. I suspected there would have been times when they felt alone and vulnerable. That they succeeded in making a significant contribution towards change in the health and education services for young children, in harmony with other educational changes in the 1950s, suggests that they must have identified and used effective strategies. I was interested in those strategies and the personal costs and benefits of the struggle of the pioneers to implement them.

Parents' Centre celebrated its 50th anniversary in Wellington, in September 2002, with a Jubilee Conference attended by representatives from the fifty-four branches which now exist. Tributes were paid to the founders, many of whom were present, although by then most were 80 years old and more. The Conference organisers took the opportunity to remind participating members that the improved conditions for childbirth and the '*more humane policies towards young children*', which Chris Cole-Catley, one of the pioneers, referred to in her conference speech, owed a great deal to the efforts of the pioneers of Parents' Centre. Time was set aside at the conference for descriptions of the prevailing practices of the 1950s, in regard to childbirth and the rearing of children under three. I noted as a participant over three days that 'Lest we Forget' was a phrase often repeated and explained by leading speakers. Conference delegates were urged to become aware of and appreciate the efforts of the founders and to protect the gains they had achieved. I hope this thesis may play a part in promoting awareness and appreciation.

In this chapter I introduce Parents' Centre, an organisation that was part of a movement towards the liberalisation of education, and the Parents' Centre pioneers. I refer to my methodology and I introduce the political, social, health, educational, family and personal contexts out of which the organisation emerged. I used historical and educational texts by New Zealand and overseas writers, my own story about life in education and those of the pioneers. I incorporate other studies of Parents' Centre and outline the structure of the thesis (Ragin & Becker, 1992).

### 1.1 The Parents' Centre organisation

Parents' Centre is an organisation pioneered in New Zealand in 1952 by Helen Brew who made this claim in my interview with her: *'I started it all'*. She had been influenced by New Zealand psychiatrist Maurice Bevan-Brown from the time when, as a senior college pupil, she attended one of his lectures. In my interview with her she referred many times to the impact of his words. She said; *'There I was in a gym-slip and I was hugely impressed'*. She learned more about his philosophy and its practical application, when she trained, first as a primary school teacher and later as a speech therapist. This connection, which Helen B often acknowledged, was supported by another participant in my study, Jim Robb, who was aware that *'There was a direct line from Bevan-Brown through to Helen Brew'*.

By the time Helen Brew heard Bevan-Brown speak, he had studied and worked in England for seventeen years. He had been a staff-member of the Tavistock Institute Clinic which 'based on the impetus of Freudian and related innovations after the First World War ... offers treatment, training and research facilities in the field of neurosis, child guidance and groups in human relations' (Dicks, 1970: Introductory publicity material). On his return to New Zealand in 1952, Bevan-Brown was concerned about the incidence of mental ill-health in this country. In his opinion, the way the birth of the child was handled was a vital factor in the achievement of emotional maturity which to him was synonymous with mental health. He believed that 'the conscious achievement of birth and its realisation sets the seal on emotional maturity' (Bevan-Brown, 1947, p.1).

Helen Brew found support for Bevan-Brown's ideas in her work with parents, particularly mothers in Hawke's Bay, where she worked as the first speech therapist. When she later had her own children she was astounded and dismayed at the way the hospital services failed to address the opportunities for providing parents and children with a good start on

the path to mental health. These experiences led her to study the teachings of Grantly Dick-Read whose book *Childbirth Without Fear* (1942) had become more widely available in New Zealand in 1945 after World War II. Dick-Read promoted the idea that adequate knowledge and relaxation techniques would reduce pain in childbirth. By the 1950s there were many other writer-practitioners who believed that the 'fear, tension, pain syndrome' could be overcome by 'preparation of mind and body to the natural experience of childbirth' (Dick-Read, 1933, p.12). The demand for information about his method grew. An increasing number of women were reporting success. Other obstetricians in England and in New Zealand, such as Dr Phyllis Stockdill in Hawera and Dr Enid Cook in Christchurch, used Dick-Read's basic methods and adapted them to their own circumstances and patients.

After two births in a private hospital, which was considered 'the best' by her obstetrician, but '*a horrendous experience*' for her, Helen B became convinced that reform was needed in two major areas. Firstly, in training for childbirth through ante-natal education of parents, both mother and father; and secondly, in the management of childbirth in hospitals where, by the 1950s, most children were born (Mein-Smith, 1986). Thus, the philosophical rationale and methodological approaches of both Bevan-Brown and Dick-Read played a significant part in providing direction for dealing with the growing disquiet among some mothers, concerning hospital provision for childbirth and its effects on themselves and their children.

Before the establishment of the Parents' Centre organisation in 1952 there was no effective mechanism by which women could express their concerns to those responsible for the obstetrical services. Helen Brew described these as being '*dominated by the O & G [obstetrical and gynaecological] boys, who were the heavyweights in New Zealand medicine, and all males, and had total control of the policy which dictated the conditions for women having babies*'. Although there were a few doctors who were quietly and without provoking controversy, introducing their patients to Dick-Read's methods with success, the only female doctor who had any major influence on the obstetric scene was Dr Doris Gordon. Gordon was a prime mover in the foundation of the Obstetrical Society, which, in 1927, had 'stood for medicalised childbirth in opposition to the Health Department's insistence that the natural methods should suffice in normal childbirth' (Mein-Smith, 1986, p.43). For a short period, 1946-48, she was Director of Maternal

Welfare in the Health Department (Gordon, 1957). In the absence of strategies for pain relief in labour such as Dick-Read was to advocate from 1932 on, most women welcomed the analgesics and anaesthetics that doctors could provide. It is understandable therefore that Gordon, being experienced herself in childbirth, would be popular among women with her maxim that 'science owed pain relief to every woman' (Gordon, 1955, p.215). Unfortunately that principle put her and many women who had welcomed pain relief in labour, in the opposite camp to the Parents' Centre pioneers. They believed childbirth was a normal and natural event and that extensive pain relief was not necessary if women had knowledge and strategies for coping with the process. However, as Dick-Read's books became available and more women experienced success with his methods, support grew for the idea that a natural birth was desirable and that women should have the right to follow Dick-Read's ideas, if they so desired.

Helen Brew provided a focal point for those who wanted change by professionals and bureaucrats that would take into account the needs of the consumers of the services for childbirth. At meetings of the Christchurch Psychological Society in the 1940s, Helen B had been given the chance to express her views about changes needed in the system of childbirth in hospitals. She had received wide publicity. When she and her husband Quentin moved to Wellington in 1947, women sought her out for instruction in the methods of Dick-Read. It was this demonstration of the obvious need for an alternative approach to childbirth which was the catalyst for the foundation of Parents' Centre. *'I couldn't hide and say 'it is a pity' and carry on and just get on with it ... while I was saying in my mind 'Let's just forget all this', there were all these people coming to the door.'*

Helen Brew did not hide from the attempts of women to seek her out. And neither did her friend Chris Cole (now Cole-Catley) who was another key participant in establishing Parents' Centre. Chris was a capable and experienced journalist who used every opportunity to publicise concerns about the management of childbirth. A group of enthusiasts joined Helen B and Chris in Wellington and eventually formed the organisation Parents' Centre for ante-natal education in the Dick-Read method and as Chris stressed, for *'conveying the voices of the users of the services to those making the policy'*. The early pioneers realised this would involve *'shaking things up'* (Chris) as in 1952, the idea of the

consumer having a voice was in its infancy. The 'shaking up' of childbirth by the Parents' Centre pioneers included advocacy for the provision of ante-natal classes which would include husbands and which could be led by parents who were not necessarily medically trained. This was indeed radical and threatening to many doctors who 'foresaw the possibility of Parents' Centre interference in the doctor-patient and doctor-hospital relationships' (Dobbie, 1990, p.47).

The Parents' Centre pioneers believed and had been convinced by writers such as Dick-Read (1942), that knowledge of the reproductive system and of the process of childbirth was essential for the conscious achievement of birth. They believed therefore that these subjects should be openly discussed and taken out of the area of 'secret' knowledge. As Helen Brew recounted at the Jubilee Conference in 2002, it was not only doctors who were threatened by those ideas. Many members of the public and even consumers of the services were hostile towards change which, in their view, could roll back the gains in lowering the rate of maternal and infant mortality. Helen B spoke with strong feeling about the way she was shaken by the reception she received when speaking to a National Council of Women conference (Page, 1996) in the early 1950s:

*I was shouted down and even hissed at for daring to express these views. You didn't talk about these things before then. That's not nice. Flora Cameron, of the Nurses and Midwives Board, told me we were a bunch of communists!*

I could empathise with her experience after being part of a delegation to the National Council of Women on the subject of rooming-in in 1959. Our ideas were not only dismissed peremptorily we were called 'baby murderers'. Another challenge the pioneers faced and one I was particularly involved with was their belief that the education and care of the child from birth to three needed to be brought into line with the progressive thinking and practices which had been gaining ground in the schools and pre-schools of New Zealand since the 1920s. The Parents' Centre pioneers had adopted the progressive thinking (Gardner, 1949) which stemmed from the new emphasis on the psychological aspects of development. In their work as teachers, health and social workers they had advocated loving relationships and understanding as the basis for intervention in problematic child behaviour and by implication humane treatment of the young child. These concepts were central to the ideas of Bevan-Brown and of other writers making an impact on child development theory in the 1940s and 1950s. Susan Isaacs, whose text *The*

*Children we Teach* (1932) was used in Wellington Training College in the 1930s and 40s, made a major impact on New Zealand teachers when she visited and spoke in Wellington in 1938. D.E.M. Gardner (1969) who wrote a biography of Susan Isaacs linked her to the 'progressive' or 'liberal' type of education, which she defined as:

'The kind of education ... which is based on following up and providing for the satisfaction of children's interests, aiding their discoveries and helping them to achieve their own purposes, while also providing an environment which will afford rich and valuable opportunities for their growth and development...' (Gardner, 1969, p.168).

Others who followed and were much read and quoted by Parents' Centre teachers were John Bowlby (1953), and Donald Winnicott (1949), and an emerging group of New Zealand professionals trained in New Zealand and overseas in education, social work and health in the 1940s and 1950s. These included Helen and Quentin Brew, Chris Cole-Catley, Alice Fieldhouse, Ephra Garrett, Lex Grey, Jim Robb, Beverley Morris, Diana Mason and myself. All these people, except Quentin, who died in 1977, have participated in this study. Prior to the establishment of Parents' Centre, most of the pioneers working in education had already been advocating and applying what they regarded as up-to-date and valid theories and practices in their professions and family lives. In their work in education they could be assured of some support for the implementation of their progressive ideas from policy makers, colleagues and friends. Their achievements are analysed later in chapter 5. There was not the same momentum, or sympathy, for change in the health services. The wide gap in philosophy between the education and health services, perhaps only vaguely perceived, assumed a shocking reality when the pioneers became consumers of the obstetric services. In the words of Helen B:

*What happened when I had my first baby was horrendous...it was out of touch totally with the way my experience in life was up to that point. Just remembering some of it is quite a nightmare.*

In attempting to apply progressive ideas to the education of children under three, the Parents' Centre pioneers challenged much of what had been regarded in New Zealand as the prerogative of the Plunket Society which until then was almost the only source of advice to parents on parent-child relationships, feeding, toilet training, and sleep management (King, 1913). The Plunket Society was founded by Truby King in 1907 (Snowden, 1937; 51). It was part of a Western-world infant welfare movement that aimed to improve the survival and fitness of future citizens in the interests of 'national



efficiency'. 'Clinics were set up and nurses employed to monitor infant health and provide advice. Although the movement was medically inspired, in New Zealand's case principally by Dr Frederic Truby King, it was generally organised and maintained by voluntary groups of women and run by nurses with little medical supervision' (Bryder, 2003, p.1x). When it was founded the first patron was Lady Plunket, wife of the Governor General. 'She was to become very involved with the Society and described it in January 1908, as the Society for the Protection of Infant Life, indicating where the emphasis lay.' (Bryder, 2003, p.18). The Society's basic philosophy came from a behaviourist school of thought which believed in the malleability of the infant. In the words of Susan Isaacs, the Plunket philosophy would have come into the category of systems that regarded the 'little child as a simple bodily machine, or a mere creature of habit and reflex response' (Isaacs, 1929, p.62).

King's major emphasis was on the physical aspects of care. Although he believed that 'even development of mind and body is the surest foundation for adult health and happiness', almost all his advice centres on 'the formation of good and regular habits while young'. His doctrine, which he published in the book *Feeding and Care of Baby* (1913) and a booklet *Baby's First Month* (1913) was issued to all women after giving birth (May, 1997). The Plunket manual was revised in 1918, 1922, and again in 1937 when it was edited by Tweed and Fitzgibbon and, in 1940 and 1945. When referring to the Plunket manual in future I will quote the 1945 edition called *Modern Mothercraft* (revised by Deem & Fitzgibbon) as it is the one which the pioneers would have used in the 1940s and 1950s. It had a strong influence particularly on literate mothers who sought advice from books. By 1947 85% of pakeha women were on the Plunket register. King's doctrine was reinforced by 'nurses, branches, Plunket rooms, Karitane hospitals, Mothercraft training courses and ante-natal clinics' (Papps & Olsen, 1997, p.106). There was support both nationally and internationally for Plunket. Obviously practice would vary according to the personality of the Plunket nurse and the mother she advised. By the 1950s, some Plunket nurses such as Alice Fieldhouse were becoming less rigid in their advice. As Helen Brew observed:

*I knew there was some part of the nursing fraternity who were gentle with mothers. I had one such, who alleviated the distress caused to my son by four hourly feeding with advice tailored to his needs.*

No doubt too, many mothers like myself did not follow Plunket procedures rigidly, but as Bryder (2003) found from talking to mothers, those who deviated tended to keep their own counsel. Thus, the consumer view had little or no influence on Plunket practice or advice. The same was true of the hospital services. Wairoa Hospital provided an example of the dire results which could follow moves to accommodate consumers. The staff in the hospital's maternity ward had dared to challenge the accepted procedures for post-natal care, when they had installed bidets to encourage and provide for the early ambulation of mothers, rather than forcing them to stay in bed and be panned – a very unpopular procedure (Dobbie, 1990, p.56). Over 10 years the Wairoa system had proved itself, in terms of patient satisfaction and the lower rates of infection. In 1959 however, when maternity nursing was introduced into the new nurses' training scheme, Wairoa's maternity ward came under the jurisdiction of the Nurses and Midwives Board that had dominated obstetric practice from 1925. To ensure 'safe maternity' (Mein-Smith, 1986), the Board had laid down rigid requirements. The management of Wairoa Hospital were soon informed that unless they abandoned that practice, the hospital would be deregistered for training purposes (Dobbie, 1990). There was no attempt to consult the consumers who were given no opportunity to participate in the discussion, or present their views.

The foundation of Parents' Centre meant that ante-natal classes could be provided in response to a demand by women. Classes not only provided knowledge and specialised exercises that could improve the birth process but also gave support to those brave enough to step out of line. The organisation brought together a number of people who were dissatisfied with the existing system and believed they could make a useful contribution to the education of parents. Some had been working for change to the obstetric services in isolation. Parents' Centre provided them with an opportunity to pool resources and contribute to change in the services for childbirth. In the words of the poet, O'Shaughnessy, 'One man with a dream at leisure can go forth and conquer a crown, but three with a new song's measure, can trample an empire down'. Chris Cole-Catley with her skills as a journalist and connections in the press, played a major role in publicising Helen Brew's views. Helen B found *'The Christchurch Press were most supportive'*. However in general, those responsible for the services were not convinced and were able to slow down the pace of change. Some professionals feared the intrusion of lay people into their fields. Many women too were afraid to antagonise those who had control of the only services



available to them. Although there were parents who agreed with Helen B's ideas, most were not convinced enough to be in the forefront of change. The development and expansion of the organisation is described in more detail in Chapter 6, but it has been important to position the backdrop of contestable ideas that both fuelled and constrained the work of the Parents' Centre organisation and its pioneers, in this chapter.

## **1.2 My life in education prior to my involvement in Parents' Centre**

My involvement in Parents' Centre was only one part of my life in education. From 1958, when my second child was born, Dick-Read's ideas became an important thread in my educational philosophy and advocacy. From 1958 to 1962, part of the period covered by this thesis, I was bringing up my two younger children and working part-time, running classes and workshops for Parents' Centre, Playcentre, and Kindergarten students. Those in charge of these organisations allowed and even encouraged me to introduce so-called 'progressive' ideas on education into their training programmes. In my classes I emphasised holistic development, understanding of children's behaviour, respect for individual growth and learning, the importance of play, and positive relationships between adult and child. All these ideas were becoming acceptable in the education of children aged over three years in Wellington, particularly in playcentres and kindergartens and to some extent, in primary schools. There was still a long way to go, however, before these ideas would be generally accepted in early childhood education by New Zealand parents and more particularly by health professionals, most of whom felt comfortable with conservative ideas and were loathe to change. Professionals who worked for change, such as Alice Fieldhouse and Mary Logan, two pioneers who were nurses, could be at risk and overlooked for promotion.

In retrospect, I can appreciate that I have been a part of and sympathetic to the movement to make education more child-friendly from birth and involved in the tension between the progressive and more conservative trends at all stages of my life. I can appreciate also that my work in Parents' Centre gave me my best opportunity to work towards the progressive ideal. I had freedom and support to apply my ideas. I regarded parents as a key group in the education of their children, and it seemed to me that an organisation devoted to parent education would provide an ideal situation for informing them about progressive methods of child rearing.

My progressive educational philosophy had its origins in my upbringing. I was born in 1922. My father was a secondary teacher, head of languages at Rongotai College from 1930-1944. Rongotai, a boys' college, had been established in 1928 in a working class area of Wellington. In its early years it had a reputation for being progressive. Several of the Parents' Centre pioneers had connections with the college as old boys, such as Lex Grey, or as staff, such as Peter Morris – husband of Beverley Morris, another of the pioneers in the study. My father was regarded then as a kindly, interesting, humorous and innovative teacher by Lex, one of his pupils and was acknowledged in a similar way in a publication on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2003 (Martin, 2003). As a serviceman in World War I, my father experienced life in France, Germany and England and was always interested in world events, particularly in those countries. He was politically active and a skilled advocate, being one of the first staff representatives for the Post-Primary Teachers Association, travelling the country to rally support for improving secondary education, and restoring the teachers' salary cuts of 1932 (Butchers, 1932).

As a father he was very involved with his children. I am convinced that my beliefs in the importance of play, in discipline based on understanding and in parent involvement in education, have roots in my own early childhood education at home, in the wider family, particularly with cousins and older relatives and in the neighbourhood in which we lived. My father often looked after me and my siblings in school holidays and provided us with rich play experiences and memorable excursions into the wider community. He built us play houses, joined in and encouraged our imaginative play, told and read us stories and took a great interest in our school work. Discussions of our day round the dinner table were a highlight when I was a school child. My father was supportive of my mother, although her ideas were not as progressive as his, nor were those of her family especially in regard to discipline. This difference in basic attitudes often caused family conflict. Thus the tension between the traditional and progressive methods of education was a part of my upbringing from the beginning and I came to prefer the progressive aspects.

My mother, reared by a strict Calvinistic Scottish father, tried to follow the Plunket regimen, particularly the rule that there should be no night feeding of infants (King, 1920). Plunket ideas were more compatible with those applied in her family than with those of my

father's family. My father had been exposed to more liberal ideas as a child and in his teacher training at Wellington Training College (as it was called then). He tried to counter the distress the strict Plunket management appeared to cause me and my siblings as infants, by soothing techniques, such as carrying us around and singing lullabies. As a result I experienced from an early age both liberal and conservative practices in my family. I believe this situation lay at the root of my desire to promote progressive education in my subsequent life. Like the poet John Masefield, I realised from an early age, that 'The days that make us happy, make us wise' (Gwen Somerset, 1975, p.88).

My experience was probably a microcosm of the debate throughout the country, particularly from the 1920s on. In chapter 4 I describe the stage this debate had reached at the time the first Parents' Centre was established. My school education began at Newtown School in Wellington in 1927 when I was five. I remember very little about it, except the positive reinforcement for reading and the delight of imaginative play with friends at playtime. When I was eight my family moved to Lyall Bay. The local school had some progressive elements, balanced against the demands of the proficiency exam (Lloyd, 1959) which determined who would proceed to secondary school (Ewing 1970). I enjoyed the music, drama, and poetry: not so much English and maths which were taught in a climate of fear. My secondary school, Wellington East Girls College was conservative. I did not enjoy my years there nearly as much as those I spent at primary school. At the end of five years, in 1939, I entered Wellington Training College which, compared with my secondary school was progressive, and for me a wonderful educational experience in the holistic sense. I can appreciate now that my early life and education had presented me with two clear pictures of the world. In one all people were treated with respect, kindness and consideration. In the other they became the means to an end by those in authority. I much preferred the former and have tried to make this the principle on which my practice in education is based. After much consideration of career options which were admittedly limited in 1939 I decided to train as a teacher – a decision which I have never regretted.

When I began my teacher training at Wellington Training College, the main thrust of lectures and practicum was on 'method'. As students we were directed to focus on methods of teaching in the classroom. I recall nothing about any justification for the methods, or that adaptation might be required for different situations. It was assumed that good teachers

would get the results they wanted if they worked hard, kept order and applied the methods advocated. Many students studied at Victoria University as part of the college course. In the university lectures which we regarded as 'theory', we learned about some of the influences of home, family, culture and socio-economic class on outcomes for learners. There was little if any reference to New Zealand conditions or research. Most of the examples given to illustrate theory were from overseas, particularly the United Kingdom and United States. I cannot recall any advocacy of the need for teachers to be involved with parents or for any parent contact, except through annual reports on children or through fund raising by school committees. The only acknowledgement of the need to understand education before five or its significance, came in the presentation of theories on the value of play and when discussing reading readiness. On that subject there were some criticisms of current teaching in Wellington, especially of reading before five which was a feature of some local private schools. Critique of the methods used by the associate teachers to whom we were 'apprenticed' was not encouraged because of the need for their services in student training and the consequent need to avoid offending them.

I realise now that the practicums in the 'normal' schools, the name given to schools established in association with the teacher training colleges were demonstrating a type of educational practice which was based on progressive theories. These theories had been advocated since the 1920s by some lecturers at Wellington Training College (Macaskill, 1980; Sutch, 1966), but were still not universally adopted. All students had to undertake at least one section in a normal school. Reflection on my experience in teaching at that time and discussion with contemporaries and friends today, leads me to believe that the usual model of teaching was an authoritarian one. In many schools, however, particularly in Wellington there were moves towards freeing up the curriculum and making it more child-centred. Although the syllabus which governed the curriculum, the 'Red Book' published in 1929 (Beeby 1992), gave scope and opportunity for teachers to introduce more liberal and child-friendly activities, such practice was not the norm in the 1940s. Through courses at the Department of Education's in-service centres at Lopdell House in Auckland and Hogben in Christchurch from the 1940s onwards, these ideas became more general practice (Ewing, 1970). In my teacher training, I became enthusiastic about implementing the progressive ideas I was introduced to but it would be some years before I was able to apply and succeed with them in the classroom. That opportunity came in 1945 when I was

appointed teacher of fourteen pupils at a sole charge school, in Matahiwi on the Wanganui River.

My first teaching appointment was at Lyall Bay School, in 1941, to a class of six-year olds. I soon became concerned that so much of what we as teachers were supposed to be achieving, was not happening. I applied all the methods I had been taught in my training but still many of my pupils did not learn what the syllabus demanded. Many had no background of knowledge I could tap into. The school administration was laissez-faire in that teachers taught in their own way. There was no provision for discussion of the school's direction as there were no staff meetings. I became concerned that I was being used as an assistant in the class of the Infant Mistress, the senior teacher in charge of children in their first two years at school, rather than being given responsibility for my own class. My father's networks in the teaching profession enabled him to intervene on my behalf. Thus I learned early the importance of networks in every organisation I worked in and the effectiveness of identifying and finding ways of communicating with those 'at the top' with similar views.

My next appointment was to Te Kaha Native School in 1943 (the term 'Native' was used until 1969). I had some background for this work, as at Training College I had joined the Maori Club, attended classes in Maori language and become a member of Ngati Poneke (Broughton, 2001), a Wellington club for young Maori adults who had come to the city for employment. The club had provided me with knowledge and experience of Maori culture and language. Although the syllabus at Te Kaha stressed European language, culture and skills, there was some concession to the background and culture of the children: Maori art and legend were included in our programmes, some parents came into the school to teach waiata and haka, and a Maori speaking junior assistant initiated the five-year-olds into school and the English language. Nevertheless, the principal's style could be classed as authoritarian. He always carried a strap in his hip pocket, was driven by results in the 3Rs and motivated by the desire to increase his grading so that he could be promoted to a big city school. He succeeded, as did some of the pupils. Three well-known artists: Cliff Whiting, Para Matchett and Whare Te Moana came from Te Kaha School and a sizeable number of pupils won scholarships to Queen Victoria and Te Aute Colleges for their secondary education. Many others, however, experienced failure and as adults, became

critical of the education system. Together with another graduate from Wellington teaching at Te Kaha, I continued learning the Maori language which I had begun at Training College and to taking part in community activities. I felt the mismatch between education in the school and the home but at that stage would have attributed the cause of that to the home, not to the syllabus. I disliked the main thrust of the school's direction but was able to apply only a few of my 'progressive' ideas learned in Wellington. There were no staff meetings or chances to discuss education with the parents or with the Headmaster and his wife who as Infant Mistress held the only other senior position in the school.

In 1943 I married Paetahi Mete Kingi whom I had met at Training College. He was waiting to be called up for service in the Maori Battalion, so we stayed at our respective schools, he at Rangitukia and I at Te Kaha for the rest of that year. In 1944 I returned home to Wellington, to live with my parents. My husband went into military camps in Rotorua and later in Trentham and in June, 1944 went overseas. Our son John had been born in 1944 and I spent that year working as a mother and in various other activities, such as providing temporary accommodation in the family home for workers 'manpowered' to Wellington. The money I received from this employment enabled me to live on a soldier's wage of £13 a month. In January 1945 I became a widow with the death of my husband in Italy.

When I returned to teaching in February 1945, by invitation of an officer in the Department of Education, it was to be the sole teacher at Matahiwi, a small settlement on the Wanganui River. The position was termed a 'war appointment'. I relieved, while the incumbent was on active service. My mother who had also been recently widowed, came with me to provide child care for my eight-month old son. Nine of my fourteen pupils were from the Ranginui family who became most supportive of all aspects of my work with the children. On reflection, I believe that their co-operation was as much a function of our shared history as my teaching. They respected the Mete Kingi family with whom they were connected. The ancestors of both the Ranginui and Mete Kingi families played an important part in the story of the Wanganui River, particularly in the battle at Moutua Island where Paetahi's people fought alongside the Europeans against the Hau Hau. The parents at Matahiwi School, appreciated the way I brought Maori culture into the classroom and community. This was innovative to them. The previous teacher had not been popular and had been forced to resign, although in terms of the curriculum basics of reading, writing, maths and



study skills, she had been effective. As a result of the cooperation engendered by my family connections and their successful grounding, the children were easy to teach. I enjoyed this year and was able to apply what I considered the best of the practices I had observed and been inspired by as a student teacher in Wellington. I also had a good relationship with the parents and visiting officials such as the Health Nurse and Sister Elsie, an Anglican social worker who lived among the community and was loved and respected. As an accepted member of the community I gained valuable experience and was often asked for advice on family matters. Unfortunately I had to leave at the end of the year, as the incumbent returned from the war and wanted to take up the position. He left after six weeks! I have often reflected since, on the change of lifestyle for him after active service in the war and how unrealistic were the expectations on him. Few people addressed this phenomenon at the time except Bevan-Brown (1945), in his monograph *War Neurosis* (1945). I refer to the difficulties servicemen experienced on returning to civilian life and the effect on their families in chapter 3.

In late 1945 I returned to Wellington, having completed the requirements of country service which involved working for three years in a school designated 'country'. It was a necessary step in career advancement, as teachers could not be considered for senior positions until country service had been completed. The Matahiwi appointment had given me experience of leadership in both school and community. Such career experience would have been unusual for young women teachers before the 1940s. It was a product of the times, with the men who usually filled such positions away at the war or in reserved occupations (Taylor, 1986).

I gained an appointment at a two-teacher school in Houghton Valley, Wellington, as teacher of children between five and eight years of age. In addition I had the experience of being acting-principal for one term. There was a wide spread of ability in my class whom I got to know well, as I had them for three years. At the same time I finished my degree which was a BA. I majored in Latin and French and my degree included political science, education and philosophy. Studying political science with newly appointed Professor Lesley Lipson who later became a world leader in that discipline, gave me a new perspective and prepared me for an understanding of the effect of the wider social context on education. This concept built on the ideas of Professor Ron Gould who had been one of

my lecturers in Education I, in 1939. Professor Gould introduced me to ideas similar to those of Urie Bronfenbrenner writing in the 1970s (Bronfenbrenner, 1972, 1979).

These experiences in teaching gave me a conviction about the rightness of the progressive ideas in education. With that belief came a desire to understand the learning process further so I could ensure that all children had a chance to succeed and be happy as they tried to master the skills and knowledge the school curriculum and society generally expected. I also wanted to know more about the influence of the years before five and the effect on educational success of the society and family from which the child came to school. This desire for more knowledge led me to study for a post-graduate Diploma in Education at Victoria University in 1948. Lectures in the course provided a link between theory and practice. There was much discussion led by students, a technique which I had only rarely encountered in my previous study. As students we were encouraged to apply the theories taught at the University in the classroom and to look at the effects on children, not just on their attainment. Our lecturers were: Professor Colin Bailey, who was interested in pre-school education and had chaired the Consultative Committee on Pre-School Educational Services (1947), Dr Arthur Fieldhouse (later Professor), who had a special interest in education for children with special needs and had studied with Susan Isaacs in London and Betty Odell, the only woman in the department and an adviser to and enthusiast for the Playcentre movement. Odell brought a focus on children under five. I did a study, as part of the course, on the idea of a pre-school for Maori children which I see now was monocultural. I advocated instruction in English with full day care and emphasis on hygiene and nutrition, in the tradition of the Nursery schools of the McMillan Sisters (McMillan, 1930). The course, my class teaching, and the development of my son (who was by now aged four), and children of my friends, most of whom were the same age or younger, whetted my appetite for learning more about the development of children under five.

In 1949 I was fortunate to have the opportunity to travel overseas. I studied in a course at the London Institute of Education for outstanding teachers from the United Kingdom who were being groomed to take up positions in training colleges which were expanding post-war. I paid my own way and that of my mother who came as my companion and substitute carer for my son. In this way she fulfilled her lifelong ambition of visiting her ancestral home in Cornwall. As a war widow I applied to the New Zealand Rehabilitation Authority



for returned war veterans for the money to study. I received the course fee of £65, the generous gesture counter-balanced by the stern proviso that I should not apply for anything more! I accepted the money with gratitude but could not refrain from comparing it with the much larger monetary help many of my male colleagues received to do further training.

The course at the Institute of Education was centred on child development. There were fifty places, three set aside for teachers from the Commonwealth, one of which I obtained. For the first time I was a full-time student in tertiary study. I found the experience stimulating and rewarding. The views of the lecturers on education were totally compatible with my own. The writers referred to in our classes were leading researchers such as: Donald Winnicott, who believed 'ordinary' mothers could manage their children well if they understood them (Winnicott, 1957); John Bowlby, who emphasised the importance of a stable relationship with a primary caregiver throughout infancy (Bowlby, 1953); and Dorothy Gardner, Course Director (Gardner, 1949). All these people were subsequently to have an important influence on Parents' Centre leaders. Gardner had researched a sample of English 'progressive' schools and compared the results of their teaching, especially in the '3Rs' and art, on children aged seven and nine with those of more traditional schools. She was able to demonstrate that the children from the progressive schools which incorporated and promoted play as an important part of the curriculum for children between five and nine, reached the same standard in reading and writing as those in the traditional schools in their infant school years but were more creative, particularly in art. These results were later published in Gardner's two books: *Testing Results in the Infant School* (1952) and *Further Results in the Infant School* (1954). The methods used in our course encouraged child study, research, leadership and the challenging of ideas. Inspiring lectures were followed by well-conducted tutorials. I was impressed with the method and the content of the teaching. Visits to schools demonstrating best practice were another feature of the course. On one school visit, I spent a day with A.S. Neill at his school, Summerhill (Neill, 1962). On completion of the course I was appointed to St. Leonard's Nursery School in Coram Fields in central London which was used for demonstration by London University. I became an associate teacher for students of Anna Freud who in 1950 was training 'child experts' as they decided to call their trainers, from her residential nursery in Hampstead (Young-Bruel, 1988).

I returned to New Zealand in 1951, enthusiastic about implementing the practices I had observed and been involved in. I was supported by Moira Gallagher, the first pre-school supervisor appointed in the Department of Education (May, 2001). Gallagher had been appointed to this position following a recommendation by the Government's Consultative Committee on Pre-School Services (1947). Gallagher, a primary teacher by background saw the need to free up kindergarten programmes and make them more appropriate to the needs of children. She encouraged me to implement what I had learned in London and helped me to secure a place as director of Pahiatua Kindergarten where my qualifications were recognised as being equivalent to those of a kindergarten teacher. This recognition was a necessary step towards acceptance by the New Zealand kindergarten community which was the main provider of early childhood education at that time (Hughes, 1989). I was able to apply the methods I had become familiar with overseas, especially in the nursery schools which were seen as leaders in their field in the United Kingdom (Gardner, 1949). The staff at the nursery schools where I observed and worked, Chelsea and St. Leonards, implemented the ideas advocated in my London Institute of Education course. Thus, I gained experience in teaching in the style I favoured.

In 1952, I returned to primary teaching at Mt. Cook School in Wellington because of financial considerations. Remuneration in the kindergarten service was more in keeping with that which would keep young girls preparing for marriage, than for a widow with a young child to support. At Mt. Cook, I had *carte blanche* to introduce the ideas of the English activity school model advocated in our lectures at London University and demonstrated at the schools I visited (Lloyd, 1959). The principal Miss Gowdie was most supportive of my ideas in providing for play and an all day programme that based reading on the interests of children. With her approval I used child study to assess development. She encouraged me to apply for the lecturer's position in Junior Education at Wellington Training College to which I was appointed. I stayed at Wellington Training College for six years from 1953 until 1958.

I can appreciate now that I had achieved a certain respect through having met and worked with some key international 'gurus' in education overseas. I am sure this played a part in my securing the position at Wellington Training College. My appointment broke new ground. Up to that time 'junior', or 'infant', education in the college had been the

prerogative of Infant Mistresses close to retirement and appointed because of their successful methods. Degrees were not seen as necessary to their work with students. I had a degree at 31, was nowhere near retirement and had only five years' experience of teaching children 5-8 in the junior school!

I appreciated the support of those in authority in helping me to effect change. I had support at the Training College from the principal, Reg Waghorn, most of the other lecturers and many students. I taught human development from birth to eight years of age using the model of training in progressive education demonstrated at the London Institute of Education. I tried to involve the students in their own learning in their courses in child development and curriculum implementation. All students were given an assignment to study an infant from birth over two years as I wanted them to appreciate the amount of learning that occurs in the first five years of life. They had the task of observing the child's development and checking their findings against the developmental levels in the text books. I used the manual written by Benjamin Spock (1946), a paediatrician in New York City from 1929 to 1947. He was later associate Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Minnesota. Spock's ideas were much more child-friendly than those of Truby King. The child study exercise had the added benefit of teaching students to communicate with parents.

On teaching section students observed good practice in early childhood education and infant schools and critiqued it in the normal schools where teachers worked in tandem with the lecturers. Guidelines were worked out by consultation with teachers and were based on the principles of learning which were then being identified in the educational texts of writers and educationists, such as Susan Isaacs (1932), John Dewey (1933), Herbert Read (1943) and Edna Mellor (1950). The basic principles included provision for holistic development and individual differences, the use of interest as a motivator and happiness as a criterion for success. Corporal punishment which was still used for establishing and preserving school discipline was considered harmful by those educationists and the staff in the education department at the College. Alternatives were explored and promoted. In my experience, it was rarely if ever used in the normal schools. The course also included sex education which had no part in the school syllabus at that time and was avoided by most parents. It was appreciated that students could do nothing directly in schools where they

put themselves at risk if they did but it was hoped that in the future they could support moves to provide information, at least to their own children when they showed an interest.

In my time at the college in the 1950s I often used the technique of 'consciousness raising' with students. It was hoped that this would help them to look at their own backgrounds, to identify the ideas in their training which were compatible and those which they found hard to come to terms with. Advocates of the technique, such as Anna Freud (Young-Bruel, 1988) and Enid Balint (Dicks, 1970), a psychiatrist from Tavistock Clinic who worked part time in my course at the London Institute of Education, believed that the ease or difficulty of effecting change had its origins in the early childhood education of each individual. Group discussion was regarded as an effective component of classes. Efforts were made to ensure this technique had benefits for all, not just the vocal and articulate.

Looking back from a perspective of 50 years, I can see that many of these ideas were in the progressive tradition and even radical in the 1950s. I can appreciate too, that Wellington provided the context necessary for me and others of like mind to pursue our ideas. As the political centre it enabled those like Dr Beeby (1992) working towards progressive reform in the schools to have direct contact with those given the task of implementing it. Some teachers felt threatened, others were enthusiastic. The liberal leaders of the Wellington Training College and Education Department of Victoria University of Wellington such as the College Principal, Reg Waghorn, and his deputy Walter Scott and Professors Colin Bailey and Arthur Fieldhouse at Victoria were sympathetic to my ideas. My associate lecturer, Irene Ely, who held the position of 'Women's Warden', and was senior to me was enthusiastic and supportive. She paved the way for much innovation in her administrative role in the college. I was encouraged and given opportunities to introduce change throughout the country. One important assignment for me was to join the leadership of an in-service course for teachers, held at Ardmore Training College in 1958, under the chairmanship of George Parkyn, Director of the New Zealand Council for Educational Research. Such in-service courses boosted the changes. Myrtle Simpson, the only woman inspector on the Wellington Education Board and Florence Lowrie (May & Middleton, 1997), an infant school advisor who had studied in England, had been appointed to promote the idea that children learned through play and that therefore play had a legitimate place in the infant school curriculum (Mellor, 1950). This curriculum change often derided

and criticised by the press and many parents (Beeby, 1992), was usually welcomed by the children if their teachers understood their role in providing for interest, challenge and active learning.

It was at this time, 1954, that I became actively involved in Parents' Centre. I had met Quentin Brew who, as part of his role as an educational psychologist, had been invited to the Training College to talk about children with special needs. He told the students about the Parents' Centre organisation. Quentin and I found our ideas compatible and he invited me to speak to Parents' Centre classes on the topic of starting school.

In the years 1959 to 1973, my major responsibility was the care and education of my own children. I had remarried in 1954 and left the Training College in 1958, to care for and educate my daughter Kathrine and son Simon. John, my eldest child, was by now at Rongotai College. Like most women of my generation, I left full-time employment to care for my children but I was still involved in teacher and parent education, as I had a number of part-time positions which I was invited to take up. In 1958 I had joined Parents' Centre for my own education in the Dick-Read techniques. I was invited by Helen Brew to organise and run the ante-natal classes and by Beverley Morris and Joyce Barns to lecture to Playcentre supervisors and kindergarten students. I followed the same procedure I used at the Training College but found I was freer to experiment, being bound only minimally by testing, grading of students and large class size. The class members who were parents enjoyed applying the knowledge about development to the understanding of their own children. The interest and enthusiasm they brought to classes was often a contrast to that shown by younger students training to be kindergarten teachers. The latter, at 17 and 18 years of age were developmentally more interested in relationships with each other and the opposite sex than with the children which might result! I found the work with parents stimulating and rewarding. It was also challenging as the parents tended to be active participants and not afraid to present different perspectives from mine. Once again I found I had trust and support from those in authority. Beverley Morris and members of the Playcentre training committee in the Wellington area were enthusiastic and included me in policy meetings and in-service work (Stover, 1998). Joyce Barns, principal of the Kindergarten College, had invited me to join the staff in 1959, as lecturer in child development. She gave me unlimited opportunities to try out my ideas. She, too, had

studied at the London Institute of Education, in 1951-52 and was, like me, motivated to free up early childhood education (May & Middleton, 1997).

I continued my work in Parents' Centre from 1959 to 1962, when I left to lead a group of parents in setting up *Matauranga*, a progressive parent co-operative school, for children aged four to thirteen (Rose, 1990). This school was based on the model of the English activity Infant Schools (Gardner, 1952) and the New Zealand Playcentres (Stover, 1998). The basic principles included parent participation, holistic development, an emphasis on play, and freedom from corporal punishment. It began as a school for children 4 ½ to 8 years old, in August 1963. In response to the wishes of the founding group it became a full primary school in 1965. I led the group and taught there from 1963-1971 (Rose, 1990; Bell, 1963)

I accepted the invitation to run the classes for Wellington Parents' Centre with alacrity. I felt confident that I had the knowledge, experience and expertise that the position required. I had enjoyed my job at the Training College and felt a sense of loss at having left that behind. I could afford to work in a voluntary capacity for Parents Centre, as my husband's salary could finance the family and I earned some money by lecturing part-time in playcentre and kindergarten training courses. I was in a position to grasp the opportunity to put into practice the ideas I believed in, with few if any restrictions. In the four years I ran the Parents' Centre classes I was able to apply the skills I had acquired in my work in adult education as did many of the pioneers I interviewed. Most of them, like me had been applying progressive ideas in their work and the rearing of their own children. Helen Brew had worked with children with speech problems and their parents using a new holistic approach acquired in her training; Alice Fieldhouse introduced nurses to new ideas about the treatment of sick and well children; Ephra Garrett and Ann Rosenberg brought a progressive approach to social work; Beverley Morris, Lex Grey and Helen Thornton taught parents in Playcentre how to understand children and provide for and foster learning through play; Diana Mason and Mary Logan brought a humane and enlightened approach to mothers and children in the medical field; Chris Cole-Catley and Mary Dobbie used their writing skills to inform and educate policy-makers and the general public about progressive practices for young children and parents in health and education; Jim Robb passed on the new ideas to students at university and parents training to be marriage



guidance counsellors; Richard Savage, a lawyer, developed his already progressive ideas about parent education from being sympathetic to his wife Nora's involvement in Playcentre by providing legal advice and protection to those advocating change in the public arena.

The other three pioneers in this study, June Bastings, Mary Mowbray and Barbara Hodge had not been involved in work with parents and young children before joining Parents' Centre. They joined for their own education and were so convinced of the value of the ideas that they were motivated to work for the organisation, after completing their courses. The background and contribution to Parents' Centre of all the pioneers is analysed in chapter 5. The pioneers, like me, saw Parents' Centre as an effective organisation for promoting the progressive beliefs most of them had been advocating and wanted to share with parents. Their ideas and experience helped to shape the Parents' Centre organisation and its objectives.

### 1.3 Other studies of Parents' Centre

I am not the first to study the phenomenon of Parents' Centre. Mary Dobbie did an extensive study of the organisation, providing a history from 1952 to 1990 based on her own involvement in it, accounts from the Parents' Centre archives and interviews with many of those who were leaders between 1954 and 1990. The archival material she used included minutes of meetings, conference reports, submissions to commissions of enquiry and publications such as the *Parents' Centres Bulletin*<sup>3</sup>. Dobbie's *The Trouble with Women* (1990) encapsulated the paternal attitude of the medical professionals in the 1950s, particularly obstetricians, towards the women they attended during childbirth. Dobbie gives full descriptions of the reforms worked for and of the challenges those in the movement faced. Her book is liberally illustrated with quotes from Parents' Centre workers. Dobbie's work was a valuable resource for me, not only in the way the development of the organisation is recorded, but also in the way it is set against the social conditions and developments, particularly in obstetrics, up to 1990. I hope that my view may complement her record in providing a perspective from a group of those who

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<sup>3</sup> The publication of Parents' Centre has had various name changes as follows: *Bulletin of the Parents' Centres*, July 1954 to Dec 1956; *Bulletin of the Parents' Centres*, Dec 1956 to Dec 1966; *Parents Centres Bulletin*, Dec 1966 to Oct 1996; *Kiwi Parent*, the name since Oct 1996. In this study I will refer to this publication as *Parents' Centres Bulletin*.

pioneered the organisation, were 'movers and shakers' of the health and education services for children under three and could assess what they saw as the value of the content and methods used by the organisation from a perspective of 50 years.

Sandra Coney (1993) has provided a brief history of Parents' Centres in New Zealand (1952) in *Women Together: A history of Women's organisations in New Zealand. Nga Ropu Wahine o te Motu*. Coney records the reasons for the founding of the movement and a little about the early members, especially the leader, Helen Brew. Coney sees the organisation as one of the attempts over the years 'to bring the woman back to the centre of the health care circle' (Coney, 1993, p.274), thus justifying its inclusion in the book 'Women Together', a history of women's organisations in New Zealand. Coney drew upon Parents' Centre archives for her information. She provided a feminist perspective from which she, like the pioneers, challenged the health services provided for but not with women in New Zealand. Coney has worked tirelessly in her career to challenge and improve the provision of services and bring them more in line with what women want and need. I appreciate her sympathy with the movement and especially its contribution in the early years 1952-1962. However, as an insider I did not consider Parent's Centre as solely a 'women's movement', especially in the beginning. Three of the pioneers I have interviewed are men who made an important contribution both philosophically and practically to Parents' Centre. There was a major emphasis on the importance of the father's role in childbirth and parenting.

Heather Knox, in her thesis 'Feminism, Femininity and Motherhood in Post-World War II New Zealand' (1995), investigated the extent to which three New Zealand Women's organisations of the 1950s, i.e. Parents' Centre, Playcentre and the Plunket Society centred on mothering. She argued that these organisations served as vehicles for change in the lives of the women of the 1950s. Knox examined the philosophy, policy, membership and structure of the organisations and set them in the social and medical climate of the time. A central issue for her is the tension between the feminist and maternalistic aspects of Parents' Centre philosophy. She believes that concentration on the mother's role in mental health has led to condemnation of mothers as 'probable contributors to poor development' and 'neglect of the role of social forces in individual lives' particularly by those making policy for the family (Knox, 1995, p.105). However, this critique seems harsh as I know



that Parents' Centre leaders were aware of the role of social forces and the consequent need for women to have representation in the making of social policy. They worked to bring about policy change and had some success. They also tried to make parents aware that there were factors in parenting beyond their control such as the services and that rather than feeling guilty they should work to change them. For example, in 1959, seven years after Parents' Centre was founded, some of their submissions to the Consultative Committee on pre-school health services (the Finlay Commission<sup>4</sup>) were among the recommendations submitted to government. It is true that some policies, such as the need for parents to stay with young children in hospitals took a long time to be implemented. The effort which was sustained over twenty years may not have been obvious to those outside the organisation. One of the satisfactions in my involvement in Parents' Centre, has been of members such as the Parents' Centre pioneers becoming political, in order to have some control over the 'social forces' which set their boundaries and defined their roles. I have had many opportunities to further the involvement of women and/or parents in decision making, particularly as an inspector in the Department of Education (1974-1982) and as an active member of the Labour Party in most of my adult life. I have always tried to make the groups I work with aware of the need to inform, persuade, and, if necessary, harass policy-makers. Parents' Centre pioneers emphasised the importance of the role of the mother, at a time when most women were full-time mothers (May 1992), not only to make women appear valuable and raise their self-esteem, but also to try to convince policy-makers that mothering was a complex and skilful occupation; that the opinions of mothers were worthy of respect and that government policy should be analysed to ensure it helped mothers in their role. This may have worked to the disadvantage of some women later, particularly when policy-makers who were opposed to women's advancement in careers, opposed the provision of quality child care. Although in the 1950s the pioneers would not have considered themselves feminists, they would admit today that feminism and Parents' Centre were not mutually exclusive but had much in common.

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<sup>4</sup> 'The Consultative Committee on Infant and Preschool Health Services was set up by the Minister of Health in 1959 to investigate and advise on New Zealand's preschool health services targeting the Plunket Society whose Karitane hospitals were an increasing charge on the Health Department. The threat of a Government takeover of Plunket, or its slow attrition through loss of Health Department support, could be seen only as a threat to the principle of voluntary service, and to the funding of all such services. For this principle the Parents' Centres, Playcentres, Free Kindergartens, other groups and community-minded individuals were prepared to pull out all stops' (Dobbie, 1990, p.59).

Helen May (2001) describes Parents' Centre as both radical and progressive in the 1950s, in that it advocated that mothers be more permissive in child management than had been advocated by Plunket. The campaign by parents to change the conditions for women during childbirth so that mothers were empowered to form good relationships with their children was a radical move at that time. May, however, outlines the apparent conservatism of Parents' Centre in the 1970s, in the light of feminist politics. Parents' Centre's emphasis on 'continuous relationships' with the primary caregiver, and its reference to the writings of Bowlby, provided ammunition to some politicians in their opposition to child care outside the home. This brought them into conflict, in the 1970s, with women who, wanting to continue career and motherhood, saw quality child care as a necessity for them. Some of the pioneers I interviewed felt that Bowlby had been taken out of context by childcare advocates of those years, and that his idea of continuity with 'mother substitutes', and enjoyment of relationships with young children, did not exclude quality child care.

Sue Kedgley, writing in *Mum's the Word: The Untold Story of Motherhood in New Zealand* (1996) viewed Parents' Centre as a radical movement which helped women to 'regain control of childbirth' (p. 170). Her book is written from the perspective of a successful career woman who became a mother at forty-two and found the change of lifestyle and status in society a challenge. This experience led her to research motherhood in New Zealand from a feminist perspective. Feminism was not a term much used in New Zealand in 1952, but I, like the pioneers I have interviewed, can appreciate in retrospect that Parents' Centre pioneers were addressing a feminist issue: the right of women to have a voice in the services provided for them and their children. Kedgley's account covers the steps the founders took to gain that right but queries the direction they took in establishing a medical directorate as part of the organisation. I can appreciate that the founders believed they had no other option at the time, given the power of the medical establishment, particularly of the obstetricians. Physiotherapists could not be paid for their exercise classes, in preparation for childbirth, unless their clients had the signed permission of their doctors. These exercise classes, with their apparent promise of an easier birth, were the major drawcard for parents. Discussions on parent-child relationships which formed the core of the Parents' Centre theory of child rearing, followed the exercises. Many participants stayed on at first out of curiosity and then became interested, even enthusiastic. As the pioneers of Parents' Centre appreciated this opportunity to draw the

parents into classes on child rearing, especially as no other organisation was providing advice in the progressive tradition for the rearing of children under three, they accepted the compromise of a medical directorate. In the event it consisted of people with ideas compatible with Parents' Centre ideals and proved to be helpful and supportive.

I have reflected on the content of existing studies on Parents' Centre and on my own experience in the context of their views. I can empathise with Kedgley (1996) over the tension between career and motherhood and I have found Knox's (1995) analysis largely compatible with my own. I realise many women today still have difficulty reconciling the demands, both physical and philosophical, of motherhood and career, or even making a choice on how they will order their lives. I acknowledge some Parents' Centre leaders, in their enthusiasm to convince may have added to the anxiety of some parents. Parents' Centre leaders were often accused of making mothers feel guilty, especially by those opposed to their views. However, I believe the issue of guilt as a socialising technique for women, is a complex issue. It has been used widely, although not always consciously, by parents, church groups, schools where 'considerable use was made of guilt as a tool of discipline [for girls]' (Fry, 1985, p.178) and even Plunket and Playcentre, over many years. In discussing the pressure on mothers of Plunket doctrine McKinlay states 'social problems [have been] laid squarely on the country's mothers, who are in fact held responsible for every aspect of their children's lives and futures' (McKinlay, 1983, p.123). Most women coming to Parents' Centre would have been vulnerable to guilt feelings as a result of earlier socialisation. I became aware of guilt as a concern for women at the United Women's Convention in 1978 where over 600 women enrolled in a workshop 'Guilt: The great Controller'. Many women there wanted alternatives to this form of discipline for their daughters and expressed concern about the effects on themselves.

Bryder (2003), in her recently published book, *A Voice for Mothers: the Plunket Society and Infant Welfare 1907-2000*, highlights the relationships between Parents' Centre and Plunket. She describes Parents' Centre as 'a lay group formed to encourage natural childbirth and more relaxed parenting' and one which came under the 'patent influence of Bevan-Brown' (Bryder, 2003, p. 119). Bryder describes the efforts made by Parents' Centre pioneers Helen Brew and Chris Cole-Catley to work with the Plunket society. She also records that the medical adviser to the Plunket society, Dr Helen Deem, who followed

Truby King in that position, 'personally supported the Parents' Centre movement', (p.129). However, Deem had to tread carefully, because of opposition from obstetricians, especially Dr Corkill in Wellington (Mein-Smith, 1986). As Bryder recalls, he was 'a member of the Nurses and Midwives Registration Board and author of a text-book for midwives' (p.127). As the Board had links with the Nursing Division of the Health Department, Deem feared that pressure from powerful doctors such as Corkill could result in the role of Plunket being taken over by that Department. Some doctors and officials resented Plunket nurses who had only a short training, usurping their position in the field of paediatrics. Bryder describes the similarities between Plunket and Parents' Centre teaching, such as involvement of fathers in parenting, breast-feeding and the view that 'parents needed guidance and encouragement to bring up their families to be emotionally stable' (2003, p.138). The major difference between the organisations, I suggest, lay in their structures. Plunket was hierarchical. It was headed by a Director of Medical Services and employed paid Plunket Nurses. Else (1993) makes the point 'The nurses are supported at the local level by women on the voluntary branch committees, which manage the affairs of the Society. The overall policy of the society is directed by the Executive Council, made up of women elected from, and representing each district' (p.257). In the eyes of many Parents' Centre pioneers these women tended to be of an older generation than that of the parents (Knox, 1995) more affluent and able to do voluntary work, then the mothers they purported to represent. Parents' Centre, on the other hand, was a consumer organisation and the classes were led by volunteers. However, Bryder makes the point that women, mothers themselves, could have a voice through being on the executive and through Mothers' Clubs which were an important vehicle for bringing mothers together, giving them a chance to discuss their anxieties and successes and to gain knowledge from each other. As women came together in Plunket clinics, in the 1940s and 1950s, they naturally discussed their birth experiences and child rearing. They were often addressed by Parents' Centre and Playcentre speakers and were exposed to new ideas on parenting. In this way I believe Plunket helped to provide a seed-bed for Parents' Centre ideas.

#### **1.4 Setting the study in the context of the times**

Since the 1970s, when I first read Urie Bronfenbrenner's books *Two Worlds of Childhood* (1972) and *The Ecology of Human Development* (1979), I have become convinced that any movement for change can only be fully understood in terms of the forces operating in

society at the time. These forces include the economic, social, and political settings where the need for change arises. As I mentioned earlier, those ideas had been presented to students like myself in the 1940s, in the courses of Professor Gould in Education I, and by Professor Lipson in Political Science at Victoria University. In the words of Bronfenbrenner (1979, p.22):

The environment defined as relevant to developmental processes, is not limited to a single immediate setting, but is extended to incorporate interconnections between such settings, as well as to external influences emanating from the larger surroundings ... the ecological environment which is conceived topologically as a nested arrangement of concentric structures, each contained within the next.

The concentric structures referred to by Bronfenbrenner are the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-systems. The micro-system is a setting in which face-to-face interactions are possible, such as that in which the mother feeds the child. The meso-system is the series of connections which influence the micro-systems such as occur in the hospital where mother and child relate to nurses, doctors, cleaners, and food providers, other parents and children. The exo-system is one in which events occur that affect what happens in the meso- and micro-systems, but in which members of the micro-system have no direct part to play, such as hospital policy. The macro-system refers to society as a whole and its economic and social policies, cultural beliefs and attitudes, priorities and prejudices. I have become aware of the interconnections Bronfenbrenner describes, in my life in education and politics, particularly as an inspector in the Department of Education working for change in Early Childhood Education. I learned that, however soundly based in theory and necessary in the eyes of those who framed it, new policy only has a chance of success if, in the opinion of the politicians, there was support in the wider society 'the macro-system'. I appreciate the 'nesting' metaphor, which implies nurturance of the small units, such as the family, by the larger ones, such as Government. Unfortunately, governments, particularly in their economic policies, have sometimes introduced legislation which has been damaging to family life, has not caught up with change in the community and has been framed without the contribution of those involved. The Parents' Centre pioneers considered this was the case in the 1950s with government policy on childbirth. I can relate with enthusiasm to Bronfenbrenner's idea of dynamic interconnections and influences which he emphasises throughout *The Ecology of Human Development* (1979). Bronfenbrenner presented a copy of this book to me. As chair of the Early Childhood Convention I was given the opportunity to choose the key speaker. I invited Bronfenbrenner

because I believed at the time that his ideas could help early childhood teachers to become more aware of the need to enter the political arena. I was interested to ascertain how far the social climate of the 1950s contributed to the success of Parents' Centre. In this study I devote chapters 3 and 4 to the over-arching influences on the socio-political environment of the 1950s, within and beyond New Zealand, as they affected the services for childbirth and the parenting of children under three. I describe these influences and identify elements which had a particular effect on the pioneers, their education, their careers, their parenting and their motivation for founding Parents' Centre.

To obtain my information I read a selection of work by historians writing about New Zealand in the 1950s and 1960s. Some gave valuable insights about matters of particular concern to families and showed clearly the changes which brought about the need for an organisation like Parents' Centre. W.B 'Bill' Sutch (1966) described the tension which has always been present in New Zealand between the liberal and conservative views of education. His work enabled me to realise that Parents' Centre philosophy, part of the liberal tradition, had its origins in the beginnings of New Zealand settlement, particularly in education. The texts I have been able to consult, have been written by New Zealanders, except for that by David Ausubel (1960), an American who often visited Wellington Training College when I was a lecturer there. Ausubel (1960) in his book presented the view of an outsider. A sociologist, he was most critical of New Zealand's policies and attitudes to Maori, women and the school system. The book *The Fern and the Tiki* was widely criticised on its publication but was in accord with many of the views of those involved in change, such as the Parents' Centre pioneers.

Cook (1945), May (1989) and Dalley (1998) demonstrate that, under the veneer of post-war happiness, there was much conflict and challenge in family life, in the 1950s. Family conflict, much of it stemming from the absence of husbands and fathers during the war and the problems of reunion, affected many children. Dalley (1998) in her study of child welfare gives facts and figures about the problems many children faced in the 1950s and the attempts by Government to solve these. In the absence of a comprehensive system of pre-school education, many of the effects on children were not identified until they entered school. Most of the Parents' Centre pioneers however, as teachers, social workers and medical professionals, had already become aware that all was not well with those with



whom they worked. This knowledge motivated them to study the causes of problems and help parents to avoid them. The pioneers applied this knowledge in their own families, as far as they could. In New Zealand, however, few of those working in services for parents had come to realise their potential for helping parents to avoid problems. Their experience of these services motivated the pioneers to work for change. I have devoted a chapter to leaders in the progressive tradition who, by their writings and methods of teaching, inspired, supported, and gave credibility to the efforts of the pioneers of Parents' Centre to bring about change. I have called them the 'gurus' of Parents' Centre and I have identified these from the interviews, my own recollections and information in the Parents' Centres Bulletins.

All these studies have been valuable in providing a range of perspectives on the role of the Parents' Centre organisation. They have also strengthened my belief that a retrospective view from some pioneers could be useful for those working to provide services for young children and their families today and in assessing the needs Parents' Centre fills in today's social climate.

## **1.5 Thesis structure**

This thesis presents an analysis of the stories of sixteen pioneers, alongside my own, about our involvement in Parents' Centre. In this introductory chapter I have described the nature of my study and my reasons for undertaking it. I have introduced the Parents' Centre organisation, the pioneers I interviewed, and my own life in education with particular emphasis on my attempts to advance the progressive tradition, particularly for children under three. I have also briefly discussed other studies of Parents' Centre.

Chapter Two details how I devised a methodology which enabled the pioneers, including myself, to recall the 1950s and the Parents' Centre organisation, 50 years on. I discussed my reasons for using oral history and my attempts to involve the pioneers in the planning, analysis and conclusions.

Chapter Three describes the social climate of the 1950s, particularly the way in which the improved economic circumstances set the background for the changes which seemed the pioneers were advocating as a result of pressures on families following the return of the



troops, the opening up of New Zealand to new ideas brought by immigration and increased opportunities for travel and study.

Chapter Four focuses on the services for childbirth and parenthood in the 1950s. I analyse the factors which led the pioneers to consider them outmoded in terms of their knowledge about children, particularly those under three.

In Chapter Five, I position the pioneers in the context of their family background, education, training and career experiences. Their experiences of parenthood are discussed, leading to an analysis of the factors in their lives which motivated them to promote, sustain and expand Parents' Centre.

Chapter Six analyses the development of the organisation, Parents' Centre, as seen by the pioneers, their role in it, its purpose and functions. The philosophers, writers and researchers who influenced the beliefs and values of the organisation are identified, their backgrounds described and their contribution assessed.

Chapter Seven identifies the successful strategies for change used by the pioneers. It demonstrates how the pioneers pooled their knowledge to educate parents for childbirth and parenthood of children under three, using progressive methods of education. It also records strategies used to change the views of the community, those in charge of the services and policy makers.

In Chapter Eight the voices of the pioneers are presented, as they reflect on the impact of Parents Centre, from a perspective of 50 years from its foundation. The chapter records their satisfactions, their perceived gains, the costs to themselves and their families and their views on the organisation today.

In Chapter Nine I conclude the thesis with a synthesis of the main themes identified. I reflect on the methodology and bid the pioneers farewell.

## CHAPTER 2:

### Methodology

In this chapter, I outline the methodology I used in answering my research questions and justify this within the framework of qualitative research. The procedures I used to gather and analyse my data are described and the way I identified themes in the material and used them in constructing the participants' stories of their pioneering days in the Parents' Centre organisation.

I decided to write in the first person, because I regarded myself as a narrator of my own experience, as well as of those I worked with. In that way, I have remained able to include and take responsibility for what I heard, saw, felt and concluded. I believed that, as the researcher, I had a central role in the way the pioneers' stories were told. This was made clear from the start to the people I interviewed. In human relations terms 'I own what I say'; I hoped that my example of being present and engaged with each person I interviewed would encourage a democratic and egalitarian form of discourse (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 375, Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 98).

#### 2.1 The use of a qualitative research paradigm

In choosing the methodology for this study, I was aware of the need to ensure that my research methods would allow the pioneers to tell their stories in their own voice (Truegar, 1988). While I acknowledged that, I too had a story to tell about my own involvement in the early days of Parents' Centre, I realised that the pioneers might have different ideas on the movement. I thought it was important that I used processes which encouraged them to express these. I was concerned with "the individual's point of view" and believed I could get "close to the actor's perspective through detailed interviewing" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 10).

One of the aims of this study was to promote understanding of the need for Parents' Centre in the 1950s and its survival into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In deciding on the study method, it therefore seemed necessary to consider the times, 1952-1962 in New Zealand, particularly in terms of the prevailing practices in health and education, as a factor in the success of the organisation. I used data from the transcripts of the pioneers and also material from writers

of New Zealand history, one, Mary Dobbie, from inside the organisation, and the others from outside.

I was committed to a method through which I could share the power which a researcher necessarily has, so that the findings of the study could be seen as collegial, both in the interviews, analysis and conclusion (Maynard & Purvis, 1994). Since I regard the pioneers of Parents' Centre as important and effective people whose wisdom and knowledge could be lost if not drawn on now, I wanted to gather the "truth" as they saw it. I knew from my own experience in the organisation, in the 1950s at least, that that experience provoked a range of human emotions – fear, anger, despair, joy and delight. It was these experiences that I wanted to access. The imperative I felt to tell the stories of the pioneers, in their own voice, to tell the "truth" in their own words, drew me to the qualitative method of research as ideal for my type of study. It could highlight the way "they (the pioneers) came up against the constraints of the every day social world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 10). I wanted to capture that.

## **2.2 The use of oral history methodology**

The great strength of oral history lies in the ease in which all kinds of voices can be researched by all kinds of researchers (Gluck & Patai, 1991, p.221) [and the researcher can] discover how individual women [and men] define and evaluate their experience in their own terms (Gluck & Patai, 1991, p.23).

As an elderly person myself, wanting to research a group of elderly people, I considered that oral history was the medium I should use. I thought about the alternatives, such as a questionnaire or answers to written questions. A questionnaire would have been too limiting and, in my opinion, too much influenced by my perception of what was important. Written answers would have demanded more time and effort than I thought it was fair to ask of people in this age-group, especially as some were, like me, not computer-literate. I also wanted to make the gathering of data from them a happy and stimulating experience, rather than a demanding task. As I had known and worked with all the pioneers in various roles in Parents' Centre and had found that an enjoyable experience, I felt sure that it would be possible to replicate the enjoyment in an interview.

I agree with the conclusion of Gluck and Patai (1991) when they discuss the analysis of the contributions offered by written material:

We can only infer what individuals mean by the language they use; with oral interviews we can ask them. As they discuss examples, the particularities of their experiences often begin to emerge from behind the veil of familiar and ambiguous forms. (p.17)

As a member of Parents' Centre myself in the years I was studying, 1952-62, I was familiar with the terms commonly used in the organisation in the 1950s. That familiarity was an advantage in that I knew I would rarely have to ask for clarification of the names of the many influential people inside and outside the organisation and the educational and health practices they discussed. I could appreciate that my intervention would need to be only minimal in asking them to expand on a point. As I did not want to have an influence beyond that I necessarily had as researcher and analyst or cause annoyance by interruption I could let them do most of the talking without intrusion. Our common knowledge would reinforce the idea that we were colleagues and that it would be helpful for them to expand on topics we both understood.

Oral history has another advantage in that it gives the interviewer the opportunity to be sensitive to the body language of the person interviewed. My experience of interviewing has raised my awareness of the importance of correct interpretation of body language and the need to check in words that my observation is correct. I expected that I might need to check for fatigue or that there was a feeling of discomfort about some data which had been revealed. The oral history process gave me that opportunity.

### **2.2.1 *Oral history interviews***

I decided to study and investigate the past by conducting 'first-person life histories ... directed at using the person as a vehicle to understand basic aspects of human behaviour or existing institutions'. I intended to use a 'face-to-face verbal interchange', with each pioneer being interviewed on their own (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 45).

As most of my research questions (appendix 3) concerned relatively intimate matters which could be seen as intrusive such as the effect of involvement in Parents' Centre on husbands and families I believed that I would have to build a sense of trust which could be done more easily in a face-to-face encounter. Having established my purpose with those I interviewed by telephone conversation and letter (see appendices 1 and 2) I could work to

put the pioneers at ease, being sensitive to their initial remarks and body language and adapting my own behaviour accordingly.

I went further to test my success by setting aside time at the end of the interview for assessment in their terms; by sending them the transcripts of the interviews and the quotations I used and a draft of the conclusions of the thesis, along with the chapter in which I analysed their lives. I also provided the opportunity for a second interview.

In collecting my interview material I was aware I had to be careful to overcome, as far as possible, the influence I had, in my dual role as interviewer and a pioneer myself, in placing their stories in a contemporary context. I needed to counteract the tendency to lead the interviews in a direction that followed my own interests rather than those of the pioneers. The practices I adopted to achieve this, are described in the following section. In my professional life I have done a great deal of interviewing – of applicants for teacher training, for lectureships, for positions in the Department of Education, for appointing staff to schools I was involved with and for market research. In my time as a member of the teacher training team in the Department of Education, 1974-1982, I was involved in a change in the way officers were assessed for competency and promotion. The interview process was used as one of the tools for assessment. I was also, after an Education Department seminar in International Women's year (1975), given responsibility for setting up workshops where women were given techniques, both as interviewer and interviewee, to ensure that women's strengths were revealed at interview. Some of this background knowledge was relevant to the way I conducted my interview. I was aware that 'the interactional nature and the social dynamic of the interview can shape the nature of the knowledge generated ... Interview participants are actively constructing knowledge and questions and responses' (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995, p.647).

I took into account the fact that I was in a more powerful position than that of the interviewee to influence the oral material. For example, I had as much time as I wanted, or needed, to consider the information I wished to gather. I had taken an active role in seeking out the interviewees and could be seen as using them for my purposes. The fact I was doing the study as part of a university degree could have affected the spontaneity of the subjects, especially as the material relating to childbirth, a central topic of the Parents'

Centre struggle, could be a sensitive issue. Within the Parents' Centre organisation I had a reputation as one who supported its aims, as a parent, class organiser, lecturer, representative at the Finlay (1959) and Currie Commissions (1962)<sup>5</sup>, national training officer, agent for obtaining Government funding and life member. This involvement might have conveyed a view that I would not welcome criticism of the organisation. I did not want such a perception to inhibit disclosures, which could be seen by the pioneers as negative or critical. With all these considerations in mind I regarded my relationship with the pioneers as a key factor if I were to be successful in ensuring that the process was a collegial one.

I studied the literature on interviewing to ensure I used the best of the current practices. All the literature stresses the need to listen. As most of the people I interviewed are women I was particularly interested in the advice of Gluck and Patai (1991, p.11):

To hear women's perspectives accurately, we have to learn to listen in stereo, receiving both the dominant and muted channels clearly and tuning into them carefully to understand the relationship between them.

and in the text of Heilbrun and Stimpson (1991, p.11):

[where they] ... urge biographers to search for the choices, the pain, the stories that lie beyond the 'constraints of acceptable discussion'. An interview that fails to expose the distortion and conspires to mask the facts and feelings that did not fit will overemphasise expected aspects of the female role. More important, it will miss an opportunity to document the experience that lies outside the boundaries of acceptability.

As material from my interviews with the pioneers was my main source of data I prepared carefully paying particular attention in my preparation to avoid the use of strategies which might distance me from those I interviewed and make them uneasy about sharing their opinions.

### **2.2.2 Use of archival material**

A set of the Parents' Centre Archives is located at the Institute for Early Childhood Studies, Victoria University of Wellington and I had permission to use these from Professor Helen May, curator of the archives.

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<sup>5</sup> 'In 1960 the Minister of Education, Peter Fraser, set up the Currie Commission to review the whole education system below university level with both professional and lay members and with the widest terms of reference' (Beeby, 1992, p.193).

Before each interview I read up in the Parents' Centre archives the roles each interviewee played. During the interview I gave participants a chance to recall those roles, though I did not insist. This was to enable me to 'look for complementary links between these oral history sources and documentation' (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 222).

There are full records in the Parents Centre archives of (a) records of meetings and conferences; (b) submissions to Government and Commissions of enquiry; (c) the publications called Bulletin of the Parents' Centres, editions 1-7, 7/54-10/56; 8-11 Bulletin of the Parents' Centres 12/56-8/58; 13-20 Bulletin of the Parents' Centres 6/59-11/62 and Kiwi Parent (the name since Oct/Nov 1996; Dec/Jan 2001-2004), records of the time such as histories of politics, family life, support services for health and child management (e.g. Plunket, Kindergarten, Playcentre); (d) documents and texts used in education and health (Bibliography including the Archives list).

The search through the archives and writings of those whose beliefs underpinned Parents' Centre objectives served also to revive my own memories. I studied the writings of those who at the time were in powerful positions of influence over the Parents' Centre, particularly those who held a contrary view to those the Parents' Centre pioneers were advocating. The special terminology of the Parents' Centre movement all came back to me with renewed vibrancy: e.g., demand feeding, 'natural' childbirth, inductions, support in childbirth.

I found particularly useful the many relevant historical texts at the Institute for Early Childhood Studies, the Colin Bailey Library and in the main library at Victoria University of Wellington.

## **2.3 Methods and procedures**

In this section I explain the methods I used to obtain and analyse my data.

### **2.3.1 Ethical approval**

Ethical approval to conduct this study was granted in May 2001. Following normal guidelines about participant confidentiality I undertook to offer the use of pseudonyms for



reporting data from my participants. In the event, all the participants opted for their real names to be used in the thesis. I submitted the transcripts of the interviews to the participants as an opportunity for them to delete or modify any elements before these were used in my thesis. This process resulted in a small number of minor factual corrections. No changes of substance were made or requested.

### *2.3.2 Choice of participants*

As far as possible I chose to interview people who were involved in the foundation of the organisation, or in a development in the first ten years. I wanted to obtain the views of founder members, with as wide a range of background and experience as possible.

The availability of participants was another consideration. It was fortuitous that nine of the sixteen participants still lived in Wellington where the organisation was founded and where I live and am studying. They comprised a number of people who contributed to Wellington Parents' Centre in many different ways. I had met them all in a variety of situations and it was not hard to contact them as in many cases they were still in Wellington or had friends or relatives still here. This meant travel costs were minimal. However, there were four people now living in Auckland who had made a major contribution to the organisation. I felt they had to be included. They were Chris Cole-Catley, Mary Dobbie, Lex Grey and Beverley Morris. I also thought I should include Ephra Garrett in Palmerston North, Ann Rosenberg in Christchurch and Helen Thornton, now in Nelson, for the diversity of their backgrounds and contribution. I was prepared to add others if necessary but by the time I had interviewed these people I felt I had obtained material which represented a good cross-section of the experience of the pioneers (Kvale, 1996).

I interviewed Mary Mowbray and Barbara Hodge in pilot interviews. I chose Mary M as she not only worked for Parents' Centre but went on to become one of the pioneers of the Society for Research On Women. She has a background of research knowledge and methodology concerning women in particular. Mary M was candid and direct and gave valuable feedback on the process of the interview. I chose Barbara because she was president of Wellington Parents' Centre in the late 1950s and was involved in discussions

with doctors, the National Council of Women and preparation of submissions to the Finlay Commission (1959). She was also direct and not afraid to express her opinions.

I then proceeded to interview the other participants using the knowledge of procedure I had gained from the two pilot interviews.

- Helen Brew, the founder of the organisation and acknowledged by the other pioneers as a most important 'mover and shaker'. *'I trained as a primary teacher and then as a speech therapist in my third year during the war'*. Helen worked as the only speech therapist in Hawke's Bay until she married Quentin Brew. After the birth of her first child, she became active through the Christchurch Psychological Society in promoting the ideas of Dick-Read and Bevan-Brown. When the family moved to Wellington the publicity she received following an address to the Family Planning Association on natural childbirth became the catalyst for the foundation of Wellington Parents' Centre. She was its first president and later the first president of the Federation of Parents' Centres. I develop further in chapters 6 and 7 the ideas of the other pioneers about the importance of her leadership.
- June Bastings, a foundation member who made a valuable contribution to class organisation, over a long period. She was particularly interested in keeping the library well stocked and used. She led discussion groups in Wellington Parents' Centre classes as a volunteer. *I got as far as School Certificate and then I did draughting in my father's architectural office, until I was pregnant*. June was not an upfront worker, but was invaluable in providing and sustaining resources for classes. I thought it was important to include her because she brought a slightly different perspective in her role.
- Christine Cole-Catley, secretary of Parents' Centre for many years, a well-known journalist and editor of *Parents' Centres Bulletins*. She made a major contribution in publicising the organisation, and in putting together submissions to the Finlay Commission:  
*I had a career in journalism and radio. I worked in Wellington on the Southern Cross newspaper ... I had been a journalist all my life, since I was fourteen actually. I used to get paid to write in the school newspaper.*

- Mary Dobbie, one-time Bulletin editor, founder of Auckland Parents' Centre, at Bethany Hospital, and author of *The Trouble With Women*, a history of Parents' Centre. *I was already a mother of five and had been involved in writing the leaflet 'Painless Childbirth – Safe and Possible', to promote that. I had training in journalism.* Mary's journalistic skills too, made a major contribution but in a different way from those of Chris Cole-Catley as she came into the organisation later through founding Auckland Parents' Centre.
- Alice Fieldhouse, a most experienced and well-respected senior member of the nursing profession. Alice joined Parents' Centre when she became pregnant. She led classes and made an important contribution to the 'Young Children in Hospital' campaign:  
*I had done nursing training in 1934 in Auckland Hospital which I completed in 1937 and followed that by six months maternity training in Whangarei Hospital ... I later trained as a tutor at the Nurses' Post-Graduate School in Wellington ... Later I did a BA degree in Education at Victoria University and an MA at the Teachers College of Columbia University.*  
  
Alice brought a wealth of knowledge from practice in New Zealand and overseas. She had contact with the university through her husband, Arthur Fieldhouse.
- Ephra Garrett, a teacher who trained at Wellington Training College. She later became a social worker, and Parents' Centre leadership trainer, particularly in Palmerston North where she became president in 1963. She helped to prepare Parents' Centre submissions to the Finlay Commission 1959. *I trained as a teacher ... and was on the second training course for social workers in New Zealand in 1951/2. In those days that offered a very good education; not just a training by a long straw.*
- Lex Grey, a Lecturer in Child Development, supporter and adviser and involved in inservice training of group leaders, particularly for Playcentre. *I was a secondary pupil at Rongotai College in Wellington. I trained as a teacher at Wellington Teachers College and Victoria University.* He became a member of the Parents' Centre Educational advisory Council set up in 1957 when he was a lecturer at Auckland Training College. His work in the education of young children reinforced Parent's Centre ideas in training.

- Barbara Hodge. *I wanted to go to university in England [from where she emigrated to New Zealand] but priority was given to ex-servicemen...In my office job I trained staff to operate office machines.* After joining Parents' Centre for ante-natal education she served on the Wellington Parents' Centre committee: *I was secretary for a couple of years and then I became president* Barbara was particularly effective as an advocate and recruiter for classes.
- Mary Logan, a nurse trained in England. She had experience with home births and a good working and theoretical knowledge of 'natural childbirth'. She contributed much to classes and at times lectured in the child development programme at the Wellington Training College. *I had been a midwife – only for 18 months but I was qualified ... I was trained in a small town hospital. The matron's treatment of her patients was excellent.*
- Diana Mason, one of the few obstetricians who openly supported Parents' Centre in the 1950s and lectured in classes on preparation for childbirth and child rearing. She played a prominent role in referring her patients to Parents' Centre, when few other doctors would do that:  
*I trained as a general practitioner at Otago University. Later I had post-graduate training in pediatrics at Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children in London ... I had been an obstetrician for quite some years before I first became involved with Parents' Centre.*
- Beverley Morris, primary teacher, University Extension lecturer, leadership trainer, writer on child development and Parents' Centre leader, particularly in Upper Hutt. *I trained as a teacher at Wellington Teachers College and Victoria University, 1941-1944... I did some leadership courses which included Marriage Guidance ... how to get the message across.*
- Mary Mowbray, secondary teacher. *They didn't take married women at Teachers College, but there was such a shortage, they took me in to teach.* Her ability as a writer impressed Nola Fox who had taught her at Wellington Girls College. When Nola became president of Wellington Parents' Centre, 1959-60, she invited Mary to edit the newsletter: *I went on the committee and became editor and I guess I was on*

that for six years [1955-1961]. She helped to set up advisory sessions with Quentin Brew for parents with problems.

- Jim Robb, a lecturer and later a professor of Social Science. He was a supporter and adviser to Parents' Centre and active in leadership training:

*I did a year in Wellington after we [he and his wife] completed our degrees. Then we went off to London. To our surprise we ended up in London for seven years and in the last part, I was working at Tavistock Clinic, with James Robertson.*

Jim's university and Tavistock links helped to validate Parent's Centre principles with research.

- Ann Rosenberg, social worker. *I had trained in three very advanced places, Manchester Psychiatric Department, the Child Guidance Clinic and a mental hospital in North Wales ... I didn't go as preparation for childbirth. I wanted to help ... I helped and went to meetings, but didn't hold office ... I did stay around with my kids and thoroughly enjoyed those years.*
- Richard Savage, president of Wellington Parents' Centre for one year to relieve Helen Brew when she was pregnant. He was a lawyer, and supported his wife Nora, who lectured in the classes and helped with submissions. *We also supported Helen Brew when she presented the Parents' Centre submissions to the Finlay Commission in case there was cross-examination.*
- Helen Thornton, a scientist, became a Playcentre leader and founded Upper Hutt Parents' Centre. *I trained as a scientist ... we had an incredible university course where we had one hour off a week.* She was president of the New Zealand Federation of Parents' Centres 1967-1969.

I believe this group provided a good cross-section of people who worked to promote and sustain Parents' Centre in its first ten years.

### 2.3.3 The first interview

I designed an interview schedule which, though not tightly structured, was directed towards obtaining information on three main topics. The first topic was the background of

the pioneers which I hoped would shed light on the reasons for their involvement in the organisation. Questions 1-3 (see appendix 3) were framed for that purpose. The second topic (questions 4-9) related to the organisation and included the reasons why the pioneers joined, the roles they played and the effects on their lives. The third set of questions (numbered 10-13), were intended to elicit a retrospective view of the organisation, its goals, practices, and effects, from a distance of fifty years.

#### **2.3.4 *The interview procedure***

To promote the collegial nature of the research process I shared my preparation with the participants through telephone calls and a letter of information which included the semi-structured interview schedule to be used during the oral history interviews, at least two weeks before the interview (see appendices 1-5).

I gave the pioneers as much control as possible over the venue, timing, length and conduct of the interview, so that I did not have an overweening influence on the outcome. I spent time at the beginning of the interview discussing concerns including use of the tape recorder. I made it clear that although my questions followed a time sequence the interviewees could follow any order that suited them. I checked off areas they covered on my question sheet and gave each participant the opportunity to return to topics they had not addressed or wanted to add to.

In consideration of the age and physical condition of the pioneers and aware that trying to cover all the topics in one session or one day could be tiring I discussed the proposed format at the beginning of the interview, communicating by words, body-language and actions that my goal was their physical and psychological comfort. During each interview I checked on this from time to time and adjusted my plan accordingly. In this way I was following the well-tested advice of Humphries in which he listed simple 'dos' and 'don'ts' for interviewing that are likely to result in a successful interview:

- Do make an interview checklist (containing essential biographical and career details)
- Do be friendly and reassuring
- Do be clear
- Do show interest
- Do use questionnaires flexibly and imaginatively
- Don't talk too much
- Don't interrupt

Don't impose your views  
Don't contradict or argue  
Don't rush away as soon as the interview is over (Humphries, 1984, pp. 19-20)

I realised that I could never exhaust the supply of information each interviewee could provide. Opportunities for them to add information which they regarded as important were given after they had read the transcripts, during the discussion with them and after they had read the draft statement of my findings which I sent before the second interview.

I sought feedback on the way I conducted the interviews as a monitoring process for my interview style. At the end of the interview I assessed my feelings about it and kept notes about this as part of the interview schedule. After the interviewee had done the same, we discussed our observations, mindful that my objective was to preserve the participants' voices, equally with my own (appendix 5). In June 2001 I began my pilot interviews with Mary Mowbray and Barbara Hodge. I had no problems with any aspect of these interviews. Both Mary M and Barbara were interested and cooperative, even inspirational in their encouragement of my study! The only comment on my style was that I tended to be somewhat over-enthusiastic at times, so I worked to tone that down in further interviews. I next interviewed the Wellington people I had approached. My first interview was with Alice Fieldhouse. I carried her interview out in two sessions as she had a particularly wide and varied experience in her work in the health field. I followed that with interviews with Helen Brew, Mary Logan, June Bastings, Diana Mason, Jim Robb and Richard Savage.

After each interview I sent a copy of the transcript to the person interviewed. As noted earlier, in each case only minor alterations were required. I next travelled to Nelson to interview Helen Thornton who invited me to stay overnight. We had two interviews on two days. My next destination was Auckland, where Beverley Morris was my host. She not only gave me an interview, but took me to the homes of Lex Grey, Chris Cole-Catley and Mary Dobbie. Following this I travelled to Palmerston North, where I interviewed Ephra Garrett at Massey University where she was lecturing in 2001. Finally I travelled to Christchurch where I interviewed Ann Rosenberg.

News that I was doing this research soon spread among Parents' Centre members. There was some concern that I had omitted people seen as crucial to the development of the



organisation. By this stage, however, I felt I had enough data to answer my research questions and that the themes I was identifying were documented well enough. I was aware that further information could be obtained in the second interview by direct contact if necessary. I sought opportunities to discuss these points at the Parents' Centre Jubilee Conference, 2002, with the people concerned. They were understanding and did not seem offended.

### *2.3.5 The second interview*

I have said in section 2.2.1 that I wanted the process of the compilation of this thesis to be a collegial one. I did not want to manipulate the pioneers' opinions to produce a result which served a predetermined agenda I had brought to the study. I therefore thought carefully about providing an opportunity for the pioneers to give me feedback about my use of their opinions, my analyses and conclusions. I had considered holding a focus group discussion among the sixteen pioneers after they had studied my draft report and including an account of this discussion in my final chapter. After having reading recent research by Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson (2001, p.98) about the use of focus groups as a means of co-participation at the end of a study, I decided against this as the notion that 'end-of-project feedback groups can act as a validation exercise for an earlier analysis' is now seen as mis-leading. Bloor et al (2001) also believe that 'the composition and conduct of focus groups are subject to too much uncertainty, variation and frailty to permit belief in anything but highly context-dependent sets of results' (Bloor et al, 2001). I realised that any attempt to get such a large group together and create a group climate which enabled free, frank and truly active interaction to take place would be impossible. Also taking into account factors such as the health and frailty of some of the participants, it seemed too intrusive on their wellbeing to request participation in such an enterprise. The pioneers of my study have not met for years, if ever, for a group discussion and a group of seventeen would be much too large for it to be satisfactory. However, Bloor et al (2001) also state that 'there is a possible value to the researcher of monitoring the reactions of participants, to the analysis' ... because 'feedback groups can act as part of an 'extended system of peer review'. '... Groups of lay persons who have an understanding of the research topic, through their lived experience, may also be a source of critical appraisal ... [they] may contribute comments which may modify and enrich that same final report ... they may become 'one further source of analytic ideas'' (Furtowicz & Ravertz, 1993). I

therefore decided that a second interview would be the most useful way to get the information I wanted. I rang the pioneers to get their opinion about the value of a second interview. They were all enthusiastic about participating.

As preparation for the second interview I sent the participants the following material:

- (a) a draft I had prepared of the thesis up to that point (August 2003);
- (b) Chapter 5 'The Pioneers of Parents' Centre' in which I had analysed the similarities in the backgrounds of the pioneers and the influences which had contributed to their desire, and ability, to found the organisation; and
- (c) The draft of chapter 8 in which I incorporated answers to my questions about the content and strategies of Parents' Centre, at a distance of 50 years, and their views on the organisation today.

A week after the mailout I rang to make appointments. I began by interviewing the two pioneers I used for my pilot study, Mary Mowbray and Barbara Hodge. I then covered the pioneers in the Wellington area. In Auckland Beverley Morris and I drove to see Lex Grey. I told Beverley I wanted this to be more of a discussion than the first interview and asked her to participate. After the interview I asked Beverley to give me her feedback and she commented that I had talked a lot, so I made a conscious effort to curtail my comments in further interviews. As I stayed with Beverley for two days I had many opportunities to discuss the project with her. She read chapter 3, the History of the Times, and had pertinent comments to add from her recollections of that period.

I interviewed Helen Thornton again in Nelson and later travelled to Christchurch where I spent an hour with Ann Rosenberg. I was particularly grateful to get this interview as the health of Ann's husband's had deteriorated further. I got the impression that the Rosenbergs now rarely see visitors outside the family. My final interview was with Ephra Garrett who spent some time with me at the Institute of Early Childhood Education. She continued to add enthusiastic comments to her account of the development and worth of Parents' Centre. In chapter 9 I comment further on the results of the second interview.

## 2.4 Analysis

When we talk about analysis we are referring to the ways in which the researcher moves from a description of what is the case to an explanation of why what is the case, is the case. (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 295)

I wanted to know how the Parents' Centre pioneers were affected by the times. To gather data on the social climate of the 1950s in New Zealand I combed through the interview data 'discovering and deriving patterns in the data, looking for general orientations in the data, trying to sort out what the data are about...'. I used 'naturalistic qualitative inquiry, concerned with the description and explanation of phenomena as they occur in routine, ordinary, natural environments (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). I was particularly seeking information on the early lives of the pioneers in family and community; the role models their parents presented and their education as children and for careers. From this data I hoped to find clues to their motivation to join and become actively involved in the organisation. Many connections emerged. I looked at the other questions, which yielded answers about the content of the information given in Parents' Centre classes and the process by which it was transmitted. I had a particular interest in this part of the work of Parents' Centre as I wanted to know what they considered, on reflection, were the factors which brought about change. Such information could be relevant today.

Listening to the interview tapes and reading the transcripts showed that there were clear themes in the responses to the interview questions. I used colour coding to identify the material relating to the themes in each transcript, collected the material on each theme and sorted the information into chapters. The chapters vary in the use of my voice, those of the pioneers and of others such as historians and educationists. Chapters 1, 2, and 9 are weighted in favour of my voice. Chapters 3, 4 and 6 contain a preponderance of the views of historians and educationists. Chapters 5, 7 and 8 are mainly constructed from the voices of the pioneers.

When all the data were analysed and the pattern of the oral history narratives emerged I wrote a summary of my analyses. I had chosen to illustrate the narratives of the participants and many conclusions with quotes from their interviews. I sent these by post to the participants for their approval, inviting them to comment before preparing the final thesis report.

I found that this procedure was useful because 'having read extracts from our transcripts others were able to point out where we might have missed or glossed over what they regard as key aspects of the interview narrative'. This made me aware of my own role and power in choosing some issues and ignoring others. Working with the other pioneers highlighted for me the fact 'that people have more than one way to tell a story and see a situation through different lenses, and in different lights' (Gilligan, 1990, p.33).

## **2.5 Chapter overview**

My motivation for this study was a desire to know how the progressive theories and practices advocated and the organisation the pioneers had founded had stood the test of time. I also wanted to know the satisfactions and personal costs of their involvement. As I had lectured to many students in the 1950s at the Wellington Training College over six years, 1953-58, Playcentre supervisors 1959-1960 and kindergarten students, I at first considered using sample groups from those organisations. However at 82 and with limited time and energy, I decided that a more accessible group would be the pioneers of Parents' Centre. This proved to be the case.

For practical reasons, one being my age and the age of the pioneers, I decided to use qualitative research with oral history as my method: It would not be demanding on the participants, I could check with them at the time of interview any meaning which was unclear and ensure their comfort and I could later share through transcripts and my analysis that they were happy with the outcome. I studied the archives, books, reports and submissions to refresh my memory before devising questions on which to base the interviews. To ensure the exercise was collegial I kept my interviewees informed about my purposes and progress. My interview questions proved useful for my analysis.

Reading the social, political and economic history of the 1950s provided the knowledge I sought about the 'ecological environment' from which the organisation Parents' Centre emerged. I used the skills I had acquired in the last 50 years to 'listen in stereo' and felt I had achieved that goal as few challenged anything I had said. The interviews revealed how the pioneers 'came up against the constraints of the every day social world' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, p.109) and used their knowledge, experience and strategies to make a lasting

impact on it. I considered many ways of continuing the collegial process and finally decided on a second interview to which the pioneers responded with enthusiasm, justifying my belief that the process had been positive.

In the next chapter I analyse the times, the 1950s, in which the Parents' Centre pioneers defined the need for reform in the health and education services for parents and children under three in terms of their objectives. Chapters 3 and 4 form an important backdrop to the development of the Parents' Centre organisation.

### **CHAPTER 3: Post-War Family Crises: Everything Was Changing**

The behaviour of parents is strongly determined (as is that of their children) by the social and economic circumstances in which they find themselves and over which they, individually, have little direct control. (Arthur Fieldhouse, 1978, p.1)

The central theme of this chapter is encapsulated in the quotation from Arthur Fieldhouse, husband of Alice, one of the pioneers of Parents' Centre. In this chapter I develop the idea of the importance of the macro-system (Bronfenbrenner) in the 1950s in bringing change in the institutions of society and within every day family life, particularly for children under three. I identify the 'social and economic circumstances' in which New Zealand parents found themselves after the war and the social forces which brought changes. I drew on the experiences and views of the pioneers of Parents' Centre, the archives of the Parents' Centre organisation and history texts of writers who have analysed the socio-economic climate of the 1950s and its impact on families. I demonstrate how societal change had brought a need for changes in child rearing and in the formation of policies in health and education which shaped the services for parents and young children. Understanding the changes is essential to appreciation of the challenges the pioneers faced in their attempts to found the Parents' Centre organisation.

In Chapter One I argued that between the 1930s and the 1950s, progressive educational theory had gradually become the basis of reforms in the New Zealand school curriculum. Progressive ideas were changing both classroom methods and programmes for students training to become teachers. Many of the pioneers of Parents' Centre had been part of this change in their training and careers, particularly in education and social work in Wellington, and to some degree, in Christchurch, in training college and university programmes. In most cases support for progressive methods in education had been instigated by those in authority, such as Peter Fraser, Minister of Education, Dr Beeby, Director of Education, and Professors Colin Bailey, Arthur Fieldhouse, Crawford Somerset and Ronald Gould at Victoria University of Wellington and Frank Combs, Frank Lopdell and Walter Scott, principals of the Wellington Training College, (Beeby, 1992).

The Health services, by contrast, had largely resisted change, particularly in the field of obstetrics. Childbirth and advice on the rearing of children under three was regarded as the

domain of health workers. When the pioneers entered hospitals in the 1950s in New Zealand, they were astounded by their personal experience, '*they felt helpless and their bodies assaulted*' (Beverley Morris). The pioneers believed that the first days of life gave children experiences which laid the foundation and set the direction for their education and mental health. They saw the services as not only outmoded but harmful, especially to the formation of good family relationships, particularly those between mother and neonate. They were motivated to 'move and shake' the system.

### 3.1 War and its aftermath

In 1945 World War II ended. For six years it had dominated every aspect of New Zealand society. 'A war which has wrought such tragic destruction and injustice upon children has brought a feeling of needing to build a brighter future. It is no longer trite to say that children are the one remaining hope of mankind'. These sentiments of Gesell (1946, p.xii), a famed American psychologist and one of the authorities used by many New Zealand lecturers in the progressive tradition in the 1950s, were equally mirrored in New Zealand and have been supported by scholars, such as Bevan-Brown (1945) and Dalley (1998). Much post-war pedagogy was devoted to creating a new and better world for children. As Beeby recalled (1992, p.44):

By the end of the war exciting things were beginning to happen to educational thinking in Britain. In the way wars have, it had aroused the conscience of the country to the injustices done to the young, and education offered one mode of making recompense to a new generation ... more radical thinking was taking place on the fringes of the formal school system. New names, which were to become commonplace within a decade or two, were just coming over the education horizon.

Names which had become commonplace by the 1930s included Sir Percy Nunn (1920), Bertrand Russell (1932), John Dewey (1933), Susan Isaacs (1930) and AS Neill (1962), all of whom influenced the Parents' Centre pioneers who trained for teaching.

Beverley Morris recalls, that in MA class discussions in 1946, '*we were idealistic in our expectations of a better world for children*'. I recall too, at lectures at London University, that the underlying theme was the need to compensate children and families, particularly those of working class origin, for the suffering caused by war. These were the children identified by progressive reformers as the ones who had typically, before then, missed out on the opportunities that a good education could offer.



When the war ended there was a huge task of reconstruction for families. Nan Taylor (1986), a war historian, records that in proportional terms, New Zealand's contribution in manpower was not exceeded by any other Commonwealth country and that in financial terms 'the only allied nation to come near to equalling the British proportion of annual income devoted to the war effort was New Zealand'. However, there were benefits later, as Taylor (1986, p.1286) acknowledges:

New Zealand gained from the forcing-bed process of the war, which in many areas, jolted it out of lingering colonialism and conservatism into attitudes and capacities that improved its ability to survive in the post-war world...the world and the people were changed, not the least in attitudes to human behaviour and education.

Diana Mason and two other pioneers endorsed these sentiments, '*it was a very fascinating and progressive time*' said Diana. June Bastings, another pioneer, recalled '*Everything was changing. All the new architecture. Europeans coming to New Zealand. Anything foreign or new rocked the people*'. Some found being 'rocked' difficult and tried to cling to old and tried solutions to the problems brought by change but many, such as the pioneers, saw change as necessary, particularly in child rearing and welcomed it.

In economic terms, the early post-war years were a time of prosperity. The reasons for this, as suggested by historian Laurie Barber (1989, p.161) were that:

Britain needed New Zealand's produce as never before. Britain was then a market into which unlimited tonnage of butter, cheese, wool and meat could be poured ... it was a boom time, a departure from New Zealand's normally slightly depressed economy.

This 'depressed economy' had meant that there had been little growth in housing, health, education and social work during the 1920s and early 1930s. There had been progress after the election of the Labour Government in 1935 but the demand was only partially met before World War II put a drain on the economy. After the war, as returning servicemen moved into work, marriage and family life, demand for these services escalated and resources were more available to meet this demand.

It became obvious to policy makers and constituents alike, that there was need for investment in social services. Housing and employment were high priorities, particularly as families grew in size and the number of young children in the population escalated. One

of the priorities became training for workers in health, education and social work. The conservative ideas which had predominantly underpinned student training for health, education and social work in the pre-war years, were replaced by new ideas and practices in the training colleges and universities, particularly in Wellington. Thus, those who lectured to students in training courses were, on the whole, more progressive than those before the war. What is more, progressive theory, rather than being seen as an interesting alternative, was forming the basis of training courses. In my experience, the new ideas were received sympathetically, particularly by mature students. The war veterans had been exposed to a wider variety of experiences of human behaviour and practice than formerly, both in New Zealand and overseas. Beverley Morris recalled that:

*Many servicemen, after years in the army, were sick of being bossed around, and as New Zealanders had become respected for their ability to question authority and mount successful initiatives; they did not intend to be bossed round by people they saw as incompetent, in peace time.*

The troops, mainly men, had been away for years on active service, in battle, in prison camps, or on surveillance duty. It became a Government priority to help them settle down to civilian life. War veterans had to make the transition in peace time, both in terms of psychological adjustment to their families and to work (Bevan-Brown, 1945). There was a general agreement in New Zealand society that the successful rehabilitation of servicemen was a top priority. Many of the war veterans, such as my own father and father-in-law, recalled the difficulties and hardships suffered by servicemen after World War I. By the end of World War II, some veterans of World War I were in positions of leadership and supportive of moves to give returning servicemen, in 1945 and 1946, what they saw as a fair deal. They put pressure on government, through organisations such as the Returned Servicemen's Association (RSA), which had done much to advise Government during the war (Taylor, 1986) and continued to hold a powerful position in the post-war period. The RSA thus helped to ensure a fair deal for the veterans of the 1940s and 1950s and played a part in preventing a repetition of the conditions in which many veterans of World War I found themselves 'living on the margins of distribution in good years and [when there were] downturns in the business cycle plunged into dreadful misery and squalor' (Olssen, 1981, p.276). This pressure and the general climate of sympathy for returning war veterans, led to the provision of opportunities for further education.

As Taylor's history records:

Progressively, various forms of education, academic and technical, came into the rehabilitation field, where assistance ranged from text-book allowances and fees to full-time bursaries at university or other colleges...Educational activity and assistance increased greatly, during 1946, and in the year ending 1947, approved applications, both new ones and renewals, rose by 14,626 to total 23,537. (1986, p.1282)

Many of the men and some women like myself, with whom I trained at Wellington Training College in 1939, were given financial support to undertake or complete degrees in education, psychology, medicine, dentistry and social work. Ironically, and in an indirect way, the fact that they took time out of work for training, gave further opportunities for career advancement to their wives who, in many cases, postponed their families and continued their careers to support their husbands while they trained or retrained. This was the experience of the Parents' Centre pioneers who were teachers.

What was happening in New Zealand had international parallels in western countries. The numbers of children born after the war put pressure on the services designed for childbirth and parenthood. Trained personnel were in short supply. A need for training in education and health in New Zealand became apparent and led to training of many kinds being offered. Pioneers, Alice Fieldhouse, Diana Mason, Jim Robb, Ann Rosenberg and I had the opportunity to study and gain experience overseas in the 1940s.

In their work and training, people like the pioneers came into contact with key progressive researchers overseas such as Isaacs, Bowlby and Winnicott. With much family life shattered throughout Europe and thousands of children seen to be at risk, people such as Anna Freud, Isaacs and Bowlby who had researched children's development, were consulted, heeded and respected, and given resources to research further in ways of assisting damaged and deprived children. Freud, Bowlby, Winnicott and others looked not only at the realities of children directly affected by war, but also into the institutions on their doorsteps. They came to realise that hospitals, children's homes and penal institutions had regulations which were separating parents and children, very much as war had done and causing unnecessary problems as parent-child relationships were damaged. When the pioneers who studied overseas returned to New Zealand, they found employment and were

given chances to influence practice and become educational leaders in the progressive tradition. Thus the progressive ideas were reinforced and reached a large number of teachers, parents and children, particularly those involved in early childhood education.

### **3.2 The impact of immigration**

Just before and during the war, New Zealand benefited from an influx of refugees and immigrants, mainly from Europe. Three of the pioneers, Mary Logan, Helen Thornton and Barbara Hodge were immigrants. Historians James Belich (1996) and Michael King (2003) have portrayed the impact of immigrants on the country. Newcomers to the work-force, mainly men in the 1950s, enriched the community and those they met at work or socially with their skills and talents, by setting up or joining businesses and trades, or working in health, education and social work. Through day to day encounters in schools, churches, and other community activities, New Zealand women too came to meet people with different backgrounds and became aware of different ideas on the rearing of children (Taylor, 1986). 'Our combination of cultures created a unique fabric of diverse and changing styles of child-rearing' (Bird and Drewery, 2000, p.74).

Immigrants added to the social and cultural life of New Zealand. Some came as war brides, some as refugees. Others came seeking more opportunities, particularly for their children. Historians Oliver (1981), Belich (1996) and King (2003), record how immigrants brought with them new ideas about alternatives to the usual New Zealand practices. One example relevant to the Parents' Centre pioneers, was that it was possible for English and Dutch mothers to have home births with husbands present, at a time when this alternative had become almost impossible in New Zealand because the medical profession and other health policy makers regarded hospital confinements as much safer than home births and had worked hard to ensure hospital births were the norm (Mein-Smith, 1986; Odinet, 1989). In Holland and England home births were still common practice. My perception, as a lecturer to parent groups, was that immigrants joined classes for parents with alacrity. In discussion groups, particularly, they would describe practices different from those which were the norm in New Zealand. The pioneers in this study who were British immigrants, Mary Logan, Helen Thornton and Barbara Hodge, made a contribution in Parents' Centre classes by describing practices which were common knowledge to them but outside the

experience of many of the New Zealand class members. This exchange of ideas often revealed the limitations of the New Zealand services and became a force for change.

Overseas travel was facilitated for New Zealanders by the development of inter-country transport which included both shipping and air travel. As Belich (1996, p.352) observed: 'railways helped shrink the country to a fraction of its former size in travelling time ... air travel did the same to the world' and Beeby (1992, p.44) recalled [before the war]:

A return journey to Britain took nearly 3 months, and a reply to a letter at least as long. Books on serious subjects were a scarce resource, libraries were poor, and the supply of periodicals and overseas newspapers unbelievably scant!

Air travel not only enabled migrant families to settle in New Zealand, it also helped them to revisit their countries of origin and to absorb new ideas about family life. In my experience of listening to women in my classes, it was quite common when the women took their children by sea for visits to their relatives that the husband stayed behind and continued his job for financial reasons. I met women in this situation when I travelled to England by sea in 1949. The long sea voyage provided opportunities for friendships to be formed. Differences in services for children were discussed and either applauded or criticised. The behaviour of the children was scrutinised and discussed. The idea of understanding behaviour and treating the symptom in relation to the cause had been promoted by educationists in England, over many years (before and during the 1930s). Susan Isaacs had pioneered advice in women's magazines and this continued post-war. For example, her column in *Nursery World* was eagerly read and became a vehicle for disseminating new and progressive ideas for children under three. In these columns the writers who followed Isaacs in their answers to parents' questions, emphasised understanding, observation, individual differences and the importance of play, as factors to consider in changing behaviour. Thus many parents were being influenced in their daily lives to become knowledgeable about and often receptive to changes in the policy and practice of the services in health and education for young children. This receptivity was an important factor in the success of the Parents' Centre organisation. It had already fuelled the growth of Playcentre and some developments in education, in kindergartens and primary schools.

### 3.3 A new focus on family life

It is useful to explore the impact of war on family life in more detail, both during the war and after the war ended. Many young people who were engaged or married had been separated by war, some for up to five years. They had dreamed of settling down and having a home and a family (May, 1992). This dream now became a reality. Marriage and family life became popular. Couples were marrying younger and those who had been separated by war were starting or increasing their families. As Beverley Morris recalls '*it was considered a kind of norm to have four children*'. The affluence which by the mid-1950s had carried New Zealand to the second highest standard of living in the world, allowed men to get married earlier and to establish their own homes. 'In the years 1955-1959, 44% of all marriages occurred with the bridegroom under the age of 25, compared with only 20% (excluding Maori) in 1935-39' (Phillips, 1987, p.268). The result was an unprecedented 'baby boom' which created a demand for homes and transport (Farmer, (1975).

The positive mood of the Government and the New Zealand community towards family life and children, created a climate in which it was hard for women to avoid being caught up in child-bearing. 'Motherhood became something of an essential industry, if not the fundamental patriotic duty of female citizens' (Montgomerie, 2001, p.133). Contraception was unreliable, hard to get and not necessarily wanted (Stover, 1998; Taylor, 1986; Coney, 1993; Smyth, 2000; Montgomerie, 2001). Abortion was completely outlawed, but was practised (Mein-Smith, 1986; May, 1988; Kedgley, 1996; Taylor, 1986; Smyth, 2000). Mary Dobbie, one of the Parents' Centre pioneers described experiences which led her to work for change through the Family Planning Association:

*I remember going to a summer house...it had an old-fashioned copper which was blocked up underneath, so it wouldn't light. I scraped underneath and out rolled a bundle which was the result of an abortion. On another occasion a girl who was living with us became pregnant (she was a school teacher, so it was totally inappropriate then) who had met this American and so she arranged an abortion ... so it wasn't uncommon. There was a third one also, a friend of mine who was nursed for a long time after her abortion. Fearful that she would have to go to hospital and be identified. A lot of women suffered back then. (Mary D)*

Amidst the optimism that characterised the post-war years, families were under pressure (Coney, 1993; Kedgley, 1996). To begin with, the return of fathers after years of separation, was often problematic. Bevan-Brown recognised and wrote about the problem



which he called 'War Neurosis'. He discussed the subject in a monograph 'designed for the Guidance of Relatives, and Friends of Ex-Service Men and Women'. He appreciated 'the urgent need for the community to be better informed on the subject of neurosis in general and particularly at the present time' (1945, p.1). The pioneers of Parents' Centre appreciated the problem, not only because of their association with Bevan-Brown, but also because some such as Helen Thornton, Barbara Hodge and Lex Grey had knowledge from childhood experiences about the damage caused to children by mental illness in a parent. Along with that knowledge came the realisation that people reacted differently to traumatic situations. The writings of Freud, Isaacs, Bowlby and Bevan-Brown strengthened the belief of people like the pioneers about the importance of a good start in life and a happy childhood which could enable an individual to survive what Shakespeare called: 'The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'.

Another problem which sometimes became apparent when families were reunited, concerned relationships between father-mother-children and grandparents. Neil Begg, Director of Medical Services for the Plunket Society recalled:

I observed the tensions in my own extended family, where grandparents were happy to accommodate a daughter and one child, as a temporary measure during the war. However, to include a male partner and other children for an indefinite period was a hard task, and often a source of conflict. (1970, p.2)

A re-positioning and role change occurred, as servicemen returned to assume the position of head of the family. Where the mother and child had lived with or near parents, as was common practice, grandfathers had often taken on the roles of substitute fathers and authority figures. There was naturally some resentment, confusion and bewilderment, when the father came back to his family (Ebbett (1984). Further complications might have arisen when a second child was born.

Re-constituted families became a common phenomenon as war widows remarried. Children I observed in my family and teaching experience were sometimes deeply affected by the conflict of ideas, particularly on discipline, between mother and the father who had been absent at the war, or between stepfather and mother. Children sometimes found themselves alienated from their mothers who were forced to change their child rearing patterns in response to the new relationship. Some men found that they had difficulties in bonding with their own children, born after they had left for war or not seen for several



years. There could be similar problems with step-children. The arrival of other children added to family stress and caused divided loyalty for the mothers. As a teacher at Houghton Valley School (1946-1948), I saw examples of the challenges which children faced after changes in family composition. I also experienced the difficulties of incorporating new members into family life when I re-married at the time that my son was nine. In my extended family I was aware too of children who had been outgoing, confident and sure of love, becoming withdrawn, unsure and even hostile when their family membership changed.

I became convinced that if children were to survive the challenges of daily life in the post-war family, parents needed help with knowledge about relationships, mental health, child development and problems such as jealousy. In spite of my knowledge and relatively positive circumstances, I could appreciate, on a personal level, the difficulties parents and children faced, as families tried to cope not only with family life, but with the inevitable challenges of life outside the home. I had the ability and resources to seek help for my own problems. I realised, however, how hard it was for parents to obtain help. The personal, career and training experiences I had post-war, provided me with a strong motivation to disseminate my knowledge among parents to improve their lot. I could identify with what I saw as their struggles.

### **3.4 Challenges for families in the 1940s and 1950s**

Women, even though they did not have the problems I have referred to, could feel powerless, isolated, bored and unsupported in their role as mothers of young children. Even as late as the 1970s, when there was much focus on feminism, writers such as Begg (1970), of the Plunket Society were continuing the tradition of Rousseau from the 18th Century, in stating that the role of women was to be that of mother especially when her children were young. By the 1950s these sentiments were becoming embedded in family policy even though women of the 1950s could find this role unsatisfying and unrewarding. The role of the father was also prescribed. Historian Jock Phillips, describing humorous images of men in New Zealand society, cites the self-concept that men held about their role as family men:

Beyond his undoubted status as household provider and driver of the car, the man was expected, when in exclusive male company, to express resentment of the obligations of family life. (1987, p.237)

Leisure patterns too tended to be a factor in isolating women by removing men from the company of wives and children. [They were] 'dominated by the male stereotype of 'rugby, racing and beer'. The rugby club, the pub, the race course and the TAB were institutions of social integration, for males at least' (Dunstall, 1981, p.423).

As Stover (1998), Playcentre historian, stated 'All men worked. They never thought of taking time off to do things with their children and we [women] never suggested it' (p.45). Phillips (1987) described how the emphasis for men was on the role of breadwinner. They had to provide the money for home and family and do outside chores, such as fixing cars, mowing lawns and building paths. In most cases, war had not dramatically changed that expectation and may even have set it more firmly. To be good breadwinners men were often prevented from being supportive, or even present, in their families. All these factors tended to work against the building of good relationships with wives and children.

New suburbs, schools and hospital services were developed (Dunstall, 1981). The buoyant economy of the post-war years and the desire of Government to settle men and women into family life meant that money was available from Government to help families acquire their own houses (Dunstall, 1981). There were many opportunities for families to do this. One was for the father to build his own home. This was a fairly cheap option but as fathers were the main bread-winners, this work had to be done outside work hours. As a result, 'many of these schemes became yet another factor in separating many fathers from their families for most of their spare time' (Dalley, 1998, p.13). There was also significant growth in State housing which created demands for builders and others to supply services. By working long hours, those in trades earned overtime pay but were in this way isolated from their families (Dalley, 1998, p.13).

Another factor removing men from the family and increasing the isolation of mothers, was the location of housing developments on the outskirts of towns and cities. Houses were seen as the priority – other facilities had to be a secondary consideration. As a result, women could find themselves without basic facilities such as telephones, shops, libraries, pre-school centres and other community facilities. Women were often lonely and bored and located far from extended family support and friends (May, 1988; Stover 1998; Knox, 1995; Powell, 2003).

What is more, many women who had no experience with (or knowledge about) children, suddenly became almost solely responsible for their care and education. Beverley Morris recalls life in Taita, a newly developed suburb in Wellington, in 1954. *'When we got to Taita the units [railway transport] went only to Waterloo [some distance away]. There were very few shops, butchers called and women often could be seen shopping in dressing gowns'*. I myself recall women in my classes describing their loneliness and depression. Some like those Beverley observed, even lacked the energy to get dressed. I remember a vivid description by a class member of my Playcentre Supervisor's training course, of regularly walking three miles to shops, pushing a pram, just to find someone to talk to. Many of the pioneers of Parents' Centre, from their contacts with mothers in their careers, could appreciate the desperate need for help for many mothers of young children.

Pre-school education of any kind was limited. Organisations such as Playcentres, Plunket mothers' clubs, playgroups and kindergartens were available only to a fortunate few (May, 2001). In 1947, fewer than 5% of 4-year-olds and virtually no younger children were receiving any form of pre-school education – outside the home (Stover, 1998; Barney, 1978). The result was that many women were forced to cope alone and their children, though not lacking for the company of peers, received little help from knowledgeable adults to help them relate well in social situations.

Some women who enjoyed working during the war would have welcomed the chance to continue but there was little community support for the idea of mothers of young children working in peace-time (Cook, 1985). For mothers and children this could be a stressful period. This situation provided motivation to mothers, and some fathers, to seek out and work towards establishing pre-school services and any other sources of help, knowledge and support for child-rearing.

### **3.5 Need for parent education as seen by the pioneers**

Through their professional work in health, education and social work during and after the war, the pioneers of Parents' Centre had become aware of the pressures on families. They believed that many of the existing services were not getting to the root of family problems and that a programme of preventative mental health would be the most effective way of

helping parents. Such a service could not only help these families who were facing problems, but by laying a sound foundation, help future parents to prevent them.

### **3.5.1 *The discipline of children***

I argued in chapter one that the psychological discourses the pioneers were exposed to during their training and which were justified in their work led them to believe that child management in this country was too harsh. On the extreme of harshness to children have been practices which Jane and James Ritchie later regarded as child abuse (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1981). A contributing factor to this harsh discipline could be the fact that up to, and including, the 1950s, young children often played a significant part in adult work, especially on farms. I was aware of this when I taught at Te Kaha school. The economic survival of the family depended on the labour of women and children as well as men on dairy farms. Many of my pupils were up before dawn, herding and milking cows, cooking, planting, fishing and minding younger children. In the cities too, children often augmented the family income by selling papers, bottles, and other articles. Girls helped with housework, cooking and child-minding and boys with outside chores (Lee, 1949; Simpson, 1974). In homes, schools and other institutions there was wide acceptance of corporal punishment in the rearing and education of children in New Zealand in the 1940s and 1950s (Ausubel, 1960; Marshall, J. & D., 1997; Ritchie & Ritchie, 1978). It was often seen as the role of the father to administer this, 'especially to boys' (Ritchie & Ritchie, 1978, p.29). Much of this harshness would now be regarded as psychologically damaging, but at that time it was often ignored or condoned by extended family members, neighbours, schools and policy makers.

In spite of the wide acceptance of corporal punishment in the community there was a growing constituency for change. I noted in my classes that women who had raised young children on their own while their husbands were away at the war, had often formed strong bonds, particularly with only children, and were managing without the use of corporal punishment. Lauris Edmond in an interview with a soldier's wife describes the sort of relationship between a mother and a child which could develop:

Anna is my darling, my tyrant, my comfort, and my constant occupation and pre-occupation ... She is very good and sweet ... I don't like her to cry' (Edmond, 1986, p.65)

It would be interesting to speculate how any husband could be fitted easily into that circle, let alone one with no understanding of children. Some mothers who had been in that situation, in my experience, resented criticism by husbands who often blamed the 'misbehaviour' on the mother's 'lack of discipline' by which they meant corporal punishment. This led some mothers to look for reinforcement of their ideas, sometimes, I must admit, from my experience in classes, as ammunition in arguments with their husbands. Playcentre and Kindergarten enabled fathers to learn about new ways in discipline through involvement in centres and parents' evenings. But many fathers had no opportunity to learn about alternative ways of guiding children's behaviour. This caused some women to become aware that an organisation which could reach fathers as well as mothers was needed, particularly as public concern about the behaviour of young people was growing. New psychological understandings about children's behaviour were being promoted in many ways and challenged the justification that corporal punishment was necessary to make children tough and obedient (especially boys). There was a nervousness in the community, however, that the abandonment of tough discipline could result in children becoming out of control, particularly as teenagers were becoming a group causing concern.

Migration from the country to the cities increased after the war and there were many young people among the migrants who necessarily left their families behind, as cities offered opportunities for work and training (Oliver, 1981; Belich, 1996; King, 2003). Leaving home and family gave young people freedom from parental control and farm and domestic chores. There were more opportunities for socialising in their newly acquired independence away from family and familiar role models. Teenagers found independence for the first time and they were often completely unprepared for that. Jobs were plentiful, so young people had money to spend on leisure, often for the first time, as much of their labour on the family farm was unpaid. The 40 hour week allowed them to have more free time. Teenagers and their behaviour, particularly that which was considered unacceptable, became more obvious as the numbers in cities grew and caused concern in the community. 'The baby boom, Maori urbanisation and suburban expansion together created a visible pool of young New Zealanders'. Publicity surrounded the Mazengarb enquiry into the behaviour of teenagers in the Hutt Valley.

The storm of publicity which erupted induced the government to appoint a special committee to enquire into moral delinquency among the country's youth. Hastily

conceived, rigid in its interpretations of juvenile behaviour and alarmist in its predictions, the inquiry and its report, known as the Mazengarb Report, have been read as a knee-jerk, moralistic and exaggerated reaction to the activities of the young in 1950s New Zealand (Dalley, 1998, p.179-181).

Discipline and the alternatives to corporal punishment were, in the eyes of the Parents' Centre pioneers, subjects about which parents needed knowledge and help, particularly as they believed that discipline based on good relationships from infancy, created a sound foundation on which management of the older child could be based.

### **3.5.2 Sex education – The great taboo**

Sexual attitudes and practices among young people and the more open attitude to sexual relationships, were subjects causing concern among parents, community leaders and the pioneers of Parents' Centre. Else has observed that 'birth, abortion, contraception – dominated women's health work from the 1930s to the 1960s!' (1993, p.246). Parents, teachers, church members, the police and policy makers were anxious and looking for guidance and support. Despite the new liberal thinking and psychological attitudes which advocated that education should bring knowledge about reproduction, in all its aspects, out of the closet, the older attitudes which stressed the importance of keeping children innocent/ignorant as long as possible were still strongly supported in New Zealand and the western world (Smyth, 2000). General knowledge about sex education was something people learned by 'stealth and subterfuge' (Odinot, 1989). The 'facts of life' were rarely explained or discussed between parents and their children. Several of the pioneers in this study regarded sex education as a central issue in family life because it affected parents and children alike. Beverley Morris recalled the problems of those trying to help, *'It just wasn't kosher to talk about body parts'*. She found, in her later research on mothers and daughters in the 1940s, that the mothers were embarrassed by the subject of sex and were unsure about how to tackle the subject (Morris, 1992, p.28). Ephra Garrett, another pioneer, attested, *'My mother hadn't told me anything about birth ... when I tried to talk to her about it she just replied "OK it's an awful business, you don't want to know"'*. Diana Mason, too, recalls a patient who was forced to address the subject. *'I remember very clearly a woman who came to me with a child aged six or seven. She said "Tell the doctor what's wrong with your rudey"'*.



Both Diana Mason and Beverley Morris recalled that schools could not provide information about sex as they can today, '*Teachers were not allowed to answer children's sex questions*' said Beverley. The one thing about reproduction that girls would know, however, was that becoming pregnant before marriage was the worst thing that could happen to them. Birth control was a taboo subject. Most doctors were reluctant to give advice on contraception, even to married patients. The general attitude is summed up by historian David McGill who stated: 'Nothing was explained or talked about. It was the era of sexual prudery' (1989, p.162). Beverley recalled that she sometimes did discuss some matters with children in her primary school classes. This showed courage as, if there had been complaints from parents, she could have been in trouble, even suspended from teaching.

As a result of these taboos children and teenagers who were naturally curious about sex, reproduction, sexual relationships and the taboo areas of their bodies, got their knowledge where they could (Morris, 1992, p.29). In my experience of talking to parents and students in my classes, sources of information and misinformation included friends, magazines, the press where the subject of births to teen-age mothers were regularly aired, encyclopaedias, the Bible, jokes and biology lessons which usually skirted around human biology. The opportunity to discuss and clarify knowledge gained from these sources was rare.

Some parents would have magazines and books which contained accounts of sexual relationships in their homes. Children were usually forbidden to read these publications but this did not diminish interest. I can remember as a child in the 1930s, reading, unbeknown to my parents, "Advice to Mothers" pages in 'The New Idea' magazine and the book 'All Quiet on the Western Front'. Diana Mason recalled an incident which mirrored my own experience.

*I remember once, picking up in my family home, long before I was married, a book called 'Lady Chatterley's Lover', and started to read it. And my mother said 'What are you reading?'. I said, 'I thought this looked rather interesting'. And she said 'Of course you can read it, but you've got to promise me one thing that you're not going to lend it to your friends'... and I did lend it to her [the girl next door] of course. And her mother discovered it and all hell broke loose.*

The situation had not changed by the 1950s.



Ann Rosenberg, a Parents' Centre pioneer, was a social worker. She recalled the concern about children's interest in sexual experimentation among foster parents. In her opinion, the way the foster parents handled the situation could promote unhealthy attitudes to sexual relationships. Visiting foster homes, as a social worker, and talking to the foster mothers increased Ann's concern. One said, as Ann recalled:

*'That girl will have to go. She's putting sanitary towels under the mattress', [and] 'that little boy. I always make him lie on his back with his arms crossed on his chest, so there is no hanky-panky'.*

I found from discussions with mothers in my classes, that parents wanted help. There was little literature on sex development available to parents, apart from a few pamphlets put out by the Department of Health (Mein-Smith, 1986). Thus, parents had little if any help in communicating what most of them saw as embarrassing information. Even book publishers were loathe to endorse material on the subject, as Beverley Morris described:

*When I was published by Reed in 1967, they wanted me to take something out about sex education... I folded in the end, because I wanted it published.*

In the opinion of the pioneers, ignorance about sex was one of the factors causing an increase in pregnancy among young unmarried women. If marriage was not an option when a pregnancy eventuated, the girl would normally be forced to leave home and work away from her family and friends. This practice sometimes led to exploitation, isolation and depression. Some young women became a form of unpaid domestic help in private hospitals, such as Bethany, run by the Salvation Army, or Alexandra that provided a service by accommodating pregnant unmarried women and often arranging adoptions. In return the young mothers worked to provide services for the paying patients. Conditions of work could be harsh. But even worse, there was little if any consideration of the woman during the process, or once the child was adopted (Taylor, 1986).

Pioneer Mary Dobbie, in her work in the Family Planning Association (Smyth, 2000) and later in the Auckland Parents' Centre based in Bethany Hospital, became concerned about the treatment of these, mostly young women, and expressed this in an article in *Parents' Centres Bulletin* (No. 22, Nov, 1963, p.23-25):

*What of the mother herself – the girl whose pregnancy, for a brief humiliating time, separates her out from the crowd, and who, at the end of it, will slip from sight again, her personal problems still unresolved, her view of life and of maternity, coloured by the experience she has just passed through. This is where our thinking*

*stops short – with the girl and her future. This is the gap that needs to be bridged.*  
(Mary D)

Abortion was illegal and effective contraception rarely available, even to married women. Approved solutions to unwanted or unplanned pregnancy were the 'shotgun' wedding and adoption, a large industry after the 1955 Adoption Act enabled babies to be adopted at 10 days old (Else, 1993). The number of adoptions soared.

In 1952/53 of the 2,329 children born out of wedlock, 1,297 were adopted and 932 stayed with their mothers. In 1962/63, 1,669 were adopted and 1,960 stayed with their mothers. The numbers in foster care also rose from 1,737 in 1948/49 to 2,599 in 1971/72 (Dalley, 1998, p.235).

There was concern in government, not only about the moral aspects but the practical difficulties of caring for these children. The Parents' Centre pioneers worried about the likely effects of the solutions on the mental health of the mothers and their babies who were forced apart.

The practice of adoption, as it was carried out in New Zealand in the 1950s, has been questioned over the years. In the 1950s, Bowlby (1953, p.119), one of the gurus of Parents' Centre, expressed concern about the plight of children born out of wedlock or 'illegitimate' as was then the term. He showed concern that:

Little serious study has been given to the problems of adoption and it is only gradually becoming recognised as a process, requiring scientific understanding and professional skill.

Bowlby (1953) tended to support early adoption, so the adoptive parents could form a relationship early in the child's life but he was able to identify difficulties in that practice. In wartime New Zealand and for some time after, there was a demand from parents wanting to adopt and there was a good supply of children for adoption. By the early 1960s, the number of couples seeking to adopt declined. This put another pressure on already overworked social workers. A friend of mine from school-days who had responsibility for adoptions in the 1960s, described to me how she would go home on a Saturday afternoon, with a large pile of files, and try to match a few from the large number of children awaiting adoption with the small number of suitable parents who were not making specific demands about the type of child they wanted. She admits that mistakes were made. In my case, when applying to adopt a girl from birth, I was offered a boy of six months. Aware of the

Bowlby belief that adoption should happen earlier, I had some misgivings, but took up the offer. I must admit there were challenges but I was again in the fortunate position of being able to get help.

Bowlby came to the conclusion, correctly, in my experience, that:

There is no such thing, unfortunately, as a 'guaranteed adoption', no children agency can safely mark as 'certified'. It is vital, therefore that parents be able to accept a child whether or not he can measure up to their hopes and wishes for him. (Bowlby, 1953, p.119)

At that time, the feelings of the mothers who had no option but to give their children away, were not considered important. As knowledge has grown about the effects of adoption on mothers and children, the Adoption Act in New Zealand has been modified, with changes in 1955 providing for 'better consent provisions and greater protection for all in the process' (Dalley, 1998, p.229; Else, 1991). Fostering was another option, but foster-homes were hard to find and often unsatisfactory (Dalley, 1998). Young children sometimes suffered greatly from cruel or indifferent treatment and frequent changes.

Many of the Parents' Centre pioneers had become aware of the problems caused by unplanned pregnancies. They believed knowledge about reproduction could be one solution to the problem that children should receive information from parents about sexual development and reproduction suited to their age and stage. This subject became an integral part of Parents' Centre programmes. When the women enrolling for ante-natal exercise classes were shown the Birth Atlas at the beginning of the course, they were introduced to the idea that the reproduction system should be described in medical terms. They were encouraged to use those, when discussing such matters with, not only other adults, but also their children.

### **3.6 Growing interest in new solutions**

Educational leaders in New Zealand travelled overseas and returned with new ideas for change which could benefit children and families. Some leaders from other countries visited New Zealand and studied our institutions. The views of New Zealanders who were part of the movement for change, were sometimes reinforced and supported by those coming from another society. Professor David Ausubel, a psychologist from the University of Illinois (US), visited for a year as a Fullbright research scholar at Victoria University of Wellington in 1957 and added to the momentum for change. In conducting his study he

visited homes, schools, and maraes and interviewed pupils, parents, teachers, government officials and other citizens.

Ausubel was particularly critical of relations between Maori and Pakeha, the New Zealand education system, and attitudes to authority in this country. His book unleashed criticism from conservative teachers, particularly those in traditional secondary schools and many policy-makers and bureaucrats. But it reinforced the convictions of many parents and teachers working to make education more kindly, humane and effective at all levels. Ausubel often visited Wellington Training College where I was working at the time and was welcomed for his lively contributions in discussions, particularly to those lecturing in education. He argued that:

It is the authoritarian, moralistic and punitive approach to children, youth and youthful offenders that imparts a somewhat Victorian flavour to contemporary New Zealand ideology. (Ausubel, 1960, p.54)

Ausubel believed that disciplinary practices in New Zealand 'reflect inordinate and implicit acceptance of the doctrine of original sin and the cardinal principle to be observed, in the handling of the young, until they reach full adult status' (1960, p.85). He noted the absence of democratic or co-operative methods of controlling children by parents and teachers and deplored the lack of attention to understanding the causes of behaviour problems. He also regretted the poor relationships educators had with their pupils. Ausubel's visit was just one example of the way more progressive ideas in education were reinforced and disseminated to enrich the seed-bed for change.

As the message 'all is not well' with our children and their parents became a public concern, the remedies were discussed in the press, in magazines and on radio and television which became established in the early 1960s. The conservative members of the community wanted stricter discipline and restrictions on children and young people. A growing number of liberal thinkers in education, social welfare and to some degree, health however, were advocating new approaches. Some, influenced by concerns about mental health, believed preventive measures should be put in place. Support was growing for the idea that sound practice in childhood could change the world and that education was the key to social reform (Parry, 1982). Interviewed in 1990, Dr Clarence Beeby, remembered the optimism that prevailed among educators: 'We believed in education in those days. We

were simpletons maybe, but we really believed that the world could be altered by education' (May, 1997).

From my interviews I became aware that the Parents' Centre pioneers were, or had been, involved in discussions about child rearing in their work, families and neighbourhoods. The interest, enthusiasm and positive changes that followed discussions led them to believe that parents could benefit from discussing problems in groups with skilled leaders and from gaining access to new ideas on child rearing. The pioneers were becoming aware that an organisation, perhaps similar in nature to Playcentre, but providing for children under three, and focused on parent education, could provide such a service.

### **3.7 The rise of consumer groups**

In the absence of moves by Government to initiate change, consumers were beginning to express their need for a voice about the services they required. By the 1960s a number of consumer organisations were operating. Jim Robb recalled:

*The Consumer Association dates from the same era [as Parents' Centre]. There were glimmers of that pre-war, a Minister of Commerce was making the first moves towards a Consumer Association.*

Several women's groups were either founded or strengthened, in the 1950s, to meet women's needs, give them a voice and provide a necessary service, often on a voluntary basis. Else has noted a new emphasis:

Improving the conditions of women's and children's daily lives continued to form the basis of many post-war organisations from Playcentre (1941) to the Maori Women's Welfare League (1951). But there was a new emphasis on self-determination and the needs of women as individuals. Time and again, in helping others, women found themselves empowered. The commitment extended to political actions and public education (1991, p.117).

Some of the pioneers were involved in consumer developments. Helen Brew and Mary Dobbie were involved in the Family Planning Association. Parents' Centre pioneers such as Ephra Garrett, Lex Grey, Beverley Morris, Ann Rosenberg, Helen Thornton and I played a part in the development and spread of Playcentre. Consumers were having an influence on the kindergarten movement too (May, 1992; Bryder, 2003). 'Though originally founded to socialise poor, needy and potentially delinquent children, the client base of kindergarten had expanded by the 1950s to include a wider group' (Hughes, 1989, p.10). With the demise of the pool of labour devoted to domestic service after World War

II, 'middle class women could no longer leave their children in the care of someone else in the house' (Else, 1993). From the 1950s, middle-class parents became interested in establishing kindergartens for their own children as well as the children of others in their communities, to give mothers some relief from the demands of continuous childcare and also because they believed the facilities offered were of benefit to children. The report of the Consultative Committee on Pre-School Educational Services recommended that pre-school services be quickly extended (1947, Recommendation 1.P.5).

A new generation of parents became particularly interested in pre-school education, creating a need for rapid growth. In 1948, government developed policies about the establishment of kindergartens which required that the community should raise some of the necessary money (Downer, 1989; Hughes, 1989). Fathers and other male community leaders became involved because often they had the knowledge and skills to raise money. Male participation legitimised and strengthened the case for pre-school education in homes and in the community generally. At public meetings held to inform parents about the procedures for setting up kindergartens, speakers would spread the word about the benefits of pre-school education as a way of seeking community support. They would usually talk about the value of a good start in life. Thus, the number of parents aware of the importance of the early years increased.

Once kindergartens were established they involved mothers as helpers and in mother' clubs. For many women this participation proved to be a way of achieving liberation from a life confined to the household. As Hughes records: 'mothers would hear lectures on child rearing by doctors and teachers, which supplemented their own skills and did not challenge their identity as mothers' (1989, p.40). Mothers heard new ideas, shared their opinions, and were often challenged in their thinking, or moved away however slightly from long-held beliefs. The clubs also provided friendship, support systems and much needed listening ears. The groups formed around the needs of early childhood education, often provided support similar to that given in the past by the extended family but not available for many in the 1950s.

Membership of these consumer organisations gradually built a parent constituency, who were beginning to question conservative ideas and motivating skilled leaders with the time,



energy and resources to bring about change. People such as the pioneers of Parents' Centre, were, in their involvement with consumer groups, increasingly seeing a need for an organisation which could meet the needs of consumers who wanted a voice to advocate ways of obtaining knowledge about child rearing. Mothers were also learning strategies, such as the skills necessary to run committees, in playcentres and kindergartens. Those skills gradually equipped them to join and learn more from established and influential groups such as school committees about the skills of advocacy and lobbying.

### **3.8 Political resistance to alternative views**

The constituency for change was growing. A difficulty facing people who had new ideas that challenged the status quo, however, was the danger of being labelled 'communist'. As historian Laurie Barber described:

In New Zealand hysterical anti-communism prompted government, press and patriots to identify suspected communist infiltrators in the trade unions, civil service and the universities. New Zealand's political leaders, Labour and National, believed that a communist conspiracy for world domination was afoot (1989, p.164).

Beverley Morris recalled, *'It was the era of the Cold War ... people were being divided by suspicion ... a little bit of suspicion and then you'd be looking at the next one and the next one'*. Some people in positions of authority who felt comfortable with the status quo and who were benefiting from it, were able to denigrate those advocating change by labelling them 'communists' or excluding them from positions of influence. Helen Brew was aware of this phenomenon when she said, *'If you're going to put your head above the water, look out!'*. When I was a lecturer at Wellington Training College in 1957, I observed an example of the treatment of one person who was prepared to stand by his beliefs. The vice-principal Walter Scott, criticised a statement made by the then Minister of Education. Scott had just been appointed in-service education director at Lopdell House, in Auckland. This was an influential position in education, as it brought teachers of leadership potential together, to discuss new policy (Ewing, 1970). Scott was told to retract, or lose the position. He refused, but time was on his side. He later became principal of the Training College (1948-1958) and was much admired for his integrity (Sutch, 1966, p.405).

Similarly, some Parents' Centre leaders, challenging medical practice, were labelled communists (Else, 1993, Kedgely, 1996, Sutch, 1966, Knox, 1995). But as Sutch explains:



Some young professional people did join the Communist party, disillusioned with the society the sacrifice of two world wars and many depressions had produced. They saw in communism a new and hopeful way. (1966, p.134)

The climate of fear in the United States which was engendered by Senator Eugene McCarthy in the 1950s, created 'a kind of national hysteria which got its outlet by hunting down and labelling as Communist, anyone whose views seemed to support human rights' (Sutch, 1966, p.374). This hysteria was spread to New Zealand by the media and those happy with the status quo and limited or prevented many from speaking out against the traditional ways of doing things (Sutch, 1966). The measures taken in 1951 against the watersiders who challenged the ship-owners and their Government supporters, provided a powerful warning to dissenters. 'Many people became more cautious and those who spoke out were often denied promotion' (Sutch, 1966). Some Parents' Centre pioneers however and others who later became leaders in education found the Communist Party at that time, with its plans to expand living standards for workers, a compatible organisation where they learned successful techniques of group discussion which they later applied to their work in Playcentre and Parents' Centre.

Some members of the medical profession were appalled at the emerging demands for change. They were convinced that their rigid practices such as hospital birth for all and emphasis on isolation of mother and neonate from other family members, were necessary to prevent maternal and infant mortality (Mein-Smith, 1986). Such scions of the medical profession had prestige and much support from women who had trusted them completely and been grateful for their services. Another reason preventing women from allying themselves openly with change was concern about their husband's promotion and the consequences, in money terms, for the family. However, some women like the Parents' Centre pioneers were free from such worries, or felt strong enough, with their husband's support, to ignore them. They continued to change minds and hearts, by providing effective education, wherever they found the opportunities.

### **3.9 Chapter overview**

I have argued that World War II and its aftermath spread ideas for change in the education of young children in a variety of ways in New Zealand. Travel, migration from other countries and from country to town, in-service training, the number of people embarking

on family life and the consequent strain on existing services, all led to a questioning of, and often dissatisfaction with, the old certainties. New ways of effecting change in the progressive tradition were being tried in the education of children aged 3-8 years in playcentres and, to some extent, in kindergartens and Plunket. However, there was at that time no concerted action to give advice in the progressive tradition to help parents when their children were under three.

In chapter 4 I focus particularly on the services for childbirth and the health and education of children under three, which, when experienced by the pioneers, became a trigger for the founding of the Parents' Centre organisation.

## CHAPTER 4:

### The Pioneers' Focus For Reform: The Services In Health And Education For Childbirth And Parenthood In The 1950s

In this chapter I discuss the major problems the pioneers experienced when they used the services in health and education for childbirth and children under three. By the 1950s many of them, like Helen Brew, sought services for childbirth which would provide them and their infants with a good start in life. Their personal experiences of childbirth and care of the newborn and the exclusion of parents when young children were hospitalised became the trigger for setting up the organisation Parents' Centre, to provide a voice for the many who were dissatisfied with the system but could not find any way to change it. As Helen Brew observed with feeling in our first interview: *'The power had to be taken away! The mother had no voice anywhere ... we needed to do something'*.

I analyse the reasons why the Parents' Centre pioneers felt that reform in the progressive tradition was necessary.

#### **4.1 The hospital services for mothers and children in the 1950s**

##### ***4.1.1 Hospital services for childbirth***

Grantly Dick-Read who had a major influence on Helen Brew's views about the conduct of childbirth, expressed what many women in New Zealand felt about the childbirth services in hospitals:

I cannot write too strongly of the cruelty that still exists in some hospitals and maternity organisations, when the quality of kindness is buried beneath the stern regimentation and routine of institutional efficiency. It sometimes seems that maternity hospitals are originated for the convenience of doctors and nurses to which the patients are subjected, irrespective of their comforts and desires. (1942, p.10)

One of the major motivations of the Parents' Centre pioneers was to influence change in the hospital services for childbirth, so that mothers, during the birth process 'sustained and increased their confidence, knowledge, spontaneity, maturity and self respect ... [factors which] are good for the mother, good for her baby, and good for her family' (Dick-Read, 1942, p.10). After World War II the main thrust of policy-makers, bureaucrats and the

medical profession was pro-natalist, to replace the casualties of war and build up the white population to ensure that Europeans were the dominant, healthy and powerful group in the Pacific. In Victorian times, many women of European descent had raised large families, if they survived childbirth. Policy-makers wanted to keep it that way (Mein-Smith, 1986; Sutch, 1966).

Official preoccupation with the dangers of maternity provided the opportunity for the medical profession to categorise childbirth as pathological – ‘an illness which required the presence of a doctor’ (Mein-Smith, 1986, p.43). Moreover, even Dr Doris Gordon who was one of the few women doctors in the 1950s and a mother, supported this view. She had prestige in the medical world as she had founded the Obstetrical Society in 1927 that played an important role in the endowment of obstetrical chairs and became director of maternal and infant welfare, 1946-1948. As she said from her experience as an obstetrician, ‘It is better for us if they don’t know anything about childbirth and anyhow it is our job, not theirs!’ (Gordon, 1957). Alice Fieldhouse recalled:

*It was a time when medication was given routinely for “painless childbirth”. Nursing was dominated, to a large extent, in both training and practice by the medical profession. Doctors gave lectures and in my own experience as a teacher, I found that the doctors would give detailed lectures about the disease rather than emphasising the disease was incidental to the person being cared for ... A leading doctor in the Obstetrical and Gynaecological area gave lectures to nurses and midwifery students, conducted examinations and really influenced the nurses in the Health Department very strongly. (Alice)*

The increasing trend towards birth in a hospital environment enabled medicine to acquire a stranglehold on childbirth (Else, 1993; Kedgely, 1996; Papps, 1997). By 1932 New Zealand’s rate of death in childbirth (excluding Maori) was one of the lowest in the world at 0.52 per 1000 (Mein-Smith, 1986). On the basis of that success, hospital delivery became the norm (Papps, 1997). Most women had come to believe that hospitals offered protection, not only against disease but also against toxæmia, which in the past had endangered mother and child.

The trend to have all women confined in hospitals led to control by doctors, nurses and Health Department officials in the management of the neonate, the mother and her family. Some mothers, at least, found this control difficult to deal with as Mary Logan and Beverley Morris observed:

*As usual in those days, I was rather nastily dealt with by a sister who was notorious as a control freak at Wellington Hospital. (Mary L)*

*I was not asked if I wanted anaesthetics, (that the feeding times were routine for everyone), that I was made to feel guilty because my baby did not gain the required weight, I was given little help with breast feeding and I was confined to bed for a week! (Beverley)*

In addition to the St. Helen's hospitals, there were a few private hospitals for women who could afford to pay, with doctors as the medical superintendents. All my experience of childbirth was in private hospitals: I was born, in 1922, in Willis Street Private Hospital, Wellington. The salary of my father, employed as a teacher at Wellesley College, would have been over the limit for St. Helen's of £350 per year. I had my son in 1944 in Hopwood, a private Maternity Hospital because of pressure on services at the time. As I was five months pregnant when I returned to Wellington, after leaving teaching in Te Kaha, that small private hospital was the only facility available to me. I chose Alexandra Hospital in 1958 for my second child, because my doctor, Diana Mason, was the medical superintendent and that hospital was reported to be less rigid, in its management of infants, than the public hospital. These hospitals in my experience differed little from the public facilities. I experienced the same dissatisfactions as those expressed by Beverley Morris. The matron of Alexandra was not convinced about the advantages of 'rooming-in' for mothers and infants. When I attended the National Council of Women with a delegation from Parents' Centre to put the case for 'rooming-in' in 1959, she vehemently opposed our proposal.

Rigid rules dominated hospital routine, as a precaution against sepsis (Else, 1993; Mein-Smith, 1986). By the mid-1940s sulphonamides, introduced in the 1930s, and antibiotics, such as penicillin, were helping to reduce mortality, but the rigidity continued. This seemed unnecessary to some parents, including Alice Fieldhouse, who said that such:

*...means of controlling these potential hazards to the lives of mothers and babies meant there could be some relaxation, but there wasn't.*

The concern about infection led medical staff to regard family members as potentially dangerous in their propensity to bring diseases into the maternity wards. This fear even excluded husbands: 'Families were excluded from the birth process – even the ante-natal classes' (Kedgely, 1996, p.196). Typically, and this was my experience, the husband [most

partners were husbands then] brought his wife to the hospital, and departed to await the announcement of the birth by telephone. Because of pressure on hospital staff this meant women were often left alone to cope. Beverley Morris and Mary Logan recalled with strong feeling how she was left alone for long periods, bored, frightened and humiliated:

*I don't think these days people remember how nasty and how dismissive and insulting the hospital staff could be to women. They didn't think of them as a person. They just thought of it as their work space ... they would put a sheet round you and stick your feet up in the air and treat what was underneath it as their workspace. (Beverley)*

*Women were not being treated as people ... [I was] left alone in the labour room, on a narrow table, legs in stirrups and told to get on with it and push. Then they up and leave you. (Mary L)*

This system was particularly difficult for rural families as Mein-Smith (1986) noted and Mary Dobbie experienced. Many women either had to wait around in town for labour to start, a costly sojourn, or run the risk of having the baby at home, or en route, without professional help.

#### **4.1.2 The neonate in hospital**

Once the baby was born – and there was a perception of some, like my mother, that it was at the convenience of the doctor and thus maybe a forceps delivery, its nurture was completely under the control of hospital staff (Kedgely, 1996). Immediately after birth, babies were separated from their mothers in nurseries and brought in for feeding at roughly four-hour intervals, except at night, when they were usually separated for eight hours – between 9pm and 5am. The pioneers, with their belief in the importance of mother-child contact right from the time of birth and individual differences in need for food, found this practice distressing. Ephra Garrett remembered:

*I must say the hospital was dreadful ... your baby is down in the nursery and they used to bring the babies up on a trolley and then they would give you your baby sometimes for far too long and sometimes they would take them away too soon.*

Contemporary studies of the new-born would lead us to believe that many infants too, would have found this treatment upsetting (Martin, 1979; Smith, 1982). The work of Bowlby and Winnicott on the importance of mother-child contact added to the concern of the pioneers. To alleviate their distress, babies were often fed supplements of formula,

milk, or sweet water and, as a result, were often too sleepy to feed, or perform the vigorous sucking necessary to stimulate milk-production.

*All the things they did in hospital – weighing the baby after seven minutes. You were not allowed to feed more than seven minutes. The nurse would say ‘Mrs R. your baby has only put on two ounces. (Ann Rosenberg)*

Adult family members could visit the mother in hospital but only at set times. This often proved inconvenient in terms of work and family commitments. Children were excluded (Morris, 1992). As the hospital stay for mothers was traditionally two weeks (Mein-Smith, 1986) the separation of other children from the mother could cause distress and bewilderment. Many mothers found this caused problems on the return home, with the relationship between mother, other children and the new baby, impaired (Morris, 1992).

In my experience, on the day the mother left hospital, the infant was handed over with great ceremony by a senior nurse, who usually received grateful thanks, in spite of any private feelings the mother might have had about her treatment. With no consumer voice, or knowledge that other ways existed, most women accepted this treatment without criticism. Many too, in the light of what had happened to their female ancestors, probably felt genuinely grateful that they and their babies were alive (Marshall, 1983).

Unaware of the true nature of their infants, after two weeks of separation, many mothers found the subsequent time at home with their babies traumatic. Those with knowledge about breast feeding considered that treatment was a reason for the failure of many women to continue (Kedgley, 1996). Although each mother had a right to a weekly visit by a Plunket nurse in her home, for the first six weeks of her child’s life, the advice given tended to follow the Truby King practice:

*The rigidity of Plunket at that stage was so horrendous. And the things they told you in those days. Breastfeeding was good, but every four hours on the dot. If you didn’t you were considered a ‘bad mother’. (Helen Brew)*

*The Plunket nurse ....didn’t like the way I was feeding Sarah. I fed Sarah on demand. It worked. She got into a feeding pattern very very quickly. She slept through the night at six weeks old and when I told the Plunket nurse she said I had to wake her every four hours. (Barbara Hodge)*

*I was not a good ‘cow’ and I swallowed gallons of ‘tiger’ milk and finally with all my best efforts I really didn’t have much and my daughter refused to take the bottle*



*and the Plunket nurse just said 'Oh well we'll put in Karitane and starve her for 2-3 days'. (Ephra Garrett)*

If the baby cried, he was not to be picked up. This would make him 'spoilt', a dreaded word in Plunket language. Mothers were reassured with the maxim that crying was good exercise for the lungs (Deem & Fitzgibbon, 1945). Many parents, however, found this crying stressful and were torn between their feelings for the child and the advice given (Wachs & Gruen 1982; Wilson, 1983), such as this described by Helen Brew; '*He's got to learn who's boss*'. My experience with mothers, in groups in Parents' Centre and Playcentre particularly, demonstrated that they would admit to each other but not to the Plunket nurse, that they rocked, sang to, walked around with, and even took children for a drive in the car, in attempts to settle them without feeding. A few 'brave souls', among them several of the Parents' Centre pioneers fed 'on demand' as Bryder (2003), a Plunket historian, found when talking to mothers.

#### **4.1.3 Exclusion of fathers**

Kedgley (1996) has argued that, as soon as pregnancy was diagnosed, fathers were separated from the whole process. Ephra Garrett realised this only too well, but, with the support of her husband, broke the mould:

*I had my baby in Alexandra because you could have your husband there ... if your doctor allowed it ... I took my husband with me [to meet the matron] I don't think she had ever seen a husband before.*

This was a brave move as there was little or no provision for men to visit the doctor with their wives, or attend ante-natal classes. Fathers were rarely admitted when their wives were in labour, even in the early stages. In visiting hours they saw their babies through a glass screen. Common practice was for the nurse on duty to raise the baby's head for father viewing. This often had the effect of waking the child, who might become distressed, if it was not attended to until the prescribed time. The subsequent crying often upset the father who was then loathe to repeat the procedure and cause distress. By the time the baby went home at two weeks of age, the father would typically have never held it or seen anything but its head. This was my husband's experience in 1958 and typical, according to the content of many Parents' Centre class discussions on that subject. Separation of baby, father and other family members was designed to preserve a sterile environment and get the baby into a routine. Some mothers in my classes were convinced the practice worked

and it probably did for some but others felt that the babies became upset and therefore hard to deal with, on their return home. Furthermore, a Parents' Centre supporter and adviser, Professor Harvey Carey, medical superintendent of the Auckland National Women's Hospital had proved that these practices did not ensure a sterile environment. In a lecture to Parents' Centre members at a conference at National Women's Hospital in Auckland, in 1963, Carey presented findings from measurement of bacteria in hospital nurseries, which proved that the environment was anything but sterile. The assembly of mothers and babies, in the nurseries, intensified the occurrence of bacteria in the air. Carey validated his findings by presentation of bacteria counts (*PCB*, No.12, December 1958, p.5). Personal and expert knowledge such as this, intensified the determination of people like the Parents' Centre pioneers, to work for change, such as rooming-in which limited contact with other people as well as allowing mothers to have access to their babies when they needed feeding and comfort.

The exclusion of fathers from the first days of the child's life meant they got no opportunity to handle the new baby or learn how to enjoy and/or comfort and tend it. The mothers who for most of their time in hospital would have seen their child only for feeding, were usually allowed to undress, change and bathe the child, before leaving. Thus, by the time she returned home the mother had some knowledge about her child and had learned some skills. Anxiety about the father's lack of skills could make her wary about handing the baby over to him. Also those duties were rarely regarded as the father's role in the 1950s. He would thus often confine his attention to the older children and an opportunity for bonding, familiarity and empathy with the baby was lost. When researchers such as Bevan-Brown (1947) and Bowlby (1953) claimed relationships formed in the early days were important, this imbalance between mother, father and baby became a concern to people such as the Parents' Centre pioneers and others who had read books or attended lectures on the subject.

#### ***4.1.4 Children in hospital***

Another concern of the pioneers was the treatment of children, particularly those under three, when they were hospitalised because of illness or accident. Several such as Helen Brew, Mary Dobbie, Barbara Hodge and Mary Logan had seen the unhappiness and long term ill-effects caused to families by typical hospital practice, which involved complete

separation of children from parents, often quite suddenly, and without any preparation. The emphasis on prevention of infection led hospital staff to regard parents who by necessity had contact with the outside-world, as major sources of infection. Although staff usually accepted that children were distressed at first by the departure of parents, most believed that they settled down quite quickly until visits by parents resulted in re-activating distress. In the absence of knowledge about the effects of separation, health professionals concluded the visits were damaging (Bowlby, 1953; Brew, 1959).

Some parents such as the Parents' Centre pioneers, had tried, on an individual basis, to change this practice. Helen Brew, whose two year-old daughter was admitted to hospital, in an emergency, had done her best to stay with her child.

*I went over and over to the hospital to say 'I'm the mother. I'm not leaving' and they would say 'there is the door, and we will give you five minutes with the child'... and as soon as I got my hands on her and told her that everything is alright, they would cry out 'Time is up, thank you'.*

Mary Dobbie spoke to the National Council of Women on the effect on her own child of a hospitalisation.

*She had to have a stomach pump. Us not being able to visit her had a marked effect on her personality. We noticed the effect on her immediately when we got her home.*

Not all doctors, however, were in agreement with typical hospital practice. In the 1950s, Doctors H.P. and Cecily Pickerill were providing a model seen as ideal by the pioneers, in their hospital, the Bassom, in the Wellington area. They had proved that plastic surgery on infants could be carried out with a high degree of success, if each baby was nursed by its own mother before and immediately after the operations (Dobbie, 1990). Cecily Pickerill, indeed, believed that: 'separating a baby from its mother had an adverse effect on the success of the operation, but:

*'...prejudice from within the New Zealand medical profession did not allow rooming-in, and mother care to spread beyond the walls and gardens of the Pickerill's little hospital' (Dobbie, 1990, p.26)*

In addition to books by Bowlby and Winnicott, the pioneers were aware that in England the Platt Report *The Welfare of Children in Hospitals* (1949), commissioned by the Ministry of Health, had concluded that 'attention needed to be paid to the needs of the child under three in hospital.' Separation from the mother, especially when the child was

depressed 'can sometimes be calamitous!', and that 'men and women in public life will recognise the relations of mental health to maternal care and will seize their opportunities for promoting courageous and far reaching reforms' (Bowlby, 1953, p.182). These words were a further trigger to efforts for reform by the pioneers.

The recommendations of the Platt Report (1949) in Britain included a number of practical ways of implementing the required changes. They consisted of cutting the length of hospital stay, exploring alternatives to hospital care, involving parents at all stages and encouraging them to note the long-term psychological effects of separation and seek help to cope with them. As there was no indication that these or similar recommendations would be implemented in New Zealand, some pioneers became committed to the idea that it would be left to the consumers to effect change.

In this section I have demonstrated that health practices which influenced the young child's education were causing concern to parents who were becoming educated for change. New ideas from parents, professionals, books and the media were feeding the growing disenchantment with existing services and the lack of action by policy makers and increasing the pressure for change.

#### **4.2 Pressure for change in health policy**

The pattern of separation of newborn, parents and family had become well established in maternity hospitals by the 1940s and continued throughout World War II, without being challenged. By the 1950s, however, there was pressure for change. Much of it came from women within the education sector when they and their friends, relatives and neighbours experienced childbirth in hospitals. Some of it, however, came from within the health sector itself from people like Alice Fieldhouse, who had the chance to go overseas and do further training and gain skills which were needed for new developments:

*In 1945 I joined UNRRA [United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association] and I was posted to Germany ... The United Nations was making use of professional people who were in the camps to help them run the organisation there and they needed more help for the doctors. Because I had teaching experience I was seconded to a British Red Cross Hospital to train Polish girls as nursing aides to work in the camps. (Alice)*

In Europe WHO (World Health Organisation), UNRRA and local and national aid groups were faced with the task of restoring world order and trying to compensate those who had

been severely damaged, physically and psychologically, by loss of family, country, health services and education. Personnel in these aid groups, had to quickly re-examine priorities and train workers to implement them. Ideas and practices which were considered humane, particularly in early childhood education and health were seen as a top priority for those who had already suffered deprivation and pain. New books on child health and rearing, based on practices which considered the feelings of patients were printed and avidly bought and read (chapter 6). New and faster methods of communication helped spread knowledge. Practices which accommodated the new knowledge about children were filmed and shown to students and parents. These included films such as *Grief* by Spitz (1946), *The Two Year-Old Goes to Hospital* by James Robertson (1951) and one on Anna Freud's work in her Hampstead Nursery school, where she emphasised the importance of individual development and the success of child choice in routines (Bowlby, 1953; Young-Bruehl, 1998). Exercises in child study such as those expected of students, encouraged them to look at the reality of what was happening in hospitals, classrooms and families, especially to young children. All these training techniques helped to pave the way for reform of the hospital system which separated hospitalised children under three from their prime caregivers, usually their mothers and other family members.

Some key New Zealand health professionals and educationists such as Bevan-Brown, returned to this country from overseas and became critical of the status quo: They began to work for change and received some support from those working in education. In health this caused problems with the entrenched establishment. One reason for the difference in openness to the new ideas was that post-graduate training in education was generally available in New Zealand for teachers at an earlier time than it was for nurses. Policy makers in education, in government, training colleges, universities and schools, were encouraging change and offering facilities for post-graduate training, even by the 1940s (Beeby, 1992). This momentum had increased by the 1950s. Teachers in training were encouraged to study at universities, assess the relevance of practices in other countries and apply their ideas back in the classroom. A Diploma in Education for graduate teachers with experience was well established in the 1940s at Victoria University.

For nurses, however, policy makers in health such as Gordon in the Department of Health, and Corkill on the Nurses and Midwives Board actively opposed change (Mein-Smith,

1986). Post-graduate training was available only to a limited number of tutor nurses at Victoria University in the 1950s and did not become well established for a wider group until 1973, at Victoria University and at Massey soon after (Barrowman, 1999). Thus, many in positions of authority in nursing, had not had the chance to study new theory and practice, particularly at tertiary level. As the disciplines of health and education are intertwined in the rearing of children under three, many educationists such as Alice Fieldhouse who had both nursing and teaching experience, were au fait with what they considered more humane reforms in the health care of young children and were frustrated that they could not implement them. Alice said:

*Wellington ... was the strongest and best organised centre of conservatism in the maternity services, dominated by restrictions and controls in study and practice ... any deviation or innovation in such matters was unacceptable and seen as a serious threat*

When the pioneers were preparing for parenthood they naturally looked for services which would be in accord with their needs and wants. Many sought out services which they had read about, observed overseas, or imagined would be available in New Zealand:

*Half of my training had been done in a small hospital in Yorkshire, and the sisters in charge of the maternity ward were absolutely wonderful ... I never heard any screams or shouts or complaints except from one woman.* (Mary Logan)

The pioneers were concerned about the treatment they and other parents received. As a result they felt that change more in line with the model Mary Logan has described was necessary for themselves and all parents, if their children were to get the start in life they had come to believe was necessary.

#### **4.3 Education: Tension between liberal and conservative traditions**

The educational ideals of the Parents' Centre pioneers and their struggle can be traced back to the beginning of New Zealand settlement. There were those who came as colonisers and wished to replicate the class system, 'the desired replica of English civilisation', and those who believed 'that all men are equal and that equality of opportunity is what is required to develop the potentialities of mankind' (Sutch, 1966, pps.8 and 13).

Both parties in this philosophical debate saw education as a key tool and as a practical way of advancing their ideas. Typically, those with wealth and power aspired to supporting the



school as a vehicle for educating their children to be fit to take up the leading roles in society.

These conservative ideas are well summed up by historian Tawney (1938, pps 17,18):

There was an age – the first 30 years or so after 1870, when public education still remained primarily a discipline, half redemptive, half repressive, for those known in the blue-book English of the day as the children of the ‘independent poor’. It was a discipline, on its intellectual side, to confer by mass instruction, a minimum standard of proficiency and, on its social side, to create an orderly, civil and not inconveniently restive population, with sufficient educators to understand an order and not so much as to question it.

Similarly Belich (1996, 406) noted:

Schooling helped select ‘respectables’ to enter the gentry, but also helped keep out everybody else, bond the junior elite and their parents too, through Boards of Governors and the like.

Those affiliated with the working class, especially those who had a voice in the trade unions, wanted schooling to provide equal opportunity for all.

The gravamen of their ideas was that children were precious material, each one different from the next, going through successive stages of development and requiring an environment which would bring out rather than dwarf its potentialities. At school the child should develop these potentialities and express them in a way that would assist him to live in and contribute to his community. (Sutch, 1966, p. 260)

#### ***4.3.1 The advance of the liberal tradition in education***

In this section I demonstrate the ways in which progressive theory gradually came to influence classroom practice and that of early childhood education. The traditional view of education had largely predominated in New Zealand in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The books and teaching materials emanated from the parent culture, England. Children were taught largely by colonists educated in the traditions of the old country (Graham, 1981; Gibbons, 1981). By the 1920s, a number of leaders in education, particularly a group in Wellington working in the Wellington Training College and the Education Department of Victoria University were challenging traditional practice. The contribution of these leaders in education is analysed more fully in chapter 6. Waghorn and Scott carried the liberal tradition at the college into the 1950s and 1960s, as did Barns at the Kindergarten College



(May & Middleton, 1997). Not only did these educationists influence pre-service students, they encouraged teachers to do post-graduate work. In this way they influenced classroom practice by encouraging teachers to change their methods, as they became convinced by introduction to new pedagogical theory, that the traditional methods of teaching were ineffective and could even be harmful to children. Being involved as leaders, especially in teacher training, they were to have a profound influence on their students, through their style of teaching and their strength in promoting and defending their beliefs, in the college and the wider community. Some of these students became the pioneers of Parents' Centre. In the publication 'Ako Pai' (Wellington Training College, 1980), published for the occasion of the College Centenary, tributes were paid to these progressive leaders in education by many who went on to become influential educators themselves in the liberal tradition.

At policy level 'liberal' thinking and practice were reinforced and increasingly disseminated through the Labour Government's educational programme initiated in 1935 by Peter Fraser, Minister of Education, 1938 (Campbell, 1938; Ewing, 1970; Beeby, 1992; Alcorn, 2001). The basic concept was that 'the child had a natural right to education'. Policies to implement this philosophy included the opening up of teacher education, by providing increased allowances for students; the removal of restrictions on married women teachers, grants for adult education which enabled 'second-chance' opportunities and free education to the age of 19 (Sutch, 1966, p.424).

A young liberal, Dr C.E. Beeby was chosen to implement the new ideas. As Director of Education in 1940 (Beeby, 1992; Alcorn, 2001), he was able to steer the direction of the current of change in the field of primary education. He initiated curriculum changes and used a process of consultation which was an innovation. However, as Beeby noted himself, this consultation did not include parents, although he was supportive of the Playcentre organisation in which his wife was a pioneer and which consulted parents on all matters.

Graduates from the teachers colleges were having an impact in the classroom. Beeby's influence was being felt in his cultivation of progressive educational leaders (May, 1997, p.173), and in his support for their appointments to the teachers colleges. In 1937 Beeby promoted the visit of Susan Isaacs who was brought to New Zealand by the New

Education Fellowship (Beeby, 1992), by releasing teachers to attend her lectures. Pioneer Lex Grey who attended, as a student, remembers that '*she made a tremendous impression*' particularly when speaking about her teaching and research at her Malting House school, in Cambridge, England and about her experience in advanced teacher training, at the London Institute of Education. Isaacs' two books *Social Development in Young Children* (1930) and *Intellectual Growth in Young Children* (1933) combined theory and practice in a way that helped and inspired teachers. Beeby saw the conference as 'an almost unbelievable opportunity to catch up with the thinking of the outside world' and Peter Fraser (the Prime Minister at the time) endorsed that hope by saying: 'that the conference marked the commencement of an educational renaissance from which much will come' (Beeby, 1992, p.106).

#### **4.3.2 My experience with 'liberal' teachers**

My primary school education reflected the tensions between the liberal and conservative traditions which had been an important factor in my own early childhood education. At Lyall Bay School, from 1930-33, I was fortunate to have some outstanding liberal teachers. Pupils were introduced to the project method, an idea which stemmed from Dewey (1933), and encouraged to express our opinions through public speaking and debating by our teacher W.J. Mountjoy who had been a member of a debating team which visited the United States. Our principal, Oscar Banner, shared with us his love of music. After the Wellington Training College re-opened in 1936, after being closed as an economy measure in the Depression of the early 1930s, Banner became principal of the Kelburn Normal School. Our eyes were opened to culture in the world outside New Zealand because those whose parents could afford it, were taken in school parties to the Opera House to see overseas actors of repute, such as Sybil Thorndike in the *Medea*. We were encouraged to write, produce and act in our own plays and participated in 'verse speaking' which encompassed a range of poetry of high quality. One teacher, Edith Conway who also later became a member of the staff of Kelburn Normal School had visited England in the early 1930s and often departed from the set curriculum. She whetted our appetites for overseas travel by reading us H.V. Morton "In search of London", interspersed with her own experience. This enrichment of school practice was allowed and obviously encouraged by the authorities in education, as the principal and another teacher were promoted to leadership in teacher training.

Discipline was for the most part authoritarian. The strap was often used. A climate of fear prevailed for much of the time. Even as a young child I abhorred watching the punishments meted out daily to the same boys who were regularly strapped, not only for misbehaviour but for failure to achieve. The proficiency exam loomed large for children aged 12 until 1936 (Beeby, 1992), as the reputation of schools and teachers' employment were dependent on the pass rate. Classes of forty children or more were taught in a large group and in the same way for reading, writing and maths. In my area, Wellington East a working class suburb most left secondary school at the age of fourteen. Only those who gained proficiency had the right to go on to academic secondary schools. Some even left from primary school, usually girls who were destined to stay at home or to do unskilled jobs. For most parents, keeping children at secondary school was a financial drain and for girls often seen as irrelevant.

#### ***4.3.3 Changes in the education of children under eight***

After World War II, for children of 5 and 6, at least, there was some freeing-up of classroom practice 'a more relaxed and friendly relationship between teacher and pupils could be discerned in many classrooms' (Ewing, 1970, p.193). Group work was practised in the teaching of reading, so that children could proceed, to some degree, at their own pace. New, more interest-based readers were replacing those based entirely on a phonic approach. Ideas from overseas, such as relating the curriculum to the child's life were being explored by people like Sylvia Ashton-Warner (1963). An Infant Adviser, Florence E. Lowrie who had done post-graduate work in London (May, 1997) was appointed to work with Wellington schools. She tried to build continuity between pre-school and infant school practice by the provision of a free-play time, called the 'developmental period', from nine to ten in the morning and to introduce more freedom and movement into schools than was typical at that time. In 1948 Lowrie was able to promulgate these ideas through in-service courses for teachers, in school-time, as the schools were closed during a polio epidemic to halt the spread of infection. A woman inspector, Myrtle Simpson who 'made a major contribution to the introduction of new methods and materials in infant rooms' (Beeby, 1992, p. 150) showed interest in my classroom methods based on those of the English activity schools in 1953. She encouraged me to apply for a lectureship in Junior Education, at the Training College.

In 1958 George Parkyn, the Director of New Zealand Council for Educational Research, in response to the urgings of progressive teachers many of whom were involved in supervising teacher trainees on practicum, convened a conference of Infant Teachers at Ardmore Teachers College. The conference aimed to discuss the teaching of reading, in the light of the new ideas particularly of ensuring literacy for all children. It gave a boost to changes such as relating reading to children's interests and individual ability. I was invited to contribute what I had learnt in England. Irene Ely, my colleague, who worked with the teachers at the normal schools in Wellington and Betty Congleton, a senior teacher, contributed by translating these ideas into their classroom practice. June Melser recalled:

The main speakers were Betty Congleton and Marie Bell – both then, I think, lecturers at Wellington Training College. These two women stressed the value of having a happy classroom; of having a daily developmental period, when children were encouraged to choose their own activity and be creative, and in needing to have interesting and varied reading books available and to allow children to choose the books they wanted to read. They also advocated that children should write and illustrate their own stories every day. (Melser, 2004, p.186)

The Child Guidance Service which was established in 1945 (Dalley, 1998) and had become the School Psychological Service, though limited in its scope, was gradually making parents and teachers aware of the complexities and holistic nature of children's learning. The service made people aware that the quality of children's relationships with parents and teachers played a major role in the learning process. Later, Quentin Brew and his colleagues promulgated their ideas about good parent-child relationships further, through opportunities provided by Parents' Centre.

In the area of pre-school education, playcentres were providing children between 3 and 5 with a programme based on free play. Mothers training to be parent helpers and supervisors were becoming acquainted with current child development theory, as were students in the kindergarten colleges. More students especially those who had completed their families, were expecting to make teaching a career, rather than a short-term occupation sandwiched between adolescence and marriage. Some of the kindergarten trainees were parents already and had experience of early childhood education in

playcentre or kindergarten. They were often confident enough to challenge current practice, in the light of their experience and knowledge of children. Some, such as Carol Garden who later became president of the Kindergarten Teachers Association, quickly gained senior positions and had a major influence on liberalising the Kindergarten service (May & Middleton, 1997). In some cases, the people who lectured to kindergarten students such as Gwen Somerset who had done pioneering community work in Feilding with parents and children, also ran classes for Playcentre mothers (Somerset, 1949). This ensured that the theory and practice advocated became more similar in the two institutions, and was a factor in making kindergarten practice more progressive. The lectures on child development began with pregnancy and birth and demonstrated that learning began at birth if not before. This was a revelation to many who believed that learning began with school attendance. In my experience, the usual pattern of courses for lecturers was to follow an outline of the 'milestones' in development identified by researchers such as Gesell (1940; 1946; 1949). Teachers and parents would be urged to provide the conditions that would enable children to reach these milestones. Inevitably the discussion would examine and criticise the current practices for managing infants and toddlers in hospitals and in homes. Some students, especially the mature, would express their concern about the child under three and discuss possible changes. Thus, younger students would absorb ideas on the need for change from other students as well as the lecturer.

Educators with overseas experience, such as Barns and Scott (May & Middleton, 1997, p.244), who studied at the London Institute of Education in the 1950s, were regularly invited to address meetings of kindergarten administrators, most of whom would be aware of, but not necessarily supportive of the new ideas which were circulating. They would agree, however, with the importance of 'a happily lived childhood', and on that basis became more open to the new ideas. It can be appreciated that an awareness was increasing in the community that there was a need to 'liberalise' the programmes of children in the home and in early childhood institutions. A significant acceleration occurred when Moira Gallagher who had been a primary teacher in the progressive tradition, was appointed to the Department of Education, as pre-school supervisor in 1948. She had a 'brief from Beeby to free up the kindergarten' (May, 1997, p.184) and to involve mothers as 'mother-helpers'. Barns, appointed principal of the Kindergarten College had been convinced of the

value of free play as a kindergarten teacher and had been able to implement changes at the Helen Deem Centre in Dunedin.

#### **4.4 Guiding the development of children under 3**

I have demonstrated that there were ongoing attempts to apply progressive methods to the education of children aged 3-8, in a number of educational settings but these liberal ideas had not generally been applied to the education of children under three. As I have noted in chapter 1, the education of this age group, in New Zealand, was dominated by the teachings of Truby King (Deem & Fitzgibbon, 1945; Bryder, 2003; Chapman, 2003) whose ideas on education were conservative rather than progressive. Although King recognised the importance of the early years in the development of the whole person, the emphasis throughout his teaching and writing was on shaping the child to form habits, rather than developing understanding of the individual child as a basis for child rearing. There is no doubt that by the 1950s Plunket nurses varied in the way they interpreted the Truby King philosophy and that New Zealand society was gradually moving from the rigidity of its original approach. However, there was generally an emphasis on imposed routines, often at the expense of the establishment of the good relationships which the pioneers regarded as essential to mental health (Bevan-Brown, 1945). There was little recognition that the child was receiving an education from daily interactions and activities from the beginning of life.

This advice not only upset the beliefs of the pioneers in regard to children, they objected to the authoritarian relationship nurses no doubt learned in hospital practice and carried into their relationships with mothers. The Parents' Centre pioneers found this style of communication demeaning and even offensive.

Lynne Giddings admits that 'although King strongly believed in giving women information about their children and how to do it better ... that information was directed at rather than for women' (1993, p.258). Advice given in *Modern Mothercraft* (Deem & Fitzgibbon, 1945) is full of commands: 'never force a baby to sit up, always cover the floor with a rug' and lots of 'shoulds', e.g. 'he should be sat on the toilet after meals' (p.127); 'children of 4 or 5 years of age should be able to dress themselves completely' (p.131). 'a healthy mother should be able to nurse her baby for the first six months of life' (p.75). This list of milestones in development was advice guaranteed to strike fear into the heart of a



conscientious Plunket mother and probably a sense of failure if these milestones were not reached. There was no advice on how to accomplish these tasks or rationale for the assertions. Only 6 pages of the 225 in the book dealt with education, the rest covered health – diet, clothing, sleep, toilet training and hygiene.

Barbara Hodge, Ephra Garrett and Helen Brew recalled the way they were challenged. Their words convey their strong reactions when their opinions were summarily dismissed and they were left feeling inadequate and angry:

*I said 'I'm not feeding her like that'. She said I should be. I was able to tell her 'No! ... I was the mother and that was the end of the relationship between the Plunket Society and myself. I managed without, much to the astonishment of just about everybody. Because everyone was very strong with the Plunket society ....* (Barbara)

*So I grabbed my daughter and wrapped her in a shawl and marched her off to Diana Mason who said 'That's utter nonsense. Can you afford to buy a blender?' So she told me to blend vegetables and I managed to carry on for another three months with her having the vegetables. I never had Plunket for the second one. I even used the formula out of the Spock book. The writers of these times, their time had come, and they were marvellous.* (Ephra)

*I still see this Plunket nurse, banging on the door and then she would sweep in and she looked at my baby's cot and she just threw everything on the floor. Literally threw it, and she said 'What is this?!'. She had thrown all the covers on the floor ... I didn't have the right number of covers or whatever it was. If you didn't do that you wouldn't be a very good mother ... I just thought 'The power has to be taken away. The mother has no voice anywhere'.* (Helen B)

Quentin Brew picked up this concern among mothers in his work and deplored the 'lack of communication, and so of respect and understanding' between Plunket nurses generally and mothers' (PCB, No. 16, 1960, p.11).

My knowledge of the Plunket system began with my mother's accounts of her problems with Plunket advice. She tried to be a good Plunket mother but had difficulties applying the rules on feeding and sleeping. King's dictum that 'there should be no night feeding' (Deem & Fitzgibbon, 1945) caused problems. I grew up with stories about my father walking the floor with me and singing in a monotonous tone, as he was tone-deaf. It was always a cause for family mirth that I preferred his way of soothing to that of my mother who was an excellent singer. In hindsight, I think I probably was desperate to be fed. To be



close to my mother and not be fed, must have been an agonising and protest-provoking situation for me. In the story there was no criticism of the system. My mother accepted that the advice was correct but that I was difficult, my father was too 'soft' and she felt powerless. Her experience with my brother increased her feeling of inadequacy. He fed, slept well and was a contented child until my mother was advised to wean him as 'Breast feeding should not be continued beyond nine months' (Deem & Fitzgibbon, 1945, p.75). He refused to take any food until my mother persuaded him to take chicken broth. She became convinced that his weaning experience was the cause of his lack of interest in food throughout his life.

When I became interested in Freudian theory and talked with my mother about the importance of feeding in the building of a good mother-child relationship, and later attitudes to food, she was supportive of the connection. I can now appreciate that these discussions probably influenced me in advocating and practising gradual weaning – not only in feeding but as applied to other transitions in life such as leaving the family to enter school. I can appreciate, too, that my experience as a mother living at home during the war with my own mother who was re-assessing Plunket doctrine on the basis of my experience, probably influenced my attitude to the Plunket philosophy.

My next experience with Plunket was 20 years later with my own child. I found my Plunket Nurse supportive but the relationship was still 'top-down'. I felt I was the 'third-former' to her 'head-prefect'. My son's first three months coincided with a traumatic time in my life. I was living at home with my family who were not happy about having their sleep disturbed by a crying baby, my father took ill and died and my husband left for the war. I found the Plunket nurse sympathetic to my son's lack of ability to reach the required weight. She suggested I try 3-hourly feeding and a small complement by bottle but never suggested feeding on demand. I eventually worked out a system which worked for us both. I trained my son in bowel and bladder control at an early age but at the cost of constant vigilance. In the end I felt I was taking too much control of his life and was uneasy, especially as war widows in the 1950s were warned to beware of over-protecting their sons. When I became aware of less controlling ways of managing children's development, through post-graduate work at Victoria University in 1948 and 1949 and later, in 1951, at the London Institute of Education, I was ready to adopt them.

Fourteen years on with my second child I followed Parents' Centre ideas and used Plunket services only minimally. My daughter had no problems with gaining weight but was a wakeful child, night and day. My husband and I were not prepared to let her cry so had to work out our own solutions which was not an easy task. Our belief in Parents' Centre philosophy and support from members and friends helped us to cope. The experience furthered my interest in individual differences in infants and strengthened my belief that imposed routines could be harmful.

It appears that in some areas, however, Plunket nurses had freedom to adapt the advice to their clients and some pioneers had more positive recollections. I must admit that the Plunket manual *Modern Mothercraft* had tempered its advice somewhat. Its style, however, was very different from that of Winnicott and Spock who showed respect for the mother and gave reasons for their advice. Those teachers who were influenced by Susan Isaacs would have found the philosophy of *Modern Mothercraft* at odds with her belief 'that it is not what we do to the child that educates him, but what we enable him to do for himself, to see and hear and feel and understand for himself' (Isaacs, 1938, p.82). Both Helen Thornton in Upper Hutt and Jim Robb who grew up in a country area accepted the need for Plunket advice to change but were not excessively critical.

*We had good co-operation from Plunket. Our Plunket nurses were good. I didn't always do what my Plunket nurse told me to do but what she said was sensible and she was supportive. She didn't lay down the law which I think some of the nurses in Wellington did. (Helen T)*

*Plunket. I suppose given where their thinking was coming from – immediate physical health, it was not surprising they did not include fathers. Plunket visited. I have vague recollections. I remember hearing about fairly enlightened Plunket nurses ... There were twins 7 years younger than me [in his family]. The Plunket nurse visited them. I remember her as being very elderly and also recollect her as being rather pleasant and kindly. The twins initially weren't in good health, so rules were used only where necessary. (Jim)*

June Bastings noted the changes over 15 years:

*We would have a stand-off periodically. They were very good mostly. They respected the views I had and they were useful for weights and measures and we got on fairly well. ... When I was having my children from 1951-1966 they had some of the biggest changes – didn't they?*

No doubt some of these changes were due to acceptance of more liberal ideas by policy makers, such as Dr Helen Deem (Bryder, 2003) successor to Truby King. She aimed to make the Plunket movement more mother-friendly (May, 1997). Deem was able to convince Government, in 1941, that they should set up a model nursery school to be used in the training of Karitane nurses in Dunedin. Its purpose was to demonstrate 'best practice' in health and education and was modelled on the Australian Lady Gowrie Centres and the English nursery schools which were using progressive practices.

While some women simply appreciated the free and individual services provided by the Plunket nurses (Bryder, 2003), the pioneers believed that was not enough. They wanted the current Plunket philosophy to be updated in line with the new understanding of children's development and learning. They had identified new ideas and practices which gave consideration to the child's emotional needs, were conducive to building loving human relationships and recognised the continuity between early and later learning, in the words of Isaacs (1938) that 'the infant's problems are not essentially different from those which occupy the older child or the men of science or affairs' (p.85). They believed that a more democratic relationship, between Plunket nurses and mothers would help both parties. If such a relationship existed, parents could give honest feedback which would improve the services. Mothers could discuss their needs, anxieties and their own discoveries about children without feeling demeaned. Parenting could become more enjoyable. In spite of criticism, however, the pioneers would admit that Plunket provided a forum for women at home with children 'away from the traditional environs of church and family and, in many cases increased their confidence and self-esteem' (Else, 1993, p.258). It could be said that, in many ways, Plunket paved the way for the reforms Parents' Centre was able to promote. As Parents' Centre developed as an organisation, many Plunket mothers joined. Helen Deem herself stated that 'She would be the first to enrol in their classes if she again fell pregnant' (Bryder, 2003, p.129).

#### **4.5 Chapter overview**

In the 1940s and 1950s ideas about child rearing, were undergoing change in New Zealand. The effects of war on families and children created a need for workers in health and education to study ways of rehabilitating children whose family life had been disrupted. The study and research that ensued, particularly at London University's Institute of

Education, Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children, and the Tavistock Clinic, produced literature and demonstrated practices which developed further the progressive ideas which had gradually been gaining ground in this country. These ideas had to some degree, influenced education in New Zealand, in Wellington and Christchurch, in the training of students for teaching, in early childhood education, particularly in the Playcentre organisation, and in classes for children aged five and six in primary schools before the 1950s.

Although health services had not moved towards the progressive tradition before the war as much as those in education, they were becoming open to the same influences. Many nurses and doctors, such as pioneer Alice Fieldhouse served overseas in the armed forces, or as part of post-war rehabilitation. They were often involved in innovative practices. On their return to New Zealand they inevitably compared New Zealand practice which had remained unchanged for many years, with that seen overseas and in many cases applied what they had learned, or at least discussed the possibilities with colleagues. This led many professionals and patients to believe the health services needed a change of focus from exclusively physical health to more holistic considerations.

Gaps in the services for families became apparent to the pioneers of Parents' Centre. New ideas on childbirth, pioneered by people like Grantly Dick-Read, were discussed and championed by many women as pressure on the obstetric services highlighted what they saw as deficiencies. Many wanted information about, and training for, childbirth, particularly 'natural' birth. As there were few public ante-natal services, a demand built up particularly among women undertaking Playcentre training and listening to lectures in Plunket Mothers' Clubs. Those training as nurses and teachers were exposed to ideas about the importance of loving relationships with children from birth. They found the hospital services and the advice of Plunket at odds with their beliefs, particularly on relationships, feeding, toilet training, discipline and sex education. Concern was not limited to the management of young children. Teenagers too caused anxiety in their families and communities. Parents wanted knowledge to help their children avoid problems at all stages of development. Both conservative and progressive ideas about solutions were aired in the press, on air and in magazines and often stressed the importance of good relationships between parents and children. The public generally was becoming more and more aware

that early childhood was important and that parents needed knowledge about how to handle it well if children were to be guaranteed a sound start in life.

The constituency for change was growing and becoming more widespread. All it needed was a focus. The pioneers of Parents' Centre provided this when they were motivated by their experiences as consumers of the services for childbirth and parenthood to establish an organisation for this purpose.

In chapter 5 I analyse the qualities and experience the pioneers were able to draw on to found the organisation Parents' Centre which through parent education and advocacy was able to bring progressive ideas into general practice in New Zealand.

## CHAPTER 5:

### The Pioneers Of Parents' Centre: A 'Reasonable' Sort Of Background

*Well, I think I had a good beginning, not just marvellous parents, a good beginning.* (Helen Brew)

In this chapter I analyse the pioneers' responses to my questions about their family backgrounds, schooling, careers and experiences as parents (appendix 3). What emerges is the similarity of their life experiences and their ability to embrace and pursue progressive ideas about the upbringing of children from birth to three years of age. I identify links between these characteristics and their motivation to establish the Parents' Centre organisation. In most cases the pioneers regarded their childhoods as coming close to the ideals of Parents' Centre. These statements encapsulate the pattern that emerged in this study:

*I had a reasonable sort of background that may be fitted in with Parents' Centre ideas.* (Mary Logan)

*Overall, through Norah's and my own family life there was an affinity with the aims – no antagonism. The messiness and noise of kids was not a problem.* (Richard Savage)

#### 5.1 Family background

Eleven of the sixteen pioneers in my study were born and brought up in New Zealand. Of the others, three were born in England, one in Hungary and one in India. Those born here were almost entirely of European origin. Most grew up in an urban environment. Except in two cases, the families of the pioneers were small, three being the norm. They were of the pattern most common in the 1920s in New Zealand European society in that they comprised parents and their children only (Adair & Dixon, 1998). Their parents were together during the childhoods of the pioneers, except in two cases, where the fathers served in World War II.

Both mothers and fathers played significant roles in the upbringing of the 'pioneer' children. In most cases their families were remembered as happy. The recollections from Chris Cole-Catley and June Bastings could be applied to all the families, including my own. Happiness was regarded as an important criterion of success by progressive educationists. So by that criterion the pioneers had a good start in their family lives.

*I knew families were happy places ... My own family life was extraordinarily happy. (Chris)*

*I had a good family life. I had a happy childhood too. (June)*

Relationships with mothers were almost entirely regarded as good and affectionate as Beverley Morris stated, *'My mother was very warm and cuddly'*. As well as being affectionate, mothers showed the strength and ability needed to cope with adversity. Many had learned to provide for their families on limited incomes during the years after World War 1 and in the Depression of the 1930s. Lex Grey expressed his admiration for the way his mother coped when his father returned from World War 1 *'stone deaf'* and therefore unable to work. He paid tribute to the fact that, in spite of this hardship, his mother ensured her three children got a secondary education. Some mothers provided role models of women who had interests outside their home and family. Helen Brew described her mother as *'Grace Butler, the painter'*, Ann Rosenberg's mother was *'originally a founder of the free Kindergarten Association'*, and Chris Cole-Catley said that she never saw herself *'as a full-time mother'* because her *'own mother ran a school'*.

Overall, the mothers of the pioneers although they were strong and self-reliant present a picture of compassionate people who were sympathetic to those in need. Where they could, they contributed to the improvement of conditions for others less fortunate in their communities. Alice Fieldhouse recalled her mother's community involvement, in this way.

*She knew what it was like to be poor and that affected her attitude to other people in society and particularly to Maori people. She would never hear a word against the Maori people, with whom we had a lot of contact ... that made her very much a nice person who helped others and would get friendly. She watched her money, but she would give milk, or whatever she could. (Alice)*

My own mother demonstrated a strong commitment to the community, especially in support of our schools. One example was her work in the Ladies Auxiliary of Rongotai College. She was a good neighbour, helping others where she could. Through the Miramar Townswomen's Guild (Else, 1993) which she chaired during the war 1939-45, she organised comforts for the troops and food parcels for fellow Guild members in England. She was also the Guild's representative on the National Council of Women.



Fathers, too, are mentioned frequently and usually with affection. They were regarded in most cases, as supportive and encouraging, good humoured and involved with their children. Beverley Morris and Jim Robb recall spending time with their fathers.

*My father was a bit more sharp and he liked my company. (Beverley)*

*When I read about other people's childhoods I realise how different mine was, with my father, a farmer, around most of the time. I saw a lot of my father ... Some things my father said sounded pretty severe, but they were not usually translated into action! Can't complain – it was more the threat. (Jim)*

Helen Brew and Ephra Garrett remember their fathers as loving and supportive:

*My father, an equally loving, caring person. (Helen B)*

*My father was a very capable man ... I loved my father dearly ... he would say 'I don't understand what you're doing but I'm so pleased you're doing it'. (Ephra)*

Chris Cole-Catley's father provided a role model of a man who was not deterred from helping with what was regarded as 'women's work':

*My mother was born with only one arm and there were things that she found difficult to do. Some of my earliest memories of my father, a big strong football playing, rifle-shooting farmer, were of him pegging napkins on the line, feeding bottles to the baby, making school lunches – whatever! (Chris)*

My own father always helped with family chores and often looked after our family completely in school holidays when my mother went to Stratford to help care for her elderly mother. He tried to meet our needs for comfort, guidance and help, particularly in school work. His advice was not always relevant to my situation but even when I was quite young my affection for him led me to defend him against criticism. One of my own cherished and slightly bitter-sweet memories, is of his trying to cut out a doll's dress for me when I was sewing with a group of older girls. I knew it would not come up to their standards, so hid it to avoid hurting his feelings.

I have mentioned that some of the pioneers recalled their mothers working in the community to improve conditions and to right what they saw as injustice. Alice Fieldhouse and Helen Brew each had that experience with their fathers. Alice's father worked to provide cultural amenities for their community:

*My father and an engineer at the power station, were really the community leaders in the cultural life. They started a debating society ... after that there was the library. The society organised concerts and plays. (Alice)*

Helen Brew's father was one of the early protectors of the environment:

*My father cared a great deal about the terrible things that were happening in the environment because of the Arthur's Pass ... He was the first person to start the hut and to be the representative of the people. (Helen B)*

My own father worked as a Post Primary Teacher's representative as I have said in chapter 1. He also served on the Board of Governors of Wellington East Girls College which my sister and I attended and was active in organising money-raising events to improve amenities at Rongotai College. Thus, some of the pioneers at least as children would have had the experience of being involved in discussions about the strategies, successes and failures, that are concomitant with community activity. Such activity was an important part of my family life, with phone calls (often in the middle of meals) and visitors at all hours. Like many of the pioneers, I grew up with the conviction that voluntary work in the community was necessary; that ordinary people could make a difference and even had an obligation to make the effort to improve the quality of life for others, as well as themselves.

Only in one case was a father described as a negative influence among the pioneers. Helen Thornton recalled:

*I had a very difficult father, who had been in the war and he was very nervy and extremely critical. I had no self-esteem at all. So when I went to university I was so shy and ill-equipped for it, I didn't speak to anyone for a couple of weeks ... I was so sure that my kids must have a feeling of self-worth which has guided more or less everything I've done ever since. (Helen T)*

This experience was one of Helen T's motivations for working with Parents' Centre. She became committed to improving the self esteem of the mothers with whom she worked. In their work with children and their families after the war, the other pioneers frequently saw at first hand the effect parental problems had on children. I have discussed this in chapter 3.

Generally, the parents of the pioneers had ideas about child rearing which could be seen as progressive in the 1920s and 1930s. Mary Mowbray, Mary Logan and Helen Thornton all recalled that disciplinary practices in their families were noteworthy for being humane and

in advance of the usual practices which were dominated by corporal punishment (Ritchie, 1970, 1978; Marshall, 1997).

Mary Mowbray recalled:

*My grandparents [who brought Mary up after the death of her parents] were as modern as most of the parents of my friends, if not more so. (Mary M)*

Helen Thornton:

*Had never been spanked as a child ... My husband had never really been spanked either.*

Mary Logan remembered her father applying methods of discipline which would still be seen as humane and effective today.

*My father, being a bit advanced for his times, used to say 'Don't say don't' ... You must always make positive statements to children. Give them a positive alternative, if they are doing something dangerous or something you'd rather they didn't do ... He didn't believe in any corporal punishment. My brother was difficult ... he used to have terrible tantrums and my mother never knew what to do with him and wouldn't have hit him. She used to put him in his bedroom, until he felt better. (Mary L)*

My father rarely used corporal punishment. When he did it was usually to support my mother who, like most women in the 1920s and 30s was our major caregiver and had to deal with us in all our moods and for long periods on her own. She, however, used threats more than corporal punishment.

These experiences of family life gave the pioneers the belief that certain child rearing practices were conducive to a good start in life and that people like themselves could work successfully for change. Chris Cole-Catley sums up these ideas:

*I guess like most people I brought my perceptions from my own family life which was extraordinarily happy. I was extremely fortunate. (Chris)*

## **5.2 Schooling**

All the pioneers had a secondary education to a level that enabled them to undertake a tertiary training. In the 1930s and 40s many parents, appreciating the fact that education could enable their children to lead satisfying and rewarding lives as adults, were trying to give them opportunities to further their education. The parents of the pioneers ensured their children had that opportunity. Many New Zealand children were unable to go on to

secondary school because of the financial constraints on families. Girls were particularly constrained by the idea that advanced education was wasted on them. The pioneers themselves were so imbued with the sense of the importance of education that they stayed at school until they were qualified to train for a profession. In some cases, this meant they had to obtain the necessary money themselves. Both Chris Cole-Catley and Mary Dobbie earned the money required by writing for newspapers. The pioneers could thus be regarded as an exceptionally well-educated and motivated group at that time. In 1936 when most of them would have been at secondary school, only about 63% of primary school leavers had gone on to post-primary school and many had never reached Standard 6. Moreover, only a small percentage of New Zealanders stayed at secondary school past the leaving age of 14. Even fewer went on to tertiary education (Beeby, 1992).

The pioneers valued their education and had positive feelings about secondary school. Diana Mason explained how she felt: 'I loved Marsden and felt that it had given me so much'. Helen Thornton and Helen Brew showed an appreciation of inspiring teachers who served as role models:

*I was lucky, because we had a lot of women on the staff who couldn't get other jobs because they'd graduated and everything stopped (because of the war). I had two women with PhDs in chemistry, teaching chemistry. We had a Doctor of Divinity teaching religious studies. Wonderful role models! (Helen T)*

*I just happened to come from a very good secondary school, Avonside Girls' High School. And a wonderful Head Mistress, Miss Samuel. Even though she had a big lump on her back, which was diagnosed as cancer, she kept going until she died. She had class! (Helen B)*

I too was fortunate. I had five years secondary education and by the time I reached the 7th form (called 6A at the time) in 1938 at Wellington East Girls College, there were only two in my class. Most of the girls had left as soon as they turned fourteen. They were allowed, by law, to begin full-time paid employment at that age. Beverley Morris related a similar situation in 1940 at the same school when there were only four girls in 6A.

I did not enjoy Wellington East Girls' College which I attended from 1934 to 1938 but I never questioned the need to stay until I had received the qualifications necessary for tertiary education. I often felt excluded because I was over-promoted and physically a slow developer. I felt pressure to excel academically and was susceptible to shaming which was

used often as a way of 'encouraging' us, especially in the top 'A' forms. This was in contrast to my primary school which had been a positive experience for me and an interesting, stimulating and exciting place in which to learn. Nevertheless, I now appreciate the good teaching Wellington East Girls' College provided, particularly in English, French and Latin and the opportunities for leadership I was given. Although the school was tightly controlled by the curriculum and teaching methods, I was enabled to promote new ideas such as team building among the prefects and writing about sensitive issues, such as conservation, when I was editor of the school magazine. I received positive reinforcement for my foray into 'moving and shaking' when a member of our Board of Governors, Mrs Knox Gilmer who was devoted to preservation of the environment congratulated me on my article, publicly at the prize-giving ceremony in 1938.

All the pioneers left school and trained for careers, even if they were not entirely clear at the time as to which careers they should undertake. As Alice Fieldhouse recalled:

*I had gone to university because I did not know what career I wanted to follow. My teachers had encouraged me to prepare myself for secondary school teaching.*  
(Alice)

The pioneers were all well qualified to undertake tertiary education in their chosen fields. All but five entered New Zealand universities or teachers colleges in Wellington and Christchurch which were, to some degree, incorporating liberal ideas into their work. Seven went on to acquire some post-graduate training in England, three in London, where they came under the influence of progressive educationists.

### 5.3 Careers

All the pioneers took up careers which involved relationships with people. Some of them also had responsibility for community education. They gained experience of speaking to groups of parents, in Plunket, Kindergarten and Playcentre, Marriage Guidance, churches and Parent-Teacher associations. The humane views of the pioneers towards people, their role models of parents demonstrating the power to challenge injustice and what they considered cruel treatment and the insights and success they gained from community experience, gave them the conviction, confidence and knowledge, before they became parents, that groups of people 'with a similar focus' (Lex) can effect change.

Those pioneers who had done post-graduate study overseas played a role in familiarising their New Zealand colleagues with the books, films and lecture notes produced by their teachers. This intellectual activity led them to be involved in a continuing interchange of ideas with leaders in their fields. Later Helen Brew and Beverley Morris visited England and formed important working relationships with leaders in progressive education. I had an ongoing relationship with Dorothy Gardner, director of the course I undertook at the London Institute of Education (1950-1951). When I became the leader of a group who founded a parent cooperative primary school, Matauranga in 1962 (Rose, 1990; Bell 1963), Gardner was helpful and supportive. She honoured the school with a visit when she was in New Zealand in 1966.

The education the pioneers received and its successful outcome groomed them to become avid students and aware of the advantages that education could provide for all children. Like me, many became interested in children who were not benefiting from the services offered. This concern motivated them to learn more about children's development in their families and communities.

Although as I have said earlier, the family life of the pioneers was mainly happy, they were aware at an early age and at a personal level, that there could be problems in family life. This knowledge provided the seed-bed for later concern. Helen Brew and Ann Rosenberg had grown up with stories about childbirth which had led them to be concerned about the process and the way women were treated in hospital. Helen B recalled the difficulties her mother had faced:

*My darling mother nearly died with her first baby and that has always affected me. She used to tell me in detail what happened. (Helen B)*

Ann Rosenberg gained some of her convictions that hospitals were not necessarily safe places for childbirth from her own mother, who 'had her babies at home'. She thought it was dangerous to go into hospital:

*A man working in my father's office couldn't afford a home birth, so his wife went into hospital and died. (Ann)*

My mother often talked of her problems caused by what she regarded as the unnecessary intervention of her doctor who she claimed wanted to get my birth over so he could play his Sunday golf.

Barbara Hodge, Mary Dobbie and Helen Brew remembered the distress to all the family caused by the hospitalisation of young family members. Barbara's sister was hospitalised at the age of three for twelve weeks and not allowed any visits. Barbara described the effect this traumatic experience had on her parenting and that of her sister:

*I dreaded the thought that one of my children would have to go to hospital ... I remember my sister going to hospital ... it made a great impact on me, as well as Joan. Joan would not talk about it for years. Later she resisted putting her son into hospital. This was in my mind when we talked about the hospital business and I dreaded the thought, that one of my children would have to go into hospital.*

I now consider there was a direct link between my experiences as a child separated from my mother when my brother was born and the subsequent deterioration in my relationship with her. I was one year and ten months old and eighty years on, I can still recall my distress. My mother was in a nursing home for two weeks and I did not see her at all in that time. When we were reunited, much of her attention was necessarily devoted to my baby brother. I believe that experience of separation played a large part in affecting my relationships with my mother and my grandmother with whom I stayed at the time. I became attached to my father and grandfather. I appreciated the affection and support they gave me but I became quite hostile to my mother and grandmother whose positive roles in my upbringing I can now appreciate and acknowledge. As an adult I can empathise with the difficulties the first child in a family faces and the ways in which the hospital system of that time exacerbated this. I am certain that this knowledge fuelled my energy and even passion when I discussed this topic with students and parents.

#### **5.4 Support from partners**

This section will show that the pioneers, as adults were helped to have a large degree of control over their lives by their husbands. In their careers Helen Brew, Chris Cole-Catley, Alice Fieldhouse, Lex Grey, Beverley Morris, Jim Robb and I were supported in our desire to deviate from 'normal' practice by our partners. The pioneers married people whose views on family life and children were compatible with their own. They attested to strong support from partners, in enabling them to work in and be advocates for the Parents' Centre organisation and other projects they wished to undertake. All their marriages remained intact during their children's early years and for most into old age. Barbara



Hodge paid tribute to the value of her husband's support. She could obviously rely on it and put her energy into pursuing her own concerns:

*Pete was very supportive and that support is worth so much. It gives you an inner strength. You can put your resources where you have to. It is very precious and important.* (Barbara)

Beverley Morris' husband regarded her job as equally, if not more important, than his. This was unusual in the 1950s, when many women gave up their jobs to follow their husbands who had to move around the country to advance in their careers, or saw their role as that of prime care-giver of the children:

*He [her husband Peter] would have given up his job if I had wanted to go to Auckland for a job.* (Beverley)

Support often involved practical help, such as baby-sitting as Helen Thornton recalled:

*Royd was always tremendously supportive. I never felt that he didn't want me to do it ... quite often at night I had been out at Parents' Centre meetings and he had to babysit.* (Helen T)

Childcare could be a problem in families, with husbands having to settle tired children who often resented mothers leaving. Some husbands, including my own, sometimes complained that their wives were too busy to give them the attention they wanted. Chris Cole-Catley recalled '*that at times he wanted a little bit more of my time*'. But it was something in my experience the parents could resolve because they believed in the cause. In my own family, this experience strengthened the bond between my husband and the children and became particularly apparent when they became teenagers and often turned to him for support.

In some cases, the partners of the pioneers helped them to undertake post-graduate training which would give further opportunities and advancement in their careers. Ann Rosenberg's experience can now be seen as extraordinary in the context of the time and was certainly in marked contrast to the usual pattern.

*I went with the first lot of students after the war, 1945-46 to a course in Social Work at Manchester University. I'd only been married four months and everyone was surprised at that, but I couldn't put it off. He was very encouraging and encouraged me to go.* (Ann)

My husband always gave me a day at the weekend, for study, preparation and reading and did many hours of baby-sitting at night while I ran classes for people training to be Playcentre supervisors. He was always interested in what went on in classes. Feedback from him on my summaries of the events and topics discussed was most helpful to me.

The women I interviewed had firm views about their roles as women. These were quite unconventional at the time but were supported by their husbands, as Ann Rosenberg said:

*I never intended to be in any kitchen. We built our house on the Cashmere Hills. The architect said 'The kitchen must have a view'. I said 'Why?' I'm not going to spend any time in the kitchen. (Ann)*

Their husbands also stood by them when they sought to challenge the prevailing wisdom, such as hospital being the best place for childbirth to take place. Ann recalled;

*I had the third at home. There were two doctors here willing to do that ... Wolf was there and helped. (Ann)*

They were either convinced these practices advocated by the Parents' Centre pioneers were right from their own training, or became convinced, once they were exposed to the ideas, as Diana Mason recalled:

*Bruce was very much behind my working with Parents' Centre because he had trained at Teachers Training College. He already had some of his own ideas about what was the right way to treat the young. He was an absolutely wonderful father. Bruce was one of the first 'house-husbands'. (Diana)*

The husbands of the pioneers were also willing to be included in every aspect of the birth, such as ante-natal education and support during labour. They also played their part in child-rearing as Ephra Garrett described.

*He was a very involved father. My husband was very good with the children, even though he was away a lot at weekends. (Ephra)*

Mary Dobbie's husband encouraged her to speak out publicly:

*My husband said to me why don't I go and talk about children's visiting hours. I said I couldn't do that, but the more I thought, the more I felt I should ... My husband was keen for me to have a home birth. (Mary D)*

My own husband had no child development theory in his training as an accountant, but from his own experience as a child, wholeheartedly supported the humane practices advocated by Parents' Centre.

These characteristics were different from those of the New Zealand male portrayed in fiction in the 1940s. A major theme in the novels and short stories of the late 1940s is the polarity that exists between the sexes and the difficulties faced when men and women came together in marriage. As historian Jock Phillips (1987, p.1237) stated:

The wives feel isolated and abused, the men prefer their friendship with their mates ... they were incapable of dealing with the traumas of marriage and childbirth.

### 5.5 Experiences as parents

The pioneers all said they liked children and looked forward to having them:

*There was no question that you didn't have children like so many people do now. We both always loved children. I've always responded to their curiosity about the world which I've found absolutely fascinating ... I enjoy their innocence and their freedom and I can't bear to think of anybody abusing a child.* (Diana Mason)

*When I had my own, they were a treat.* (Mary Dobbie)

I have always enjoyed children, their openness, their enthusiasm, their wonder about the world expressed in questions which make me re-think and clarify my own knowledge and values and their ability to retain information about things which interest them. Like all the pioneers, I hate to see children abused verbally, emotionally or physically.

The pioneers had some control over their family planning and, in the main, were able to have children when they believed the time was right. Beverley Morris recalled:

*Peter and I were determined not to have a baby before he went overseas [to the war]. So we managed to get family planning. We did want children and were both keen on them. After teaching for five years, we decided to have our four children.* (Beverley)

But even for these well-educated women, methods of birth control at the time were often unreliable. Some admitted to having more children than they had planned, but they were able to cope and seemed quite relaxed about it, as Helen Brew and June Bastings recalled:

*I had three kids very fast ... and that was in spite of the best contraception* (Helen B).

*We only wanted four, but never mind.* (June)

Some of the pioneers even regarded the unplanned births, as an advantage in the long term. Mary Mowbray found she was pregnant not long before she and her husband were leaving for the United States, where he was to study. In seeking out the best conditions for

childbirth in the United States, she became involved with the Association for Parent Education in Cleveland, an organisation very similar to Parents' Centre. This gave her a chance to compare conditions there and in New Zealand. Mary M enjoyed the involvement. The parents she met were interested in Parents' Centre in New Zealand and Mary M was often asked to speak.

All but two of the pioneers, Barbara Hodge and Mary Mowbray, were parents before they became involved in the organisation. Diana Mason had been able to apply the ideas from her family life and her post-graduate training as a doctor, to the upbringing of her own children. These included progressive ideas on feeding, toilet training, sex education and discipline:

*In our handling of our children we were extremely liberal in our thinking about the way children should be brought up ... I had liberal ideas, in terms of how babies should be with their mothers at all times ... I definitely believed in demand feeding. I have objections to the idea of sitting a child down on a potty and saying 'You do it!!!' I was very relaxed about toilet training. I think I got there before Parents' Centre. I had my ideas fairly flexibly fixed. Because of my knowledge of anatomy I always insisted that the body parts were known by their correct name ... we weren't smackers, or used any form of corporal punishment. (Diana)*

Helen Thornton and her husband realised the limitations of their training as scientists and had been making up for what they saw as deficiencies in their knowledge by consulting books before they had children:

*We had done quite a bit of reading about childhood because we were both scientists and scientists aren't really good about human relationships. (Helen T)*

Chris Cole-Catley and her husband sought out services for childbirth which would provide what they thought of as the ideal, but were disappointed. They realised that even people who had the conviction, confidence and resources to meet their own needs could rarely find the services they sought.

*I had rooming-in in 1950 with my second baby in Alexandra Hospital. I used to sneakily demand feed. We had to go out to Lower Hutt to get rooming-in for my next child [where she could feed on demand]. (Chris)*

This experience was a factor in Chris' belief that the pioneers, as consumers of services, needed to use every available opportunity to convince those in authority of the value of their ideas. Mary Dobbie, in her work with Professor Carey at the National Women's Hospital in Auckland, grasped the opportunity to negotiate an ideal birth for herself and

was able to convince him through her experience, that the ideas Parents' Centre advocated for childbirth could be applied practically in his hospital.

*I told him [Professor Carey] about my wish to room-in with my baby and to have as near as possible to a natural birth ... and I had all those things. (Mary D)*

Not all the pioneers, however, were convinced of the value of Parents' Centre ideas before they joined. Mary Mowbray had not been a parent when she was initially involved in the organisation:

*I think I had a very authoritarian outlook originally ... I think, left on my own, I might have had a kind of attitude that was summed up by one of my neighbours when she said 'kids is kids and grown-ups is grown-ups'!. (Mary M)*

Barbara Hodge confessed 'My concept of children was I had never even thought about them ... I didn't have any concept. I could say I was conceptless'.

## **5.6 Coping with criticism**

All the pioneers had been employed immediately after their training for their respective careers. In most cases they had a sufficient level of responsibility which had enabled them to put their progressive principles into practice, and gain the assurance that their ideas were sound and practical. Most of them had learned ways of dealing with criticism in a number of different situations and a variety of settings, as Alice Fieldhouse, who learned to defend herself as a child in her family recalled: '*as I grew up I could argue with my father and both of us enjoyed it*'. There were times as Mary Logan recalled when they felt some frustration and uncertainty: If you are surrounded by people who criticise you, you start to feel very insecure.

Some pioneers had worked out ways of coping with criticism. One was Helen Brew who, during her student days, had learned this skill. When still a student she had tried to organise meetings of the Students' Association, so that 'the students could have a voice in their meetings'. As the first woman president of the Students' Association at Christchurch Training College, she had gained experience of standing up to students, particularly men who found her position offensive:

*John O'Shea [a fellow student, later head of Pacific Films] got up and shouted 'What are you doing on that stage?' and I told him 'When you've finished, Sir, I would be grateful for a bit of silence from you'. (Helen B)*

This was good practice in defending herself against some of the attacks she survived later, from people opposed to her ideas. Helen B came to appreciate the support she had been given by her peers. As one of the first speech therapists trained in New Zealand Helen B gained support from the senior inspector and many parents and teachers. Experiences such as these validated her belief that support was important.

Diana Mason had been an obstetrician for some years and had become accustomed to defending her progressive views to other doctors, nurses and midwives, Plunket nurses and patients. A testimony to her success was the number of people who sought her services. She described her progress in standing up for her convictions thus:

*I regard circumcision as an extraordinary acceptance of something that was probably brought into the Islands of the South Pacific by the missionaries ... At first I meekly gave in and did a few and then I decided not to do it any more ... I used to use an argument to quite a lot of parents ... Do you want me to take this child's appendix out just because they might get appendicitis? and of course that*

involvement. They had learned to defend Playcentre philosophy and practice successfully to parents within the organisation and others in the community.

Jim Robb was training social workers, using the methods of the Tavistock Clinic in London (Dicks 1970). This caused friction with 'a rather critical Director of Child Welfare' (Jim). He did not abandon his ideas but learned to proceed with caution. Eventually he was successful. Ann Rosenberg too met with criticism of her progressive ideas in her role as a social worker. On her first day she was told by her superior officer 'Anything you may have learned before will be of no use to you'. Having been convinced that her ideas were useful and practical, she applied them where she could in her career. Later she was able to apply the same ideas in Christchurch Parents' Centre, particularly in helping parents to enjoy parenthood.

Similarly, Alice Fieldhouse, as a tutor of post-graduate nurses had to 'tread carefully' in applying the ideas she had gained in her training at Columbia and with work for the World Health Organisation to her education of nurses:

*I was aware of J's [a fellow tutor] problems of associating with Helen Brew ... I attended some of the sessions, where I had invited them [Parents' Centre leaders] to talk to the students and knew the problems which followed, where such activities were prohibited ... all the tutors were put under some constraints. (Alice)*

My own experience of applying my progressive ideas was, on the whole, a fortunate one. In Pahiatua Kindergarten, the parents were so pleased to get a director for their hard-won and beautiful kindergarten building, that they welcomed me although I was not trained as a kindergarten teacher. The parents, particularly those on the committee who were leaders in the town, cooperated readily with my progressive ideas. When I was later appointed to Training College my ideas were welcomed. I was supported by the College leaders, Waghorn and Scott whenever I was criticised.

I have agreed that the founding group of pioneers were experienced in dealing with criticism. This stood them in good stead when establishing the Parents' Centre organisation. They supported each other. They used sound techniques of identifying those in authority who were already applying progressive principles, albeit in a quiet way and gaining their support. They also learned to bide their time and use their knowledge when the time was right.



The experiences of the pioneers in effecting change led them to realise that on their own they could do little except proceed slowly and in small ways. It was important to meet their own needs and harness the energy for change that they had identified in the community. They needed to find some mechanism which could achieve that. When Helen Brew publicised her concern about the damage to mothers and children caused by the obstetric services, many parents could relate to that experience. They realised that association with a person who was prepared to act and capable of attracting support could affect the change they wanted. The support Helen B was able to elicit from other women convinced some of the pioneers, that she was the leader they needed. The story Helen B often told can be summarised thus:

*What happened when I had my first baby was horrendous ... You see the first time you had a baby then and the way you were treated was quite antipathetic to the way you were treated as a child. For the first two births I was put out ... anaesthetized and I didn't even know if I'd had a baby or not ... I didn't get to see the baby for another 6 to 8 hours. It wasn't good. And the next one, two years later, I actually had my feet up in stirrups. So these two experiences were not pleasant. Absolutely humiliated, just a body giving birth and I thought it was time something was done about it. (Helen B)*

This was a powerful story for women.

## **5.7 Motivation**

In the introductory chapter I quoted the poet O'Shaughnessy who celebrated the strength of groups of like-minded people. Barbara Hodge also testified to the power of group support:

*What's more, even more important, is the meeting of like minds.*

The 'meeting of like minds' appears to have been a significant factor in providing the Parents' Centre pioneers with the impetus to work for change and to found an organisation where, by force of numbers and pooled expertise, they could be more effective than they had been when working in isolation.

By the early 1950s, the pioneers of Parents' Centre and a sufficient number of 'others', were convinced that the more progressive and humane practices being promoted for children over three needed to be applied from birth. They knew that there was a constituency for change among young parents and after much consideration saw a

consumer organisation as the best model for passing on their ideas. This concept will be developed further in chapter 7.

Another motivation was the desire to carry the knowledge and practical skills they had acquired in their training and work experience into an organisation which could help parents. Ann Rosenberg said:

*I really went along to Parents' Centre to help facilitate new ideas I had got in my social work training, where those seeds had been sown.*

Most of the pioneers as I have indicated had education and experience in passing on progressive ideas to students, teachers, mothers and Playcentre parents. They saw the opportunity that could be provided by the Parents' Centre organisation to reach a wider constituency of parents and were prepared to take up the challenge. They had positive feelings about people and their power, given the right environment, knowledge and support. Parents' Centre for them, became another step in the path of promoting their views on parenting.

## **5.8 The catalyst to start**

In 1952 the Parents' Centre organisation had begun ante-natal classes in education and preparation for childbirth. Both Helen Brew and her husband Quentin saw the captive audience provided by these classes as an opportunity to transmit progressive ideas about child rearing to parents. This particular development attracted some of the pioneers in this study. Barbara Hodge and Mary Mowbray point out that they came initially as learners and stayed to pass on the knowledge they had gained. Some such as Diana Mason, Beverley Morris, Jim Robb and I were invited to join to pass on their expertise, and welcomed the opportunity. They recounted that:

*Helen Brew rang me up and said 'Would you be prepared to come and lecture' and I said 'Of course I would ... I think Helen wanted to approach me because she had heard from patients of mine about my ideas on what was the right thing to do in terms of liberalising what then I regarded as fustian ideas. (Diana)*

*It was a place where I could perhaps help some women understand what children are all about ... and could talk about various things that still worried me about how children were being treated and getting the ideas of child development across. (Beverley)*

*I was doing things with an organisation which, on the face of it, was valuable and tied in with my work. (Jim)*

Those pioneers involved in Playcentre saw Parents' Centre as an effective way of educating parents to provide good conditions for growth at the start of life. Often lecturers such as Helen Brew, Mary Logan and I lectured to both organisations. A further complementarity developed between Playcentre and the Parents' Centre. Helen Thornton in her Playcentre work, identified a need in her community and proceeded to meet it:

*Eventually we began to see that there was something wrong with Upper Hutt. It was just too difficult for people to have a decent ante-natal education ... it was a long way to go especially when you had other children ... it was women who came from the poorer areas, who never had a chance, that we wanted in the classes ... we could see that people needed help. (Helen T)*

Some joined because they felt that participation would give them the confidence and support to carry the ideas they had been advocating with students into practice with their own children. Alice Fieldhouse was one of these. She came from a nursing background and had many years of teaching before she embarked on parenthood:

*Parents' Centre was in tune with the philosophy of life I had developed in theory. I was well prepared to become a Parents' Centre parent, but I still had a lot to learn in practice. (Alice)*

For the two pioneers Barbara Hodge and Mary Mowbray who had come to learn and stayed to contribute, it was the start of a journey. They were offered the opportunity to join Parents' Centre by Diana Mason, their obstetrician:

*She said 'Barbara, I think you would benefit from going along to Parents' Centre' ... I knew nothing ... it was all totally new to me ... I knew nothing about children, nothing about childbirth. I hadn't even thought about it. (Barbara)*

*Diana said the classes at the YWCA [Parents' Centre] were about exercises and discussions for both parents and that appealed to me ... There was nothing in my training or in my education that gave me what I considered enough information to deal with children and family life. (Mary M)*

Pioneers, such as Mary Mowbray and Richard Savage, valued the education they received in the classes and were prepared to contribute their strengths, when invited:

*Having been to Parents' Centre first and then come back with the second pregnancy I was asked if I would join the committee – I was asked to edit the newsletter and Nola Fox [President at the time] who had been my teacher at school*

*had invited me saying 'I really think it would be a good idea if you went on the committee' (Mary M).*

*I went on the committee because Norah [a pioneer now deceased] strongly supported it, but was too busy with the children to give the time ... later when Helen Brew was going to have a baby and could not continue as president, I agreed to take that role for a year to keep the administrative side going. (Richard)*

All these pioneers moved on to become 'movers and shakers'.

## **5.9 Participation in Parents' Centre**

The pioneers would share Ephra Garrett's sentiments that '*alongside Helen {Brew's} involvement, that of the rest of the pioneers looks quite small, but all played important roles. Many played several.*' Parents' Centre was an organisation which fitted in well with family life, so for most of the pioneers there was a feeling that they and their families were enriched, not diminished, by participation. This topic is developed further in chapter 7.

I was able to use and keep alive the knowledge and skills I had acquired in my work with students at Wellington Training College. While my daughter enjoyed the playgroup. I benefited from the discussions in the classes and with the leaders. I appreciated the opportunities to read the research literature which Helen Brew was able to obtain through her networks and the up-to-date books we were able to buy for use by members. Certainly I could not have bought them as an individual at that time because of cost and import restrictions which limited the number of books on sale in shops. For me, as for the other pioneers, being involved was a joy as much as a chore. Ann Rosenberg may well have spoken for all of us, when she said, '*I did stay around with my kids and thoroughly enjoyed those years*'.

All the pioneers I have interviewed were deeply involved in Parents' Centre, gave generously of their time and skills and undertook many roles. Helen Brew, the founder, had occupied many positions. Her involvement is discussed more fully in chapter 7.

June Bastings and Barbara Hodge also played a number of roles. June said:

*I was on the committee for a while and helped with the library and the crèche during classes ... I also led discussion groups. (June)*

And Barbara recounted that she:

*...was secretary for a couple of years and then I became president ... I used to have various other supportive roles in fundraising and hosting little groups. (Barbara)*

Helen Brew, Ephra Garrett, Helen Thornton and Richard Savage, were presidents. Mary Dobbie helped to establish and became president of the Auckland Parents' Centre and set up ante-natal classes at Bethany Hospital. She was also Federation Secretary from 1964-66 and Bulletin editor from 1963-76. Alice Fieldhouse, Ephra Garrett, Lex Grey, Mary Logan, Diana Mason, Beverley Morris, Jim Robb, Ann Rosenberg, Helen Thornton, and I organised and contributed to classes, submissions and in-service training of leaders. Mary Mowbray wrote the newsletter for Wellington Parents' Centre. Chris was the first editor of the Bulletin and did much to publicise the organisation in the media.

### **5.10 Chapter overview**

This chapter has demonstrated that the family life of the pioneers had been compatible with Parents' Centre ideals. The pioneers came from families which were, in the main, loving, secure and stable. Relationships with both parents were reportedly almost all good. Both parents played major roles in the upbringing of their children and were, on the whole, remembered with affection. Most of the parents of the pioneers were progressive to some degree in their disciplinary practices and were often described as ahead of their time. They valued education highly. At a time when economic circumstances in New Zealand made it difficult to keep children at school beyond 14, the families of the pioneers had ensured that their daughters, as well as their sons, had enough secondary education to qualify for acceptance in the tertiary training courses required for careers in education, health, social work and law.

All the pioneers took up the careers they trained for. Given the opportunities World War II provided, the women gained experience of leadership in their fields, both with children and parents, at an earlier stage in their careers than had previously been common for women. After the war, some were able to travel overseas for post-graduate study. Their study, and experience gave them the conviction that they should play a part in ensuring that parents and policy makers realised that the foundations of mental health lay in the child rearing of the first three years; that prevention of problems was simpler and less costly than cure.

Through their work in different but related fields, the pioneers came to associate with like-minded people in New Zealand and overseas. It became obvious that efforts as individuals were only of limited value and that an organisation was necessary to provide a vehicle for change. Some of the pioneers were already involved in successful consumer organisations, such as Playcentre and Family Planning. Through participation in these, they came in contact with parents who were seeking help with childbirth and child rearing, especially of children under three. They realised there was a constituency for change. I have argued that it was the pioneers' own experiences of childbirth and early parenthood which provided the trigger to found the Parents' Centre organisation.

## CHAPTER 6:

### The Parents' Centre Organisation: A Meeting Of Like Minds

*'Without my Parents' Centre involvement I might never have encountered others of like mind'* (Mary Dobbie)

A detailed story of the foundation and early days of Parents' Centre has been told by Mary Dobbie in her book *The Trouble with Women* (1990). In this chapter I tell the story from a different angle, the perspective of the pioneers 50 years on from the foundation of the organisation. I chart the progress of the pioneers from their attempts to effect change in the health and education services for children under three at a personal level, in their careers and family lives, to the formation of the Parents' Centre organisation which became a major force in 'moving and shaking' the services for childbirth and parenthood. In the first section of this chapter, I identify their motivation and record their views on the formation of the Parents' Centre organisation. In the second section I consider the ideas of a group of progressive educationists who became what I shall term 'gurus' of Parents' Centre and analyse their influence on the pioneers in developing, supporting and strengthening their basic philosophy and applying it in the New Zealand context.

In Chapters 3 and 4 I have described how new, more liberal ideas were influencing educational practice in playcentres, kindergartens and classes in schools for children under eight years of age. Women coming together in groups such as Plunket Mothers' clubs, playcentres, kindergartens and the workplace and reading papers and women's magazines, were becoming aware of the new ideas about the development and education of young children. A desire for change in the maternity services was being fostered by the books of Grantly Dick-Read and his disciples, since the publication of Dick-Read's *Childbirth Without Fear* (1942). Wellington became a fertile ground for practical action towards reform and a focus for a consumer voice. My story of the progress of the organisation begins with Helen Brew who, as I have described earlier, was influenced by Bevan-Brown during her training in Christchurch as teacher and speech therapist.

#### 6.1 The role of Helen Brew in founding Parents' Centre

Helen Brew was acknowledged by all the pioneers as the key person in the foundation of the Parents' Centre organisation, although others such as Diana Mason played significant



roles. They shared Ephra Garrett's view that '*I would like to say I'm eternally grateful to Helen Brew and Diana Mason in having the energy to carry it through*'. Helen B's training and subsequent career were discussed in chapter 5. In her work she had become convinced of the significance of birth as '*one of the great maturing experiences of life – one which has a subtle and often powerful influence on future family relationships*', (*Parents' Centres Bulletin*<sup>6</sup>, No.1, 1954, p.3). Where childbirth was not handled well, as had been the case with her own mother and many of the mothers she worked with as a speech therapist, she observed that the situation often became a source of conflict between mother and child.

On the return of Quentin Brew from war service, Helen Brew left her work in Hawke's Bay and the Brews married and embarked on family life. Between the births of her first and second children, Helen B. had studied Dick-Read's *Childbirth Without Fear* (1942) and 'came very close to achieving a natural birth ... like many other women, at the time, who had trained and educated themselves in Read's methods ... [she] found the maternity hospital experiences unsatisfactory, to say the least, with an unequal battle of wills being fought over orthodox versus unorthodox procedures' (Dobbie, 1990, p.4). Influenced by her sister Grace Adams (1968) who was a member of the Christchurch Psychological Society, Helen B spoke to that group on the need for change in the obstetric services. As I mentioned earlier, the talks received much publicity through the efforts of Chris Cole-Catley who not only reported them but influenced their position and frequency first in the Christchurch Press. The articles also received prominence in Wellington newspapers through the efforts of Marie Bullock, journalist, actor and mother who had successfully given birth using the Dick-Read techniques during home confinements (Dobbie, 1990).

A key event in the formation of Parents' Centre, was the appointment of Quentin Brew to the Department of Education in Wellington, as a District School psychologist in 1947. His second wife, Margit, wrote this tribute to him, on his death. It was published in the *New Zealand Herald* (circa 1977):

Immediately post-war, Quentin, with one other student, was the first to train under Professor Ralph Winterbourn, at Canterbury University, to become an educational psychologist. In the position of District Psychologist in Wellington, the only psychologist in the Department, he had full responsibility for children in a large part of the North Island, as well as the northernmost part of the South Island – a

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<sup>6</sup> In future referred to as PCB

position he held for some 20 years ... While he never, in any way, set out to seek recognition, his influence was very considerable, in the field of parent education ... He will be remembered foremostly for his immediate and unconditional human warmth. He had the unique ability to detect and focus on the positive aspects of his fellow men, in a way that gave them new hope and strength.

The Brew family moved to Wellington, where a number of active and confident young professional people who were also parents, were promoting liberal ideas in the arts, education and health. The Brews became involved in these groups, making new friendships and renewing those with others. These included Chris Cole who by then was working on the *Southern Cross*, a left-wing newspaper; Ray Stroobant, a lecturer in education at Wellington Training College, Bruce Mason a playwright and director in Unity Theatre and pioneers Jim Robb, Diana, Lex Grey and Beverley and Peter Morris. All these people, as young parents, had recent experience of the services for childbirth and parenthood and believed that change was necessary.

One of the concerns of this group and their friends was the lack of services available for family planning. They had been drawn to the Family Planning Association which was founded in 1936, by a group of Wellington women who set up the Sex, Hygiene and Birth Regulation Society (Else, 1993, p.264). This organisation became a catalyst for the foundation of Parents' Centre through the interest of its members in childbirth. Elsie Locke was its first secretary. 'Locke had experienced a successful birth in the Dick-Read method and had influenced many students training in midwifery at St. Helen's Hospital, because she allowed them to participate' (Dobbie, 1990, p.16). Her example emboldened other women to try the Dick-Read methods. A physiotherapist at St. Helens Hospital, Mrs Dufour, with the approval of the medical director Sylvia Chapman, established and conducted exercise classes in which women were able to practise the preparatory techniques. Dufour had trained at St. Thomas' hospital in London and kept in contact with the sister in charge. Other New Zealand nurses had visited St. Thomas' which had become 'a Mecca for everyone who wanted its teaching certificate in maternity exercises (Dobbie, 1990, p.16). They had learned the new ways and became convinced of their worth. On their return to New Zealand these nurses passed on their ideas to those interested and explored ways of incorporating them into their work. Dufour, through St. Helen's, was contributing to the constituency for change developing among midwives and many mothers.

Most members of the Family Planning Association were middle class women, 'though a smaller number of working class women were initially attracted by the services and stayed to become staunch supporters' (Fenwick, 1993, p.265). In many ways the association provided a model for Parents' Centre, in its membership and strategies, particularly in eventually winning the cooperation of doctors so that the services became available to all women. 'NZFPA skillfully negotiated its survival in the face of a powerful, organised threat, learning lessons that were to stand it in good stead for the controversies to come' (Fenwick, 1993, p.266).

In 1951 Helen Brew was asked to talk to the Family Planning Association at the University Women's clubrooms in Lambton Quay, Wellington. She spoke about her first birth experience and the rigidity of hospital practices comparing that with her subsequent births where she had success with the Dick-Read methods. The address received wide publicity, again thanks to the efforts of Chris Cole-Catley and Marie Bullock who by that time was a close friend and neighbour of Helen B.

The interest aroused by Helen Brew's address led to discussion about how change in the management of childbirth could be advanced. The circle involved in these discussions included a number of people in health, such as Joy Alley, tutor in obstetrics at the Nurses Post-Graduate school, but also a number of educationists, such as Ray Stroobant. Thus, the founding group had an educational, as well as a health focus from the beginning and this finally resulted in a meeting on 6 December, 1951 of a group interested in forming an organisation for information and advice about natural childbirth. The group gathered at the Brews' home on 28 February 1952 (Early Wellington Branch Minutes 1952-1979, Parents' Centre Archives<sup>7</sup> Box 1.0). The group consisted of: 'Mrs Cole, Mrs Robinson, Mrs McLeod, Miss Hills (a midwife), Mrs Hamerton, Mrs Elliot, Mrs Evans, Miss Clayton (a Plunket ante-natal sister), Mrs Ward, Mrs Miller, Mrs Dyer, and Mr and Mrs Brew'. 'The object of this meeting was to form an information centre and to assist mothers in pregnancy until doctors, realising the importance of adequate education, take over this job that is rightly theirs' (PCA, Box 1.0, Minutes 28 February 1952). It was to be a self-help group, with mothers teaching other mothers. The organisation was called 'The Natural Childbirth Group'. Helen B. took on the role of selecting and training mothers to run

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<sup>7</sup> In future referred to as PCA

classes. This activity provided the catalyst for forming the organisation. Helen B. conducted exercise classes in her own home. The interruption to family life became intolerable and it became obvious that alternative premises had to be found.

## **6.2 Parents' Centre is formed**

In June, 1952, the Natural Childbirth Association decided to change its name because the society wanted to cover a wider area than childbirth education. It was moved by Mrs Cole and seconded by Mrs Brew and carried 'that the title be changed to Wellington Parents' Centre Inc' (PCA, Box 1.0, Minutes 25 June 1952). A general meeting was called at the YWCA for 25 June 1952. A draft constitution was presented by the Solicitor, Agar, and approved by 47 members and friends ... the re-elected committee gained a new member in Lex Grey (Dobbie, 1990, p.21).

Helen Brew, Marie Bullock and Chris Cole-Catley used their various networks to good effect. As Helen B recalled: *'Bullock's mother-in-law was the wife of a bishop and very involved in the Young Women's Christian Association [YWCA]. She agreed to use her influence to get us a room there'*. Chris, a friend of Madame Gisa Taglicht, Director of the YWCA's classes in rhythmical gymnastics, persuaded her to conduct the exercise classes in the YMCA gymnasium. Taglicht was a refugee from Austria, after Hitler's invasion. She had been a staff member of Professor Philip Smithell's team, at the Dunedin School of Education, so she also had links to education. Helen B. who was by now a friend of both Diana and Bruce Mason, invited Diana to lecture and she agreed. Lex Grey, senior tutor at Victoria University's Department of Adult Education, and part of the Playcentre connection, had attended the discussions. Lex had particular expertise in family dynamics and group discussion. He became a key player in obtaining sponsorship for the lecture series, through the Regional Council for Adult Education. The Playcentre link was strengthened further by the appointment of Mrs K Torrence who became the first playcentre supervisor for children whose mothers were attending Parents' Centre classes (*Parents' Centres Bulletin*, No. 1, 1954, p.6).

Public meetings were promoting awareness of the organisation and its goals. Chris was successful in ensuring that there was a good supply of well written information for the press. Inevitably there was opposition, particularly from obstetricians and the Nurses and

Midwives Board (Dobbie, 1990). Nevertheless, support grew. The exercises became a drawcard and the hallmark of Parents' Centre. For some parents this was the only part of the organisation they were involved in. However, from the beginning, some of the pioneers, like Helen Brew, were equally concerned about using the organisation as a vehicle for change in the rearing of children under three. Beverley Morris remembered:

*There was a real gap in the knowledge about children 0-3 at this time – almost a no-touch attitude. The experts were afraid to interfere in what mothers were doing.*

The potential for exposing those attracted by childbirth education to information relating to the concerns many parents were expressing about children under three was obvious. The pioneers seized the opportunity and set up classes on child rearing, based on progressive theory. A flyer advertising Parents' Centre classes in Wellington in 1959, indicates the way sessions were organised (PCA, Box 1.0):

#### **Wellington Parents' Centre**

The Wellington Parents' Centre provides a comprehensive programme of education for parenthood.

At our ante-natal classes, held Tuesday mornings from 9.30 till 11.30 a.m. at Ngati-Poneke Hall, Hotel Cecil buildings, expectant mothers, with their doctor's permission, take part in exercises and training for childbirth under the direction of a qualified physiotherapist. They make use of our library of books, pamphlets and magazines on topics covering all aspects of normal childbirth, child care and child development. After a cup of tea and a chat, the mothers take part in a lecture-discussion led by an expert in her field on such topics as preparing for childbirth, breast feeding, hospital routines, good mothering, the beginnings of good discipline, learning through play.

Two or three evening meetings are held during each course to enable fathers to participate in the preparations for the coming child. A reunion, or "graduates party" is held each year to give proud parents a chance to display their offspring to their classmates.

Parents usually remain members of Parents' Centre after their child is born and are able to attend evening meetings on topics of general interest to parents.

Wellington Parents' Centre is this year offering for the first time, a course of evening meetings designed specifically for adoptive parents. The aim in this as in all our work is to help equip parents for their demanding but rewarding role, and to help them to establish sound family relationships, thus giving their children the best possible start in life.

For further information about our activities telephone 72-695.

A set of objectives (called objects by the founders), was framed by Helen Brew and Chris Cole-Catley and endorsed by the first committee. These objects were published later, in *Parents' Centres Bulletin* No.1, July 1954 and given a prominent position inside the front cover in subsequent editions. They became the key focus of the organisation. By publicising these objects in the *Parents' Centres Bulletin*, which was designed to reach the professionals involved in childbirth, as well as the parents, whose consumer role was repeatedly emphasised, the pioneers were reminding those inside and outside the organisation of their basic principles.

The first object stressed the importance of the emotions of all involved in birth and child management. It stated that Parents' Centre was set up to:

Foster the appreciation by parents, the medical and nursing professions and the general public, of the significance of the emotional aspects of pregnancy, childbirth and infant nurture. (*PCB*, No.1, July 1954, p.2)

The second object put the case for ante-natal education which the pioneers believed should, like all progressive education, be a holistic process and address emotional as well as physical needs. The aim should be to help the mother cope well with childbirth and feel confident about her mothering role. This object was expressed in this way:

To make available to expectant mothers, classes which will help them to be intellectually, physically and emotionally prepared for childbirth, so that they may be able to look forward, with greater confidence, to an easier and more satisfying labour. (*PCB*, No.1, July 1954, p.2)

The third object concentrated on parent-child relationships which the pioneers regarded as the central issue in the planning of services. These ideas were encapsulated in this statement:

To encourage these practices which have beneficial effects, upon early parent-child relationships such as trained childbirth, home confinements, rooming-in, breastfeeding and 'permissive' methods of child care. (*PCB*, No.1, July 1954, p.2)

The fourth object described the provisions the organisation should make, to educate everyone involved. It was framed in these words:

To establish and maintain an information centre, to make available to those interested, literature and information, on all aspects of the above aims. (*PCB*, No. 1, July 1954, p.2)



There were people available with qualifications, experience and expertise to run the classes. To win the confidence of doctors, so that they would sign the forms for their patients to attend the exercise classes and become supportive of the Parents' Centre philosophy, it became obvious that it was necessary to appoint a panel of honorary medical advisers. 'This was not difficult, as a number of doctors, including psychiatrists, obstetricians and a pediatrician (not all in Wellington) were happy to help in what they considered an important community service' (*PCB*, No.1 1954, p.4). The panel consisted of Dr Enid Cook, Doctors I & E McKendrick and Dr Phyllis Stockdill, all of whom had experience with Dick-Read's methods personally and with their patients. In an article '*Classes for Expectant Mothers*' the format of classes was explained (*PCB*, No.1, 1954, p.6). The advisers considered it important that the birth process should be understood by both parents. Lex Grey was invited to attend the planning meetings because of his expertise, particularly in group discussion. Chris Cole-Catley continued to be successful in ensuring that there was a good supply of information for the press. Public meetings, too, continued to ensure awareness of the organisation and its goals. In spite of opposition, support grew, particularly for women pregnant with their first child.

In this section I have demonstrated how Helen Brew's leadership skills and her arrival in Wellington in 1947, provided the catalyst for the foundation of Parents' Centre. That organisation was able to provide a mechanism for the change many parents such as the pioneers wanted but had only been able to effect in a limited way. Parents' Centre, once established, became a focus for the many able people who were available and willing to work for change, by contributing their time, energy and expertise. It also played a major role in educating the public to understand the issues and to support change.

### **6.3 The launch of the Federation of Parents' Centres**

Word of the new organisation soon spread, through word of mouth, the press, and the *Parents' Centres Bulletin*. Parents in areas beyond Wellington began meeting with the intention of setting up their own centres. Typically, groups outside Wellington who were interested, would write to the Wellington Parents' Centre and ask for information about ways of setting up their own centres. Then they would invite Helen Brew to meet them and give further details and advice. Palmerston North was the second centre to be established



in 1954, soon after Wellington. Others followed, such as North Shore in 1956 (PCA Box 1.1). Much encouragement and help was given to potential Parents' Centre groups, provided they met certain conditions, such as 'Local medical and nursing support; the services of a registered physiotherapist and lectures in sympathy with the W.P.C's aims' (PCB, No.6 June 1956, p4).

There was so much interest in the new organisation that the resources of the Wellington pioneers became stretched. Helen Brew, although willing to give her services, found the commitment stressful. In her words: '*I had to remind people I had five young children, no transport and a very busy husband*'. It became obvious that it was necessary to set up a national organisation.

According to its first annual report dated 1958, The New Zealand Federation of Parents' Centres was formed at its first Dominion Conference, held on 30 and 31 March, 1957, at Wallis House, Lower Hutt, in Wellington (PCA Box 1.1). The New Zealand Federation of Parents' Centre aimed to: 'provide a strong national voice' (Coney, 1993, p.273; PCB, No.9, July, 1957, p3; Dobbie, 1990, p42) and be 'in a better position to receive a Government grant', (Dobbie, 1990, p.45). Thirty delegates from centres which had been established in Auckland, Hamilton, New Plymouth, Palmerston North, Christchurch and Wellington took part (Executive Meeting Minutes, 1957-1969. PCA Box 11.14). Beverley Morris, with her experience in the early days of Playcentre, recalled:

*This was very rapid progress to federation – five years! It was similar to that of Playcentre, and it filled the same need – access to information on the process of forming centres and preservation of the basic philosophy!*

Helen Brew became president of the Federation's executive committee, Louis Johnson, editor of Parent and Child Magazine, the secretary. A treasurer, Harold Short, and Centre representatives made up the first committee.

To guide the Federation, an educational advisory council was now added. Its members, drawn from a number of specialties, were: Dr Enid Cook, Dr Maurice Bevan-Brown, Dr Wallis Ironside, Professor Philip Smithells, School of Physical Education, Dunedin; Dr James Robb, School of Social Science, Wellington; Professor HCD Somerset, Department of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, member of the National Council of Adult

Education; Quentin Brew, psychologist, Department of Education, Wellington (and acting editor of the *Parents' Centres Bulletin*); and Lex Grey, lecturer in child development, Auckland Teachers College (Dobbie, 1990, p.45). They were indeed a powerful and influential group dedicated to the development of progressive education.

By 1962, the end of my period of study, the organisation had eleven centres in Auckland, Papakura, Hamilton, Central Hawke's Bay, New Plymouth, Palmerston North, Mana, Upper Hutt, Wellington, Christchurch and Timaru. An important role had become the presentation of submissions to bodies responsible for policy in both health and education. The Parents' Centre submission to the Maternity Services commission (1960) urged that a commission of enquiry into the New Zealand Maternity Services be set up, as issues regarding these services 'virtually affect the mental health of mothers, the family and the community'. A number of issues were raised also, in the Parents' Centre submission to the Finlay (1959) and Currie (1962) Commissions. They included the need to consult consumers of the services, teacher selection and training, particularly in human relations; the recognition and treatment of maladjustment in children, and the abolition of corporal punishment (PCA Box 10.1).

Upon becoming a formal federation the organisation made progress towards respectability, although on a sometimes halting path. In 1962 the British Medical Association agreed to the appointment of a panel of medical professionals who covered a wide area of expertise in health. They included: Professor Harvey Carey, Director of National Women's Hospital, Auckland; Dr Vivienne Croxford, obstetrician and gynaecologist, Christchurch; Dr Jim Henderson, general practitioner, Auckland; Dr Wallace Ironside, Head of the Department of Psychiatry, Dunedin; Dr Neil Begg, Director of Medical Services, Plunket Society, Dunedin; and Dr Derek Taylor, Director of Maternal Welfare, Department of Health, Wellington. Dr Watt was Chairman and Chris Cole-Catley assumed the position of secretary. By this time Chris had returned from overseas and was again editing the *Parents' Centres Bulletin*, so was in a strategic position to disseminate ideas through literature supporting Parents' Centre ideals and conveying the opinions of consumers to people who could influence policy.

#### 6.4 Some successes in the first ten years

One sign of the organisation's move towards acceptability, particularly by well-established and respected women's groups, came in 1959, when Helen Brew, by now president of the Federation, was asked to address the annual conference of the National Council of Women. Her remit to the conference on the need for rooming-in facilities, in all New Zealand maternity hospitals, was unanimously supported by the conference delegates. In the same year, 1959, a number of Parents' Centre remits to the Finlay Consultative Commission (Brew, 1959) on Infant and Pre-School Health Services, were endorsed (PCA, Box 10.1). Of significance was the Commission's recommendation that family relationships should be fostered by the presence of husbands with their wives in labour, rooming-in of infants with their mothers, and the daily visiting of pre-school children in hospital (Dobbie, 1990, p.60).

The recommendations of the Finlay Commission (1959) were gradually implemented, in hospitals throughout the country. Some centres entered the political arena to achieve this. They worked to elect representatives who supported Parents' Centre philosophy to Hospital Boards. Alice Fieldhouse and a group of fathers who had tried many strategies such as public meetings, press coverage, and a petition to the Wellington Hospital Board, finally achieved success in the 1970s, in their efforts to be allowed to support their wives in labour, by helping to elect Betty Campbell, a tireless worker for Parents' Centre, to the Wellington Hospital Board where she succeeded in convincing her colleagues to support this change.

Networks were well used. Helen Brew's association with Roy McKenzie in the Canterbury University tennis team was no doubt a factor in the New Zealand Federation of Parents' Centres becoming eligible for a grant from the J.R. McKenzie Trust (Dobbie, 1990). This grant, with a small government addition, made it possible to give assistance to individual centres and to publish the *Parents' Centres Bulletin*, the official organ of the Federation. It also financed a conference at the National Women's Hospital in 1958 when Professor Carey took the unprecedented step of inviting the combined Parents' Centre to share in a three-day residential conference in Auckland (PCA Box 2A). In 1960 the Health Department directed hospital boards around the country to provide ante-natal classes. Through their networks with Plunket, doctors and matrons of maternity wards, Parents'

Centre members worked to obtain representation on planning committees for classes if they could not organize the classes themselves. Two successful examples of Parents' Centre setting up classes in hospitals were those at Upper Hutt in Wellington and Bethany in Auckland (described more fully in chapter 5).

The pioneers worked to have representation on community organisations. In 1958 Parents' Centre joined the National Council of Women which provided a forum for women's concerns. Many of the representatives to it had some sympathy with Parents Centres' aims, particularly for a consumer voice (Else, 1993). When the Maternity Services Committee was set up in 1960 as a permanent Board of Health Committee on Maternity Services to advise the Minister on all matters affecting maternal welfare and to receive representation from individuals or organisations, the pioneers realised that this would have a major influence on the curriculum and conduct of ante-natal classes. They could appreciate that consumer representation at that level was crucial and after much lobbying and many submissions they succeeded in 1961 to achieve agreement for a consumer voice. But it was a token victory only. The representative was not a Parents' Centre member and in her time on the committee made little impact. In fairness, even if she had been a strong Parents' Centre advocate, she could have been outvoted.

Meanwhile the Federation continued to develop and use networks to good effect, in my period of study 1952-1962. They had gradually built up relationships over a long period with nurses, particularly in Wellington where pioneers such as Alice Fieldhouse and Jim Robb were involved in their post-graduate training. In many cases they had come to realise the effectiveness of the Parents' Centre teaching in childbirth. Jim, in his classes at Victoria University, was to have a profound influence on many nurses in influential positions. One such was Thelma Smith, matron of the Salvation Army's Bethany Hospital in Auckland. She later encouraged the organisation of Parents' Centre classes based in her hospital. Lecturers from the Training College had lectured to student nurses training to be tutors in Wellington, for many years. In my time at the College 1953-1958 this was one of my roles. These initiatives contributed to a sympathy for the Parents' Centre objectives among nurses and the general public. At the same time, some medical personnel such as Dr Heginbotham, whose help pioneer Helen Thornton acknowledged, were taking their own initiatives towards incorporating more progressive ideas into their obstetrical work. Nurses,

by the late 1950s and early 1960s were often parents, like pioneers Alice and Mary Logan, as the demand for services allowed and even encouraged married women to continue working. Younger doctors were subject to influences from overseas through post-graduate training, literature, and contact with English doctors who had emigrated to New Zealand after the war. Parents' Centre members, too, would no doubt have had an influence on their obstetricians and Plunket nurses during routine contacts. The *Parents' Centres Bulletin* and the books it recommended played a part among the number of forces which were coming together to make the Parents' Centre ideas more acceptable to those with the power to effect change. One identifiable sign of progress was provided by the Nurses Association of New Zealand who sent a delegation of senior nurses to meet directly, in 1962, with the Federation of Parents' Centres and St. Helen's Hospitals. The outcome was that the rules for visiting were changed to allow children to visit mothers in the wards, on Sundays (PCA Box 1.1).

Relations with the Plunket Society were improving. Dr Neil Begg who had succeeded Dr Helen Deem as medical director of the Plunket Society, was able to promote the concept there was more to good child nurture than weight gains and regular habits. A growing number of Parents' Centre members had also worked on Plunket committees, and had an influence on both groups (Bryder, 2003)

## **6.5 Membership of the organisation**

It has been previously noted that the pioneers, in retrospect, expressed disappointment that the Parents' Centre organisation consisted, in its early days at least, of almost entirely white middleclass women and men. In some areas, that was true too, of those who attended the classes.

Chris Cole-Catley and Barbara Hodge recalled:

*All the people I met there would have fallen into the category of white middle class. But it was not intentional exclusion. Anyone who wanted to come was welcome (Chris).*

*We discussed at one time that we were getting no Maori women. None at all ... We were worried ... We were getting the same middle class group and we weren't getting any of the people we could really help. I remember one day saying that those were the people who were hounded into submission by Plunket nurses ... I was very anti-Plunket at the time, but based on my own experiences! (Barbara)*

As I have already noted in chapter 5, there were exceptions in some areas such as Upper Hutt and Auckland where Helen Thornton and Mary Dobbie were successful in attracting a wide social and economic group. At the time Upper Hutt was a new, lower to middle socio-economic area. Like so many new suburbs of the immediate post-war era, it was providing only limited community services for families. Helen T recalled:

*We got a very high proportion of mothers, of all walks of life. This was the thing that was important as far as we were concerned. We really weren't interested in middle-class women because we thought they could learn for themselves. It was women who came from the poorer areas, who never had a chance, that we wanted in the classes. And he [Dr. Heginbotham, their medical adviser] really did make the effort to get his other doctors behind him. With a small community it's not so difficult!*

Mary Dobbie established the first Parents' Centre classes in Bethany Hospital in Auckland enabling Parents' Centre leaders to influence a captive audience of women who, as part of their acceptance by Bethany, had to attend clinics for ante-natal checks.

Not all approaches by Parents' Centre were so successful. Two of the pioneers, Helen Brew and Chris Cole-Catley who were keen to offer classes to a group they believed could benefit but were missing out, moved out of the central city to offer their services to an area where a large number of Maori families lived. As Chris recounted:

*Helen and I tried desperately to set up Parents' Centre in Porirua, although we did know that as two white wealthy liberals, we couldn't get very far. But we did try.*

They consoled themselves with the belief that their efforts in promoting change, in the services available to all parents, particularly the hospitals, were of benefit to everyone. On the positive side there is no doubt that in attracting parents like themselves, with middle-class, professional backgrounds, they did much to ensure the survival and progress of the organisation and the spread of its philosophy into the services for all cultures and socio-economic groups. Middle-class professionals had many advantages over other groups in changing policy at that time. They could relate to politicians who, like Dan Riddiford, a Member of Parliament for Wellington Central, joined Wellington Parents' Centre classes with his wife, gave support and joined delegations lobbying other members of Parliament. They were often connected by family ties, training, daily work and social life with professionals and policy makers who had the power to effect change. Not only did they



'talk the same language' and read the same books, they tended to be involved in the same leisure pursuits, such as theatre, where the Brews, Bullocks, Coles and Masons, all Parents' Centre pioneers, spent some of their off-duty time.

In its first ten years, 1952-1962, the time frame of my study, the Parents' Centre organisation had moved from being a small group of parents to a national movement, which made an impact on the policies of those who controlled the services for childbirth and on the rearing of children under three. The pioneers, who themselves had felt that the system for childbirth and parenthood oppressed and demeaned them and gave them no voice as individuals in the organisation, Parents' Centre were able to have an effective voice in promoting change.

The Parents' Centre members had moved from consideration of issues which concerned them directly as individuals, to the promotion of wider issues which affected families, not only in New Zealand, but throughout the world. In 1963 the Federation executive committee gave its support to the campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (Dobbie, 1990), thirty years before this became the policy of the New Zealand government. There were to be other examples, in the years to follow, of Parents' Centre members promoting policies which affected organisations other than their own but in line with their objectives. By so doing they continued to enrich the seedbed in which change could flourish. One such example was the abolition of corporal punishment in schools, advocated in 1959 by Parents' Centre and not implemented by Government until 1988.

## **6.6 The gurus of Parents' Centre**

Between the 1920s and the 1960s there had been educators who, in their writing, had been advocating liberal approaches to education compatible with the objectives of Parents' Centre. For the purpose of this thesis, I have divided them into three broad groups: International educators influenced the pioneers in their training for teaching prior to the 1950s; International Educators who wrote for parents and others involved in the rearing of young children in the 1940s and 1950s; and the New Zealand gurus who wrote for New Zealand parents and early childhood teachers. In the following sections I identify the key educationists in each group and discuss those elements of their philosophy which had most impact on the pioneers.



### **6.6.1 *Ploughing the ground for change: The influences on Parents' Centre pioneers***

The first group of international educators helped 'plough the ground' for change in the minds of New Zealand teachers. They moved their thinking away from the traditional and conservative views that had dominated New Zealand education, to new, more progressive ideas emanating particularly from England and the United States. These educationists had an inter-disciplinary approach, bringing together philosophy, sociology and psychology. They were attempting through theory and practice to re-position education, particularly that of children in primary school, in the context of the 20th Century. The most important books in this group were written by Sir Percy Nunn, John Dewey, Herbert Read, Susan Isaacs, Bertrand Russell and A.S. Neill. All but John Dewey who was from the United States, were from the United Kingdom. My interviews with the pioneers show that they were influenced by these educationists both during their training and in their subsequent careers and lives. The pioneers were exposed to the texts of those writers in their training as teachers, particularly in Wellington and Canterbury (Sutch, 1966; Carter, 1993; May & Middleton, 1997). What is more, some lecturers, for example, at Wellington Training College and Victoria University used the texts, not only to help students form an educational philosophy but also to demonstrate the practices they advocated in the conduct of their lectures and the general day-to-day life of those institutions. When I interviewed them some of the pioneers could see that lecturers, such as Thomas Hunter, professor of philosophy at Victoria University, were ahead of their time. Ann Rosenberg, who was a student of Hunter in the 1940s says of him, '*We had Thomas Hunter, a rationalist and disbeliever of most conventional things!*'.

There was a second group of 'gurus', who, in the broadest sense, used the thinking of the first group to stress the importance of early childhood education and to promote change in the education of children from birth. Their books were used by the pioneers for personal information, support and inspiration. They were quoted in *Parents' Centres Bulletins* and bought for class libraries. The authors specifically addressed people who could effect change in the rearing of young children, particularly those under three such as parents, policymakers, doctors and nurses, school teachers and those training staff for early childhood education and health. The writers included Grantly Dick-Read who wrote *Childbirth Without Fear* (1942), Maurice Bevan-Brown who wrote *The Sources of Love*

*and Fear* (1955), John Bowlby, Director of the Tavistock Clinic, who wrote *Child Care and the Growth of Love* (1953) and David Winnicott, author of *The Ordinary Devoted Mother and Her Child* (1949). Some of the English writers had a personal influence as pioneers such as Jim Robb worked with them. A group of writers from the United States also had a major influence. They gave friendly, practical advice to parents on matters of concern such as growth and development in addition to feeding and other physical care. In the 1950s these books were becoming readily available. Written in language which appealed to literate parents, they avoided being dogmatic and treated mothers as colleagues in the parenting enterprise and as reasonable human beings. Those found most useful by the Parents' Centre pioneers were Dr Benjamin Spock who wrote the now classic *Handbook of Baby and Child Care* (first printed in 1945); Dorothy Baruch *New Ways in Discipline* (1949); Adele Davis *Let's Eat Right to Keep Fit* (1947); and Arnold Gesell *The Child from Birth to Five* (1946). As writers, they used language which would appeal to the kind of parents who would not necessarily have had a tertiary education, but as June Bastings recalled, were '*hungry for books*' because they found them helpful.

The third group of educationists who influenced the pioneers consisted of New Zealand writers, all of whom had worked in education in this country and therefore understood the social context of the education of young children. They captured the essence of the ideas of the international gurus, and then, in their own writing, became gurus themselves. Each of them worked at a practical level with parents, in leadership training and in their efforts to influence policy makers and politicians. Nearly all these writers had links with Playcentre. The thinking and writings of this group are based on their everyday experience as parents and teachers, in family and Playcentre. They included Lex Grey, Beverley Morris, Jim Robb, Helen and Quentin Brew, Chris Cole-Catley and Gwen Somerset. In the 1950s they wrote in the press and in notes for those attending Playcentre and Parents' Centre classes. Several of these leaders in education, such as Beverley, went on to write books that influenced the next generation.

In the next three sections I explore the ideas of the three groups of gurus in more detail and identify their influence.

#### 6.6.1.1 *The influence of international educators*

In the 1920s, 30s and 40s international writers had an important influence on the pioneers who trained as teachers. They were the only educational texts generally available and were considered radical at that time. One of the great liberal educators, and a member of the group of international writers who influenced New Zealand thought, was Sir Percy Nunn (1876-1944), emeritus Professor of Education, in the University of London and sometime Director of the London University Institute of Education. His text *Education: Its Data and First Principles*, first published in 1920 and last reprinted in 1949, was prescribed reading for students. The thinking underlying Nunn's work influenced many of the pioneers who had access to it in training. Clarence Beeby (1992, p.49) said of Nunn's text 'It probably did more than any other book to influence the thinking, if not always the practice, of a whole generation of teachers.' Nunn believed in holistic development, stating that: 'Individuality is an affair of the whole organism-body-mind' (Nunn 1949, p.26). This belief provided a counter-philosophy to the behaviourist theories which were basic to Plunket theory and school practice in New Zealand (Bryder, 2003). Nunn was influenced by the psycho-analytic school as this quote demonstrates: 'The adult mind is but the visible surface of a living structure, whose deeper layers are humic elements, dating from infancy, or even beyond' (Nunn 1949, p.40).

Nunn supported play 'as essential to children's healthy and happy development' (1949, p.85). In his philosophy, discipline was an ideal which could only be achieved by education and through 'the sublimation of misdirected energies' where deviant behaviour was being addressed' (1949, p.251). He was one of those who pioneered child study as a new way of gaining information about children, their education and development. Child study was adopted in the early days by the New Zealand pioneers who were influenced, not only by Nunn but also by Susan Isaacs, who used this technique as the basis for her work. Gwen Somerset too, a pioneer of Playcentre helped to make this practice widely adopted in New Zealand in the 1950s, particularly for people training students in early childhood education.

Nunn's central belief, like that of the Parents' Centre pioneers was that all children had a right to achieve, as far as their individual abilities allowed. He did not, however, remain

focused on the individual. He believed that communities would benefit as the young drew from them to achieve their potential and later, in their turn, realised there was a need to contribute to the education and well-being of others. This belief had been demonstrated in the families of most of the pioneers and was one they put into practice in their contributions to founding and working in Parents' Centre, as volunteers.

Another liberal educator, Bertrand Russell (1872-1970) wrestled with the concept of holistic development and the dichotomy between the individual and society (Russell, 1926 & 1932). Russell is more broadly remembered as a peace activist and mathematician who explored ways of promoting peace on a worldwide basis through education. Nonetheless, he was concerned about the effects of the peer group on development, referred to, in his key text as 'The undesirable effects of the crowd upon the lives of school children' (Park, 1963). The Parents' Centre pioneers had been exposed to models of parents who were concerned about other people and strong enough to stand up for the principles they believed in. This was something the pioneers continued to do in Parents' Centre. Their skills enabled them to gain support to stand up for humane practices for children and oppose those who they believed were responsible for impairing children's sound development. Russell's ideas on peace were reflected in the Parents' Centre models of discipline without force or violence and their support of peace movements in the community. Russell developed his ideas on education in his marriage to Dora, with whom he founded a school. His great vision was that people should live and be '...inspired by love and guided by knowledge' (1963. p.172), a maxim which would have fitted easily into the ethic of the Parents' Centre pioneers who regarded loving relationships with parents as essential to mental health.

Another educationist who influenced New Zealand educators and their students, was John Dewey (1859-1952) of the University of Chicago. He expressed belief in the importance of early childhood education in this statement: 'All education proceeds by the participation of the individual in the social consciousness of the race. This process begins unconsciously almost at birth' (Archambault, 1964, p.427). Although Dewey was interested in the work and new thinking of early childhood educators, he wanted to move beyond the constraints of Froebel who was having a major influence on their practice. Dewey, too founded a school which helped him to articulate his ideas on cooperation, free play, links with home

and children's prior and continuing experiences (May, 1997, p.111). One of his key ideas was the project method (Dewey, 1933; Cufford, 1995) which my teacher Jo Mountjoy used in the 1930s. It is still an educational tool which is frequently used. Besides encouraging students to research topics of interest and become independent learners, it has proved itself as a way of involving parents in their children's school work, not always, I am sure, as Dewey intended. I recall that in standard 4 my class was set a project on the history of Wellington. Mine received much praise but it was almost entirely done by my father!

The ideas of Herbert Read (1893-1968) were influential at Wellington Training College in the 1950s. His central belief was that 'each individual is born with certain potentialities which have a positive value for that individual' and that society should value, respect and nurture these. In his view, the task of the teacher is '[to create] an environment of spontaneity and happy childhood industry' (Read, 1943, p.295). His ideas were having an impact on New Zealand education and were close to the basic philosophy of Playcentre in the 1950s and later free kindergartens, schools and Parents' Centre (Stover, 1998; Densem, 2000).

A.S. Neill was a practical educationist (1883-1973) from Forfar, Scotland. After teaching for twelve years in Scottish schools, before founding with others an international school in Helleau, Dresden and another later in Austria, he returned to England and set up his own school Summerhill, in Leiston, Suffolk. Neill was influenced by psychologists such as Freud. Although he was critical of the family and traditional schools because of what he considered their restrictive and often harsh treatment of children, many New Zealand educationists appreciated his ideas, particularly about holistic development and the importance of considering children's emotions. Like Nunn, he believed in the value of play and child study (Neill, 1962). His writing style was forceful and he illustrated it with examples from classroom practice. He had similar concerns to those of the pioneers about early childhood, seeing strong links between early childhood practices and adult personality. Like them, he was critical of hospital care of the neonate which he described as 'such cruelty' (Neill, 1962, p. 161). He was also particularly critical of adult attitudes to sex, 'Possibly there is no salvation for adults; but there is every chance of salvation for children, if we do not force on them the awful ideas of sex, that were forced on us' (p. 199). Few other educational writers at the time addressed the subject of sex education,

certainly with such conviction. Many in Parents' Centre would have held views similar to his (as I have indicated in chapter 3). The main difference between his philosophy and that of Parents' Centre would have been his exclusion of parents from the education of their children. One of the aims of Summerhill was to put right the damage done to children by parents. Like the Parents' Centre pioneers, he believed that the consumer should have an effective voice in the way the service was run. In his school the consumer was the pupil. His pupils were encouraged to give him feedback on the school's operation in the weekly meetings.

Susan Isaacs (1889-1948) had a strong influence on many New Zealand teachers, such as Arthur Fieldhouse, Joyce Barns, Ted Scott and Lex Grey, some of whom visited her Malting House School in Cambridge, or attended her course at the London Institute of Education. She visited New Zealand at the invitation of the New Education Fellowship in 1937 and was highly regarded by the teachers who heard her speak at a seminar in Wellington which Lex Grey attended (May, 1997). In her school she not only taught, but also studied the children. Her books *The Nursery Years* (1929) and *The Children we Teach* (1932) were used as texts at Wellington Training College. Her studies had convinced her about the influence of the early years on adult development, the importance of 'the study of the child as a whole, and of the interplay of the various aspects of development within the developmental sequence' (1932, p.75). These ideas were totally supported by the pioneers.

As I have stated earlier, all these philosophers influenced the teaching at Wellington Training College and Victoria University of Wellington which were attended by five of the pioneers of Parents' Centre; Ephra Garrett, Lex Grey, Beverley Morris, Jim Robb and myself. Ephra talked about this as: *'All that good stuff from Teachers College'*. Diana Mason's husband trained there too and *'was very keen on the ideas of Neill'* and *'was absolutely crazy about Lopdell. He thought he was wonderful'*. Alice Fieldhouse did post-graduate training at Victoria University and was influenced by Colin Bailey, Crawford Somerset, Betty Odell and Arthur Fieldhouse, all of whom were at the forefront of thinking in New Zealand and known as liberals and academics who not only believed in these ideals but tried to put them into practice, as Alice recalled:

*They all treated me as a friend, from the first contact. Crawford had the strongest influence in preparing me for involvement in Parents' Centre later'.*



Ann Rosenberg also attended and studied education at Victoria University before receiving further qualifications in social work at Manchester University. The skills in teaching she had gained in her advanced classes at Victoria, where classes were small, were developed further in England, particularly in relation to discussion groups.

From analysis of the pioneers' interviews it was evident that Wellington Training College in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, had an influence in the liberal tradition on them. In 1980 Wellington Training College celebrated its centenary. To mark the occasion, an issue of *Ako Pai*, the College magazine, was prepared and published. The author Patrick Macaskill, a lecturer in English at the college from the 1950s to the 1980s, gained his material by 'writing to as many articulate students and staff, past and present, as possible, and asking them to write about what the College meant to them'. The quotes I have chosen pay tribute to those staff members who played a large and important part, in setting the liberal, progressive direction of education which flowed through to become the basic philosophy of Parents' Centre. Max (Marcus) Riske (*Ako Pai*) encapsulated this idea:

The novel notion that education involved development of what the child brought to the classroom, more than it meant rote memorisation of what his elders desired him to repeat successfully at examination time, was initiated more in Wellington than elsewhere, practised by many people around the schools there, and in the Teachers College [previously Training College] ... the mid-twenties in Wellington produced a great number of men and women teachers who did so much to advance the cause of education. (Macaskill, 1980, p.8)

Walter Scott who, as lecturer, Vice-Principal and Principal from 1936, after the College re-opened until his retirement in 1965, is remembered for his personal influence over a long period and through the staff he appointed. David McGill, now a writer of note and author of, among other books, *Kiwi Baby Boomers: Growing up in New Zealand in the 40s, 50s and 60s* (1989), pays tribute to Scott (*Ako Pai*).

I am sure he was able to make our Teachers' College the sole liberal beacon in the country during those McCarthyite times [the 1950s], largely because he commanded authority ... the whole college was imbued with his moral strength ... We took strong stands because we were Scott's students ... He was a great educator. We had come in callow and incurious. We left with enquiring minds. Few educators achieve this. (Macaskill, 1980, p.210)

During the 1940s and 1950s, Scott influenced a group who later moved out of teaching, but carried his ideas into a number of other disciplines thus influencing a wide range of people



outside teaching. Dramatist, Roger Hall (Macaskill, 1980, p.213) pays tribute to this influence:

I've often said that there should be a survey done of all our writers, poets, actors, artists, potters and so on, to see how many went to Wellington Teachers College. For it was the philosophy of the place that we should all be developed as people – the teacher could, and would, come later. The cultural debt that the country owes the place is incalculable.

Many students who remained in the education service, became front line staff working for changes in the classroom – their mission, like that of Beeby, to make schools happier places for children. The Parents' Centre organisation gained much of its dynamic from the conviction of the pioneers who had trained as teachers at Wellington, when they applied these ideas to the education of children under three.

Arthur Fieldhouse, Chairman of the Council of the Wellington College of Education, in the Centennial year 1980, and husband of Alice, a Parents' Centre pioneer, wrote (Macaskill, 1980, p.9):

The qualities that I have claimed to be its distinguishing characteristics, have meant that the College has been ever sensitive to the changing needs of children and their teachers. Within the limits imposed on it, and sometimes with a great deal of ingenuity to remain within those limits, the college has responded to those changing needs, by adjusting and changing courses more frequently than otherwise would have occurred ... this perceptiveness and sensitivity has had other consequences. It has awakened in many students, a keen sense of social responsibility. Sometimes this has led them to move out of teaching to other areas where they have come to consider the social needs to be more urgent [viz the Parents' Centre pioneers] ... The college has often found itself in the vanguard of educational thinking and practice.

Among others honoured in the centennial publication was Frank Lopdell, Principal of the College in the 1940s. In the following tribute, Anton Vogt (Macaskill, 1980, p.14), poet, student in 1939/40 and lecturer in English at the college in the 1950s describes how Lopdell tried to implement the practices which he believed were in harmony with his progressive ideals:

What I remember most is something I was never to experience in any other institution: an atmosphere in which everything seemed possible, as in Ancient Athens. In all my years at the College, as student and teacher, the door of the Principal and the ears of the staff were open: to ideas, to corrections in curriculum, to grievances, to plans, and to protests. Frank Lopdell started all this. Himself small and dour, slow-thinking and soft-spoken, Christian and inartistic, he was so large and tolerant in his mind and heart that he set a pattern of near-self-government that

became a tradition. Indeed, Lopdell had an inner strength that required no badge of office: what he wanted was that others should be free. Combs, Waghorn, Scott, [all principals of the college], with all their excellences, learnt from this. The rest of us were free to learn, or to make fools of ourselves, as we chose. What we could not do was to kill the essentially democratic spirit of the College. I hope that spirit still lives in it, as it lives in me, who learnt there.

Helen and Quentin Brew, both of whom trained at Christchurch Training College in the late 1930s, were influenced by Clarence Beeby. Although I have focused on Wellington, Christchurch Training College and Canterbury University, too, had an era of progressivism. Clarence Beeby (1992, p.49) wrote glowingly of the influence of James Shelley in his training in Christchurch:

[Shelley] who in my second year at university and my first at Training College, burst into our sheltered world and deliberately set out to shatter our complacent ideas on education...the textbooks that he introduced offered us, if not a complete philosophy of education, at least an intellectual system into which those ideas could be fitted. The first, T. Percy Nunn's 'Education, Its Data and First Principles' was fresh off the press, just before Shelley left England, and it had obviously affected his thinking greatly. It still makes stimulating reading, and used in all the four university institutions, it probably did more than any other book to influence the thinking, if not always the practice of a whole generation of teachers.

Ann Rosenberg joined Christchurch Parents' Centre on becoming a parent. She mentions some of the influences that she perceived had impacted on Helen and Quentin Brew in their training and professional life and as parents in Christchurch. One who had particular influence was Enid Cook, as Ann recalled in her interview:

[Enid Cook] was a good communicator, a lay therapist... Quentin Brew was a product of Ralph Winterbourne, a lecturer in education at Canterbury. He and Bert Allen were Quentin's two educational psychologists and they were an influence down here. Henry Field started a little child guidance clinic at the university. His wife was a Health Department doctor who went to schools with the nurses. The kids got wonderful treatment. If anything went wrong it was picked up. Helen Brew became part of the nest of speech therapists. She was influenced by Marion Saunders, who taught child development. So was Ray Stroobant who became a lecturer at Wellington Teachers' College, and part of that 'Growth Plot' in Wellington. These ideas were very strong in Wellington – not so much in Auckland or Christchurch, except for the group mentioned. The school of social work shifted to Wellington. (Ann)

When the Brews moved to Wellington in 1947 they were to find a group with ideas compatible with their own but acquired at Wellington Training College and Victoria University of Wellington.

One of the people who formed part of this group was Alice Fieldhouse who had a period of post-graduate study at Columbia University.

*I went to New York on a fellowship. I attended the Teachers College of Columbia University, which was a very liberal educational institution. Dewey had taught there and his influence had remained. Also Erich Fromm and Carl Rogers. Ruth Strang had a great influence on me. She was one of my lecturers and Head of the Department of Counselling. (Alice)*

Like Alice, the other pioneers sought to teach in a way that lived up to the ideas encapsulated in this sentence:

*She saw every teacher as a counsellor. She got to know the students, identified their strengths and weaknesses, saw they had opportunities to use their talents, and got them to work on their weaknesses. (Alice)*

It is clear that the Christchurch and Wellington Training Colleges and Victoria University, were important influences on most of the pioneers. The philosophies and practices of the lecturers and the books which were required reading developed further the liberal ideas to which the pioneers were already sympathetic through childhood influences.

#### 6.6.1.2 Influential writers of the 1950s

*'The writers of those times, their time had come and they were marvellous.'* (Ephra Garrett)

The second group of people whose philosophy and practice influenced the pioneers had targeted their writings at parents. This group had identified early childhood as a key age-group and had all worked with children. They were concerned about mental health which had become an important focus in the 1940s. The pioneers found them supportive and inspirational, as Helen Brew described:

*I was able to link with them ...Me with my links with Bowlby and Winnicott...I had their writings to support me.*

The progressive ideas of these writers came from direct contact with children with whom they worked as doctors, teachers, psycho-analysts, and researchers. This group included Grantly Dick-Read, John Bowlby, David Winnicott, Benjamin Spock, Arnold Gesell, Maurice Bevan-Brown and Susan Isaacs, who comes into the first and second categories because she was writing before and after World War II and addressed teachers as well as

parents. Their work was easier to read, in most cases, than that of the writers in the first group. It was liberally interspersed with examples of the way theory could be applied in practice. These gurus assumed that parents were concerned about their children and tried to give them practical help and enjoyment of parenting.

Their specific advice on practice related to their principles, was often very useful to the Parents' Centre pioneers who were trying to reach not only parents, but also those working with young children outside the family, such as medical workers and policy makers. These writers used less academic language than the first group I have described. Some Parents' Centre pioneers, such as Helen Brew, Jim Robb and I, had met and worked with some of these people and kept up contact over a long period. This continuing contact was very supportive and kept the New Zealanders up-to-date with ongoing research and descriptions of practice and change which we could quote in classes and provide in Centre libraries.

Helen Brew recounted:

*The McKenzie Outfit [Foundation] had paid for me to go to London, so that I had the very good fortune to meet the heavyweights in paediatrics, obstetrics, psychiatry etc. I kept my papers and the interviews I had with these big people, and they totally backed you ...*

Pre-eminent among the writers of the second category was Grantly Dick-Read. He gave guidance on how birth could be managed so that women, knowledgeable about the process, could be in control and have confidence rather than fear. He had found in his practice that many women who trained in his methods managed well without anaesthesia, had a conscious birth, and were ready to begin life with their newborn in a positive and loving manner. Beverley Morris recalled that she '*was very impressed by the idea that tension through fear meant pain, so it was necessary to learn to relax*'.

In England, where Dick-Read had developed his ideas and techniques, his work was an important influence on the changes in the way childbirth was handled. The Natural Childbirth Trust was set up in England to promote his work (PCA Box 2.1). There was ongoing correspondence, sharing of resources and contact between that organisation and Parents' Centres in New Zealand. Many nurses, and some doctors, such as Enid Cook and Phyllis Stockdill in New Zealand became interested (Mein-Smith, 1986).

A writer in the *British Medical Journal* wrote in Dick-Read's obituary on 27 June 1959:

His contribution to the art of obstetrics was a unique one – one which could probably have been made by no one else and made only by one who was prepared to rebel against the established order. (cited in *PCB*, No.14, October 1949, p.20)

..... and the *Lancet* (1959) published the following:

He stimulated, even intimidated, settled minds to think again about obstetrics, and much of the new thought brought ease to mothers, even though the complete fulfilment of 'natural childbirth' may be possible only under the guidance of a personality as dominant and tireless as Dick-Read.

Parents' Centre philosophy and practice was also influenced by a group of 'burgeoning clinicians and writers from the psycho-analytic school who were in touch with European thinking' (May, 1997, p.210). One of the most influential in New Zealand was Dr Bevan-Brown who, although a New Zealander, had before the 1950s done much work and training at the Tavistock Clinic in London. When he died in 1967, aged 82, Helen Brew, reflecting on his life and influence, wrote of him, '*he was the outstanding pioneer of psychological medicine in New Zealand*'. *He was an outstanding educator of educators ... he met and influenced professional and lay people from many walks of life*' (*PCB*, No.31, May 1967, pp. 12, 13).

Bevan-Brown challenged older ideas that babies did not have feelings and emphasised in a talk to this first Wellington audience as psychiatric consultant to the Wellington Parents' Centre (*PCB*, No.7, October 1956, p.5):

The young baby is especially prone to fear and if unloved can enter a state of panic...(the later results of which are often seen in adult anxiety states) ... He is particularly likely to feel fear if his parents apply the old idea that 'the baby must be disciplined and toughened from the beginning'. I know of no more dangerous and pernicious doctrine.

Beverley Morris spoke warmly about how useful she found his work: '*in reassuring parents that loving a child was not spoiling it*'. Bevan-Brown was totally against corporal punishment for the reason that it damaged the loving relationship with parents and made children feel insecure and unable to function emotionally in a mature way.

After Parents' Centre was founded, Bevan-Brown supported it openly. He became a consultant to Wellington Parents' Centre, writing articles for the *Parents' Centres Bulletin* and speaking at public meetings. He tried to convey the message that a large part of mental

illness was emotional and had its origin in the handling of the very young child. He admitted that adults could be helped by psychotherapy, but saw it as an unrealistic option for most people because of paucity of services, cost and time. In his view, good nurture in the early years was a much more viable and effective option. The child needed love 'being loved is a matter of life and death' (Bevan-Brown, 1947), especially from the mother. People who had experienced poor parenting would find giving love difficult but Bevan-Brown believed that much could be done in developing right attitudes, especially if education was begun early, before marriage and during adolescence'. At times, he was a rather problematic ally in the eyes of some of the pioneers such as Jim: '*Bevan-Brown was regarded as eccentric*'. He was one of the few doctors prepared to speak out against medical and Plunket doctrine, in contrast to most of the other doctors supportive to Parents' Centre, who played a low-key supportive role. However, he did not antagonise Truby King who was interested in child psychology. It is reported by Bryder that towards the end of his life, King asked Bevan-Brown to take over the Plunket Society:

King, however, had no authority to make such an offer and it is unlikely that the council would have acquiesced. Bevan-Brown was an outsider who had resigned from the NZBMA and any formal association with the Plunket Society would have lost it the all-important support of the medical establishment. (Bryder, 2003)

John Bowlby and David Winnicott were 'two key figures in shaping the postwar view of children and families and in particular the roles and responsibilities of their mothers' (May, 1997, p.208). Their writings were quoted extensively in Parents' Centre classes. Helen B visited both Bowlby and Winnicott and found them supportive of the Parents' Centre initiatives. Bowlby's work in the early 1950s brought the issue of maternal deprivation to public attention. He was influenced by Freud's theories about the importance of early relationships, as well as animal ethology theories that stressed the importance of early bonding between mother and child (Bowlby, 1953; Smith, 1982). He also supported the ideas of Bevan-Brown regarding the link between birth and the emotional maturity of parents 'It seems that the early months and years after a baby is born are critical in the development of a mother and a father' (*PCB*, No.13, 1959, p.6).

Bowlby's key idea was the importance [for the infant] of a 'warm, intimate and continuous relationship with his mother [or permanent mother substitute, one person who steadily 'mothers' him], in which both find satisfaction and enjoyment'. Jim Robb, a pioneer who had worked with Bowlby in London gives a background to his work. '*Where he started*



from was his experience of damaged children who had got into a bad state through lack of mothering'. Bowlby helped parents to understand the distress of children separated for long periods in hospital (Bowlby, 1953). In the New Zealand context this knowledge proved to be an effective weapon in the struggle against those in the medical establishment who, in their preoccupation with the physical aspects of care, had not identified this behaviour or seen it as a problem that parent participation could prevent.

James Robertson, a colleague who worked closely with John Bowlby, made two films which were used in New Zealand particularly in Parents' Centre and colleges of education, during the 1950s. The first of these *A Two Year Old Goes to Hospital*, 1951 portrayed the effect on Laura, a 2-year old, of being in hospital for 10 days for minor surgery. The film broke new ground by telling the story from the child's perspective. When shown, it usually had a powerful effect on nurses and parents. Robertson's second film, *Going to Hospital with Mother* (1953), demonstrated what could be done to involve parents in the child's hospital stay and the positive results for all concerned. This kind of advice was generally well-received by Parents' Centre members in the 1950s. In later years, however, such advice became controversial, particularly to women who used some kind of substitute care for their infants (May, 2001). Even then there were differences of opinion about Bowlby's ideas as Ephra Garrett, Ann Rosenberg, Jim Robb and June Bastings related to me:

*The only thing I don't remember positively was John Bowlby. I wish I hadn't read him. It made me too protective and I was an over-protective mum.* (Ephra)

*I have no strong feelings against Bowlby. I did not feel he was putting pressure on mothers.* (Ann)

*Bowlby was on the staff at Tavistock. I knew him reasonably well. I didn't think he was extreme. You people in Parents' Centre were much more extreme than he was...He would have been horrified to think he was accused of putting women down. He was really out to help mothers and educate them in the things they could do.* (Jim)

*I didn't have any arguments with anyone in Parents' Centre about Bowlby. I refused to be bullied into feeling guilty about leaving my children with my mother or a friend. That was a bit stupid really. But he was perfectly right about long separation in the hospitals.* (June)

Bowlby lectured in the course I attended at the London Institute of Education. I did not find him dogmatic, but still tentative on his conclusions as this statement demonstrates:



As to the significance of the first six months I have rather deliberately remained non-committal. I believe them to be of importance ... However, since our scientifically based knowledge of these early months is still scanty, I am reluctant to claim too much. (Cited in *PCB*, No.17, 1960, p.17)

Bowlby's colleague Winnicott studied medicine at Cambridge, specialising in paediatrics and later undertook psycho-analytic training. His contribution was to translate ideas from theory into practical guidelines for parents (Winnicott, 1957). His book *The Ordinary Devoted Mother and Her Child* (1949) and his series of talks from the BBC and later recordings of his lectures, were used successfully in Parents' Centre classes.

Winnicott emphasised the importance of respecting the mother and her relationship with the child and tried not to be seen as the expert whose advice had to be followed. He started from the belief that 'an ordinary devoted mother' could work out her own methods of coping, if she understood the causes of behaviour. He, too, regarded child study as an important way of gaining the knowledge which leads to understanding.

If you know what is happening you will be able to ride over the difficult times and enable your baby to establish a good relationship to you when he feeds (Winnicott, 1964, p.3).

Winnicott saw the father's role as basically supportive:

Properly protected by her man, the mother is saved from having to turn outwards to deal with her surroundings at the time when she is wanting so much to turn inwards, when she is longing to be concerned with the inside of the circle which she can make with her arms, in the centre of which is the baby (Winnicott, 1964, p.13).

Like Bowlby he saw mothering as central to the sound early development of the child. His advice was generally well received by Parents' Centre members. Chris Cole-Catley and Beverley Morris, reflect the general enthusiasm for his advice, which was in many ways different from that of Plunket:

*I got very excited with Winnicott* (Chris)

*Winnicott wrote a useful book ... in fact it was heaven!* (Beverley)

Dr Spock's *Pocket Book of Baby Care* (1946) was used in Parents' Centre libraries and homes. Spock addressed parents in a friendly fashion and gave practical advice which recognised that parents and other children needed consideration as well as the baby. He

acknowledged that there were difficulties, urged understanding and tolerance and presented alternatives. This practical advice which went beyond the early years, filled a need as advice on so many subjects which concerned parents was not generally available. Spock's books sold in huge numbers and the pioneers found them useful. June Bastings '*went through two copies of Spock. One fell to bits*', and Ephra Garrett '*used the formula out of the Spock book*'

Arnold Gesell 'who defined a series of predetermined unfolding ages and stages as norms for children's development, derived from laboratory observations of children at his Yale University clinic' (May, 1997, p.114) influenced Parents' Centre to some extent. The evidence of his research reinforced the idea of maturation and his concept of what is normal had a degree of influence. He was referred to for his ideas on the concept of readiness which was emphasised by Helen Brew particularly in her lectures on toilet training. His data on child development was obtained through observation of children in his clinic at Yale University. These 'norms of development' were accepted at the time as universal because the significance of social and cultural influences had not been much explored or recognised. Class leaders often quoted his work and showed his 'Ages and Stages' films, such as *The Terrible Twos* and *The Trusting Threes* (Canadian Department of National Health and Welfare, 1950; Moss, 1950), to those who had little knowledge of children's development, or were worried that their children were not developing normally.

The anxiety typical among many New Zealand parents about children's eating habits was dealt with in Parents' Centre classes by Adele Davis, a consultant nutritionist in Los Angeles in the 1950s, and mother of two children (*PCB*, No.7, October 1956, p.9). Her writings were widely promoted in Parents' Centre classes, although they never became the subject of campaigns. Davis advocated good nutrition, but emphasised that enjoyment of food was also important. Helen Brew recommended her 'tiger milk' a mixture of molasses, brewers yeast, dried milk and fruit juice as a source of energy and an aid to lactation. Davis gave 'much practical advice on suitable and appetising meals, ... for avoiding the discomforts of pregnancy such as leg cramps, fatigue, heartburn and overweight' (Davis, 1947, p.9). Her practical ideas included simplifying meal-times by letting the baby consume the food the other family members were eating from an early age, ensuring food tasted good and avoiding tension over meals for all age groups. She showed an

understanding of the despair many mothers experienced when trying to get their children to eat recommended foods and gave practical, well-trying advice on avoiding conflict. I found her advice excellent and put an end to battles with my children over food. Many class members too appreciated the helpful advice given for overcoming difficulties with breast feeding.

Dorothy Walter Baruch wrote 'New Ways in Discipline' in 1949. Her book was used in Parents' Centre classes, and was seen as 'exceptionally helpful'. Baruch is described as:

....a distinguished American psychologist and consultant in child-guidance problems'. 'She has set forth a new concept of child discipline, adapting many of the methods of modern psychology and psychiatry to the handling of discipline problems. The theme is easily understood. There are constant examples and explanations and the tone is reassuring and sympathetic. (PCB, No.2, November 1954, p.10)

Baruch, like Winnicott, advocated learning the reasons for child behaviour, understanding the child's feelings and allowing their expression in play, language and art. She tried to assure parents that emotions such as jealousy, hate and fear, which most of them were taught to repress in childhood, are normal reactions. As Baruch (1949, p.10) sums up:

If a child is a persistently 'bad child' he is a hurt child, a fearful child, a child choking with anger. We don't know why ... all we know is that he is not behaving as we would like to have him.

I found her advice most useful. Many parents liked her idea of spending some time alone with children each day. Her advice on alternatives to corporal punishment was generally well-received. For many years after I had stopped taking Parents' Centre classes, I met parents who would speak to me about the value of this book.

### ***6.6.2 Progressive advice and support within New Zealand***

The third group of writers dedicated to making education for young children more progressive, were the New Zealand gurus who wrote for New Zealand parents and early childhood teachers. They had been influenced in their teacher training by the first group – Nunn, Dewey, Isaacs and Neill in particular. In their post-graduate work and parenting they had found the ideas and writings of Isaacs, Bowlby, Winnicott, Spock and to some extent Gesell useful. In their attempts to reach New Zealand parents and policy makers they captured the ideas and drew upon the thinking, work and research of the second group

of gurus, and then, in their own writing, in the New Zealand context, became gurus themselves. Each of them worked at a practical level with parents, particularly in the Playcentre organisation, not only training them for leadership, but building a constituency of educated consumers who could bring pressure to bear on policy makers to reform the services, in both health and education, for children under three.

Helen Brew wrote extensively for the *Parents' Centres Bulletins*, and submissions to various commissions of enquiry. She supplied notes to groups around the country, and articles for the press. She also corresponded with groups and individuals of a similar persuasion, throughout the world. This gave her basic material for her articles such as research reports to back her case. Two reports published in the *Parents' Centres Bulletin* referred to a research project by Bowlby which validated the Parents' Centre view about responding to babies crying in this statement: 'The more you 'give in' to a baby, the happier and easier he will be; the more you fight him, the more difficult he will become' (*PCB*, No.2, Nov 1954, p.12). He reported research into rooming-in and the H Bug<sup>8</sup>, another important issue for the pioneers and concluded with '[that] the mother was the last place from where infection could come ... Research has shown that one out of nine nurses is a danger' (*PCB*, No.12, Dec 1958, p.5).

Helen Brew obtained and used feedback from mothers, particularly on their hospital experiences and the child management Parents' Centre advocated in many of her articles. In the article *Solicited Testimonials* a mother provides 'notes on a birth, with a discussion on hospital attitudes and rooming-in'. This mother identified the help she received from Parents' Centre classes, some of which gave her the confidence to demand feed the baby at night 'I'd pad surreptitiously to his crib and comfort him and feed him'. It concluded with affirmation of the Parents' Centre objectives 'the most wonderful part of the whole experience was having my husband's support throughout the birth, so that we felt the baby was really born to us both. But for the knowledge and confidence which we gained from the Centre, and a very understanding doctor, we could never had had this most creative of experiences' (*PCB*, No.1, July 1943, p.8).

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<sup>8</sup> 'H.Bug, a term in common usage in the 1950s for MRSA (Methycillin Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus). It is highly contagious and runs rampant in the umbilicus. It is commonly found in hospitals among doctors and nurses' (Preston, M. 2004).

Beverley Morris made a major contribution to early childhood education. She lectured in child development particularly in courses for Playcentre supervisors as well as Parents' Centre leaders. In the 1960s, Beverley became an important guru, positioning for a generation the progressive ideal for parents, in her book 'Understanding Children' (Morris, 1967). In the introduction she stressed the fact that 'parents are the experts where children are concerned and they should have confidence in their own decisions'. She admitted, however, that 'Parents of today are particularly confused because moral values within the community have altered with trends towards more secular and rational thinking'. She paid tribute to the gurus of the past by saying 'each era ... provides new data for interpreting the behaviour of children'. Between 1975 and 1992 Beverley wrote a regular column for the *Parents' Centres Bulletin* called, at first, *Talking About Children* and then later *Living with Children*.

In this way the pioneers were using their writing, as well as their teaching skills, to enlarge the educated consumer base, so that they would become allies in the move towards change. Other adult educators such as Gwen and Crawford Somerset (O'Sullivan, 2000), influenced parents in the liberal tradition through their work in Playcentre training. Though not pioneers of Parents' Centre, they were influential personally and through their writings. Gwen Somerset, as an infant teacher had been in the forefront of liberal change in the classroom (Somerset, 1988). Her work with Crawford her husband, provided a model of successful parent education in the liberal tradition in Feilding, particularly about the value of play. It inspired many to go on to becoming Playcentre supporters (Campbell, 1945).

Lex Grey is another pioneer whose books were used widely by teacher trainers, Playcentre and Parents' Centre workers and parents. He emphasised observation of children as a vital ingredient of understanding, an ideal which all the gurus I have described would support. 'By looking and listening, that is by observing children while they are at play, grown-ups can learn how it is that a self grows, how it changes and something of the significance that those changes have for the growth of the self' (Grey, 1975, p.3). He demonstrated the belief that 'understanding more about children is a big step towards understanding more about oneself as parent or teacher' (Grey, 1953. Introduction; 1979). Quentin Brew reviews Lex's book *Children at Play* (1953) in this way:

The book is not concerned only with children at play, but rather seeks – successfully – to give understanding of children and their environment (including their parents) through focussing upon the most childlike aspect of children – their play. The writing is simple and direct even, in dealing with complex and subtle issues. This manual is eminently practical, having obviously grown out of a great deal of first-hand experience, as well as thinking and reading. Mr Grey knows children and their play inside and out, he is a professional in the field of adult education; and he can write – enough said. (*PCB*, No.11, August 1958, p.23)

## **6.7 Chapter overview**

A group of like-minded people, the pioneers of Parents' Centre rallied round Helen Brew in 1952 to found the Parents' Centre organisation. They were motivated by the philosophy which had been an ingredient in their childhoods and developed further in their training and careers to liberalise childbirth and the education of children under three. I have analysed the contributions of the educationists who gave them a basis for their Parents' Centre work – they were the gurus of Parents' Centre.

## CHAPTER 7:

### Successful Strategies For Change: Modifying Attitudes To Child Rearing

In this chapter I identify from the interviews, my own recollections, subsequent experience as National Training Officer, and material in the Bulletins. The strategies used by the pioneers to bring about the changes they regarded as necessary, to achieve their objectives. This goal presented the pioneers with four major tasks. The first was to provide 'a comprehensive educational programme to help equip parents for their demanding, but rewarding, role (PCB No.1, July 1954, p.1). A second task was the necessity to build the understanding necessary to replace in the minds of parents and those close to them, misunderstandings and anxieties which had become an essential part of their belief system. The third task was to build enough confidence in Parents' Centre members, for them to become part of a constituency for change, through transmission of their ideas to others, such as family members neighbours, members of organisations they belonged to and the service providers. The final task was to equip some members for leadership in Parents' Centre and in effective campaigns to change community services.

In this chapter I will demonstrate how the focus on those four basic tasks affected the nature of the organisation, its structure, the conduct of the classes, and the strategies to educate the public. These had immediate consequences for Parents' Centre and created a supportive constituency for change .

#### 7.1 The gap in the services

I argued in chapter 6 that a major reason for the success of Parents' Centre was that the people who attended Parents' Centre classes, did so because there were no other facilities to meet their needs. As Chris Cole-Catley remembered, '*there was a general happiness in the group* [because they had found the service they required]'. There were three major deficiencies in the services:

- (i) No holistic ante-natal education which included husbands;
- (ii) Little help for parents with feeding, toilet training, discipline and sex education, in more child-friendly ways than those advocated by Plunket, in the 1950s; and



- (iii) No mechanism for parents by which they as consumers could put pressure on policy makers to reform the services for childbirth and parenthood of children under three.

The pioneers were aware that there was a constituency for change in the community. People like Barbara Hodge, were seeking guidance, because they knew almost nothing about child rearing.

*My concept of children was that I had never even thought about them...I could say I was conceptless)... That was a period when the old ideas of parents "that children should be seen and not heard" had gone. But there was nothing really in its place and I think people found that hard. I had never had anything to do with small children ... there was no easing into family life for me. Probably par for the course then. (Barbara)*

Beverley Morris believed that the decrease in family size was a factor in the lack of knowledge about child-rearing among prospective parents '*we came from small families, so had no experience of bringing up others, as is the case in large families*'.

The pioneers realised too that there were others such as Mary Logan, who disliked the rigid practice she had observed in nursing and had been brave and knowledgeable enough to try the new ideas on her own but had found the experience difficult and often denigrating. She, like many other pioneers, who already had children, needed a boost to her self-esteem. She felt Parents' Centre gave that to her:

*If you are surrounded by people who criticise you, you feel very insecure ... somehow it was the only place I was able to talk about these things. So it was very freeing for me and wonderful to be with people who were immediately in sympathy with my feelings. (Mary L)*

Some pioneers like Beverley Morris, were aware of the new ideas on child rearing from overseas and were becoming impatient that they were not being applied here.

*We were concerned at the advice given by Plunket which was very much at odds with our own feelings against forcing children, denigrating them and making them unhappy. (Beverley)*

There were, therefore, parents ready to seek advice and support by attending Parents' Centre classes (Jarvis, 1995), and others like the pioneers, motivated and ready to offer a service to fill the gaps, and confident they could (see chapter 5). Helen Thornton, Ann

Rosenberg and Beverley Morris demonstrated motivation and confidence, typical of the pioneers, in these quotes:

*When we started we had lots of kids [in our Playcentre Community] and could really see, in their neighbourhoods, that people needed help. I was so sure that my kids must have a feeling of self-worth and that guided more or less everything I've done ever since. (Helen T)*

*The school teachers could not understand why our children were so easy-going and easy to deal with – the Sutherland children were at the same school. I said it was because of Parents' Centre ... I had met Bevan-Brown before he went to England ... he used to say 'Don't stop baby thumb-sucking, it will lead to masturbation! (Ann)*

*I would tell them that it's not spoiling the child by giving it what it wants. The child is not a competitor. They are not crying to get one over you – they don't have the brains to do that ... I don't think people are speaking plainly enough to kids. They need to tell them all about it [sex]. They get totally mixed messages from the TV these days. It's no wonder they are confused. I remember being at a meeting in Khandallah and a boy came up to me and said 'how will I know what to do when I do it' and I just told him 'Your body will tell you'. You just need to be honest. (Beverley)*

## **7.2 A consumer organisation**

I have introduced the fact that Parents' Centre was a consumer organisation from the start (chapter 1). In this section I argue that Parents' Centre was forced into becoming a consumer organisation which was suitable for New Zealand parents and then retained that model as a vehicle for change. This made the organisation different. There were only a few comparable organisations readily available to emulate or consult so the founders were free from the constraints of copying and adapting overseas models. They could work out a pattern that suited them. Admittedly there were some similarities with the Playcentre organisation which had been founded by consumers, the mothers. Playcentre, however, was not seen as a major affront to educational practice in the way that Parents' Centre challenged the health services. In many ways the philosophy and practice of Playcentre was in accord with and demonstrating, the changes in education approved by Government and policy makers, (Beeby, 1992; Alcorn, 2001; Stover, 1998; Densem, 2000; Chapman, 2003). The Family Planning Association was similar in some ways but it was not seen as advocating any major change to the health services. By contrast, Parents' Centre, from the beginning offered a challenge. Many who joined, in the early days, had already deviated from the system on an individual basis, and were regarded as a threat, particularly if they

had made their views public. Helen Brew and Beverley Morris, for example, had tried to follow Dick-Read methods in childbirth; demand feeding and childrearing. Lex Grey, Beverley Morris and I had challenged the lack of emphasis on play in kindergartens and infant schools.

Traditionally, changes in health and education, before the 1940s, had emanated from those in authority who had the responsibility in their organisations for decision making. Change from the top, was the norm in a hegemony of Government departments, universities and training colleges. These institutions could command change by exerting pressure on their paid employees. I had been aware of this procedure, in my teaching career and had instigated some change myself before I became involved in Parents' Centre. I became even more mindful of that process as an officer in the Department of Education between 1974 and 1982. The change process typically began with a decision of Government, followed by circulation of documents detailing recommendations from working parties of people especially chosen, on the basis of expertise in and enthusiasm for the changes required by Government policy. These recommendations were discussed at in-service courses, where key people were brought together to assess methods of implementation. New appointments, based on evidence of enthusiasm for the changes, would follow. Consumers could be represented in this process but did not usually have much influence. By contrast, the Parents' Centre pioneers, the consumers, sought change in accordance with their perspective as consumers. What is more they wanted change which was based on their own needs, knowledge and experience. Not all at the top opposed Parents' Centre views. Some of the policy makers in health were open to the new ideas but were afraid that the entry of lay people, especially women into the arena could engender resistance from other professionals and create a barrier to change.

The pioneers were familiar with the way change was effected and managed in the established organisations from experience in their professional work. It would have been simpler to copy a traditional model. Indeed, in my opinion, most of the pioneers could have become successful authoritarian leaders. They realised, however, that, to build a constituency for change, they would be more successful in adhering to the consumer model. This meant they had to rely on and continually build consumer power (Brew, 1959, p.3).

Justification for staying with and building up the consumer model was expressed forcefully by Mary Logan, Diana Mason and Jim Robb:

*Parents' Centre was effecting change from within ... it was a consumer group working to get change for themselves and people like them. (Mary L)*

*I felt that as far as I was concerned it was taken over by the women themselves, who were pregnant. Women demanding to be treated as equals. Women saying 'This is what I want to happen with such and such ...' and I think that's a very good move'. (Diana)*

*We didn't feel that somebody else should be doing it. We did it because we knew it had to be done. (Jim)*

Strategies had to be considered carefully. They had to be weighed up against the goals of the proposed organisation and the stage of readiness of the possible constituency. In the rest of this chapter I identify the ways in which the pioneers drew on and pooled their own knowledge and skills, sought and obtained expertise from others who had some sympathy for their cause and developed the knowledge and confidence of the consumers they worked with to meet their objectives.

### **7.3 The voluntary component**

Besides being a consumer organisation, Parents' Centre was a voluntary organisation, a characteristic that was another key to its success. In the 1950s there were few, if any, avenues for passing on information to groups of parents at the time when they were establishing families. Government funding existed only for Plunket services. It was not common practice to obtain sponsorship from businesses, who did not have the range of baby products they could advertise to parents as is the case today. Without the voluntary contribution of people like the pioneers, the organisation could not have succeeded. Payment for salaried workers would have had to come from class fees as June Bastings recalled: *'We weren't charged much. It was all done on a shoestring'*. Fees would have had to be set at a level which would have excluded many from classes, particularly in areas such as Upper Hutt which, mainly led by volunteers, produced a strong centre among working class people. Even middle-class parents who, in the 1950s, typically lived on one income, were not usually affluent especially when they were embarking on parenthood with its extra costs. Helen Brew made this point to the Finlay Commission:

We feel that we do not need to elaborate upon the economic advantages of making use of voluntary effort. A hundred pounds collected by a voluntary society itself, or granted to it by a trust or government, can do the work of a much larger sum directly spent by a Department whose salary and administrative costs are so much higher. (Brew, 1959, p.31)

The female pioneers could work as volunteers in the 1950s and 1960s because they were supported by their husbands. That was the traditional pattern at least among middle-class women. Some like myself worked a few hours a week, often as a response to invitations. The freedom from full-time paid employment gave some women leisure to pursue interests such as Parents' Centre. With its provision for children, the organisation provided the opportunity for volunteers taking time out from careers to play a meaningful role in the community and keep alive the skills they had learned.

Apart from financial considerations, volunteers in Parents' Centre provided a valuable counter-balance to the professional view as they were free to be innovative and radical (for their times). In her submissions to the Finlay Consultative Committee, 1959, Helen Brew expressed the conviction that *'some of the deficiencies which the present committee [the Finlay has been set up to examine] exist precisely because of this failure to obtain the parents' views.'* (Helen B. Introduction).

Although all the pioneers had been members of the paid work-force before parenthood, they were prepared to work as volunteers because they had confidence in the necessity for the organisation and realised that its success depended on them; they also enjoyed their work. The pioneers soon realised that the ethos of being a volunteer was different, in many ways, from that of being a professional. For example, it was particularly difficult for volunteers to make a regular commitment to an organisation, especially when they had young children. In their professional work the pioneers would have learned to be punctual, responsible and reliable. Their primary focus would be the job. Family and home considerations had to play a secondary role. This was not the case with volunteers. In the 1950s the welfare of husbands and children had to be the prime considerations for mothers. Thus, they could not be as reliable or as efficient as people in the paid workforce. This meant that the pioneers, when leading classes, had to learn to make do and cope with small and even quite large irritations. Common problems, in my experience, were lateness, because the baby or husband was upset or forgetfulness which resulted in vital equipment

not always being available. As a leader, I soon realised that if I or other leaders, conveyed by word or body language that we were annoyed by their short comings, the volunteers could 'vote with their feet' and they often did. I found too, that in some cases husbands had problems with the time and family income spent by their wives in working in classes or on committees. This was rarely the case with the pioneers, as their husbands were supportive, but even with them it could be a problem at times (chapter 5). This anxiety, in some cases created a gap in understanding between those who had been professionals and those who had not. Where a service involving volunteers worked, as it did in the main with Parents' Centre, organisers learned about the reality of life for the mothers who were prepared to help. It kept them grounded. Personally, this learning became a valuable part of my knowledge when later, as a Departmental officer, I negotiated with voluntary groups who worked in early childhood. Sometimes I was able to temper the demands of male officers for large amounts of paper work from voluntary organisations.

Another strength which the pioneers had to develop, was the ability to adapt to work conditions different from and often less comfortable than those they had taken for granted in their professional lives. Classes were often located in halls or rooms used for a variety of community purposes. As national training officer I was billeted in Parents' Centre families and came to appreciate the strain on those who had to billet me. There were also difficulties for me. I sometimes had to sleep in a room with the baby, had nowhere to regain equilibrium between sessions and was often aware of the tension with husbands less devoted to the cause than their wives. I learned too, that it was important in working with volunteers to ensure they did not develop the perception they were there only to carry out the ancillary roles. These experiences made me aware of the family context of Parents' Centre and the need to respect and cater for that when I planned for my classes and training sessions. Fortunately, many of the pioneers too had been initiated into this cultural change when they became Playcentre leaders.

Volunteers not only led classes, they carried out class organisation and were encouraged to play an active, though low-key and sensitive role, in helping people to relate in tea breaks and on other informal occasions. This practice helped people to feel comfortable in contributing to discussion and exchanging ideas. The fact that the leaders were bringing up



small children, gave them a rapport with class-members and much learning occurred outside set class times:

*I got a lot of tips from mothers. I felt this was at least as useful as some of the lectures were, talking amongst ourselves ... we would talk about things, ... you do get pretty wound up in your own pregnancies and so sometimes it was good to have other people listen to you and to listen to. (June Bastings)*

*I learned that the mistakes we made weren't made with ill-intent. We all learned from each other. (Chris Cole Catley)*

For many of the pioneers, voluntary work in Parents' Centre was a way of offering services they were trained for, while they were out of the paid work-force bringing up their young children. The satisfaction and skills they gained probably helped them to form a rapport with class members who might have felt inadequate if the leaders had been too efficient. I found this experience helpful even though much of it required me to alter some of my 'professional' standards and rearrange my priorities.

There were other challenges facing Parents' Centre in its effort to effect change, and to gain the sympathy and support of the public. The organisation attracted a group of people who were diverse in parenting experience and political and religious belief. This diversity put pressure on leaders to be tolerant and supportive of all viewpoints and this was emphasised in training sessions. No doubt there were times when tolerance broke down but Barbara Hodge felt they succeeded in that way:

*I had been challenged into a whole lot of reading and thought and discussion groups. We weren't all in agreement. I wouldn't like you to think that everybody was in agreement. There were some argumentative people, who really did not go along with what Helen and a few of the others were saying ... it was good to have all those other views spoken. No-one was pushing me. (Barbara)*

Beverley Morris noted that 'tolerance of a range of views could accommodate differences in religious belief' which could be divisive. From the beginning, Parents' Centre leaders avoided alignment with any one political party. Dame Hilda Ross (McCallum, 1993), a National Party member, took a strong stand to support the organisation to obtain funding in 1956, against the advice of the Health Department. Walter Nash, Labour prime minister in 1957 'had been a friend to Parents' Centre' (Dobbie, 1990, p.45) and attended and spoke supportively at the performance of the production 'Mum's the Word' in Wellington in 1956.



Among class members there was diversity in the experience of parenting. Leaders had to cater not only for first-time parents but also for those who had other children. It was important that the latter were not made to feel guilty because their child rearing had not been of the type advocated by Parents' Centre. They had to be encouraged to externalise their guilt into a force for change or to try alternative methods which achieved a similar result. As June Bastings recalled *'I did feel a bit guilty, but I tried to rationalise it and say that I can't do the best thing for her so I'll do the next best thing'*.

#### 7.4 Leadership

In the Parents' Centre submission Helen Brew made this statement to the Finlay Commission:

Leadership of the Centres is, for the most part, undertaken by mothers and fathers who as teachers, social workers, nurses etc before marriage have had professional careers that equip them for parent education. (1959, p.12)

The pioneers fitted that description. They had all been leaders in their fields. They all agreed however, that Helen Brew had extraordinary leadership qualities. She was remembered as dynamic, unifying, energetic, effective and charismatic, by many women. Although some admitted they felt inadequate by comparison, the pioneers generally agreed that the organisation could not have taken root without her. She was a good speaker and effective at getting her message across. She endeared herself to other women by relating her own experiences, both of failure and of success. Chris Cole-Catley described Helen B's leadership qualities:

*Helen was the strength, the one determined to get things done. We owe her a very great deal. I'm just so immensely grateful for Parents' Centre and in particular Helen for starting it...She had an invincible belief in her own rightness. It just so happened that I agreed with it. She was a bit of a zealot. She could laugh at herself. We needed someone like her though. Her speaking ability was extremely good, with her acting. She was very well read. But we had to be, didn't we? She was able to find all the right sort of people to come into Parents' Centre. She never put anyone down. She could relate to those women. She did sometimes think the world revolved around her and was rather put out when you wouldn't drop things immediately to go and see her. She got a huge support from Quentin. He was a very special guy. (Chris)*

Helen Brew had learned the importance of gaining support for her leadership. She could even command it, at times, as she did in her experience as student president at Christchurch Training College:

*I grabbed a couple of people on the stage and said 'Look you'd be an awfully good person to propose me' and he did!!! When I came out of the meeting I was totally overwhelmed by the support. I told them that I had to have everybody help me. And I needed everybody to work together. (Helen B)*

The strength of her leadership is best illustrated through the voices of the pioneers themselves. They emphasised her ability as a speaker:

*I listened to all these marvellous speakers including Helen Brew and got very excited. A lot of people (especially women) got a crush on Helen. She was very charismatic. I know I did. I got carried away when I first met her. (Mary Dobbie)*

*The main experience I had of Helen was in a drama group in Unity Theatre. That was when I had my three kids. I saw Helen first at Newtown Kindergarten Mothers' Club. She was beautiful and humorous, even though she spoke on a serious subject. I was aware she was having fights with the obstetricians and I appreciated what she was doing for women. (Beverley Morris)*

*She did wonderful things and she had these ideas that people grasped. My experience was that she often told stories from her own experience and her acting ability helped her to tell a very strong and memorable story. She was also very open about her feelings. (Barbara Hodge)*

*The Parents' Centre at Upper Hutt said "We'll run a meeting here and they asked Helen Brew to come. So we did this and of course she was extremely inspirational – very good about explaining what Parents' Centre was all about ...". (Helen Thornton)*

*Helen Brew [influenced me] she was totally committed ... she was amazing. (June Bastings)*

I can affirm all these statements. I would add my admiration of the amount of time and effort she put towards preparing submissions and speeches to ensure her facts could be supported, even though she was a mother of five children, one very young. She could and did use the assertive right of asking for help to good effect. Chris Cole-Catley documented Helen Brew's convictions, in a way which was well researched, powerful and convincing. She had the ability to adapt her style to the people she was addressing. The quote below from the 1970s, demonstrates this point:

*R.D. Laing came to New Zealand and by this time I had been working with mothers for years and before I even contacted him I did the right things. I wrote, I rang, I gave my background and somehow one of his people softened up a bit and said 'Well, my dear, you're not a doctor but we could give you five minutes. Would that be alright?' ... all that had to be said and I only had five minutes to say it in... I was trembling. I mean I was a good actress so I didn't fall apart. I put on a professional face that I really didn't have ... I told him all the key things, and I said, in a few sentences, what we had been doing. (Helen B)*

Helen Brew recognized the importance of putting people at ease, e.g. in the 1970s when R.D. Laing visited her she recalled that:

*He [Laing] came here and he looked at my red room and I had to minimise anything that would irritate him.*

Helen Brew had the ability to form close relationships with those who had power and influence, such as Bowlby and Winnicott, and was often able to persuade them to be of assistance to Parents' Centres. An example of this was Laing's cooperation in making the film 'Birth with R.D. Laing':

*This man was a god in this area. There was no question. The genuine article. He was really an international figure and he was in my house. Suddenly I've got this god with me and nobody doubts this RD Laing. He had been in the papers so often. He said 'I will reach you in London and we'll make a film together ... well that just turned it totally around. (Helen B)*

I am arguing that the personal qualities of Helen Brew were a crucial factor in the success of the organisation. The other pioneers too had leadership skills which they used in various ways in the Parents' Centre organisation. They presented role models of people who were ready to support and defend their beliefs with sound arguments and without becoming defensive. In most cases these qualities had been firmly set in place from childhood and built on later in their careers. Most too had a good sense of humour and the ability to laugh at themselves.

Let us hear from the pioneers themselves:

*We always regarded ourselves as being at the forefront of liberal thought in Wellington ... We were both [she and her husband] voracious readers ... I had liberal ideas about how babies should be with their mothers at all times. (Diana Mason)*

*I had confidence in myself. (June Bastings)*

*I was of good intelligence and did well in subjects that girls generally did not – science and Latin. (Alice Fieldhouse)*

*I suppose I saw myself as a strong woman ... I was strong in my feelings about the right care of children. (Ephra Garrett)*

*I am open to ideas ... an enthusiastic person. (Barbara Hodge)*

*I was really into social issues such as family planning and abortion. A lot of women suffered back then. (Mary Dobbie)*

*I really class myself as a Peter Pan because I really like to play and I can't help being spontaneous and working with my hands. (Beverley Morris)*

*I felt very sorry for mothers ... I had been a midwife myself ... I felt that although the letter of the law was being observed, the spirit of it was not. Women were not being treated as people, but as machines producing babies. (Mary Logan)*

*I'm very lucky that I've greatly enjoyed life. I had no limitations ... I just took for granted that I had all these opportunities ... I was very lucky to have met a lot of people and I was very curious ... I've always considered myself a feminist, even before the word was really used. (Chris Cole-Catley)*

In summary, leadership was an important factor in the success of Parents' Centre. All the pioneers were leaders in their fields before they became parents. They all believed, however, that the leadership of Helen Brew was a crucial factor in the establishment and early success of Parents' Centre. She could not have done without them anymore than they could have done without her. I always regarded her as the mechanism which launched the Parents' Centre rocket. It had to be well built and staffed to survive and the other pioneers guaranteed that. They had been trained for leadership from their childhoods. Most of them had role models of parents who took leadership roles in the community to bring about change for themselves and others. The times, during and after World War II, gave them opportunities for leadership in their careers, often as change agents. Their work had often taken them into the community and involved them with parents, so they had some expertise in community leadership.

## 7.5 Leadership training

Leaders like Helen Brew, Beverley Morris, Lex Grey, Helen Thornton, Jim Robb and I had been working with students and parents, using theory and practice in accord with the progressive tradition, before we worked in Parents' Centre. We did not believe however, that we should rest on our laurels. We came to realise as we worked in Parents' Centre classes, that there were particular skills that we needed to improve. Although we had developed skills of leading group discussions which we saw as the best way of encouraging class members to express and meet their needs, there were always concerns about the people who said nothing and even worse the 'Mrs Smiths' who had to speak all the time. The contribution the leaders should make, in groups, such as defining and adhering to the boundary between education and therapy, was another much debated topic. Feedback was considered crucial in preserving the consumer aspect of the organisation. Leaders had to learn to encourage and support critical as well as positive comments and not become defensive. An important part of training was to give the pioneers opportunities to share their skills and get support from each other in leading and participating in group discussions.

*The whole subject of group discussions was very new ... the group discussion was very hard to achieve. We would just try and get the discussion going back then ... there was no thought to confidentiality or anything like group contracts. I think then, it had a strong feminine lead and a general goodness towards all people, especially towards the very young, I think that was its greatest strength. (Lex Grey)*

*I think I learned how to run good discussion groups on the women, who were very strong and not slow to challenge what you said. (June Bastings)*

*I did an internship training course; ran a group of this kind among men active in Parents' Centre ... Parents' Centre people found they needed leadership training and this was one of my contributions. (Jim Robb)*

Leaders of training sessions worked hard to ensure that members respected their own abilities. The ability of class members to participate in a meaningful way was rewarding for leaders. This appears to have been the result for Helen Thornton and Beverley Morris.

*I went out to Linden Parents' Centre. They asked me some really good questions, especially the fathers, on discipline. I always thought Parents' Centre was great for raising these matters. (Helen T)*

Similarly, Beverley stated:

*It was a revelation to me that I was useful talking to parents. I didn't feel like I was being looked at like a guru or something like that. They were just drawing from my experience, and therefore I could offer them some form of support.*

I too found that working with parents and applying the skills I had developed further, were rewarding experiences.

I have noted that the Parents' Centre pioneers shared their skills with each other. There were times, however, when people with a reputation for successful teaching outside Parents' Centre, were asked to run courses, which the pioneers and other leaders attended. Such was the one Beverley Morris recalled in this extract:

*Later on there was a man called Dr Janes, an American, who came to give a weekend school at the Majestic Hotel in Paraparaumu. He was an import and came through the Extension Department [of Victoria University]. The course was for Playcentre and other leaders of discussion groups. He would talk about brainstorming and the silent questions. He would say that silence was OK because people were thinking, so I was applying those techniques at the Parents' Centre talks. I was very conscious about the people who couldn't speak out so I would ask them if they were frightened about anything in their pregnancy and they often thought they might have an intellectually handicapped child. So we would all discuss these fears and letting everyone have a go. And ask those who already had children to talk about their experiences. (Beverley)*

In summary, the pioneers pooled their knowledge and sometimes used the services of experts outside their organisation to develop their skills further. They and the others they were able to recruit, worked for the organisation as volunteers. This meant the pioneers had to learn and use effective ways of ensuring a regular service was offered while respecting the constraints on volunteers.

## **7.6 Use of networks**

Networking was used successfully by the Parents' Centre pioneers. The leaders of Parents' Centre had strong support philosophically from Victoria University's education department and the Wellington Training College. On a practical level, networking reduced the costs of equipment, advertising and payment to class leaders. It also led to interchange of ideas on training and ways of dealing with problems. These interactions had particular value, because the clientele of all these groups had similar backgrounds, but a slightly different perspective and focus.



Helen Thornton recalled the cooperation between groups:

*The Playcentre provided a jumping-off stage and the Parents' Centre provided a hall, a crèche, a room for us to have meetings [in the Maternity Hospital, through the cooperation of the matron] ... and of course we had tremendous help from University Extension [where Beverley Morris later worked].*

This mutual assistance reduced the amount of time and energy the volunteers had to spend on money raising, although a certain amount was necessary. The endorsement of compatible organisations helped to give the movement credibility, validity and a 'liberal' rather than a 'radical' aura. The involvement of University lecturers gave the organisation respectability in the eyes of many attending classes and helped them to accept the progressive educational principles on which the courses were based. Parents' Centre thus gained from the networks of liberal thinking in other organisations and contributed to them, as this quote from Jim Robb demonstrated:

*The University encouraged its staff to get out and do things in the community and so if you were getting out and doing things, taking time off work and doing things related to working, it had a value. So there was no problem about doing that. I was doing things, which, on the face of it, were valuable and tied in with my work. I could regard the people in Parents' Centre as being from the same points of view particularly with Quentin, as colleagues. A lot of Parents' Centre people, especially new members, were part of my general constituency of students...As time went on and as I got to know the people better – I'd never met Quentin before, or Helen – they became a group of people I knew well and liked working with and I became good friends with David and Hazel Ross. David was responsible for introducing me to Quentin. Both were in psychological services. David and I trained together. Both of us were best men at each other's weddings. We had a long contact. We were at Teachers college in 1940, 41. (Jim)*

Networking often involved the pioneers in training in groups with similar goals, such as Playcentre, student training for nursing, teaching and social work, Marriage Guidance, the Family Planning Association and the Workers Educational Association. Helen B emphasised this in her submission to the Finlay Commission (1959, p.8).

Thousands of young mothers and fathers have expressed their views, aired their worries, and received much help and encouragement during lecture discussions conducted by Parents' Centre leaders at the invitation of such groups as Plunket Mothers' Clubs, Kindergarten Associations, Parent-teacher groups etc.

Jim Robb also emphasised this point:

*There was an overlap in my activities. I showed the Robertsons' film to trainees in Marriage Guidance and some Parents' Centre members turned up, as Marriage Guidance trainees, e.g. David and Hazel Ross were involved in the training. Lots of*



*things were going on. There was a rush of interest in regard to the mental health area. Lots of associations were set up. We kept meeting the same people at meetings, such as Wallis Ironside and a number of others. I met Bevan-Brown and knew the Cooks quite well. I had heard about them at Tavistock – I had been there.*

This sharing of resources for training spread the objectives of Parents' Centre to a wide range of people in the community and often promoted sympathy for the organisation and its goals. The networks proved important in identifying and finding professional people such as doctors, nurses and physiotherapists who were sympathetic to Parents' Centre ideals, at least in some degree. They could recognise there was a 'critical mass' (Swain, D. 2004) in the community becoming sympathetic to change. Parents' Centre leaders sought and kept the cooperation of these people by treating their views with respect, inviting them to leadership training courses and demonstrating appreciation of the restraints on them as professionals, as the following quote from Helen Thornton demonstrated.

*We did always try to cooperate with the professionals, the Plunket nurses and the nurses in the hospitals. We didn't try to antagonise them because what we felt we needed to do was keep them on side, to keep the whole thing going properly ... Sister M, although she was quite difficult to get on with, was very helpful and really did allow us to use their facilities and bring people in for night classes there ... we wouldn't be extreme. Our physio didn't want us to be extreme. She was a rigid physio, who believed in what she was doing and did it, and was bound by her ethics. (Helen T)*

The knowledge the pioneers had obtained about childbirth and parenthood and their ability to use good strategies for communication, enabled them to get cooperation from people who had, at first, only a modicum of support for the Parents' Centre ideas, as Helen Thornton indicated here:

*We visited all the doctors and most of them were a bit apathetic. But Denis Heginbotham was not. He was really keen. He wanted to go ahead and he, I suppose, pressured his fellow doctors into saying that all mothers must go [to Parents' Centre classes]. He really did make the effort to get his other doctors behind him. With a small community it's not so difficult. Denis Heginbotham gave a talk to the fathers but he still wouldn't have fathers in the delivery room. He fought that one right to the last minute. We respected Denis. He was only a young obstetrician. He had only just qualified as an obstetrician and he had a husband in with a birth that had been disastrous. The father had been a 'real pain' and that had put him off completely. He couldn't see past it and rather than make a fuss and antagonise him, we said 'all right, we respect your ideas and you respect ours!'. He was really very good about it. That was just his one block. (Helen T)*

Some of the pioneers offered their services on a voluntary basis to other organisations, such as Training College. Members such as Mary Logan, Alice Fieldhouse, Helen and Quentin Brew and I gave lectures on birth, which were seen as a necessary part of the child development course, though there were few College staff, confident or knowledgeable enough to present them. Thus they filled a gap and often gained support at the time for Parents' Centre. There was a double advantage in that. When the students became parents they sought out Parents' Centre classes and used their skills to support and promote the organisation by serving on committees and as class leaders.

The leadership qualities I have described had an important role in the success of the classes. The pioneers worked to convey the progressive ideas they cherished and which they believed they needed to demonstrate, not only for the benefit of class members, but as a way of training future leaders.

### 7.7 The classes

The pioneers of Parents' Centre had a strong belief in their basic principles, as Ephra Garrett attested in this statement:

*I was so sure we were right... I was strong in my feelings that I was right in the care of my children.*

The leaders, especially Helen Brew, conveyed this message in no uncertain terms to class members, as June Bastings recalled:

*Helen Brew ... she had no doubts about anything.*

The pioneers supported their views by reference to the work of the 'Gurus of Parents' Centre'. Their certainty helped them to put their energy into promoting practices which they believed were well supported by research and had proved effective when they applied them, in their work and family lives. It also gave confidence to parents:

*Total insight came when you met the parents [of children with speech problems] who were very nervous and often ashamed their child couldn't talk properly. (Helen B)*

*I didn't have any difficulty with any of them really [her children]. I was so sure we were right. Of course we were right and we knew it, because we were all so much happier. It wasn't that I was unhappy before but I did feel guilty with the four-*

*hourly feeding. She [Helen B] had an invincible belief in her own rightness. It just so happened that I agreed with it. (Chris Cole-Catley)*

This certainty stood them in good stead when questions were asked and ideas challenged especially by well-respected professionals such as obstetricians and Health Department officials. The pioneers however, were not generally a group who could be called 'closed minded'. If they showed such a tendency, many class members were strong enough to challenge them. The organisation of class time allowed for discussion and feedback:

*If people such as Helen B. became dogmatic, there were usually others strong enough to challenge her ideas. (June Bastings)*

*There was only a right way; there was no choice [according to Helen Brew]. That was ok. I had enough wits to know there was always a choice. (Barbara Hodge)*

One of the educational advisers on training, Crawford Somerset, was helpful in warning leaders against an authoritarian approach and urged them to stay open-minded.

The format of the classes was considered crucial as the pioneers believed not only in advocating, but in demonstrating progressive methods of teaching to ensure class members prepared to lead feel welcome, included and appreciated: *'It was inclusive'* (June Bastings). I can recall that the pioneers thought carefully about the way they would present the opening sessions of courses and the image they wanted to convey. Ann Rosenberg and Helen Thornton present the ideal, in these statements:

*A class leader was a powerful and warm person who didn't force anything. She set the scene for the classes (Ann).*

*You were delighted that they were pregnant, you were delighted that they were in your class and wanted to get involved [and it was important to demonstrate that]. (Helen T)*

They realised that the setting for classes was important and tried to present a friendly alternative to the school model, as Mary Dobbie explained:

*One of the first things I would do, was rearrange the chairs in a circle and try and get the discussion going.*

Although it is a simple technique, the arrangement of chairs in a circle so that people can see each other and pick up reactions shows in body language, is one of the most valuable in involving participants in Parents' Centre. Later, as a leader at in-service courses run by the

Training Division of the Department of Education I used the same technique irrespective of the type of trainee. Group members ranged from students, to those in authority, such as school principals and inspectors. I found that in many situations, men found this arrangement difficult to handle and would create a challenge for me, as leader, by sitting side-on, and forming second rows or sub-groups. I have rarely found this technique a problem with early childhood workers who are mainly women. They appear to welcome, rather than be challenged by the in-depth discussions this technique tends to promote.

The pioneers used the format of lectures followed by discussion groups as a key strategy for giving parents the information they needed. It was realised that parents all had some knowledge of childbirth and childrearing from a variety of sources. There was usually a component of anxiety, even fear mixed with unreal expectations in their concepts. As June Bastings remembered '*You do get pretty wound up in your own pregnancies and so sometimes it was good to have other people listen to you and to listen to*'. It was important that leaders could bring the knowledge class members had already acquired into the open, help them to look at it critically and apply what they felt comfortable with. This, the pioneers believed, was education in the progressive tradition as it could meet individual needs, tap into the wealth of knowledge and concern in the group and build self esteem. They tried to convey the message that everyone's contribution was valuable. This method would have been in marked contrast to the form of education most class members would have received in their school lives. Some welcomed it. Others found the lack of criticism and judgement quite threatening and needed assurance that it was indeed a form of education. Jim Robb, Beverley Morris and Ann Rosenberg recalled the continuity between their work in Parents' Centre classes and their professional work:

*Parents' Centre meant to me, initially, a strange organisation I'd never heard of before, which seemed to be doing things I found quite attractive, from the point of view of my personal and professional reference...I was involved in Tavistock using small groups and training sessions. The technique was developed at Tavistock by a psychologist ... He got them together. He'd come in and sit there. They'd try and get him to take over. He refused and interpreted to them what they were doing and what they wanted him to do. I used it as a resource device, in the 60s. (Jim)*

*I was already using the method of giving the people the questions and asking them what they thought. Then I would put it back to them (Beverley).*

*I learned interactive stuff, in the course in Manchester. That built on what I had learned at Victoria, in classes at advanced level, which were usually small. (Ann Rosenberg)*

Being non-threatening to class members was something leaders discussed frequently, as Barbara Hodge recalled from her days as a class member:

*I never heard any expressions of dissatisfaction. But we were in discussion groups afterwards. I think they were successful because of the very casual way in which they were held. There was never any formal signing in. You could come and go as you felt like it and there was an acceptance of everyone. (Barbara)*

A strength of discussion groups was the fact that group leaders had all had recent experience of childbirth and parenthood and were of a similar age to class members. The men, such as Quentin Brew and Jim Robb who led classes had participated with their wives in childbirth and childrearing. This gave them credibility and enabled them to talk from the heart as well as the head which gave them a bond with members. Helen Brew observed:

*The fact that the leaders had coped with similar situations to those of their group members gave them an ability to empathise.*

## **7.8 Practical provisions to meet the needs of parents**

The pioneers aimed to make ante-natal education classes as enjoyable and stress-free as possible. They seem to have succeeded, at least in Wellington, where it was reported that 'discussion techniques are now used. They have proved so successful that it is often difficult to get the mothers to go home' (PCB, No.13, June 1959, p.13). Course planners always allowed for an amount of unstructured time where mothers could relate to each other and the tutors over a cup of tea, browse in the library, or seek clarification, one on one with leaders. Where possible, a creche was provided at classes. A valuable resource for mothers, it also introduced an element of controversy. In *Parents' Centres Bulletin* (No.4, September 1955, p.5) there is a section in which it is noted that 'Permission has been granted by the Wellington Association of Nursery Play Centres for the WPC to run a crèche alongside its existing nursery play centre on Tuesday afternoons'. This permission was given only because of the unusual circumstances connected with the mothers' classes – many of the women attending them had children under Playcentre age. The playgroup allowed mothers with children to attend and concentrate on the lecture-discussions, free from the distraction of children. 'Second-time' mothers were usually a valuable resource in

classes for tutors and class-members because they were seen as having experience. They had often tried the ideas Parents' Centre advocated and had relevant questions and comments. Their relationships with their children were usually noted with interest. Gradually other organisations moved to provide childcare for meetings and conferences. But there were difficulties. One was cost, but there were also requirements for accommodation, staffing, equipment and the welfare of children. Parents' Centres in Wellington in the 1950s were able to meet these requirements.

From the beginning, the founders wanted the organisation to be seen as something for parents, not just women, as Chris Cole-Catley explained:

*Someone suggested that we call Parents' Centre the 'Mothers' Something', but I said right from the very beginning, and I'm sure Helen thought so too, that it must be a Parents' Centre ... the word 'Centre', was modelled on the Playcentre organisation.*

One of the changes that Parents' Centre brought about which was revolutionary in the context of its time was the encouragement of fathers at classes, particularly when the birth process was the topic. The pioneers planned to provide the conditions which would enable fathers to be present and feel comfortable. June Bastings remembered the success of these provisions:

*We were all friends and we would talk about things and our husbands would come to lectures sometimes.*

For several years between 1959 and 1963, I was involved in course planning for Wellington Parents' Centre. In each course two or three lectures were held at night to enable couples to attend. Fathers were given the message that they could be useful – not merely bystanders, as Chris Cole-Catley recalled:

*The father also had an active part to play – rubbing her [his wife's] back, keeping her up with the breathing and generally encouraging – very important, if the nurses were busy.*

Men were given an overview of the birth process, with usually a film on birth and practical ways of helping their wives in labour. The lectures on child management and the role of the father were, as far as possible, given by men. Quentin Brew's contribution was always appreciated. Those who were already fathers were encouraged to talk about their experiences to prospective fathers. Men also played a part in committee work, not usually



as presidents, but in supportive, specialised roles such as treasurer, or legal adviser. Their involvement facilitated networking with politicians and policy makers who were nearly all men. Lectures geared towards the role of the father in classes, gave men a new perspective and, in many cases, led them to support the organisation.

## 7.9 Conferences

Conferences proved to be an effective mechanism for promoting solidarity, training and publicity. As a participant, speaker and workshop leader at many Parents' Centre conferences, I developed a realisation of their value in developing the constituency for 'moving and shaking' the system. They were a practical way of enabling class members to gain another perspective of the role of leaders, particularly in learning how to work at a political level for the organisation. The *Parents' Centres Bulletins* (1952-1962) covered the main points of Parents' Centre Conference proceedings. This was done not only to demonstrate good conference procedure, but to encourage many who were not usually conference-goers to attend, supported by groups from their centres. To this day, centres take turns in running them annually, in different parts of the country. The organisers had to learn and employ many skills to provide a conference. In the process they gained confidence and made the work of centres more widely appreciated in their communities.

Then, as now, local dignitaries, such as mayors and Members of Parliament, were usually involved in the opening ceremony. Businesses were lobbied for support, in return for advertising. The local press were invited. Part of the programme was devoted to publicising the district and delegates were usually given opportunities to visit places of note in the area. The participants learned meeting protocols, according to Beverley Morris '*a most useful skill*', often spoke in public for the first time, mastered the intricacies of remit procedure and learned to appreciate and use the support of like-minded people who often provided good role models, particularly to those who are attending for the first time.

Conferences provided fun, relaxation, a break from the daily and often monotonous, routines of parenting and housework for the women and an appreciation of women's work by the men who attended or had to cope at home with the children. On the personal level, the conference was but one of the ways Parents' Centres demonstrated that they were carrying out the Bowlby dictum that enjoyment could and should be derived from



parenting. Quentin Brew, Helen Brew's husband, was a strong advocate of the idea that women needed breaks and mental refreshment, in order to enjoy their children.

### 7.10 Books and other teaching aids

*'We had a very good library right from the start'* (Chris Cole-Catley).

The library was seen as a vital resource and was appreciated and well used by class members, many of whom were avid readers:

*I found all the readings very good and the library was good. It made an enormous difference to me, to find all this positive stuff about mothering and family life. All this empowerment, in saying that mother wasn't just a cook and bottle washer, but she was responsible for the household and I thought this was so important.* (Mary Logan)

*I really appreciated the library in Parents' Centre, because you didn't have to search for the sort of books that interested you, at that particular time ... so that's where I started reading of what was happening and what was to come. It was great to get that preparation.* (Mary Mowbray)

*When the Parents' Centre library started up and people recommended books, I read everything I could on the subject.* (June Bastings)

*The library was important. It was very focused. People in the classes used it.* (Helen Thornton)

Nearly all relevant books were by overseas authors and not readily available in New Zealand public libraries. The economic policy of the 1950s restricted the importation of books (Sutch, 1966). The prevailing social climate was so closed to discussion of anything to do with sex and reproduction, that many women would have found it hard to ask for such books, in shops and public libraries even if they had been in stock or affordable. Books on specialist subjects were expensive. Relevant books were regularly reviewed in the *Parents' Centres Bulletin*. Lists of suitable books for centres were updated by the Federation and sent to them, with costs included to encourage committees to keep their libraries up to date.

Although none of the pioneers mentioned it in their interviews, I recall the importance of some special equipment which was effective as a teaching aid. Two important items in this category, were 'The Birth Atlas' and a model of a pelvis with a doll foetus, used to

demonstrate the birth process. The Birth Atlas gave many women their first view of the organs of reproduction and familiarised them with the names. The model pelvis and doll foetus used to demonstrate the birth process often provided a relief from tension as mothers indulged in some often giggly free play associated with the birth process. Films were commonly used. I found these particularly effective as a teaching device, especially if they were introduced with care and discussed afterwards in groups which allowed for expression of feelings. Two useful films shown in 1955 dealt with children's feelings. They were *Angry Boy* and *Feelings of Rejection* (PCB, No.4, 1955, p.5).

### **7.11 Building a constituency for support**

Conferences, as I have described, provided a bridge between change effected in the classes and conduct of local organisations and the national thrust for change in policy and services as discussion of remits to Government, service providers and commissions has always been an important part of the programme. There were other ways in which Parents' Centre aimed to effect change by gaining support from people outside the organisation. The *Parents' Centres Bulletin*, the publication compiled by Parents' Centre, was seen as an effective way of publicising the objectives of Parents' Centre and recruiting people who might at first be critical, or, if convinced, useful allies. The distribution list (PCA Box No.1a, appendix 6) demonstrates that it included politicians, doctors, nurses, hospital administrators, nurse and teacher trainers, and workers in health and education, some of whom communicated their appreciation of the service such as 'a hospital matron who expressed pleasure in accepting and reading the *Parents' Centres Bulletin* and [added] 'I would like to subscribe something towards the cost' (PCB, No.7 October 1956, p.3). In their submission to the Finlay Commission (1959) (p.3, para 2) the Parents' Centre authors stressed the value of the *Parents' Centre Bulletin*, thus [Parents' Centres] 'publish a printed Bulletin, which has wide distribution throughout New Zealand, goes to all maternity hospitals and children's wards and has aroused considerable interest overseas'.

The *Parents' Centres Bulletin* had four main functions. The first was to give information on new developments in childbirth and parenthood within New Zealand and overseas, by professionals, e.g. an account of an address: Taking the Fear of the Unknown from Childbirth by Dr. H Carey, Professor of the Post-Graduate School of Obstetrics and Gynaecology in Auckland (PCB, 7 October 1956, p.14). The second was to provide facts,

especially from research, which could serve as ammunition, when members such as the pioneers found themselves and their views challenged. An article *World Trends and the WPC* gave facts about 'the advantages of the home delivery over the hospital' (*PCB*, No.2, November, 1954, p.3). This was particularly useful when Parents' Centre pioneers were mounting campaigns, such as the need for parents to be able to stay with young children in hospital. The third was to publicise developments and build among members a sense of pride in belonging to a successful and expanding organisation and to give information about ways of establishing and conducting their own centres. Accounts of successful events in Wellington Parents' Centre and Palmerston North (p.7) and a useful book-list (p.9) were published (*PCB*, No.2, November 1954). The fourth was to document the personal experiences of members, the successes and challenges to which other parents could relate (*PCB*, No.18, November 1961, p.23 'Mothers Experiences').

During the years of this study – 1952-1962, the *Parents' Centres Bulletin* was edited by the Parents' Centre pioneers, who were experienced in the skills of journalism and completely dedicated to the cause. Chris Cole-Catley volunteered her services and was editor for the first two years. When she was overseas in Jacarta (from 1956-59), where she was foreign correspondent to the Australian Broadcasting Commission, Quentin Brew took over. Chris resumed as editor from 1959-61. In 1962 Mary Dobbie, another very experienced journalist from Auckland, assumed that role.

Chris defines her view of the role of the *Parents' Centres Bulletin*:

*My specific job was pretty soon starting up the Bulletin, which was much more for doctors than anyone else. It was written as simply as possible, so that other people could understand it and enjoy it. The whole idea was to persuade doctors and nurses to work in with others.*

I found the *Parents' Centres Bulletin* useful in classes, discussions with officials and academics, Members of Parliament and other policy makers. The editors kept themselves informed about visits by overseas experts to New Zealand approached them for articles and were sometimes successful in introducing them to policy makers. The visit of Professor WB McDonald, Professor of Child Health, at the University of Western Australia, who came to New Zealand to lecture at 'the recent conference of paediatricians at Wellington Hospital' was reported. He allowed his opening address on 'The Welfare of Children in Hospital', to be published in the *Parents' Centres Bulletin* (No.15, December 1959, p.6).

Support from sources outside the movement was publicised in *Parents' Centres Bulletins*. One was the Pope's announcement of support (*PCB*, No.6, June 1956, p.9). This must have been comforting for members who belonged to the Roman Catholic Church, especially those who were aware that the organisation was labeled 'communist' by some obstetricians. In my experience, some were concerned about the provision of informal advice by class leaders and other parents on family planning. This advice was often different from the practice endorsed by their religion.

Information in the *Parents' Centres Bulletin* probably indicated to doctors, nurses, policy makers and the general public the growing strength of support among their colleagues and this helped to minimise professional risk. The names of the committee members of new centres were usually featured. This practice not only identified them and acknowledged their contribution, it helped many whose family had to shift for work, or promotion, to find Parents' Centre members in their new district.

Many articles could be regarded as ways of assuring readers that practices advocated by Parents' Centre were not radical or even dangerous but were generally acceptable in countries such as the United Kingdom or United States of America. The need for co-operation with the doctor was stressed as Parents' Centre policy, particularly about the provision of pain relief was often misquoted and used against the organisation. Critics such as Flora Cameron a member of the Nurses and Midwives Board, denigrated Parents' Centre by calling them the 'Jump for Joys', and claimed that Parents' Centre discounted the need for pain relief (Bryder, 2003). Helen Brew and Chris Cole-Catley tried to counter this criticism by writing a pamphlet '*Maternal Care and the Family*' (1955) for general distribution. The article tried to encompass the Dick-Read philosophy and yet allay the fear about lack of pain relief which was being fostered by opponents:

Under competent medical care today, she[the mother] needs to have no more pain during labour than she is ready and able to take in her stride (*PCB*, No.3, June 1955, pp.7-8).

Successive editors appreciated that contributors such as doctors, nurses and parents took some risk in contributing articles and used techniques to protect them. Mary Dobbie cites examples of this vulnerability in her book '*The Trouble With Women*'. A number of

articles by writers were identified only by initials, especially in the case of doctors who were often referred to as just 'a local doctor' (a G.P.) and a 'Parents' Centre mother' (*PCB*, No.18, p1.3). Chris Cole-Catley explained to me that it was important to protect the anonymity of writers, because they were breaking new ground in giving accounts of personal matters.

Joint submissions to the Consultative Committee on Hospital Reform were published (*PCB*, No.2, November 1954, p.13). In the preparation of submissions Parents' Centre members were invited to contribute from their experience on matters such as childbirth and hospital practices. My experience in helping to compile submissions was that these contributions by parents were taken seriously and both positive and negative aspects included, e.g. tributes were paid to some aspects of Plunket services in submissions to the Finlay Commission (1959). Feedback which was considered irrelevant was noted, added to the store of knowledge and put aside for future consideration

#### **7.12 The use of the media: Taking the message to the public**

Whenever possible the pioneers used the media to publicise their philosophy and its practical application. This was done in as many innovative ways as the combined expertise of the pioneers could provide. Material on Parents' Centre celebrations such as anniversaries, was sent, usually with photographs to local papers. Using their media contacts, Chris Cole-Catley and other members often received coverage in radio and early television.

A novel departure from normal practice in gaining publicity, was the production of the revue *Mum's the Word* in Wellington (*PCB*, No.12, December 1958, p.3). Chris Cole-Catley wrote 'Mum's the Word' which followed four sets of prospective parents, first in a doctor's waiting room and then in the reception hall and ward of the "Peachaven Maternity Home'. On the occasion of the public performance, Helen Brew used the positive and sympathetic audience reaction to good effect, when in a short curtain speech, as Federation President she emphasised the aims of Parents' Centre.' This production proved to be an effective way of getting the Parents' Centre message across to the Wellington public. The organisers had used their influence to ensure that some policy makers were present and asked to speak:

*Warm and perceptive tributes to the work of Parents' Centres were paid at the close of the revue which marked the opening of the annual conference, by the Prime Minister, Mr Nash, the former Minister of Health, Mr Marshall, and the Mayor of Wellington, Mr Kitts. (PCB, No.12, 1958, p.3)*

Another effective way of publicising the work of Parents' Centre and building a constituency for change among the general public, was by accepting invitations to speak at gatherings of parents, in organisations which were well established but outside the areas of concern of Parents' Centre. One example is noted in *PCB*, (No.12, December 1958):

Links between Parents' Centre and the Salvation Army were forged in 1958 when Helen Brew addressed a session of the Salvation Army Congress in Palmerston North as Federation president, on 'Building Parent-Child relationships.

It is noteworthy that a group of Parents' Centre activists, skilled in capturing media attention, triggered and orchestrated a whole package of concerns adding campaign tactics of various kinds to the strategies I have already identified. There were three major campaigns in the first ten years of Parents' Centre's existence. Helen Brew, ably assisted by Chris Cole-Catley's expertise in using the media and the drama skills of Parents' Centre supporters such as Bruce Mason, Tim Elliot, Pat Evison and Margaret McLuskie, promoted the case for reform in childbirth. Quentin Brew and Alice Fieldhouse led a campaign with public meetings, petitions to the Hospital Board and articles in the press, to advance the cause of fathers' support in childbirth. Later Helen B, Alice and others used the media to press the case for allowing parents to stay with their young children in hospital and to support Betty Campbell's election to the Wellington Hospital Board from which position she was able to influence change from within. These campaigns, led by Parents' Centre pioneers, not only proved successful, they made the public familiar with their work and boosted recruitment to the classes.

### **7.13 Chapter overview**

The Parents' Centre pioneers defined a need for the incorporation of progressive practices into the education of children from the beginning of life. They chose the consumer model to launch the organisation, Parents' Centre, as a response to the need that existed, and worked as volunteers. That model proved to be effective because it provided a way of educating, convincing, and involving parents in building a constituency which could put pressure on service providers to adapt to their progressive ideas. Through the classes, the networks, media publicity and the *Parents' Centres Bulletin*, the pioneers inspired and

enabled others with similar beliefs to play a part in changing the attitude of parents. The support the pioneers built up among parents and health and education professionals, enabled them to put effective pressure on policy makers, to change the health and early education services for the benefit of all. These strategies enabled the pioneers to meet their objectives and also made a significant contribution towards the promotion and support of progressive education, particularly for children under three.

In this chapter I have demonstrated that the Parents' Centre pioneers had developed leadership capability and knowledge of successful strategies for improving parenting which they applied in the Parents' Centre organisation. They believed the success of the organisation, as well as that of the parents, was reliant on the need for leaders to build confidence and self-esteem in members. They organised the classes in such a way that members could feel valued and confident enough to become leaders themselves. To support those within the movement, and to spread the message among the general public, they used the strengths of the people who were attracted to the organisation. These included competent writers, speakers, teachers and dramatists who were prepared to publicise the cause and contribute to campaigns to effect change. All these strategies made Parents' Centre an effective organisation in promoting its thrust for change and 'moving and shaking' the existing systems for childbirth and parenthood in the 1950s.



## CHAPTER 8:

### **Tried And True?: The Pioneers Reflect On The Parents' Centre Way**

In chapter 7 the pioneers spoke about the effective strategies they used to inform and convince parents that the progressive practices they advocated 'the Parents' Centre way' brought happiness and success in child rearing. They reflected on the strategies they used to bring their ideas to parents in classes, to policy makers who had the power to change the services and to the general public whose support was necessary.

In this chapter I have shifted the focus to consideration of the effects on the personal lives of the pioneers of Parents' Centre involvement; their opinions on the practices they advocated and their views on the organisation today. The times, with their focus on families and concern about happiness after years of misery caused by depressions and war seemed right for the application of more humane practices. I was interested to find out whether the pioneers believed their ideas on child management, feeding, toilet training, sex education and discipline had withstood the test of changing times and attitudes to and knowledge about children over the last 50 years. I also wanted to know their views on the direction and influence of the organisation they had played a major role in founding in the 1950s, from a distance of 50 years.

In the first part of this chapter I have brought the voices of the pioneers to the fore as they responded to the questions put to them at the first interview in 2001. Data from questions 5-13 which concerned reflection on the objectives of Parents' Centre in the 1950s, the effects on their personal lives and their view of the organisation today have been collated and analysed as the basis for this chapter. I also include my reflections. My voice appears again and is strongly evident. I justify this on the grounds that my involvement in the Parents' Centre organisation has been longer and more continuous than that of most the other pioneers. Some, like Jim Robb, Mary Dobbie, Chris Cole-Catley, and Beverley Morris are still advisers to Parents' Centre, and may be consulted in that capacity. Others have left the organisation behind but remain interested in developments reported in the media, or the Parents' Centre publication *Kiwi Parent* (which replaced the *Parents' Centres Bulletin* in 1996). There are some also whose children, or grand-children, have played their part in the organisation and so have recent, if vicarious, knowledge of developments.

## 8.1 Personal satisfaction

In this section the pioneers recall with pleasure the satisfaction of achieving a goal which they believed was important not only for themselves but for all parents. Their success gave them confidence. The involvement of men in the organisation meant that although their work often took them out of the home, it encouraged family unity. In general, 50 years later, the pioneers have held to their beliefs regarding the practices they advocated and are as confident they are right today as they were in the 1950s. There were, however, some concerns about their ability to help parents regarding discipline especially when, as often seems to occur in New Zealand, their children have to cope with violence in neighbourhood, school and the media. Overall the memories of the pioneers present a mellow picture.

The convictions of the pioneers, and the power they were able to exert to effect change, appear to have outweighed, in hindsight, the practical difficulties. This is evident in this statement:

We used to go up to the National Film Unit – it was hard for me to get up Clifton Terrace with a push-chair – then three buses – but it was worth it. (*Barbara Hodge*)

All the pioneers emphasised that they experienced positive personal change. Barbara expressed this strongly:

I would say, if I had to put one thing above all others, it was the confidence it gave me; not just within myself, but the part of me that enabled me to go and search for other ways. (*Barbara*)

*Ephra Garrett found that involvement in Parents' Centre 'removed so many anxieties, and provided a map for the whole experience [of parenthood].*

As I argued in chapter 5, most of the pioneers came into the organisation with strong beliefs that education in the progressive tradition was the ideal for parents and children; that people could, given appropriate guidance, work out their own solutions without being bullied, dominated or given strict rules. In the words of Alice Fieldhouse:

...human beings seemed to have an innate tendency to move to a good life, to seek a good life.

They had the satisfaction of experiencing growth in themselves as well as others. As June Bastings attested:

*It taught me how to relax. I can be very short-tempered and I do a bit of shouting.*  
(June)

This satisfaction led to a desire to empower parents so they could, with a context of knowledge about children, choose what was right in their own situations. Like Lex Grey, they believed that they helped parents to understand the basic needs of children, and to work out their own strategies:

*I think Parents' Centre seems very clear on what the basic needs of youngsters are and helps people to define these. It comes as a revelation when parents realise the difference between basic felt needs and wants and this gives them a chance to come through.* (Lex)

For many of the pioneers, involvement in Parents' Centre is recalled as an exciting time in their lives and one that gave them an incentive to continue learning about children. This statement by Mary Dobbie expressed a common experience, *'I went home from the meetings in a state of excitement and told my husband'*.

Another aspect of Parents' Centre which was recalled in a positive way in my interviews, was the stimulation and support of friends and leaders in the field:

*Involvement in Parents' Centre brought me an ever increasing number of friends and brought me in touch with some outstanding personalities both in Auckland and other parts of the country. Thelma Smith, of Bethany, Helen Brew, Alice Fieldhouse...to mention just a few. And overseas visitors like James and Joyce Robertson. They all helped to widen my horizons. We were a family living in an unfashionable suburb, in a battered old house, with a small income and no car. Without my Parents' Centre involvement I might never have encountered others of like mind, nor travelled to conferences and other centres much outside Auckland, nor made films ....* (Mary Dobbie)

*I did not lose friends ... I made many new friends.* (Chris Cole-Catley)

*Most of our friends were involved in Parents' Centre. It didn't cause friction anywhere. We were all going the same way and doing the same thing.* (Helen Thornton)

I made many friends in Parents' Centre and the bonds of friendship have remained firm over fifty years. This was apparent at the Jubilee Conference 2002 and in the cooperation and enthusiasm shown to me throughout the process of this thesis. I realise now, given the age of the pioneers, myself included, that the study would have been much more difficult if I had come to it as a stranger. The years of involvement, and the relationships built up then,

made it possible for me to gather the data quickly from a group who, like myself, had only limited time, energy and in many cases, technological skills. This was particularly relevant in my case, as I was not computer literate at the beginning of this study. My attempts to obtain effective computer skills proved impossible given the time-frame. The ready cooperation of the pioneers was an important factor in my ability to undertake and complete this thesis.

## **8.2 Changing the system for childbirth**

As I have shown in preceding chapters, one of the major triumphs of the Parents' Centre pioneers was the establishment of an organisation which gave them a consumer voice. This achievement still ranks very highly indeed in the eyes of the pioneers. I am aware too, that being a member of a consumer group which has gained momentum, strength and often success in the last 50 years, has been a source of pride and satisfaction.

Diana Mason still believes that a consumer organisation was the most effective way of passing on the new ideas:

*It was consumer oriented. I felt that women firmly believed that it [Parents' Centre teaching] was going to achieve greater harmony between parents and children and therefore they believed in it to start with. (Diana)*

Ephra Garrett believed that the consumer structure gave her the opportunity to share helpful advice:

*Something that Quentin said I've never forgotten "two things about child rearing are very important (a) take it easy and (b) it never lasts". I've never forgotten that ... I wanted to pass it on. (Ephra)*

It can be rightly claimed that the pioneers of Parents' Centre were the first in New Zealand to develop a consumer organisation which had some success in effecting change in government services for women and children. The model allowed and encouraged parents to express their views and work for change without the elaborate and time-consuming procedures which are associated with a hierarchical organisation. Their experience within the organisation made them confident enough to work for a similar voice in the services provided by government.

At the time that I interviewed the pioneers in 2001, they believed that they had succeeded in spearheading changes in the system. Ephra Garrett expressed the view that *'the system only has to change in one area and then change will spread'*. June Bastings had a gap of sixteen years between the births of her eldest and youngest children. She *'noted an incredible change over sixteen years. I put some of this down to Parents' Centre'*. Barbara Hodge described a discussion she had with some women at a craft class in 2001. They believed that the changes would have happened anyway. Barbara did not agree. *'I don't think it would have. It still would have had to have been fought for'*, and she felt a sense of satisfaction in being part of that struggle.

In chapter 5 I argued that the pioneers were not only 'movers and shakers' in the 1950s, but also before they joined Parents' Centre. Almost all, like myself, had been involved in initiating change in their careers and lives as parents. The company of others *'of like minds'* (Jim Robb) and *'with a similar focus'* (Lex Grey) were key factors in their successful bid to change the system and turn their dreams into reality. I too felt the power of and necessity for support on many occasions, particularly when I was a member of Parents' Centre delegations to members of Parliament, important policy makers and influential groups such as Plunket and the National Council of Women. Practical advice beforehand about what to wear and how to act, support at the time and exchange of views afterwards when the stress was lifted, gave us cause for celebration, appreciation of each other and the strength to persevere. When we failed or were made to look foolish as was sometimes the case, we overcame our disappointment by looking at the positive aspects of our endeavour and resolving to learn from our experience and try again, with some modification of our strategies.

This group support helped us to regain our self esteem, after what at the time, were experiences which challenged not only our right to make a case but also our knowledge and experience. One example was my appearance with Hazel Ross, a Parents' Centre leader from Palmerston North, at the Finlay Commission in 1959. At the time we were speaking to a submission in which we reported in response to evidence by large numbers of women that relationships with Plunket nurses were authoritarian. One of the older men silenced us with the statement that 'Plunket nurses are wonderful', which we were not

disputing. We felt demeaned but recovered afterwards as we speculated on the critic's experience as a young parent seeking advice about a problem baby.

Sometimes support came from minority groups in the 'opposition's' ranks as Jim Robb attested:

*The only commission I was involved with, was the Finlay, to which I put a submission. I did not do it officially, on behalf of Parents' Centre, but involvement in that affected what I said. My main thesis was on the part played by voluntary organisations in social policy ... Finlay took me up on that and made some very discouraging remarks. I was the last witness at that session. Everyone was leaving. One member of the organisation, Mason, had a social conscience and as the Commission went out he stopped, paused and said quietly "Don't worry, you'll be remembered". I have had similar experiences and there is no doubt they play a huge part in encouraging other attempts. (Jim)*

Clearly, the Parents' Centre pioneers are convinced that, as a group, they played an important role in bringing change to the services for childbirth. They would never claim they did it alone. They instead acknowledged the power of this group who could pool their skills, knowledge, experience and strategies to good effect, at the right time and wherever an opportunity presented itself.

### **8.3 An organisation for parents**

Fifty years from the establishment of the organisation, the pioneers still believed that Parents' Centre was genuinely a centre for parents, both mothers and fathers. A number of men played a prominent role alongside the women; others worked behind the scenes and the pioneers recalled Parents' Centre's success in achieving this important and often difficult objective of involving fathers in parenting and in the organisation.

*There were usually a good sprinkling of men coming into Parents' Centre. It did seem more attractive to men than any other parent movement. (Lex Grey)*

*I suppose it was one of the earliest feminist movements in a way. But it did involve a lot of fathers. I can remember meetings where a huge number of men came. (June Bastings)*

*Quentin Brew impressed me a lot because he talked about the father's role. (Mary Dobbie)*

*Quentin was pivotal in that I found him very non-judgemental. He shepherded people along, and it was always very nicely done. (Ephra Garrett)*

Some influential and well-known people in Parents' Centre in the 1950s were men. This thesis has recognized the important role of people such as Quentin Brew, Lex Grey, Jim Robb and Richard Savage. The fact that men could be seen as role models, sharing their feelings of awe, wonder, inadequacy and success in parenting, was appealing to men and women. Meetings for couples were well attended and noteworthy. Mary Logan recalled those clearly:

*One of the changes that Parents' Centre brought about, which I think was revolutionary, was the encouragement of fathers at evening classes, where there would be a film, or a record, describing the birth process. It was often a shock to men and women. The father also had an active part to play – rubbing her back, keeping her up with the breathing and encouraging her. That was very important, if the nurses were busy. (Mary L)*

The Parents' Centre pioneers realised it was difficult to get men involved in what, to many, was a new and untraditional role, in the 1950s. Lex Grey had noticed in his work in Playcentre, in University Extension and at Auckland Training College that, where men were involved with women in organisations such as kindergartens and school committees, they usually ended up taking over. I have referred to Ausubel's (1960) observations in this regard. Lex saw this tendency as a problem '*... the difficulty of men coming in, lies in terms of them wanting to take over, wanting to organise things, ... while women get in quietly behind the scenes, to ensure things go well.*' This did not prove to be a particular difficulty in the first ten years of Wellington's Parents' Centre. In all cases, the husbands of the pioneers in my study were supportive of the endeavours of their wives to bring them and other fathers into the family from the beginning.

Women in Parents' Centre, in the 1950s, did most of the routine organisation, as was the case in other organisations involving parents, but they also did most of the teaching and public advocacy. I was particularly interested in the involvement of fathers. I felt I had been successful at Training College, as a lecturer, in interesting men in the development of young children. Many of them took much convincing that a baby study was an important learning experience but did change.

Helen Brew in particular became the public face of Parents' Centre. Her husband Quentin played a supportive role. The early advisers were mainly men, as were many of the gurus (chapter 6). My experience was that they did not dominate. Some fathers spoke by



invitation at evening classes, describing their own interactions with their children and the importance of their supportive role in practices such as breast-feeding, toilet training and sex education. They were also valuable in providing feedback which helped to ensure the classes were meeting the needs of men. In Wellington, men became involved in a campaign to allow husbands to support their wives in labour in hospital. They applied their knowledge to call a public meeting, in conjunction with one of the pioneers, Alice Fieldhouse and then lobbied hospital management to allow fathers to be present during childbirth. The rejection of their case helped them to be empathetic with the women who had much experience of having their concerns rejected.

*We prepared our piece and presented it to the Hospital Board, but were rejected.*  
[Alice Fieldhouse speaking of a delegation of men led by Jim Ritchie and Russell Feist]

However, they did not give up and were finally successful, as Alice Fieldhouse recalled, '*after there had been a change of Medical Superintendent*' and a Parents' Centre pioneer Betty Campbell, now deceased, became an effective advocate on the Hospital Board. Parents' Centre men played an important part, alongside women, in helping to get Betty elected to what was, at that time, a male domain.

The Parents' Centre pioneers advanced their ideas on the participation of fathers by involving their own husbands, providing fathers with opportunities to attend classes and seeking feedback which would give information on how classes could be improved.

#### **8.4 Problems with family, friends and others**

Being a 'mover and shaker' puts a person on the radical edge of the community. It was perhaps inevitable that there would be some problems. In considering any problems caused by participation in Parents' Centre, June Bastings held the opinion in retrospect:

*Some of them [Parents' Centre members] probably would have got quite a lot of criticism from families and even husbands. I don't know that, but statistically I would imagine they would have.* (June)

June's view was not, however, supported by anything said by the other pioneers. None reported major difficulties with family and friends. To me a surprising aspect of the data was the overwhelmingly mellow picture of their involvement which must have demanded much juggling of family responsibilities. In some cases husbands and children recalled that

that they would have liked more time and attention but this was not a major issue, as Chris Cole-Catley recalled:

*I have talked to my children about this and they did say that perhaps they could have done with a little bit more time. They understood though ... My husband had learned so much through Parents' Centre ... He was very supportive.*

In my own case, I was given support by the older generation, particularly my children's grandparents. My involvement and that of my husband in Parents' Centre brought no friction in our relationships with friends. Those we associated with, tended to go along with our ideas. Elderly relatives, particularly, enjoyed the opportunities to relate warmly to our young children and to nurse and comfort them when they were tired or distressed. I felt in some cases, they were reclaiming lost opportunities from the time when those practices were frowned on and regarded as 'spoiling'. Such occasions often provided opportunities for my husband's mother, particularly, to recall some of the harsher aspects of her own childhood. That brought us close together.

Helen Thornton, Jim Robb, and Mary Mowbray also found support for the new ideas from their families:

*It didn't cause any tension in the family. And of course most of our friends were involved in Parents' Centre. It didn't cause friction anywhere. We were all going the same way and doing the same thing. (Helen T)*

*The family accepted the way we disciplined the children. It was different from my childhood – less firm, compared with what I heard from some of my friends. (Jim)*

*My mother-in-law, although she was brought up as a Plunket mother and put her children on 4-hour feeding, was never too inclined to want to leave the baby crying and so she could understand when I tried to feed on demand. (Mary M)*

Only two pioneers remembered facing open opposition in career or family. Mary Logan met hostility face to face from colleagues, in the course of her nursing:

*I didn't think of Parents' Centre being a feminist movement then, but I encountered quite a lot of hostility from men who knew I was involved. The senior doctor at the Health Centre used to tell me "Even if you have a bad time you soon forget it. Or you may remember it wrongly and claim you received inadequate care". (Mary L)*

and June Bastings found her father had some doubts but supported her, on the whole:

*My mum was fairly easy (she thought it was great), but my father thought I gave them a little too much rein ... they respected the views I had. (June)*

Ephra Garrett's mother was positive, *'She thought it was great!'*.

Several of the pioneers mentioned that the support of friends whom they met at Parents' Centre or who had influenced them to join, helped them to hold fast to their progressive ideals. Friends often gave help with child care, to release mothers for Parents' Centre work. Mary Dobbie recalls a Parents' Centre friend to whom she turned in desperation when she went to Auckland from the country to have her baby. The friend not only offered her accommodation, but shared her knowledge about the Dick-Read methods which she had used successfully. Mary D describes this situation in which she was sent out of hospital, when labour stopped and had nowhere to go:

*I went to the public telephone and rang M. I asked if I could go to her place. She came and picked me up and began to tell me about her confinement ... She had told me how to relax and so when I finally got to the hospital I was practically in transition. (Mary D)*

Pioneers who were more experienced at applying the new ideas, were available to help with advice as Barbara Hodge recalled, *'I could always ring Norah'*.

At one time a group was set up for ongoing help with parenting. Mary Mowbray saw this as a lifeline and particularly helpful to those who had no older relatives at hand.

*We also set up the advisory committee, which we really thought was an important thing to have – someone to approach to give them advice when they were desperate with their children ... I'm not sure that it was very productive or not, but it was a lifeline. (Mary M)*

I was often called on to assume a supportive role to Parents' Centre members. It could be demanding, as pleas for help could intrude on family life, often at awkward times. On reflection, I think I was perhaps too ready to help and I should have set more limits on my time. It was hard to walk away, however, when so few other resources were available to parents who felt desperate and had nowhere else to turn.

All the pioneers found that a great advantage of Parents' Centre was its ability to provide support for people through the classes, books, films and friendships which were made and often strengthened as people worked together towards a common goal.

## 8.5 Practices advocated for childbirth and child management

In talking about the practices Parents' Centre advocated for child management, all the pioneers agreed that the preparation for childbirth in Parents' Centre classes was successful, even though not everyone had a perfect birth. Ephra Garrett who had a caesarian birth, summed up her experience in this statement:

*It meant for me a marvellous focus for my pregnancy and birth. All the things I wanted to know were there. It certainly made it all worthwhile and meaningful.* (Ephra)

The ideas of respecting individual differences and the advocacy for breast feeding on demand, were well regarded on the whole, although there was some feeling they were pushed too rigorously, as Barbara Hodge recounted:

*They pushed breastfeeding which was fine if you could breastfeed. Those who couldn't were left feeling a little bit guilty. I wondered whether I would have felt like that had I not been able to successfully breast-feed both my children. But I was able to do it. Therefore the food experience was quite easy.* (Barbara)

A few felt their needs were not met in regard to breast-feeding. June Bastings was able to reconcile herself to lack of success and used other techniques she had learned in classes, to substitute for the benefits to mother and child of the breast-feeding relationship:

*It certainly made no difference to my breast-feeding at all, which wasn't very good. That was my one sadness that I was not a good breast-feeder. Nothing I did or tried would help. But I just had to try and relax about it and make bottle-feeding a good experience. I think that was important too.* (June)

All agreed with the practices Parents' Centre advocated in regard to toilet training:

*I agreed, because I knew that people were doing it too early. I thought "what was the point?".* (June)

*I didn't push it anyway... S really toilet-trained herself. I didn't have to do anything with her ... Parents' Centre helped me to recognise that I had a disgust of touching anything dirty ... I know I have not passed this on to my children. If it hadn't been for Parents' Centre, I am sure I would have passed this on and she [her daughter] would not be working with plants and soil now.* (Barbara)

Few of the pioneers commented on sex education which, as I have discussed in chapter 3, was a taboo in the 1950s. They admitted lack of sex education was a major problem, particularly for pregnant women and when young children showed an interest in their bodies. Those who did comment, like Barbara Hodge, expressed their satisfaction at being able to discuss sexual relationships with their children. For her, the discussions at Parents'

Centre broke the ice and enabled people to get some experience in talking about the issue, 'Basically I felt I had the confidence to talk about it' (Barbara)

June Bastings felt she obtained a good basis for discussion as the children got older:

*We had some hysterical times about talking about sex education, with some of the ideas they brought home from school. My son had a friend who had the most extraordinary ideas about sex and my kids would bring that home and I would say "No. that's not right".*

All, like June, found the ideas on discipline helpful to a large degree:

*I was pretty easy on the kids. Occasionally I would get carried away and smack them and really wish that I hadn't. We tried to find ways of working around things and I would read some books and rethink things and would say "Yes, that's a much better idea to do that ...". Dorothy Baruch was terrific. I really tried to implement that.*

Some, like Mary Logan, had concerns about interpretations by members:

*I can remember being with two Parents' Centre mothers and a child being allowed to hit another child, pushing another child out of a pushchair, a child who hit his mother on the back and he wasn't even reprimanded. I couldn't go along with that. It was a kind of acceptance of what the child wants to do is always right...it was their interpretation.*

Chris Cole-Catley recalled that talks on discipline were always well attended:

*I read Dorothy Baruch ... if we wanted to get a lot of people along, we would have discipline as the subject.*

The books on discipline were mentioned as being particularly helpful:

*Norah was softer than I. She had them all the time. I provided the ultimate limit and set the limits, so the children didn't have to prod about to find out what they could get away with. I think we were jolly fortunate. We read many books on Parents' Centre ideas. Norah was a great reader and often chose them. (Richard Savage)*

*I think I had a very authoritarian outlook, originally. You will do as you are told and if not you give him a slap, but I never had done any child development or anything else along those lines. I hadn't thought about the relationship issues. Struggling along in the school was one thing. Then I was learning about children at Parents' Centre. It made me realise there were all sorts of other processes of discipline and so on. A lot of the stuff I heard and read influenced me terribly. (Mary Mowbray)*

However, there were concerns, such as those expressed by Helen Thornton who articulated a problem, which I find myself and many other parents concerned about today. We wonder

about the helpfulness of assertive strategies for resolving conflict when children come up against those who have been socialised to solve problems in an aggressive way and attack others, both physically and verbally:

*I'm not sure that it does [help]. I think it must have been very hard when they came up against people ... I know F found herself at sixes and sevens, when she met with kids who were "dragged up" and they really were. They protected themselves and she didn't know how [to protect herself]. I have a feeling that was something we didn't encourage. Self protection. I don't know how we do it, under the Parents' Centre philosophy. (Helen T)*

Ephra Garrett recalled that *'dealing with aggressive children became a problem for her son 'a gentle soul' when he went to the intermediate school'*. She and her husband often discussed the problem with him. She admitted their solution was to teach him some strategies such as the 'ankle tap', a well-directed and painful tap on the ankle which was an unobtrusive and effective way of dealing with an aggressive opponent. She concluded by asking the question *'How do you help people?'*.

I admit that coping with violence is a complex question of major importance today not only in New Zealand (*New Zealand Listener*, 2004) but on the world stage also. Aggressive behaviour is demonstrated not only in schools but in the community, in sport, in business, in parliament, in the media and family life. In 2003, the world's most powerful nation, the United States, has flouted the attempts of the United Nations to find a peaceful solution to the problems in Iraq. These models of conflict resolution have convinced many that force is the only effective strategy. Thus, while the models of discipline were sought after by parents and seen as effective and helpful, they were not regarded as a total success.

In discussions with my grandchildren on the issue of aggressive behaviour at school I notice the boys are loathe to admit that bullying concerns them. But they agree it exists and that to survive you have to be seen as 'tough' and have support from other children who are considered 'strong'. They emphasise what to them is a basic principle, you do not 'nark' on other children! This situation makes it hard for adults to help and adds to the difficulties.

The answers to interview question 5 demonstrate that the child-rearing practices advocated in Parents' Centre classes were perceived by the pioneers as having stood the test of time. Many have supported the methods of discipline advocated for children under three years of



age. Yet I am aware that they are concerned about violence in schools and the community generally. Parents' Centre has continued its efforts to reduce violence in schools, e.g. by submissions to the Currie Commission, 1962 on the abolition of corporal punishment in schools and remits advocating the banning of corporal punishment by parents in the home. The Parents' Centre conference continued this tradition, when in 2003 it passed a remit against parents being able to use Clause 59 of the Crimes Act defined as 'reasonable force' (Kiwi Parent, 2001, p.38) as a defence in cases of child abuse.

## 8.6 Long-term effects

Practically all the comments by the pioneers on the long-term effects of their involvement in the organisation were positive: All found the experience significant and helpful. In their view, they, their children, the extended family and even friends received great benefits. Ephra Garrett recalled *'that both Parents' Centre and Playcentre could help you enjoy children'*. On the whole, like Diana Mason, the pioneers do not criticise the philosophy or practices of the organisation and continue to support these original objectives *'My ideas about toilet training and not smacking children, continue to be in existence'*.

This section has shown that involvement in Parents' Centre is seen, from a distance of 50 years, as rewarding in terms of membership of a supportive group that reached many of its goals and helped the implementation of progressive practices which have stood the test of time for children under three. I must admit to surprise that all the pioneers have almost completely happy memories of their work and involvement. Perhaps they have come to realise over the last 50 years that, as Michael King concludes (1999, p.240):

The most profound satisfactions are to be found in having a life in accord with the natural world, exercising the human capacity for friendship and altruism, engaging in creative and purposeful activity, and experiencing an allegiance to one's origins.

I can appreciate that work for Parents' Centre in the 1950s met all those criteria. I share the view of the pioneers about the long-term effects but have concerns about the fact that there are still many parents who have not been able to adopt the 'Parents' Centre' way.

## 8.7 Parents' Centre today

Now, at the end of this chapter, it is appropriate to consider the position of Parents' Centre in 2004, incorporating my own knowledge and that of some of the pioneers. There is a



group of pioneers, such as Jim Robb, Alice Fieldhouse, Mary Dobbie and myself who have kept links with Parents' Centre and whose advice is still sought. Others have some knowledge through receiving *Kiwi Parent* and following media debates which involve Parents' Centre. Some have left it behind. I will use the voices of those who are still involved, including my own, to consider Parents' Centre today. The opinions of those who founded the organisation may be useful to those working in it today in a very different environment for families.

All the pioneers who are still involved in Parents' Centre have continued to support its aims and ideals in theory and also would, like Ephra Garrett '*Try and do anything ... to help in any way*'. As Jim Robb said:

*In a way, my involvement is continuing. For a long time my official connection was as educational advisor. After a lot of my more regular commitment stopped, I worked on a different tangent, but stayed on that committee – mainly in an honorary capacity.* (Jim)

In the period of my research between 2001 and 2004, essential elements of the organisation during the time frame of my study between 1952 and 1962, were still recognisable in Parents' Centre. However, the organisation has changed considerably.

At a seminar at Lower Hutt in Wellington, in 2003, with Parents' Centre workers who lead classes and train leaders, I learned that the desire of both parents to advance in their careers, long hours of work, the need for preparation of work at home, and the increase in shift work at night and weekends, are all factors which leave little time or opportunity for parents to attend classes, let alone take the lead in voluntary organisations. People lamented the difficulty to ensure the attendance of men at Parents' Centre classes beyond the ante-natal stage, let alone lead classes and talk informally to other men, as was common practice between 1952 and 1962. In many cases they are not even available to baby-sit so that their partners can attend (Podmore & Callister, 1995).

In the 21st Century the maternity services are still political and there are still concerns about them. The pioneers are aware that there are some problems which the obstetric services are not addressing. One is the length of the hospital stay. In the 1950s, many mothers wanted an earlier return home than the statutory 10 days or even two weeks. Now, as Jim Robb stated, mothers are forced to leave early.

*Mothers are turned out of hospital as routine - a different kind of rigidity. You can have a struggle to stay in 48 hours or more. There is not much help with feeding. Our next door neighbour is having that problem. (Jim)*

I believe the need for the organisation is less clear than it was in 1952. During the 1950s the pioneers were able to seize the opportunity to effect change, because the gaps in the services for childbirth and child rearing were obvious. At that time, there was a void in childbirth education and knowledge about liberal methods of child rearing for children under three was not widely available. It is, however, less easy to identify the gaps today, as knowledge about childbirth and child rearing is available from books, magazines, radio and television. What is more, discussion of reproduction and childbirth is open and thus in marked contrast to the situation in the 1950s:

*[Now] There's no huge mystery about it like there was. People didn't talk about it so much ... Everybody is much more open about it now. (June Bastings)*

Alternatives to traditional services include home births, water births and social caesareans. In contrast to the 1950s when children were excluded from hospital, staff today allow and even encourage parents to bring children with them on ante-natal visits where they can observe scans of the foetus and visit new babies. Some parents choose to have siblings present at the birth. In hospitals facilities are now usually provided for the comfort and even the entertainment of families visiting young children. Sex education is an accepted part of education in intermediate schools through agencies such as the Life Education Trust, and is widely available in television programmes, where sexual problems become part of family viewing.

However, the Parents' Centre organisation still finds that members raise issues which it continues to address. One is child care for women working when their children are young, as was evident in the issues of *Kiwi Parent* published during the course of my study 2001-2004. Child care facilities, quality and selection are regular features.

A concern of contemporary Parents' Centre is the changed position of women in regard to their roles in family and employment. Many women who come to Parents' Centre have qualifications and experience similar to those of the pioneers, but do not have the expectation that they will care for their children under three in the home on a full-time basis. Most couples raising children today require two incomes to supply basic needs for

their children. Many women take only a short maternity leave, for which, since mid-2002, under certain conditions, they qualify for a government grant. They then return to work, using substitute care for their children by relatives, house-fathers, grandparents, professionals who may be nannies, Family Day Care providers or Day Care staff.

There is also, in 2004, a more positive attitude to women continuing their careers while they are mothers of young children, than there was in the 1950s (Kedgley, 1996). Childcare services today recognise the educational component and government plays an active role in monitoring that along with health (May, 2001):

*'at least that's checked these days – the quality [child care provision]'* (June Bastings).

It is more generally recognised that women should have the right to choose to work and that many need to advance their careers, contribute to family finances and play a role in policy making. This has been demonstrated by politicians such as Ruth Richardson and Liz Tennant in the 1980s and more recently Katherine Rich, all of whom have continued in their careers, immediately after maternity leave.

Jim Robb too noted this change and said:

*We would not be able to get that voluntary effort today. That shows up, in a lot of situations. One of the things I'm commonly asked to go on, I would have been in 40-50 years ago. New people are coming at me to go on, because others aren't available, the consequences of policy in the last 20 years. If you go into a suburban street during the day it's a sort of desert – people are all out working and not because of a decline in social conscience. There are not a number with time and energy from work. I've been involved with M. in setting up and running the Citizen's Advice Bureau. It's a struggle all the way to keep it going. (Jim)*

In this thesis I have already referred to the fact that in the 1950s married women gave up paid employment and engaged in voluntary work while their children were young – usually up to the time, they started school at five. This changed position presents a dilemma for Parents' Centre in the 2000s. The organisation's survival and success, particularly in the period of 1952-62, owed much to the voluntary contribution of parents, educationists and health workers. It was not all one way, however.

*It's women that did all this voluntary work. I think it's a pity that, of course, it will all be gone, because a lot of women now aren't able to do voluntary work. (Ephra Garrett)*

The pioneers insist they received great personal benefit.

*I had the luxury of not having to work those first five years.* (Helen Thornton)

Sometimes, today, the female partner's paid employment is more stable and better paid than that of the male, so it is in the family's financial interests for the mother to continue working, after a short period of maternity leave. Mary Dobbie noted that '*In many families both parents work and mothers return to the workforce just weeks after their baby is born and are left with little time or energy for voluntary action*'. Most often the demands of work, home and family mean that there is little or no time to spare for voluntary work and few women feel any commitment to it (Else 1996). It is, therefore, hard to attract volunteers. Those who can offer their services, rarely stay more than two years. This is in marked contrast to the involvement of the pioneers, who, like myself, have been available in one capacity or another, for a long period of time – up to 50 years. This situation is an illustration of the way changes in the macrosystem of New Zealand society have affected the microsystem of the family, and caused new areas of need (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

When I left Training College in 1958 to care for my daughter, I recall being dismissive of the idea that I could still work and have my child in care, even though a good friend offered to be her nanny. By contrast, my daughter has not had the option of being a full-time mother. All but her eldest child have spent time in child care, the youngest two from the age of one year. Their mother has rarely had the time or extra energy to do voluntary work. I still do voluntary work, mainly in the Progressive Association, the Labour Party, and occasionally in Parents' Centre. I find that in the former two organisations most of my co-workers are elderly and retired like myself. In Parents' Centre today, there is difficulty attracting volunteer class leaders, particularly those of the same age as those attending classes. The fact that class leaders were often young parents was a particular strength of the Parents' Centre classes, in the 1950s. Parent leaders provided excellent role models for members as I have emphasised in Chapter 7.

On the positive side, it is true that in some suburbs and small towns volunteers are available to lead post-natal groups, particularly if the courses are of short duration and on topics causing concern for mothers. These services are still popular but facilities for training leaders are in short supply. People willing and equipped to be trainers are usually working, at least part-time. They often resent time away from their own children,

particularly at weekends which are, ironically, the best time for training workshops. Those leading training sessions expect payment for their services and accommodation away from families so they can have privacy between sessions. Even if funds are available, attendance may be poor and often affected at the last minute by crises in family, work or sport. Certainly full attendance could not be assumed when I was training officer. I could afford to be positive about the value of small numbers attending, however, when I did not charge the organisation for my services.

Another area which has suffered has been work on the political front. In conversation with the president of Parents' Centre in 2004, Sharon Cole, I learned that preparation of remits for conferences by members has been difficult. Effective remits need sound research to support them and time and resources to persuade members of their worth before they will give their approval. As a democratic organisation they must have conference approval for remits. Another consideration is that as more women hold senior positions in the Public Service, they are more restrained in their ability to challenge Government policy and decisions. The change in the ability of women to provide voluntary services has, therefore, become a significant issue for the Parents' Centre organisation.

The factor of growth, from 1962, the end of the period of my study has not been entirely positive. In the opinion of some pioneers, growth has affected the nature of the organisation. Jim Robb believes that, *'You don't get the same personal involvement, once you get thousands of people'*. In the opinion of Helen Thornton, this lack of involvement has had the effect of making class members passive and less motivated to help themselves:

*When I came to Nelson I felt quite differently [from the way she had felt at Upper Hutt]. I was around for a couple of years, but I couldn't be after that, it was the fret of this doing for, trying to get them to cooperate. I felt that this was a place that Parents' Centre was doing things for not with. (Helen T)*

Jim Robb and Lex Grey, also observed 'a different dynamic' now for working with young people. They see them as more self-centred, less caring about their communities and more concerned about wealth. Concomitant with that dynamic, according to Jim and Lex,

*...is the lack of co-operative involvement. The people I talk to couldn't do the kind of things they did then. So much is put upon them at work. (Jim)*

*There is a different dynamic now for working with young people – they are seen as individuals. They are going to be different. They are going to express that in different kinds of ways. (Lex)*

There is a view by some of the pioneers that the 'consumer society' has had another marked effect on Parents' Centre. Much of the funding now comes from sponsorships and advertisements. Those who were concerned it was mainly a middle-class organisation in the 1950s and tried to spread the net wider, are even more concerned today. Helen Thornton expressed these fears:

*I noticed when I went to the National Conference, at the Rutherford Motel that this had become a very much middle-class, well-to-do organisation, where people were doing things in a charitable way, which was not how it started out. That was emerging. I couldn't believe the affluence of the women there. Really beautiful baby carriages, well dressed. There was nobody there from the grass roots. Really, the people I felt, needed the help.*

In 1993 the Federation made the decision to introduce a new management structure modelled on business lines. A strategic plan was discussed and in 2001 there was a major change from an executive to a Board with a salaried chief executive officer and managers responsible for finance, professional development, volunteer services, advocacy and lobbying – all functions which in the 1940s were carried out by volunteers. The use of paid employees who have not necessarily worked in, or been a part of the organisation is a major departure from the previous consumer model. Furthermore, it has been hard to find administrators, who have a thorough understanding of the strategies required to work successfully with volunteers. Thus, there are often tensions between paid and unpaid workers. To try to create an atmosphere of understanding between the two groups the Parents' Centre executive held a seminar in 2003 to discuss the issues which were causing particular concern. I have noted here some of the points which were raised. Paid employees do not always understand that volunteers can rarely have the time to be completely reliable and efficient, and yet remain valuable to an organisation (chapter 7). Volunteers work because they think their contribution is worthwhile, and, in my experience, are passionate about the issues. However, they also hope to enjoy what they do. If they feel this is not the case, they usually leave. Volunteers, especially those away from the centre of the organisation, Wellington, need support. But the paid office workers now have little time to answer calls for help as they are usually fully employed in office work.



Government funding to Parents' Centres has stayed at the same level over many years. Other organisations now exist for parent education and they compete for funding, both from government and private enterprise. Governments now are more inclined to fund what they consider disadvantaged groups, such as Maori and Pacific Island families, those with special needs and those in violent relationships who rarely have the resources, knowledge or skills to form consumer organisations. They also are less likely to be avid readers and thus benefit from the resources like books which the Parents' Centre pioneers found so valuable for themselves and other members. In the public arena, there is an attitude even among the pioneers, as Helen Thornton's quote illustrates, that Pakeha middle-class parents can afford to manage their own services. Applications for funding demand time and expertise and often necessitate the production of glossy attention-getting brochures, lobbying and time-consuming meetings. Private firms considering sponsorship may also expect commitments which are not in accord with the basic philosophy of the organisation, such as advertising breast-feeding supplements. If officials are not steeped in the organisation's philosophies, they may not realise the implications of what they agree to. Much of the funding can be absorbed into the accoutrements of central office where understandably, those who work there all day, and interview likely benefactors and representatives and delegations from kindred organisations, try to present a good image. Bringing offices up to an acceptable standard has proved to be expensive and has caused some resentment, particularly by those who are full-time mothers, stretched financially, and working in a voluntary capacity in what may be, by comparison, poor conditions.

### **8.8 The future of Parents' Centre**

Faced with difficulties, members of Parents' Centre have been forced to address a number of questions about the goals of the organisation. These include the need for the organisation now, in the light of change in society. For some of the pioneers, such as Mary Dobbie, a more urgent question for a group with the knowledge and expertise of Parents' Centre, is that of child poverty. Others believe there should be a new consideration of the way the basic objectives, as spelled out in *Parents' Centres Bulletin, No.1*, can be applied to today's conditions for families. Many wonder whether Parents' Centre can rightly be accused of being closed-minded and top-down, where those at the top make the rules for those at the grass-roots to follow. There is still a strong belief among the pioneers such as Lex Grey that the organisation should strive to safeguard its consumer structure:



[It is vital to] stress the importance of 'avoiding becoming a top-down organisation' which prevents the voice of the consumer coming through. (Lex)

Jim Robb too believed the consumer voice is still important:

*If people asked me to go on certain types of committees for a genuine reason, I would. But my reaction is that this committee has to make decisions about what happens in the future. I think these decisions should be made by the people who will benefit/suffer from them. I think all people with varied experiences have a part to play. (Jim)*

Some now have criticisms of the organisation's direction. Some believe it has lost its way. Like Jim Robb and Mary Dobbie they saw the changes reflected in the *Kiwi Parent* magazine which in a way, is Parents' Centre's front window to the public:

*The magazine has had changes. It has become much more of a glossy – a sign of the times ... it is certainly a much more respectable journal now. There's not much of the crusading spirit. I don't get the impression it's a battle cry and wartime bulletin as it used to be earlier... Possibly also, it's got in a way a slightly less academic flavour than it used to have ... the impression I get is that fewer academics are writing for it now. (Jim)*

*I don't mind the magazine being glossy and colourful now, but it should have more political issues in it. (Mary D)*

A worry for some is that Parents' Centre can no longer be regarded as a radical organisation speaking out for change. My experience is that many current members are unaware that Parents' Centre once had a strong and subversive political agenda. Mary Dobbie expressed this concern through experience of seeing how organisations change with age and are reported in the media:

*I have noticed that organisations seem to go through a number of recognisable changes in their life span. They begin as enthusiastic radicals making their voice heard, a force for change. Then they achieve government funding of some kind, become more careful and acceptable, tone down their voice and somehow lose their way. Is this what is happening to Parents' Centre today?*

*Whatever efforts and pressures upon government may be taking place at the top level of Parents' Centre, they are not, seemingly, getting through to the membership, nor are they reflected in the magazine. When does one see the name of Parents' Centre in the press, or signing a letter to the editor of a newspaper? ... There does seem to be an apathy towards protest. In that climate some Parents' Centre gains could be slipping away. It may be that I am out of touch but I don't see much in *Kiwi Parent* [the publication of Parents' Centre which has replaced the Bulletin] to suggest that Parents' Centre is a vigorous force to be reckoned with ... If Parents' Centre wants support, it must show itself to be an outward looking,*

*watchdog kind of an organisation, with concerns beyond teddy bear picnics and best baby photograph contests!*

*If I were involved today I would want to stir it up and make it more accessible to lower income families. I think that, as the poverty gap widens in communities, Parents' Centre becomes more distanced from those couples that need its teachings. It is not just a matter of affording class fees, it is also the discomfort of feeling that they don't belong. Again, I think we were lucky in Auckland, in the early days, when the Salvation Army's Bethany Hospital met the needs of many working class families and they were encouraged to attend our ante-natal classes.*  
(Mary D)

I think it is still a moot question as to how far the basic principles of Parents' Centre, particularly those about mental health, have spread and become deeply rooted in all sections of the New Zealand community. For the pioneers, the ideas, particularly on parenting, had their roots in their own childhoods and were mainly a continuation and development of those used by their parents. I now question the extent to which these ideas work with people whose childhoods reflect a markedly different attitude to children and included at least a component of violence. The Parents' Centre alternatives to harsh discipline, which has always been a feature of much New Zealand family life (chapter 3), include an emphasis on understanding, communication and respect. I wonder how this ideal can be accepted by people whose childhoods fail, often extremely, to meet their needs for love, respect and communication; who are not used to gaining help from books, are inarticulate, particularly in regard to expression of feelings, and lack respect for themselves and others. Such people and those making family policy for them may regard Parents' Centre ideals as mono-cultural, middle-class biased and not relevant to their way of life.

In the 1950s the organisation was dependent on the services of well-educated and trained volunteers who were parents themselves and who believed it was important for mothers to be at home with their children, in the early years at least. Not only is this not possible for many women today, many women do not believe it is necessary. There are others again who consider that the family is itself a contributor to mental ill-health (Neill, 1962; Laing, 1964; Kedgley, 1996).

The greatest draw-card to Parents' Centre classes is still information on childbirth. Indeed, the organisation now receives funding on the basis that it is a service provider for childbirth education. In contrast to the 1950s when information on birth was limited, it is

now widely available in many forms. Parents today may not need information as much as opportunities to clear their thinking about the options available and to sort out what suits them, even though there would be issues if they choose options, such as customised caesarian births, which Parents' Centres do not support. After leaving the work environment many women find themselves isolated and need the support of an organisation like Parents' Centre which can offer a wider range of friendships than those made in the workplace.

Funding remains a concern. A dilemma is the need to keep attendance fees low enough for all families to be able to use the services Parents' Centre provides, keep the organisation afloat and pay for the services of trainers.

An even greater concern is a basic question: Do we still need Parents' Centre? The organisation has made a major contribution to liberalising the services for childbirth and the parenting of children under three. Would it matter if it were handed over to others who are paid to give the services required? Rather than 'filling the gaps' today it operates in competition with other organisations such as the Plunket Society which now offers similar services, and is better funded mainly because it is in a position to reach a broader range of ethnic and socio-economic groups than Parents' Centre.

The basic philosophy of Parents' Centre is now a well accepted component of most training courses for those working with young children in health and education, although the emphasis, particularly on the role of the mother in the first three years of the child's life, remains controversial and is much debated (Kedgley, 1996; Bird & Drewery, 2000; Daley & Montgomerie, 1999). Alice Fieldhouse summed up much of the controversy when she said in her interview in 2001:

*I think we need to have more research about the quality of care received by children in creches etc while mothers go out to work, and the level of understanding of children's needs and the mothers' state of health'.*

Some of the pioneers, like myself, Helen Thornton and Mary Dobbie particularly, remain concerned however, that there are still parents in New Zealand who do not have access to these ideas at least in a form that is relevant to their lives. However, although Parents' Centre faces problems today, all the pioneers agree it has made an important contribution

to the liberalising of the services for childbirth and children under three and still has an important role in the 21st Century.

## 8.9 Chapter overview

In 1952 the pioneers were able to join the movement for change in the liberal tradition. They helped to carry the message to parents embarking on parenthood with considerable success, at least in the first decade of the organisation when the need was clear. The times, the 1950s provided the need for an organisation like Parents' Centre. The philosophy the pioneers promoted is still sound to them. It was forged at a time when happiness was regarded as an ideal and a criterion of success in the upbringing of children. This may have changed. Suzanne Moore mother and journalist writing in the *New Statesman* in April 2004 believes that the goal of parenting in the 21st Century is not happiness but educational success. I see signs of this in New Zealand too and such a change could present a challenge to Parents' Centre's objectives. Whether a group of well qualified parents is available or necessarily the most effective to carry on this work in 2004 however has become a question for debate. Perhaps as women take their place alongside men in politics, and hospital and obstetric management and are likely to be represented on District Health Boards, advisory committees and early childhood community services, they may have more opportunity to express their concerns directly to those who have the power to effect change, or be change agents themselves. If the present Parents' Centre leaders believe they can still make an effective contribution to mental health, still a great concern for all including the white middle class, they may have to bend their effort towards making a case for funding and support, on that basis rather than on education for childbirth per se. A study of the original goals, experiences and practices of the pioneers could perhaps be helpful in determining the direction of new family support services. Research which was such an important feature and support, in the first 10 years of Parents' Centre, may need to be used to answer some of these questions. The pioneers still consider however that the liberal practices they advocated for parents and children under three in the 1950s have been tried and have stood the test of time for families in New Zealand in 2004.

## **CHAPTER 9:**

### **Ave Atque Vale: Hail and Farewell**

Using the words of the Latin poet Catullus writing in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC, I now move from celebration to farewell.

As I write this last chapter I cannot but reflect on the statement by Michael Frisch (1990) 'their rememberings are their truths'. I celebrate their truths. This chapter is a synthesis of what the pioneers of Parents' Centre remembered about their Parents' Centre experience. At the same time I add some reflections of my own, particularly on the methodology used for this study.

#### **9.1 The pioneers' memories of the system**

The memories of the Parents' Centre pioneers about the system for childbirth and parenthood that they worked to change in New Zealand in the 1950s still contain elements of passion and anger. On the whole, however, I felt that there was a mellow aura surrounding their reflections, particularly when they talked about the measures they took when they founded Parents' Centre and organised campaigns to effect change.

Their memories and my reading of the history of the 1950s helped me to appraise the significance of the socio-political environment of the 1950s in promoting the need for change in the services for childbirth and for the health and education of children under three. My analysis showed that Helen Brew's ability to voice the concerns felt by a growing constituency of women about the existing services and the lack of a consumer voice, provided a focus for the pioneers to found Parents' Centre as a way of promoting change through education and advocacy.

The pioneers welcomed the excitement of change, of new ideas coming into the country from returned servicemen and from immigrants and the opening up of education to new progressive influences. Their childhoods provided enough liberal elements to enable them to adopt progressive education in their training, careers and later family life. Most of their parents provided good role models of people concerned not only with their families but also with issues in the wider community. Their achievements demonstrated that ordinary

people have the power to effect change. The pioneers all had a secondary and tertiary education which, in retrospect, they valued. All felt they benefited from the role models, teachings and books offered in their training, particularly in Wellington and Christchurch at the Training Colleges and at Victoria University in Wellington.

The pioneers realised in retrospect that they had a large degree of power over their lives. Experience in careers had given them some opportunities to apply the progressive ideas they favoured to their practice in education, health and social work. Knowledge about the importance for mental health of stable, loving relationships and humane treatment of infants in the first days of life, led them to seek conditions for childbirth and parenthood modelled on the methods of progressive educationalists. The lack of respect shown to them and their ideas and the insensitive handling of their infants and families by the health system of the time provided the catalyst to work for change in the obstetric services. When Helen Brew expressed publicly the dissatisfaction she felt about the maternity services, the pioneers rallied to her leadership, pooled their resources of knowledge and practical experience and founded Parents' Centre, an organisation which became a change agent for childbirth services and the rearing of children under three. All the pioneers were proud of the fact that they had founded a consumer organisation that successfully filled gaps in the services. They also thought that the fact that they could work in the organisation as volunteers when they were parents of young children, was a strength.

Although Parents' Centre was founded 52 years ago, as I write in 2004, all the pioneers are of the opinion that the organisation and the practices it advocated are still relevant. Some of the pioneers like myself continue to be available as advisers and help the organisation where they can. Others have left it behind as far as active involvement is concerned but are still interested and believe in the worth of the organisation. A few, such as Mary Dobbie, feel it has lost its power to influence Government and wonder whether its objectives accommodate the changes in the lives of young parents in the 21st century, or address serious issues such as child poverty.

## **9.1 Reflections on the interviews**

I have enjoyed this project and after I read Kerith Power (2004), who had to reassess her methodology because of resistance from the 'practitioners with whom she was working', I



realised how fortunate I was in getting the cooperation which made this project viable. I considered it important to analyse the reasons. I realised that they included the fact that I had been a pioneer myself, that I too was a participant in the research, and that I was about the same age as the other pioneers. All these factors contributed to my feeling of acceptance by the subjects in my study. Additionally, I shared a similar culture and life experience with those I interviewed. I had worked closely with some, not so closely with others, but I knew them all well enough to feel comfortable about asking them to take part in this project and felt I was regarded as an insider, not an outsider looking in.

A further helpful element was that the pioneers were all familiar with research and its benefits. Lex Grey, Beverley Morris, Alice Fieldhouse, Mary Mowbray, Mary Dobbie and Jim Robb had done research themselves. Chris Cole-Catley had published the research of other people. I had worked on research projects in my post-graduate training at Victoria University and at the London Institute of Education. I had assisted, supervised and assessed post-graduate teachers with action research while at the Wellington Training College and Victoria University as a lecturer between 1990 and 1995. Helen Brew, Alice, Diana, Beverley, Chris and I had been interviewed in other projects. Research was a tool used in the early days of Parents' Centre to convince consumers and opponents alike of the validity of the Parents' Centre message. I was aware of the research knowledge of the pioneers and ensured that in approaching them I had clarified my purpose, met ethical guidelines, which included confidentiality and made my role clear. I was convinced that they, from their own experience, appreciated there could be some benefits to the organisation from my attempts to analyse their contribution to its success and its relevance and direction in the 21st Century.

### ***9.2.1 The first interview***

After the initial contact, during which I concentrated on putting the pioneers at ease, I felt supported and encouraged by their enthusiasm. I considered the way I would set the scene for the interviews, recalling material from Parents' Centre training sessions on the importance of making people feel comfortable in the early moments of an enterprise. I encouraged them to choose the meeting place. All chose their own homes and usually mid-morning or lunch-time for the interviews, so the session began with a companionable cup of tea and food to which I contributed. I also offered to help with preparation, as I did



not in any way want to be regarded as a visiting 'dignitary'. Over tea I brought members up-to-date with the development of the research. I found also that discussions of family were a way of breaking the ice. In many cases I had known their now middle-aged children from childhood, so discussion of them created another meeting of minds. They, like me, had learned about communication skills in their careers and in Parents' Centre. These included the ability to listen, clarify, paraphrase, offer an alternative viewpoint assertively and summarise. Therefore, their ability to use these skills made them easy to interview. Although my experiences differed from theirs in some ways, e.g. I was the only member of this group who had been a solo mother before I joined Parents' Centre, had worked full- or part-time when my children were under three and was the only one with an adopted child, we had much in common. My own understanding of the events they mentioned through participation and reading of the archives, meant that I rarely needed to prolong the interview and this avoided the possibility of causing irritation by seeking clarification. I felt we 'spoke the same language' when we talked about the first decade of Parents' Centre.

### **9.2.1 *The second interview***

An impression I took away from the second interview, two years after the first, was that the pioneers were more open on the second occasion. In general there was a more comfortable atmosphere and more laughter. I felt more relaxed. Furthermore, I picked up the feeling that participation in the early days of Parents' centre was not always as harmonious and strife-free as many had indicated in the first interview. The second interview revealed that, as is often the case in my experience, when those who are strong, determined and certain they are right work together, there is usually some friction. Though all agreed that Helen Brew's leadership was a key factor in the success of the organisation, it was obvious that working with her was not always easy. However, all continued to applaud her ability, persistence and knowledge and the inspirational effect she had on others. The other pioneers were pleased she had been recognized by the community with an MBE. My second interview with Helen B proved valuable and moving: her memory loss was more apparent than at the first interview. There were three issues to which she kept returning. One was that she heard Bevan-Brown speak when she was still a school-girl – '*There was I, in my gym-slip, [school uniform at the time]*'. The second concerned the pregnant women coming to her house and insisting on being taught the Dick-Read techniques for

childbirth. The third was the constant stream of invitations to address meetings of parents throughout the country after Wellington Parents' Centre was formed and received publicity. She stressed, with some exasperation, *'I had five young children, a very busy husband and no transport'*. At times during the interview I felt like someone playing an old record in which the needle got stuck in the groove. I found myself 'gently lifting it up' so we could move on and wondered if, in hindsight, she realised that her inspiration and success put a burden on her and her family and felt some resentment.

On reflection, I think there were three factors which made the second interview rewarding and a helpful element in achieving my goal of making the oral history exercise collegial. The first was that I had sent the notes of my thesis to the pioneers and they could see how I used their contributions. They could appreciate that I had incorporated my own story into the text and that I was as deeply involved in the story as they were. In this regard I must admit that although I was prepared to reveal intimate details about my own life, I could not help feeling embarrassed when I saw them in print. This statement by Michael King (1999) captured my feelings:

I cannot help but be conscious, however of how often the first person pronoun appears in a text such as this with all its attendant overtones of egotism and solipsism. Unfortunately in a work that is largely autobiographical an imprint of this sort is unavoidable. (p.10)

The second helpful factor in the second interview was that I used a discussion method and did not have a tape recorder running. Whenever they asked for the text to be changed for clarity and to protect other people I accommodated their alterations directly onto the typed manuscripts. Thus we changed the text together, as in Mary Dobbie's account of her experience with abortion. She wanted the story changed lest the people whose house was described be identified. The third helpful aspect of the second interview was that they could see what I had done with the quotes and had a chance to challenge my analysis. Several of the pioneers wanted to strengthen certain points, such as Beverley Morris' emphasis on the optimism in the 1950s, the worth of the Parents' Centre organisation as demonstrated in its rapid expansion and its pioneering success and contribution.

Overall my belief in the importance of a second interview was validated. It was an expensive exercise in time and money but it gave me a different perspective in some cases and a stronger emphasis in others. Any fatigue I felt was offset by the enthusiasm of the

pioneers for the study and their delight at recalling the times and the part they played in them. I would like to pay a particular tribute to Beverley Morris for her support in this project. She billeted me, transported me round Auckland, participated at my request in the second interview of the pioneers who live in Auckland, and read my finished thesis critically. I had told her beforehand that I would like her to participate in the interview discussion. She did, unobtrusively and effectively. She was also able to provide feedback. After the first interview, which she participated in, she observed that I had spoken a lot. This gave me cause for reflection and at the three subsequent interviews in Auckland I was careful about the purpose and frequency of my contributions.

### 9.3 Getting older

I finished the second interview with a feeling that the timing of this study had been right. Although at 82 I am well past the age of the average student, this has been the right time for me to do this study as I have been able to enjoy hours of uninterrupted time for reflection, reading and writing. In the two years between the interviews, age has taken more toll on us all. Although the pioneers were enthusiastic about a second interview, there were more difficulties for them than there had been two years ago. When I rang Alice Fieldhouse I was taken aback when she said *'Well, you'd better come tomorrow, I'm going into hospital on Wednesday [the day after]'*. Mary Dobbie said *'I'm nearly blind now, but I'll get my daughter to read the papers to me'*. Ephra Garrett had been struggling for many years with a serious illness but insisted on coming to Wellington from Foxton to meet me and discuss the thesis. June Bastings too had been ill. All the pioneers were involved with family and grand-children, often in a helping capacity, as am I. Barbara Hodge, Ann Rosenberg and Mary Logan, were caring for ailing husbands but they all managed to set aside time for the interview. Some had, like me become involved in projects related to their past lives. Alice was preparing material for a nurses' jubilee conference; Lex Grey and Mary D were each writing an autobiography; Chris Cole-Catley is still working in her publishing business, Ephra in her community; Beverley Morris in the University of the Third Age, an institution which provides further learning opportunities for retired people and June for the Workers Educational Association. They are still vital, enthusiastic and capable people contributing to the welfare of others.

## 9.4 Concluding comments

Although I have interviewed only 16 people I have been fortunate in being able to gather material from a group who were among the 'movers and shakers' of the services for childbirth and parenthood. Some such as June Bastings, Helen Brew, Chris Cole-Catley, Lex Grey, Diana Mason, Beverley Morris and Jim Robb played key roles in setting up the Parents' Centre organisation in Wellington. Alice Fieldhouse, Barbara Hodge, Mary Logan, Mary Mowbray, Richard Savage and I contributed to sustaining and extending the service in its early days. Mary Dobbie, Ephra Garrett, Ann Rosenberg and Helen Thornton played important roles in setting up centres in other areas of New Zealand. I am sure from the interest shown by Parents' Centre members that it has been worth celebrating and recording the achievement of this group who 'seized the day' and used it effectively to promote change for children under three and their parents.

Testament to the worth of the Parents' Centre organisation is its survival and the fact that the ideas it promoted are still valid and practised in many families, most training institutions and early childhood centres. For example, the philosophy that 'early childhood is a period of momentous significance' is basic to the Early Childhood curriculum document Te Whāriki, which, since 1996, has underpinned daily practice in New Zealand's pre-schools and most parent education programmes (Ministry of Education, 1996; Nuttall, 2003). The pioneers of Parents' Centre can rightly take credit for setting the direction of developments which are now taken for granted in New Zealand.

As pioneer Ann Rosenberg recalled, *'I would say Parents' Centre ideas had an effect. It was part of enriching having young children, meeting up with all those people, a lot of whom are dead now'*.

\* \* \*

As this study draws to a close I am drawn to a quote from the poet O'Shaughnessy whose words of wisdom have already provided me with the title 'Movers and Shakers'.

'Each age is an age that is dying, or one that is coming to birth'

The pioneers of Parents' Centre played an important part in hastening the demise of the old age with its ways of managing childbirth and parenthood. This thesis has shown that the pioneers of Parents' Centre also helped to shape the life of the new in its important early years.

## APPENDIX 1

### First Contact (by Phone)

It will be structured according to the relationship I have with the interviewee.

1. Introducing myself, my involvement in Parents Centre and the reason I am doing the study and my proposed method.
2. Mention the fact a tape recorder will be used and seek feelings about that .
3. This interview is semi-structured. I have themes (which I will explain and follow up in my letter and questionnaire. I will be happy to accept that your answers and examples may not follow my agenda rigidly.
4. I know the way I respond verbally and non-verbally will have a big effect on the way the interview goes. The relationship between us will be an influential factor. I want to avoid following my pre-conceived ideas as far as possible.

### Note

By the time I am ready to interview the pioneers I will have done two preliminary interviews with people who have a history of involvement with Parents Centre but would not be classed as 'pioneers'. I should then have a good idea of the time each interview will take. I will share this information with future interviewees and ask them how they would like to proceed eg separate parts on separate days; one day with breaks between; other forms.

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **FOLLOW UP LETTER OF INFORMATION AFTER TELEPHONE CONVERSATION**

My name is Marie Bell. Like you, I was involved in promoting and developing Parents Centre. I organised the Wellington ante-natal classes between 1959 and 1963; was spokesperson for Parents Centre submissions to the Findlay and Currie Commissions; is, was and still am an educational adviser, training officer and honorary life member. I am now retired from my work which has, over a long period of time, been concerned with the training of teachers and the promotion of policy which will improve what I regard as the most important area of education – that of Early Childhood.

Most of the improvements in Early Childhood Education have been achieved by hard work on the part of those involved in the services. Much of this has been voluntary work undertaken by people with young children, and was achieved in spite of opposition from policy makers, family, experts and peers. I believe Parents Centre is an organization which has made a huge contribution in making services for childbirth and parenthood more helpful and friendly to parents and children. Their members, advocates and supporters played a large part in bringing about change in areas such as ante-natal education, choice in childbirth, feeding, toilet training and discipline which were compatible with child development knowledge at that time. Also, the inclusion of the family in the hospitalization of young children was the basis of another successful campaign.



Yet few young parents today, who enjoy the results of these efforts, have any idea of the hard work and challenges the pioneers faced. I believe that the women who founded the movement need to have their voices recorded. Now I have the time and opportunity to work on recording the beginning and development of the movement from the perspective of the founders, I intend to work on this.

I have chosen to record the views of the pioneers in the form of a doctoral thesis undertaken at the Institute for Early Childhood Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. I believe the supervision I will receive from Dr Helen May, Professor of Early Childhood Education and Dr Carmen Dalli, Director, will help me to gain a more valid picture of the origins of the Movement than I could achieve from working on my own. After two months' work I can already appreciate how valuable is the discipline imposed by doctoral study and the concomitant access to modern research methods in texts, theses and archives which are readily available. One area in which I have modified my views considerably is that of gathering my material. I want to ensure that as far as possible you feel that your contribution is valuable and valid and that my ideas do not dominate. In short, I want the exercise to be a cooperative effort.

I hope I can make the interview a comfortable and satisfying experience. I would like to share my analysis and get your opinion as to its validity from your perspective. I will seek feedback from you on the process of the interview at the time and after you have received and had time to study the transcript. If you wish to add to or change parts of your contribution as a result of the process I will be prepared to change or negotiate.

The question of confidentiality will be discussed with each person interviewed and I will respect your wishes.

When all the interviews and analyses have been completed it may be possible to hold a group session at which we discuss significant findings and what should be done with the material. Attendance at this would, of course, be voluntary.

I enclose a copy of the questions I intend to ask to give you a chance to mull over the topics which I see as the key issues. I believe it is very important for you to have a chance to consider them. I have had a year to think about the subject and still find myself coming up with different ideas especially as I read and discuss the topic with others who may have different perspectives from mine.

I am convinced, too, that interviewees should continue to be part of the process of this research at all stages. Part of this conviction comes from reading papers which challenge traditional methods of research, and part from my own experience of being interviewed without due or any preparation. My responses would have been different if I had known the purpose of the research and had time to reflect on it in that context. I would also have liked to challenge the analysis in some cases.

Thank you for agreeing to participate. May we all find the process satisfying, interesting and thought provoking. I hope, too, that from our work comes a record which may help consumers of services challenge and change practices which they regard as harmful, irrelevant or outmoded.

May others honour you – the pioneers of Parents Centre - and follow in your footsteps (perhaps) strengthened by the success you achieved in reaching many of your goals.

## APPENDIX 3

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What did Parents Centre mean to you?
2. How would you describe yourself when you first became involved with Parents Centre?
  - your concept of children?
  - your ideas of family and family life?
3. Tell me in your own way what led you to join Parents Centre?

A list of factors that could be considered could include:

  - prior experiences in personal and family life
  - work and training
  - association with friends, other families and community groups
  - contact with philosophers, educational and health leaders and reformers through their writings or personally.
4. What role/s did you play in Parents Centre?
5. Parents Centre had a commitment to empower and to inform parents about pregnancy and childbirth. It also considered the child's nature, individuality and holistic development.

Its aims were to change the prevailing practices in regard to:

  - the role of parents
  - feeding

- toilet training
- sex education
- discipline
- separation of children under 5 from parents on admission to hospital?

What was your affinity with the aims and values of Parents Centre?

6. Which of the changes identified in question 4 did you find

- helpful
- difficult
- impossible
- a mixture

Can you identify why?

7. What experiences had you had previously of putting the Parents Centre ideas into practice?

8. What were the results for you at the time of departing from current practices in regard to question 4?

9. Did your actions (in question 4) affect

- your own comfort?
- relationships with medical professionals?
- your own family, neighbours, friends, colleagues, and others involved in Parents Centre
- in what ways?

10. How long did your involvement with Parents Centre continue?
11. What have been the long-term effects of Parents Centre involvement on
  - yourself
  - your family
  - your career
  - your philosophy of life
  - the way you regard children>
12. Have you continued to support Parents Centre itself, its aims and ideals?
13. If you were contemplating parenthood today would you become involved in Parents Centre and to what extent?
14. What influences in your own life in the last 50 years could have shaped changes in your thinking about the movement?

## APPENDIX 4

### CONSENT FORM

Title                      Movers and Shakers of Childbirth and Parenthood  
                                 A study of the pioneers of Parents Centre.

I have discussed the purpose and scope of this research study with Marie Bell by telephone and received a copy of an information sheet which detailed the procedures this study will involve. I have been given an opportunity to question her further.

I understand I will be able to:

- Structure the interview according to my wishes in terms of the time taken, topics developed and amount of disclosure seen as helpful
- Give feed back on the content of the interview
- Listen to the recording
- Read the transcript
- Read and discuss the analysis
- Withdraw any material from the study which on reflection I do not wish to have included. I can do this until the start of the writing up of the results of this project.

GUIDELINES FOR DISCUSSION  
ON CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW

To be filled in by interviewer and interviewee after the interview and used as a basis for discussion.

Date: .....  
Time: .....  
Location: .....

Feedback on preparation including information on the aims of the research and procedures.

Venue - was it suitable, comfortable, practical? .....

Length of time – was it a good length, too long? .....

Recommendations .....

Feelings about the interview – was the use of the audio recording comfortable, intrusive? .....

Could you express your views in your own way? .....

Did you feel supported in what you said? .....

Was the structure of the interview helpful? .....

Was there enough time for preparation? .....

What changes should be made? .....

Next interview:      Location: .....

Time: .....

Form of interview .....

Signed: .....



My preference for storage of the tapes and transcripts of my interview/s is that:

1. The tapes and transcripts be kept as part of the Parents Centre archives held at the Institute of Early Childhood Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. ☐
2. The tapes and transcripts be returned to me. ☐
3. The tapes and transcripts be destroyed. ☐

For the purposes of the written reports from this project my preference is that:

1. My real name be used. ☐
2. A pseudonym be used to present my data. ☐

The pseudonym is .....

I give my consent to taking part in the project subject to the conditions outlined above.

Name of participant.....

Date .....

I would like to be sent a summary of the research findings ☐

## APPENDIX 6: Distribution List of Parents' Centre Bulletins

NAME	ADDRESS	ADDRESS 2	ADDRESS 3	ADDRESS 4	Comments	Last Issue	No. of Copies	Expired
Jarbara Stewart	NZ Trust	Parliament	Wellington		Free		1	
Deverly Morris	474 Clifton Road	Herne Bay	Auckland		Free		1	
Brownen Summers	Green Party	PO Box 1258	Wellington		Free		1	
Cefeste Palmer	NZABA		Wellington		Free		1	
Thuthuthi Educators NZ	121 Lisle Road	Imkenhall	Auckland		Free		1	
Christine Bush	Assistant Librarian	McKinnon Brown Library	University of Canterbury	Private Bag 4800	Christchurch		1	
Christine Cole-Catley	81 Ngataraunga Rd	Dewarpet	Auckland		Free		1	
Commissioner for Children	P.O. Box 5610	Wellington			Free		1	
Dame Marie Clay	Flat 4	153 Bassett Road	Auckland 5		Free		1	
Drarry Young	41 Oak Street	(Genesi)	New York 14451	U.S.A.	Free		1	
Dr Melvine Walker	8 Kaitiaki Drive-Christchurch 2	New Plymouth	Wellnessy Street		Free		1	
Dr Paul Dempsey	184, Seaview Road	P.O. Box 6026	Wellington	Auckland	Free		1	
Graham Stannard	Cuckoo Power NZ Fish Lakeview Inc	Box 2091	Wellington		Free		1	
Henry's Lloyd	Librarian Shelf NZ	Marumui	Wellington		Free		1	
Helen Brew	19 Healey Road	Wellington			Free		1	
Human Rights Commission	P.O. Box 5045	Wellington 1			Free		1	
R McKenzie Trust	P.O. Box 10 006	Red Hill			Free		1	
an Centre	P.O. Box 412	Wairakei Downs	Auckland		Free		1	
Jane Farrelly	21 St. Annes Crescent	Panmua	Wellington		Free		1	
Jeannette Volland	54 Kaim Road	P.O. Box 97347	Sub Auckland Mail Centre		Free		1	
Julie McNe	Kimberly-Clark NZ	PO Box 21-106	Christchurch		Free		1	
Carol Guilford	Waystone Trust	P.O. Box 691	Wellington		Free		1	
Carol Herbert	MP National Party	Parliament	Wellington		Free		1	
Katherine Rich	CHC Course	Private Bag 902	Timaru		Free		1	
Karina Shaller	P.O. Box 1270	Wellington			Free		1	
La Teche League	Parliament Buildings	Wellington			Free		3	
Librarian Research Unit	Literarian Serials	P.O. Box 12-340	Wellington		Free		1	
Lyne Pully	MP Labour Party	Parliament	Wellington		Free		1	
Minister of Education	Parliament Buildings	Wellington			Free		1	
Minister of Health	Parliament Buildings	Wellington			Free		1	
Minister of Social Welfare	Alexandra House	Ollham Terrace	Active	London W3 6NH	ENGLAND		1	
National Childbirth Trust	P.O. Box 12 117	Wellington North	Australia		Free		1	
National Council of Women	P.O. Box 4040	Glen Iris 3146			Free		1	
Margaret McKenna Asst of Aus	P.O. Box 234	Wakatu Mail Centre	Wellington	Auckland	Free		1	
Peter McCaulle	Head of Research, ACT Party	Parliament	Pukekohe	Hamilton	Free		1	
Physicentre Federation	Glenhwyk Road	RD4	Private Bag		Free		1	
Professor James Ritchie	Psychology Department	University of Waikato			Free		1	
Rose Ann McKen	Nira Private Bag 92028	Auckland			Free		1	
Bonny McKay	200 Balmacevan Road	Helmshough	Dunedin		Free		1	
Shirley Day	Secretary Todd Foundation	P.O. Box 3142	Wellington		Free		1	
Steve Chiswick	MP Labour Party	Parliament	Wellington		Free		1	
Bue Beaulieu	MP Green Party	Parliament	Wellington		Free		1	
Bue Keigley	MP Green Party	Parliament	Wellington		Free		1	
Diana Philip Field	MP Labour Party	Freepost Parliament	Wellington	Auckland	Free		1	
Fremah Handbale	Office of Hon. Ruth Dyson Minister of Women's Affairs	Private Bag 92-512	Wellnessy Street		Free		1	
The Editor	Little Treasures	Marion	Wellington		Free		1	
Tracy McNaughton	90 Hemdens Lane	P.O. Box 123	Egson	Auckland	Free		1	
Wayne Mount	National Radio	Chisle Rd			Free		1	
Women's Health Info Unit	Nat. Women's Hospital	Lytelton			Free		1	
William Frater	19 Huxtons Road	116 Marsden Ave	Balmoral		Free		1	
Ann Baker	Motives Collective	P.O. Box 4138	Auckland		Free		1	
Auckland City Libraries	Stables Department	Ground Floor, Block 4	Green Lane West		Free		1	
Auckland Healthcare Library	Green Lane Hospital	Christchurch 8015			Free		1	
Christchurch City Libraries	P.O. Box 3845	Christchurch 8015			Free		1	
Christchurch City Libraries	Wellington Trust	Box 35028	Lower Hunt		Free		1	
Conductive Education	P.O. Box 1235	P.O. Box 10 107	Upper		Free		1	
Early Childhood Coordinators Ministry of Education	P.O. Box 147	P.O. Box 717	Hamilton		Free		1	
Early Childhood Coordinators Ministry of Education	Private Bag 2522	Christchurch	Wellington		Free		1	
Early Childhood Coordinators Ministry of Education	Private Bag 3012	Wanganui	Wellington		Free		1	
Early Childhood Coordinators Ministry of Education	P.O. Box 1749	Rotorua	Wellington		Free		1	
Early Childhood Coordinators Ministry of Education	Private Bag 47 911	Auckland	Wellington		Free		1	
Early Childhood Coordinators Ministry of Education	Ministry of Education	PO Box 1666	Wellington		Free		2	
Early Childhood Info Centre	Curriculum Teaching & Learning	PO Box 99914	Wellington		Free		5	

F3: North District Libraries	Perivichals Librarian	Ci: Kaitiaki Public Library	Melba Street	Kaitiaki 0500	Renewal	Jun/July 2004	1
	Bay of Plenty Polytechnic	Private Bag TGI2001	Tauranga 3020		Renewal	Dec/Jun 2004	1
	Eastern Institute of Technology	Private Bag 1201	Tauranga	Napier	Renewal	Dec/Jun 2004	1
	Whitireia Com. Polytech Kapiti Campus	P.O Box 249	Paraparaumu		Renewal		
	P.O Box 30-037	Lower Hutt			Renewal	Feb/March 2005	1
	P.O Box 30-037	Lower Hutt			Renewal	Jan/Feb 2004	1
	Lynda Williams	Waitakere	Auckland		Renewal	Dec/Jun 2004	1
	Ministry of Education	PO Box 1666	Wellington		Renewal	Dec/Jun 2004	1
	NZ Tertiary College	Griffin	Auckland 1001		Renewal	Dec/Jun 2004	1
	Periodicals Department	P.O Box 1992	Wellington		Renewal	Feb/March 2004	1
Periodicals Assistant	Dunedin Public Library	P.O Box 5542	Moray Place	Dunedin	Renewal	Feb/March 2004	1
	P.O Box 200	Hastings	Hawkes Bay		Renewal	Feb/March 2004	3
	Parse ECE Training (NZ) Ltd	Private Bag 2025	New Plymouth		Renewal	Dec/Jun 2005	1
	Police Anki	Waihi Beach			Renewal	May/June 2004	1
	Rebecca Rangitia	Waihi Beach			Renewal	Dec/Jun 2004	1
	Rowena Public Library	Private Bag 3029			Renewal	Dec/Jun 2004	1
	Sarah Rumpack	3600 Harri Road	Rotorua		Renewal	April/May 2005	1
	Senaldi Info Team Leader	Private Bag 3105	Hamilton	USA	Renewal	Feb/March 2005	1
	The Librarian	Private Bag 607	Greymouth		Renewal	Feb/March 2005	1
	Tracy Smith-Burr	Tairāwhiti Polytechnic	Silverdale	Hibiscus Coast	Renewal	Dec/Jun 2004	2
Tracy Grant	48 P.O. Box 1000	Kopu	Wellington				1

## **Material From The Archives Used In This Thesis**

My main sources of information of Wellington Parents' Centre in the years 1952 to 1962 are collected and stored in boxes 1-15.1 and on the shelves of the Parents' Centre Archive Collection held at the Institute for Early Childhood Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, 92 Fairlie Terrace, Wellington.

### **Boxes**

1.1 Early Federation Files Executive Minutes: 1957, 64 and 75.

2a, 2b and 2c: Wellington Parents' Centre Courses and Conferences

2.1: NZPC Early Correspondence (1958-1962)

2.6: Correspondence to Branches 1960-65

2.7: NZPC Correspondence – Adoption and Fostering

2.9: NZPC Campaigns about lead in petrol, toy safety, swimming pools

2.13: Mary Dobbie file

2.15: NZPC Library correspondence

4.1 Helen and Quentin Brew: includes many articles, reports and preparation for radio programme 'Let's talk it over' 1959.

6a: Wellington Parents' Centre Correspondence (in the 50s but referred to for development)

10.1 Submissions 1953-1969

10.2 Submissions 1970-1990

11.14: Executive Meeting Minutes (1957-1969)

12.1: NZPC National Conferences 1957-1979 – programmes and related correspondence

12.3: Newsbriefs 1959-1991 (another medium for publicity)

14.5 A and B: Training

14.6: Grant applications 1958-1981

14.8: Volunteers, New Zealand Federation of Voluntary Welfare Organisation correspondence related material

15.1: International Federation for Parent Education: Women in social and economic development folder report on IWY Conference.

### **Special topics, not numbered**

Collections of material on special topics including: fatherhood, abortion, home births, ante-natal and post-natal courses, NZ Foster-Care Federation, books, articles, Facts for foster parents.

NZPC Press Cuttings (unmarked box in the Collection)

A box labelled Obstetrics with articles labelled 1950s→. A mine of information on many topics related to obstetrics and the Parents' Centre view, such as 'Human Relations in Obstetrics' (1961: Central Health Services Council, London) to 'The Husband's Role in Childbirth' Bradley, RA, M.D. 1965

### **Stored on the shelves in the Archive Room, not boxed**

1953 – Joint submissions to the Consultative committee on Hospital Reform

1959 – Submissions to the Consultative committee on Infant and Pre-School Health Services which give an idea of the wider issues Parents' Centre was involved in

1960 – Submissions on Maternity Services in New Zealand Report by a subcommittee of National Council of Women (on which there were Parents' Centre representatives such as myself).

1960 – Submissions to the Commission on Education by Federation of NZPC's

1961 – Submissions on Home Confinement to the Commission of Enquiry into Maternity Services, by Margaret Hales.

1963 – Report on Children in Hospital in New Zealand, submitted to the Superintendent Waikato Public Hospital.

### **Historical Readings**

The Moira Gallagher Collection: An interview with her, letters to her, tributes to her on her retirement and reception of the MBE.

The Beverley Morris Collection: much material for children. Book lists. Advice on reading. Pamphlets for Parents. Information on playgrounds, films and equipment.

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