

A black and white photograph of four children playing in a sandpit. In the foreground, a boy is crouching, looking towards a girl who is standing and smiling. To the right, another boy is crouching, looking down at a toy cart filled with wooden blocks. In the background, a fourth child is partially visible. The sandpit is filled with sand, and there are various toys like a wheelbarrow and a cart. A chain-link fence and a building are visible in the background.

AHIPARA PRE-SCHOOL

1959 – 1963

The first Māori Pre-school's first four years

Barbara Mitcalfe

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1959–1963

The first Māori Pre-School's first four years

A memoir dedicated to
Florrie Berghan, Liz Ngauma, Kiri Henare, Dolly Snowden,
Mary Hanlon, Annie Walker and Kath Busby

by
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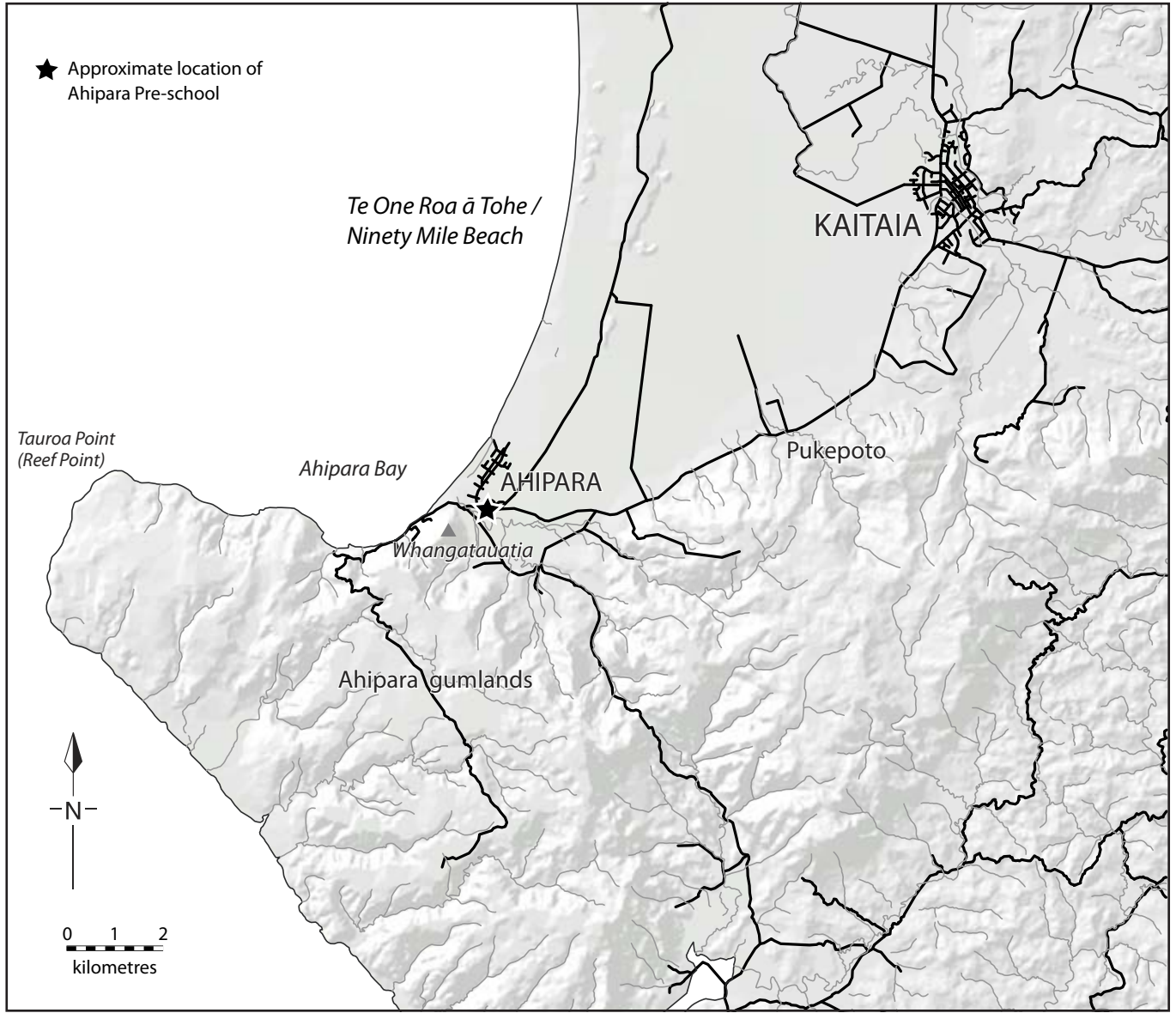
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Cover photo: Fun for four at the sand pile. Photo: © *The Northland Age*.

Contents

Introduction	1
Ahipara, a Far North rural community in the 1950s and 60s	1
The start of Ahipara Pre-School	2
September 1959	2
1960	2
1961	7
1962	12
1963	18
Acknowledgements	20
Appendix 1 'An experiment in pre-school education at Ahipara'	21
Notes made in 1962, in answer to a joint Department of Education and Department of Māori Affairs request for information	21
Appendix 2 'Notes for mother-helpers at Ahipara Pre-School, May 1963'	26



Ahipara, Kaitaia, and the surrounding district.

*Ka nukunuku, ka nekeneke
Ka kite koe i te tai o Ahipara
E hora nei me he pīpīwharaua tuā
Takoto te pai, takoto te pai.*

*Behold the rise and fall of the tide at Ahipara, the sea glittering like the breast of the
shining cuckoo ... how still, how peaceful it lies.*

This ancient Far North pepeha was told to me by my friend and neighbour in Ahipara, the late Pūhipi Te Pā, (Te Rārawa, Aupōuri). It refers to the wonderment of a person journeying from a long way inland, gazing out over the sea at Ahipara for the first time, from the summit of Whangatauatia, at the foot of Te One Roa ā Tohe / Ninety Mile Beach. I use it here as a metaphor for tides of change, referring to early childhood education in Ahipara which has been evolving through significant changes in relatively recent times.

Introduction

This memoir covers the first four years of Ahipara Pre-School, the first Māori pre-school, a community initiative which began in 1959 from an idea expressed by a local parent. It was founded and run by parent and grand-parent volunteers, with support from the newly-formed Ahipara School Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and the Ahipara School Committee.

Ahipara Pre-School was a pioneer in the early childhood education of Māori children in an era when pre-school children's learning centres in New Zealand were virtually unknown in remote rural communities, particularly in the Far North.

Throughout 1959, first, as pre-school sub-committee Chair, and then from 1961 as inaugural, honorary, Ahipara Pre-School supervisor, I made occasional, brief, hand-written notes for my own personal interest. Rediscovering them some years ago in a long-disused drawer, I decided to use them as the basis of an account of the pre-school's beginnings, filling a gap in the evolving history of Māori early childhood education in Ahipara in the early 1960s. Included in the memoir are excerpts of relevant articles from Kaitaia's *The Northland Age* newspaper; submissions, correspondence, and photographs from the era.

Ahipara, a Far North rural community in the 1950s and 60s

Ahipara was the centre of Rārawa tribal settlement in the Far North, where tribal loyalties were strong—especially on the rugby field on Saturday afternoons in winter. Subsistence farming, wild orchards dating from early gum-digging days, home vegetable gardens and plentiful kaimoana helped sustain many Ahipara households.

Kaitaia, the nearest town, provided employment for some Māori adults in the Post and Telegraph Department, roadworks, and the public hospital. Most of them commuted daily, departing in the early morning and returning in the early evening. The workers' bus, as it was called, and the school bus, were the only forms of public transport.

Communication was primitive, party telephone lines being the main mode. Radio reception was very poor and television unheard of. Mail was delivered to and collected individually from the tiny Post Office opposite the only Ahipara shop, which sold a few basic grocery items and milk.

Kaitaia College serviced the educational needs of teenagers, many of whom travelled long distances by bus from further north. Kaitaia itself was geographically, economically and socially a frontier town, the last town before the long haul up the Aupōuri Peninsula to the lighthouse at Te Reinga. To the east, the coastal highway led through prosperous beachside and citrus-growing communities, to Kerikeri and Whangarei. To the south, a largely unsealed highway wound tortuously over the Maungataniwha Range, and another led southwest through the Herekino Gorge, to the Hokianga.

In Ahipara, *'Children generally are part of households larger than the national average (3.75 persons per dwelling), or than the national Māori average (6.23 persons, 1956–61 figures). And houses are smaller. That people aged thirty-five-plus speak fluent Māori and have a lower level of formal education, (only 31% with secondary schooling), has implications for pre-schooling. Many children, cared for by grandparents come from a largely Māori-speaking environment (eight of the first 24 at pre-school). Others come from a home where language background is transitional – sub-standard English and sub-standard Māori.'*

(from H.P.B. Mitcalfe's article *Pre-School Results Tested in Ahipara School*, published in the magazine *Child*, February 1968, pp. 16-17.)

The start of Ahipara Pre-School

September 1959

Ahipara School Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) is formed

Most local families sent their children to Ahipara Māori School, though some sent their children to school in Kaitaia instead. Mr 'Tam' Lambert, recently brought out of retirement to oversee Ahipara School's transition from the Māori School system to the state school system, had just been appointed as relieving principal.

A PTA was an entirely new concept to the Ahipara community, so a public meeting of parents of children at the school was arranged to elect an inaugural committee. Although a very recent newcomer to Ahipara, I was elected to the position of Honorary Secretary, probably because I was a trained teacher, with three children already attending Ahipara School, and two younger children.

During general discussion at this well-attended meeting, a person who had recently returned from living in Auckland expressed surprise at the complete lack of local provision for Ahipara children of pre-school age to play and learn. Thus the idea was born, and after a lively sharing of opinion, the meeting resolved to enquire into the possibility of using the old, former Ahipara School building, as a kindergarten.

1960

February–June A pre-school sub-committee is formed

The PTA Committee consulted Mr Lambert, and as a result a pre-school sub-committee of mothers was elected to find out what might be involved. They were: Mary Hanlon, Kiri Henare, Dolly Snowden, Annie Walker and I. We set about making enquiries locally and further afield, but in June we had to report to the school committee that a kindergarten was totally unrealistic for Ahipara. This was because although a Crown section across the road from Ahipara School could theoretically have become available as a site:

- the old school building was deemed completely unsuitable, though it was still being used as a temporary classroom at the time; in such disrepair, it would not

have gained approval for use as a kindergarten without substantial work and expenditure well beyond the community's means;

- obtaining and keeping trained staff in such an isolated area would have been an insurmountable problem;
- there were not enough 3–4-year-olds in Ahipara to meet the requirements of a kindergarten, namely, twenty children each morning and twenty other children each afternoon.

July–August A fallback option explored

Meanwhile, not wanting to stand still, on behalf of the PTA, I took the initiative to write to the secretary of the National Play-Centre Association in Wellington, seeking advice in principle about setting up a Play Centre as a fall-back option. Wellington's Gwen Somerset, then National President of the association, kindly referred my request to the Whangarei Play Centre. Through their liaison officer, Mrs Andrews, our request was taken up by Alex Grey, Whangarei-based, Far North Pre-School Officer of the Māori Education Foundation. He offered to come and talk to us in Ahipara in September during one of his official field trips. The subject was to be, *Advantages of Pre-School Education*.

At this time Mr Lambert passed on to our pre-school sub-committee a rumour that the Department of Education might be considering setting up an experimental pre-school centre somewhere. Heartened, we thought: why not Ahipara? As it later turned out, it was nothing but a rumour, but our vision and the momentum it created kept us energised.

September Alex Grey addresses us

An enthusiastic crowd of parents at Alex Grey's talk encouraged us to continue to seek ways to get what we wanted—a pre-school.

October A public meeting

Mr Lambert asked me to draft a PTA newsletter on behalf of the pre-school sub-committee, convening a public meeting of Ahipara School parents for 11 October to discuss *Support in principle for an experimental pre-school in Ahipara*. Below is all that survives of it:

'... The classroom advantages are very considerable. Children who have attended a pre-school of some sort are quicker to learn to read. They are not taught to read or count in pre-schools but because they are provided with the right sort of play materials (puzzles, blocks, books, paints, etc.) the children learn to concentrate, to see likenesses and differences; to make intelligent guesses; to get acquainted with colours, shapes, sizes and textures; to evaluate and criticise their own efforts. This is the period which in rural schools is likely otherwise to be prolonged and difficult for the child and the teacher.

Above all, children who have attended a pre-school come to look forward to primary school as a continuation of an experience they have already learned to enjoy, not something new and possibly frightening.

The above is just an outline of what may be achieved. It could be, if we really want it to be, the first pre-school attached to a Māori school, in New Zealand. Your School Committee and the P.T.A. Committee both support the idea. You are bound to have all sorts of doubts and questions and maybe even objections: Who would run it? Would it cost us anything? And so on. Well, there will be a meeting at Ahipara School at 8 p.m. on Tuesday next, October 11th to discuss all aspects of the idea. We must find out if there is sufficient support from parents before we go ahead.

Will you come, even if you are (so far) against the idea? Mr Lambert will be in the Chair. It would be good to see some new PTA members there that night. A cup of tea will be provided but any contributions towards supper will be appreciated.

Haere mai koutou katoa ki te hui.

Barbara Mitcalfe

Hon. Secretary,

Ahipara PTA.

The Northland Age reported that the lively, 11 October meeting carried unanimously the motion that, 'This meeting wholeheartedly supports the idea of an experimental pre-school centre in Ahipara, staffed by a fully-qualified person appointed by the Education Department, assisted in turn by mothers of children attending.'

Age limits, numbers of children, and other matters, were to be decided separately.

November Our first submission

As Chair of our pre-school sub-committee, I was then delegated by Mr. Lambert to write a submission to Mr Ray Bradley, newly appointed Superintendent of the Auckland Regional Office of the Department of Education, expressing our community's support for a pre-school centre in Ahipara. This was to be the first submission I had ever written. The pre-school committee warmly approved it, the school office assistant kindly typed it, and I posted it on the eve of the 1960 general election.

Never having kept a copy of the submission, to my amazement, in 2010, I came across a photocopy of it while investigating some other old papers at National Archives, Wellington, in a Department of Māori Affairs folder stamped, 'CLOSED'. So unbeknown to us, back in 1960, our small group's submission, based on a rumour, had already been copied to officers of the Māori Affairs and Education Departments' head offices in Wellington. Our existence was known about after all. Here is the submission:

Ahipara

Northland

4 November 1960.

The Senior Officer for Māori Education,

c/o Private Bag,

Newmarket,

AUCKLAND.

Dear Mr Bradley,

As a member of a committee of five elected from a public meeting held here last month, I am writing to respectfully present what we believe to be a strong case for an experiment here in pre-school education.

It is not our intention to dwell on the general desirability of pre-school education, especially in rural Māori areas, as this topic has already received at least some publicity in the Press, following forceful recommendations throughout the country by groups which are vitally concerned about Māori education, e.g. the Post-Primary Teachers' Association in its representations to the Commission on Education in New Zealand; the Māori Students' Association in its submission to the same, and all the Young Māori Leaders' Conferences to date, including the most recent one, October 21st – 24th, Tai Tokerau, which I had the honour to attend as an observer.

We wish instead to concentrate on the following local reasons why Ahipara has at least as much claim to be the site for an experiment of this type, as any other locality.

GENERAL BACKGROUND

Ahipara could be described as an economically-depressed rural area, the population of which is very largely Māori. Ahipara School itself is one of the largest Māori primary schools in Northland, and shortly the completely new buildings will be finished.

NUMBERS

There are approximately fifty-five 3-5-year-old children in Ahipara half of whom live within half a mile of the school, so that transport would not be a problem. A survey conducted last year by the School Committee showed that the numbers of 3-5-year-olds were too small to warrant establishing a kindergarten.

LAND

There is a Crown section in close proximity to, yet separate from, the school. The County Member and Riding Member has expressed his willingness to help press our claim that the section should be made available for educational purposes, and in general the Crown acts on the recommendation of the County in such matters. The section involved is central to the whole community.

BUILDING

There are at the school now, prefabricated buildings due to be vacated very shortly when the new block is opened. We do not suggest that these are of a type suitable for a pre-school, but if they are not urgently needed elsewhere they could perhaps suffice temporarily.

If in 1963, the proposed Intermediate School is opened in Kaitaia, there should be at least vacant classrooms here in Ahipara. We do not however consider it advisable (a) for school and pre-school to share the same play area, (i.e. the room, if used, would need its own play area fenced off), or (b) to have to wait till 1965 for the solution to a problem we feel to be urgent now. It could be difficult to maintain local interest in the project at its present high level, unless it was implemented in the near future. Next term would be ideal if it were only possible.

I think you can safely assume that there is a body of parents here reasonably well informed about the general advantages of pre-school education. It is largely through the local PTA, formed last year, that the campaign has so far been conducted. As Secretary of that group I have from time to time written up our activities for the local newspaper, The Northland Age, and I am therefore enclosing three cuttings relevant to the topic of pre-school in this district, in case you may find them of interest.

Other organisations here, e.g. the Māori Women's Welfare League (re-formed this month after being in recess for a year or so) and the Women's Institute are in support of the idea. The School Committee members are also unanimously in favour.

Some of the local mothers have recently paid visits to the Kaitaia Kindergarten, to observe a pre-school in action and are most enthusiastic to start something here of a similar nature.

Mr Grey of Auckland Teachers' Training College came to lecture the PTA at short notice, on the advantages a child gains from pre-school attendance. (See cutting, September 30th). This meeting was held on a Sunday, a night when there are always numerous small religious meetings but several of these were cancelled in favour of the above, and the attendance of 30 people was very creditable for a community of this size and nature.

Mr Grey concentrated on the Nursery Play Centre as an example of an organised and recognised Pre-School Service. However we feel that though Nursery Play Centres

help greatly to compensate for the fact that kindergartens are practicable only for towns and cities, (because of the money and numbers involved), they rely heavily, in fact completely, on skilled help available in the community and those communities which are the most backward, the most depressed economically and culturally, will be the last to see the need for, and to be able to organise, such a service. Somewhere, somehow, the vicious circle must be broken.

FINANCE

Early last year the Ahipara School Committee and the Ahipara PTA jointly undertook to find out what was involved in establishing a kindergarten, with a view to setting one up here. (See report appended). It was found however that the finance required was almost certainly beyond this particular community. Further, the number of 3–5-year-old children was too low, (though nevertheless high in comparison with the total population, and this is a further argument in favour of a pre-school), there are for instance, no areas set aside for safe play for the young children here at all, and many play on the roads all day.

It seems that in order to make possible the development of pre-school services in rural Māori areas such as Ahipara, help from the Department is essential. If the Department were to consider giving their help, some sort of pilot project would be advisable to ensure that the effort would not be misdirected, and to provide a testing ground from which valid conclusions about organisation and methods could be drawn. Such a project, run by a fully qualified woman experienced in infant work and able to record relevant data, would be invaluable, practical research of nationwide application.

ORGANISATION

We fully realise that the actual organisation of such a project would be a matter for the Department to decide, but we would be sincerely grateful if the following suggestions made from our personal involvement in and knowledge of the local background, would be considered:

1. That the person in full-time charge be a woman, preferably a mother, with considerable experience of work with young children and of such a nature as to be able readily to mix with, and gain the confidence of, our local mothers.
2. That she be genuinely interested in the Māori people, their culture and their problems, and be prepared to teach simple Māori songs, games, legends etc, as an integral part of the work of the Centre.
3. That that person be able to give particular attention to speech work; (approximately 1/3 of the school children here have been referred for speech therapy).
4. That she be assisted in turn by a recognised group of mothers, so that they will themselves (1) become a working part of the Centre, thus strengthening the home-school link; (2) provide additional security for the children, and (3) share in the responsibility for its success. In this way we feel that the pre-school could be an important field for Adult Education, especially in such fields as Health and Child Care.
5. That the project be under the 'paternal' guidance of the headmaster of the Primary School, who has already consented to fulfil this role if he is required to do so.
6. A working knowledge of Te Reo Māori would, we feel, be an advantage in furthering 4 above, but is not essential.

We fully realise that if this project is once begun, we must pledge our support for as long as the Department is willing to conduct it.

We wish to assure you of our humble and sincere determination to make it a success. If there is any further information we can provide, we shall be glad if you will let us know.

Meantime, with all good wishes,

I remain,

Yours sincerely

(Signed)

(Mrs) Barbara Mitcalfe,

Honorary Secretary,

Ahipara PTA pre-school sub-committee: Mrs Mary Hanlon, Mrs Kiri Henare, Mrs Dolly Snowden, Mrs Annie Walker.

1961

January Mr Bradley replies

On behalf of the new Minister of Education, Mr. Tennant, Mr Bradley wrote, *'There is no possibility of a building, let alone a staffing allocation, but the idea has my full support.'* We felt greatly encouraged. Before this, we had no idea that in addition to being our official Department of Education Auckland Office contact, Mr Bradley was to become our unofficial mentor.

Meanwhile, we found out that there had been another local proposal for use of the old school building. Independently, the Tribal Committee had applied officially to the Education Department to use it for marae purposes. We then learned that in replying to this application, the new Minister of Education had written to the Secretary of the Ahipara School Committee, that there could be no decision on the fate of the old school building until it was no longer in use as temporary classroom space, because the new school buildings were still in the process of construction.

Local politics

Mr Bradley (now Ray, to us), rightly decided that this issue would have to be decided at a public meeting in Ahipara, so one was organised, but I was in Wellington with my family on our summer holiday, and no information about the planned meeting reached me in Wellington, or any of our sub-committee members in Ahipara. Perhaps one reason why we were not invited to present our case was that we still had no official status in the state system.

It was not until later, when I returned from Wellington, that Mr Lambert confessed to me that before the meeting, and without consulting us, he had suggested to the PTA that we, the pre-school sub-committee of the PTA, withdraw our application for use of the building. No minutes of that meeting were kept, but apparently it had been decided that the marae's need was more urgent than ours, and that the building should go to the Tribal Committee for free, on condition that they moved it to the marae within a specified time and made it available for a children's centre if required. I understand that there was subsequently an official letter confirming this arrangement, from the Education Department, to the chairman of the Ahipara School Committee.

Mr Lambert made it clear that, if *'the pre-school thing'* was going to be located over the river, i.e. on the other side of the settlement, he would be unwilling to keep an eye on it. He also told me that it had been taken for granted that as a qualified teacher, it was expected that I would be the volunteer supervisor of *'the thing'*.

April Mr Bradley offers support

Feeling confused, disconcerted, and wondering what we should record about the whole situation in our report to the PTA annual general meeting in May, I wrote to Ray for advice. He very kindly drove up to Ahipara to explain to Mr Lambert and me that he was now so keen on our idea of a pre-school in Ahipara that if I would organise and run it, the Department (i.e. he personally) would assist by providing initial equipment, as if it were part of the infant school. Mr Lambert was to keep a 'paternal eye' on it, and the small, seldom-used medical inspection room (c. 6 × 2.5 metres) was to be set aside for it. As for the idea of locating the pre-school at the marae, he advised us to, 'let that issue lie, meanwhile.'

Approval to begin!

This meeting meant that after all our set-backs, at last we had approval to begin sessions. Our morale soared. At the same time however, we noted with concern that the medical inspection room was hardly more than a passageway!

Below is the PTA newsletter to parents, advising that we were going ahead:

May 26th 1961, Ahipara School notice to parents

Have you a four-year-old-child (or one who will turn four this year) whom you would like to send along to the Ahipara Pre-School starting this term?

In an isolated district like Ahipara, children have little chance of attending a kindergarten, and thus, when they start school they are likely to be handicapped by excessive shyness and even fear. Kindergartens and play centres are a recognised 'bridge' between the shelter of home and the strangeness of school. Mothers are encouraged to come along with their children for the first few visits, after which, the children gradually become used to staying there by themselves, learning to mix and play with the others.

For those who are interested, here is an outline of what we hope to do:

Our aim is to provide safe, constructive, educational play for four-year-olds here so that they will be able to enjoy the considerable educational advantages which kindergartens and play centres offer. Isolated areas lack such organised activities but we are lucky – we have been given permission to use a room at the school, and special play material has been lent by the Education Department. We shall hold our Pre-School on Tuesday and Thursday mornings in the room which used to be the office, but which has been renovated and will provide a very pleasant setting for our indoor activities (blocks, books, dolls, dough, music, dressing-up, painting, drawing, and so on).

The scheme will be run by voluntary mother-helpers, under the guidance of Mr Lambert. (It differs in this way from kindergartens and play centres which rely on paid staff, and which charge fees.)

Parents of children attending will be most welcome to come along and see how things are working out. In fact we will be glad of mothers who are not at work, to come, say, once a month to help supervise.

There are many of us who look forward to seeing something like this scheme set up on the marae, but until the Department formally hands over the old school building to the Tribal Committee, and it is moved and suitably fitted out, this will not be possible.

Meantime we are going ahead, and in a few weeks there will be a meeting of parents interested to discuss further details, date of beginning, etc.

So if you have a four-year-old you'd like to send, or know of anyone who may not have

received a copy of this notice, but who would be interested, (particularly someone who has no children at school yet), then do let us know.

Please fill in the attached form and return it to Mr Lambert before Friday, June 2nd if you want your child to attend, or be sure to let one of the Pre-School Committee know before that date: Mrs Dolly Snowden; Mrs Annie Walker, 461 K; Mrs Mary Hanlon, 461 S; Mrs Kiri Henare, 261; Mrs Barbara Mitcalfe, 570 X.

.....Cut off along here.....
I would like (Child's full name)
born(date of birth).... to attend the Ahipara Pre-School.

.....
(Note: The numbers after the Pre-School Committee names were our phone numbers).

June

After the May holidays, we met with Mr Lambert to discuss what should happen next. He talked at length about official administrative matters such as records, tests, surveys and controls, which did not fit well with what we had in mind, having liked what we had heard about the relative freedom enjoyed at Play Centres. However we remained optimistic and determined to proceed with our first choice, an independent pre-school.

Mr Lambert offered to send a letter to Ray asking for the promised basic equipment to be sent as soon as possible so that sessions could start. Later we found out that unfortunately that letter was never sent, causing further delay. However we appreciated that Mr Lambert already had more than enough to do, what with running Ahipara School itself, and organising its transition to the state system, let alone dealing with this strange new 'pre-school thing'.

Early August

Meanwhile, to prepare for starting Ahipara Pre-School sessions, our helpers spring-cleaned the medical inspection room inside and out.

To our great excitement, some infant school furniture from the Department of Education at last arrived, marked tactfully, "**ON LOAN**", so we promptly called a meeting to draft a roster of intending mother-helpers.

Official arrangements were somehow made for the pre-school children and their mothers to travel on the school bus to and from pre-school, along with their siblings who were already attending school. I still do not know how, or by whom, behind the scenes, this remarkable concession was authorised, but it was of great assistance to us since not many families had cars, and some pre-school children would otherwise not have been able to attend.

August 12 Our first session!

In our first session in that crowded room, with mothers, toddlers, crawlers, excited pre-schoolers and the new, brightly-painted equipment in an underfoot jumble, we overflowed on to the verandah. As a result we decided we would have to halve the group, each half attending only one session per week instead of the two we had planned. This was very disappointing for all concerned, but we were determined to do our best with what we had been given or lent. Looking back now, I realise how tolerant and supportive the Ahipara School staff were, putting up with our use of the verandah and the medical inspection room every Tuesday and Thursday morning.

The pre-school committee decided on a fee of five shillings per term, this money being very ably accounted for by our Honorary Treasurer, Kath Busby. We felt a strong sense of privilege and responsibility as we discussed our priorities for play equipment which we could afford to buy on behalf of the group.

September

The 22nd September issue of the Kaitia newspaper *The Northland Age* ran a front-page article:

Ahipara Pre-School is first of kind.

'An innovation in education is the Ahipara Pre-School, the first of its kind, which functions in much the same way as a nursery play centre. A swirl of water, a scatter of blocks and a flurry of flour greeted an "Age" photographer when he visited... There is no formal teaching, mostly free play under the supervision of the director (whose work is voluntary), and an enthusiastic, hard-working group of mother-helpers who take turns to come along and help. ... It is an attempt to bridge the gap between the shelter of home life and the strangeness of school for children who, because of their isolation, have little chance of attending a kindergarten.'

A visit from Department of Education officials

Two friendly Department of Education officers, Mr Gillett and Mr Stafford, came up from Auckland to 'inspect' us, encouraging us to feel that we were being treated as part of 'The System'. To supplement this, and with input from our committee, I wrote regular, informal reports to Ray so that he could keep the Department of Education briefed on our progress, thus maintaining a paper link with officialdom. Mr Lambert also appreciated getting a copy to supplement the quick chats he and I had when he occasionally dropped into the converted medical inspection room. I had the distinct impression he found it chaotic, and indeed it was, at that early stage of our development!

November

We got into the swing of it, running fund-raising events such as film evenings on child development, using the school projector in a classroom. At Ray's suggestion and with his support, we also wrote to the Māori Affairs Foundation, seeking a grant to purchase more play equipment:

Submission to the Department of Māori Affairs

Ahipara

Northland

12 November, 1961.

J.K. Hunn

Secretary for Māori Affairs

Māori Affairs Department

WELLINGTON

Dear Sir,

I was particularly interested to read your conclusions in the Education section of your report on the Māori Affairs Department, especially numbers 6 and 7, about Kindergartens and Play Centres being needed, and the desirability and scope for research into Māori educational problems.

Here in Ahipara we have instituted what we call a Pre-School. I am enclosing a cutting which will give you an idea of its nature.

I am also enclosing a copy of a submission which we sent a year ago to Mr Bradley who referred it to Mr Tennant. The official Ministerial reply was that there was no possibility of paid staff or of a building being provided. Mr Bradley however strongly supported the idea of a pre-school and promised what help he could. The resultant set-up is under the wing of the school, but not official. The room in which we function is only 10 x 20 feet, with projecting cupboards which further reduce the area and we

have had to curtail our numbers accordingly, despite very great local interest and support.

The scheme also differs from the original one we hoped for, in that it relies completely on voluntary work and donated funds. This places a very considerable strain on the resources of the organisers who all have numerous small children and little spare time.

We could, by moving out of the school and by levying parents, become a play centre. But we firmly believe that the idea of a pre-school, part of, yet separate from, the school, properly supervised, a place where 3-5-year-olds can come to play and gradually 'grow into' the school, has great value. To become a nursery play centre would take away this advantage. It also seems to us a very good idea that in our present setting, parents too become involved in the school instead of regarding it as a place where parents only appear if they have to.

Also, to change over to a nursery play centre would mean levying parents about £2 – £3 per term, a sum which would be utterly beyond most families here in Ahipara, an already economically depressed community.

Becoming a nursery play centre would also remove the project from the auspices of the Education Department or the Māori Affairs Department and thereby make it impossible to use it at some future date for a research project – urgently needed. Ahipara would be ideal for research in many ways. The school, a Māori school, has a roll of nearly 200. It would be possible to have a group of say 20 pre-school children and a group of 20 who did not attend pre-school, as a control group. Further, there is already a favourable attitude towards research here. In fact, the public meeting called for the purpose of electing a committee to work on our original submission, pledged its support for such a scheme. (October 1960). Also, Dr. Joan Metge's doctorate thesis was based largely on material gained from her involvement in this community. And there are at Kaitaia College (9 miles away) several staff members deeply interested in this project and prepared to do any 'follow-up' necessary.

To enable us to extend this beginning, into a pilot project for research into results and effective methods of organisation, we would need an annual grant from an outside source. We would be grateful if you could give us a lead, some indication of what aid might possibly be coming, if any.

With best wishes for your work for the Māori people.

Yours faithfully,

(Mrs) B. Mitcalfe.

Honorary Secretary,

Ahipara Parent-Teacher Association.

.....

December

We had our first Christmas party. Ray came up from Auckland to see how we were managing, and noting the small size of the medical inspection room, said, 'I might just be able to jack up something better.' He also announced that the Department of Māori Affairs had given us a one-off grant of £20. Then he quietly informed me that if I would supervise for three mornings per week instead of just two, the Department of Education would put me on the payroll. Feeling very complimented, I thought about it long and hard, but with five children aged between two and nine, I was reluctant to give up any more personal time. A clinching factor in my decision not to take up the offer was that our team of helpers asserted their desire to complete a training programme to help prepare

them for any additional, rostered supervisory duties. I interpreted this as clear evidence of their personal commitment to continue developing the pre-school.

We felt further encouraged that Ray had confidence in us and what we had already achieved, so we ended the year with optimism, looking forward to what the new year might bring.

1962

January

Returning late at night from our Christmas holidays in Wellington, I could hardly believe my eyes—a 'prefab' had been delivered to a site just behind the school, and we found out next day that it had been provided to house our pre-school!

March–April

Mr Lambert offered to write to the Minister of Education to ask if a grant equal to those which play centres were receiving, could be made available to cover some reimbursement for me as honorary pre-school supervisor, but we later found that this letter was never sent, and anyway I was happy to continue in the role. Meanwhile, at our AGM we elected a new pre-school committee.

May—Life in the prefab

It was exciting to hold our first pre-school session in the prefab, followed by a jumble sale to raise more funds. We also raised the fee to seven shillings and sixpence per term. There were 24 four-year-olds, and because at last we had enough space, each child came for two sessions per week, enabling an extended programme of activities. Knowing of grandmother-helper Florrie Berghan's nationally-acknowledged expertise in mahi raranga, (weaving), I was looking forward to a time when she could be invited to organise and lead this activity.

The prefab still had no plumbing or electricity and we were extremely fortunate to be able to call on The Dads Team, many of whom were skilled and qualified in a variety of trades. As volunteers, over one single weekend, they installed and connected plumbing and electrical wiring for us, these materials being paid for by the Education Department. All these improvements made things so much more comfortable for us and helped to keep our spirits high.

Ahipara School Committee generously paid for light, temporary fencing materials to separate the pre-school play area from the school itself. Unfortunately, school committee funds could not extend to fencing around the back of the prefab, where a steep, slippery bank sloped down to a stream which was subject to flooding. We always rostered a mother-helper on outside duty when any pre-schoolers were outside, but we still felt uneasy about the hazard presented by the lack of a proper fence. However it was better than nothing.

A truckload of sand donated by Te One Roa ā Tohe / Ninety Mile Beach—no resource consents were needed in those days—created an instant sand pit, a huge success with the children, providing an energetic diversion which took their minds off the joys of wrecking the temporary fence.



Two heads are better than one,
September 1961.
Photo: © *The Northland Age*.



Sand + water = endless play possibilities, September 1961. Photo: © *The Northland Age*.

July

The Dads Team also installed a Zip water heater and a sink bench, so we no longer had to use the school staffroom for our tea break. It felt so good to be more independent of the school facilities.

Fund-raising

On the night of Saturday 20 July, another great community effort, a basket social, (a popular rural custom of the time), raised £40 for the pre-school. A local band was engaged to provide dance music, and virtually the whole community attended. Halfway through the evening, all the 'baskets' which people had brought along, ranging from mussels, rock oysters, cooked chooks, newly-dug kūmara, to iced cakes, things baked, sewn, woven, built, knitted, dug, painted or otherwise donated, were auctioned.

With the proceeds of the basket social safely in the bank, we ordered more play equipment from Auckland. The pre-school committee voted me £3 per term, for which I was grateful, but I felt happier donating it back, to swell our slender funds.

Feedback from parents

The machine for reproducing documents in large numbers at the school was a Gestetner, which was always busy, but occasionally the office assistant was able to find time to do small clerical tasks for us. To obtain feedback from parents as to how they felt about the pre-school, we sent out a brief questionnaire to be returned to the principal. People who had had a turn at being helpers were asked to think back over a session at which they were assisting, to remember the things they noticed, good, bad, amusing, interesting, surprising. We explained that we appreciated frank comments and that we valued their opinions. It is unfortunate that although the survey was approved by the school and replies were to be posted back to the school via pre-stamped envelopes, no trace remains of the response rate, or the nature of the comments. Perhaps it was too much

to expect from busy parents, and probably the school's expectation for people to write comments felt unnatural. Besides, parents who had become used to participating in sessions seemed very comfortable to comment freely and voluntarily in person.

Te Reo

I had a basic familiarity with, and a strong commitment to, te reo Māori, and was mindful of the hurt and insult experienced by earlier generations, tūpuna of our pre-schoolers, for example, who had been punished for using te reo at school. I felt very comfortable using and encouraging others to use everyday Māori phrases alongside English, when interacting with the children and the parents.

Activities

Now that we were in our own prefab, we introduced music and movement, simple jigsaw puzzles, dough and water play, painting, story time, etc. Under supervision, the children also enjoyed using our supply of light tools to make small items for themselves out of off-cuts. The sandpit, with its buckets and spades and wooden barrows, was always popular.

July

Surrounded by winter mud, we applied for, and to our great relief, were granted, £100 from the Golden Kiwi Lottery, for badly-needed linoleum to cover our bare floor.

August: Our very own mobile library

With money from our collected fees and a generous £10 donation from the school committee, we bought more books. As a surprise gift, local kaumatua Simon Snowden, a skilled carpenter, constructed an innovative, free-standing, folding bookcase about 1 metre high, on extra-large castors. Picture books stood up on the shelves, their colourful covers facing out. The bookcase was hinged in the middle, to open and shut just like a book, standing on its lower edge. When not in use, our very own mobile library could be fastened shut with its cabin hook and easily wheeled against a wall. My son Mike's sketch of it is on page 15. A great hit with all of us, it was in constant use.



Music makers keep the beat, September 1961.
Photos: © The Northland Age.



Our mobile library was designed and constructed by Simon Snowden. Sketch by Mike Mitcalfe.

Story books had become very popular with the children and were getting much use at pre-school and at home. We had made vinyl bags for all the children for their chosen book when they took it home on the bus, and it was particularly pleasing to see how well they were cared for. None were ever lost or damaged. As well, the mother-helpers gained useful experience in reading stories to the children, issuing books and keeping simple clerical records.

We pasted the following message into each book:

TO YOUR FAMILY

*We hope you will enjoy having this book in your home.
Your pre-school fees and a generous grant from
the Ahipara School Committee have helped to buy it.*

PLEASE LOOK AFTER IT

*Ask your children to make sure they have clean hands
before they handle it, and encourage them to sit down
with it, not run about. Keep it in a special place and
teach them to put it back there when they have finished
with it each time. Then we will have a library that will last.*

(FROM YOUR PRE-SCHOOL COMMITTEE).

Below is our Pre-School Library Consent Form for parents to sign:

If you would like your child attending pre-school to be able to borrow books to take home for a week at a time, then please sign the form at the bottom of the page and return it to pre-school. All library books must be returned before the last week of each term so that they can be checked. This means that there will not be any books allowed out over the school holidays.

AHIPARA PRE-SCHOOL LIBRARY

I would like my child who is attending Ahipara Pre-School to borrow books from

its library. I agree to take good care of the books, to return them when due, and to replace any which are lost or damaged beyond repair, while borrowed by my child.
SIGNEDPARENT OR GUARDIAN

In another communication to parents, we included the following message:

Books, properly used, give pleasure and information to all. They are an essential part of education and no home should be without them. If you provide suitable books for your children, and, better still, if you yourself spend a little time each day reading a story to them, you are not only sharing an enjoyable experience but also stimulating their imagination and helping to enlarge their vocabulary. A child listening to a story is also learning to concentrate, to think for himself what might be going to happen next. A bedtime story, read by you or one of your older children, is a good way to finish off the day; it brings the family all together to share a quiet time after the day's activities.

Children often enjoy hearing the same story over and over again, each time gaining more from it. They can even fill in some of the words for you, and maybe will end up telling the story to you. Be ready to show an interest in the books they bring home, encourage their questions and let them point out and name things they know in the pictures. This will help your child to look forward to and enjoy reading when he goes to school.

*Yours sincerely,
The Pre-School Committee*

Assistance from the National Library Service

Following our request to the National Library Service, we felt very privileged to receive regular consignments of books on loan from Helen Mansell of the School Library Service in Wellington, to supplement our own little library. The children were impressed that 'a nice lady in Wellington' had expressed her delight in sending books to us in the Far North, over hundreds of miles by rail and bus.

The pre-school committee voted me £12 per term, which I accepted, donating most of it back into our funds.

September–October

Mr Barry, Mr Gillett and Miss Malcolm, Education Department officers from Auckland, paid a friendly visit. They seemed very pleased with what we had achieved, though there is no official record of this visit.



Truck + hammer + peg board = boy-heaven,
September 1961.
Photo: © The Northland Age.

Following a request from Mr Simpson, (a Department of Education officer in Wellington), Mr Lambert and I each wrote an article expressing our personal views on the pre-school explaining our aims, he from the perspective of Ahipara School principal, and I from mine, as pre-school honorary supervisor. I did not see Mr Lambert's article but mine was headed *An Experiment In Pre-School Education At Ahipara*. (Appendix 1).

Being officially still outside the education system, we did not receive any direct feedback, but months later we heard that Ray had copied both articles above, for circulation at the inter-departmental committee on Māori education in Wellington, and that they had stimulated a great deal of interest.

In 2010, I found my own article in the same Māori Affairs folder, marked 'CLOSED', at National Archives, where our original 1960 submission had also been stored, as already mentioned.

November

There was still no sign of the linoleum which we had ordered, and it was very difficult to keep the old, bare, wooden boards clean because of the sand and mud surrounding the prefab. Furthermore, the equipment ordered in July through the school, had still not arrived.

Training

As supervisor, I continued to correspond with Alex Grey about the possibility of arranging training for our team. We were encouraged in this by Mere Paitai, local resident and Māori Welfare Officer, who had just begun assisting a group of parents at Pukepoto, the small settlement between Ahipara and Kaitaia, to establish a play centre there. As time went by, we attended their training functions and invited them to ours, feeling supported by being part of an informal, cooperative network.

In addition to corresponding informally with Ray and Mr Gillett in the Auckland office, we responded to numerous requests from rural communities in other rohe, for information about how we started in the first place. For instance, a group of parents at Ratana Pā had heard about Ahipara Pre-School and wanted guidance to set up something similar. While it was gratifying to us that word had spread about our success, our advice to them was that each community would need to experiment with its own home-grown local model, assisted informally by other agencies, just as we had been.



We're all in this together,
September 1961.
Photo: © *The Northland Age*.

December

We held a Christmas party, followed by an end-of-year cleaning session.

1963

January

After a good deal of discussion, the pre-school committee decided sessions should be in recess while the school was closed for the summer holidays, and until we had a fence at the back, and the linoleum and the equipment which we had ordered months before. Meanwhile, the committee continued to meet regularly, and a new committee was elected following the well-attended annual general meeting.

March

We continued to hold fund-raising raffles and general maintenance work-bees. Ten of us attended another enjoyable training course on children's play, run by Alex Grey, at Pukepoto Play Centre. We felt privileged to be invited, and pleased that our choice to remain an independent pre-school was accepted and respected.

April–May

The linoleum, and some of the equipment we had ordered, had at last arrived, but there was still no safety fence at the back.

By this time I knew that I would soon be leaving Ahipara because my husband Barry Mitcalfe had been appointed as inaugural lecturer in Polynesian Studies at Wellington Teachers' College. In preparation for leaving, I drafted a folder of personal guidelines, *Notes for Mother-Helpers at Ahipara Pre-School, May 1963*. This document is at Appendix 2. When I read the notes now, I feel they offered personal, practical guidance for the team of helpers with whom I had so much enjoyed working at pre-school—something to study, something to have in the hand, to take home and discuss. I must add however that I am embarrassed now to observe that, like everyone else in those days, I used non-gender-inclusive language in the notes, but it was over fifty years ago, well before the arrival of the women's movement and consciousness-raising!

After I left, the guidelines were distributed and put to use straight away by Mrs Marewa McConnell, the newly-appointed Ahipara School Principal, replacing Mr Lambert who had just retired for the second time.

The new principal

We had full confidence in Marewa's mana, personality, experience and skills to carry on the pre-school work as part of her official duties, assisted by the infant school teacher, Polly Nathan. For some time, Polly had been giving our older four-year-olds a warm introduction to her infant room, after their pre-school sessions on Tuesdays and Thursdays. This arrangement, which had official approval, had been working well and it continued to do so, making a very satisfying transition for the children and teaching staff alike.

Official status at last

Some years later, in Wellington, I heard the wonderful news that our years of setting up and developing Ahipara Pre-School had eventually resulted in a delegation of pre-school advisors visiting the pre-school to arrange for it to become an official pilot project under the Department of Education. Polly was thereby appointed to take over supervising the pre-school on three mornings per week as part of her paid infant-school duties, assisted as before, by our partly trained helpers. She was a well-known person in the community and very highly regarded by all, so this arrangement was not only ideal to help the

children make a smooth transition to the infant school—always our principal aim—but it also gave Ahipara Pre-School official status at last.

Ngā hua mō ngā tamariki

This paragraph describes some of the benefits that children gained from having been at Ahipara Pre-School. In 1964 Barry Mitcalfe compared Ahipara children who had been to the pre-school, with those who had not, using a number of general ability, arithmetic, vocabulary and reading tests, and teacher assessments of attitudes and achievement. In an article for *Child*, February 1968, he reported that in their oral work, social skills, and attitudes to school work, ex-Ahipara Pre-Schoolers had higher scores than those who had not been to pre-school. They also had higher scores in vocabulary and written fluency. These results were not because of differences in family resources between those who had attended Ahipara Pre-School and those who had not—the scores reflect very positively on Ahipara Pre-School.

Looking back

I have always felt privileged to be involved in the pre-school project. We were trail-blazers. Ahipara Pre-School was a pioneer, home-grown, community-based, educational hybrid, using some of the practical structures of the primary school system, while keeping free play a clear priority. Occupying this niche creatively, our team found useful and enjoyable learning and teaching opportunities in both modes.

I had no connection with Ahipara Pre-School after I left, and did not follow its subsequent development, but Florrie Berghan and I kept in touch for several years by letter. Florrie was a grandmother who generously stayed on as a helper after I had left and after her grand-daughter had started school. Her comments on all kinds of topics, including observations about the occasional visiting educationalists from overseas, were full of wit and wisdom. It is largely owing to stalwart volunteers like Florrie, Liz Ngauma, Kiri Henare, Mary Hanlon, Annie Walker, Dolly Snowden and Kath Busby, for example, that Ahipara, the first Māori pre-school, continued to thrive and develop as a recognised, independent learning centre.

In 1991 it was disestablished, partly as a result of the introduction of self-managing schools; partly because Ahipara School decided it needed the spare classroom occupied at that time by the pre-school, and partly as a result of the *Before Five* reforms, which introduced licensing criteria for pre-schools including their own self-management, rather than continuing to be attached to schools.

In 1993, “Sandhoppers”, a new, Early Childhood Education Centre, was set up beside Ahipara School, servicing a widespread Far North catchment centred on Ahipara. Flourishing under founder Glenys Brasell’s management, with a roll of 90 children of whom approximately two-thirds are Māori, it is also a licensed training centre for adults studying for their qualification in Early Childhood Education, *but that’s another story!*

Acknowledgements

- All volunteers who helped set up and run Ahipara Pre-School, especially mother-helpers and grandmother-helpers and The Dads Team.
- Ahipara School staff, especially Pareaute Nathan.
- Department of Education official Ray Bradley.
- Department of Māori Affairs official Alex Grey.
- Those who helped with this document: Cathy Wylie, Jeremy Rolfe, Chris Horne; Mike, Tanya, Ann, Kaaren and Margaret Mitcalfe.
- The Far North Regional Museum Trust, for offering its website to host the document.
- *The Northern Age* for permission to use eight photographs from 1961.



Group photograph of Ahipara pre-schoolers, 1962

Photographer: John Sanders, Kaitaia.

Note: I have done my best to trace the children's names. and apologise for any inaccuracies.

Back row, left to right:

Barbara Mitcalfe, holding Moana Ngawhika; Walter Williams, Paul Snowden, Donald Clarke, David Hepi, Andrew Walker, Sean Hanlon, Graham Snowden, Sid Williams, Florrie Berghan, holding Patrick Rogers.

Front row, left to right:

Dawn Snowden, Sharon Snowden; (no name supplied); Tammy Walters, Florence Berghan, Margaret Mitcalfe, Kaaren Mitcalfe, Joy Hanlon, Ngareta Clarke.

Appendix 1 'An experiment in pre-school education at Ahipara'

Notes made in 1962, in answer to a joint Department of Education and Department of Māori Affairs request for information

My position is an entirely unofficial one, and so, therefore are my opinions. Moreover, my personal involvement in this Pre-School, for whose existence I suppose I am responsible, and which is the only one of its kind to my knowledge (and may be the last of its kind too!), is bound to have influenced my thinking in a general way about pre-school developments in Māori areas to a point where possibly I see things through the wrong end of the telescope?

However, having presented my apologia, I think it would be best to give you a brief outline of how the Ahipara Pre-School began, how it functions, and finally, how it could develop, as a sort of prototype, perhaps.

1. How it began

Right in Ahipara. It's a home-grown idea. The idea of a Kindergarten for Ahipara was explored by the local P.T.A., (see enclosed Submission to Mr. Bradley, 1960)¹ but it seemed quite impracticable — insufficient numbers, impossibility of raising the required finance.

(Note: This submission was originally composed on the strength of a rumour that there was to be an experimental Pre-School Centre set up somewhere, for research purposes. It proved to be wrong.)

The official reply to this submission was that the Department could provide neither paid staff nor building, but that if we could find someone to take on the organisation, they would give it their "unofficial sanction" and allow us the use ("long-term loan") of a small room at the School if there was one to spare. Mr. Bradley asked me if I would undertake to organise the project which, at that stage of course, was nameless. I agreed to do this, though I have no special qualifications in this field. (My background is: one year primary (S.I.) teaching following my gaining B.A. (Languages mostly); an interest in Māori language etc and five small children.)

And so we began, in a very small way, in a tiny room, (about 10' x 18'), with 20-odd children, four year olds only, and had to restrict it right from the start by forming two groups, one to come on Tuesday mornings and one on Wednesdays. We started sessions in August of 1961, after meetings etc to introduce the idea. See "Age" cutting, Sept.22 1961.²

2. How we function now, 1962.

We have the loan of a prefab. In the grounds, which means that we can have nearly 30 four year olds coming all together on two mornings a week. We have our own playing area fenced off but use the school toilets.

The mothers of children attending take turns to come and assist as 'Mother-helpers' as in Nursery Play Centres. (In many cases they're Grandmothers or Guardians instead, typical of the Māori Community pattern.)

There is a committee of eight mothers and together we arrange fund-raising efforts such as the one described in the newspaper cutting; decide on equipment; arrange Work Bees and cleaning etc.

We are fortunate enough to have received donations from local bodies – the School Committee, the P.T.A., the Māori Affairs Department, and lastly, on application, one from Golden Kiwi proceeds. As well as these, each family with a child attending provides a fee per term of 7/6d. We have Sales etc to raise further funds. The standard of equipment is fairly high though of course not up to kindergarten standard, and all the money raised is spent on buying and maintaining it. (I direct the Pre-School voluntarily and without payment.) We have: paints, crayons, chalks and blackboards, dough, sandpit, puzzles, blocks, dolls, prams, cots, trucks, construction toys etc. Musical instruments on the way.

I have introduced the idea of a library, and we have now a collection of six dozen children's books used at Pre-School and taken home as library books.

1 Not included here.

2 Not included here.

Sessions are on two mornings only (ideally there would be more, but I cannot find time) from 9 o'clock till 12 o'clock. Largely, and by design, they consist of free play with dolls, dough, drawing, painting, cutting out, pasting, building with blocks etc., but for all that there is a certain amount of routine and an approximation of a programme? timetable? call it what you will, e.g., the children all sit down to their milk and playlunch together, having washed their hands. Each morning we have simple games and physical exercises, songs and nursery rhymes and usually a story, as well as something along the lines of a "health" or "nature study" etc. talk. I also try to take advantage of situations that arise during sessions, for (particularly) speech 'work' etc. but in general, i.e., for two-thirds of the time, the children are playing with what they like, under supervision.

The work of Pre-School goes on at two levels: with the parents as well as with the children. The mothers are encouraged to offer suggestions by replying to periodical written questionnaires as well as at meeting. They are an absolutely essential part of the project, and one of the most encouraging things about Pre-School is the way in which they are developing – in attitudes, management of children etc. In this way it reacts, back into the home.

In conjunction with Pre-School we have a night class in children's clothing, and educational evenings on a variety of topics. It is also a vehicle for health education. To mention one aspect: through Pre-School we arrange dental treatment for children whose parents would otherwise not bother to do so. We also keep height and weight records etc. I have in preparation a form for parents of children attending Pre-School to complete, giving background information on a variety of things which help to fill in our knowledge of the child so that he is not the decidedly unknown quantity he so often is in areas like this when he first comes to school. It includes details such as number and place in family and occupation of parents, etc. This I feel is one of the major advantages of Pre-School, obtaining information which will help the child in his school career, before it is too late – unsuspected deafness, for instance, crops up often.

The records I have kept so far are probably highly subjective, so far as observation of the children's behaviour is concerned. I am not skilled in the techniques which are needed for accurate objective data to be obtained. But having recently read the report of the Council for Educational Research, "Research needed in the Education of Māori Children", I am more firmly convinced than ever that we are here in Ahipara working, however slowly and gropingly, along the right lines.

Broadly, I am aiming at all the following:

With the children:

- * Bringing home and school closer together
- * Broadening and enriching the experience of the children
- * Stimulating them to progressive and creative achievement
- * Assisting them in their language and social development
- * Making their adjustment to school easier
- * Gathering information about the children and their background
- * Maintaining a (basically) learning situation, the climate of which is both enjoyable and remedial, under gentle control.

With the parents:

- * Education in matters affecting the family, especially health, child-care and development
- * Encouraging parents' interest in school
- * Promoting a greater sense of responsibility towards their children
- * Strengthening their belief in themselves and their ability, and their need to exert a positive influence for good on their children.

3. And now for the way I'd like to see Pre-School develop.

Ideally, a Pre-School should be run by the Education Department as an official part of the education system, salaries to be the Department's responsibility and to be worked out according to qualifications and hours worked. Obviously, training should also be a Departmental responsibility but for two reasons

I suggest that wherever possible, the person in charge be drawn from the communities themselves, because

- (a) there is already a grave shortage of teachers, and
- (b) the sort of people who in my opinion would be good at the job are women who having been teachers, are now bringing up their own children and are likely to have deeper roots in their community and a better idea of problems of family management etc than those who are fresh from training. (The Commission's Report also stresses the use that these people are proving to be in the educational system today).

Refresher courses should be arranged and also a preliminary training period for suitable applicants, who should in every case be prepared to work in the closest liaison and sympathy with the parents.

It is absolutely essential that in each case there be a committee of parents (as well as Mother-Helpers) which be given a real function to perform, some measure of authority and responsibility for the running of the Pre-School. The parents should be kept fully informed of the whole working of the Pre-School, assist in its development, planning of programme, making equipment and so on. This, I am convinced, is the only way to achieve the aim of making Pre-School a true "growing point" in Māori Education. By this I mean that it would be fatal to make Pre-School simply a downward extension of the School; it must be a place where parents feel they belong, because they are needed, because they are an essential part of its organisation. In this way they would absorb new ideas, broaden their knowledge and gradually become more skilled in child management. This would be a direct influence on the parents, one which could help, before it is too late, a generation which is otherwise largely beyond the reach of education. (This brings me to the point of Adult Education. Obviously courses in child-rearing etc. should be arranged in conjunction with Pre-Schools.)

I would like to say here that the above recommendations about parent-participation must not be construed as meaning that parents should actually be in charge of Pre-Schools, nor that I feel that parents in general do not get the chance of a 'foothold' in the Schools. What I am trying to stress is that Pre-School must not be just "imposed from above" i.e. from the School, or the Department, but that in each case the parents be asked to help organise (create?) it, guarantee their continued support, and elect their own committee (about seven members, with the usual officers) and that they have certain responsibilities in the Pre-School. Otherwise Pre-School would become a place where the parents show a superficial interest and where their participation is superficially tolerated, even encouraged, but where in reality they do not have any 'job of work' to do; they have no vital function. It is important too, that their responsibility and participation increases, as they become more 'trained'. They can take over parts of the programme, look after the library, act as relievers etc. Too many projects particularly in Māori areas, have withered away because of lack of vital involvement, too much reliance being placed on one or two leaders.

Pre-School should be separate from the main School, with its own play area, containing plenty of outdoor play equipment – sandpit, swings and slides, workbench and tools, timber scraps and boxes for 'building' etc., trees and children's garden plot.

The sort of Pre-School I envisage would always have some parents, young toddlers and babies of Mother-Helpers etc present, and this is an additional reason for separation from the School, so as to avoid distractions for the older (School) children. Personally I think Pre-School functions best as a sort of 'little world' beside the big School anyway. It is too much of a 'Social Welfare' setup to be included in the main School.

Pre-School should function on at least three half-days per week for four year olds, and ideally, should also cater separately for three year olds at least once a week. I say this because I believe four years is already too late to start providing the sort of educational environment and experiences that Pre-School can provide. I know too from my own experience here, just how much more value Pre-School would have if the children could start coming at an earlier age.

Hours should be either 1 o'clock to 3 o'clock (children can come and return with older children at school), or 9 o'clock to 11.30. I consider (as do Kindergarten and Nursery Play Centre Authorities) that three full hours is

too much. The children should be away from home no more than three hours; that includes travelling time. The person in charge and Mother-Helpers need quite a lot of time afterwards to clean up after painting, pasting, dough, sand and water play (especially after the three year olds!). Also, there are records and files and rolls etc. to be kept after each session, and these are better done immediately after a session, I find.

I think parents should pay a small fee per term (ours is 7/6d) as a guarantee of faith and to assist in maintenance, paying for outings, Xmas party etc. (We have had no trouble at all with payments so far.)

Parents should sign a consent form for their child to attend, agree to: take their turn on the Mother-Helper roster; help with Work Bees; come to meetings; replace lost or damaged library books, and so on. (No trouble here so far.)

Pre-School should have, in the way of equipment, everything that a Kindergarten has, and in addition everything necessary for practical research and recording of data (tape recorder etc).

It should maintain a close liaison with the Infant Department but not merely be an extension of it. Adequate files should be kept at Pre-School giving information (supplied by both the parent and the Pre-School Director) on the child, so that the Infant Mistress will have a fairly complete picture of his health, family situation, temperament, ability etc.

It should include a Library of books to be used at Pre-School and (very important) to be taken home.

It should be a setting where research is carried out, particularly in language, health etc (see report of NZCER working party).

It should have a Māori cultural bias, reflected in songs, crafts and so on, so far as content is concerned, and in the person in charge, by her ability to communicate her interest and empathy in the community, and if possible, by her knowledge of Māori language and Māoritanga.

So far as content is concerned, I think we should be guided by current and future research as well as by what is already known about the needs of Māori communities. (Much of course is only surmise as yet.) But I think if one assumed that in general the children for whom Pre-Schools would (I hope) be designed, are deprived, educationally, and culturally, then it follows that the primary role of Pre-School should be to provide a stimulating educational environment, More specifically, the environment, that is, the equipment itself and the opportunities for creative play it offers, the company of other children, the encouragement and guidance of the Director and Helpers should be the constant background and fundamental basis, out of which come the stimuli for further achievement by each child personally, and by the whole group together. I do not see Pre-School organised as a classroom is organised. I feel that for approximately half the time of each session the children should be allowed to play freely inside and outside provided that (a) they are properly supervised and that (b) they are making some observable progress in their play, e.g. solitary to social.

While this is going on, the Director can do more intensive work with individual children or small groups (especially the older children) at e.g. looking at books, asking the child questions about the pictures, getting an idea of a child's grasp of vocabulary, teaching new words and how to pronounce them properly.

The whole group: I think that the children should be taught always to wash their hands before sitting down together for playlunch. Nearly every session there should be a simple health topic taken, together with any song, rhyme, hand-play, puppets etc, which can reinforce the message – teeth cleaning, hand-washing, and all the usual things.

Simple art and craft work such as is done at Kindergarten should be undertaken to develop skills and to give the children a sense of practical achievement. Flax work of course should come in here.

Stories for their own sake are of the greatest importance especially for these children, most of whom have never been read to. Stories also provide a good means of stimulating imagination (by guessing answers, anticipating what comes next etc), enlarging vocabulary, encouraging concentration, absorbing good speech models.

Poems, songs, music, dancing have also obvious value, and, so I believe, have simple physical exercises and games. As well as their value in physical development and the enjoyment they provide, they are useful in inducing orderliness and carrying out oral instructions.

Outings to places of educational interest should be included in the programme. (Last year we visited the Milk Treatment Station.)

Children can be assisted to recognise their own names, e.g. on clothes pegs, on their own shelf, on their paintings, and some will learn to print theirs, beginning by tracing it on sand, then in paint, crayon etc. So few of the children seem to recognise any of the colours that I think they should be taught the main colours in Pre-School. A start should also be made in recognising "how many" e.g. blocks etc.

I am sure that it is of the greatest importance to have plenty of suitable books-to-take home, at Pre-School. If the children can come to enjoy and value books there, they should be much less of a reading problem when they go into Infants.

A point I neglected to make in 'Hours' was that a person appointed in charge of a Pre-School could do only Pre-School (which would probably suit most applicants especially those with young families), or if qualified, do as well, school clerical work or School Library work for instance (both paid positions) and thus free full-time teachers from the burden of such duties which at present decrease the amount of time they can spend in actual teaching. Properly done, it would be practically a full-time job anyway.

*(sgd) Mrs B.J. Mitcalfe
Hon Director, Ahipara Pre-School.*

Appendix 2 'Notes for mother-helpers at Ahipara Pre-School, May 1963'

By B. Mitcalfe.

These notes are written to guide you in your attitudes, methods and duties while assisting at Pre-School. Read them over, the night before your turn as Mother-Helper, and again afterwards. They should help you to enjoy your work there, and also give you confidence.

Preparation: Plan the night before, to be on time, and get clothing etc. ready then, so that next morning, things will run as smoothly as possible. You see, if you yourself are late and rushed, your child will be anxious and upset and this is to be avoided. The mornings when you are on duty at Pre-School should be ones of special enjoyment for your child, when you and he go out together to share in a morning play session with friends.

Clothing: Wear comfortable clothes and shoes, not your best outfit. Dough and paints and clay and paste can make an awful mess! Dress your child in comfortable clothing too, not long pants and several jerseys. Our climate is so mild that active Pre-Schoolers if they're fit, don't need to be bundled up too much. Besides, you as Mother-Helpers know how awkward it is to have to undo layers and layers of clothing when a child wants to go to the toilet for instance. Too much clothing also restricts a child's play. But a light raincoat for him to wear to and from Pre-School is a good thing. He will not need an apron and neither will you; Pre-School supplies these.

Play-lunch: A word about play-lunch. Many of last year's Pre-Schoolers brought such huge play-lunches that they just couldn't finish them. If a child has a good breakfast and a good lunch to follow Pre-School, then all he needs at playtime is a sandwich, followed if possible by a piece of fruit. Milk is supplied free. By the way, it's a good idea to put your child's name on his play-lunch bag or box; it saves them getting mixed up.

Children under 3 Years: If possible, arrange for a friend to mind your children under three.

Bring your 3-year-old by all means, to get him used to coming. (Later we may be able to have a session a week for 3-year-olds anyway). But you'll feel freer to enjoy the session and to carry out your duties if you haven't got a baby or young toddler with you. And we haven't a great deal of room. However, we'd rather you came with baby and all, than not come at all! So you and your friends try and arrange to mind each other's children. Whatever you do, don't keep a school child at home to mind the younger ones. In the first place, they are not responsible enough, and in the second place, it is not an acceptable excuse for a school child's absence.

Notify if you can't come: Please remember that you must notify Mrs Busby, Phone number 33265-D, (who looks after the duty list), before the day you're on duty, and at the same time, arrange a substitute Mother-Helper yourself, if at all possible. Otherwise, someone has to take your place at the last minute, which can be very awkward. Or the supervisor has to carry on alone, which can be even more awkward!

At Pre-School

Right – now let's assume that you've arrived at Pre-School in good time – you can pick up mail and bread afterwards – we finish at 11 45 a.m.).

Pre-School sessions begin at 9 o'clock. You are asked to be there a little before 9, to settle your own child first. If he is just starting at Pre-School and is a bit shy, talk with him about all the enjoyable things he will be able to do there. Emphasise the fact that you are there to stay. Show him around. Don't push him away or tell him to "Go and play," or "Do what so-and so is doing." That will only make him cling all the more. It is annoying sometimes but just try to accept the fact that he may need to stay by you for reassurance.

If you yourself join in the activities with him by your side, presently he'll become absorbed in playing too.

Try and be as polite and patient to your own child as you are to all the others – this is not so easy as it sounds! He will be proud and happy to have you there and may "hang around" you for just that reason, so your response should be sympathetic, not abrupt.

Attitude to children: The best advice I think I can give you is: come prepared to enjoy your work at Pre-School, not to think of it as just a chore; come expecting to like the children, to let them see that you like them, respect them and value their efforts. This is the greatest reward that you can give them, and yourself.

Pre-School Routine: Although the larger part of a Pre-School session is taken up with free play activity, there is for all that, a certain routine or programme, which the children gradually learn to conform to, and this is very desirable.

The children play inside and outside from 9 o'clock till 10.15 a.m., when they are called inside to wash their hands before sitting down to eat their play-lunch and drink their milk. After that they may go outside till 10.45, when they are called in again and all sit in a group to have songs, finger games, story, music, etc. At this time, they are all expected to stay in one group. At approximately 11.30 their paintings etc. are given out, and those who wish, may go to the library to choose a book to take home. When all have their belongings, they stand to say "Good morning" to the Mother-Helpers. After that, those who are to spend the afternoon in the Infant Room (only by special arrangement with the Infant Mistress and Headmistress) are taken there and the others are taken in an orderly group and seen safely across the road.

Duties of Mother-Helpers: At all times remember that you are as much a part of Pre-School as your child is. We need your cooperation all the way. Without you, there could be no Pre-School. As a Mother-Helper, you have a responsible job to do.

Pre-School is different from a classroom where all are sitting down at work together and must ask permission to move about or to leave the room. At Pre-School the children may play wherever they wish, so long as they are inside the Pre-School fence and it is not morning tea time or group time, where all are expected to be inside together. This freedom of activity means that there must be someone supervising outside as well as inside, all the time. Not just to see that no one gets slaughtered! but to be there as a friend and guide, someone to talk to, someone to comfort a child who gets hurt, someone to keep a watchful eye on the play, so that she can anticipate -say - a squabble between Eric and Jocelyn before it actually happens, divert Betty from climbing over the fence and give her some boxes and boards to climb over instead, and so on. Yet we must also try not to "stand over" the children like a "boss", but get down to their level often and be really one of them. Be ready to assist with whatever your supervisor asks you to do, and remember that you have a real job to do; there is no time to sit and have a gossip. Do not discuss or criticise the children. Talk with them, not about them, at the session. And give praise where praise is due.

Control: There is no need for smacking at Pre-School. So far as I am aware, there has never been a child smacked there. I believe that smacking is necessary sometimes, certainly, but not at Pre-School. If the equipment is plentiful and stimulating and if the supervisor and helpers are doing their job properly, control problems will not arise at Pre-School which can be solved by smacking. What then should we do? First we try to anticipate trouble by being constantly watchful and by gently but firmly providing an alternative for the child to vent his feelings on. For instance, if Alan and Dick are fighting over a truck, don't just take the truck away. Give Alan a turn at the truck and take Dick over to the wheelbarrow, saying, "Perhaps we could fill the barrow with sand and make a road for the truck to go on" By the time that has been done, Alan and Dick may be friends again, and what's more, you're their friend too. You'll feel you have achieved something, even at the expense of getting your shoes full of sand...

Threats + Bribes = Poor Training: Never threaten a child if you don't intend to carry out the threat. It's fatal! It's like telling a lie, and the child knows it. He knows perfectly well that you're not really going to "screw his neck" or "half-kill" him, so he takes no notice of you.

Bribery is another poor method of training. It's very difficult not to do it. Probably we all do it sometimes, but we must try not to make a habit of it. For instance try to avoid this sort of situation: "If you go to Pre-School by yourself this morning, you can buy a bag of lollies on the way." Exit Hunia, bright-eyed. He comes to school chewing away, (making all the other children jealous and incidentally ruining his teeth), happy as can be. But what happens next time? Hunia won't go by himself unless he has a bag of lollies, and so it goes on. Far better to train him by taking him along yourself those few extra times to help him get over his shyness, explaining that now he's getting older and more grown-up, he doesn't need you to take him any more.

Practical Duties:

Now for the more practical aspects of your morning at Pre-School.

Help the children as they come along, with removing their coats etc.; help them put on their aprons. See that all the required equipment is set out ready; be on the watch for shy children who need a little extra comforting on arrival; help peg up the paintings and pastings to get dry; be friendly and interested in what the children are doing; encourage lonely children to join in with the others, but do not force them at all; take children to the toilet if asked, (we use the Infants' toilets, through the back door, facing Pre-School); see they wash their hands afterwards. At about 10 o'clock, fill and switch on the Zip heater.

At morning tea time, assist with bringing the children inside, washing hands, arranging chairs and cleaning two tables for food, and seeing that children all get their play lunches. Then help give out the milk and straws but only to each child when he has finished eating otherwise he has too much to manage and may spill the milk. Do not insist on children finishing their milk. The children should put their own scraps in the rubbish bin and replace bottles in the crate. Each child must stay sitting down until he has finished, then he may go outside. Remember that one Mother-Helper must be on duty outside if any children are out there. The other Mother-Helper can go ahead and make the morning tea (which is provided by Pre-School). When she has had hers, she changes places with the-one outside. Remember though, that you are still "on duty" even at morning tea time. Also, for several reasons which I do not intend to discuss here, you are asked not to smoke at Pre-School. After interval, assist the children to bring in equipment and store it in its correct places; see that all children are inside; help arrange chairs if needed for group songs etc. and join in the group yourself. After you have had several turns as a Mother-Helper, you will be asked to choose a book to take home and prepare to read a story from, on your next duty day. Don't worry; you'll enjoy it! Practise on your own family, and adapt or simplify the story as you wish, or make up one of your own. You might like to take a song or game sometime, string-games are suitable for this period too.

After the group activity, there is a time set aside for changing library books. Make sure that the children have brought back their last book, before allowing them to take another out. Cross their name off the card in the library box, and put the card back in the book it belongs to. When they have chosen their book, remove the card from the book, write the child's name and date on it, and put it in the library box. Put the book in a library bag and give it to the borrower.

Help the children to take off their aprons; give out paintings etc.; see that they all have their belongings and are in an orderly group.

After "Good Mornings", help see the children over to the Infant Room or safely across the road. Then we finish clearing up.

Remember that there is always a chance after sessions are finished, to discuss any questions with your supervisor. During sessions, there is too much to do to stand and talk!

* * * *

Pre-School Privilege

That we have a Pre-School at all is a privilege which we must not abuse. Thus, while Pre-School is functioning, you should not try to send your 4-year-old child to school as well as Pre-School. The Infant Mistress has already a roomful! Besides, special permission must be obtained by the parent from her and from the Headmistress, even for those children who live a long distance away, to wait in the Infant Room after school, for the bus to return home.

* * * *

Lastly, you are asked to support Pre-School in every possible way; by being on time; by paying your term fee promptly; by coming to Work Bees and Meetings, and especially by coming to courses arranged to assist you in your Pre-School work. There is to be one shortly, in June (you will be notified of the date later) at Ahipara.

Don't forget, bring contributions to the Opening Day Stall on May 28th.
