

4. PRIMARY EDUCATION

Some progress can be reported in all subjects of the primary-school curriculum, whilst the extra-curricular activities, special features of Native-school work, continue to flourish in the hands of enthusiastic teachers, lending interest and purpose to the daily routine. The success of a Native school cannot be judged by academic results alone, but more by its influence for good among children and adults alike.

In arithmetic the issue of the new departmental text-books has given a new stimulus to the teaching by making it more live and real to the child. While mechanical accuracy is essential, it is now more closely related to practical work in shopping exercises—buying and selling, weighing and measuring, making up accounts, giving change, &c.—in which the children take a very keen interest. The school shop is an established institution in most Native schools, but there is even more scope for practical arithmetic in the school and its grounds, in the garden, and in the woodwork and cookery rooms.

During the year most of the infant-teachers were visited at their schools by the Organizers in Infant-teaching, or had opportunities to attend local refresher groups held by these officers. The keenness of our infant-teachers to make themselves conversant with the most recent methods is commendable, and beneficial results are very evident, particularly in regard to reading and number. In both these subjects teachers are appreciating the importance of educational readiness and well-graded teaching.

Written expression continues to be closely related to the needs and experiences of the children. It is pleasing to note that a few teachers, in developing suitable vocabularies for the children, are giving some attention to the study of basic English. While it is not considered necessary to confine vocabularies strictly to the frequency order set out in this scheme, yet it is highly important that, by the time the Maori pupil leaves the primary school, he shall have a thorough mastery of those English words which are essential if he is to be able to express himself clearly and concisely in his adopted language.

Even more necessary is it that the child shall be able to speak the language fluently, correctly, and confidently. This explains the high importance attached to oral expression. The varied activities in the Native schools provide abundant subject matter for speech work and discussion. In addition, recitation, choral speaking, and dramatization provide further opportunities for raising the standard of speech. The subject-matter for these subjects needs to be carefully chosen if the children are to be naturally attracted to them. No longer are they regarded as tests of memorization, but aim rather that the children shall first enjoy them, then love them, and finally develop a taste for good English. Dramatization cannot yet be said to be as highly assessed as it should be. There is a dearth of suitable printed literature for this subject, for most of the books are printed in England for English children, but it is pleasing to see that short, simple, attractive plays are now being published in the *School Journal*. These are greatly enjoyed by the Maori children, especially when they are taught to enter thoroughly into the spirit of the play.

Art work generally can be said to have developed well, but handwork is capable of much greater development in quite a number of schools. Shortage of materials has been a substantial contributing factor, for the Department has not been able to supply the quantity and variety of materials as in pre-war years, yet in quite a number of schools the teachers, by using the resources of the district and their own ingenuity, have successfully triumphed over these difficulties. In a few schools, where well-planned and graded courses in woodwork are provided, the teaching of this branch of handwork has reached a high standard. But there are too many schools where work of inferior quality and poor finish is allowed. In this subject pride of craftsmanship should be one of the major aims, for without this the result must be failure. Generally speaking, in such schools it is usual to find that little attention is given to the care of tools.

More progress, however, can be reported in the teaching of Maori arts and crafts, as a result of the keen interest of teachers, who have themselves acquired considerable skill and knowledge. The appointment each year of more trained Maori teachers is helping to promote this work. It is pleasing to note a growing demand for specialist instructors.