

# The First Yearsof Kindergarten in Canada

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The first elementary schools in Canada were founded in Quebec in the 1630's by the Jesuit and Ursuline Orders, with the goal of educating native children in French culture and Catholicism.<sup>1</sup> It was not until two hundred years later that early childhood education, as we think of it today, was introduced in programs for Canadian elementary students, through the influence of the British Home and Colonial Infant School Society.<sup>2</sup> This organization, which followed the principles of Pestalozzi, became known to the Reverend Egerton Ryerson, the first superintendent of schools in the Province of Ontario, and he brought to Canada a variety of materials that were being used in the Society's schools in England. By the mid nineteenth century, there was a growing interest in Ontario and Quebec in establishing programs which would be appropriate for young children.

Almost all of the first kindergartens in Canada were begun in southern Ontario, the most populous part of the country, in the late nineteenth century. These kindergartens were firmly based on Froebelian principles<sup>3</sup>, as were many of the contemporaneous kindergartens in the United States. In fact, the Froebelian movement in North America at that time was characterized by a frequent exchange of ideas and visits back and forth between Canadian and American kindergarten educators.<sup>4</sup>

The City of Toronto claims the distinction of opening the first public school kindergarten in Canada in 1883. However, in Berlin (now Kitchener), Ontario, a kindergarten was opened in 1882, and a private kindergarten was opened as early as 1877 by Ada Marean in St. John, New Brunswick. In the following year, 1878, Miss Marean moved to Toronto where she opened another private kindergarten which drew the attention of the education community.<sup>5</sup>

Adaline (Ada) August Marean was an American, born in 1848 in Maine, a small town near Binghamton in New York State. (Her birthplace has apparently been confused with the State of Maine, one of the New England States which lie to the east of New York, as she has sometimes been called a New Englander.) She was trained at

the Normal School in Albany, New York, and subsequently worked as a teacher until 1877, when she went to New York City to work with Mrs. Maria Kraus-Boelte.<sup>5</sup>

Maria Boelte had come from Germany where she had been a pupil of Froebel's widow. She had been a successful kindergarten educator both in Germany and England, and came to New York in 1872 at the invitation of Henrietta B. Haines. Miss Haines operated a large private school and wanted to start a kindergarten program. Miss Boelte's work at the school received immediate attention and in the same year she married Professor John Kraus who was also an advocate of kindergarten education. Also in that year, the National Education Association (NEA) was organized in the United States and Professor Kraus was a member of a committee formed at the outset to study Froebel's principles and methods. At the NEA Meeting in 1873, this committee presented a report on the merits of Froebel's work, augmented by a paper delivered by Mrs. Kraus-Boelte.<sup>6</sup>

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By 1877, when Ada Marean became her student, Mrs. Kraus-Boelte was well known to North American kindergarten educators and in that year, with her husband, she published the first installment of their "Kindergarten Guide." Later that year, Miss Marean moved to Canada and opened a private kindergarten in St. John, New Brunswick. Thus we see a direct link from Froebel, through his students, to the first Canadian kindergarten.<sup>5</sup>

In 1876, James L. Hughes, a Toronto educator, visited the kindergarten exhibits at the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition, which had been organized by Mrs. Kraus-Boelte for the NEA annual convention. The next year, when Miss Marean opened her first kindergarten, Mr. Hughes became, at the age of twenty-eight, the youngest superintendent in the Toronto public school system, the largest school district in Canada. Because of his interest in Froebel's work, he wrote to Mrs. Kraus-Boelte and asked her to recommend a teacher who might establish a kindergarten program in Toronto. She recommended her former pupil, Ada Marean, who was already in Canada.<sup>5</sup>

In 1880, Mr. Hughes visited Susan Blow's public school kindergarten in St. Louis, Missouri, which had been in operation since 1873 and was the first public school kindergarten in North America.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, in 1883, Miss Blow and a colleague were invited by him to visit Toronto to give talks and demonstrations, and following this, Ada Marean was sent to St. Louis to study the program there.<sup>8</sup>

It is interesting to note that the Toronto educational authorities felt that their own teachers would accept Froebelian kindergartens in the public schools more easily than their counterparts had done in St. Louis. The annual Inspector's Report of 1883 (pages 29 and 30) states: "There is a painful tendency on the part of many of the primary teachers in St. Louis, to show jealousy of, rather than sympathy with, the kindergartners. This would not be the case in Toronto, as the primary teachers have long shown a commendable desire to introduce into their classes the true spirit of the Kindergarten..."<sup>8</sup>

Several classrooms in the Louisa Street School in the Toronto public school system were used temporarily in 1883 as the site of the first Canadian public school kindergarten program. Ada Marean was the head teacher, with seven unpaid trainee teaching assistants and seventy children enrolled. In the following year, the Victoria Street School and Niagara Street School were the sites chosen for the first established kindergarten classes. Four of the trainees from Louisa Street became teachers in these classes. One or more kindergartens were started each year in other Toronto schools, so that by 1890 there were twenty-four kindergartens, with 1,554 registered pupils.<sup>7</sup>

In 1885, kindergarten instructors (called "directresses") were appointed to the Toronto Normal School, at that time the largest institution in Canada for preparing elementary school teachers, in order to train new kindergarten teachers. In the same year, kindergarten instructors were added to the staff of the Normal School in Ottawa, Ontario. It is evident that the kindergarten movement was being taken very seriously by educators in this part of the country. In 1886, the Ontario Provincial Ministry of Education communicated with cities and towns across the province, urging them to establish

kindergarten programs in their public school systems.<sup>5</sup> And in 1887, the Ministry instituted an examination for the granting of diplomas to kindergarten directresses and assistants, which were the first formal early childhood education credentials awarded in Canada.<sup>7</sup>

It has been pointed out, however, that while Froebelian kindergartens in Ontario were an immediate success among educators and those who had direct contact with them, the movement was not without difficulties. Donald Jones refers to the problems of convincing taxpayers that public money should be designated to carry out training programs and establish, equip, and maintain kindergarten programs in the public schools. The general public did not see kindergarten programs as serious education for teaching children to work.<sup>5</sup>

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Jones also mentions the problem that the Church of England (Anglican Church of Canada) had in accepting Froebel's philosophy. In particular, Church officials objected to his book, "The Education of Man," which was adopted for use in the kindergarten training program of Ontario normal schools. Froebel's vision of children's innocence and potential for excellence was seen as contradictory to the Church's theory of original sin which was prevalent at the time.<sup>5</sup>

The policies of the Ontario Provincial Government resulted in a new thrust in teacher education, however, in which Ada Marean Hughes (she married James Hughes in 1888)<sup>9</sup> was to play a leading role. In 1890, she established the Toronto Kindergarten Association, an organization for practising kindergarten teachers in the Toronto area,<sup>5</sup> thus promoting a professional identity for kindergarten teachers in Ontario.

In 1891, the annual convention of the National Education Association (NEA) was held in Toronto. Although this was primarily an American organization, there was no Canadian counterpart at the time and Canadian educators were welcome as members of NEA, so that in effect the Association served the whole continent. At this meeting, Dr. A.S. Draper, state superintendent of education for the State of New York, proposed a resolution, which was carried unanimously, that "the kindergarten should be recommended as part of all school systems." Mrs. Ada Hughes was then appointed

president of the NEA kindergarten department, her duties to begin with the upcoming 1892 meeting in Saratoga Springs, New York.<sup>6</sup>

While Mrs. Hughes had by now achieved a position of great influence, it is clear that she viewed her role strictly as an advocate of Froebel's educational principles. Records of teaching practices in Toronto kindergartens of the time show that Froebelian methods were adhered to in a highly orthodox manner. An example of this is the collection of handwritten lesson notebooks from around 1891, now in the Toronto Board of Education Archives, which belonged to Susie Beedle.<sup>10</sup> These books lay out in sixteen-week sequences the use of gifts and occupations in the classroom, and descriptions of daily events. The schedule for a typical morning includes activities in the following order:

- Opening exercises (prayer, hymn "God Is Love")
- Songs ("Good Morning, Kind Teacher," "Thumb & Fingers")
- General ball exercise
- Modelling
- Third gift with new children
- Sticks and tablets
- Folding
- Sewing (vertical in red, connect with sticks)
- The circle
- Games
- Closing Song

A photograph taken around 1895, belonging to the Metropolitan Toronto Library Board, shows a Toronto Model School of the day.<sup>11</sup> One's first impression on looking at the photograph, is of a very large room filled with teachers, students, and equipment. There are eighteen small tables in groupings of three, with two children sitting at each table. The tasks occupying the children include arranging cubes, folding paper, and weaving paper strips. White lines on the tables indicate where children should place the cubes according to Froebelian practice. White lines are also painted on the floor in a large circle with radiating spokes, ready for circle activities.

The photographed classroom shows an upright piano in the corner being played by a middle-aged woman. Twelve younger women (students?) are sitting on a row of chairs along one wall, posing for the photographer. At each table cluster (with six children), there is an adult woman (assistant teacher?). All this takes place beneath a large wall-mounted photograph of Queen Victoria which, to the viewer, appears to dominate the room.

A considerable sum of money was spent on equipping this type of classroom. In the Annual Report of the Public School Board of the City of Toronto for the year ending December 31, 1892, the total cost of supplies and equipment for the year for a single kindergarten program was listed as \$3,188.85, of which \$941.40

was for furniture and permanent equipment. According to the report, there were thirty-five of these programs in Toronto that year, with 3,672 registered kindergarten teachers. The total amount paid for salaries to these teachers in 1892 was \$20,490.16.<sup>12</sup>

In that same year, kindergartens were established in the Province of Quebec,<sup>13</sup> as additional programs were opened in Ontario. 1892 was also the year of the Saratoga Springs meeting of the National Education Association, where seven members were elected to investigate the feasibility of establishing a separate organization for kindergarten educators. Ada Marean Hughes was one of these seven who prepared plans for this new organization and who recommended that a National Kindergarten Union be formed. After further discussion, it was decided that a more appropriate title would be the International Kindergarten Union.<sup>14</sup> (In 1930 this organization became the Association for Childhood Education, known since 1946 as the Association for Childhood Education International.)

This new Kindergarten group met at the NEA meeting in Chicago in 1893 and at the 1895 NEA meeting in Denver. The first separate meeting of the International Kindergarten Union (IKU) was held in New York City in 1896, and from then on this organization was independent from NEA.<sup>15</sup>

James Hughes spoke at the New York meeting in 1896, which was held at Teacher's College, Columbia University. He gave a half-hour talk entitled "The Kindergarten and the School." At the time, Ada Hughes held the post of first vice president of the IKU.<sup>16</sup> In 1897, the Union held its first large conference in St. Louis, where Mr. Hughes gave the evening keynote address, "Froebel and His Work." The next afternoon, Ada Hughes gave one of four addresses under a general title of "Study of Child Nature;" other speakers included Anna Bryan of Chicago and Patty Smith Hill, then of Louisville, Kentucky.<sup>17</sup>

In 1904, Ada Hughes was appointed to the IKU Committee of Nineteen, which was charged with the work of formulating contemporary kindergarten philosophy for the association.<sup>18</sup> Because of the influence of Mr. and Mrs. Hughes, the 1905 IKU annual meeting was held in Toronto.<sup>4</sup> In 1906, Ada Hughes was elected president of the IKU, and in her second year, gave the keynote address at the 1907 conference.<sup>19</sup> At the 1913 IKU meeting in Washington, D.C., the Committee of Nineteen finally presented its report, which was divided into three sections to reflect the differing views of the members. The conservative or most orthodox section was written by Susan Blow, assisted by Maria Kraus-Boelte, Ada Marean Hughes, and others.<sup>18</sup>

Thus we see that these early years of the kindergarten movement, in Canada but also to some extent in the United States, owed much to the work of James and Ada Hughes. In addition, in 1900,

James Hughes' book, "Froebel's Educational Laws for All Teachers,"<sup>20</sup> had been published and apparently had been very well received. As described by Nina Vandewalker in 1908 (pages 170 and 171), the book "most admirably met the needs of school men," and "emphasized the universal character of Froebel's principles and the effect of their application to grade work, in the most admirable manner."<sup>6</sup>

Ada Hughes continued to be an active member of the International Kindergarten Union until her death on Christmas Eve, 1929. (Her husband lived until 1935.) In a memorial statement written by Lucy Wheelock and published by the Association for Childhood Education in 1930, Mrs. Hughes was remembered as "a leader in the kindergarten cause and a splendid type of womanhood. In Toronto the teachers call her the 'Mother of the Kindergarten.' We shall miss her from our group of early workers, but she will be to us still a living presence..."<sup>21</sup>

### *Canadian provinces beyond Ontario and Quebec were slow to adopt public school kindergarten programs*

In a handwritten, unpublished biographic sketch of Ada Hughes by Noreen Dorrien, one of her Canadian colleagues, mention is made of the Thursday Round Table Group, a weekly meeting of Toronto kindergarten teachers, which Mrs. Hughes had established.<sup>22</sup> This group was the forerunner of the Toronto Kindergarten Association which still exists today as the Toronto Early Childhood Association.

Despite the enthusiasm generated by the work of Ada and James Hughes, Canadian provinces beyond Ontario and Quebec were slow to adopt public school kindergarten programs. Kindergarten education was not accepted as a progressive national movement, and it was only after the Second World War that the four western provinces incorporated kindergartens into their elementary school systems. One reason for this piecemeal development was the fact that the British North America Act placed responsibility for education with each individual province in Canada, therefore discouraging the possibility of forming national policies and programs and the growth of national professional organizations. ♣

#### Author's note

This article was first presented as a research paper at the annual conference of the International Standing Committee for the History of Education - Early Childhood Working Group, held in Prague, the Czech Republic, August 1990.

#### References

Most of the information described in this paper has been gathered from materials belonging to the Toronto Board of Education Archives (Toronto, Ontario), and the International Kindergarten Union Archives contained in the historical collection of the Association for Childhood Education International, which is housed in the McKeldin Library of the University of Maryland (College Park, Maryland).

- 1 Woodill, Gary. (1986). The European Roots of Early Childhood Education in North America. *International Journal of Early Childhood*, 18(1), 9.
- 2 Monroe, W. (1907). *History of the Pestalozzian movement in the United States*. Syracuse, NY: C. W. Bardeen.
- 3 Corbett, Barbara (1970). The public school kindergartens in Ontario, 1883-1970. *The Educational Courier*, June 1970, 14-15.
- 4 The International Kindergarten Union. (1905). Proceedings of the twelfth annual convention, Toronto, Canada, April 19, 20, 21, 1905.
- 5 Surprisingly little has been written about Ada Marean and her pioneering work in Canadian Education. The Toronto Board of Education Archives contain school staff lists and other internal school board material that document her roles as an educator in Toronto. An informative summary of her early life and teaching career is given in:  
Jones, Donald. (1983). *Historical Toronto: Adaline Augusta Marean*. Toronto Star, January 8, 1983, 10.
- 6 A comprehensive review of the early years of kindergarten programs in the United States was written by Nina Vandewalker in 1908. This book by one of the early pioneers provides an excellent account of the work of her colleagues, and includes many references to Ada Marean and James Hughes:  
Vandewalker, Nina C. (1908). *The kindergarten in American Education*. New York: Macmillan.
- 7 A summary of facts and figures from the first seventeen years of kindergarten education in Toronto, drawn from the Toronto Board of Education Archives, is given in:  
Masemann, V.L. (1982). *Kindergartens in Toronto 1883-1900: Pedagogies Visible and Invisible*. Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Canadian History of Education Association, Toronto, February 13, 1982.
- 8 Hughes, James L. and Roden, E.P. (1883). *Annual Inspector's Report of the Public School Board of the City of Toronto for the year ending December 31, 1883*. Presumably these comments were written by Mr. Hughes as a result of his visit to St. Louis.
- 9 Brown, Grace L. (1930). *Tribute to Ada Marean Hughes*. Committee on Necrology (Grace L. Brown, Chairman), International Kindergarten Union, in the program for the 37th annual conference, Memphis, Tennessee, April 1930.
- 10 Beedle, Susie E. (Circa 1891) *Handwritten notebooks in the historical collection of the Toronto Board of Education Archives*.
- 11 This photograph of the Toronto Model School Kindergarten (circa 1895) is in the Historical Photograph Collection of the Metropolitan Toronto Library Board.
- 12 Public School Board of the City of Toronto. (1892). *Annual Report for the year ending December 31, 1892*.
- 13 Dickinson, Patricia. (1990) *The Early Childhood Professional*. In: Doxey, Isabel (Ed.). *Child Care and Education: Canadian Dimensions*. Toronto: Nelson Canada, 157.
- 14 Wheelock, Lucy. (1941) *Handwritten note, written in Boston on April 18, 1941, contained in the Association for Childhood Education International Archives*.
- 15 Association for Childhood Education International. (1967) *75th Anniversary Yearbook*.
- 16 International Kindergarten Union. (1896) *Program for the annual meeting held in New York*.
- 17 International Kindergarten Union. (1897) *Program for the annual meeting held in St. Louis*.
- 18 International Kindergarten Union. (1913) *Reports of the Committee of Nineteen on the Theory and Practice of Kindergarten*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Co.
- 19 From lists and programs contained in the International Kindergarten Union Archives.
- 20 Hughes, James L. (1900) *Froebel's Educational Laws for All Teachers*. New York: D. Appleton and Company.
- 21 Wheelock, Lucy. (1930) *In Memoriam*. *Childhood Education*, March 1930, 327.
- 22 Dorrien, Noreen D. (Undated) *Unpublished biographical sketch of Ada Marean, contained in the Toronto Board of Education Archives*.