



# Early Life Foundations

Education Consultancy, Research & Parent Support

## WELCOME

Greetings to our regular readers and a big welcome to our new readers. This edition leads us towards the end of the year - if anyone is wondering where 2011 went, then join the club! In this edition we have a parent focus, with both the comment and feature article being dedicated to parents. Our Early Life Foundations team has had such a wonderful year developing the extensive range of services that we have provided to parents, Early Childhood Educators, primary teachers and educational leaders. In particular, our voluntary parent outreach service has been accessed by hundreds of parents around the country.

It has been a difficult year for many Early Childhood Educators whose discontent, stress levels, and confusion with the expectations and practice in the field has been at an all time low. One of our most popular PD sessions titled "Want your life back?" provided Early Childhood Educators with strategies for efficient and effective planning and documentation; and encouraged them to trust their knowledge and expertise as professionals in the pre-school setting.

The Walker Learning Approach (pre-school to year 9) is making a significant difference to children, teachers and school communities across the country – highlights are reported in the WLA section on the back page. Kathy and I have finally moved into the 21st Century with social networking (Facebook) and we are really enjoying sharing our experiences, ideas, photos and news with our readers. In 2012 we will be welcoming to the team Rachel Fox (WLA Mentor and Communications Officer) and Caroline Jemison (administration) – keep an eye out for them next year. We also say a fond farewell for a year to Marina Portelli. Marina has been working with us for the past two years as a Mentor and Administration Officer. She is taking 12 months leave and we wish her well for 2012.

Kathy and I would like to extend our well wishes to all who we have worked with this year and look forward to our continued shared journey in 2012.

**Shona Bass**  
Editor

Chief Executive Officer  
Early Life Foundations

## COMMENT: WHEN WAS THE LAST TIME YOU DIDN'T SEE ELECTRONIC?

When was the last time you went to a café or a swimming lesson or any public place where there was not one child being entertained with electronic devices? When was the last time your children went to someone's house and there was beautiful, rich, creative play (and no electronic)? Sadly – the answer for many of us is – I can't remember.

Electronic is part of life in the 21st century – however being part of our life does not then translate to dominating our life. Being part of our life is when there is well-defined, balanced and appropriate exposure of a child's use of electronic. Electronic domination of our life is when children spend the majority of their free time being entertained by electronic and where children are unable to self-initiate and engage in activities that are non-electronic. Electronic domination of our life is also when parents continually use it as a baby sitter and as a behaviour control mechanism.

Research clearly demonstrates that children need regular and consistent time to explore, to create, to imagine and to interact with the outside world (to look, to be and interact with the world). Research also shows the importance of learning through the modeling of adults whether that be out in cafes or waiting for

siblings to finish swimming lessons; they learn to wait, to be patient, to observe the world, to make sense of the world. They develop their oral language skills (that underpins all their learning) through conversations with adults. Excessive and dominating electronic mediums not only limits children's opportunities to develop these skills but it also influences the mapping of neural networking during a crucial time of brain development.

The excessive use of electronic often sneaks up on us without notice –more electronic perpetuates more electronic and visa versa, more free play promotes more free play. The perpetuating cycle of more electronic is often hard for parents to break and often involves considerable strength and hardship (in the beginning) for the parents as their children make the transition away from electronic. The time to break the cycle is sooner not later: the patterns, expectations and behaviours we set up for our children during the childhood years form the platform that they work from as adolescents.

The end of year holidays are nearly with us – start encouraging, facilitating and insisting on non electronic play now so that during the holidays your children will enjoy spending time exploring their world outdoors, being creative, using their physical energy, learning to initiate their own ideas and moving away from electronic domination.

**Shona Bass and Kathy Walker**

# EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATORS: SUPPORTING FAMILIES CHILD FIRST – TAKE THE FIRST STEP

The Early Childhood Development Project is a Victorian initiative designed to explore opportunities, ideas and strategies to facilitate Early Childhood Professionals and Family Service Practitioners working together to better support vulnerable families with young children. Our Team operates in the Southern Region covering the LGAs of Glen Eira, Stonnington, Port Phillip, Kingston and Bayside. We are working closely with the Child FIRST Team to establish a user friendly consult service that Early Childhood Professionals will feel comfortable to contact to discuss a situation or source support for families.

Early Childhood Professionals are often presented with challenging situations associated with vulnerable families and may not have the support or knowledge of where to go or how to proceed with an appropriate process.

## Early Childhood Professionals commonly ask the following questions:

- > What do I do when I am concerned or worried about a child and his / her family?
- > What should I do? ..... Do I support families?
- > Do I get involved when issues outside the Early Childhood setting are impacting on a child's wellbeing?
- > Is this outside the scope of my role as an educator of the child?
- > Is supporting families' part of my 'Duty of Care'?

## We consider support of the family to be a legitimate extension of the notion of 'Duty of Care' for all educators of children.

The reality is that sometimes young children need advocates to ensure they remain safe; Early Childhood Professionals are important figures in seeking support for a young child and their family.

If you have any of these concerns about a child and his or her wellbeing, even if you just need to discuss your thoughts with someone, or if you are working with a child and family who might benefit from support then Child FIRST might prove to be a valuable contact for you.

## What is Child FIRST?

Child FIRST (Family Information Referral Support Team) supports families by providing advice and resources to help them cope during the difficult times most families face at some time. Child FIRST receives calls every day on a range of issues including behaviour management, accessing services and parenting.

Child FIRST is also the central intake point for Family Support Services. This service matches referred families with a worker who liaises directly with the family to support them in addressing their family issues.

We ask you to take the FIRST step in seeking advice or support for a family. We invite you to contact the friendly and professional staff at Child FIRST on 1300 367 441.

## Kathy McGee

Early Childhood Development Coordinator FamilyLife



## DVD: TEN TOP TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE PARENTING

Our DVD is a high quality production that is a great resource for parents, schools and early childhood programs, maternal and child health professionals, play groups and other organisations. It provides a quick and easy to watch list of strategies presented by Kathy and Shona that are practical and straightforward for ages 2 to 12 years (toddlers, preschoolers and primary school aged).

## NEWS:

**NEW PD for 2012:** A whole new range of professional development opportunities including how to reclaim your own professionalism and time while reducing stress around the issues of National Quality and Frameworks.

We have also introduced **Emotional Intelligence workshops** which include sessions on how to work more effectively with parents, committees, children and colleagues.

## Parent Outreach and Support

Check our website regularly for our range of parent support, including; fact sheets, FAQ, newsletters, editorials and more! Information related to: school readiness, effective parenting strategies, promoting language skills, limiting screen time and lots more. Feel free to use this information as handouts or during meetings with parents.



## ZART ART

We are delighted to announce our new initiative with Zart Art; this collaboration is focused on the development of creative and open-ended products and materials specifically designed for play based curriculum in early childhood and early years primary.



## WISE AND WONDERFUL PARENTING IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

The team at Early Life Foundations is working with parents across Australia through a range of opportunities, which include:

- > Presentations about issues related to parenting (on average four evenings each week for 40 weeks of the year). Topics include: Raising Girls, Raising Boys, The Role of Dad's in Parenting, The Role of Mum's in Parenting, Building Resilience in Children and Parents, Promoting Self Esteem, Effective Parenting, Behaviour Tips and Looking after Yourself as a Parent
- > Parent workshops (3 x 2 hour sessions eight times a year)
- > Free-phone consultations (on average 20 calls per week)
- > Face-face consultations (on average 5 per week).

It is during these wonderful opportunities to work with parents that I am constantly struck by the commitment, energy and dedication parents have in their efforts to parent respectfully and wisely with their children. Parenting can be a wonderful, exciting and joyous experience. It can also have times of loneliness, anxiety, frustration and confusion.

There are many messages around about what it means to be a parent, how to parent, what to do and not do, but in some ways, it seems we have less confidence or clarity than in previous times. For many, there are fewer supports, less family or friends living close by as we have greater movement of families between suburbs, interstate and internationally.

Society in many respects is moving at a faster pace: the irony is that for all of the great opportunities many families and children have in Australia, these are often matched by very real challenges as well.

Australia now has one of the world's highest suicide rates in the Western world for young men aged between 15 and 25 years. We have significant drug and alcohol abuse in many of our young people. We have high anxiety and depression amongst the population, including young children.

We have messages being given that success in life and learning is as simple as measurement of the once off score of a standardised test in grade 3 or 5 and that choosing a school and finding out about what might suit a family and child is as simplistic as looking at a website called My School.

We are often sold products and activities for children as young as 18 months. There is a developing culture where young children are participating in swimming, gym, music, circus, athletics and learning how to read at 2! All in the name of success! We plug them into Play Stations and Nintendo DS when they are only 3 or 4 years of age, we allow them to watch TV during breakfast and dinner and we have them eat their meals in shifts without the presence or modeling of adults sitting with them, listening, chatting and sharing the day. The paradox is that parents in their endeavor to give their children the best opportunity in life have immersed the family in a culture that places huge pressures on children.

We are a society that portrays young children as being almost grown up...when they are actually not grown up. They can be dressed like mini adults, have parties for 3 year olds that are actually suitable for 8 or 10 year olds and then we wonder why so many children are overwhelmed by their world.

Society at large is selling a message about children that sends so many in the wrong direction. On the one hand we talk about wanting quality, measuring success in meaningful ways, taking greater care of our children, and yet, we allow the media, retail, advertising and lifestyle to perpetuate a rushed, hurried and adult like lifestyle upon young developing children.

Parenting in the 21st century requires all those wise and wonderful parents we meet every day and evening around the country to stand up and become great advocates for childhood, for slowing the pace, for saying no to padded bras for preschoolers, to say no to inviting 25 three year olds to a birthday party, to saying no to the M rated movie at the 6 year old birthday party, to having more time to play and talk and share at home and less time at extra curricula activities every day of the week.

We need to say yes, to reflecting on the fact that childhood and family life requires adults who are reflective, wise and take the time to slow the pace of life for children who as Plato is attributed to having said, "are just at the beginning, and the beginning of something is always very important and needs time to grow."

**Kathy Walker**  
Director  
Early Life Foundations

Adulthood is the ever-shrinking period between childhood and old age. It is the apparent aim of modern industrial societies to reduce this period to a minimum.

Thomas Szasz

## FACEBOOK



Yes we are in the 21st Century! Facebook for Early Life and Walker Learning is a valuable resource for Early Childhood Educators and parents. We regularly post comments, photos and ideas about a range of issues related to current political issues and other related subjects pertaining to children, families and society.

You can contribute your own ideas, comments and experiences and start sharing with the wider early childhood community about children.

<http://www.facebook.com/EarlyLifeFoundations>

Check out our online shop at [www.earlylife.com.au](http://www.earlylife.com.au)

All our books, DVD's and podcasts are available online to buy. They will be sent directly via post to your address.

**Podcasts available in 2012**

A series of free and paid podcasts for parents and educators will hit the airwaves through our websites early in 2012. The podcasts will cover a range of issues including, school readiness, parenting tips, personalised learning, choosing a school, and a whole lot more.



## WALKER LEARNING APPROACH IN THE CONTEXT OF PLAY BASED PEDAGOGY

The WLA is based upon years and decades of research about play based and personalised learning and social constructivism. IN ADDITION to this, it is the first major Australian based pedagogy to be designed and implemented.

It is not a program, or an inquiry model sitting discreetly or separately from other curriculum areas. It is a total approach to teaching and learning which combines the need for children to be active participants in their learning (through hands on and creative exploration and investigation) which sits along side formal instruction. There is explicit teaching and development of not only literacy and numeracy skills and knowledge but also the range of vital social, emotional and life skills.

It is the first pedagogy to be designed for Australian schools, successfully providing teaching and learning which:

- > Personalises and engages students in active learning alongside explicit and formalised instruction
- > Is culturally and developmentally appropriate across all demographic regions of the country including remote indigenous communities of Arnhem Land right through to elite independent schools

### Walker Learning Approach:

- > Viewed as a pedagogy of learning and teaching for all ages birth –12
- > Developmentally and culturally appropriate
- > Specifically designed in Australia as a total pedagogy not just a section of a day or program or as a unit of inquiry
- > Not all children are ready to learn the same thing at the same time at the same rate
- > Open-ended and play based with a mix of investigations and explorations alongside explicit formalised instruction until grade 2 and then projects and explicit formalised instruction for grades 3 to 6
- > Skills and process is the emphasis rather than just an end product or content oriented
- > Investigations or project based
- > Intrinsic motivation (not extrinsic)
- > Peer modelling
- > Adult scaffolding and modelling with instruction
- > A chair is a chair or to create something

### Walker Learning Approach ACCREDITATION

WLA accreditation is now available in three categories: Prep to grade 2; Grades 3 to 6 and Leadership. WLA accreditation is valid for a period of three years; after this time teachers and leaders who wish to maintain their accreditation are required to go through the "re-accredited" process. Details are available on the website.

### WLA (Grades 3-6)

The number of schools across the country, that have successfully implemented or are starting to implement the WLA 3-6 is growing rapidly. We have been inundated with many teachers wishing to commence the accreditation process for WLA (grades 3-6). Details and the process for WLA accreditation for grades 3 to 6 are available on the website. Watch this space for the names and details of the first teachers in Australia soon to become accredited in WLA (grades 3-6).

### WLA (Preschool to Grade 2)

Congratulations to all the teachers who have been accredited in WLA (Prep-2) this year. We are delighted to acknowledge the teachers from the NT and Tasmania who are the first in these states to be accredited. Teachers who were originally accredited in WLA (Prep- Grade 2) three years ago who would like to maintain their WLA accreditation are required to go through the WLA re-accreditation process.

### WLA (Leadership)

We now have a special category of WLA accreditation for principals and assistant principals who have actively led the implementation of the WLA pedagogy across their school community. This accreditation recognises outstanding commitment to the philosophy of a defined pedagogy across a school and leadership qualities in supporting staff and parents through the implementation process. See website for details.

### NEWS and NEW INITIATIVES FOR 2012

#### WLA in the Northern Territory

We are delighted to announce a major WLA initiative in the NT for 2012 where we will continue our work with indigenous communities in both mobile preschools and schools implementing play based and personalised learning.

#### WLA Membership 2012

In 2012 Early Life Foundations will provide the opportunity for professional groups and individuals to become members of ELF and WLA. Membership will provide an additional range of resources, opportunities and benefits from those we already offer the community. Watch the website for details.

All of us have moments in our childhood where we come alive for the first time. And we go back to those moments and think, this is when I became myself. **Rita Dove**



### WLA AWARDS 2011

We are proud to announce a number of awards for 2011 in recognition of exemplary practice in WLA in the following categories:

- > Visionary and Effective Change Leadership
- > Outstanding Pedagogical Practice in WLA
- > Above and Beyond Commitment to WLA