



Early Life Foundations

Education Consultancy, Research & Parent Support

WELCOME

Kathy and I are delighted to announce that we have a new office for parent consultations, parenting workshops and professional development for teachers and leadership. We provide weekly parent consultations at the office (and on the phone). In June we will launch our monthly 'parent drop in' coffee morning: this will provide an opportunity for parents to chat with Kathy and myself about parenting issues as well as meeting and networking with other parents. We are just a few doors up the road from one of the best coffee shops in town so we may even end up there some mornings!!

In this edition we address a very important issue related to the demands on early childhood educators related to superfluous and extensive irrelevant documentation. Our latest editorial (#2, 2011; Buildings and Furniture; the Icing and Not the Cake) published on our website is very relevant to many teachers across the country. This editorial develops the argument that pedagogy and philosophy must come before any discussion or set up of the environment. Unfortunately with the Building Education Revolution (BER) the reverse has been true in many schools – wonderful environment but no rigorous pedagogy! The responsibility of getting this the right way around lies with leadership. Our colleague Neil Tucker has contributed the feature article about the importance of leadership. Sustainability and appreciation of the preciousness of our environment is an important part of education for all children.

Preschools and schools have the opportunity to develop these understandings for children in a very natural way. We have a wonderful contribution from Mary McLoughlan about creating and embedding sustainable environments in an education setting.

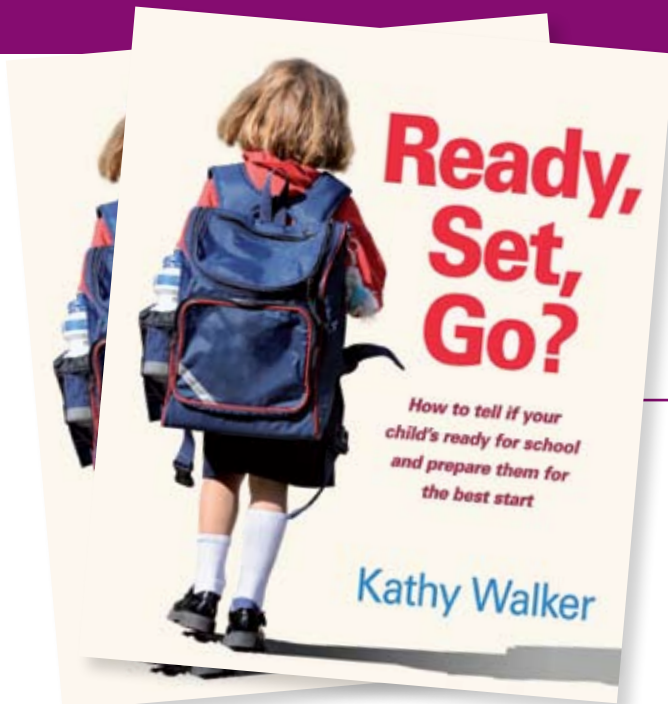
Those who are regular visitors to our websites (news and blog items) will know that Kathy and I have been speaking out about many things this term.

Disappointing was the unfortunate and misinformed debate about the use of 'naughty corners' for children. Our children at home, preschool and school require the opportunity to develop intrinsic motivation to regulate their behavior and to make appropriate choices. Naughty corners use punishment and shame (extrinsic motivation) to intimidate children and have been shown to be very unsuccessful as a strategy. Further information related to understanding the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation can be obtained from Kathy's book Parenting or by attending one of our parent presentations 'understanding children's behavior'.

We look forward to our continued contribution to you, your families and school communities.

Shona Bass
Editor

Chief Executive Officer - Early Life Foundations



PARENT WORKSHOPS

Will be conducted at the office in term 3 – keep an eye on the website or email us via 'contact us' if you would like to register your interest. These workshops will be over three evenings with a maximum of 10 parents. If you are a group of 8-10 parents and would like to book a workshop series please contact us.

A small parent friendly book published by Penguin. This book has two sections.

Section 1: Works through the big issues and anxieties of when to send your child to school and how to know when they are ready.

Section 2: Provides practical strategies about preparation and transition, not just for the child but for family life and parents too.

OSH Club 
Happy Children Learning

facebook

Find us on facebook: Search for 'Early Life Foundations'

Our shop will be set up on the websites shortly – you can purchase all our books and soon our new DVD Ten Tips for Effective Parenting!

COMMENT: DOCUMENTATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAMS GONE MAD!

It seems we never really get the balance right with our good intentions to increase the quality of what we provide for young children in their early childhood years of education. We seem to confuse what I call the “tools” of our teaching with the key ingredients of our teaching and learning.....what do I mean?

Tools are the helpful “add ons” such as: Cameras, portfolios, journals, learning stories, videos, DVD’s, photos, displays, communication boards, and narratives.

Key ingredients are the relationships we build with the children. That is actually relating to children without a camera in front of their eyes, or a keyboard tapping away during a session interrupting the time we should be talking, listening to and interacting with the children.

In our narrow interpretation of “proving”, “documenting”, “communicating to parents”, “capturing the learning”, “sharing with parents and children”, “enabling the voice of the child”, we are in fact, moving further and further away from spending time and building relationships with children and parents.

Attempting to measure the quality of early childhood programs with documentation and photo evidence is a flawed and narrow measure right from the start.

We now have so much so called “accountability”, attempting to prove quality, documentation, tick the box, and analyze yourself it has taken us away from reflecting upon what actually makes real quality early childhood education - photos and learning stories actually don’t. This is what does.

- > **Small group sizes of about 20 maximum for 4 year olds, less for under 4’s.**
- > **At least 2 qualified staff with these groups.**
- > **Funding for resources and much higher pay for staff.**
- > **Staff who actually really want to teach rather than those who get into a course as their third or fourth option because they didn’t get into their preferred course.**

Early childhood educators contact our office every day struggling with the overload of documentation and often don’t have their weekends now because they are busy with their photo stories or are simply spending much of their sessions taking photos, laminating and writing during the session.

Let’s reclaim early childhood for children, let’s reclaim relationships, high quality interactions and play based curriculum minus the intrusion of documentation, photos and typing during sessions and overexcited professionals (who are the ones not teaching anymore) who are like children in a toy shop with new things to play with who keep telling the teachers to document, document, document!! I’m telling teachers to play, play, relate, relate and “be” for children.

We surely have gone completely mad with the latest amount of documentation linked to accountability linked to “quality”!!!!

Kathy Walker – Early Life Foundations



*“Parent Outreach”
Kathy preparing for a
parent consultation at
the new office Suite 3,
119 Gardenvale Rd,
Gardenvale*

CREATING AND EMBEDDING SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTS

St Kilda & Balaclava Kindergarten is the first early childhood centre to achieve the traditional 5 star AuSSI rating for sustainability (Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative). The kindergarten has actively engaged staff, families and the community in education and practice of sustainability for many years. These include initiatives to reduce waste, increase energy efficiency, reduce water usage and increase biodiversity. Since 2006, it has achieved greenhouse reductions of 24% and water savings of 46% and is well on its way to achieving its goal of a greenhouse-neutral kindergarten. One of the success stories was to include parents through the development of a sustainability sub-committee and to involve organisations like the City of Port Phillip. Kindergarten Coordinator Mary McLoughlan stated that one of the best results of the program was the families enthusiasm that enabled a range of infrastructure changes, such as the 40,000 litre water tanks that have created a tank to toilet system in addition to changes to the heating and cooling of the building that have reduced energy bills and greenhouse gas emissions. St Kilda & Balaclava kindergarten has led the way, making a commitment to the environment across the curriculum.



Here are some examples of their accomplishments:

- > Tracking energy and water bills to determine carbon usage.
- > Parent sub-committee developed with roles for water, waste, energy and biodiversity.
- > Child energy, compost, recycling and water monitors have been given the responsibility to remind others about energy, waste and water conservation.
- > Developed garden plan and established gardens have also created more shaded areas.
- > Children have designed the planting in a project.
- > Passive solar techniques are being used through the use of sun blinds on windows and adjustable bamboo reed, outside shades.
- > Push taps have been installed to children’s sinks.
- > Recycled toilet paper now purchased.
- > Green cleaning strategies adopted.
- > Families and educators take part in programs such as Earth hour and the Challenge to Change program.
- > They have become members of the Jane Goodall Roots and Shoots organisation.
- > Ongoing projects with children including, vegetable gardens, measuring water levels and reading gauges, development of plans for frog bog.

For further details www.skbk.org.au

WHAT IS YOUR CHILDREN'S SCHOOL LIKE?

We delighted for our guest contributor Neil Tucker to share his story and opinions about leadership.

A Short Story

The family was new to town; they had two children, a boy and a girl aged 6 and 8, ready for Years One and Three. They were looking for a school that said it provided for individual children and individual learning. The girl was already interested in any sport that involved balls and racquets. Her brother was quiet, loved drawing, and read voraciously. The parents didn't think they wanted special treatment, but they did want to be able to meet the potential teachers, get a sense of how the school 'felt', and be told what the Principal wanted for the school.

The Principal of the second school they visited was in his third year at the school which was relatively small. There were two classes of 25 children per year. There was a sports and physical education program with young male and female teachers who emphasised participation and enjoyment. The colourful classrooms were arranged with individual tables that could be grouped, a reading corner, couch and lots of cushions. Each classroom had two or three laptops and a data projector or electronic whiteboard. Some had 'wet areas' at the back and little garden plots outside. There was shade cloth in the courtyard. The teachers smiled.

"How involved are you in the daily life of the school?" the parents asked the principal. "Do you visit classrooms and see the teachers teach? How do you deal with children who need a lot of attention in class or in the playground? If we are worried about something – that perhaps can be cleared up quite easily, whom do we see? What do we come to see you about? Do parents help in any of the classes?"

Your Story

What do you expect of the school where your children are? Do you get it? Whom do you see when something comes up – to do with homework, absence, or a behaviour issue? Can you confidently approach your children's teachers and expect to be heard, and that some sensible action will be taken, or will you be brushed off? Do your children come home from school buzzing with news? Do they simply seem happy?

Do the reading and mathematics programs allow for children to move at their own speed, with opportunity to pursue their interests – or do they require mainly working through photocopied sheets and even repeating them if someone finishes too early? Are music, art and play treated as extra subjects and activities, or fun languages to learn like maths?

Leadership is everything in a school. Principals need to be expert and informed about curriculum, educational philosophy and pedagogy. The benchmark for great leadership is where the philosophy and pedagogy of the school are clear to everyone in the school community; and the rigor of teaching and learning is second to none and reflect the pedagogical philosophy across all levels of the school.

Shona Bass 2011

School Leadership

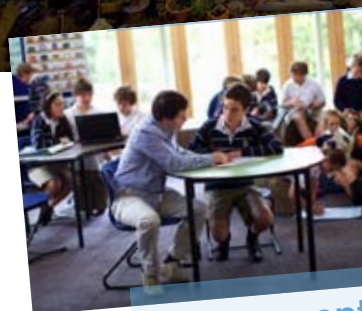
In a primary school, particularly if it has less than 400 - 500 students, the Principal is expected to be everywhere. He/she attends school events, knows all the children by name (and preferably parents also), interviews all families at enrolment, is approachable and personable, and preferably has a sense of humour. The Principal should be reputed for honesty, administrative efficiency, fairness, knowledge of the teachers and their styles, their ability to listen and to fix things. Above all the Principal is the learning and cultural leader of the school. The quality of the teaching and learning environment comes first.

There is a consistent approach to inquiring pedagogy across the whole school. There is an infectious shared pleasure in children. Individual children and their learning styles, multiple intelligences and interests matter. Their ability to learn independently is encouraged, but so is their capacity to socialise effectively and learn collaboratively. The culture of the staffroom is positive, lively and reflective. Teachers question why they each teach in particular ways. They are not afraid to be questioned, nor to question their colleagues and seek out best practice in other schools. The Principal does not however dominate the school. The most effective leadership works with and through others. School Principals have the opportunity and responsibility to grow others' leadership and competence.



Neil Tucker

Has been principal of five Australian independent schools including an international school and a Steiner school. He has been Executive Officer of the Catholic Schools Principals Association of NSW, a school evaluator for DET NSW and CIS and an executive career consultant. He was founding Chair of the Board of Lakes Grammar School and Chair of the Newcastle Anglican Diocesan Schools Commission. He has written for Creative School Management on school people issues since 1995.



Engagement Matters

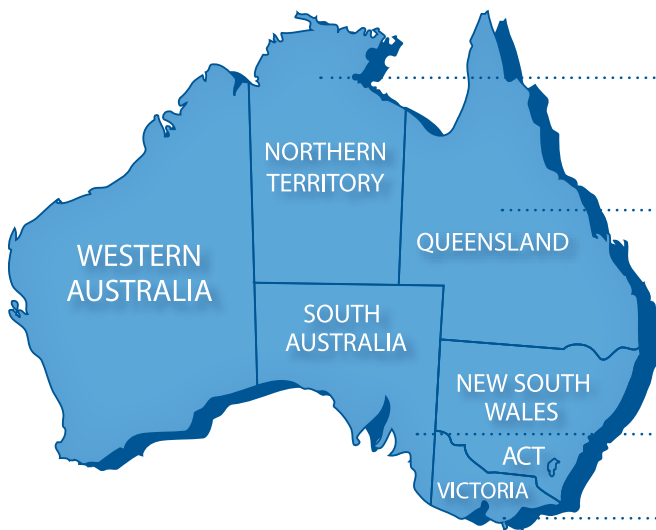
Personalised learning for grades 3 to 6
Kathy Walker & Shona Bass



Play Matters

Investigative learning for preschool to grade 2
Second Edition - Kathy Walker

WLA ACROSS AUSTRALIA



TASMANIA

Walker Learning is taking off right across the country and wonderful work is being done by teachers in schools committed to personalising learning and engaging children from preschool to grade 6.

Top End:

This term we have worked up in Darwin, Katherine and the Gove Peninsula (the long wet season and pending cyclone halted the trip to Gapuwiyak).

Queensland:

We have been contacted by a number of schools in QLD wanting to find out more about WLA. Kathy and Shona are looking forward to visiting and sharing the philosophy with these schools in the next few months.

ACT, SA and NSW:

These days we feel like we need offices in SA, NSW and ACT! We are really enjoying our trips interstate and are very excited about the number of schools in these states implementing WLA Preschool through to year 6!

Victoria:

100's of schools across the state are implementing the WLA – many now prep-6. We are delighted that over 30 teachers in Victoria have been accredited in the WLA.

Tasmania:

Our work in Tassie started in the North 18 months ago and has started to flow across the north west and down the east coast. Our recent symposium attracted lots of staff from many schools and we are conducting a 2 day study tour in June specifically for Tassie teachers.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Teacher Professional Leave:

Many teachers have been successful in their applications for professional leave to develop their understanding of the philosophy and pedagogy associated with the WLA and personalized learning. We have developed customized programs for these teachers including shadowing of Kathy and associates, reading groups, seminars, video analysis, and personal and team goal setting and planning. Contact our office if you would like to be involved.

Professional Development:

The WLA Study Tours are a raging success this year with both the one and two day tours being booked up well in advance. Introduction and extension symposia are also providing great opportunities for teachers to develop their understanding of the theory and core elements of the approach. In the PD sessions and study tours we provide breakout sessions to meet the specific needs of teachers.

Customised Professional Development:

Consistent with the way we work with children we also personalise learning for teachers. PD sessions, symposiums and study tours are customized for specific groups across Australia. Please contact our office if you have a group that would like a customised PD session – symposium or study tour either P-2 or 3-6.

WLA UPDATES

WLA Accredited Teachers:

We congratulate teachers from many schools who have recently become accredited in WLA. There are now over 40 teachers accredited across the country: the list of teachers is on the website.

WLA Daily Diary:

Building collegiality between teachers across the country through teachers sharing ideas on setting up learning environments. The WLA Daily Diary is available to teachers who are having professional development with the Walker Learning Team. On average 500 visits from teachers every posting on the diary.

Publications Finally!

The 2nd edition of Play Matters and our new text book for grades 3-6, "Engagement Matters" are out!! They can be purchased from our shop online or from ACER.

WLA Implementation Plans:

Are you on your journey or just at the start? Getting it right where ever you are in your journey is important for the integrity and the rigor of the approach. We have detailed implementation plans developed after years of work with schools implementing the approach. Contact the office for your copy.



Kathy and Shona will be conducting personalised and customised professional development for teachers and early childhood educators at the new office at Suite 3, 119 Gardenvale Rd, Gardenvale.