

The Walker Learning Approach Philosophy and Pedagogy Compatibility with National Early Years Framework and Australian Curriculum

The Walker Learning Approach is an Australian designed teaching and learning approach (pedagogy) that authentically personalises learning and is developmentally and culturally appropriate. Learning is real, relevant and meaningful for all children regardless of their age, culture, family context, socioeconomic background or geographical position. The WLA has been developed over 20 years using an action research model. It places the child at the centre and utilises developmental psychology and biology alongside cultural and environmental influences as its pedagogical platform and the basis for practical application across the Australian setting.

International research highlights that educating children requires a systemised approach that embraces family and community (Burnham et al 2007, Otero et al 2011). The WLA is incorporated in a systems based model for the education of the whole child (birth to 12 years) through theories of practice, parent education, empowerment and inclusion, teaching and learning at school, and establishing and sustaining links and networks between family and community. Within this systems model the WLA provides a seamless transition from childcare to preschool, to early and upper primary school and beyond.

The Key Values and Philosophy Guiding WLA Key Practices

The WLA is underpinned by intentional teaching, using children's interests (not for the interest alone, but as a catalyst for engagement, motivation and skill instruction) and respect of a child's culture and context. These are used as a springboard to facilitate further understandings and skill development in all areas of learning including literacy, numeracy, language, cognition, social, psychological and emotional development. Table 1 lists the key principles that guides WLA key practices across all stages of development. Table 2 lists the WLA key practices within the pedagogy that provide consistency and continuity across all stages of schooling for children and their families.

Table 1: The Key Principles that Guides Walker Learning Approach Key Practices Across All Stages of Development

The Key Principles Guiding WLA Key Practices
<p>The key principles that guides WLA practice are that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All teaching is intentional. • Not all children are ready to learn the same thing at the same time in the same way. • Children’s interests are used not for the interest alone, but as a catalyst for engagement. • Children’s interest, culture and context are respected and used as a springboard to facilitate further understandings and skill development in all areas of learning including literacy, numeracy, the sciences, the arts, language, cognition, social, psychological and emotional development. • Child development is used as a basis for guiding practices as well as the principles of culture, community and family. • Learning is personalised and uses the children’s interests alongside additional exposure and concepts and experiences for children to explore their world, concepts, skills and environment. • The process of learning and skill acquisition is valued - not just, or always the focus of the end product. • Intrinsic (not extrinsic) motivation is valued and embedded in practice. • The adult / child relationship is highly valued and the relationship itself is a scaffold in the learning alongside the child. • Relationship with child, family and community are integral components of the approach. • The WLA does not require topics or themes but does include opportunities for teachers to include specific concepts. • Child development is used as a basis for guiding practice. • Relationships are developed and deepened through a range of key practices including Focus Children • Learning is real, relevant and meaningful and is contextual to the child, family and community

Table 2: Key Elements of the Walker Learning Approach Pedagogy

The WLA Key Elements	
<p>Preschool to Year 2</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Children • Tuning In and Reflection • Investigations (play-based) • Children’s interests • Notice Board – Parent • Common Language • Planning documents Statement of Intent 	<p>Years 3 to 8</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus Children • Tuning In and Reflection • Education Research Project (project-based) • Children’s interests • Specific set up of Learning Environments • Communication Board • Common Language • Class Meetings • Affirmations • Clinic Instruction Groups • Planning documents Statement of Intent
<p>Planning, Documentation and Assessment</p> <p>Planning across Preschool to Year 8 uses a fortnightly dynamic planner (Statement of Intent), which builds in children and family’s interests, culture, and key learning intentions taken from and audited against the National Early Years Framework (NQF) and the Australian Curriculum.</p> <p>Assessment, testing, reporting are all based upon individual strengths and abilities and needs of children in all curriculum areas as well as the five key outcomes of the National Early Years Framework (Identity, Community, Learning, Well being and Communication). In addition, given the broad range of each state and territory assessment requirements, the WLA accommodates each particular testing and assessment requirements.</p> <p>The planning and assessment documents include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of Intent Planning Document • Developmental Domains • Individual Observation Record • Daily / Weekly Record 	

The Walker Learning Approach and the National Early Years Framework and National Curriculum

National Early Years Framework

The WLA sits and works alongside the current National Early Childhood Framework (NECF). The key principles and practices, the key outcomes contained within the NECF are essential elements of play-based curriculum. These are reflected within the WLA, which were developed and implemented long before the NECF was introduced. Just as Steiner, Reggio, Montessori and other play-based approaches (including those found in mainstream schools and preschools that do not necessarily identify as holding a specific set of principles or underlying theoretical foundations). Planning, documentation, intentional teaching, outcomes, and Focus Students are all integral to and embedded within the WLA and all reflect the key principles and practices of the NECF.

Australian Curriculum

In schools the question is often asked, “Does WLA fit with the Australian Curriculum, or does WLA deliver good data and outcomes?” This question reflects a lack of understanding of the WLA as a pedagogy. The WLA is not just a tool or an ‘add on’, it is sometimes assumed incorrectly by people that the WLA is simply a program of children playing or that explicit and/or formal instruction ceases. This is definitely not the case, in a school that implements the Walker Learning Approach literacy and numeracy are still taught every day – as it always has!

The Walker Learning Approach is an Australian Pedagogy that has a systemised approach that retains explicit instruction of literacy and numeracy, produces positive data in these and other curriculum areas and also builds in rich engagement, pro social behaviours and life skills.

The Walker learning Approach meets all Government requirements for early childhood, primary and early secondary education and uses the appropriate early childhood and primary Frameworks for auditing, planning and assessment.

The WLA Developmental Pedagogical Continuum

The WLA pedagogy naturally embeds all of the key values and philosophy in a developmentally and culturally appropriate way. Figure 2 illustrates the WLA Developmental Pedagogical Continuum (Walker and Bass 2012) that demonstrates the changes in pedagogy to suit the developing child while maintaining the inclusion of all key values and practices consistent with the WLA philosophy (This is also influenced by children’s contexts, environments and communities).

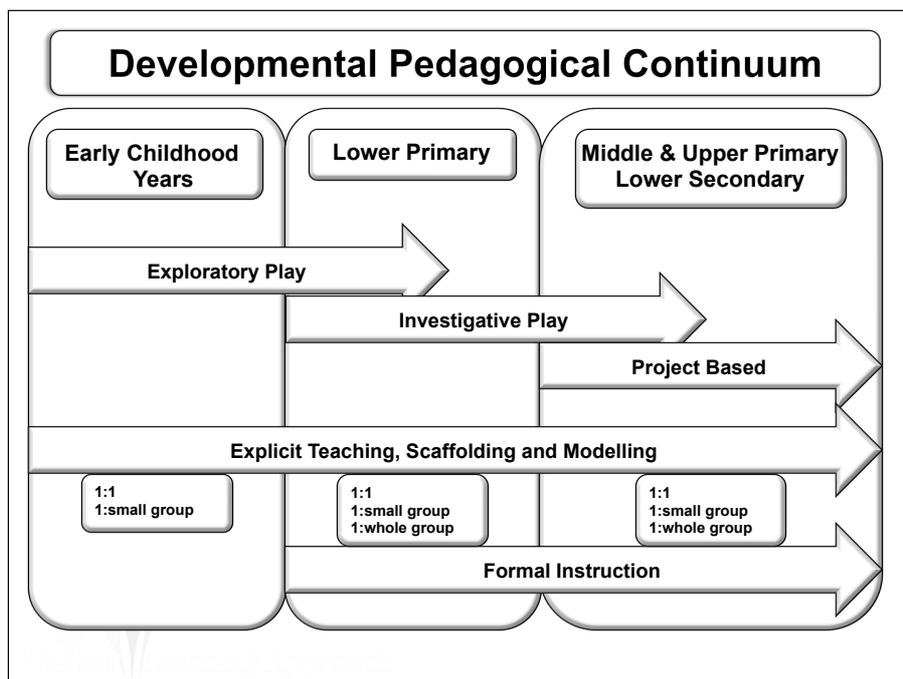


Figure 2: The WLA pedagogy changes to suit the developing child while maintaining the inclusion of all key values and practices consistent with the WLA philosophy (Walker and Bass 2012). In the early childhood years children are engaged in exploratory play with no formal teaching, in the Prep-Year 2 children are engaged in investigative concrete hands-on experiences that are balance and integrated with formal teaching. In the Years 3 to 8 children are engaged in project-based learning that is child-centred and integrated with formal teaching.

The following Table lists the key elements of the WLA practice at each stage of the WLA Developmental Pedagogical Continuum; early childhood years, lower primary and, middle and upper primary and lower secondary school.

Key Elements: WLA Preschool and Early Childhood Years (Birth - 6 Years)

The Walker Learning Approach in preschool and early childhood programs:

- Uses play-based learning throughout the day; embracing open-ended play experiences, indoor and outdoors learning and is culturally inclusive.
- Is defined by a learning environment that is set up with intentional learning centres designed to promote many aspects of development, skill and learning through open-ended play
- Provides the platform for the adult to use a play-based curriculum to instruct and explicitly unpack learning and skills without formal instruction.
- Values skill acquisition and process
- Embraces the importance of high quality preschool education as a significant contribution to combating social exclusion and promoting inclusions particularly in disadvantaged children and importantly improving long term education outcomes (EPPE 2009)

Key Elements: WLA Prep - Year 2

The Walker Learning Approach in Prep to Year 2:

- Is a pedagogical approach to teaching and learning that reflects that children require a mix of active investigation alongside explicit and at times formal instruction.
- Retains explicit and discreet times of instruction of literacy and numeracy each day alongside deep immersion and active engagement for children to investigate their world through a range of specifically planned open-ended learning centers.
- Is defined by a learning environment that is set up with intentional learning centres designed to promote many aspects of development, skill and learning through open-ended play.
- Incorporates an investigation component (>45 minutes) four mornings a week that frames the learning for the day with active exploration of learning with the foundations of play-based curriculum.
- Incorporates a 20-minute Tuning In session prior to every investigation time which is an explicit whole group session where learning intentions for the day in all curriculum areas are highlighted as well as key provocations in investigation time are reviewed.
- Links skills, concepts and processes experienced during investigations through a 20-minute Reflection time at the end of investigations. The teachers model, unpack and highlight skills and learning with key students such as Focus Children, a Reporter and a Photographer.
- Values skill acquisition and process
- Does not require topics or themes but does include opportunities for teachers to include specific concepts.
- Is a play-based curriculum that draws upon many play-based perspectives and utilises a Vygotskian perspective alongside a social constructivist approach.
- Provides learning that is personalised and contextualised through the implementation of the Reporter and Photographer.

Key Elements: WLA Years 3 - 8

The Walker Learning Approach in Years 3 to 8:

- Uses a project-based approach for key discipline subject areas such as Science, History, Health, which match directly to the Australian Curriculum.
- Creates the learning environment intentionally to de-institutionalise the learning area, provide opportunities for the children to work individually, in small groups and whole groups, and values and respects the child, their needs, culture and context.
- Uses authentic integrated curriculum model where all subject areas are contextualised and incorporated into the Education Research Project.
- Promotes independent learning, responsibility, self and peer reflection, knowledge and skills through the use of the Communication Board, the Education Research Project, Clinic Groups, Student Lead Conferences, Class Meetings and Expos.
- Ensures specific literacy and numeracy instruction times are retained.

Implementing the Walker Learning Approach with Integrity and Rigour

Teachers and leadership require professional development and support over several years to develop a full understanding of the pedagogy and to develop their teaching skills in scaffolding and relationship building.

Teachers who have developed their understanding and skills, and are implementing all the core elements of the approach consistently with rigour have the opportunity to be accredited in the Walker Learning Approach. Accreditation in WLA is specific for leadership, preschool early childhood, assistant teachers in early childhood, Prep-Year 2 and Years 3-8.

References

1. Walker K (2011) *Play Matters Investigative Learning for Preschool to Grade 2*. 2nd Edition ACER Press, Camberwell, Australia
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4. West Burnham, John, Farrar, Maggie, and Otero, George. (2007) *Schools and Communities Working Together to Transform Children's Lives*. London. Continuum Press.
5. Otero George, Robert Csoti and David Rothstadt. (2011) *Creating Powerful Learning Relationships: A Whole School-Community Approach*. Hawker Brownlow, Melbourne.
6. *Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) Project: Final Report - A Longitudinal Study Funded by the DfES 1997-2004*