



Welcome

Welcome to our very first newsletter for 2009. Kathy Walker and Associates is a not for profit consultancy; consistent with this philosophy we work hard to provide where ever possible free information, support and commentary that is accessible to as many people and organisations as possible. Our newsletter is an example of this; we email it to you to save costs and to ensure a wide distribution across Australia and beyond. The associates and other contributors provide material without payment and we greatly appreciate their commitment and expertise.

Each newsletter has a range of issues related to education, parenting, and general aspects of family and early childhood life. There will always be a section on the Australian Developmental Curriculum as well as sections for updates on events for the future and parenting tips and suggestions. Each edition will include a profile of one of our Associates – this will give you a chance to get to know us better!

In each edition of the newsletter Kathy or one of our Associates will write a short editorial alongside the editorials that are posted on the home page of the website each month.

Shona Bass
Newsletter Editor
Business Manager

In this Issue

Associate profile

- Find out a little more about our associates; in this issue we feature Maree Mullen.

Major topics in this issue

- Editorial; “The perils of homework in the early years of school.”
- Feature Article: Promoting literacy and language at home
- A principal’s perspective on the Australian Developmental Curriculum
- Promoting understanding for parents on the Australian Developmental Curriculum
- Implementing Australian Developmental Curriculum in grades 3-6
- Common parent challenges in family life
- “Newsletter rap”: Important notices including upcoming events / conferences

Editorial

Avoid Homework in the Early Years

I was asked to write a short piece for the Education Age online quandary that is posted each Monday on whether young children in the early years of school should be given homework. I am totally opposed to homework in the early years of school.

As I write in my book *What's the hurry?* home time after school needs to be relaxed, fun and filled with play and rest. In essence the key points to consider regarding homework include:

- Learning is meant to be meaningful and relate to not only academic skills but to life skills and the building of a child's self concept and creativity.
- Homework in its most pure form is simply about family life building upon and extending children's life and learning experiences.
- Homework for young children is not about worksheets and 60 minutes of "spelling practice".

Homework for young children in these years aims to provide the following opportunities:

- Time to relax and play at the end of a busy day
- Time to read with a parent and to enjoy the relationship between parent and child
- Time to explore the love of literature, storytelling and reading
- Time to reflect upon the day over a meal with the family, to talk, share and discuss
- Time to simply spend together with parents and children.

Reading, talking, playing, creating, listening to others, having conversations, being relaxed in your own home and not being pressured to "fill in a worksheet" are the key elements of what we might call the most ideal and appropriate "homework" for young children. These all promote the building blocks of oral language, literacy, reading, writing and numeracy.

From time to time in these early years, a teacher may provide some additional work or learning that the parent and child can explore

together at home to help reinforce a skill or need. But this should be individual and not frequent.

The best "homework" is for parents and children to be reading together, playing together, talking and conversing together and some down time to relax each day after school.

Kathy Walker

Wisdom is not a product of schooling but of the lifelong attempt to acquire it.

Albert Einstein

Common Parent Challenges in Family Life

In my new book about positive and effective parenting being published by Penguin Publishing I have included a whole chapter on how and why things go wrong. Here are just a few samples that may be helpful for parents to factor in at those times and situations when everything starts to unravel.

Each family member has their own personality

There is no such thing as a blank slate. Each of us has our own personality visible and evident from birth and inevitably, sometimes those personalities will clash. Instead of trying to change the personality of each other, attempt to understand the particular characteristics of each person, accept who they are and then work around that. Some children may need us to be clearer and firmer, others may need only a gentle reminder. Some children will find it hard to experience any type of change, others will

jump in quickly. To get you started, consider some of the broad categories of personality types; these include - intense, slow to warm up, easy. None of them are bad or good; each personality type simply has its own unique characteristics. Differences in personality types often lead to friction, arguments and misunderstandings in the family home.

Sibling rivalry is an inevitable part of family life

It is usually inevitable that some form of jealousies, envy or feeling put out will occur between siblings at various stages of their lives. One of the most effective ways to work with sibling rivalry as a parent is to attempt to avoid being the umpire. Empower your children to solve some of their disputes themselves, help them to see that you won't always be the one to fix things and save the situation. Obviously you may need to step in if arguments become physical, but most studies indicate that the normal run of the mill sibling rivalry isn't a problem for the children, just the parents!!

Tiredness in parents and children regularly means the wheels fall off

The end of the day is most commonly viewed as the most difficult in family life. That is not surprising, given that children and parents are usually most tired and less resilient at the end of a day. Always allow more time for routines such as bathing, getting ready for bed, stick to a routine that is unhurried but predictable and avoid any discussions that are potentially going to mean arguments or distress.

Inconsistent parenting techniques between parents

Whilst we may believe our values are similar as parents, it is often not until the arrival of a baby that we start to see where our different upbringings, past parenting from our own childhood and value systems may sometimes differ. It is extremely important for young children to have consistent parenting techniques within the same home. Whilst we can each be our own personality, we need to use the same strategies when working with our children. It is not fair for a child to have to keep adapting to different expectations. It also often undermines both parents or promotes a "good cop bad cop" mentality which is also unfair for the whole family. It is very important that parents spend time together to sort out and negotiate their parenting styles.

Ensuring happy school holidays

The holidays will be here shortly. It is something that children look forward to and for preschool and prep children, it is a great opportunity to rest up and recover a bit from their very first term at school or preschool. The beginning of formal education is often said to be the most mentally, emotionally and physically tiring time during childhood.

Therefore it is important to ensure for the whole family that the holidays are not so rushed and filled with extra curricula activities; that there is time for just playing at home, going to the park, playing games with siblings and friends and visiting family and friends.

You don't need to spend a lot of money for children to enjoy their holidays. Making play dough together at home, doing some cooking, going for a bike ride or walk or

visiting the beach. Riding on a tram or train or bus is exciting for some children. Visit the children's garden at the botanical gardens.

Encouraging your children to make up games, to build cubbies, to enjoy playing at home and inventing things helps your children's creativity.

Avoid spending lots of money and try to limit the amount of time children spend in front of TV, videos, computers and DS nintendos and Wii. Technology may have a place in a child's life, but it shouldn't be the dominant aspect of a child's life.

Holidays need to be simple, fun and creative where everyone can relax and enjoy some down time.

Kathy Walker

Never mistake knowledge for wisdom. One helps you make a living; the other helps you make a life."

Sandra Carey

Feature Article:

Supporting the Development of Language Skills in Young Children

Research has shown that language and literacy acquisition happens best in the context of caring attentive relationships. The biggest influence on children's early language development is the home.

The best context for learning to take place is a language rich environment, where parents communicate and interact with their children,

engage them in reading and storytelling activities and actively involve them in daily household routines.

Some children commence kindergarten with a vocabulary of over 3,000 words while others may have a vocabulary of fewer than 1000 words. Whilst these differences may be due to underlying developmental, speech or hearing problems (which may require specialist intervention) they can also be due to differences in the child's environment. A child who is rarely read to, sung to, or talked with, will not develop language at the same rate as the child actively immersed in a language rich environment.

Some of the Ways We Can Encourage Language and Development

- Encourage a talking environment. Talk about anything and everything throughout the day.
- Recognise that every situation is a chance to encourage language. Talk about colour texture, size, number and use opportunities to develop spatial concepts such as: up, down, over, under, into.
- Read stories and nursery rhymes and play word games. Reading should be a daily occurrence and don't worry if the child chooses the same story time and time again. Repetition is necessary for children to learn new language. Nursery rhymes and songs allow children to hear the flow and rhythm of language. Through stories, rhymes and songs, we can expose children to much rich and varied language.
- Encourage him/her to express views, feelings and ideas. "Do you think he liked that?"; "What do you think may happen next?"

- Use opportunities to extend your child's emotional vocabulary. Include words beyond happy and sad, for example, joyful, excited, frustrated, and disappointed.
- Allow the child to be the storyteller. They will often want to "read" to you; pre-reading for a child takes many forms; sometimes they are making up their own story; other times they are recounting a story you have read and other times they are telling a story prompted by pictures.
- Be a listener. A child needs to know that you are valuing and respecting what he/she is saying. Maintain eye contact and use positive body language, smiles and nods to communicate that you are listening. This in turn, will help your child to develop the crucial listening skills required for successful learning. Effective listening involves you hearing the meanings and feelings of your child and allows you the opportunity to rephrase and re-state in different words what your child has said. This affirms the child and shows that you understand the message. It is also a very positive way to model correct speech and to extend the child's vocabulary.
- Model correct language structure. Use complete sentences and pronounce words properly, avoid using slang and baby talk. You can also extend the child's language by adding to their incomplete sentences. For example,

Child: "Bike"

Parent: "Yes, there is a bike outside. What colour is the bike?"

Child: "Red."

Parent: "Yes. That is a red bike. How many wheels does it have?"

- By adding vocabulary and concepts you are expanding and scaffolding the child's understanding and experience.
- Avoid correcting all the time. Instead, re-state their words modelling correct form and pronunciation. Constant correction will create a sense of failure and discourage attempts.
- Provide and encourage opportunities for imaginative play and creative expression. Encourage role-play, drawing and dance and provide toys, materials and equipment that promote creativity and expression. A dress up box can be a world of wonder for a small child. Provide opportunities for interaction and play with other children.

Most importantly, have fun communicating with your child. Enjoy his/her development and celebrate every small achievement.

Maria Kyrgias

Children will not remember you for the material things you provided but for the feeling that you cherished them

Associate Profile: Maree Mullen

My name is Maree Mullen and I am the coordinator of the Australian Developmental Curriculum. I'm very excited to have joined the consultancy this year working alongside Kathy and her team of enthusiastic and dedicated staff.

This year is already proving a very busy time for the consultancy. The success and widespread interest in the Australian Developmental Curriculum is very exciting and I feel privileged to be part of the many

exciting initiatives and developments within the consultancy. This year I have travelled to the ACT and Darwin providing mentoring and support for the implementation of the Australian Developmental Curriculum.

I am thrilled to be working with such dedicated teachers and school staff and parents who share my passion for this approach

I have been a primary school teacher for many years in the Northern Region having spent the last six years as a prep coordinator. It was during this time that I met Kathy and with her ongoing support implemented the Australian Developmental Curriculum in my own classroom and within the prep unit. Since this time I have become a very strong advocate for this approach which engages children in developmentally appropriate experiences and practices whilst truly catering for their individual needs.

It's very refreshing to implement a curriculum that aligns with my own teaching and learning philosophy; a rigorous curriculum that is developmentally appropriate and engages children in play and uses these individual experiences as a springboard for the explicit teaching of literacy and numeracy.

I look forward to working with many of you in the future.

Marree Mullen

“Whatever they grow up to be, they are still our children, and the one most important of all the things we can give to them is unconditional love. Not a love that depends on anything at all except that they are our children.”

Principals Perspective: The Australian Developmental Curriculum

Many schools throughout metropolitan and country Victoria, Canberra, New South Wales, Northern Territory, and Western Australia are currently implementing Kathy Walker's Australian Developmental Curriculum. The outstanding success of The Australian Developmental Curriculum lies in its clear understanding of how young children develop and learn. The Australian Developmental Curriculum is based very firmly on the latest educational knowledge, and ensures that children are truly engaged in their learning whilst developing socially, emotionally, physically and cognitively. Formal literacy and numeracy lessons are very definitely an integral part of the curriculum – children are achieving excellent results in all areas, as they are having the opportunity to learn in the way that suits them best.

School principals today have the exciting but challenging task of ensuring that the curriculum offered by their school meets the unique needs of their clients – the students, the parent community, and the wider society in which they live, whilst also meeting the requirements of the relevant educational systems and the government of the day. Most importantly, principals have the responsibility for ensuring that the teaching and learning programs offered by their school represent world's best practice – and that those who make it all happen – the class teachers – have access to the very latest techniques, strategies, structures, support, technology, research, and knowledge about how children best learn and develop.

The Australian Developmental Curriculum provides an outstanding educational framework which encompasses and integrates all the requirements of best educational theory and practice.

The Australian Developmental Curriculum, with its user-friendly guide, "Play Matters", and its provision of on-going support from mentors and seminar meetings, ensures that principals and teachers have a clear structure and guidelines for developing exciting, relevant, rigorous and highly engaging learning experiences for young children. Children and their unique backgrounds and interests are at the centre of their learning experiences. Hands-on activities, open-ended tasks, creativity of thought, the fostering of individual learning styles and developmental needs and a focus on literacy and numeracy are all a reality in the Australian Developmental Curriculum classrooms. The classrooms are abuzz with language of exciting investigations, social co-operation and learning.

It is no wonder that principals in schools where the Australian Developmental Curriculum is being implemented report that children are achieving such pleasing results in all areas – socially, emotionally, physically, and academically.

Helen Newton

(Helen's previous leadership roles include principal Roberts McCubbin Primary School, principal Waverley North primary School, and Assistant Principal Ashwood School)

I've come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It's my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child's life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humour, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is my response that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or de-escalated and a child humanized or de-humanized."

Dr. Haim Ginott

The Australian Developmental Curriculum:

Upper Primary Years

In the middle and upper primary school classroom (grades 3-6) the Australian Developmental Curriculum replaces the traditional integrated studies units. Broad foci or areas of investigation are developed to comply with VELs requirements but specific topics are not set; instead the children are given the opportunity to develop Investigations or Education Research Projects based on their personal needs and interests and that sit beneath the broad foci.

Australian Developmental Curriculum sessions are conducted at least 3-4 times per week with the children following Individual Contracts they have negotiated between themselves and their teacher which set out areas of interest, time line for completion of various pieces of work and style of presentation of work. Students are regularly monitored and scaffolded during Australian Developmental Curriculum sessions to ensure specific learning outcomes are being reached and Individual Contracts are being followed.

At the completion of an area of investigation (timelines for these are outlined at the beginning when the broad foci is stated, some may take a few weeks, others may take the whole term) children present their work and findings at an Expo or Presentation session inviting members of the broader school community. Children also provide in depth presentations to other members of the grade which results in peer tutoring and student to student teaching. Evaluation is very extensive throughout this process and includes self, peer and teacher assessment and as with all Australian Developmental Curriculum sessions regardless of the age of the student extensive student conferencing and peer reflection takes place every session.

The Australian Developmental Curriculum approach to education greatly benefits the students in relation to socialisation, problem solving and engagement in learning. It allows for the children to self-direct and self-regulate their learning. It is based on individual learning styles, needs and interests and thus ensures children are interested, excited and engaged in their learning.

This is just a very brief “snapshot” of how this approach looks in the middle and senior areas of the school. If you require more information please don't hesitate to contact the consultancy. Kathy Walker and Associates are in the midst of writing the next text book for teaching the Australian Developmental Curriculum. Similar to “Play Matters” this new text “Play On” will be a user friendly, comprehensive and practical guide for teachers wanting to implement the Australian Developmental Curriculum in the upper primary years (grade 3-6). Watch this space for more information!

Emily Ryan

Newsletter Rap!

Don't forget to check out our website (www.kathywalker.com.au) on a regular basis; we pride ourselves on presenting a dynamic website. There is always something new being posted; whether it is a new parent fact sheet; some literature of interest being highlighted and updated information on the Australian Developmental Curriculum. Of course don't forget Kathy's blog; this is proving to be very popular as is her monthly editorial. Upcoming events, news and views are listed regularly. The term 2 community presentation schedule is also up and running so you can check out the topics of presentations and where Kathy and the team are speaking. Some of the upcoming topics for term 2 include: sibling rivalry, children's behaviour, school readiness and resilience.

Major Upcoming Events being Conducted By Kathy Walker and Associates in 2009!

- A 4-day Interstate Teachers Conference on the Australian Developmental Curriculum (June 22nd-26th): information on the Web
- Regional symposiums on the Australian Developmental Curriculum Across Victoria, ACT and NT
- Kathy Walker is a Keynote Speaker for Conferences for Principals in the North West and South West regions of Victoria, and WA Catholic Education Conference
- Community presentations on school readiness, children's behaviour and resilience as well as a new presentation for 2009 “Happy parents, happy children”
- Inaugural Australian Developmental Curriculum Conference

Children are the world's most valuable resource and its best hope for the future