



Welcome

Welcome to our second newsletter for 2009 and a particular welcome to our new subscribers. We look forward to continuing our free information, support and commentary that is accessible to as many people and organisations as possible.

In this edition there are several articles about the very important and emotional issues related to school readiness. Unfortunately, there are many confusing and incorrect messages out in the public arena about these important issues. Too often we find the media and professionals quote research that is poor quality and rated to be of a 'low level of evidence' to be sensational or to champion the cause for misguided policy and professional attitudes. In 'Kathys comment' you will read about what good quality and high levels of evidence tell us about school readiness.

Also included in this edition is information for parents who are choosing a school for their child next year. In this section we will suggest some questions you can ask the principals to drill down on the key issues and move them beyond the normal rhetoric about their school. Many parents are contacting the consultancy on a daily basis requesting information about which schools are implementing the Australian Developmental Curriculum. Our consultancy is now working with 100's of schools across the country that are implementing the Australian Developmental Curriculum.

We have included some questions parents can ask schools if they are interested in finding schools that are implementing the Australian Developmental Curriculum. The Australian Developmental Curriculum often known as the ADC has been designed by Kathy Walker who has used her theoretical and practical expertise as a child expert, teacher, academic and researcher. This curriculum has been researched for over five years and has proven to be more successful than traditional methods in the following areas:

- Higher levels of engagement and motivation
- Higher oral language skills
- Increased writing
- Increased pro social skills
- Decreased behavioural problems
- Increase in school attendance

Refer to the section on the Australian Developmental Curriculum if you are interested in your child attending a school that is implementing a developmentally appropriate curriculum that has been proven to be successful.

Kathy Walker and Associates is a not for profit enterprise that prides itself on educational best practice and a philosophy of providing support to all families, children and educators. We are also committed to working with families who are disadvantaged by socio-economic, geographical or cultural circumstances. We are excited to report to our readers that our initiatives developed to underpin this philosophy have been very successful. The new website launched late last year has consistently grown in popularity. In June the website had 2,419 "unique visitors" and a total number of 2,495 visits for that month! This year approximately 80 parents have been given support from our consultancy through our free parent support line (via phone or 'contact us' on the website). The consultancy has also conducted 85 parent evening presentations on topics ranging from school readiness, understanding children's behaviour, building resilience, sibling rivalry and happy parents happy children. The success of ADC has resulted in 100's of schools across the country working with our consultancy to implement this approach. Many ADC initiatives are being forged in Victorian regions; we are also working with schools and homeland communities in the NT; while in the ACT we are working with the early childhood schools and primary schools.

On behalf of Kathy Walker and Associates I welcome you to our term 2 newsletter. We hope that the holidays are a safe and joyous time for you and your family.

Shona Bass
Editor

In this Issue

Associate profile

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

Major topics in this issue

- Kathy's Comment: When to start a child at school
- Feature Article: School Readiness
- Choosing a School? Things to consider
- Australian Developmental Curriculum Schools
- Effective Parenting; find out more
- "Newsletter rap": Important notices including upcoming events / conferences
- Suggested Reading

Kathy's Comment

The Issue of when to Send a Child to School

As a consultancy we are all educators for over 30 years. We reflect a range of expertise including, researchers, academics, principals and classroom teachers. We are totally committed to ensuring that the journey upon which all children travel in their 13 years of schooling is the most positive, productive and beneficial as possible.

So many opinions, studies, comments and perspectives are discussed across the world on readiness for school. In recent times a few "newer" or "louder" perspectives have been offered based upon supposed 'research' or commentary of the moment. Here are some of the most frequent comments made in recent times: " We should simply just make schools more ready for children" "Children catch up and perform as well academically whether they have been to school younger or older"

We believe that the simplistic view of making schools ready for children ignores basic and fundamental elements of what children require and if we followed the argument put forward to make schools ready for children, and then children could enrol at age 2 or younger!!

In addition, researchers often quote results of children who have repeated a year at school, often not quoting the range of variables, the range of reasons for children doing so, as an argument for not retaining them based upon similar academic scores of children once they reach VCE. They often use these flawed and misleading studies based

upon retention during the school years, often in secondary years, and extrapolate these studies into an assumption that therefore children should not have the benefit of an additional year to mature and develop skills before they even enter school.

We will be writing some formal academic papers and journal articles about these issues in more detail in the coming months but for the purposes of this newsletter we make the following points.

Earlier this year it was reported in The Age, that there was no evidence to suggest that children could benefit from an additional year of life and maturation before starting school and that in fact it may be harmful. Unfortunately the media gave much credence to the stated outcomes of this study without looking further into the quality and power of the study to make such claims. A review of the full manuscript of this study revealed that the methodology, the assumptions it made and the links that were made to suggest that children would not benefit from an extra year before starting school were all flawed. This type of misleading and less than accurate research sends fear and misunderstanding throughout communities that are already stressed about the decision of when to send a child to school.

In addition, other studies that have considered the issue of repeating during primary or secondary years do not identify children's lack of maturity as a factor in these studies, nor do they measure or study the aspects of self esteem, resilience, attitude toward school or the quality of the journey of 13 years of schooling. Nor do they describe or define the additional tutoring, counselling or additional supports that may have been required in some instances.

The vast majority of these studies simply confuse repeating a year of school with the same issues as delaying the start of school for a year or having an additional early childhood year if needed.

However, most importantly, what these studies fail dismally to do is highlight the fact that finishing your final year of school and receiving a range of marks and scores is actually not the only or most important way of meaning a child's "success".

For decade after decade, teachers in preschool and the first year of school and teachers throughout the school system, including secondary years, highlight and identify many children who were simply not mature enough to make the most of, enjoy, participate as fully and experience a high level of well being.

So many children arrive at school and start to struggle emotionally, behaviourally, or simply slip through the net. They hardly get noticed and yet they often underperform or find the effort of trying to socialise and be like everyone else very difficult.

As a consultancy, we will soon be providing a full literature review of international studies that highlight the fact that it is the quality of the journey, the emotional and social aspects of school life and not simply a score that provides the deeper level of information about what is most important about a child's schooling.

We are tired of hearing some professionals quoting studies that say, "There is no difference, the results at the end of schooling are similar".

Life, learning, the journey one takes, the sense of self and esteem and belief about yourself as a learner, all of these things are fundamental to making a child's education holistic and meaningful.

Life is not as simple as a score, despite the number of people who attempt to narrow a child's education and the quality of it based upon the end result of 13 years based upon a score.

In addition, Australia continues to have one of the youngest age entries into school across the western world. We actually believe that for most children, having more time to mature, to experience life, to develop skills, to have more opportunity for rich play based curriculum (which international research highlights increasingly the importance for all children) is a fundamental right and need for all children.

Why some academics and researchers feel the need to prove that there is no difference of when a child starts school and therefore encourage parents to rush their children into school is beyond understanding.

A successful life and holistic education, is not just about academic outcomes. Being able to enjoy a rich childhood and specialised early childhood programs must be viewed as an imperative in these early years.

Our consultancy spends all day every day helping schools to introduce a play based curriculum across first to third years of school through the Australian Developmental Curriculum. This itself is helping schools to readjust and recognise that children's learning is not just about explicit instruction for 6 hours each day. Schools using this approach are more ready than they have ever been to help children adjust and make the most of their learning.

However, we argue strongly, supported by the results of international research as well as holding a strong philosophical stance, that children need more time of childhood, play and a strong sense of self, rather than being placed into school at an earlier and earlier age.



Our focus is always upon the importance of childhood and the simple aspects of life

A successful education is not about a race that has to be run to see who gets off at the starting line first and finishes first. It is about the fundamental right for all children to have a high quality early childhood without hurrying them into school before they are ready.

Kathy Walker

Feature Article: Understanding School Readiness

Why is School Readiness so Important?

Each child is unique, with an individual set of characteristics, and an individual developmental pattern which is influenced by both genetic and environmental conditions.

Developmental milestones in all areas of development (physical, cognitive, language, social and emotional) are attained at different rates and times for each child.

The concept of "school readiness" has concerned early childhood educators at both preschool and primary school levels for several years. Children who have commenced school without developing vital readiness skills, have been identified as "at risk" for their future academic, social and occupational success.

Kathy Walker (2005), in her book, "What's the Hurry?" emphasises the importance of allowing today's children sufficient time to mature and develop, and to benefit

socially and emotionally from their preschool experiences of life, before starting school.

The Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY) has recently published (February 2007) a research paper on the importance of school readiness.

In this document, Dr Estelle Farrar, Dr Sharon Goldfeld, Dr Tim Moore from The Royal Children's Hospital, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, acknowledge that the experiences of early childhood have lifelong implications for our health, well-being, and development, including our ability to become productive, socially and emotionally adjusted members of society.

Drs Farrar, Goldfeld and Moore also emphasise that gaps in children's functioning and achievement develop early and may be significant by the time they reach school. Children who enter school not yet ready to learn tend to do less well in school, and are more likely to experience social and emotional difficulties throughout their lives.

With the increasing complexity of our world today, and the corresponding increases in the skills needed by young people entering adult society, school readiness has never been more important.

When is a Child Ready for School?

Previously, school readiness was understood in one of two ways: it was either simply assumed on the basis of chronological age, and children were admitted into school when they reached the designated age; or it was thought of in terms of specific skills and competencies that could be measured and assessed against established norms and standards.

More recently, however, a rethinking of what constitutes school readiness has occurred in the context of our increasing understanding of the importance of the development of the whole child, and the formative influences of the early years of childhood.

Overall, current research highlights the importance of considering all aspects of a child's development when considering "school readiness". It is essential to provide support, experiences and effective early intervention strategies, where necessary, to optimise a child's development - well before a child approaches school entry.

Developmental Domains of School Readiness

The concept of "school readiness" also encompasses an understanding of the developmental 'domains' considered relevant to a child's readiness to manage the complex demands of a formal school environment.

"School readiness" refers to the physical, socio-emotional, language and cognitive developmental milestones children should ideally have achieved, under optimal circumstances, before they enter school.

Thus, school readiness is not restricted to levels of cognitive development, but is multidimensional, involving physical, social, and emotional development as well as general approaches to learning.



The journey through school is a long one. Let's make it as easy and exciting and wonderful as possible

Can School Readiness be assessed?

Parents and early childhood educators have in-depth knowledge of the children in their care, based on their expertise, their understanding of each individual child's developmental milestones, their environment, and their personal experiences.

On occasions, parents, in partnership with the early childhood teacher, form a strong belief that a child is not quite ready for school – that his/her development in one or more of the developmental domains; (social; emotional; physical; language; or cognitive) has not yet reached sufficient maturity to be able to cope easily with school.

Quite often, the decision is clear – the indicators are strong, and unambiguous – the preschooler would benefit from a further year in a preschool setting. However, there are times when a third opinion may be very helpful, and both parents and early childhood educators seek an external professional opinion to provide an objective viewpoint.

An independent school readiness assessment from a qualified early childhood educator, or child psychologist will include a range of observations and incorporate the latest professional and theoretical understandings about child development. Developmental information from the parents and the preschool teacher is also an important consideration for the external consultant.

What Can Parents Do?

Research indicates that language facility and social and emotional development are the significant factors for on-going successful learning throughout both primary and secondary years.

Parents often ask what they should look for in the language, social and emotional domains of school readiness.

In general, children who are ready for school are co-operative with adults and with other children. They show self control in most situations, follow the rules of their home and preschool, and can use their free time in an acceptable way. They are happy to share their toys and other belongings – and can give in or compromise with their friends when appropriate.

Socially, children who have well developed “school readiness” show concern for other children, and comfort other children who are upset. They show affection for other children, and like to invite other children to join in their games. In return, they are accepted and liked by their friends.

Social interaction is an important indicator of school readiness. Children who have developed maturity in this area like to play with several different children, they can also work and play independently when required. They make friends easily and are invited by other children to play

They adapt well to different environments, and are able to separate from their parent easily.

They can stand up for their rights by using their language skills to negotiate an outcome.

They are confident in social situations, and relate well to their teachers and other adults.

Children who are ready for school have well developed language skills. They use words rather than body language to express a feeling or a need, communicate well with their peers, and speak clearly enough to be understood by others. Their vocabulary is well developed, and they use language creatively to describe what they are doing.

Children, who are ready for school like to participate in classroom discussions, enjoy singing songs and saying little rhymes. They love to listen to stories, and to look at picture books. They are becoming aware of the link between language and print, and may start to recognise their own name, and some symbols in their environment. They are confident to ask for help from adults when needed, and to seek comfort from an adult when hurt.

Parents can provide a range of wonderful experiences and positive reinforcement to help their children develop these skills.

For a number of children, however, a further year of maturity, experience and guidance at preschool may be required to enable their language skills, emotional skills and their social interaction skills to mature and develop sufficiently to allow them to deal with the complex social demands of the school environment.

For these children, the benefits of a further preschool year may extend throughout their schooling, and indeed, throughout their lives.

School Readiness Assessments

Kathy Walker and Associates, as qualified preschool teachers with additional qualifications, are available to conduct individual School Readiness Assessments.

These assessments may assist parents and teachers in their decision making process as to whether a child could benefit from an additional year in preschool before commencing school.

Further details can be obtained on the website:
www.kathywalker.com.au

Helen Newton

A number of factors in the emotional and social domains such as; independence, responsibility, self regulation and co-operation predicts how well children make the transitions to school and how they fare in the early grades.

Copple and Bredekamp 2009

Choosing the Best School for You and Your Child

A child's primary years form the foundation for life learning. They are the vital years of literacy, numeracy and of social, emotional and intellectual growth. These are the years when a lifetime love of learning should begin.

How then, as parents, can you make the very best choice of school for your child?

You have the right of choice and there is great diversity of choice but there is no one best school. What is ideal for one family may not reflect the values, beliefs, aspirations and needs of another.

For some families, the choice may be between public, religious or independent schools, or between single or co-educational. Or it may be a commitment to a particular educational philosophy. For others proximity to the home or the availability of before and after school care may be crucial factors.

You know best your child's strengths and weaknesses, personality, interests and abilities. Sometimes it is useful to write a list of what is important to you and your family and then find the school which best meets these needs.

Some considerations:

- Will your child thrive in a large school or does he/she need a smaller setting?
- How far are you prepared to travel?
- Do you want a school in your immediate locality? Is this important socially for you and your child?
- Does the school offer small class sizes? Is there additional class support?
- Does the school offer extracurricular activities such as sport, music, sport, camps etc?
- Does your child have special needs that will require additional support?
- How is the children's wellbeing and safety ensured?

Once you know what you are looking for, it is important that you visit some of the schools that appear to meet your needs.

Make an appointment to speak with the principal and visit the classrooms. Most principals will be happy to show individual parents around as well as conduct group tours. If not, you must wonder why. It is important to see the interaction between teachers and children.

Make a list of questions to ask so that you come away with specific information. Promotional brochures and pamphlets may not address all your queries and concerns. You may wish to ask about school policies, parent involvement in the school, student well being and behaviour strategies, or whether class groupings are multi-age or straight. You may ask what particular philosophy and approach to teaching is used and how parents are kept informed? What are the schools assessment and reporting procedures?

Open-ended questions require more comprehensive answers so instead of, "Do you have instances of bullying in the school?" you might say "Tell me about your student well being policy". Feel confident to ask for more details and examples if the answers given do not seem adequate.

The actual visit is vital. Trust your instincts. You will feel whether it is the right school for your child and your family.

Some positive signs:

- Children are happy and absorbed. Don't worry about the noise; this is inevitable if the children are actively engaged in a range of activities and experiences
- Leadership team and staff are welcoming.
- Interaction between staff and children is positive. There is evidence of mutual liking and respect.
- Classrooms are bright and cheerful.
- Displays are mainly children's work.
- There is evidence that the children's work is valued.
- Outdoor space and other facilities are well utilised and welcoming for children. There are adequate sheltered areas.
- Children are happy at play.
- The school buildings, corridors and grounds are obviously cared for.

It does seem like a daunting task, but if you have confidence in the knowledge of your child and in what you know will be the best for her/him, you will make the right choice.

Most schools do a great job and most teachers are dedicated professionals.

Good luck and enjoy the journey.

Maria Kyrgias

The Australian Developmental Curriculum Schools

Research now comprehensively confirms that 'how you learn is as important as what you learn; and that successful programs are those that encourage playful learning where children are actively engaged in meaningful discovery" (Hirsh-Pasek et al 2009). Consistent with this understanding is a fast forming and committed ground swell of parent and teacher support for this approach. The challenge of course is to find a curriculum that provides a delicate mix of the concrete hands on experiences that are real, relevant and meaningful for children to use as a springboard for the explicit teaching of numeracy and literacy while developing all the important developmental domains. Like any pedagogical approach there needs to be rigorous theoretically underpinning, practical application and extensive research to confirm the approach successfully achieves these outcomes. The Australian Developmental Curriculum when implemented with rigor and integrity has been proved to achieve all of these criteria.

To help parents find schools who are implementing the Australian Developmental Curriculum and that the teachers are being mentored by one of our associates we have listed the following questions you may like to ask.

- Has your staff been working with Kathy Walker and Associates?
- How long has the school been implementing the approach?
- At what grades is the school implementing the Australian Developmental Curriculum?
- Is your school certified by Kathy Walker and Associates for implementing the Australian Developmental Curriculum according to the approach designed by Kathy Walker?
- If you would like to know if a school in your area is currently implementing the Australian Developmental Curriculum, please email us via the contact us option on the website.



We are proud of the word, its meaning and its importance

Let children PLAY!!!

Associate Profile: Emily Ryan

Hi my name is Emily Ryan and I took up an associate position with Kathy Walker and Associates at the end of 2008 after spending many years as a primary school teacher and co-ordinator. My current role with Kathy Walker and Associates is as the Rural/Regional Consultant for the Bendigo / Shepparton / Swan Hill / Mildura regions and surrounding areas as well as doing work in the Northern Territory and other areas of Australian which is a very exciting part of my position.

Throughout my teaching career I have worked mostly in country and rural areas of the state and have had a wide range of experience in all curriculum areas and grade levels both as a classroom teacher, specialist and curriculum co-coordinator with much of my teaching career being as a prep teacher and junior school co-coordinator.

I have implemented the Australian Developmental Curriculum into my level 4 classroom practice. My personal experience with implementing the Australian Developmental Curriculum has given me the opportunity to observe firsthand the great benefits and extensive learning that occurs in an Australian Developmental Curriculum classroom due to the rigorous planning, explicit teaching

and learning and extensive assessment practices that sit alongside the developmental domains that form the basis of this approach.

During my time as an Associate I have had the opportunity to work in many different schools from Public to Catholic, very small two teacher schools to large schools of 500 or more students. The one thing that always strikes me when walking into an Australian Developmental Curriculum classroom is how the children are engaged, completely on task and most of all happy!! It is so wonderful to walk into these classrooms and hear the buzz that comes from little children who are taking part in meaningful play experiences, sharing, co-operating and working with their peers, planning, predicting and problem solving and most importantly having fun and really enjoying the learning experiences they are taking part in. The other thing that I have noticed while visiting schools across the state is that every single teacher I speak to whether they are just starting out on their journey implementing the Australian Developmental Curriculum or one or two years along the road is that they are all excited and enthusiastic about teaching and learning and their role within the Developmental Curriculum classroom. Many teachers have even stated that they had come to a cross roads in their teaching career and that the Australian Developmental Curriculum has added new life and excitement to their tired and mundane teaching practice; and they once again love coming to school and teaching in a very purposeful, engaging way.

I am extremely honoured to be part of the great work that Kathy Walker and our team are doing across the country and love the fact that I am able to help improve teaching and learning in our schools and most importantly help to provide our children with exciting, engaging and meaningful learning experiences that will help to develop them into happy, lifelong learners.

Emily Ryan

Because of how children spend their time outside school, many young children now lack the ability to play at the high level of complexity and engagement that affords so many cognitive, social and emotional benefits. As a result, it is vital for early childhood settings to provide opportunity for sustaining high level play and for teachers to actively support children's progress towards such play.

Copple and Bredekamp 2009

Effective Parenting

Parenting often has its challenging moments.....

We are proud to provide parent workshops and parenting talks for all families. On the 1st and 2nd of August we are conducting a weekend intensive parenting workshop. This will provide couples with the opportunity to share key understandings about effective and positive parenting. It will also provide a safe and caring environment for couples to identify and work through common parenting issues. If you are interested in finding more about parenting workshops please contact us either by phone (03 9855 1243) or via the "contact us" link on the website



"Be the change you want to see in the world"

Mahatma Gandhi

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; new 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 3 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 3 include: sibling rivalry, children's behaviour, school readiness, preparation for school 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
- ADC Initiatives in Warburton, Bendigo, Ballarat, NT and the ACT
- 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
- A new weekend intensive parenting workshop being conducted on 1st and 2nd august.

Suggested Reading

The following text books on best practice in developmentally appropriate education can be purchased or borrowed from the Gowrie Victoria bookshop:

Walker Kathy
Play Matters. Engaging Children in Learning; The Australian Developmental Curriculum
ACER Press Camberwell 2007

Copple C and Bredekamp S
Developmentally Appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs. National Association for the Education of Young Children. USA 2009

Gestwicki C
Developmentally Appropriate Practice. Curriculum and Development in Early Education. 3rd edition
Thomson Delmar Learning, Clifton Park, NY 2007

Hirsh-Pasek K, Michnick Golinkoff R, Berk LE, Singer DG
A Mandate for Playful Learning in Preschool Presenting the Evidence
Oxford University Press, New York 2009

Hirsh-Pasek K, Michnick Golinkoff R
Einstein Never Used Flash Cards
Rodale Inc. USA 2004

Edward Miller and Joan Almon (2009). **Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School.** College Park, Maryland: Alliance for Childhood.
http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/sites/allianceforchildhood.org/files/file/kindergarten_report.pdf

"Education is the best provision for the journey to old age"

Aristotle