



# Early Life Foundations

Education Consultancy, Research & Parent Support

## WELCOME TO 2013

The new Early Life Foundations Centre (ELF Centre) has been the highlight of the new year! A bus load of early childhood educators from Gippsland launched PD at the Centre this year with a whole day session in early January. The word is spreading about the excellent opportunity to compliment theory with practice through our Training Room, Demonstration Unit and Zart Art Showroom. We are being kept busy with the many requests from groups for customised sessions conducted at the ELF Centre. Please contact our office if you would like to know more about booking a customised session.

Another exciting initiative we are launching this year is our inaugural Monday Night Parent Sessions at the ELF Centre. These sessions not only provide the opportunity for parents to learn more about being proactive and positive parents, but they also provide

an opportunity to meet Kathy and myself, and to mingle with other parents over a cup of tea or coffee. To book in or find more details on these sessions, please visit our website.

The inaugural Early Life Foundations Conference being held on 19 October this year boasts an impressive list of renowned international and national speakers. The conference program "Personalising Learning for the Whole Child" will provide thought provoking theory and practice underpinning authentic personalised learning. This conference will inspire teachers and parents to think of the child beyond just the academic - that the child comes with a context of the self, peers, family, culture and the broader community. Register through our website to be part of this exciting and inspiring day!

On behalf of myself, Kathy and the team we welcome you back for an exciting and enjoyable 2013!

### Shona Bass

Director

## COMMENT: IMPROVING CHILDREN'S LEARNING OUTCOMES IS RELATED TO 'HOW' WE TEACH, NOT 'WHAT' WE TEACH

The new national curriculum provides consistency across Australia in terms of what our children are taught - the content, skills and understandings. The Federal Government's Building Education Revolution (BER) provided the opportunity for schools to build wonderful learning spaces - many open plan learning spaces, consistent with moving the classroom environment from a single classroom to a community of learners. While the Australian Curriculum, new buildings, and new IT are great initiatives, they do not translate to an improvement in the quality of teaching or our children's learning outcomes. The only way to improve children's learning outcomes in a meaningful and authentic way is to improve the teaching practice!

**The way we teach (the 'how') is so much more important than the 'what' we teach, or the buildings we teach in or the new tools we use.**

International best practice demonstrates convincingly that to improve learning outcomes for children we need to improve the quality of teaching.

To achieve this, Australian education needs:

- > Intelligent leaders who know how to lead teams away from past practices into new evidence based practices
- > Reflective teachers who are open to new ideas

- > The study of Education in the tertiary sector to be viewed as a privilege and that a place to study Education at university is comparable to a place in the study of Law or Medicine
- > The tertiary sector to provide cutting edge teacher training and skill development in evidence based teaching and learning
- > A government that embraces the position that teacher education cannot be achieved in 6 weeks or 12 months - teacher education requires significant understanding and development of the knowledge and practice of teaching.

To teach is highly challenging! Teaching is to reflect upon and understand the nature of individual temperament, family life and culture, learning styles and personalities, to interpret curriculum appropriately within context of the community, the children and the families you work within, to build relationships, to communicate effectively, to make learning come alive and to be meaningful for the student! The quality and effectiveness of learning outcomes for our children will not improve until the actual teaching practice (the "how") is given the credence and support by the government to facilitate improvement in the rigour and effectiveness of teaching practice.

Australian teachers deserve the respect from the government to move beyond political point scoring, standardised testing pressure and to be given the opportunity to improve their professional practice to be truly cutting edge. If we really want our children to be engaged in learning and to have the skills and passion to be successful learners, we need to provide the same opportunities and respect to those who have the privileged responsibility to teach our children.

Shona Bass, Director

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# LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS: PROCESS, NOT END PRODUCT

It is an exciting time for us here at Early Life Foundations to have our own Centre with our own Demonstration Unit with many learning centers and play spaces set up for educators to visit and gain ideas from. In addition, we have just released a new DVD on learning environments and how to set up different play spaces with ideas on provocations, resources and materials.

In early childhood it is particularly important that our play learning experiences never stray too far from remaining true to those wonderful open-ended experiences where children's own imaginations, creations and ideas can come to the surface and be explored. That wonderful phrase, **the process not the end product** is one that has always been a main stay for my practice and in my work with early childhood educators. For children to have that true opportunity to explore the process, to explore the properties of materials, to experiment with, to investigate, to imagine and to engage richly is very important.

In recent years, there has been a disturbing shift in some areas of early childhood away from this wonderful open-ended process not end product emphasis. A mentality of projects seems to have crept in where children are expected to continue on investigating the properties of a butterfly or ladybug for days on end. This seems to be often when it is the adult who is driving this and the child or children are not intellectually even interested! At times it seems the art display or the installation of the work of the child or the narrative written all over the work of the child seems to have taken precedence over the actual experience of the child. Sometimes, in our efforts to capture the richness and importance of the child's voice or expression, we seem to have felt the need to write a thesis or construct a huge portfolio, which sometimes seems to devalue the often spontaneous moment. Children's play, as evidenced by research throughout the centuries is rich, wonderful, justified, important, necessary and also able to be utilised as parts of pedagogy in early childhood. We don't actually need to over document it or write so much about it all of the time. It's a bit over kill!

The learning environment must reflect the opportunities for children to explore, investigate and to learn through interactions, use of materials, rich oral language, and all the play based areas we embrace in early childhood. There seems little need to follow down the path of our primary colleagues and place children into working on projects for days at a time which they will have to do once they arrive at school for the following 13 years!

Thinking about brain development, how children perceive, think, learn, how they often live in a moment rather than days or weeks at a time, reminds us that our programs and learning environments need to offer children opportunities for extension in ways that don't require the formalisation of learning and projects that seem to be popping up across many early childhood programs.

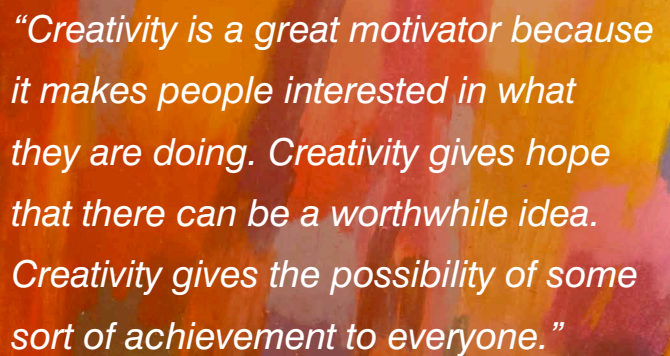
I often wonder what has happened to sensory areas where children don't have to explore the Antarctica but can simply explore the properties of the tactile, the feeling of things, the touch, the texture, the smell, the taste? What has happened to the pasting table where

children don't have to produce an ongoing installation of their house, but rather explore the feeling of the paste on their fingers, and enjoy pulling out the masking tape, learning how to place certain materials together, how things work or don't work together?

Personalising learning requires early childhood educators to ensure open-ended learning centres and play spaces that allow for children's interests, skill development and exploration. Intentional learning and emergent curriculum does not mean projects!

The beginning of a year is a good time to audit how open-ended the play spaces really are. Lets embrace process, not end product and write less and enjoy the moment of creativity with children more!

**Kathy Walker, Director**



*“Creativity is a great motivator because it makes people interested in what they are doing. Creativity gives hope that there can be a worthwhile idea. Creativity gives the possibility of some sort of achievement to everyone.”*

Edward de Bono

## Download

one of our fact sheets on open-ended experiences or purchase our new DVD on learning centres at [www.earlylife.com](http://www.earlylife.com)



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Check out thousands of photos of learning centres on our Facebook pages!

## HOW YOU TOO CAN TAKE BACK A BIT OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE!

Work-Life balance – it's a common phrase that slips off the tongue but how do individuals, especially parents, maintain it when they're busy working, parenting, caring, running households and trying to have a life?

My experience is that 'work-life balance' can be a narrow phrase. Life is more like a recipe; you have your core ingredients and then the flavours and spices that make it unique. Each time you cook the recipe it may differ slightly, much like the weeks, months and years of our lives as our responsibilities, priorities and values shift.

As a parent this is even more relevant as you cannot always control what your ingredients are! We've all had the days when a sick child is thrown into the ingredients and you still have to get the recipe to work!

Whatever role you have in life, there will always be constraints around you. You need to have some tools available to help you include as many ingredients into your recipe, and sometimes to simplify it because it's just too complicated right now.

Try working through these tips and see if you can complete your recipe a little easier this week:

- > Identify what you need to be a content person in life. What do you want to add to your lifestyle recipe and what needs deleting? Is it exercise, greater career challenge, more socialising or family time?
- > Create your wish list and take time to analyse your 'ideal life'. Take steps towards it, such as booking your dream holiday or opening a new bank account to start saving for it.
- > Be reasonable. Try to work with your manager/family/and your team to achieve your preferred lifestyle recipe.
- > Set expectations around your lifestyle recipe and prove that you can make it work without letting anyone down.
- > Be creative when it comes to how your lifestyle recipe can work in your family/work-life. Talk to colleagues, see if they have a personal need and perhaps together you can achieve the needs of the team and your personal ones too.

Don't wait for others to pave the way. Be accountable for your own lifestyle, change has to start with you, the individual. Work out what you want, the constraints you have and reset the expectations of those around you accordingly. Just remember that flexibility needs to occur within you and others and in the words of U2, "Some days are better than others".

### Debbie Marks

Director, The Edge Coaching and Training



[www.theedgecoaching.org](http://www.theedgecoaching.org)

*"It is utterly false and cruelly arbitrary to put all the play and learning into childhood, all the work into middle age, and all the regrets into old age."*

Margaret Mead



*Kathy and Shona at the Early Life Foundations Centre Grand Opening*

## VENUE HIRE

The Early Life Foundations Centre is available for hire! Located in Bayside Melbourne, the ELF Centre is a purpose designed training, consulting and function venue that offers great amenities.

Bookings: 03 9596 9056



The Walker Learning Approach is the first major Australian based total and holistic pedagogy (Preschool to Year 8) 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.

## 2012 WLA AWARDS

We were proud to announce our 2012 awards in recognition of exemplary practice in the Walker Learning Approach by hosting schools and educators from all across Australia, local parents and a range of organisations at our annual end of year celebration in late December.

### Visionary and Effective Leadership:

Ray Higgins, Antonio Catholic School, South Australia  
Kerry Hudson, Anula PS, Northern Territory  
Jan Walsh & Tracey Stewart, Monash PS, ACT

### Exemplary Teaching & Learning Practice:

Anna Redlich & Tarryn Anderson, Beaumaris PS, Victoria  
Rick Pedetti, Jenny Hill, Jenny Parsons, Angela Alessi & Felicity Blake, Sandringham PS, Victoria  
Jacquie Thomas, Stockdale Road PS, Victoria  
Mandy Ryan, Ferntree Gully North PS, Victoria  
Tanya DiLernia, Antonio Catholic School, South Australia  
Janelle Thorne & Simone Nicholson Pedder- Anula PS, Northern Territory  
Claire Parsons, Sandringham East PS, Victoria

### Above and Beyond:

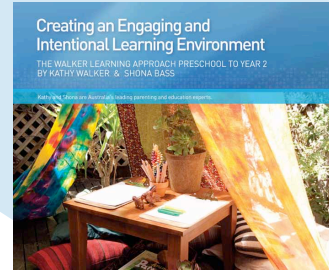
Andrea Cummins, Wilson Street Kindergarten, Victoria

## WLA PODCASTS

Keep an eye out for new podcasts on our online shop!

## WLA DVD EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

The learning environment is a critical element of the Walker Learning Approach. The environment, provocations, materials and resources are what will ultimately provide the richness, engagement and personalising of the learning and provides opportunities for teachers to scaffold and to make links to the learning intentions. Visit our online shop for your own copy!



## MONDAY NIGHT PARENT SESSIONS

Our Monday Night Parent Sessions are being held at the ELF Centre in Brighton throughout the year. Join Kathy and Shona for these parenting sessions that will provide information and strategies that are simple, respectful and empowering for parents and children.



## DR. GEORGE OTERO, CENTER FOR RELATIONALEARNING

We are looking forward to hearing Dr. Otero, Director of the Centre for Relational Learning speak at our conference this October! Don't forget to have a look at Dr. Otero's new website, [www.relationalearning.com](http://www.relationalearning.com)



## EARLY LIFE FOUNDATIONS 2013 CONFERENCE – MELBOURNE, SATURDAY OCTOBER 19

If you are committed to authentically personalising learning, this conference is a must! The program offers an interactive day with high quality international and national speakers who will provide thought provoking theory and practice underpinning authentic personalised learning. Places are limited, so please book in early!  
[www.earlylife.com.au/info/conference-2013](http://www.earlylife.com.au/info/conference-2013)



## NEW PD WITH ZART ART

In collaboration with Zart Art, this year we are conducting professional development sessions together to model the range of rich provocations and uses of materials to use in a rich range of open-ended ways to provoke thinking, imagination, creativity, skill development, language and other areas of learning.



We can be contacted via the 'contact us' on the website or calling the office 03 9596 9056  
Visit: [walkerlearning.com.au](http://walkerlearning.com.au)