

# MOTHER TERESA CATHOLIC COLLEGE

## EARLY LEARNING APPROACH

### WALKER LEARNING APPROACH POLICY

YEAR DRAFTED: 2014

Reviewed: 2017

Review 2019

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#### RATIONALE

##### *The Learning Environment*

*Children require an environment that reflects and respects their interests & ideas, provides creative and open-ended experiences, offers opportunities to work alone or alongside each other and promotes a sense of authentic choice.*

*The learning environment is one of the most important ways to personalise learning. It is informed by child development theory, the intentional planning of the teacher and the current interests of the children. It promotes motivation, inspiration and belonging. The learning environment is child centred, rich in a range of materials, resources and opportunities in which children can engage. The attention to detail in the learning environment provides the richness of the learning and the overall engagement of the children. (The Walker Learning Approach)*

INQUIRY LEARNING Walker Learning Approach (WLA) is an Australian designed teaching and learning approach that aims to engage children from early childhood right through to their early teenage years using a range of strategies that authentically personalises learning. It is implemented across Australia and internationally. Children, parents and teachers embrace the approach as it relates to the real worlds in which children live.

Our school buildings are a great example of how innovative building design has focused on flexible learning spaces, tangibly supports best practice and enhances 21st century learning. A special feature of the way we 'do' teaching and learning here is through inquiry play-based learning in our contemporary and versatile learning spaces.

##### *The Walker Learning Approach ensures that:*

- Children's interests are used as the predominant means for learning experiences alongside explicit teaching of skills and understandings in literacy and numeracy.
- Children's interests are expanded, scaffolded and supported as a means of ongoing engagement in particular learning areas.

- Investigations are the major pedagogical tool for teaching and learning – alongside formal instruction.
- The nature of experiences for the children promotes creativity, imagination and scope for the child to explore processes – not just end products – and seek to encourage children to pursue some of their learning experiences into ongoing projects for either short or longer periods of time.
- Observation and documentation by teachers of key skills, needs, strengths and interests of individual children is used to further plan and implement appropriate experiences and set further learning and development objectives.
- Skill instruction sessions, small and large group times are still used within the classroom including additional explicit literacy and numeracy sessions each day.
- Teachers must still direct, scaffold, extend or intervene with children in order to ensure that children are actively engaged and learning.
- At Mother Teresa's we use a mix throughout the day of active hands-on investigations alongside group times, personal reflection times, skill instruction and other learning experiences provided by the school.

All these features of the way we provide teaching and learning, implemented with integrity and rigour here at Mother Teresa's, result in

- Higher levels of engagement and motivation
- Higher oral language skills
- Increased writing
- Increased prosocial skills
- Decreased behavioural problems
- Greater level of personalised learning opportunities
- Improved problem-solving and creative thinking
- Increased independence and interdependence

### **Year Pre-Primary – 2**

'Investigation time' takes place two mornings per week. The aim of the WLA classroom is to promote a sense of wonder, exploration, investigation and interest with a rich range of materials, resources and opportunities in which children can engage. Play and active investigation gives children opportunities to develop physical competence and enjoyment, to understand and make sense of their world, to interact with others, express and control emotions, and develop problem solving abilities. Research shows strong links between play and foundational capacities such as memory, oral language capabilities, self-regulation, social skills and success at school in general.

### **Collage Area.**

The collage area provides rich opportunities for a never ending range of creativity and experimentation with all sorts of materials and where much literacy and numeracy occurs. The materials are open-ended and the focus is on the process rather than the end product.

### **Construction Area.**

Children construct knowledge and understandings through hands-on creating. These experiences stimulate imagination and creativity and develop and extend spatial, geometric and thinking skills. The construction area provides opportunities for children to develop, plan, represent ideas, map out, construct, problem solve and complete designs. This area provides many opportunities to scaffold literacy and numeracy skills.

### **Role Play Area.**

Children need many opportunities for dramatic play. This is a major way in which rich oral language and a range of literacy and numeracy skills are developed along with problem solving, decision making, persistence, collaboration, negotiation, creativeness and lateral thinking. The language in dramatic play is rich and purposeful and authentic. Children are highly motivated and engaged and the vocabulary, grammar, articulation and listening skills are highly evident in these areas. Through dramatic play, children explore perspectives and roles of others through opportunities to act out what they experience or observe in their own lives.

### **Drawing/Writing Area.**

An area with pens, papers, and scissors and work-in-progress signs helps to create a learning environment to enable children to see that their writing and reading skills are an integral and purposeful tool in their investigations. Signs around this area, with letter formations modelled and with all sorts of paper and pens accessible to children, invite them to use writing and documenting within context and not just at a 'specific' writing time.

### **Reading Area.**

Reading areas are used for relaxing, reading, researching, sharing information and storytelling. They are quiet, attractive and defined spaces, which also reflect an exciting or inviting place for children to visit. Reading spaces hold a range of non-fiction as well as fiction books that children may use in their research.

### **Mathematics Area.**

An area with counters, scales, 2D and 3D shapes, pattern blocks, cubes, dice and work-in progress signs helps to create a learning environment that children can then associate with numeracy as an integral and purposeful tool in their investigations. Many aspects of real life experiences promote numeracy and key elements include experiencing and representing, classification, seriation, number, time, spatial relations, shapes, colour, relative portions, patterning and subitising.

### **Tinkering Table.**

Tinkering fuels a child's natural curiosity about life. It develops fine motor and manipulative skills, higher order thinking, problem solving and peer relationships. Tinkering provides opportunities to pull apart, investigate, plan, rebuild, redesign and construct.

### **Sensory Area.**

The senses are the most familiar way for a child to explore, process and come to understand new information. This area of play-based learning is extremely important for children in relation to therapeutic, psychological, cognitive, creative, language and explorative experiences. Children need a range of sensory experiences, as they provide opportunities for fine motor and hand-eye coordination, as well as creativity and allow children to be in tune with their sensory perceptions.

### **Carpenter's Workshop.**

This is an exciting and highly creative experience in which children can engage. The use of tools, the practice of building and constructing, taking responsibility, planning, designing and linking their woodwork to literacy and numeracy are some of the benefits of woodwork. Fine motor skills, oral language as children work alongside each other and other key skills including problem solving, perseverance and lateral thinking are all promoted in this experience.

### **Painting Area.**

Painting easels are an effective tool for improving bilateral coordination and both fine and gross motor skills. They are useful for promoting oral language, thinking, planning and describing colour and shape concepts.

## **Year 3 – 6**

### ***Engagement Matters***

Engagement Matters is a personalised learning model that continues to develop and foster the key principles of the Walker Learning Approach across the middle and upper years of the Primary School (Years 3 – 6). It encompasses developmentally appropriate practices to continue to engage students in their learning and to develop the skills necessary for 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning.

The key components of this aspect of the pedagogy are:

- Formal instruction teaching sessions;
- Student-led/ teacher supported class meetings;
- A communication board;
- Education Research Projects;
- Expos;
- Teacher, self and peer assessment; and
- Mindful planning, documentation and reporting.

The learning environments are flexible and technology is an integrated part of the Approach.

The requirements of the Australian Curriculum are specifically taught in each learning area and broad learning intentions are used to underpin the Education Research Projects that are individually developed by the students and incorporate an element of student interest related to the learning intentions.

The pedagogy across Primary aims to develop:

- Strong positive self-concept;
- Problem-solving skills;
- Resilience
- Persistence;
- Initiative
- Risk taking
- Respectful interactions
- Engagement
- Confident communication skills; and
- A strong sense of connectedness.

**Resources:**

- <http://www.earlylife.com.au>
- <http://www.earlylife.com.au/parents>