



Anula
Primary School

E anula.admin@education.nt.gov.au
T 08 8997 7500
W anulaprimarieschool.com

Whole School Approach to Walker Learning

“The WL approach emphasises that learning is much broader and richer than just literacy and numeracy and it focuses parents, teachers and children on the ‘whole’ child. The WL approach is a rigorous approach in education requiring teachers to recognise, plan for and implement a range of strategies that clearly identify learning and developmental objectives.”

Play Matters”, Kathy Walker, 2007

At Anula Primary School we implement the Walker Learning Approach (WLA) in all classes from Preschool – Year 2. This approach has been developed by Kathy Walker, an educational psychologist and is based on 15 years of research. It is a developmentally appropriate approach for young children combining play with explicit teaching of literacy and numeracy. It should be noted that WLA is a pedagogical approach, not a program. It is how we work with the children based on what we know and believe about how children learn and develop. It is not just focus children and investigations, it is the ‘big umbrella’ of how we engage with and teach the children all day long.

Walker Learning engages children in exciting and authentic learning experiences that reflect the particular needs, interest and strengths of the individual child. It ensures a greater level of engagement for all children, boys and girls, and helps to reduce behavioural issues within the school. Walker Learning also helps to increase rich oral language for all children and integrates literacy and numeracy into all learning experiences.

Our teachers and staff:

- Understand and do not confuse WLA with past programs such as ‘developmental play’ from the 70’s and 80’s or other programs such as ‘open classrooms’ or Steiner or Reggio Emilia approaches
- Recognise WL is based on rigorous brain research and child development theory
- Identify the philosophies behind and key principles of the approach so the child is at the centre of the curriculum and teaching strategies:
- a balanced curriculum of authentic student interests and engagement alongside teacher scaffolding, direction and explicit teaching
- student engagement through the children’s investigations and interests
- explicit teaching and instruction in literacy, numeracy and other learning areas
- in-depth understanding of and planning for the development of children alongside literacy and numeracy learning objectives

PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Walker Learning 'Investigation' Model

The table below shows the structure for Walker Learning investigations that Anula Primary School teachers in Preschool – Year 2 are expected to implement **at least 4 mornings a week.**

'Investigations' Model		
Tuning in with Whole Class	Tuning in for the learning of the day: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Welcome/Administration (2-3 mins) - Review/Reflection of the Learning (5 mins) - Scaffold children for Learning (10 mins) - Intentional dispersal of children to investigate (2-3 mins) 	20 mins
Investigations	Child initiated and adult directed Concrete hands on activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Settle in (5 mins) - Scaffolding focus children, reporter and photographer - Incidental Scaffolding/Observation 	Minimum of 45 mins
Reflection	Scaffolding the experiences of the investigation to link with the current learning intentions	20 mins
Reset Learning Environment	Resetting the environment for the rest of the day and investigations the next day.	10 minutes

Tuning In

This is tuning in for the learning for the whole day. It is planned and intentional. Helps to focus the children on the learning objectives (intentions) and directs them into the work for the morning. This is a particularly important time to set the tone and pace for the whole day. The teacher models the language of learning consistent with the intention mapped out in the learning intentions. It is tuning in for the learning of the whole day, not just for investigations.

You might use photographs from the previous day to help you tune into some of their projects or play. You might use a list on a whiteboard or a task from the day before. You might use manipulatives as provocations for learning. All of these things will be planned before the day starts and will be included in the provocation basket used by the teacher.

Tuning in can be broken down into the following 4 steps:

1. Welcome (2-3 mins)

Morning circle, general chat, the roll, lunches, day of the week, weather, etc.

2. Tuning in for the learning of the day (5 mins)

- Conversations of the learning over the past days
- Highlight provocations and link to learning later in the day including literacy and numeracy
- A quick revision of learning intentions. Children may provide examples.
- Possibly connecting learning intentions with the timetable for the day.

3. Focus Children, the Reporter and Photographer (10 mins)

The main purpose and priority is relationship building.

- Focus Children – scaffold authentic interests
- Reporter – teacher-directed
- Photographer – teacher-directed
- Discussions with each about what they are working on or thinking of doing (teacher modelling intention)
- In most situations teacher honours and respects the choice of the focus child but may scaffold or set expectations.
- Teacher can set the agenda and expectations with the reporter and photographer.

4. Intentional Dispersal (2-3 mins)

- Focus Children, Reporter & Photographer
- Scaffold children to leave the mat with intent.
- Focus children, reporter and photographer can go first, then the rest of the children are helped to identify where and what they may be working on or what experience they will start with.
- The idea here is that there is still some intention and thinking, not just rushing off the mat.

Investigation Time

Children choose where to work during Investigations. Investigations take place after tuning in and require a minimum of 45 minutes. The teacher will scaffold the focus children, reporter and photographer. The teacher will also scaffold and observe students who may need support or extending.

Children will be dispersed to their choice or teacher's choice of work or learning area to continue with work from the previous day or to commence something new. Some children may be directed to particular areas depending upon the teacher's scaffolding. Some may have to complete a design brief or plan their work before getting underway with the investigation or project. This might be done in an individual work folder or journal. Some may have to write about their project from the day before or map out what they intend to do next.

It is important to remember that play is a powerful learning tool and should be seen as children's work. To be powerful play must;

- Be well planned for by the teacher

- Involve the teacher in observation and scaffolding
- Preferably occur inside and outside
- Promote creative opportunities
- Link with numeracy and literacy
- Include assessment, observation and reporting
- Be integrated into the day as a part of learning and not seen as a separate time that has no link to learning

The teacher may choose to watch or participate in the investigation, observing language, literacy and numeracy skills. Flexibility with a snack is allowed when the individual child feels hungry or thirsty. It is not necessary to wait until recess.

Investigations can be broken into the following steps:

Settle in (5 mins)

- Children take time to get started
- Teacher takes time to observe

Scaffolding Focus Children, Reporter and Photographer

- Teacher spends time with each focus child to scaffold from their authentic interests and talk about their learning.
- Teacher spends about 5 minutes scaffolding the photographer and reporter

Incidental Scaffolding/Observation

- Teacher scaffolds children who need extending or support
- Teacher observes and makes mental notes related to particular skills or development the children are demonstrating
- Teacher identifies Freebies

Reflection

Reflection time is a critical aspect of WLA. You can never run investigations without having a reflection time. Reflection time is not show and tell. Reflection time helps to identify the learning that has occurred during the session and most importantly is a springboard and link back to the literacy and numeracy that is occurring for the rest of the day.

Reflection has three key elements making up about 20 minutes in total:

1. Reporter/Photographer/Focus Children (10 mins)

Reporter/Photographer:

- Reports back on task they were assigned and what they learned
- Children are encouraged to respond, to comment and ask questions.

Focus Children

- Report back on their learning and work
- Teacher highlights skills or learning that have occurred.
- Children are encouraged to ask questions and make comments

2. General Discussion & Freebies (5 mins)

General Discussion

Conversation about learning from investigations and links to formal teaching.

Freebies – one or two children who have either:

- Demonstrated a skill that happens to link with literacy, numeracy or other learning intentions.
- Demonstrated an interest, skill or behaviour that doesn't necessarily link to current learning intentions but is just a great moment to capture, share and model with the children.
- Freebies can be used wither at the end of the reflection time or at the commencement of a literacy/numeracy session to highlight a skill that links to what is currently being taught

Reset Environment

Organising and pack up for the rest of the day's learning (5 mins)

- This is meant to be a relaxed, purposeful, unhurried experience, for the children where they are reflecting, organising, and packing up.
- The key here is that it should not be a rushed, noisy experience. Children need a quiet transition from investigations to the rest of the day's learning.

PROGRAMMING EXPECTATIONS

Planning and programming with WLA is done through a fortnightly Statement of Intent (SOI). The planning should be done as a team (Anula is an open plan learning environment and there are usually three classes within each area. This is the team referred to.)

When creating the SOI, the teachers will consider the interests and developmental needs of their students, use their term menu for all key curriculum areas (linked to the Australian Curriculum) and plan for the learning and skills they want their students to learn. These are developed through Learning Intentions; 5 from the developmental domain (social, emotional, cognitive, language and physical), 2-3 each for Literacy and Numeracy learning and 1 each for Science and HASS.

Each SOI should be reflected on at the end of each fortnight before the next SOI is planned. When reflecting, teachers should consider individual children and refer back to the reporting documents (Individual Observation Records and Daily Weekly Records).

Teachers plan for skills and learning intentions rather than activities in all key curriculum areas.

After the learning intentions have been developed, the teachers plan for the learning environments and provocations that will be created. The environment should reflect the children's interests and foster the learning that is being planned.

For whole program planning purposes, WLA time can be accounted for up to one hour (half hour each for Literacy and Numeracy) of core curriculum allocation requirements. The allocation of one hour is based upon the expectation that Tuning In and Reflection will include explicit teaching of literacy and numeracy concepts as guided by the learning intentions for that fortnight.

ENVIRONMENT

The environment in a WLA classroom is intentional and planned for. Teachers set up learning areas based on the children's interests and the learning and skills being focussed on. There should be Construction Area, Sensory Area, Dramatic Play, Tinkering Table, Collage Area, Literacy Area, Numeracy Area, Science/Nature Area (Preschool Climbing). Each area will include provocations linked with the learning intentions. For example, if one of the numeracy intentions is 'we are learning to recognise shapes' the teachers might include different shaped cakes in the home corner, or if a learning intention is 'we are learning to share with others' the teachers might create an area that can only be used by 2-3 children at one time.

NON-NEGOTIABLES

The following non-negotiables should be evident in classrooms in Preschool – Year 2:

- Parent Communication board
- Statement of Intent
- Focus child roster
- Photographer and reporter roster
- 8 Walker Learning Areas; Construction Area, Sensory Area, Dramatic Play, Tinkering Table, Collage Area, Literacy Area, Numeracy Area, Science/Nature Area (Preschool Climbing)
- Individual Observation records
- Investigate a minimum of 4 days per week always in the first session
- Tuning In
- Reflection
- Freebies
- Explicit Investigation links to Literacy and Numeracy
- Work display board/Use of Seesaw
- Provocation basket

ASSESSMENT

IORs are kept for all students. These include observations about children that the teacher views as relevant to their development and learning. These are a comprehensive document of the child's journey at school throughout the year. Notes should be taken at least every time the child is a focus child, but also when anything of note needs to be documented.

Daily-Weekly record – this is a daily record noting where/who/what a child has been doing. These can be referred to when planning tuning in and when doing the fortnightly planning.

Please note that formal assessments for core curriculum areas are not to be completed during Investigations time. However, you will be able to informally assess and observe children's skills and knowledge during this time.

RESOURCES

Supporting documents (IORs, SOI, Daily-Weekly) and helpful resources for WLA can be found here.