



## A Slower Journey Through Childhood

by Kathy Walker, education consultant and author of the new book, *What's The Hurry?*

Childhood is a time that is precious and wonderful for young children. However, increasingly, the valuing of childhood as a unique period within the lifespan, a time for exploration, investigation, playing and becoming used to life, is something at risk of becoming lost. Many parents/carers feel the pressure of thinking that to give their child every opportunity, children must be enrolled into a range of extra curricula activities, sometimes up to three or four a week on top of school or early childhood programs. The value of just being at home, playing outside, making cubby houses out of old cardboard boxes, playing at the local park, are all valuable experiences for children.

Increasingly, parents and children are receiving the message that in order to be a success academically, healthy and fit, a range of extra curricula activities are a necessary part of a young child's life before they even commence school.

As society begins to significantly blur the line between what is appropriate for a child and an adult, we see a growing range of inappropriate expectations of children begin to develop. A child is not the same as an adult or teenager. A young child in their early childhood and early primary years most especially, reflects a unique and wonderful phase of life - a life that can best be promoted through exposure to a sense of wonder, creativity, imagination and time to just be a child rather than to be forever in the back of a car being driven to endless extra activities. Many preschool teachers report that some children arrive at preschool exhausted and too tired to engage in play and learning, due to having been too busy during the week.

When parents are asked what they most want for their children, I have found the top three responses are to be healthy, happy and successful.

If we view success as simply performing well academically, we forget what other key factors are involved in success, for both adults and children: the ability to communicate effectively; articulate and express feelings appropriately without causing hurt to others; accept diversity and difference; be a good problem solver; take risks; feel good about yourself and to be able to form meaningful relationships with others.

If we, as a community, continue this manic push to hurry children through, to have them overscheduled, busy and tired throughout their early childhood years, what opportunities will children have in these most formative years to develop and learn about themselves?

The notion of an over-scheduled young child, rushed through their childhood, is something we all need to be challenged to think about in relation to our roles, either as parents/carers, teachers, policy makers, advertisers, and simply a community in general.

Children have a right to a childhood and it needs to be protected and encouraged by everyone.

### About *What's The Hurry?*

*What's The Hurry?*, helps parents understand that raising children is about: *nurturing*, not training; *encouraging*, not controlling or forcing; *modelling* and setting appropriate limits; and *rules* at times in a child's life when they are ready and mature enough to understand them.

Other valuable information addressed in the book includes: the importance of play in children's lives; understanding children's behaviour; choosing a school; self-esteem and resilience; school readiness; children's learning and children at school. *What's The Hurry?* is a book that gives permission for parents to relax and not over-schedule their child, as well as providing appropriate information about a range of early childhood and school-related issues.

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## **A Slower Journey Through Childhood Continued**

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Parents, caregivers, teachers and other members of the community can download a sample chapter from the book, *What's The Hurry?* from ASG's website: [www.asg.co.nz/wth](http://www.asg.co.nz/wth)

*What's The Hurry? Reclaiming childhood in an overscheduled world – A guide for parents, teachers and the community* by Kathy Walker can be ordered from ASG Education Programs New Zealand for \$21.95 plus \$5.90 postage and handling.

### **Tips for helping children experience the joys of childhood**

- Understand that childhood is a unique, specific and special time for your child.
- Don't rush your child into growing up too soon.
- Give your child the time to grow, to learn and to experience life in a non-rushed and relaxed environment – it's an important foundation for future learning.
- Don't enrol your child in too many extra curricula activities each week because this often leads to an over-tired, stressed child who ceases to benefit from anything.
- Don't bow to the pressures and expectations of others in relation to the opportunities you give your child.
- Don't feel guilty if your child isn't involved in numerous extra curricula activities.
- Don't expect your child to be perfect.
- Try to avoid labelling your child and judging your child's less desirable behaviours.
- Involve your child in age-appropriate activities when they are ready.
- Aim to provide a balance of time at home, to play and to enjoy spending time with family members.

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