

# ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION REVISITED, REIMAGINED AND RE-ENERGISED!

BY CATHARINE HYDON – ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION FACILITATOR



## Then

Road safety education has played an important part in the lives of young children over the last fifty years. We all remember snippets of programs introduced to us at school and in our lounge rooms that helped us learn to ride our bicycles safely and cross the road at the lights. I remember Hector the Road Safety Cat who promoted road safety in the 1970s on posters, in comic strips and television commercials. And then there was my annual visit to the traffic school where I and my kindergarten peers rode our bicycles, with training wheels attached, around the make-believe roads and intersections. And when I became an educator some thirty years ago, I continued the practice utilising

the resources of the VicRoads Starting Out Safely program to teach children how to hold their parents' hands, wear their seat belts and use the passenger door.

## Now

Fast forward to the twenty first century road safety education programs – something significant has changed. While the purpose of the program remains the same; ensuring that children along with their families, are well equipped to safely navigate the roads as passenger, pedestrians and cyclists; the methodology is significantly different. Children are no longer seen as passive recipients of predetermined road safety concepts offered in static ways and in short doses.

Instead when educators participate in the professional learning opportunities on offer in the Starting Out Safely program they are challenged to know and understand the evidence and research about road safety and combine it with a contemporary understanding of how children learn. Rather than delivering the road safety message in theoretical ways, children are supported through intentional teaching to learn how to be active participants in their own and others safety. The result is a far more dynamic approach to road safety education that encourages educators, children and families to leave the safety of their early childhood spaces and venture into the real world of road safety.

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### Connecting with communities through contemporary learning

The invitation to explore road safety in this way connects strongly to the principles that now define early childhood education. Children as capable and competent citizens with ideas and opinions on matters that affect them has become a central tenet of this road safety approach and one of the main reasons that I have been pleased to be a part of the team delivering these messages to the early childhood community in Victoria. It is truly a captivating notion that through the everyday practice of road safety children and their educators can take up their right to participate in community life. Furthermore, their capacity to make lasting contributions can be fully realised if children know how to navigate the streets and footpaths of their local neighbourhood. When children can cross the road safely they can visit the aged care facility and bring joy and laughter to others. When children learn to ride a bus or a tram safely they can visit the museum and learn about the world around them. When children learn to use the traffic lights they can join with other members of the community to clean up their local creek. And when children can walk safely to the local shopping strip they can join in the

important community events that join us together.

As ELAA's team of Road Safety Education facilitators travels around Victoria, we have been excited to hear about educators who have embraced the possibilities that a strong road safety education program can offer. Invariably educators leave the professional learning session motivated to challenge the “taken for granted” practices that prevent children from getting out and about.

If your understanding of road safety education seems a bit disconnected from these ideas or you feel that the potential of road safety in your centre hasn't been fully harnessed, then maybe it's time to get along to a professional learning session. Not only will you learn about the current evidence and research about road safety and young children but you might just unlock the world beyond the gate!

For more information about the Starting Out Safely program go to [www.childroadsafety.org.au](http://www.childroadsafety.org.au) or email [rse@elaa.org.au](mailto:rse@elaa.org.au).

### Learn more about contemporary approaches to early years Road Safety Education at this year's Early Childhood Education Conference

Join ELAA's team of Road Safety Education facilitators (Catharine Hydon, Louise Dorrat, Nicole Pilsworth, Karen Glancy and Gilda Howard) for *Inroads to community* – an interactive panel that will challenge you to become a pedagogical innovator in Road Safety Education by removing the assumption that road safety education is a one off event and looking at it as an ongoing exploration of ideas driven by children. This expert panel will motivate you to explore and share how to exercise contemporary pedagogy, theory and practice wisdom to deliver outstanding road safety education.

**When:** Friday, 26 May at 2.15pm

**Where:** 2017 Early Childhood Education Conference – together we grow *the child in focus*, Caulfield Racecourse, Melbourne.

**More information:** for program information and to register for the session go to [www.togetherwegrow.com.au](http://www.togetherwegrow.com.au)

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