

Media Release

Schools must allow more play to develop young minds: report

A new study highlights the importance of play in developing the minds and capacities of young children, and calls for schools to make play an essential part of learning.

In her paper, *The Importance of Early Childhood and the Academia of Play*, Early Learning Education Officer Kim Moroney said teachers and parents must recognise and value play more highly because it has positive outcomes for a child's academic, social, emotional, spiritual and creative development.

"Play helps children develop key skills including critical thinking, problem solving, interpersonal abilities, emotional resilience and creativity," Ms Moroney said.

"High quality play teaches children about personal responsibility and self-regulation in ways that formal lessons cannot.

"It has positive benefits for a child's cultural, academic and physical development as well as their health and well-being."

Ms Moroney travelled to Sweden, Finland, the UK and China to study best practice in early learning after winning the 2017 Brother John Taylor Fellowship - a research prize offered annually by Catholic Schools NSW (CSNSW) to encourage further study among its educators.

"I explored the role of play in children's learning and development in different educational contexts and the potential of these play-based approaches within the context of Catholic education," said Ms Moroney, who is employed by the Maitland-Newcastle Catholic Schools Office.

"Play needs to be recognised as a legitimate part of early learning in Australia. We need to build play into teachers' professional learning and the school day beyond recess and lunch times."

Ms Moroney said she deliberately used the word "academia" in her title because play was often viewed as trivial, unimportant and the opposite of 'real learning' in educational circles, especially among those removed from teaching students up to age eight.

"Unfortunately, play is often not legitimately acknowledged as a pedagogy in the early years of school. It is often discounted in favour of teacher-directed methods of instruction."

Ms Moroney said classrooms and playgrounds needed to be reshaped to provide play opportunities.

"Children's play is under threat from increased urbanisation, perceptions of risk and educational pressures; apartment living is limiting play opportunities, as are fears of injury or catching germs.

"Children are also overscheduled with activities, reducing opportunities for self-determined play."

CSNSW Chief Executive Officer Dallas McInerney said Ms Moroney's report and her dedication to early learning reflected the value of the Brother John Taylor Fellowship.

"Catholic educators who are passionate about teaching should apply online for the current Fellowship by September 30," he said.

Catholic Schools NSW represents the state's 595 Catholic schools and their 255,000 students.

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