



# Media Release

## Child's play is serious business for 2017 Br John Taylor Fellow

The importance of play in developing a child's learning ability is the subject of the 2017 Brother John Taylor Fellowship, a \$25,000 research prize given by Catholic Education Commission NSW (CECNSW).

CECNSW deputy chairman Peter Turner today presented the prestigious annual Fellowship to Kim Moroney, an Early Learning project officer in the Maitland-Newcastle Catholic Schools Office.

"Early childhood - or the first eight years of life - is the most significant time for brain development and shaping a child's ability to learn in later years," Mr Turner said.

"So I believe Kim's research will be highly anticipated by Catholic school leaders."

Ms Moroney said early learning's potential to develop a child's cognitive abilities, social skills and emotional growth is critical to improving equity and educational standards in Australia.

"Early learning can establish a foundation for lifelong learning," she said. "If children have more access to quality early learning, it will make learning outcomes more equitable, reduce poverty and improve social mobility from generation to generation."

Ms Moroney said her research will focus on play and its crucial role in stimulating a child's brain.

"Play is serious business because it gives children vital skills in how to learn. It creates a brain that has increased flexibility and improved potential for learning later in life.

"Numerous lifestyle changes, however, are reducing play opportunities for children with a growing tendency to rush childhood, fast track academic achievement and limit outdoor experiences.

"Play is being displaced by a multitude of regulated and over-scheduled activities such as language lessons, music lessons and even tutoring from age five. While these and other organised activities have merit, we must also value the indisputable educational benefits a child receives through play.

"Children who engage in quality play are more likely to have better memory skills and language development, and are better able to regulate their social behaviour - leading to advanced school adjustment and academic learning."

Ms Moroney said it was essential Catholic schools were at the forefront of understanding and implementing quality early childhood education.

"Every child is spiritual, and reconceptualising childhood to include the spiritual dimension is a priority for all involved in Catholic education."

Ms Moroney will use the Fellowship to visit Finland - regarded as a world leader in early childhood education - and to also Anji in China, to observe the practice of AnjiPlay at its source.

"In Finland, play builds the basis for good school performance long before formal education; children there do not receive formal instruction in maths, reading or writing until they're seven."

Mr Turner said the Fellowship was created to promote the teaching profession in a Catholic context.

"The Fellowship honours John Taylor, a Christian Brother, and his dedication to quality education and equity over 30 years as a teacher, principal and Executive Director of CECNSW."

**Media Contact:** Jim Hanna | 0414 828 629 | [jim.hanna@cecnsw.catholic.edu.au](mailto:jim.hanna@cecnsw.catholic.edu.au)