



# Member News

Autumn



## Member Profile May 2022

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#### *Can you tell us about yourself and the work you do?*

I am an Associate Professor of Education and the Associate Dean (Research) in the Faculty of Arts and Education (FOAE) at Charles Sturt University. I am a qualified school teacher with postgraduate qualifications in higher education teaching and leadership, alongside a PhD investigating the play influences on primary and secondary school children from RMIT University in Melbourne.

My play research commenced over a decade ago, when the 'Lunchtime Enjoyment Activity and Play' (LEAP) intervention research from my PhD was released. Loose parts equipment had yet to feature with any

to feature with any prevalence within Australian 'primary school-aged contexts' (e.g. had been mainly focused within Early Childhood contexts). The findings led to challenging the popular notion of schools implementing fixed equipment within primary school grounds and transformed a brand new local primary school in the Ballarat region of Victoria.

Among my publications and play advocacy over the past decade, I am the editor and primary author of the book 'Contemporary school playground strategies for healthy students' and launched a new field of research into the influence of heat and weather on children's play and outdoor recreation, which led to the updating of heat protection guidelines in various Australian jurisdictions.

From 2014-2020, I had been involved in hundreds of media appearances and contributions that were largely focused on getting school children's play 'on to the radar' through print media, radio interviews, television appearances, podcasts (including Spotify) and other types of media releases based upon the research I have conducted. I have been involved in the development of national and global statements on guiding schools towards prioritising play (including as children return from pandemic restrictions).

***What do you see as the most important issue/s we need to address in terms of children and play in Australia?***

Where do I start?! I am a passionate advocate for increasing the quality of play, and raising awareness of the importance of play across schooling contexts. One of the most important issues is increasing the prioritisation of play within school contexts to even out the balance with the dominant focuses on structured, 'classroom-room' based focuses.

Classroom scheduling is just one section of the day. Students in some schools can be involved in scheduled, unstructured play opportunities outside the classroom confines via up to 4200 school breaks during their schooling (three times per day, 5 days per week, 39 weeks per year, 7 years of primary/secondary school ). This can mean thousands of available hours to impact upon children's development at a crucial time through quality play.

There is also often also a disconnect in developmental opportunities from the younger years into adolescence, and less preparation of teachers and prioritisation during their training on quality play facilitation.

We need to find ways to move away from the historic trends of play supervision in schools being seen as a 'burden' or 'duty' or simply to get rid of excess energy to focus on the supposed 'real learning' within classroom walls. This will be important to ensure children's development can be optimised both in and out of the classroom with supportive adult decision making.

***How do you PLAY?***

My favourite mode of play is taking in turns of inventing spontaneous trampoline games on the backyard trampoline with my two daughters; Maisie (6) and Tilly (5). Their inventiveness makes me realise how old I am getting, as they are quite creative with the games they come up with in such a small space!

***Why is being a Play Australia Board Member important to you?***

We need to continue to promote the value of play and holistically build collective momentum in protecting the rights of children to leisure, engagement in play and recreational activities. There is a lot of work to be done to ensure modern influences (such as screens, urbanisation, reductions in green spaces etc) do not negatively impact on meeting Article 31 of [The Convention on the Rights of the Child](#).

I would also argue that as a Play Australia Board Member, we can all look to protect the other UN Conventions on the rights of children such as ensuring children are able to learn through play (article 30), protecting children from the harmful effects of not engaging in play (article 32) and promoting children's play so they can experience a 'full life' (among others)!

***Meet our Play Australia people [here](#).***