

University of Queensland

MEDIA RELEASE

PhD project is all fun and games

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Running and climbing, imagining different worlds, romping on swing sets... these all come naturally to children, right?

Not necessarily, according to a University of Queensland researcher, who recently completed a PhD into helping children develop “play skills”.

Jennifer Sturgess’ study examined playing behaviour in children aged between five and 10 years, a group she said was under-represented in research on play.

Play, especially in older children, was under threat in today’s society, Dr Sturgess said.

She pointed to diminished play space, such as smaller backyards and more roads, an obsession with safety leading to boring play equipment and increased supervision, and more structured out-of-school activities as encroaching on children’s independent play.

Dr Sturgess said play skills were important to assess in children because many factors could get in the way of children learning to play.

“Children who could benefit from help with play skills are many of those referred to occupational therapy for developmental concerns, or for rehabilitation after burns, or cancer, or children who have had a lot of stresses or abuse in their lives and don’t relate or interact very well with other children,” she said.

Dr Sturgess’ model for assessing play skills involves asking children to rate themselves on how good they are at different types of play. The child’s parent or carer also rates the child’s playing skills based on their observations.

Together, the ratings point towards the play skills the child should be encouraged to develop and are likely to be motivated to work on.

Dr Sturgess said allowing children to rate themselves gave a more accurate view of their skills, as parents and teachers cannot always be observing and may not always judge the child’s play in the same way that the child him/herself does.

The play skills assessed included items such as “running, climbing and moving when you play” and “making things when you play”.

Cont...

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Hi-res photos are available for this story. To view proofs of these images, click [here](#).

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