
Stakeholders Discuss Advancement in Early Childhood Education

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Officials in the Ministry of Education, Youth Affairs and Sports recently held a panel discussion with stakeholders in health and the private sectors on challenges and potential solutions in early childhood development in the Territory.

Chief Education Officer Mrs. Orlandette Crabbe, Consultant Pediatrician in the BVIHSA Dr. Natasha Frett, Founder of Imagination Academy VI Ms. Sharia de Castro, and Education Officer with the responsibility for Early Childhood Development Ms. Kimberly George were the panelists sharing important information on early childhood development.

Mrs. Crabbe gave insight on the value of soft skills that will set students in the early developmental stages up for success when they get to traditional schooling.

“In formal schooling we start from the very beginning, but let me tell you what we want,” Mrs. Crabbe said, adding, “We want a child that can listen, and follow instructions, who can relate to their peers without throwing a tantrum and falling down because they have to share a pencil or crayon.”

The CEO added, “We want our centres to be empowered to focus on what matters, and those are those non-academic skills that come about through engagement in a child’s natural environment, which is play.”

Education Officer for Early Childhood Development Ms. Kimberly George said, “In the Ministry, we worked to add the tagline Early Learning, Lifelong Impact because we believe that early learning does have a lifelong impact on our children in the future. As a ministry, we are committed to ensuring that students receive the quality learning experience that they deserve at that level.”

Consultant Paediatrician in the BVIHSA Dr. Natasha Frett gave insight from the health perspective, reiterating the importance of the early developmental stage in forming social, emotional and academic skills that lay the foundation for students as they grow older.

Dr. Frett said, “I am sure many of you would have heard that in the first five years of life, it is very critical for mental and brain development. It is during that time that about 90% of the brain is being developed, under the age of five. Here we

have this opportunity where you have all these neural pathways and connections being formed, it's an opportunity to develop certain learning skills, cognitive learning skills, social learning skills, all of these are very important for the age of five because the brain is maturing. During that early period, we find that it's a perfect opportunity to learn new skills."

Meanwhile, Founder of Imagination Academy VI Ms. Sharia de Castro contributed her expertise in early childhood education and spoke of shifting the focus from traditional education to skills-based learning that prepares young learners with the soft skills needed to navigate their educational journey.

Ms. de Castro said, "I think we have to move away from the culture that is quick to put a pencil into their hand and give them a worksheet and instead give them interactive experiences where their whole body is engaged. For example, if we are focusing on letter identification or formation, instead of giving them a pencil and asking them to do that, we give them some playdough and asking them to form it instead because we are building finger muscles and everything that we need for later learning."

The full video of the Early Childhood Awareness Week Panel Discussion can be viewed on the Government's Facebook page at [BVIGovernment](#).

NOTES TO EDITORS

Photo 1, 2, 3: Photos from the Early Childhood Awareness Week Panel Discussion

(Photo credit: GIS: R. Frazer)

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