ZEINA THE ‘DISRUPTOR’ IS 2015 BROTHER JOHN TAYLOR FELLOW

A self-described ‘disruptor’ has been awarded the 2015 Brother John Taylor Fellowship, a $25,000 research prize given annually by Catholic Education Commission NSW (CECNSW).

Zeina Chalich, leader of Learning and Innovation at St Finbar’s Primary School in Sans Souci, will embark on academic study into Makerspaces – virtual and physical spaces where students can tinker, invent and learn in a practical, hands-on way with mentors, experts and the latest ‘edutech’ tools.

“I want to explore how Catholic schools can use Makerspaces to revamp student-centred teaching to engage learners of all ages in an innovative way,” said Zeina, a school teacher for 10 years.

“I’ve always enjoyed harnessing the power of technology to improve learning. The reality is young people are now learning online, without their teachers. As educators, we need to become disruptors and find ways to support our students to think critically and creatively – to give their learning authentic purpose.”

Zeina says a Makerspace is a non-structured environment where students of all ages can connect with experts, create, collaborate, share, invent, tinker, build and explore the elements of STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art and maths) through experiential play.

“The aim is for students to acquire skills and knowledge while solving a problem, creating a product or generating a new understanding. We want our students to turn their knowledge into action, to become creators, not mere consumers,” she said.

“Makerspace uses the hands-on philosophy of learning through building things. It overlaps with the natural inclinations of children and the power of learning by doing.”

Zeina said she will use the Fellowship to attend two conferences in the United States to study the latest innovative edutech resources and teaching methods.

“I will also visit the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Lab in Boston and hope to develop my design thinking skills and connect with like-minded educators at the Design School at Stanford.”

The Brother John Taylor Fellowship is offered each year to an educator with a passion for teaching, to enable research into a priority or challenge facing Catholic education.

ABOUT ZEINA
Zeina writes for Educational Technology Solutions magazine and is a tutor at the Australian Catholic University.

She won a 2015 ‘New Voice in Leadership’ Scholarship from the Australian Council for Educational Leaders for her work in Digital Pedagogy, Gifted Education and Mentoring work with pre-service and beginning teachers.

Zeina is a co-founder of #aussieED – Australia’s largest educational professional learning network on Twitter.