Games and play school children engage in during recess in Suva primary schools, Fiji Islands

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Contextualisation

This piece of work will be part of a chain of articles to go towards a Doctor of Education with an Australian university. Recently accepted for funding, it is conducted in six primary schools of Suva, Fiji Islands. Suva, is the capital city of the Fiji Islands. This project aims to investigate what kinds of games and play class four children are engaged in during recess or break times. In the Fiji Islands and the South Pacific, no research article was found written on this area, emphasising the importance of this study. In Australia and the United Kingdom, however, children are increasingly being restricted freedom to interact and play in relatively unsupervised settings such as during recess or break time. Issues concerning the use of time in school and playground safety are reasons policymakers give to curtail such activity (Chaille, 2001). This is to the point where in many Australian schools today there is no recess, and the traditional lunch hour has been reduced to 45-50 minutes (Evans, 2003). This trend is occurring in the United States as well. School officials are eliminating scheduled recess periods to gain additional instruction time. With an expanding academic curriculum that needs to provide space for new learning focuses, and added to a society obsessed with standardised testing, recess is endangered or eliminated (Boyle, Marshall and Robeson, 2003; Waite-Stupiansky and Findlay, 2001).

All the reduction and elimination of recess are a result of underestimating the benefits of recess (Chaille, 2001). It is true that recess may be understood and implemented variedly from country to country and from school to school. However, administrators and educators have an obligation to present evidence in support of reducing or eliminating recess. Doing otherwise is to squander the trust and resources of children, families, and taxpayers (Pellegrini and Bohn, 2005). Thus, Blackwell (2004) asked an important question: What are the hidden costs to children, youth, and educators when recess is missing from the school success formula?

Abstract*: This study aims to explore games and play children are involved in during school break times and whether active free play is being encouraged. It uses a mixed method approach, where quantitative data will emanate from tallied standard observation sheets, analysed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS V.17). Qualitative data will be drawn from weekly focus group meetings and comments written by trained Research Assistants (RAs) at the end of each break's observations. Scan sampling is the observation style utilised by scanning and recording children's activities at predetermined intervals.*

Methodology

This research project uses a mixed method design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. There are different types of mixed method designs. *Sequential studies* first conduct a qualitative study and then the quantitative phase later, or vice versa. In a *parallel study* both qualitative and quantitative approaches are implemented about equally at the same time. *Equivalent status designs* use both quantitative and qualitative approaches about equally but may not be at the same time, while in *dominant-less dominant studies* a dominant

paradigm is used with a small component of the study drawn from an alternative paradigm (Tashakkori and Teddie, 1998). The type of mixed method approach this investigation uses is the *dominant-less dominant study,* where the quantitative approach is the dominant paradigm used, while a minor component of the study is drawn qualitatively. Specifically, SPSS Version 17 will be used to conduct analysis on the variables of interaction type, games and play type, school type, gender, and ethnicity, while the source of qualitative data will come from recorded weekly discussions between the researcher and research assistants. Access has been received from the Fiji Ministry of Education for access and signed consent has also been taken from children's parents prior to starting.

Methods

Direct observations of pupils during recess will be done. According to Leff and Lakin (2005) direct observations of playground behaviours tend to be more objective than peer, teacher, or parent reports. Scan sampling will be used to observe pupils during recess and break times. Scan sampling involves rapidly scanning a group of subjects. The activities are recorded at pre-selected moments, for example, every thirty seconds. This is opposed to focal sampling where observation is focussed on one subject at a time (Pellegrini *et al,* 2002).

Six primary schools in Suva are sampled randomly; two Indian-controlled schools, two Fijian-controlled schools and two government schools. A class of class fours from the six schools will be chosen. The class teachers of the six classes will be the observers during recess and breaks. Training has been organised for these schoolteachers, who will be the research assistants, to discuss the research project and particularly how to use the observation checklist and technique. Research assistants are visited individually, since the project started, to check on progress each week. In addition, at the end of each week, the whole research team meets to discuss generally on progress, all of which will be recorded. This is also to ensure that each observer is doing the coding similarly and consistently. The length of observation time is planned for over three months for every single recess and breaks during weekdays.

The standard observation list will contain the types of activities and the levels of social interaction children engage in. These definitions are incorporated from Blatchford *et al* (2003, pp 488/9):

Level of social interaction

Children will be coded as being in one of three states of social interaction.

1. Solitary – the target child is not interacting or in a parallel activity with other pupils, irrespective of proximity, eg, standing on the edge of a game watching or sitting by him/herself at a place.
2. Parallel – the target child is situated in close proximity to another child and they are both doing the same activity but are not talking or interacting in a socially organised activity.
3. Social – the target child is engaged in physical and/or social interaction or involved in a socially organised game or activity (includes children doing parallel activities but also talking).

Type of activity

Children will be coded as engaged in one of the following activities.

1. Conversation – the target child is involved only in conversation and when asked what they are doing they say just 'talking' or something to the same effect.

2. Vigorous play – the target child is engaged in vigorous activity, (eg, cartwheels, spinning, running).
3. Sedentary play – the target child is engaged in non-vigorous activity (eg, drawing, reading, playing with cars).
4. Fantasy play – the target child is engaged in imaginative/role play. This supersedes vigorous/sedentary play (eg, mums and dads, families, cops and robbers).
5. Chasing/catching/seeking – the target child is involved in a game in which pupils run after or look for others with the aim of touching (physically or with an object usually a ball, thus this supersedes ball games), catching (no object involved), or just seeing them.
6. Racing – the individual is involved in a racing competition with others the aim being to win. They may compete together, as pairs, etc. or time each other.
7. Ball games – the target child is involved in a game within which players use a ball, including pig in the middle, throwing and catching, tennis, soccer, basketball and other derived games, eg, kickball.
8. Jump skipping – the target child is involved in a game in which individuals skip with a rope each or where a rope is shared.
9. Games with materials – the target child is involved in other games with rules that use materials (eg, throwing hoops over pegs, board games, Frisbee).
10. Verbal games – the target individual is involved in an activity in which children sing or say verbal rhymes [eg, dipping ('eanie meanie minie mo'), actions and rhymes or singing and dancing, unless this is accompanied by another category, e,g. skipping, when it is superseded].
11. Other – the target individual is involved in activities that are not covered by non-games or games above (eg, musical statue, please Mr. Crocodile, hopscotch).
12. Nothing – no activity/game or play.

These are put into a form as the standard observation sheet (See Appendix 1). A form is used each break time.

Conclusion

This project is currently underway. The weekly focus groups proved to be an important element to the design. It helped ensure the consistency of RA's observations. In fact, in the first week observation anomalies between RAs were uncovered despite prior training. Consequently, observation guidelines were revised. The weekly group discussions also helps observers stay focused on the task especially when the observations need to be implemented over three months. These add to the riqour of the research design and reliability of data collected.

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Appendix 1

Observation checklist – Break times   Daily Log

Observer: Mrs X   School: Y Primary School

Day: _____ Date: _____

Child's Name	Level of social interaction			Type of activity											
	sol	par	soc	con	vig	sed	fan	ccs	rac	bal	jsk	gwm	ver	other	not
1. Student A															
2. Student B															
3. Student C															
4. Student D															
5. Student E															
6. Student F															
7. Student G															
8. Student H															
9. Student I															
10. Student J															
11. Student etc. You would put pupils real names															

Level of social interaction
Sol- solitary; Par – Parallel; Soc – Social

Type of activity
con – Conversation; vig – Vigorous play; sed – Sedentary play; fan – Fantasy play; ccs – chasing, catching , seeking; rac – racing; bal – ball games; jsk – jump skipping; gwm – games with material; ver – verbal games; oth – others; not – nothing.

Notes:

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