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RECESS: FOLLOW THE BOUNCING BALL

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by

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ABSTRACT

The opportunity for children to experience free-play (i.e. recess) with parallel opportunities to interact and relate with their peers has been diminished or eliminated in many school systems across the United States. The movement to minimize recess in schools is popular among politicians and school superintendents; they see it as a way to get tough on education, provide more academic time for students, and improve academic performance to meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) criteria. Although many educators and parents recognize the importance of maximizing the efficient use of relatively scarce classroom time, they also see the necessity for breaks between periods of intense work where children can both relax and interact with their peers. The hope is students will return to their classrooms with renewed interest.

"All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" is a well known proverb. In school, students work hard, their heads bent over their books, and most look forward to recess. As popularly conceived, recess is a time for students to release pent up energy built up after hours of sitting quietly, learning the lessons of the day, Anthony Pelligrini calls this the "surplus energy" theory. For students, recess provides a welcome reprieve from studies. One can easily observe children sitting anxiously awaiting the time when they can run out the door and get on the best kickball team, play tag, climb on playground equipment, or simply exchange the latest news. The playground swells with students having conversations, racing around, or just laughing and playing independently. Despite such happy images, however, the perception exists and, for some, the reality exists that recess is becoming an endangered practice in many American schools.

An oft-cited cause of the decline of recess is the pressures upon schools to meet the demands of the federal law..... "No Child Left Behind" legislation and their need to "squeeze in every minute for lessons that could help raise scores on standardized tests" (Gammill, 2007, p.4).

Other cited reasons involve the deterioration of some school playgrounds or issues of safety and liability. But some suggest that cutting back recess or eliminating it altogether is comparable to the elimination of work breaks or the shortening of lunchtime in an adult working environment in order to increase productivity standards (Starr, 2007). The cutting back of such individual free time in schools or corporations would seem to prompt concerns for the general well-being of individuals denied adequate breaks as well as for its impact on overall morale and productivity. Corporations such as “Google” was named in U.S. World and News Report as being one of if not the best environment in the world to work – because the employees play all day while at work.

Nevertheless, a dual discourse now surrounds the concept of school recess. On one hand, recess is understood as a traditional part of the elementary school day; a time when students can go outside, get away from classroom regimentation, and engage in self-directed physical or social activity with their peers. Under this line of argument, recess serves multiple purposes; many of which are subtle and difficult to objectively measure. On the other hand, recess is viewed by some as anachronistic, an unnecessary throwback to an earlier time when school academic achievement was less critical to students’ future lives. For others in this same camp, recess may be viewed as impractical in an era when schools must aim more resources toward academic matters and fewer toward providing a safe outdoor environment.

Although the value of recess in terms of objective student outcomes has been examined in various studies, a prevailing consensus is yet to be reached. At the same time, it seems reasonable to suggest that the value of recess lies not simply in measurable student outcomes, but also in the beliefs of administrators and teachers that the practice represents an important part of what makes a “good,” “healthy,” or “ethical”.

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POEM

Sometimes I think Grown-Ups have forgotten me,

I am there, but hard to see,

It is study and go to school,

Do not forget to follow the rules,

Master subjects, then take a test,

Busy schedules, then very little rest!

But look around and you can see,

I am climbing on your knee,

Have you forgotten me?

I go to school and work and say,

Are there enough hours in my day?

“I am a child! Please let me Play!”

by

Dr. Rose James

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“The child’s right to engage in play, recreation and leisure activities, which are age appropriate must be vigilantly protected for the sake of the individual child as well as for society as a whole. The wisdom of pursuing highly structured, academically focused and competitive activities at the expense of children’s free-play must be questioned and checked in light of research that reinforces the importance of play as a part of the child’s normal development”
(Shackle, 2005, p. 14).

Once considered a mainstay of American elementary education, recess has received criticism, cut backs and faced elimination for various reasons. Benjamin Canada, superintendent of schools in Atlanta, Georgia once stated, “We are intent on improving academic performance; you don’t do that by having kids hanging on the monkey bars” (Pellegrini, 2005, p. 3). Canada further debated the issue with one of the leading researchers in school recess play, Anthony Pellegrini, on the TV show *Good Morning America*. Canada stated that if children needed to “blow off steam” they should be expected to do so in physical education classes (Pellegrini, 2005). Canada’s assertion to build schools without playgrounds to increase time on task, accountability issues, and meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) criteria allowed school districts to respond to the new accountability pressures unleashed by the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act (Meier et al., 2004; Ohanian, 2002). Such construction occurred in Atlanta, Georgia. Yet, despite numerous arguments

to the contrary, no research clearly supports eliminating recess breaks and Canada's claim (Pellegrini, 2005; Norvell, Radcliff, & Hunt, 2009).

Canada's words offer a provocative starting point for the discussion of the history, purpose, meaning, and value of recess in American schools. Defining these terms allows for the beginning of a greater understanding of recess and play in the American school system.

Statement of the Problem

Using a case study approach with phenomenological underpinnings as the researcher's mode of inquiry, this study focuses on educators' conceptions and attitudes toward recess; in other words, it seeks to explore the meanings educators attach to the idea of recess (Psathas 1973). Research questions for this study included:

1. How do educators define recess?
2. Do educators view recess as important?
3. How do educators perceive the cost and benefits of recess?
4. Do educators "value" recess in the institutional sense?
5. Have educators understandings, opinions and experiences with respect to recess changed over the years?

This research utilizes a phenomenological approach employing a "critical case study method" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 78), a case having "strategic importance" to the general problem. Specifically, the study takes place at schools struggling over the years with regard to recess.

Recent policy trends toward test-driven, standards-based accountability pose the clearest threat to the concept of school recess, a practice called into question over the past 30 years (Pellegrini, 2005). Despite the historical link between school and recess, increasing attention to the

importance of time on task has led to concerns suggesting recess time could be spent more effectively if devoted toward increasing student achievement. In line with that concept, Marano (2008) reported that 20,000 American schools eliminated recess in recent years. Sindelar (2004) reported the same for 16,000 American school districts. Schools from Florida to Texas eliminated recess, sending the message that school is a place for learning, not frivolous play.

Tom Walker, director of school management for Manatee County, Florida revealed his stance on doing away with recess by stating, “We’re in school basically for instruction, and recess, in most cases, does not provide instruction” (Ohanian, 2002, pp. 2-3). Mirroring this notion, schools in Galveston, Texas eliminated recess in order to provide additional instructional time (Meier et al., 2004). Since the enactment of Public Law 107-110 by the 107th United States Congress in January 2002, commonly called the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, there has been a renewed emphasis on standardized testing; recess has often been one of the first things within the school day to be let go. Even earlier, in the late nineties, Atlanta, Georgia nearly banned recess completely resulting in an immediate public outcry. Eventually, Georgia’s State Board of Education required all systems to establish a policy for what it called “unstructured break time.”

Many of the schools that still allow recess are replacing traditional free-play opportunities with adult-directed activity, even going so far as changing the name from “recess” to “directed play” as a way to have the activity count toward as “instructional time” (Shouse, 2005). In schools where free-play has been eliminated, teachers may still give their children opportunities to play, but they must conduct an organized game or have specific learning goals in mind when doing so (Mulrine, 2000).

Definitions

The passages above raise issues regarding the definition of recess and its relationship with the related concepts of “physical activity,” and “play”. Schools can offer students both of these latter activities without having to offer “recess.” It is therefore important to sort out and distinguish these three concepts. A Venn diagram representing the characteristics of recess, physical activity and play show the distinctions and the commonality among the three concepts. But what are the general characteristics that distinguish recess from the other two concepts? Pellegrini and Bjorklund argued that “recess” is an activity that typically occurs outside, tends to be unstructured, semi-structured, or student-structured, and is only loosely or indirectly supervised by adults. Moreover, it occurs during formal school hours (so as to distinguish it from outdoor play that occurs before or after school). (See Dubroc, 2007; Jarrett, 2002; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005; Ohanian, 2002).

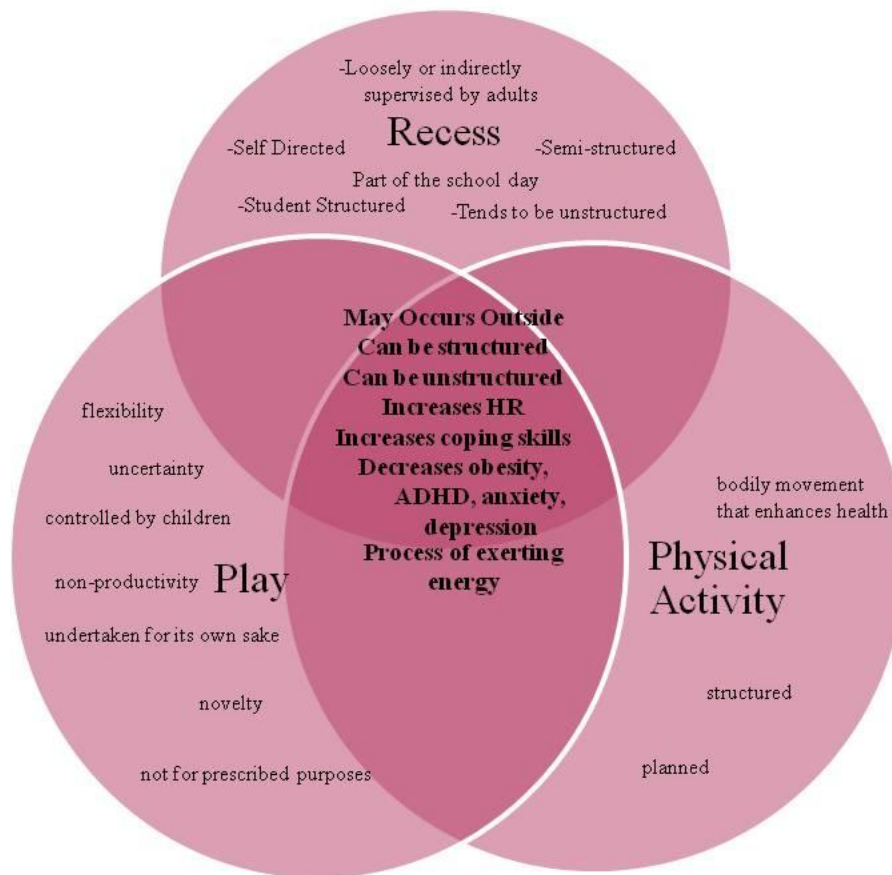


Figure 1: Recess, Physical Activity, and Play Venn Diagram.

Recess and play have been used interchangeably for decades. It is important to distinguish between recess and the differing types of play. Recess is characterized as a break from the day’s routine. School recess varies significantly in form and function. Recess, as defined by Pellegrini (1994), is a period set apart from school which is typically active and free and held outdoors for children. Thus, recess is unstructured and undirected. The term recess refers to a break from what one is doing (Jarrett & Maxwell, 2000). Generally, children from preschool through elementary school have recess as part of their school day. Although some form of recess exists at most elementary schools, the number and duration vary greatly from school to school and state to state (Pellegrini, 2005)

The importance of recess has been questioned mainly in the past 30 years. Despite the historical importance of play, the belief surrounding recess and time-on-tasks associated with increased scores on standardized tests is not one that is concrete in its findings. There is a belief that with the push for high stakes testing and Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), which came out of the NCLB, that administrators and educational leaders are decreasing or eliminating recess for more time on task.

Play is characterized as:

- Pleasurable for participants,
- Intrinsically satisfying, not because of an extrinsic goal,
- Spontaneous and voluntary,
- Active,
- Systematically related to non-play activities

(Garvey, 1977).

Play, unlike recess, is a time when you lose where you are - your sense of time and direction. Some play has clearly defined goals and when structured with rules is called a game, whereas, other play exhibits no such goals nor rules and is considered to be "unstructured". Structured play has more adult supervision and is directed by adults. There is a common thread among play and recess advocates that if children are missing this part of their development, they are missing out of giving back to society. That this developmental stage of non-directed early childhood play is carried out in recess once a child is in school, is a stage that children need to go into and come out of. James Poole, MD believes if students are not afforded this opportunity for recess and non-directed play then it could lead to some of the top chronic diseases---mental health problems and obesity (J. Poole, personal communication, February 7, 2011).

Undirected Play and the Media

Undirected play has been depicted in popular media as being conducted in an open field with children running and playing through the wheat fields and school yards. An example of this is the television show *Little House on the Prairie*. The school bell rings. Children grab their lunches and run out the school house door, down the hill, and to the stream where the children play and discuss the concerns of the day. This is the equivalent of today's lunch recess. Although Pelligrini's views on playgrounds suggest that if there isn't a playground there must not be formal recess. This notion has been refuted in movies, literature, and real life.

Position Statements

Educational organizations such as the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists (NAECS, 2001), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2003), the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE, 2006), the Association for Childhood Education International (ACEI, 2002), and the International Playground Association (Fronczek, 2004) have developed statements citing research to support the inclusion of recess as a necessary part of the school day (NASPE, 2006). Despite the pro-recess positions taken by these national and international educational organizations, school districts have elected to decrease or eliminate recess (Sindelar, 2004). School administrators have cited playground safety, student aggression (bullying), and wasted instructional time as factors influencing decisions to revoke recess privileges (Villaire, 2001). Villaire gave credence to the possible decrease in recess before the enactment of NCLB.

Besides the behavioral and physical benefits suggested above, some researchers suggest what nearly amounts to a moral or ethical argument concerning recess; the idea that removing it from the school threatens one of the most enduring qualities of our children--their human spirit. Brian Sutton-Smith (1999) sums up this idea poignantly, stating, "The opposite of play--if redefined in terms which stress its reinforcing optimism and excitement--is not work, it is depression" (p. 254).

As of 2010, nine of the 50 states have enacted separate recess policies, with Pennsylvania not being one of them. Pennsylvania chose to heed the call for recess by enacting the federal boilerplate policy entitled the Wellness Policy 246. This boilerplate policy will be discussed later in this study after a discussion on the NCLB stance and its implications on recess (P.E. and Recess State Policy Classification, 2008).

Over the years, views regarding recess have fluctuated with regard to its necessity during the academic day. However, recess has held a common foundation in that it is deemed a time where learners are given free time in which they can engage in socializing with other learners through different levels of activity – generally held outdoors (Dubroc, 2007; Jarrett, 2002; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005; Ohanian, 2002).

These policies and their supporting theories will be further explored in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“As a rule, we do not respect children. We try to force them to follow us without regard to their special needs. We are overbearing with them, and above all, rude and then we expect them to be submissive and well-behaved, knowing all the time how strong is their instinct of imitation and how touching their faith in admiration of us. They will imitate us in any case. Let us treat them, therefore, with all the kindness which we would wish to help to develop in them” (Montessori, 1965, p. 133).

The purpose of this chapter is to give credence to the history of recess and the policies impacting recess. Such terms as play, directed and undirected play, and structured and unstructured play will be defined and explained. Recess contributes to the whole child and meets social, emotional, physical, psychological, intellectual needs (Hannaford, 1995). Numerous researchers support inclusion of recess within the school day. Although research is limited in nature, available literature indicates recess plays a vital role in the educational life of the child (Chaker, 2006; Diamond & Hopson, 1998; Dubroc, 2007; Hannaford, 1995; Pellegrini, 1995; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005). In addition, recent policies and research indicates that “breaks may help you be more productive” (Pellegrini, 2005, p. 2).

The researcher compared the definitions of recess, play, and physical activity. Recess used in a school setting symbolizes a suspension of business or procedure often for rest or relaxation (children playing at recess) typically outside, loosely structured, with students having some control

over the structure and content. Play used in a school setting can be used as recreational activity; especially the spontaneous activity of children or to engage or take part in a game. Play is distinguished from “recess” in that it can be highly structured by adults. Physical activity is any body movement that works your muscles and requires more energy than resting. Walking, running, dancing, swimming, yoga, and gardening are a few examples of physical activity. It is performed for various reasons including strengthening muscles and the cardiovascular system, honing athletic skills, weight loss or maintenance, as well as for the purpose of enjoyment.

History of Recess

Schoolmaster John Brisley and philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau are credited with coining the word recess in the 1700’s. Brisley believed children benefited from a break in the school day in English schools. Rousseau, who was linked with physical education and the enlightenment period was credited with inventing recess, thought of play as being educational, and promoted education for the masses (Wilson, 2010; Simone, 2004). Since the mid-1700 before the time of the Revolutionary War, children’s right to play appears to have superseded even an adult’s right to bear arms. When training soldiers interfered with games of school children in Boston, children protested to the Governor of Massachusetts, who then ordered soldiers to move away and give children the time and space to play (Mulrine, 2000).

McClure and Kinnison (1990) surmise in pre-industrial times play was a child’s imitation of the adult world and used for the release of surplus energy. Wilson Homer’s painting, “*Crack the Whip,*” depicts free non-directed play among school children playing during recess. With the industrial revolution, play began to be seen as a frivolous and nonproductive activity. Moving into the progressive era and the introduction of toys, play took on the role of active problem solving and

socialization (McClure and Kinnison, 1990, pp. 8-9). Toys of this era included Tops, Bilbo Catcher Cup and Ball, Marbles and Jacks, and Rocking Horses. Recess games included Fox and the Hound, chase, jump rope, and numerous tag games. Recess games progressed with the times to include kickball, Four Square, and Hopscotch.

Playground equipment was introduced in the late 1800's. During this time the state of New York implemented an area for recess and free-play stating it was a space for moral movement not a charity. The progressives, people advocating or implementing social reform or new liberal ideas, first recognized the powerful influence of the playground and sought to use it as a tool to reshape the social, moral, and economic landscape of the United States, during the latter part of the 19th century (Lee, 1915; Rainwater, 1921). According to Perry (1910) and Zilversmit (2000), recess existed within the confines of progressivism and progressive education but no details of the actual events are given. Popular literature, film, and TV, seems to suggest children historically had and should have ample time to play outdoors at school although scant research exists on this topic to support this assumption. Through the use of directed play activities, the progressives hoped to produce future generations of "playground-trained-children" educated in the skills and discipline required of the industrial world (Rainwater, 1921). Subsequently, progressive educators promoted play as part of child-centered curriculum (Franklin, 2000; Zilversmit, 1993), but this approach also used play to educate students rather than as a leisure experience.

Differences arose in the socialization of students when compared to the rural one room school house where children came from miles away to go to school. Fuller (1987) wrote about this time of separation of country and city schools with the belief that the separation of country and city schools worked well. The types of games played differed in that country schools allowed for socialization across grade levels while city schools recesses were grade-specific and did not allow

for socialization across grade levels. Fuller further described recess as a time in country schools for rural folk life, while city schools focused more on “supervised American popular culture”.

Ongoing Debate over the Role of Recess in Schools

Over the past thirty years, the right to play in schools has been re-evaluated and, to a large degree, thought to have been decreased. Although data is limited on the topic of recess, the debate over recess in America is thought to have begun in the early 1980s (Pellegrini, 2005). Additionally, free undirected play has held a controversial stance over the years in regard to its purpose. It is now viewed by some as unimportant in the elementary setting. Cutting back or eliminating recess has also become a concern for many in the educational arena (Ohanian, 2002; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005).

Continuing devaluation of recess has resulted in the decrease or elimination of recess from the school day in some 16,000 school districts nationwide, prompting some districts to build elementary schools without playgrounds (Sindelar, 2004). Schools from Florida to Texas have eliminated recess and reiterated that school is a place for learning not frivolous play. Tom Walker, director of school management for Manatee County, Florida revealed his stance in doing away with recess stating, “We’re in school basically for instruction, and recess, in most cases, does not provide instruction” (Ohanian, 2002, pp. 2-3). Schools in Galveston, Texas, mirror this notion in that they, too, have eliminated recess in order to provide needed instructional time while claiming that the only way to add recess back into the day is to extend the length of the school day (Meier et al., 2004).

Many of the schools still allowing recess are replacing traditional free-play opportunities with socialized and structured recess changing the name from “recess” to “directed play activity” (Shouse, 2005). Socialization opportunities may not happen anywhere else but on the playground when students are in free-play and game situations such as Annie Over, New York and Boston, and

Dare Base (Isern, 1987) to name a few. Games such as these instill cooperation, working together, and fairness. In schools where free play is eliminated, teachers may give their children opportunities to play, but they must conduct an organized game or have a physical goal in mind when doing so (Mulrine, 2000).

Demands from administrators and legislators have added fuel to the No Recess trend because they require schools to increase student achievement and to raise standardized test scores. Sindelar (2002) pointed out that schools are pressured to implement No Recess policies as a result of demands from politicians and administrators who believe that recess consumes time that would be better spent on academics. This desire for children to make academic progress as a preparation for taking their place in the work force has led to goal oriented perspectives on play in which educational conservatives view play as a waste of time, whereas educational progressives view play as a form of children's work. In 1997, Sutton-Smith explained that the conservative view insists that play is not usefully adaptive; the progressive view, on the other hand, sees play as preparation for workplace activities. These perspectives show that play is no longer valued for the sake of play itself and, without a specific purpose or goal in mind, play is thought to serve no beneficial purpose at all (Sutton-Smith, 1997).

Supporting the progressive view of play, Jarrett (2002) presented cognitive neuroscience research showing that recess and other play experiences provide the brain opportunities to recycle chemicals crucial for the formation of long-term memory. And, without these opportunities to recycle chemicals that form long-term memory, lifelong learning is less likely to take place. Pellegrini and Bohn (2005) build on Jarrett's argument by connecting it to Piagetian theory which suggests that disequilibrium through peer interaction facilitates development, whereas unilateral interactions between adults and children are less facilitative of lifelong learning. Disequilibrium is

likely to occur when children are allowed opportunities to exchange points of view with each other in natural contexts, as they do in play environments.

Children are encouraged to exchange understandings and conceptions of the world as they participate in activities. By exchanging ideas while interacting with their peers during play, misconceptions or misunderstandings are equilibrated into schemata that can be used to build more complex thought processes (Piaget, 1962). However, the current trend toward more teacher-directed lessons even in some kindergarten and pre-school programs do not allow children to create the type of meaningful understandings they might construct when engaging in play (Gallagher, 1997).

Young children convey what they understand about the world around them through a system of symbolic representations called the symbolic function (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Representation, in its broadest sense, is identical with thought (Pulaski, 1971). Representation can be observed during events in which children engage in imitating others writing, drawing, speaking, and playing. Symbolic representation involves the use of symbols, such as written letters, drawn figures, objects, or toys, to convey thinking. To understand what children are thinking or what they know, individuals must observe and interact with them in ways that facilitate these representations. Such interactions do not indicate a replica of the reality; they do, however, provide observers with an idea of the ways children understand that reality (Pulaski, 1971).

In spite of the research and theoretical support as a valuable if not necessary component of learning, the conservative view of play is becoming the reality. Schools are eliminating free-play and recess and, therefore, may be putting children at risk by stunting neurocognitive, physical, social, and cognitive development that is the foundation of language. The conservative approach to play may set children up for academic failure (Sutton-Smith, 1997).

Policies Impacting Recess

Elementary and Secondary Education Act and No Child Left Behind

In 2002, the U.S. government reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), commonly called the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) (Abernathy, 2007; Meier & Wood, 2004; Paige, 2006). NCLB seeks to achieve two key goals. First, the law aims to close “the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers” (Abernathy, 2007, p. 3). Secondly, NCLB seeks to “create and implement an assessment regime with significant consequences for those who fail” (p. 3). Essentially, NCLB places schools, educational agencies and individual states responsible for student success (Abernathy, 2007; Meier & Wood, 2004; Paige, 2006).

Lawmakers and their staffs typically have windows of opportunities every five years to work to improve and advance policies such as those involving health and nutrition (e.g., the reauthorization of the federal Child Nutrition Programs). For the duration of this brief window a multitude of questions are asked: What works well? What isn’t working? How can we address new needs? For school nutrition professionals, including those represented by the School Nutrition Association, reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Program brings with it a special responsibility to answer these questions. For Pennsylvania, Recess falls under this reauthorization with the enactment of the state-mandated boilerplate policy called the Student Wellness Policy.

Pennsylvania Student Wellness Policy 246

Pennsylvania enacted the Student Wellness Policy 246 in 2004. This is a state-mandated boilerplate policy that directs school districts to identify student wellness and proper nutrition as

related to student well being, growth, development, and readiness to learn. Within this policy are guidelines to promote student wellness, proper nutrition, nutrition education, and regular physical activity as part of educating the whole child. The question becomes how this boilerplate came about and why recess is addressed within the overall scope of nutrition.

School board policies are written in response to legislation and are meant to clarify the law, establish local procedures, and develop protocols to comply with the law. Since there is no state or federal law requiring recess within the state of Pennsylvania, school boards have not established formal policies. The thought is that oftentimes, items that are not clear to the school board are written into board-approved student handbooks. When this occurs, it becomes a practice of the district. By the school years, 2012-14, NCLB requires 100% of schools and students meet AYP requirements. If a school district does not meet AYP requirements, strict sanctions will be placed on the district by the federal government (Abernathy, 2007).

As a result of such requirements, schools have questioned the need for recess. The question becomes, have administrators and school leaders been forced to find ways in which to prepare students for the rigorous testing requirements (Meier & Wood, 2004) so as to not be deemed as a failing school and endure the strict sanctions of AYP. Schools adhering to the NCLB requirements can achieve higher test scores if they “deprive kids of recess, eliminate music and the arts, cut back the class meetings and discussions of current events, offer less time to read books for pleasure, squeeze out the field trips and interdisciplinary projects and high-quality electives” and “spend enough time teaching test-taking tricks” (Ohanian, 2002, p. xi). However, educating in this manner could be looked at as developing robots and not the minds of children.

According to the Center on Education Policy (2007), 44% of school districts “have cut science, social studies, art, music, physical education, lunch, or recess time since 2001 in response to

NCLB mandates” (p. 16). Inevitably, the above items are areas that provide opportunities for students to enjoy the educational process and can also be attributed to educating the whole child (Jensen, 2001).

Play and recess are similar in nature. Play can have clearly defined goals and when structured with rules are called a game. Play also can exhibit no goals or rules and is considered to be "unstructured" in the literature. Recess, as defined earlier, is “a break period, typically held outdoors, for children” (Pellegrini, 1995, p. 2). Recess specifically impacts the development of sense perception and attention, memory, creativity, insight, self-awareness, organization and planning, knowledge and understanding, and socialization (Ariel, 2002). The benefits associated with recess encompass the whole child not merely the instructional aspects. Although school is an environment where traditional academics consume the bulk of the academic day but also an arena where character education, social justice issues, socialization skills, and personal health issues come into play. The implementation of recess provides this added opportunity for teachers to engage students in these additional learning arenas.

As the demands for NCLB and AYP continue to weigh down upon public schools across the nation, the education of the whole child need not be disregarded. Rather, the hope of the researcher for public education to seek educating the whole child in order to balance the child’s social and emotional, cardiovascular and physical, and cognitive components to produce a healthy, educated individual, capable of positively contributing to society, not only on a local and national level, but on a global level as well. If NCLB seeks to truly leave no child behind, then the impact recess plays on the well-being of the student, within the learning environment, ought to be considered in the context of this law.

While there are individuals in the political and educational arena agreeing with the current trend to eliminate or decrease recess, there are individuals who believe children benefit from recess and it should be a vital part of the academic day (Chaker, 2006; Dubroc, 2007; Jarrett, 2002; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005). Students' use of imaginative play allows children to pretend a picture of a male or a male doll is daddy permitting the child to infer and make connections allowing for higher order thinking. Recess allows children use of the imagination as an individual or in games with others and does not take away from time on task within the classroom.

Absence of Recess and Negative Effects

Reducing or eliminating recess has become a concern for many in the educational arena (Ohanian, 2002; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005). A body of current research across multiple disciplines has drawn empirical and hypothetical connections between the absence of recess and the following negative effects for children:

- Underdeveloped social skills and anti-social behavior (KaBoom, 2009, p. 6).
- Increasing diagnoses of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)—4.5 million children between the ages of three and seventeen are diagnosed with ADHD (CDC, 2008, p. 3)
- Lack of resiliency and development of coping skills (Marano, 2008).
- Poor health--More than 23 million youths are overweight or obese (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2009, p. 1).
- Heightened levels of anxiety and depression--Diagnoses of anxiety disorders and depression in children are on the rise, with a corresponding increase in the use of psychoactive drugs to treat them (Marano, 2008).

Clearly, some of these negative effects are hypothetical, with little (at least at this point) in the way of empirical support. However, they do suggest the overall concern of many researchers and practitioners over the decline of recess.

Inclusion of Recess within the School Day

Other studies have indicated the positive effects of recess. For example, Barros, Silver, and Stein (2009) found that providing a daily recess break for 8- to 9-year-old children in excess of 15 minutes was associated with a teacher's higher rating of class behavior scores. Jambor (1999) recognized the value of the playground at recess time as being one of the few places where children can actively confront, interpret, and learn from meaningful social experiences. When children organize their own games, they exhibit a wide range of social competencies.

Recent evidence from the field of neuroscience (Panksepp, Burgdorf, Turner, & Gordon, 2003) suggests that the disorder known as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), which affects 6% to 16% of American children, may result not from faulty brain wiring or chemistry, but rather from restricting the urge to play. Panksepp (2002) has found that vigorous bouts of unstructured social play may be the best treatment for reducing the impulsive behaviors that characterize ADHD. Other studies suggest a link between recess and students' physical fitness. Clements and Jarrett (2000) report a number of such benefits, including enhanced aerobic endurance, muscle strength, motor coordination, attentiveness, as well as heart and lung stimulation gained through vigorous activity.

Besides the behavioral and physical benefits suggested above, some researchers suggest what nearly amounts to a moral or ethical argument concerning recess; the idea that removing it from the school threatens one of the most enduring qualities of our children--their human spirit. Brian Sutton-

Smith (1999) sums up this idea poignantly, stating, "The opposite of play--if redefined in terms which stress its reinforcing optimism and excitement--is not work, it is depression" (p. 254).

Physical Effects of Recess

Today children receive significantly less time for physical activity during the school day than they did even a decade earlier (Hardman & Marshall, 2000; Wechsler, Devereaux, David, & Collins, 2000). The disappearance of recess results in decreased time for physical activity for elementary school students. Many studies related to the physical effects of activity in children deal with the issue of childhood obesity. These studies aimed at promoting physical well being in children in an effort to carry the attributes over to adulthood increasing the quality of life for children and adolescents. Other physical disorders, such as developmental coordination disorder, become areas of interest in research on the effects of physical activity in young children.

Scruggs, Beveridge, and Watson (2003) suggested "recess breaks may have important developmental and educational implications such as providing breaks from cognitive tasks and providing opportunities for unstructured peer interactions" (p. 157). These researchers concluded fitness breaks show promise as a developmentally appropriate means whereby schools can play a significant role in having an impact on the physical activity levels for children during the school day.

Childhood Obesity

When physical activity is restricted during school hours, children do not regain the lost physical activity after school, resulting in children who are incredibly sedentary throughout the majority of the day (Dale, Corbin, & Dale, 2000). The relationship between sedentary behaviors and prevalence of obesity has been well documented (CDC, 2003; Gortmaker, Dietz, & Cheung, 1990;

Pate et al., 2002). Several studies indicated childhood obesity reached epidemic proportions and identified lack of physical activity as the underlying factor (Eliakim, et al., 2002; Reilly et al., 2004; Thorpe et al., 2004). Childhood obesity affects 20% to 27% of all children worldwide (Eliakim et al., 2004). In addition, childhood obesity has been linked to additional problems in the short term including adverse effects on growth, blood pressure, and respiratory conditions like asthma and obstructive sleep apnea. The long-term consequences of childhood obesity include hypertension, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, gall bladder disease, and osteoarthritis (Thorpe et al., 2004). Children who have a body mass index (BMI) 85% greater than other children their age are considered overweight, and children with a BMI 95% greater than other children their age are considered obese. Reilly et al. (2004) found children with total energy expenditure time of less than 25 minutes per day in physical activities are at greater risk for developing childhood obesity. These researchers suggested all children should engage in moderate to vigorous physical activity for 60 minutes per day to combat obesity, recess being one of the avenues to accomplish this. In the same vein, Eliakim et al. (2004), noted most of weight gain results from an imbalance between energy intake and energy expenditure. These researchers concluded overeating, increased caloric intake, increased inactivity, and a growing sedentary lifestyle all contribute obesity.

Developmental Coordination Disorder

Obesity is not the only condition when activity is encouraged or prescribed as a combatant. Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD) is a condition affecting children's ability to participate in activities with other children due to poor motor and coordination skills. Watkinson (2001) and colleagues determined a child diagnosed with DCD show evidence of poor motor coordination and interference with activities of daily living preventing engagement in culturally normal activities.

They suggested the most common place and time to evaluate children for DCD is during their gross motor activity in school-based time on outdoor playgrounds during recess before and after school begins. They conducted a study where students were observed participating in play activities such as hanging upside down on monkey bars, swinging with a partner on a regular swing, playing tag, and playing on a tire on the playground. These observations were used to construct items for questions used in interviews with children with self reports as data. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with children to determine their feelings toward their participation in outdoor play. Watkinson et al. (2001) found children with DCD were less likely to engage in gross motor activities on the playground and suggested children at risk for DCD in classroom activities should encourage peer interactions on the playground providing more opportunities for motor coordination to improve.

Vitamin D Deficiency

Vitamin D deficiency has also seen an increase in urban children and youth. There is concern this deficiency is a result of lack of outdoor time. (Freishtat et al., 2010; Gordon et al., 2004; Kumar et al., 2009; Misra et al., 2008). The populations being affected are dark skinned, urban children (Freishtat et al., 2010; Kumar et al., 2009), which is the same demographic group most likely deprived of recess. This depravation comes as neighborhoods are increasingly unsafe and playground liabilities are on the rise.

According to a survey conducted by Clements (2004), today's children do not play outdoors nearly as often as their mothers did. The immediate and long-term effects of the lack of outdoor experience are discussed in *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficit-disorder* (Louv, 2008). This book raises public concern about the need for active outdoor play and exploration, recess has traditionally been a part (Jarrett, 2011).

The outcome of these studies call for increased physical activity to combat the negative effects of too little physical activity on children's health. However, limited physical activities may result from limited opportunities for play during recess represent only a portion of the limitations on children's growth and development; there are serious repercussions of limiting play and recess on social and cognitive development as well.

Social Effects of Recess

Investigating the social aspects of recess, Jambor (1995) argued that, "recess is one of the few places where today's children can actively confront, interpret and learn from meaningful social experiences" (p. 2). He indicated that experiences during play become socially meaningful to the extent that they help children learn to cooperate. His arguments draw on the work of Piaget (1965) whose observations showed that children also learn to solve problems within their play. Playing and developing games that involve reciprocating relationships, such as tag, become potential predictors of the ability to cooperate, and they enhance children's ability to view events from different perspectives. Children also learn respect for rules, self-discipline, and control of aggression (Shaefer & Reid, 1986); develop problem solving and planning strategies (Nichols, 1995); practice leadership, resolve conflicts, and develop an understanding of playing by the rules (DeVries, 1998).

Jambor (1995) also commented on the fact diminishing opportunities for children to engage in social interactions during the school day, limiting the experiences advancing social development. Delving into brain anatomy and physiology, he further suggested without significant opportunities to build synapses within these social contexts, children lose valuable cognitive opportunities to build synaptic connections.

Jambor (1995) stated many teachers, administrators, and parents consider recess wasted time because believing recess is nonessential to children's learning experiences and students learn best in school when they focus on basic skills and stay on task. This type of curriculum is weighted heavily towards cognitive development. However, it is important to remember during the early years of a child's life, social development is intertwined with cognitive and physical development. Practices such as isolated seating, silent lunch, and quiet lines traveling to and from places within the school, leave little or no time for children to interact with each other; without the opportunity to exchange viewpoints, children remain in an egocentric state of being (Jambor, 2000). The developmental benefits playing situations provide, work to further neurological development in all areas (Frost, Brown, Sutterby, & Thornton, 2004). However, there is nothing wrong with designing curriculum promoting cognitive gain. Pellegrini and Glickman (1989) pointed out, the curriculum must be re-evaluated when the emphasis on the cognitive domain becomes so overwhelming that children's other developmental domains, including social development, become stifled.

Linking Social Development to Cognition

In an effort to examine links from recess and social development to cognition, Pellegrini (1995) conducted a study observing kindergarteners over the course of a year during their recess periods. From these observations, Pellegrini reported children who took advantage of opportunities to initiate interactions with peers not only scored higher on standardized tests such as the Georgia Criterion Referenced Test (GCRT), but also had higher levels of social competence. On the other hand, those children who more often participated in adult initiated interactions not only scored lower on the achievement tests, but also seemed to lack the social skills to interact with their peers within the play arena. Pellegrini also found object play became a significant predictor of performance on

the math portion of the GRCT. He concluded these findings were “consistent with Piagetian (1970) theory and the curricular work of Kamii and DeVries (1978)” (1995, p. 93). These results implied recess, or unstructured play, provide children with the opportunities to react in more socially competent ways with adults and peers while building necessary connections to support learning of academic material.

Social Acceptance and Physical Competence

Barbour (1996) conducted a study of children during recess to examine the relationship between social acceptance and physical competence; the latter was defined as the ability to succeed in meeting particular situational demands in the motor realm. Barbour (1996) examined peer relations among kindergarteners and second grade children with high or low motor skills as demonstrated by more or less coordination, strength, and physical maturity. In this study, the researcher used behavioral observations on the playground during recess when children were able to engage in self-initiated, self-structured play free of adult intervention. Based on the actions observed during the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the participants to ascertain the attitudes and perspectives of children during the recess periods.

The results of Barbour’s (1996) study indicated children, particularly boys, with higher physical competence were more socially accepted than their less physically competent counterparts. This was attributed to their ability to engage in more types of social play such as soccer and other ball games. Barbour also found girls with higher physical competence were more socially accepted than their less physically competent counterparts. Girls tended to engage in pretend and dramatic play and used their more developed abilities to lead play activities. Barbour (1996) concluded “physical competence plays a part in children’s standing in their play groups. This is due to the fact

physical competence provides one criterion on which social stature is based “because it is highly valued by peers, it is a means for social recognition” (p. 43). The results of this study suggest without the opportunities to interact with other children, social competence is less likely to be established.

Intervention Strategies on Social Relations

Several researchers examined the effects of intervention strategies on social relations during recess periods (Lewis, Colvin, & Sugai, 2000; Lewis et.al.; 2002; Nelson, & Smith, 1995). Among the strategies investigated were peer mediation, interactive supervision, and school wide behavior supports.

Nelson and Smith (1995) conducted a study of second grade boys in which peer mediation was used in conjunction with self-evaluation techniques. They posited self-management procedures are well suited for children experiencing problems during recess because recess is a period of time giving children a much needed break from their work and opportunities to engage in peer mediation and self management. In addition, Nelson and Smith stated “the underlying premise of self-management procedures is congruent with cultural standards of individual self-control of behavior as well as limiting some of the potential problems associated with externally managed behavior modification programs” (1995, p. 2).

Based on these assumptions, Nelson and Smith (1995) matched students without behavior problems to students who were under behavior plans due to documented behavior problems. The researchers then taught students with behavior problems self-observation, self-recording, and self-evaluating procedures. The researchers then required students to make a judgment about their behavior relative to adult standards. Behaviors were then externally managed by the researchers and

the peer mediators for both desirable behaviors and judgments about those behaviors. Finally, the procedures, including the explicit contingencies, were gradually withdrawn when students were reliably controlling their own behavior.

Nelson and Smith (1995) found clear changes in recess behavior occurred for each student who had been identified originally as a student with behavior problems when the self-evaluation procedure was introduced. The rates of negative recess behavior decreased as positive recess behavior increased following the implementation of the instructional intervention. These rates were maintained through the experimental conditions, and difference in the rates of positive and negative behaviors gradually faded yielding more positive behaviors. They also found the introduction of the self- evaluation procedure reduced differences in the recess behavior of target students and peer partners. The findings suggested teaching self-evaluation procedures improved social behavior of students with a history of behaviors in recess settings where these students have very limited access to adult supervision.

Problem Behaviors during Recess on the Playground

Lewis, Colvin and Sugai (2000) conducted a study to examine the effectiveness of implementing a pre-correction and active supervision strategy to determine the rate of reduction of problem behaviors observed during recess on elementary school playgrounds. In this study active supervision was defined as “behaviors displayed by supervisors designed to encourage more appropriate student behavior and to discourage rule violations (supervision behaviors), such as moving around, scanning, interacting with the students, and reinforcing displays of targeted social skills” (Lewis et al., 2000, p. 110). The study was conducted at an elementary school in an ongoing project aimed at improving student behavior. Classroom teachers were already teaching critical

social skills using verbalizations such as “respect others”, “using preferred names”, and “no name calling” when the study began. The researchers implemented the study through three phases: First, the teachers reviewed the school rules and recorded social skills specific to the playground. Second, playground monitors reviewed school rules and supervision expectations. Finally, pre-correction and active supervision were introduced across three recess periods at one-week intervals.

The data collected by Lewis et al. (2000) indicated the intervention reduced the overall rate of observed problem behavior in unstructured activities during recess. The data were encouraging to these researchers because a relatively simple intervention was effective in promoting generalized social responding beyond the training setting i.e., the classroom, to a more unstructured recess setting that typically abounds with challenging behaviors.

Positive Behavior Support (PBS)

Building on the theme of prevention and early intervention to reduce behaviors and social problems, Lewis et al. (2002) conducted an additional study to evaluate the effectiveness of an applied universal positive behavior support (PBS) as an intervention. PBS consisted of social skill instruction and group contingencies on the frequency of problem behavior displayed by elementary students on the playground. To conduct this study, researchers observed students from kindergarten through sixth grade on a playground with a blacktop area for games such as basketball and tetherball and an activity area with slides and swings. Student groups on the playground during the same recess periods were comprised of second and fourth graders, first and third graders, and fifth and sixth graders. Kindergarten classes overlapped all of the recess periods observed.

The interventions implemented by Lewis et al. (2002) consisted of two components: (1) teaching rules, routines and desired behavior, and (2) group contingencies. Lessons were designed to

define rules, provide examples of the rule, model expected behavior, have students practice expected behavior, and review the rules. Nine lessons were taught; six addressed rules and routines for specific games, and three taught desired social skills. Group contingencies consisted of earning elastic loops that were carried by playground monitors and given to students when they were observed exhibiting appropriate behaviors. The loops were then used by the students to earn extra recess, to make things such as jewelry, and to receive candy and other rewards.

The overall results in this study by Lewis et al. (2002) suggested the intervention did have an impact on the frequency of problem behavior on the playground, especially during the recess periods with combinations of first through fourth graders on the playground at the same time. Through a non-intrusive, instruction-based intervention, instructors were able to reduce problem behaviors on the playground. “By creating contexts in which problem behavior is reduced through positive strategies as opposed to punishment, corollary outcomes such as improvements in school climate, teacher confidence to address problem behaviors, and a reallocation of resources were observed” (Lewis et al., 2002, p. 189).

Correlations of Games Played during Recess and Social Competence

In an effort to establish correlations between the games children play during recess and social competence, Pellegrini, Kato, Blatchford and Baines (2002) examined the playground games played by kindergarteners across their first year of full day school and the implications for social competence of these same children in first grade. Based on earlier findings by Blatchford in 1989, Pellegrini et al. (2002) suggested children who are more simplistic at games are the leaders who initiate, maintain, and terminate games. By affiliating with these game leaders, children may learn valuable social skills and form alliances. The researchers proposed that games support interactions

between children at recess. Even the most rudimentary games can be used as a basis for initial interaction between relatively unfamiliar and relatively immature children. After repeated interactions in such games, children become more familiar with each other and then can interact in other more complex ways.

Interacting with Peers on the Playground

Pellegrini et al. (2002) hypothesized games on the school playground at recess should predict adjustment in the very earliest school years because game facility is an indicator of children's engagement in one important dimension of the school day. Games that are developed by children who make up their own rules at recess represent a transition point from the relatively unstructured and peer-oriented regimen of most preschools and very early grades in primary schools to the adult-structured environment in most elementary school classrooms. This reasoning is consistent with the ethological models of domain-specific cognition described by Bjorklund and Pellegrini (2000), "the playground and first grade classes are relatively similar niches with similar demand characteristics; thus competence in one area (the playground) should relate to the competence in the other (school, more generally)" (p. 996).

Collecting data to investigate their hypothesis, Pellegrini et al. (2002) found boys engaged in significantly more chase games and ball games than girls. However, girls' exhibited significantly more verbal games and dramatic play games than boys. The researchers also found boys exhibited a more varied repertoire of games than girls. With respect to social competence, the researchers found that game leadership did not predict girls' social competence, but it did predict boys' social competence. In addition, game leadership did not predict girls' adjustment to first grade, but predicted boys' adjustment to first grade.

The adjustment could be due to girls being less concerned with games than boys because games are competitive and the competitive nature of games is more in keeping with the hierarchic competitive nature of male peer groups. The results confirmed the researcher's supposition the playground is a venue which affords males and females opportunities to engage in locomotor, competitive, social, and cognitive activities.

The results from this study by Pelligrini et al. (2002) indicated child-governed games played freely at recess are implicated in male children's social competence and adjustment to first grade. Although this study did not examine the correlations between kindergarten girls' engagement in verbal games and dramatic play during recess and their social competence and adjustment in first grade, the results indicated girls still benefit from the social interaction and dramatic play opportunities during recess; however, with girls, this study found no direct link to these play opportunities and social competence in first grade. The finding related to children's social competence developing in the context of interacting with peers is especially important as all children, both boys and girls, are rapidly losing opportunities to interact with peers during recess due to policies and school facilities not allowing no time or space for recess during the school day.

As the research has shown, social competence, peer mediation, opportunities to participate in games with rules, building relationships with peers, and learning basic rules of getting along with others are only some of the benefits that recess provides to all children. In addition, trends such as isolated seating, silent lunches, and structured play through games or centers without benefit of choice may be contributing to a generation of children who are lacking in basic social competence and interaction skills (Jambor, 2000).

Cognitive Effects of Recess

There are few studies directly identifying recess as a factor affecting cognitive development. Developmental theorists such as Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1966), however, spent considerable time observing children and drawing theoretical hypotheses about the link between play and cognitive development.

Piaget (1962) described play as a process of assimilating and accommodating new knowledge into an existing knowledge base. Specifically, he discussed the role of *phenomenism*, representations permeated with causal properties, and *egocentrism*, the inability to see the perspectives of others, in this assimilation process. He pointed out two attributes are “undissociated aspects of elementary consciousness and distinct of experimental objectivity and rational deduction” (p. 162), meaning children see the world as they choose to see it; not necessarily the way others see it. This being so, children’s play is the primary process through which the phases of this progressive segregation occurs. When assimilation and accommodation are not associated with each other and not yet reintegrated into a more permanent equilibrium, the levels of operational and rational thought are not yet complementary. Play contributes to the integration of the understandings being assimilated and provides for the misunderstandings that must be accommodated in order to advance knowledge in a way the child can understand. Vygotsky (1966) considered the impact of social interactions on a child’s play and development and saw the two as inseparable. He described play as the leading facilitator of development in young children and the means by which children learn to think abstractly and impose arbitrary meaning on objects and actions.

In most cases, recess, if recess exists, provides the only time in the school day during which students can engage in play, as it is defined by Piaget (1962) and Vygotsky (1966), and benefit from effects that play has on cognitive and social development. Many current research studies and

recommended practices in the field of early childhood and elementary education relate to play and support recess have been based on these theoretical foundations (Frost, Wortham & Reifel, 2004; Jambor, 2002; Jarrett et al., 2001; Pellegrini and Bjorklund, 1997; Pellegrini & Smith, 1993).

The studies examining the effects of recess on children's cognitive performance include one undertaken by Pellegrini and Bjorklund (1997). In explaining the rationale for this study, the authors claimed young children do not process information as effectively as older children due to the immaturity of their nervous systems and their lack of experiences. They stated these factors render children unable to perform higher level cognitive tasks with the same efficiency as older children and adults. They go on to suggest that policy makers should consider the developmental level of the child when evaluating the rigor of the curriculum. Educators can do little to hasten the maturation of attention skills, but they can do much to foster maximum attention from children through developmentally-appropriate curriculum design, classroom structure, and organization of school schedules.

Pellegrini and Bjorklund (1997) insisted recess should not be viewed simply as an opportunity for recreation, having little to do with academic attainment. Rather, they stressed recess plays a critical role in fostering attention skills in children. They argued young children, in particular, need recess due to their limited information-processing skills and the greater cognitive effort they must apply to their studies. These researchers suggested due to the cognitive immaturity of young children, the unstructured nature of recess may minimize cognitive interference, or the inability to understand multiple sources of information at one time thus inferring young children need recess in addition to other play.

Distributed Practice Hypothesis

Pellegrini and Bjorklund (1997) published results of numerous research studies conducted as support for their position stating recess provides needed play and breaks during cognitively demanding tasks, thus facilitating children's attention to subsequent classroom tasks. They found children's social interaction and physical activity at recess were positively and significantly correlated to their attention to task after recess. Pellegrini and Bjorklund (1997) used the distributed practice hypothesis to explain their results. They claimed distributed practice of cognitively-oriented tasks over time, rather than massed practice with long stints of skill and drill at one time, affords children the opportunities they need to attend to cognitively-oriented tasks and process information in more developmentally appropriate ways.

In another article, Pellegrini and Smith (1993) discussed implications of research on play for education and child development. They pointed out many school systems and even states have made changes in policy and eliminated recess because of the debate over the role of recess in the curriculum. Pellegrini and Smith (1993) cited arguments by education policy makers claiming recess detracts from instructional time in an already crowded school day. These authors described arguments offered by policy makers interested in increasing academic performance, especially as indicated by standardized tests scores, which call for the elimination of recess. Proponents of no-recess policies point that recess, often arbitrarily placed in the school schedule, disrupts children's sustained work patterns and encourages children's aggression and antisocial behavior on the playground. As stated above in the section on social effects of recess this is contradictory to the numerous research finding by Pellegrini, Kato, Blatchford and Baines (2002) and Jambor (2002).

Pellegrini and Smith (1993) disputed this claim by stating "children are more active in spacious, compared with restricted, environments" (p. 54), and increased activity does not

necessarily lead to increased aggression. However, they found correlations between social interaction and cognitive performance tend to indicate social activities during play have important cognitive implications. The fact children's play at recess is not only imitative but also creative suggests recess and its absence may have profound effects on children's development of cognitive and academic knowledge and skills (Pellegrini & Smith, 1993).

Recess and Classroom Behavior

Jarrett et al. (2001) conducted a study to determine the effects of recess on classroom behaviors, specifically the ones they classified as working, fidgeting, and listlessness. In this study, Jarrett et al. (2001) suggested recess affected children's attention to task behavior and had what the authors termed a renewing effect. This renewal allowed the children to pay closer attention to teaching-learning tasks after being allowed the opportunity to have recess. In addition, the authors concluded children in both classes were less on task and more fidgety when denied the recess break and suggested children think and work less efficiently when engaged in long periods of uninterrupted instructional time. Armed with these findings, the researchers advised educators could more effectively use instructional time in the classroom by allowing recess within the context of the school schedule.

Effects of Recess on Symbolic Development

Flavell, Miller, and Miller (1993) described the role play in symbolic representation, young children's use of symbols to represent their understanding of the world around them, and the way they acquire the ability to use these symbols. They pointed out preschoolers have trouble tracking the flow of information to acquire intelligence. They surmised play acts as the facilitator for taking

the world of mature information to the immature mind through perceptual access, within the mind through making inferences, and from one mind to another through communication. Throughout this process of building meaning and knowledge, children begin to use symbols to represent their understandings to others. Flavell and his fellow researchers discussed three distinct modes for symbolic representation: representational insight, dual representation, and representational specificity.

Through representational insight, a child uses pictures to convey their understandings. For example, they may look at a picture of a man and say daddy even though it is not *their* daddy. The child demonstrates through pictures that he understands there is a man in the picture and, in the mind of that child, a man is daddy (Flavell et al., 1993).

When they use dual representation, the child is thinking about one thing in two ways at the same time. For example, a child may use a model of a doll to represent the baby within their family. They act as if the doll is indeed their baby and may give it a personality and other human characteristics, but they will leave it in the car or drag it on the playground, not treating the doll like a real infant would be treated. The child is working out understandings of his world through these actions and understands there are relationships between the doll and a real child. But s/he has not worked out the more operational understandings of how to care for a real infant (Flavell et al., 1993).

Finally, Flavell, Miller, and Miller (1993) discussed representational specificity. This is when a child comes to the realization that a symbol can represent a specific entity. The picture and the doll are no longer just daddy or baby; the picture has to actually *be* of daddy and not just a man. The doll is just a model of something that may be real to them one day. It is the understanding that symbols represent many items in our everyday world and that as their development occurs and their minds mature, they are able to make these distinctions for themselves.

But this process of delimiting representational abilities cannot happen unless children interact with others and with objects. Without the opportunity to de-center and consider the perspectives of others, these models and pictures and what they represent will remain static and exactly as the children perceive them. The most appropriate way for this decentration to occur naturally during the school day is through unstructured play at recess (Flavell, Miller & Miller, 1993).

The “no-recess” trend fits with the general trend toward schools becoming more tightly goal driven, more bureaucratic, and generally more “rationalistic” organizations. In contrast, free play and recess are indications of a more naturalistic understanding of the school organization.

Recess from an Organizational Perspective

Recess and the Rational System

The rational system is driven by specific goals and by a need for high certainty—tests, structured activities, etc., which become very important. Simply put, there is a means to an end. School activities need to be mapped out into formal organizational goals. There are numerous views or arguments that free play recess is not a good use of valuable school time, contending children receive adequate amounts of play in school without having recess on the playground. Yet another set of arguments leans towards a recess where if it is formally organized, as in “directed play” that the students’ physical and cognitive goals would have been met.

Recess and the Natural System

Another argument supports the natural system; schools exist for reasons beyond the pursuit of formal goals; individual needs are important; not every component of value within a school can be formally measured; students gain value from recess in various ways can directly or indirectly relate

to their success or engagement within the classroom—or to their general understanding of life, community, relationships (Waller, 1932). Waller believed students should be allowed to create a culture within their school and generally experience a “small society” similar to what exists outside of school. “Extracurricular activity” works as a form of informal social control. In essence you get kids to “like” school and then you get them to achieve within the walls of the school. This belief resounded throughout history with Willower, Boyd and Charles Bidwell’s belief that extracurricular activity (i.e. free play) may be a support mechanism for academic goals (Willower & Boyd, 1989).

The Democratic Spirit and Recess

James Conant used the term “democratic spirit” to portray the organizational quality emerges from the breadth that generates a combination of democracy and human capital (Shouse, 2005). Through this democratic society schools could shape students’ training, intellect, and attitudes. Although Conant’s comments are based on a comprehensive high school his point of creating a democratic spirit of understanding through “less formal, less structured social interactions” speaks volumes for the ideology of the meaning and value of recess. Shouse’s combined thoughts on democratic spirit and the demise of “free space” within the school implies there is a decrease in the education of the whole child. By not allowing students a space to use their imaginations and pretend play it is implied recess is of little value within the school day.

Viewing Recess through the Ethical Dimensions

Viewing recess through the multiple paradigms of care, profession, justice, and critique, has not been done within the research literature. This gap in the literature has led administrators and school leaders to overlook what truly is in the best interest of the child. While looking at these

paradigms administrators and educators are in a unique circumstance to observe the best interest of the child along with personal and professional codes of ethics. Other areas such as the ethics of the community, standards of the profession, and individual professional codes aid the administrator and educator in the ethical dilemmas surrounding recess. An in-depth view of these paradigms follows.

Ethics, according to John Dewey (1902), is the science dealing with behavior (i.e. the difference between right and wrong and approved ways of acting). The ethic of justice surrounds the beliefs of the “nature of the universe, the nature of God, fate verses free will, good and evil and the relationship between human beings and their fate” (Starratt 2002, Shapiro & Stefkovich, 2011). Beauchamp and Childress (1984) and Crittenden (1984) argue educational leaders should look to laws and public policies for ethical guidance.

Ethic of Care

Children need to move, to exercise, to express themselves through play and to communicate to the rest of the school outside their classroom. Recess is this time when children can do all of this. The ethic of care surrounds the concept of giving back and the concept of the greatest good for the greatest number (Noddings, 2005). Recess is the only time within the school day a child is in all domains; physical, social, and cognitive. In this light, it is imperative to discuss the physical, social and cognitive components of recess. Throughout the past few decades researchers investigated the effects of recess and free play activities on children’s physical, social, and cognitive development. The research implicitly gave light to the benefits of recess and free play within the school day relating it to increased kinesthetic awareness, increased social skills, increased time on task, and increased test scores. However, despite the research conducted in these areas, recess and free play continues to be decreased or eliminated from school days across the country.

The first job of the school is to take care of the children entrusted to it. If this is the case and we are looking out for the best interest of the whole child then the ethic of care would argue in favor of not changing, decreasing, or eliminating recess or free play. The ethic of care stresses a move from the hierarchal model of moral decision making to a leadership style focusing on relationship and connections (Noddings, 2005).

According to Barth (1990), when an ethic of care is valued educational leaders become head leaders. What he meant by this term is in order to create educational leaders and outstanding leaders and learners the leaders need to listen to others when faced with decisions of moral aptitude and importance. Students need attention and support and direction in and out of the classroom. This brings the ethic of many levels of caring into play when discussing emotion and empathy of the child in a cognitive, physical, and psychological manner. The educational leader may look at having recess as what is in the best interest of the whole child through this lens and could be very comfortable with the decision made. Policy makers and administrators who decrease or eliminate recess are in a breach of ethics in this case.

Ethic of the Profession

The ethic of the profession brings in the individual's awareness of their own personal and professional code of ethics. It is usually filled with codes, rules, and principles of the profession. What educator or educational leader doesn't remember frolicking on the playground, playing red rover red rover, or any other numerous games they might have thought up. The freedom of the wind in their hair and running through the grass were simpler times. Using this paradigm to look at recess and if it should be within the school day brings one to think of whether we expect too much from administrators in regard to moral decision making.

Within this ethical dimension administrators have policies pushing them to decrease time for free undirected play to better spend that time as seat time. But does this make a smarter child? The research presented above contradicts this statement. If the ethic of the profession is to put the best interest of the student at the center of the decision making process then one can only foresee recess will not be reduced or eliminated because of AYP deficiencies by the year 2013-2014. One would hope for success of every student and educational leaders would join in on the playground of life.

Ethic of Justice

This leads to another gap in the literature. Courts are reluctant to impose restrictions on school officials allowing them to have considerable discretion in making important administrative decisions (Strike, 2005). The state of Pennsylvania does not address recess, in and of itself, with a law or policy. Instead recess is encapsulated in the Pennsylvania Wellness Policy 246 recognizing student wellness and proper nutrition are related to students' physical well-being, growth, development, and readiness to learn. What the policy does not address is the need for undirected play for the overall well being of the child. Is recess for the student to relax, to play, or is it there to use against the student as punishment for the student if they displease the teacher? And can teachers use the recess to make up for anything within the curriculum? Looking through the lens of justice it would be unjust to not allow the child free, undirected play for cognitive and social growth (Strike, 2005).

Ethic of Critique

The ethic of critique is closely related to justice by challenging the status quo and looking at the inconsistencies and challenges of an issue. When delving into recess we find recess plays a vital

role in the educational life of the child (Chaker, 2006; Diamond & Hopson, 1998; Dubroc, 2007; Hannaford, 1995; Pellegrini, 1995; Pellegrini & Bohn, 2005). Moreover, recess contributes to the whole-child meeting social, emotional, physical, and mental needs (Hannaford, 1995). In addition, research indicates “breaks may help you be more productive” (Pellegrini, 2005, p. 2).

Play (i.e. recess) specifically impacts the development of sense perception and attention, memory, creativity, insight, self awareness, organization and planning, knowledge and understanding, and socialization (Ariel, 2002). The benefits associated with recess encompass the whole-child not merely the instructional aspects. Although school is an environment where traditional academics consume the bulk of the academic day it is also an arena where character education, social justice issues, socialization skills, and personal health issues come into play. The implementation of recess provides this added opportunity for teachers to engage students in these additional learning areas on the playground during recess.

Critical theorists are concerned with making heard the voices that are silenced (i.e. students). Grioux (2006) and Welch (1991) believe this should lead to action in the form of a political stance. Looking through the ethic of critique lens while relating to students’ physical well-being, growth, development, and readiness to learn allows the researcher to analyze and elaborate on the Wellness Policy 246 policy. The ethic of critique provides a dialogue for expanding basic human rights and could possibly serve as the medium in the struggle against inequality. The inequality in this instance relates to the decrease, and/or elimination of recess.

When taking a stance and looking at recess outside the realm of the traditional educational box one realizes most of a child’s life is spent at school. If a child is to experience school to its fullest as part of their world then looking into the ethic of critique may be advantageous. In a free

society children should be able to experience freedom in “their” world and integrate into the organization i.e. school.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

“Education is not simply a technical business of well-managed information processing, not even a matter of applying ‘learning theories’ to the classroom or using the results of subject centered ‘achievement testing.’ It is a complex pursuit of fitting a culture to the needs of its members and its members and their ways of knowing to the needs of the culture.” (Bruner, 1971, p. 43).

This study is designed to examine the phenomena of recess, how it came about, current trends, policies that may influence it, the meaning administrators and teachers apply to recess, and if it constitutes an ethical imperative within the educational system. For the sake of this study the word “meaning” refers to the importance of recess and the values and understanding applied to it by administrators and educators.

The research was originally driven by the following research questions:

1. What has been the historical role of recess, especially over the past century? What are the current trends, over the last 30 years, in particular those federal and state policies that may have influenced state policies?
2. What empirical studies exist regarding the value of recess in terms of physical, social, and cognitive student learning? Is recess an essential part of an American education from an ethical perspective? From an ethical perspective, is recess necessary within American public schools? Do American schools view recess as being part of an ethical school?

3. Explain the methodology used in this study.

The evolution of the research questions transformed into more precise research questions.

These include:

1. How do educators define recess?
2. Do educators view recess as important?
3. How do educators perceive the cost and benefits of recess?
4. Do educators “value” recess in an institutional sense?
5. Have educators understandings, opinions and experiences with respect to recess changed over the years?

The research questions became more accurate with the evolution of the research. Originally, the researcher was looking at a single case study. The researcher soon ran out of individuals to interview due to the fact this phenomena of eliminating a recess block occurred 17 years ago; per the superintendent at the time. Thus, most individuals had retired and moved away or passed away. The researcher needed to open the research to other administrators and teachers within public education who still had valuable knowledge surrounding recess. These administrators and teachers had strong meanings and values when it came to recess within the school day.

Methodological Framework

The qualitative case study research method used a phenomenological inquiry approach to study the perception and value of recess through the eyes of administrators and teachers. The research was conducted at six school sites in two districts in central Pennsylvania that successfully or unsuccessfully tried to eliminate recess from the K-4th grade curriculum. The data was collected via administrative and teacher interviews.

Qualitative research, as defined by Gall et al. (2007), is grounded in the hypothesis individuals construct social reality in the form of meanings and interpretations and the way they make sense of their lives (Fraenkel & Wallwn, 1990; Locke et al., 1987; Merriam, 1988). The challenge attempts to understand multiple realities (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The benefits to using qualitative research are that the research takes place in a natural setting; the methods used are interactive and humanistic. Meanings and interpretations are negotiated with human data sources because it is the subjects' realities that the researcher attempts to construct (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988). The research questions and data collection process may change as the study evolves, because it is interpretive, holistic (Creswell, 2009).

Case study research used in this study was the preferred method since the researcher is a) posing questions of “why” and “how”, b) has little, if any, control over the events, c) and the studies focus is on a modern-day phenomenon within a real-life context (Yin, 2009). These situations distinguish case study research from other types of social science research yet the researcher's choice methods overlap in many ways. That is, the wealth of the phenomenon and the extensiveness to the real-life context. Thus, the case study method will allow the researcher to preserve the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the real-life event i.e. school recess (Yin, 2009).

The qualitative case study involved in this research design used a phenomenological inquiry method housing an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of recess in public elementary schools (Psathas, 1973, Groenewald, 2004, Maxwell, 2005, Merriam, 2002). This case study focuses on administrators' and teachers' perspectives and values of recess to gain insight from the adult perspective of this phenomenon.

It is the researcher's intent to use the case studies of schools struggling with recess to elicit thoughtful responses indicative of the dual discourse concerning the value of recess and the value of

instructional time. It is reasonable to assume the researcher is more likely to get thoughtful responses about the meaning and value of recess in a “relavatory” case; specifically, a school whose members experiences a process of deliberation and change with respect to the issue of recess. Given the fact that so many schools appear to have at least questioned, if not done away with the practice of recess, these are worthwhile and critical cases to examine, and one that is likely to be analogous to the experiences of some larger population of schools. Thus drawing on the schema and analysis of elementary schools, the researcher will demonstrate the capability of this phenomenon to produce empirical generalizations regarding the meanings attached to recess from educators’ perspectives.

Participants

This investigation questions whether administrators and teachers value recess, their meaning of recess, and ethically if they felt it was in the best interest of the child to deny recess throughout the school day. This study investigates whether recess is valued at the administrative and teacher levels and if opinions concerning recess changed over the last 30 years. Both administrators and teachers eagerly agreed to be interviewed when they heard the topic of the interview was recess and its value to the school day and child development. This researcher’s first interviewee was a retired superintendent who supported the elimination of a fifteen-minute morning recess. From this initial meeting the interviews expanded to three retired teachers, two active administrators, one retired administrator, and five active elementary teachers.

School Descriptor

The experiences and expertise the educators brought to their positions were observed as positive attributes.

Table 1: School Descriptors

Elementary School	Public Elementary School	Grades	Student Population
District A	1	K-4	275
	2	K-4	389
District B	1	K-4	69
	2	K-4	68
	3	K-4	471

The administrators and teachers involved in the study's schools included three small-sized (under 20 classes), one medium-sized (20-40 classes), and one large-sized (more than 40 classes). All six schools were public schools in central Pennsylvania.

The two school districts selected for this study were located in Central Pennsylvania in rural settings. The school district chosen for this case study was told to the researcher by a fellow doctoral student as a school district that had decreased their amount of recess time. The public elementary schools include a single principal and district superintendent. It was the hope of the researcher that the administrators and teachers would be willing to be interviewed and used as part of the sample (Patton, 1991, p. 169). This allowed the researcher access to individuals uniquely able to be informative because they are recognized experts at their individual school, in school district policies, and subject matter.

It was the intent of the researcher to have administrators and teachers suggest other administrators and teachers to be interviewed. The specific type of sampling used was snowball sampling, also called network sampling (McMillan, 2008). Snowball sampling selects particular

individuals because they are informative about the topic. Knowledge concerning a particular central Pennsylvania school districts elimination of some of their recess time came to the researcher concerning a districts decrease in recess time through a colleague. The researcher decided to contact the district to discuss this phenomenon with the educators involved at the time. The study originated with one retired administrator. The researcher began with administrators and educators suggested by the retired administrator. Each administrator and teacher was asked to nominate others they believed had knowledge or opinions concerning recess, including those who might disagree with the notion of recess (McMillan, 2008). This snowball sampling continued until the list of administrators and teachers were exhausted. An associated type of selection of cases, opportunistic sampling occurs after the study is under way and takes advantage of including participants who identified as being rich in the information needed. It was the researcher's anticipation the sample size would run the gamut of early, mid and late career educators.

Data Collection Procedures

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative case study research method was implemented in order to study recess through the eyes of educators. The research was conducted at schools in central Pennsylvania which struggled over the years with regard to recess; having recess, eliminating recess, then reinstating recess in some instances largely due to parental pressure.

These cases involve a research design housing an in-depth exploration of the phenomena and value of recess, in public school, via an interview process. The focus of the study was based on educators' meaning of recess, values placed on recess, perceptions administrators place on NCLB/AYP as it affects recess, and the ethical dimensions affected via these decisions to gain insight from the adult perspective of this phenomenon.

Data collection was conducted after the participants agreed to the process and signed an informed consent document (Appendix B). Confidentiality was ensured for both individuals and the school systems involved, via pseudonyms, in order to evoke valid data from personal decisions in which the participants felt compelled to discuss views without the possibility of reprimand.

Interviews

The instrument used was an interview protocol (Appendix A). This is beneficial when the researcher wants to control the questions being asked (Creswell, 2009). The interviews in this study were recorded to ensure the researcher could focus solely on what the interviewees were saying and not on scripting. This method also ensured the researcher could return and revisit the interviews upon completion of the interview process. In addition to recording the interviews the researcher used a semi-structured protocol using the same pre-made interview guide for each educator. The researcher probed when it was needed to continue with a line of thought the interviewee had begun.

Interviews can be beneficial when observations are not possible, when the researcher wants to control the questions being asked, and if historical data is relevant (Creswell, 2003).

The first individual selected for this study was on the suggestion of a fellow doctoral student who discussed the decrease of recess in a central Pennsylvania elementary school. The researcher contacted the retired principal who agreed to be interviewed for the study. Upon completion of the first interview the researcher asked the retired principal if there were other individuals they could recommend that had gone through the process of having a recess decreased, whether they had a positive or negative response to the process. The researcher used snowball sampling to continue acquiring interviewees'. Upon completion of 3 interviews the data trail had dried up due to individuals retiring, leaving the area, or being deceased. It was then recommended that the sample

group be opened up to surrounding school districts in central Pennsylvania. Once this was done, again through snowball sampling, the data became richer. Individuals from another central Pennsylvania school district were interviewed with respect to their perceptions of recess.

Interviews for this study lasted in duration from 52 minutes to 1 hour and 45 minutes. Most of the interviews took place in non-educational settings. The first interview took place at a river lot in central Pennsylvania, 6 took place at the administrator or educators home, and the last 3 took place at an elementary school in central Pennsylvania in the school library.

The interviews transpired for this study were recorded using a tape recorder so as to ensure the researcher could focus solely on what the interviewees were saying and not on scripting. This method also ensured the researcher could go back and revisit the interviews upon completion of the interview process. In addition to recording the interviews the researcher will use the same questionnaire at each site. The researcher took into consideration positive aspects and the limitations in that they are not always conducted within unnatural settings. The individuals are not always similarly insightful and communicative, and the researcher's presence possibly leads to biased responses (Creswell, 2003).

Data Analysis

The data was compiled and analyzed using the Interview Protocol Framework described by Kvale (2009) (i.e. thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, analyzing, verifying and reporting). Thematizing is the process of selecting particular topics or words as themes in sentences. Designing is the showing of forethought. To be interviewed of the art of interviewing is a formal meeting which can take place face to face, via the phone or internet, which is conducted by one person for a reproduction of a conversation. Transcribing is the act of making a hard copy of the

spoken work as in dictated material. To analysis the data is to break down the data into essential features to make meaning of the data. Verifying the data is proving the truth of the data via evidence. To report the data is to a formal recollection of the data or transactions that took place during the interview (Kvale, 2009).

Data analysis, for this study, was conducted with the focus on maintaining internal validity. The data collected from the interviews was analyzed in order to determine possible patterns of perceptions in the specific categories of teachers and administrators and how they perceived recess within the elementary school settings. A repeated thorough reading of the instrument was used to conduct the data collection with aims to represent findings of similar themes. The data was grouped according to questions and divided according to the participants' views regarding recess, perceived values given to recess in the elementary public schools and if any ethical dimension emerged.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted in June and July 2011. Interviews were transcribed and analytic memos were written for each interview. Analyses of transcribed interviews were coded during data collection and after transcriptions were transcribed. Grounded theory approach was used in coding (Strauss & Cobin, 1998). That is, open coding, axial coding and selective coding were the methods used in interview transcriptions to generate themes (Strauss & Cobin, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Maxwell, 2005). All interviews were reread specifically for codes which emerged from later interviews. Themes generated from coding were integrated theoretically to look for deeper meanings representing respondents' hidden ideology (Strauss & Cobin, 1998).

The researcher continued interviewing individuals until saturation of the data occurred (Maxwell, J. 2005, Kvale, S., 2007). It was the researchers' belief that saturation took place when the administrators and educators were relaying similar perceptions of recess. Once the researcher

reached the point of repetition of perceptions and the data pool dried up the study was ready to be transcribed.

Each interview transcription coding and theme had its own individual Microsoft Word document, but the researcher also grouped quotes with the same themes from different transcription in the same document. Once electronic versions of the transcriptions were completed the researcher used the find feature in Microsoft word to find recurring key words within the interviews. Words used to aid in coding were; play, recess, moral, ethical, fun, social, physical, and emotional to name a few. This aided the researcher in processing and coding the data. The researcher also used hard copies of the transcribed documents to lie out on the table and match with corresponding themes. The purpose was to view data either in individual description or in connection with similar data.

Validity Issues

It is important to determine the quality of the selected research design prior to its implementation. Interviewing is viewed as an individual craft. The quality of the interview depends with the intrinsic abilities of the researcher. Here validation becomes a matter of the researcher's ability to select the most honest and useful information, to continually check and recheck questions, and to interpret the findings objectively. Yin (2003) provides a set of four tests commonly used with case study designs to ensure quality is upheld. Among the four tests include construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability (Yin, 2003).

Construct validity, in case study research, examines "the extent to which a measure used in a case study correctly operationalizes the concepts being studied" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 636). Construct validity can be measured through the use of two steps (Yin, 2003). First, the researcher must choose the specific changes that are to be studied and connect them back to the initial objectives of the study

(Yin, 2003). Then, the researcher must reveal how the specific measures of the changes reflect the targeted types of change selected (Yin, 2003).

Internal validity, as defined by Gall et al. (2007), states “the extent to which the researcher has demonstrated a causal relationship between two phenomena by showing that other plausible factors could not have caused the relationship” (p. 642). The first concern with upholding internal validity is evident by indicating whether or not the research process involves exploratory (or causal) case studies (Yin, 2003). Thus, the research demonstrates a causal component making the study susceptible to internal validity restraints.

The second concern with case study internal validity is inferences must be made throughout the process (Yin, 2003). Inferences must be made each time an incident cannot be observed directly. The concern for internal validity derives from the inferences made on behalf of the researcher, with regard to events conducted and not witnessed by the researcher, prior to the research process (Yin, 2003). Understanding how one can be sure they are inferring correctly is a concern the researcher will need to take into great consideration during the research process in order to ensure valid inferences.

External validity can be defined as “the extent to which the results of a research study can be generalized to individuals and situations beyond those involved in the study” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 640). The external validity of this qualitative case study design can be generalized to other populations if the results of the case studies reveal similar results (Gall et al., 2007; Yin, 2003). It is important to note generalization is not automatic in nature (Yin, 2003). Rather, a theory tested in one case must be tested in other cases with the same outcome evident in order for generalization to transpire (Yin, 2003).

Reliability, in case study research, is the “extent to which other researchers would arrive at similar results if they studied the same case using exactly the same procedures as the first researcher” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 651). The goal of reliability ensures study biases and errors are minimized (Yin, 2003). Issues of reliability arise in connection with transcription and analysis of the interviews. For this study one researcher will transcribe and analyze the interviews (See Appendix A: Informed Consent Document).

Researcher’s Perspective

It was the researcher’s perspective or bias with her education and 27 years of experience in public education that there are benefits of recess to the well-being of the whole child. The researcher is a certified K-12 health and physical education teacher. Her background in athletics, education and knowledge of the human body led her to the questioning of recess and administrators and educators perspectives on recess.

The researcher has taught health and physical education in pre-school, K-12 public school, the university level. This is commonly known as crib to crypt education. The researcher has also given seminars in the public arena in the area of health promotion and disease prevention. Among the topics of discussion were laughter and stress, play yourself happy, and humor management.

The researcher continued her interest in play and recess with her advanced degree in educational leadership; to get at the why of recess. This culminated the educational spectrum for the researcher with umbrella of administrator and educator perspectives on recess. The researcher stayed close to the interview script so as to not show any favoritism for or against the views of the interviewees.

Young children learn differently than adolescents and adults. There is an autonomous nature to learning and children should be given opportunities to interact socially with peers and adults in order to construct understandings of the world around them. It is the researchers' belief that to expect children to gain all knowledge from direct instruction situations within school and home settings is unrealistic. This type of transference greatly hinders the advancement of social and emotional skills and decreases opportunities for synapses to form and lead to greater cognitive growth.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS

“You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation” Plato (427 BC - 347 BC).

Positive themes emerged from administrator and teacher reflections concerning recess. Examples of encouraging responses included words reminiscent of, “love”, “like”, “interesting topic”, and “I have such great memories about recess.” Key words used in the analysis of the data were “break”, “socialize”, “physical activity”, “creativity”, “attention span”, and “the need to be on one’s own” (Table 4). Such responses and key words peaked my curiosity as to why, given these overwhelming responses toward recess, recess was becoming an endangered concept.

This chapter broadly analyses the data obtained from ten interviews by summarizing five administrators’ and five teachers’ opinions about the value of recess in their school systems. This table describes the school, view on recess, and participants’ reflection of recess during their childhood (Table 2).

Table 2: Gender, Occupation Status, Yrs. Experience, Views & Reflection on Recess

Educator’s Number	Gender	Occupation Status	Years of Experience	View of Recess		Reflection of Recess	
				Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
1	F	Masters	17	X		X	
2	F	Masters	21	X			X
3	M	Bachelors	29	X		X	
4	F	Masters	30	X		X	
5	F	Masters	35	X			X
6	M	Masters	12	X		X	
7	M	Masters	25	X		X	
8	M	Masters	26	X			X

Educator's Number	Gender	Occupation Status	Years of Experience	View of Recess		Reflection of Recess	
9	M	M	35	X		X	
10	M	PhD	32	X		X	

The relevance of Table 2 above shows all the administrators and educators in this study had a positive view of recess as a professional. When asked to reflect on the experiences of recess one administrator and two educators had negative perceptions of the past. One of these teachers stated, “Recess was not very enjoyable when – when – and – and I’m – I want to say our teachers were older, but they were probably my age when I was – but they never interacted – they never played with you or anything and they never interacted in recess with us.”

Table 3 illustrates the difference that has occurred in recess over the last 30 years between two districts, District A and District B. District A is a middle sized school district with two elementary schools. One school is a town school where most of the students walk to the school. The other school is a rural school where the students are bused in; some for up to an hour. District A has had no change in the amount of recess over the last 30 years. An administrator within the school district would like to decrease the amount of recess time; this administrator did not see a decrease in recess happening any time soon. The comment from this administrator when asked if recess was dispensable was, “I don't think that's a black and white answer for me. It is important -- I believe that it -- if absolutely necessary, it is dispensable. We could live without recess.” Although this administrator believed recess was a thing of the past no change has occurred within the two elementary schools this administrator governs.

As the Table 3 indicates, four of the schools in District B changed from the pattern of one fifteen minute morning recess, a thirty minute lunch recess, and a fifteen minute afternoon recess to grades 1 & 2 eliminating a fifteen minute morning recess and grades 3 & 4 eliminating a fifteen

minute afternoon recess eliminated. The superintendent at the time “felt there were children who spent more time in recess than they did in math class.” He went on to discuss how children in the school were “missing out on a big chunk of their instructional time by having an hour of recess a day”. These schools ultimately eliminated one fifteen-minute recess for grades 1st & 2nd and one fifteen-minute recess for grades 3rd & 4th. The reasoning behind eliminating the morning recess was 1st & 2nd grade students had the early lunch period. Third and 4th grade students received fifteen minute mid-morning recess and a thirty minute lunch recess. The logic behind eliminating the mid-afternoon recess was the 3rd and 4th graders had the late lunch and would have a shortened afternoon.

Table 3: Recess Time: Before and After Recess Schedule Changes

			Before Recess Change			After Recess Change		
	Number of Schools	Grade	Morning Recess (mins)	Lunch Recess (mins)	Afternoon Recess (mins)	Morning Recess (mins)	Lunch Recess (mins)	Afternoon Recess (mins)
District A	2	K	15			15		
		1- 4	15	30	15	15	30	15
District B	4	K	15			15		
		1 & 2	15	30	15		30	15
		3 & 4	15	30	15	15	30	

By decreasing recess by 15 minutes for grades 1 - 4, the superintendent “felt he was decreasing the number of students on the playground at any given time thus reducing the number of injuries.” Teachers were assigned “professional freedom in 1st and 2nd grade to allow their students to get up and moving if the teacher felt the students needed a break.”

The superintendent in this matter was looking at lessening the possible number of liability issues on the playground by decreasing the number of students on the playground. One would think this speaks to the overall threat of litigation school districts deal with on a daily basis. But when this

superintendent was asked about litigation stemming from recess injuries it was dealt with in a jocular manner. The superintendent responded with, “I inform the individual calling that this matter would be caught up in the court system for 3-5 years. And then I would proceed to tell them how to spell my name correctly because if you don’t have all the names, addresses, I’s dotted, and T’s crossed it is going to take even longer.” Another administrator commented on NCLB, mulch on the playground, and litigation stating, “I think mulch on the playground is a joke! And the thickness it has to be mandated by NCLB. After it rains and the kids are on it a few times it doesn’t do any good anymore. All it does is make a mess in the schools for my janitorial staff to clean up.”

Themes on Recess and Recess Practices

This section explores the results of the phenomenological investigation of the perceptions and values of recess by administrators and teachers during the school day. Four of the five teachers agreed students need a “break” during the school day while only two of those teachers felt students needed this break to socialize outside the classroom. A retired teacher in the group went on to explain the concept of a “break” and “socialization” as follows:

“Well I think recess for the kids, and also for the educators, the teachers, is a break and time to just have some creative play, some free play, just to kind of regroup again and get some, you know, something not that you’re sitting in a classroom and directed that you can, you know, play with a group or you can play by yourself or interact with, you know... Recess is with - in both levels, we’re with other grades also that you could interact with other older kids and younger kids, be a leader, be a follower; just get out of the classroom and just be yourself and do some creative things too and

not have to sit there and listen to a teacher and do this and that and... But it was more just to, you know, regroup and be yourself and get up and get some fresh air. And even if you couldn't go out, we used to take them down to the Large Group Instruction (LGI) or inside and stuff, do some stuff. And sometimes it would be, you know, teaching a game or sometimes the kids, a lot of times, the kids would come with games that they would know at home that the parents – and – and do that. So they would be a – a leader in stuff with kids. But I think interacting, you know, without the teacher involved and playing on your own and things like that.”

Another teacher stated, “Recess is a break for the children and for the teachers to regroup.”

While another comment concerning the definition of recess came from a teacher in the study who commented about “needing recess as much as the students. It’s a time for the children to get some energy out and then come back ready to learn, giving them downtime to socialize and play games and things with their peers.” This teacher believed it is “important to allow students to go out to get some physical activity they need in order to learn better in the classroom.” These statements also provide an implication regarding the value or need for “free” time by teachers and students.

Three of the five administrators felt students needed a “break” from the classroom with four of those administrators agreeing students needed this time to socialize outside the classroom. One administrator was adamantly stated:

“Recess to me is one word. Socialization. I -- to me, recess is a time for the -- not just to let off energy which is what the teachers say, but for me, it's a time for the kids to interact and to

work on their other skills of dealing with issues and play and those kind of things. So that's how it kind of -- what I see recess as.”

Administrators understand students’ needs for recess as more than simple physical activity but also for socialization and a time for the students to interact and to develop other skills dealing with socialization issues and play. Administrators in the study backed the benefits of recess in terms of allowing “kids to reset and refocus” throughout the day. An administrator in the sample addressed the issue of attention span and the fact “younger students experience shorter attention spans requiring multiple breaks throughout the day” to keep focused. Numerous administrators in the study implied recess aided in children’s cognitive, social, emotional, and physical functioning.

Socialization in a school setting is the practice by which students acquire the knowledge, language, social skills, and value to conform to the norms and roles required to integrate into a group. It is an amalgamation of both self-imposed (because the individual wants to conform) and externally-imposed rules, and expectations of the others. In an organizational setting, socialization refers to the process through which a students’ learn the ropes,' by becoming sensitive to the formal and informal power structure and the explicit and implicit rules of behavior.

Creativity is defined as the tendency to generate or recognize ideas, alternatives, or possibilities that may be useful in solving problems, communicating with others, and entertaining ourselves and others. Play, unlike recess, is a time when you lose where you are - your sense of time and direction. Some play has clearly defined goals and when structured with rules is called a game, whereas, other play exhibits no such goals nor rules and is considered to be "unstructured".

Imagination is shown through a child’s use of creativity.

Physical activity was defined in Chapter 1 Figure 1. In this context attention span refers to the length of time a student is able to concentrate on a subject matter. And administrator in the study noted, “the younger this kid the shorter the attention span. These kids need more breaks to keep them on task.” The idea of students needing to be one their own during the school day was referenced by two educators and none of the teachers. Teachers were more concerned with giving students a break, physical activity, creativity, and the attention span of the child.

Table 4: Administrator and Educators Themes

Educator's Number	Gender	Occupation Status	Years of Experience	Key Words					
				Break	Socialize	Physical Activity	Creativity	Attention Span	On Their Own
1	F	Teacher	17	X	X	X		X	
2	F	Teacher	21	X	X	X			
3	M	Teacher	29			X	X	X	
4	F	Retired Teacher	30	X			X	X	
5	F	Retired Teacher	35	X			X		
6	M	Administrator	12		X	X			X
7	M	Administrator	25	X	X			X	
8	M	Administrator	26		X	X			X
9	M	Retired Administrator	35	X	X				
10	M	Retired Administrator	32	X			X		

Beliefs Concerning Children and Children Today

As noted in Table 2 seven of the ten administrators and teachers in the study had positive reflections of recess. What makes this interesting is two of the three administrators thought recess was needed as a break and to socialize outside the classroom. The administrator in the grouping was the only educator that felt students needed to be on their own during the school day.

A diversity of opinion was found among the sampled educators regarding the appropriate “form” or “framework” for recess. Two teachers and one administrator in the study did not agree with the implementation of recess “in its present form.” Although none of the three suggested alternative strategies for implementing recess, the administrator in the study stated, “we’d have to be smart about it.” This administrator also stated, “the purposes of recess are critical, but not in its’ present state”. This administrator reluctantly admits when asked about views on the importance of recess:

“I don't think that's a black and white answer for me. It is important -- I believe that it -- if absolutely necessary, it is dispensable. We could live without recess, but we would have to be smart about that. What I'm saying is its important, but that traditional let's go run outside for 15 minutes, we could find other ways of doing it.”

In contrast a teacher stated, “everything is becoming more academic, more score orientated. The value of the child development is being lost...they're just being pushed”. An administrator in the study believed the concept of recess was as follows:

“I would define recess as play, relaxation, physical movement for kids. It's a chance for them to kind of get out there and do things on their own. We -- I kind of battle with organized recess versus recess because it's two completely different things to me. Recess, you know, I feel like you kind of turn the kids loose. You let them create their own games. You let them play.”

“You know, you might play kick ball or something with them, but it's not necessarily you have to do this or you have to do that; whereas, to me with organized recess, you kind of

narrow it down to two things, maybe three, and you set up three different activities for kids to do, kind of almost like a PE class, only without necessarily the instructional portion of it. So, you know, it's three different games. The idea is to keep every kid involved, you know, and to limit the chaos.”

“So I've had kids that can handle recess and kids that couldn't. So I've had classes that only could have organized recess and classes that, you know, could pick their own games and do their own kind of thing. So I guess that's the way I look at it.”

When speaking of the framework of recess and administrator commented, “to me recess is as important as any other thing we -- any other class the kids take.” A teacher in the study commented on recess as “a compliment to the school day and needs to be part of the children’s daily curriculum.” One administrator believed schools could and should revamp recess and place it on the shoulders of the classroom teacher. A teacher in the study sees this as an “increased work load and believes for the good of the child and in the child’s best interest they should be allowed free undirected play.”

Table 5: Belief About Children, Creativity, and Play

Educator	Occupation Status	Years of Experience	Believe Children Show Imagination During Recess	Believe Children Know How to Play
1	Teacher	17	X	No
2	Teacher	21	X	No
3	Teacher	29	X	No
4	Teacher	30	X	No
5	Teacher	35	X	No
6	Administrator	12	X	No

7	Administrator	25	X	Yes
8	Administrator	26	X	Yes
9	Administrator	35	X	No
10	Administrator	32	X	Yes

All of the administrators and teachers in the study believe children showed imagination during recess. Seven of the ten administrators and teachers in the sample suggested that students are unable to know how to play in today’s society. Of the seven educators in the study all five teachers and two of the administrators believed children do not know how to play during recess. Four of the teachers contended they “must teach students how to play simplistic games such as hop scotch, tag, and four square.” There was no correlation between years of experience and belief children knew how to play.

One teacher commented how “sad she was at the deterioration of childhood.” She expressed concerns students did not know how to socialize with other students outside the classroom. This concern alone suggests a larger problem within the school day; lack of socialization skills in the classroom. Administrators also expressed concern with students not being able to make up their own games “to enhance creativity without adults interfering”. Another teacher in the study stated,

“I think a lot of the creativity if it’s not spelled out like, “Okay we’re going to play this organized game, or we’re going to play this,” they don’t know how – and I shouldn’t say – that’s just a really – you know not everybody, but I think a lot of them don’t know how to entertain themselves and play either by themselves or play with a group of five or four and come up with something to play with. If it’s not put in front of them, “Okay this is what we’re going to do at this time, and these are the rules, and

go from there,” no I don’t think there’s creativity with the kids entertaining themselves. I think they’re more – they’re more tuned into, “I’ve got to get to this level in – in a game,” and talk about that.”

There seems to be disparity between paper and pencil education and technologies use in education. This being said the older generation seems to have more difficulty with technological issues in the classroom. This particular educator seemed to see video gaming and technology as a possible threat to play. More of an analysis would suggest our younger generations are becoming technological gurus before they enter the classroom with the early inception of video games and educational technology available to the public.

Do Educators View Recess as Important

Themes from the data emerged concerning the perceptions of administrators and educators within the six elementary schools in central Pennsylvania. Seven out of ten of the administrators and teachers in the study had a common theme of the definition of recess stating it is a “break” in the routine of the day. Of these seven, four were teachers and three were administrators with four of the seven being retired (Table 5). Interestingly enough one of the administrators that believe recess provides a “break” in the day is also one that had concerns for recess “in its’ present state.” This administrator commented, “Can we do away with recess? Sure we can, in its’ presence form! We just have to be smart about it.” This administrator was in one of the school settings that had no change in recess even though this administrator would like change. This administrator also stated, “The classroom teacher could do it.” An educator in this same district did not appreciate an administrator would make a comment of this sort stating, “educators are being dumped on for

everything anymore. NCLB has made it impossible for a kindergartner to be a kindergartener; they have to hit the ground running in kindergarten.”

Category II in Table 6 indicates concern for recess by two of the retired teachers having neither a positive nor a negative response toward recess. Their perceptions on recess being a “break” in the day are similar but they were also two of the four that believe “creativity is being lost.” One of the teachers in the study commented: “I didn’t really have a positive experience with recess. The teachers were old and didn’t play with us much.” As educators these two educators could see the benefits of recess to students and educators.

Category III was bountiful with expressions of support for recess. Four administrators’ and three educators’ inferred recess was needed for not only the physical aspect of the child but the cognitive, emotional, and social aspect of the child. This category represented the majority of the administrators and teachers in the study, strongly supporting recess, with four of the five administrators and three of the five teachers. An administrator in the study stated “I have learned through the years. You don’t mess with recess!” Supporting this belief a teacher commented “It’s a time for the children to get some energy out and then come back ready to learn, giving them downtime to socialize and play games and things with their peers.”

Table 6: Categories of Perceptions

Educator	Occupation Status	Category I: Concern for Recess	Category II: Middle Ground on Recess	Category III: Strongly Support Recess
1	Teacher			X
2	Teacher			X
3	Teacher			X
4	Retired Teacher		X	
5	Retired Teacher		X	

6	Administrator			X
7	Administrator	X		
8	Administrator			X
9	Retired Administrator			X
10	Retired Administrator			X

One teacher stated that “recess is important to the highest degree.” With this in mind, this teacher observed children’s “demeanor change dramatically from the time they were in the classroom to the time they were out on the playground. When exiting the school for recess a sense of renewal comes over the child with the fresh air and free play.” In the sample, teachers supported the concept of allowing students to experience free play and believed creativity to be imperative to a child’s development, a skill being lost without recess. Another teacher in the sample described recess and creativity as follows; “children adjust their lives to a place that they want to be and figure out where they fit in.” Students begin figuring out situations early in elementary school and if they are either accepted into a group of play or not and move on to the next group. This indicates forms of synthesis and adaptation on the students’ part during recess. This implies children are using their imaginative brains and creativity during recess.

The integration of core curricula to increase time on task has seeped into education’s core subjects. In the sample, one of the superintendents believed “we've integrated social studies into our reading curriculum. We increased amounts of reading and math time and our social studies definitely suffer as far as amount of time we put in pure social studies.” This would suggest scheduling remains one of the biggest issues across education; however, the curriculum is partially mandated by

Pennsylvania School Codes. Analysis of this statement implies superintendents have to combine subject to meet NCLB regulations, standards, and while doing so core subjects are suffering.

Teachers believe test scores gains directly relate to regular recess where students “attend better in their learning due to a sound mind, sound body.” My analysis is teachers believe recess is valued in a functional sense allowing teachers’ to back the practical part of the school day while implementing recess for the children as a needed break. In my sample a teacher noted “I just can't imagine not having recess and how you would keep the kids on task.” This teacher also believed “less recess results in more behavior problems” mainly because you cannot “control students anymore” with the assumption being “no recess” would make behavior control harder. Teachers and administrators agree, “When children are afforded recess they are more apt to be themselves while getting along with each other.” Administrators and teachers seem to correlate a positive relationship between recess and behavior control.

Teachers continue to value recess stating students resolve problems sometimes during recess and learn from them. Teachers report they continually help students and their problem solving and social skills by talking to the students about difficulties they had on the playground while at recess. The teachers in my sample believed this helps students learn socially: “my learning is not in the books always.” Another teacher emphasized, “learning how to get along socially, what’s appropriate, what isn’t, and how to work their way toward adulthood. That’s what education is all about.” While students are interacting on the playground in social settings there is also drama that happens among the groups. Sometimes this drama makes it back into the classroom where the classroom teacher analyzes the situation and uses it for an extended learning situation. Teachers in the study perceive to some extent recess is the playground of life with teachable moments embedded throughout the school day.

In my sample, administrators and teachers agreed when a child is at play they are at their most creative and most excited. “They think better, they communicate better, they play better, they become a team player.” Some of my respondents in the study believe the child is able to be more investigative with an entire thought process behind their learning after recess. A teacher in my sample contended:

“We need a place to go, all of us, children especially; a place to go and release energy, release creativity to build upon creativity and build upon their thoughts and their wants. To make friendships and bonds with their fellow classmates.”

All the administrators in my sample completely agreed recess is part of the schedule; the school day. One administrator sternly expressed, you “*don't mess with recess.*” These statements from this administrator and others in the study suggest administrators perceive both teachers and students need recess for relaxation and to refocus. This administrator implies a keen awareness of this via not allowing recess to be canceled.

Personal Experiences Concerning Recess

The administrators’ thoughts in my sample turned to NCLB and possible implications from parents and the community where recess is concerned. This administrator, along with the other four administrators and teachers in this study, expressed a sense of nostalgia around recess. One of the administrators stated,

“It bothers me when everybody blames No Child Left Behind or testing. NCLB does not have a part in it. People's attitudes changed in the last 20 years. That's why you can't go out and throw football with kids anymore at recess time.”

Nostalgia for the lost youth of the administrators but also for the lost carefree spirit of recess is reflected in both administrator and educators viewpoints. Seven of the ten individuals interviewed revealed positive feelings and beliefs concerning recess. The three other subjects did not totally dismiss the importance of recess but their memory of recess was not one of a purely positive or negative experience. This would infer that recollections vary about teacher involvement during recess but perhaps are less involved today due to litigation fears. One of these teachers stated, “Recess was not very enjoyable when – when – and – and I’m – I want to say our teachers were older, but they were probably my age when I was – but they never interacted – they never played with you or anything and they never interacted in recess with us.” Today’s educators are more likely to shy away from involvement on the playground for fear of litigation.

None of the administrators or teachers in the study believed recess would become obsolete. One administrator in the study stated their “biggest dilemma is getting enough people out there to staff recess during the 15 minutes.” The biggest concern for the administrators involves the minutes allotted for recess. When examining this account of recess from this administrator one might understand why some administrators would look at the possibility of decreasing a recess period. With this being said, administrators could also look at the core subject math. Teachers needs to get the children set-up and prepared for the math lesson of the day with rulers, extra paper, scissors and paste constituting padding the lesson. Decreasing recess now does not seem as plausible.

Another way recess changed over the years relates to the fear of accountability issues around NCLB, Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) and liability. Educators in the study do believe they are doing the right things for the students stating, “we’ll teach in the most economical way that we can make sense.” As one administrator put it, “the real cause of the change in recess, in my humble ultra conservative opinion is we are so damn politically correct.” Teachers in the study

believe they will continue to teach to the best of their ability and for what is in the best interest of the children whether NCLB is mandating them to do so or not. All this, while doing their best to understand the policies and politics of the NCLB era. There is an underlying trepidation from administrators of lawyers and teachers to be “conscious of asinine things that can’t be that way anymore.” This again brings to a point the nostalgia of what recess was and what it has become.

One example of the “concern for litigation” or “issue litigation” stated above is the introduction of mulch on the playground in the 1990’s. One of the administrators in the study concluded “mulch on the playground is more of a joke and a nuisance to school property.” The other four administrators in the study conveyed their feeling on the issue stating similar concerns of when it rains the muddy mess of the mulch is drug throughout the school. One administrator believes the reason behind mulch on the playground involves a lawsuit filed somewhere. Another administrator believed these threats came from parents threatening lawsuits around 1984-85 and followed up with the belief that “this is the difference between my days of recess and today’s recess.” Administrators and educators in the study stated “there seemed to be a common understanding among the individuals that children may get hurt during recess.” Those injuries were and are a normal part of the school day. Administrators and teachers conveyed a common thread that they had more control of the school and classroom before the early 1980’s. This allows for the administrator and teacher to refer back to the days gone by when recess had more freedom. When administrators and teachers were empowered in the classroom and could discipline for misbehavior without making phone call after phone call to cover a liability issues. This is also how the essence of the “litigation correctness” movement has come into the educational realm.

Teachers in the study agreed with keeping students safe and the safety aspects on the playground. The threat of negligence and of liability is of utmost concern to educators as a whole.

One administrator stated “it takes a bold administrator to say, you know what, we’re covered.” This educator discusses liability issues as well. It appears teachers are the ones concerned with being sued over injuries during recess and play are restricted to the point of children being coddled unhealthily. In contrast an administrator in the study did not seem to be as concerned stating, “they better have their T’s crossed and their I’s dotted.” Further analysis of the data reveals administrators belief, “NCLB isn’t to blame for the way our school system has gotten. It’s the parents of today’s children. No one wants their child to get hurt.” Educators in the study voiced opinions concerning they are almost “scared” when a child is hurt on the playground.

Recess and Pennsylvania System of School Assessment’s (PSSA)

It is interesting to note administrators in the study acknowledged the need for increased recess during PSSA’s but not at any other time throughout the school year, statements made by both active and retired administrators such as:

“Recess is a reward for their hard work. We kind of use that as a carrot to dangle because we had all these incentive prizes, and the one prize that the kids said they wanted the most was the extra recess.”

“It was more important to them than a savings bond or toys from Wal-Mart. So we do the same with PSSA. We tell the kids if they work hard and all that, they’re going to get extra recesses during the afternoon. And so that’s what we do -- we have no kid problems with discipline during PSSA.”

These quotes also lend themselves to the prior quotes from administrators and teachers in the study concerning the pressures NCLB has put on school districts and educators over time on the whole. An administrator commented concerning NCLB, “with No Child Left Behind, we were creating our own stress.”

The teachers in the study repeat the idea of increased recess but were uncertain as to why the increase in recess occurred only during the PSSA testing and not throughout the entire school year. One teacher took this concept a bit further by stating, “my thought is there is no limit on the amount of recess I can give.” This statement leads to administrators’ belief that recess actually gave some credence to the increase in students’ scores. These statements support the teacher being excited about the prospect of increased cognition after physical activity (recess) found in most of the literature as stated in chapter two.

As pressure grows to decrease the amount of time in physical activity (recess) to make room for increased instructional time, it is imperative to share these results with stakeholders who will make these types of decisions. With the purpose of recess, as themed by the administrators and teachers in the study, being a break in the day, socialization, physical activity, creativity, increased attention span, and the need for students to be on their own one would think the changes in perception during PSSA’s would be understandable given the research in Chapter 2. Especially if children are being required to excel academically, physically and psychologically.

Are there Ethics in Recess

Looking at recess through the lens of the ethic of care the researcher probed the administrators and teachers in the study to find out if the school has the responsibility to provide recess in the best interest of the child. Although five of the ten educators felt physical activity was an

important part of recess with the ethic of care and a child's needs is it ethical to decrease or remove recess from the school day.

Administrators and teachers in the study believe there are positive and proactive motivations of recess. One teacher in the study believed "we must judiciously use recess as leverage for kids." Another words is it right to use recess as a reward or a punishment. Although an administrator in the study did not "believe it was morally wrong not to schedule recess, but did believe it was in the best interest of the child to offer recess." Ethically, both administrators and teachers are uncertain saying "I think we're all due a break and if they only get their recess – their lunch time break, that's not enough for little kids. It's just not enough." Ethics is simple...what is the right thing to do. Numerous teachers in the study agree "it is the right thing to keep young people healthy, to keep them comfortable in the classroom. Making them sit all day long is not healthy or right...diminishing their ability to be productive students."

A retired teacher expressed her concern with ethics and recess as follows:

"Well, I just think we're certainly getting away from -- it's just a different way of life. It's a different society. Values are different. Morals are different. Years ago, the value -- I mean, you got married before you had a child. Now you have a child and then you get married if you want to, and if you don't, well, then the grandparent -- and grandparents raising children. Oh my goodness."

"And I saw that happen during the years that I taught. When I first started, parents were parents to their own children. And the value of both parents working, just to have something that their neighbor has. It wasn't important. But now, it's grandparents

raising children. So, everything's changed. That's where recess is. It's being lost in the evolution of time.”

Administrators and teachers in the study believe the “educational system” “expects more and more of these kids academically but academically “we want a whole child.” Educators understand there is the educational, the social, and the physical but “think we’re really focusing in on just the academic child.” The educators in the study agreed to the “development of the whole person and that person develops through childhood.” Further statements by administrators and educators in the study led to the conclusion that teacher’s feel they are the teachers of play, teachers of everything. This implies teachers in the study already have an over whelming amount of educating. One teacher in the study conveyed, “I think recess is one of those places where they’re learning a lot and building their body; you can’t do that in a gym class once a week; you can’t really have one without the other. Because we’re going to have these little marshmallows doing tests really well.” These statements highlight educators belief in order to be a well rounded, academically sound child you need to not only nourish the mind. My analysis goes a step further in believing the body and soul of a child needs to be nourished.

The education of today’s children is different than it was 30 years ago according to retired teachers and administrators in the study. As stated by a teacher in the study, “It’s a different way of life. It's a different society. Values are different, morals are different and recess is being lost in the evolution of time.” Educators in the study believe “recess is being pushed aside because I guess they think children are not learning. But children do learn. One of the most important values of recess is the fact that “you got to learn to get along with other people.” Teachers in the study believe recess used to have ethical value but today’s education has lost so much in terms of curriculum. One

teacher continued her dismay with “I guess recess isn’t considered valuable anymore.” There seemed to be sadness around recess and what it has become. In a sense, ethically the right of the child has been diminished.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

“When a child has lost the ability to play, he is physically dead and a danger to anyone who comes in contact with him. It is an intriguing thing, yet most difficult, to assess the damage done to children who have not been allowed to play as much as they wanted to.” (A.S.Neill, 1960).

This study is a case study of educators’ perceptions of recess in two different school districts across 6 elementary schools in central Pennsylvania.

Implications for Policy Change:

Administrators and educators in the study believed changes needed to occur in educational policy and need to take place to accommodate recess within the school day. The top themes that arose in the sample population were the importance of students needing a break within the school day, socialization being important to the well-being of the child, and recess meeting a need for the child to be physically active. Retired educators felt the students of today were losing their creativity whereas active educators were more concerned with students not knowing how to play simplistic games. A sense of students being born in the data or technology era has some educators expressing a sense of technology depression; students are using their thumbs more than their muscles.

Educators conveyed recess may be most beneficial when it is consistently given over time during testing periods, whether recess occurs before or after academic lessons. This was evident when administrators gave a theoretical “open door policy” to elementary teachers while giving PSSA tests. Administrators and teachers in this study believed that when students were given extra

recess breaks, their testing scores increased; the students demonstrated measurable cognitive growth in test settings.

Teachers in the study felt children were able to more fully comprehend material presented to them in classroom settings when given the opportunity to process and reflect on that information. Recess provided this opportunities for children to not only reflect on material presented in class, but to interact with their classmates and exchange ideas and point of view. Six of the ten educators felt socialization was of utmost importance to the child during recess. The benefits of recess were best received when implementation occurred within the course of every day. When the weather did not permit the students to go outside students enjoyed indoor recess.

Limitations

This study was performed using a small sample set. Due to time constraints placed on the researcher, it was not possible to conduct the study over a longer period of time. However, the data demonstrated teachers' beliefs in providing a recess period during the school day despite these limitations. Although this study was not longitudinal and could not provide compelling evidence to support the effects of recess over the long term, it did provide some very conclusive evidence. Even in the short term, recess served to benefit the participants and enhance academic outcomes in all domains.

Further Research

The days of frolicking in the fields or snow covered playgrounds has been taken away from children. When children could scrape a knee or elbow and educators wouldn't have to worry about litigation. Instead of eliminating recess from the school day, it would serve children and their

education better if this important activity was accommodated within the school day. This was reiterated by an administrator in the study who stated “recess is one of the most important things we do.” A teacher in the study followed this line of thought by saying, “I can’t give my students enough recess.” Testing has become the central focus of our current education system. Testing is important, it provides information concerning students’ knowledge as a measure of teaching practices that contribute to success or lead to failure. But to use testing as the central indicator, and recently the only indicator of all academic achievement, discounts decades of research showing that other factors, too, are important to consider.

Without considering the element of whole child development, education is severely limited, and children’s achievement is hindered. Play has long been a rite of passage in childhood, a time honored tradition that is freely available to all children. However, the current trends in education are greatly diminishing the right to play for children, particularly in elementary schools. Accountability for academic improvement has been imposed on school administrators, teachers, and students and has all but eliminated the tradition of play during recess, an activity that has been around for hundreds of years. In the words of one of the most notable educational theorists of all time, Piaget, play is easily seen by traditionalists as a waste of time. In spite of the prophetic visions of the great educationalists, play has always been considered, in traditional education, as a kind of mental waste-matter, without functional significance, and even harmful to children, keeping them from their homework.

With the emphasis on high stakes testing and student performance in schools taking precedence over the developmental aspects of a child’s education, more and more schools are eliminating the time for play in school. Benjamin Canada’s attack on recess, specifically stating recess as a waste of time that is better spent on academics. The value of play has taken a direct hit

with current policy makers debunking the necessity of recess and in lieu of free time, recommending or requiring more academic tasks in all school environments.

Without opportunities to play and interact with objects as well as individuals, children are greatly hindered in all aspects of their development; cognitive, social and physical. Young children do not process information as effectively as older children and adults due to the immaturity of their nervous systems and lack of experiences. Children need opportunities to reflect on the information given and process in order to represent it through alternate means effectively.

However, if recess is valuable, how does this differ from classroom activity? Administrators and teachers in the study viewed recess as aiding in socialization (developing interpersonal relationships), physical activity (exercise), and problem-solving abilities'. Some might think there is an inference concerning teachers should be doing something better with their time than supervising recess. What better could a teacher be doing than developing the minds, bodies, and souls of children. Other areas of needed research surrounds the ethical dimensions and the best interest of the child when dealing with issues surrounding recess.

Relationship Between an Ethic of Care and Recess

When discussing the ethic of care and recess the questions concerning the ethic of care become do children have the right to freedom in their daily school lives? Is recess a freedom? Does the school have the responsibility to provide recess in the best interest of the child? Children need to move, exercise, express themselves thru play, and to communicate with the rest of the school throughout the school day. It is the researcher's belief that recess is this time to communicate with peers and adults within the school and if we as educators are not providing these basic ethical needs we are hindering the whole child. An area for administrators to delve into is if recess is a freedom

should children have the right to this undirected freedom play during the school day. Teachers in the study perceived recess as a right and how dare we not afford students recess when we are looking at the best interest of the child.

Relationship Between an Ethic of the Profession and Recess

If looking at the ethic of the profession the questions for further research would include is recess truly needed and if so, why? Is it ethical to deprive students of recess? Is it ethical to keep the student in from recess when they have not completed homework or if they have misbehaved? Will keeping the child in from recess add to their misbehavior? Do administrators assign teachers to recess duty? Do teachers see recess duty as part of their school day?

Relationship Between the Ethic of the Community and Recess

If the ethic of the community is looked upon then one would have to look at the community and see if recess (i.e. play) is valued. If playgrounds are not being used for physical activity during the school day what are they being used for. Is there green space for children to play or have all the trees' been removed for building? Is the environment not conducive to children playing outside?

Conclusions

The results of this study support school policy changes that need to be made to recognize the importance of free play on children's development. Rather than instituting policies to deny children a fundamental right to play, school policy makers should be considering the importance of time for children to develop at their own pace and in their own ways. Direct instruction methods do have a role in a classroom setting. However, using purely direct instructional techniques disregards the need

for free play and use of symbolic representation in a child's development. Social interaction provides opportunities to reflect on information, encourages children to negotiate understandings with peers and adults, and allows children to build on that knowledge. It is the researcher's suggestion that more research needs to be done in the field of recess and the perceptions, meanings, values and ethical dimensions administrators and teachers place on recess during the school day.

Appendix A: Informed Consent Document

The following document is an INFORMED CONSENT document pertaining to the research project that your participation is requested for. Participation is solely voluntary and by no means will the participants be pressured throughout the process. Moreover, a participant may decline to continue with the research at any given point without any negative repercussions.

RESEARCHER: Jeannette L. Brelsford

PROJECT TITLE: The Perception and Value of Recess through the Eyes of Administrators and Teachers

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study is to investigate teacher and administrator opinions about school recess.

PROCEDURES:

The researcher will distribute the informed consent documents, at the school sites, prior to the interview process with administrators and educators. Upon approval of an agreeable date, and IRB acceptance, the researcher will conduct the interviews of administrators and educators in their traditional, unaltered state. A teacher interview will be conducted to gain additional insight from the teacher's perspective on recess. As well, the researcher will conduct an interview with the administrator in order to gain insight into leadership perspectives on recess. The interviews will be completed on a voluntary basis only.

STUDY DURATION:

Participants from the elementary school, in central Pennsylvania, will be engaged in the research process for an estimated total of 5 days upon with the teacher and administrator may chose

to complete the interview online or via a face to face interview. Administrator and teacher interviews will be conducted during the week that the researcher is present at the site and will last approximately 60 minutes for the face to face procedure.

POTENTIAL RISKS:

There are no anticipated risks associated with this specific study. Should a subject feel discomfort, at any point, he/she has the right to withdrawal from the study or to request not to participate in specific aspects of the study.

BENEFITS:

Although compensation for participation in this study is not available the benefit of partaking in this study can enlighten other school district to the trails and tribulations' that occur when looking to decrease or eliminate recess. The results of the study may warrant the inclusion of recess for elementary students or uphold the belief that the school day should not be reserved strictly for academics in order to meet the rigorous demands of the school day.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

Throughout the entire duration of the study the participants' identities will be kept confidential. Specific names will not be used in the study in order to protect the confidentiality of all districts, schools, and human subjects. Confidentiality will be maintained via fictitious names - referred to as pseudonyms. However, the signed participants' documents will be on file with all pertinent research, at The Pennsylvania State University, although not made available within the context of the dissertation itself.

CONTACT INFORMATION:

Should you have any questions pertaining to this research project please contact the researcher, Jeannette Brelsford, via telephone at (570) 220-xxxx or via email at jb0602@gmail.com.

Jlb545@psu.edu. Should your questions need to be addressed by the researcher's mentor feel free to email Dr. Roger Shouse at rsc8@psu.edu.

VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION

The study's purpose, procedures, time restraints, risks, and benefits have been outlined herein. Contacts have also been included should concerns or questions arise. By signing the Informed Consent you are agreeing to voluntarily participate in the confidential research study, conducted by Jeannette Brelsford, with the understanding that you can withdrawal from the process at any point. Furthermore, your signature indicates that you have read, or have had read to you, the consent form and that you fully understand your rights in the research process.

Signature of Administrator/Teacher

Date

Appendix B: Interview Protocol for Administrators and Educators (Face to Face)

Introduction: Hello! My name is Jeannette Brelsford. I would like to thank you for giving me some of your time today. I am a doctoral student in Penn State's educational leadership program. I'm conducting a study about the perception and value of recess through the eyes of administrators and educators. Today I'd like to gather your thoughts about the various thoughts on elementary school recess.

I would like to record our talk for the purpose of data collection and analysis. However, if you prefer not to be taped, this is fine. Even if you agree to be recorded, you may request the recording be stopped at any time. All information I obtain from you will be completely confidential. Before we start the interview, would you please read the informed consent form and sign it if you agree to participate in this study?

Appendix C: Initial Administrator Interview

April 1, 2011

Dear Elementary Administrator,

It is with great enthusiasm that I introduce myself. I am a current PhD Candidate, in Educational Leadership, at Pennsylvania State University, and am currently in the dissertation phase of the program. With that said, I am conducting a questionnaire to elicit the perceptions and values of administrators and teacher within your elementary school. It would be extremely beneficial if you would take a moment of your valued time to complete the question at the bottom of this form, along with the Informed Consent document, and return it in the self-addressed stamped envelope. I appreciate your time in this matter and send warm wishes for a successful completion to your school year.

Sincerely,

Jeannette L. Brelsford

jl545@psu.edu

_____ I do not wish to partake in the follow up research.

Appendix D: Administrative and Teacher Recess Interview Template

1. What is recess like in your school today?

Probe: Are you happy with that or do you wish it could be different? How?

Probe:

2. Some people value recess, others say we can no longer afford it. What do you think?

Probe: How do you feel about that?

Probe: What do you think is in the best interest of the child?

3. Think back to when you were in elementary school. What was recess like for you?

Probe: How did you feel about recess? Or How did that make you feel?

Probe: When did you have recess (time of day)?

Probe: If NO RECESS: How do you feel about that?

4. How has recess changed since you began your career in education?

Probe: What do you think about the changes?

Probe: Why do you think it has changed?

Probe: How do you feel about that?

5. What are your thoughts on this statement? Recess across the country is being decreased or eliminated in order to meet accountability demands?

Probe: IF CHANGED: Why do you think this has happened?

Probe: IF NO CHANGE: Do you think this is a good thing?

Probe: Did your school meet AYP for the 2009-2010?

This concludes the interview process. I appreciate your time and assistance in this important topic. Do you have any additional thoughts or concerns regarding the topic of recess in public education?

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EDUCATIONAL HISTORY

Ph.D. Candidate, ABD, Educational Leadership, Penn State University (Expected Date of Graduation-12/2011)

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- **Dissertation Chair:** Dr Roger Shouse
- **Committee:** Dr. Jim Nolan, Dr. Preston Green, Dr. Dana Mitra
- **Title:** The Meaning and Value of Recess through the Eyes of Administrators and Educators and Recess' Ethical Value.

Masters of Science (M.S.), **Instructional Technology**, Bloomsburg University

- Concentration in Integrating Technology with Health and Physical Education
- Magnum Cum Laude

Masters of Education (M.Ed.), **Curriculum and Instruction**, Lock Haven University.

- Concentration in Youth Behavioral Risks and Changing Attitudes
- Certificate: Driver Education
- Aviation Ground School
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Bachelor of Science (B.S.), **Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance**

- Lock Haven University
- Emphasis: Health Science

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

- Quality of Instruction Research Group (Advisor: Dr. Fern Willits)
 - Surveyed 4000 University Park students with a 26% return rate on the quality of their instruction using eight points of instruction.
 - Surveyed 6000 University Park professors with a return rate of 34% on the quality of their instruction.
- Willower Ethics Center (Dr. Dana Mitra)
 - Exploring an online presence to the center and increasing visibility.
- Play Research Group (Advisor: Dr. James Johnson)
 - A blend of research students in a think tank exploring different venues of play.