

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STUDENT ENGAGEMENT, RECESS AND
INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

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Play, including recess, is viewed by child development experts as beneficial to students’ various aspects of development—social, cognitive, emotional, and physical. Recess is also deemed an opportunity for all to recharge and re-energize after hours of sitting and concentrating on instruction and assigned tasks. With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, many schools across the United States replaced recess with instructional time in order to prepare better the students undertaking their state’s standardized tests. Furthermore, instructional practices in elementary schools shifted from child-centered, play-based strategies to teacher-centered, didactic strategies. The purpose of this research was to examine fourth-grade teachers’ beliefs about the value of play in child development and classroom instruction, the types of instructional strategies they actually use in their classrooms and their students’ behaviors on the playground and in the classroom in a school with morning and midday recesses and a school with only midday recess. A qualitative phenomenological research method was used for this study in order to describe the lived experiences of teachers in the classroom and their students in the classroom and on the playground. Interviews and observations reveal that the teachers at both schools believe that play and recess are important to the development of their students, but neither has greatly modified instructional strategies to help students reap the benefits which arise through play during recess as the amount of time allotted to recess in both schools has decreased. Teachers’ reliance on teacher-centered instructional practices may be due to misconceptions about play and play-based

instruction. Professional development for teachers and school/district administrators is needed to help to nurture a positive philosophical understanding of play and play-based, student-centered instructional practices that can foster students' social, emotional and cognitive development, in addition to addressing the requisite content and skills called for in the various content standards.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Introduction

My general research interest is the impact of the reduction of play, including the loss of recess, inside and outside of the classroom on a child's development (emotional, social, behavioral, physical, and cognitive) and on a teacher's instructional strategies to engage learners. A starting point for me has been the assertion made by Zins, Bloodworth, Weissberg and Walberg (as cited in Smith, 2010) that "Learning is a social process" (p. 1) which I extended to state - learning is a social process which itself socializes primarily the student. Smith (2010) says that the research within the last two decades reveals that children's emotional and behavioral adjustment is important for their chances of early school success. It can be said that all activities in which children indulge and by which they experience an emotional outcome, will have an impact on their ability to learn. Smith (2010) claims that emotional and behavioral problems can affect children's ability to learn to read, their ability to follow directions and rules, and their ability to socialize and interact with their peers and teachers.

Through my recent studies, I have come to embrace John Dewey's (1916) philosophy that the principal purpose of education is to ensure that the aims and habits of people will live on from one generation to the next. It follows that appropriate and sufficient experiences, inside and outside of the classroom, must be provided for children in order to achieve this purpose. Dewey believed that play was a vital role in a child's educational life experience and their natural development – to be able to develop higher order thinking skills, develop an attitude towards work and allowing it to be part of a natural's child's development and meeting the needs of the whole child (Stuckart and Glanz, 2010). Wellhousen, (2002) says that educators were fired up about Dewey's theory that schools should focus on the children's needs and interests.

Therefore, the curriculum should include a valid and vibrant connection between time spent in learning, time allotted to recess from studying, the quality of the experiences inside and outside of the classroom, and the fulfillment of the mandate set out by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

The principles of No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) arose from three acts - Brown vs Board of Education of Topeka, 1954 that forbade the racial segregation in public schools, the Civil Rights Act in 1964 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 1965 (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). The NCLB Act was signed by President George W. Bush in 2001 and became effective in 2002. The act was to assure that all children – all ethnicities, children with learning disabilities, immigrant children, children in low-socioeconomic areas, and children with limited English – receive a high quality education and expanded educational opportunities by providing programs and interventions in schools. In addition, a priority was for these same children to be taught and led by highly qualified teachers and principals, with training and incentives provided to educators. The act stated that parents were to be given more choices to select a suitable school for their children. This was to give parents a sense of empowerment and control over their child's education. They could transfer their children from low performing schools (not meeting the states' standards after two consecutive years) to higher performing schools or even charter schools within their districts. The intention of the act was to create flexibility to manage federal funds, accountability by the state and increased support for education by the federal government, state and school districts.

With NCLB, teachers were expected to ensure that all students were successful learners. In order to meet this expectation, states were mandated to administer annual, standardized measurements of students' academic performance. Rather than serve as data to help teachers and

schools improve student learning, student scores of standardized tests were tied to school subsidy and the retention of a school's teaching and administrative staff, thus turning them into a wider range of high-stakes assessments.

To ensure that students' academic performances met minimal levels, there arose a national movement to reduce and even eliminate recess breaks in order to increase instructional time (Henley, McBride, Milligan and Nicholas, 2007). Politicians and superintendents, principals (and even some parents) saw this decision as a way "to get tough on education" (Pellegrini and Bohn, 2005, p. 14). Some schools implemented a no-recess policy with justifications that denigrated play and recess. Mulrine (2000) quotes Benjamin Canada, Superintendent of Schools in Atlanta, who felt "hanging on monkey-bars would not improve academic performance." She also reported that 40 percent of American schools, including Atlanta and Chicago, had eradicated recess or were considering it, decisions that displeased many teachers and parents.

Patte (2010) views this as a violation of children's rights to play, with schools justifying their decisions to eliminate play as a means to achieving higher test scores. According to Mertler (2007), 93 percent of teachers in a recent research study felt that the pressures of the NCLB negatively affected their instructional motivation. They recognized that their overwhelming duty had an impact on students' academic motivation to want to learn.

In as much as NCLB is an admirable demonstration of the government's concern that all children have equal access to high-quality education and the benefits arising from it, researchers in education and child development say that recess or free-play opportunities in a safe, wholesome environment during the school day are beneficial to children's physical, emotional, social and psychological development (Garrett, 2010). Therefore, there is a need to examine whether teachers are making curricular accommodations to provide more mentally and

physically engaging learning opportunities within their classrooms, including play-based activities, in order to foster the holistic development of their students. In other words, has play been shifted from the playground to the classroom to promote healthy student development? This is what I hope to investigate through my research.

Research Question

The purpose of the research was to explore the types of instructional strategies used in elementary schools that allow quality student engagement regularly. The research also examined the impact of reduced recess time since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001. My research question was: How do teachers' beliefs, classroom practices and student behaviors compare between a school with mid-morning recess and one without mid-morning recess?

Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2 further examined the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and its impact on teachers, principals and students. The literature review delved deeper into recent research on the impact of the Act on teachers and students over the past 10 years. In addition, the impact of recess on children's development and the effects that NCLB has had on it are examined. This was broken down into three areas: the purpose of recess, students and teachers in schools with recess and students and teachers in schools without recess. Chapter 2 also analyzed the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) over the past 12 years, from before the NCLB Act was made into law to the present in order to see whether the removal and reduction of recess is correlated with students' test scores. The latest trends in children's play opportunities, instructional strategies and students' performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) were also examined. And finally, Chapter 2 looked at NAEYC's position on

play in schools and children's rights to play in the United Nations Declaration of the Child's Right to Play.

In Chapter 3, the three methods used to collect data for this study are described – interviews, observations, and the collection of artifacts such as the school's daily schedules. The interview protocols and questions were described, as well as the methods of recording and analyzing the data. The observation procedures of recording the students' movement, behaviors, and engagement in the classroom and on the playground were described. The protocol for recording the teacher's instructional strategies was also provided. Finally, the procedure for correlating the results of the interviews and observations with the daily schedule was presented.

Chapter 4 examined the main research question in light of the data collected. Three main assertion statements were made and supported by warrants, after analyzing teachers' beliefs, teachers' instructional strategies used in the classroom and the students' behavior in the classroom and on the playground.

In Chapter 5, the research question was answered by using the analyzed data. Recommendations were then made to the stakeholders of education (policy makers, school leaders, teachers, parents) - to develop a deeper understanding of play-based learning strategies.

Definition of Terms in Education

Recess is an opportunity for children to be physically active, develop social relationships, restore their emotional balance, and to simply enjoy free-play with each other.

Play is an activity participated by one or more people for the purpose of amusement or recreation.

Instructional strategy or strategy instruction is a tool that is used by teachers or instructors to impart information to learners effectively, as well as, encourage learners to participate.

Engagement is the interaction between two people or more or between a person and an activity that involves emotions, thinking skills, physical skills, and psychological skills as part of the learning process.

Student engagement is a type of engagement that is communicative and occurs in an education institution; it is the interaction between students and between students and teachers to help with growth and development.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter 2 further examined the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and the impact it had on educators and students. We analyzed the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) over the past 12 years, from before the NCLB Act was made into law to the present in order to see whether the removal and reduction of recess is correlated with students' test scores. This chapter reviewed the latest trends in children's play opportunities, instructional strategies and students' engagement. And finally, a discussion on those who advocate play, such as the NAEYC and the United Nations Declaration of the Child's Right to Play was presented.

History of Recess/No-Recess Policy

Recess has been a standard part of elementary school in the United States for over 100 years, and since the 1950s—more than 60 years ago—three (3) recesses a day had been the norm (Mulrine, 2000). As with most veteran teachers, in my own 15 years plus of teaching, whenever I asked a pupil, “What is your favorite time in school,” the common answer would be, “Recess!” Mulrine (2000) also reported that most children say that recess is their favorite subject. However, recess—this clear choice as a favorite time of the child's day—had been cut by a large number of schools across the United States. Mulrine (2000) said that 40% of American schools eradicated recess to gain more instructional time to use to raise test-scores. Atlanta and Chicago were identified as the first states to make this decision.

The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) had a profound effect on policy-makers, inspiring districts to implement no-recess policies (Miller, 2009) and to espouse a commitment to ensuring that: (i) the curriculum is covered; and (ii) resulting test-scores dazzle the public. However, the institution of a no-recess policy to achieve the goal of higher test scores seemingly violated the United Nation's Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), Article 7, paragraph 3, which

states, "The child shall have full opportunity for play and recreation which should be directed to the same purposes as education; society and the public authorities shall endeavor to promote the enjoyment of this right". Admittedly, some states do have laws mandating and stipulating time for recess; however, it should be noted that the United States has never ratified the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child. Nevertheless, Bochman (2011) made a recent report that six states have responded to the latest statistics of children overweight and obesity – Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Mississippi and North Carolina – by ensuring that students had recess.

Theoretical support for the importance of play in the development of children came from Vygotsky's (1896-1934) and Piaget's (1945) theory on "fantasy or pretend play and symbolic play" and "cooperative or collaborative dialogue". Children use symbolic play as a time to reveal their present understandings of the world and to make sense of what they're experiencing in their lives (Goncu and Gaskins, 2011). The support also came from Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) submission that play is a time for children to act out their dreams and fears. Their theories suggested that the purpose of recess is for children to play freely, reflect, meditate, bond and build friendships, explore, discover, compete, resolve conflicts, chat, share, breathe easily or just simply hang out with each other. Adult-directed activities, such as physical education, do not allow for such freedom.

Although a supporter of recess, Jarrett (1998) laid out the justifications of some educators for the abolition of recess: (1) more instructional time is needed to improve test scores; (2) the work pattern is disrupted which caused increased levels of excitement and inattentiveness; and (3) recess encourages anti-social behavior and aggression such as bullying. Simon and Childers (2006) said that school officers are concerned about children's safety; hence, another reason why

they are against recess. The authors base their conclusions, in part, on a survey of principals' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of recess that was conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principal (NAESP) in 1999. Although 383 principals did see value in recess, they believe that recess should be "well supervised and organized" (p. 39). Simon and Childers (2006) also found, from 20 years of research on school recess, that there was a significant contingent of educators who regard recess as useless and archaic, especially in today's society that is forced to be accountable.

Jarrett (1998) reported that countries leading the US continue to retain their three recess-periods a day and, yet, they outperform U.S. students. Schools in Asia have a rigid and heavy curriculum, but despite this, recess is still provided to children in early elementary grades. Pellegrini, Huberty and Jones (1995) identified elementary schools in Japan as having ten to fifteen minutes of recess every hour, knowing that children can sustain attention for a short duration of time.

Trends

Looking at patterns relevant to children's play, one can see some clearly discernible trends. Today, the ability and manner with which children play outdoors after school have changed (Larson, 2011). There is research which shows that children are spending half as much time outside as they did 20 years ago – and much more time doing "inside" activities (Juster, Ono and Stafford, 2004).

The amounts of time children are engaged in school, programmed activities and homework, leaves very little time for them to run outside and engage in free play. Frost, Wortham and Reifel (2008) referred to a study conducted by the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research in 1998, that unstructured free time between school and bedtime has

been reduced from 40% in 1981 to 25% in 1997. Within the adult-structured sessions of play, there is no room for genuinely spontaneous creative play.

Spontaneous, traditional play has been hindered for children spend hours at the computer, watching television or playing video games (Frost, Wortham and Reifel, 2008). The situation is exacerbated for most children during the winter months when the days are shorter and there are fewer daylight hours for children to play outside. Another reason some children's free play is reduced is depending on neighborhood social conditions, children are not allowed to be outside for security reasons, as playgrounds have become hazardous, unsafe areas (Frost et al, 2008).

The Impact of a No-Recess Policy

The effects of removing recess from the curriculum could be measured by comparing cohorts of children who have ample opportunities for play to those who have their time for free play greatly reduced or withdrawn. Miller's (2009) commentary on the importance on recess cited a study conducted by researchers from Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York that found children who are given a break during the day are well behaved while those who are deprived of recess, because there is no recess in school or they are kept in, are less attentive in class and learn less material. Miller (2009) cited other studies in which children who have recess return to class more focused and more settled.

According to "The State of Play" 2009 survey by Gallup for the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, principals have been criticized by parents for taking away recess from children as a form of punishment for either not finishing school-work or presenting behavioral problems (Adams, 2011). Teachers are also guilty of using recess-withdrawal as part of a discipline package, though as employees they may have no option but to follow school policies. Frost et al (2008) reported that some teachers do not allow students to ask questions or speak with each

other because direct instruction is used as the preferred method of teaching. This risks reducing the opportunity for social interaction and play-based instruction even more. He went on to say that other schools use play as a ‘threat’, whereby all work must be completed or else there will be no recess.

Although many schools in the US have reduced the amount of time for recess in order to increase the amount of instructional time, there is little evidence to show that scores on standardized assessments have improved. Ravitch (2009) reported some good news in the NAEP trends that the reading scores for 9-year-olds were up, although the rate of progress seems to have been slow. As for 13-year-olds, their scores were back to where they were in 1992; that was regarded as progress, but only in the sense of recovering lost ground. And while reading scores went up for the 17-year-olds, they were still not as high as they were in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In mathematics, the story was similar. Again, better to see the scores going up rather than down, but the education system does not seem to have made any real breakthroughs.

There are no indications that reductions in recess time have positively impacted student achievement. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) conducts national and state assessments in Grades 4, 8 and 12 to measure student achievement in a wide array of subjects, including reading. NAEP’s Nation’s Report Card for Reading (2011) provided average reading scores from 1992 to 2011 for both lower and higher income families across 52 states and jurisdictions. From 1998 to 2011, reading scores ranged from 213 to 220 for Grade 4, and 261-264 for Grade 8, with no significant upward trend in performance. Thus, after a decade of increased classroom instructional time at the expense of recess time in order to meet NCLB performance expectations, there has been no significant improvement in reading performance at the fourth-grade or eighth-grade levels on the NAEP.

On the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS), there has been no significant change in science achievement between 1999 and 2007 at either the fourth-grade or eighth-grade levels. However, nearly half of the 16 countries assessed did show significant improvements in fourth-grade test scores and one quarter showed significant gains in eighth-grade scores between 1999 and 2007. Although mathematics scores have shown improvement, the US continues to lag behind other countries in advanced performance, placing seventh at both the fourth-grade and eighth-grade levels.

Armario (2010) reported on the 2009 Programme for International Student Assessment that out of 34 countries from around the world, the US ranked 14th in reading, 17th in science and 25th in mathematics. On the positive side, PISA 2009 report showed the United States' scores as being higher than the scores of 2003 and 2006. United States was in the lead of more than 60 countries but still behind countries such as Finland, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Canada. In reading and science, there was no statistical significance from the OECD average scores while in mathematics there was a statistical significant below the OECD average score.

There are also some other closely related consequences of reduced recess, ranging from the socio-academic to physical development. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (1997) made a plea to school officials to reconsider the idea of elimination of recess. They made it known that children were spending less time playing in their backyards and/or communities due to parents' working hours. Therefore, more time was being spent indoors in front of the television or video games. They wanted school administrators to be mindful that recess is a time for children to make strides in their social development freely, interact with their peers in a different setting, and develop other skills, such as problem solving, sharing with each other, helping others and cooperating.

More and more American children are suffering from obesity and not being physically active enough, which has become a great concern and a driving campaign by officials of the public health (Ridgers, Saint-Maurice, Welk, Siahpush and Huberty, 2011). Hellmich (2010) said that according to a 2005 study, children might live shorter lives than their parents due to obesity. She went on to say that as the numbers of children with obesity increases so are cases of diabetes, high blood pressure and cholesterol. A clinical assumption is that these health afflictions have been aided by, if not caused by, the reduction in opportunities to be physically active (Mota, Silva, Santos, Ribeiro, Oliveira, and Duarte, 2005).

Henley, McBride, Milligan and Nichols (2007) claimed that reduced recess opportunities have affected not only regular children but also children with learning disabilities and gifted children. For example, without recess, children with learning disabilities, especially those related to reasoning, listening and speaking (e.g. asphasia, dysphasia), need opportunities to interact with peers and lay the foundation for such skills. Shadden and Agan (2004) supported the point that language is a critical tool for the maintenance of situated identity; therefore students need ample opportunities to practice their language skills in a variety of settings, including recess and other places where children can engage in free-play. An even more specific study, by Stark (2008), shows that children of diverse groups, especially migrant and ethnic groups, are missing out on recess. She remarked that ‘children of diversity’ can develop a second language, and additionally children coming into contact with another language learn how to share and get along with each other, to live and play in harmony and in community during recess.

Instructional Strategies

Because there is lack of meaningful change in students' scores on a variety of standardized assessments since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 despite the reduction of recess time in favor of instructional time, we need to examine whether teachers' use engaging instructional strategies, including play. According to Schoen and Fusarelli (2008), the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 created a negative impact on teachers and school leaders, inhibiting teachers from using 21st century best practices in the classroom. According to a study conducted in New Jersey with elementary and secondary teachers, teachers expressed that the impact of high-stakes testing has led them to teach to the tests, which has placed a damper on their creative teaching styles (Cawelti, 2006). In another study, teachers felt discouraged to use the team teaching approach, (Hamilton, 2007) which can be a great way to model cooperation with others, respect for each other or team building to their students. According to Eric and Heather (2004), American play-based teachers of the early years of elementary schools were forced to change their teaching skills to traditional teaching styles due to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.

Other researchers, such as Fisher, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Singer and Berk (2011), stated that 21st century children need to do more than learn facts—they need to engage the world by seeking knowledge and solving problems that arise in and out of the classroom. They suggested that teachers should model, teach and encourage their students to communicate, collaborate, synthesize, transform, apply and lead effectively. They believed that this would help students face intricate matters head-on and courageously as they step out in the world to engage with others. With increasing opportunities given to children to commune with each other and their teachers, they can grow to be flexible, creative thinkers and lifelong learners (Fisher, Hirsh-

Pasek, Golinkoff, Singer and Berk, 2011). Cole (2008) identified effective teaching practice as one that is “engaging, relevant, multicultural and appealing to a variety of modalities and learning styles” (p. 1).

Play-based learning. As children play, they are able to make sense of their worlds, naturally and socially, independently or with others and in a structured or unstructured setting. Play-based learning activities not only foster cooperative learning, they offer students decision-making opportunities while engaging intrinsically motivating behavior. Play is beneficial to a child’s development – it enhances their learning of the curricula, their social skills, their abilities and attitudes towards learning (Martlew, Stephen and Ellis, 2011). Play-based instruction can foster teacher-student meaningful engagement, suitable to the student’s interest and abilities (Assaf, 2007). Teachers can embed play-based learning experiences in their instruction since opportunities for play has been reduced – reduction and elimination of recess in schools. Frost, Wortham and Reifel (2008) say “play should be a fundamental part of every school curriculum” (p. 222).

Student engagement. Minogue, Madden, Bedward, Wiebe and Carter (2010) found that a variety of learning experiences could occur when students are allowed to engage with each other in groups. They noted that they share ideas with peers as they investigate together; they reflect on ideas and evidence together; and they talk and write, using scientific terminology and specific writing style. When there is student engagement in a classroom or subject, such as literacy, students can be motivated to learn and will want to learn (Learning Point Association, 2007, p. 6).

Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) recognize that the more students engage with each other, the higher their grades, and the better their performance on standardized tests.

Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde (2005) say that having students get their ‘hands dirty’ or doing things, is powerful learning compared to students just sitting back and taking it all in from teachers who stand in front of the class. For instance, calculating the heights of their peers in the class then creating a graph in a small group or with a peer would be a more powerful learning experience than merely watching the teacher graph a set of data. Zemelman, Daniels and Hyde (2005) say that according to ethnographic studies, children living in poverty are engaged in literacy much more when they are required to play and draw.

Palmer (2009) suggested that teachers incorporate classroom engagement into their lessons to make them more interactive. He recommended doing this at the beginning of the day, as a way to jumpstart active learning, to pair up students to share their thoughts on an activity. Other ways to have students engaged with each other is students review each other’s work or teachers asking students for feedback on their learning experience thus far. He says that peer or small group discussions should be closely monitored that way teachers can give feedback to students and to ensure they are staying on topic at hand.

Gender Differences and Play

Research studies have documented gender differences in behavior pre- and post-recess. According to research, boys are more active than girls, they tend to lose focus quicker than girls during class time, and they are not as settled as girls are during work time (Pellegrini, 1995). Depending on how active or vigorous children played on the playground, their behaviors may have some effect as they return to the classroom (Jarrett, Hoge, Davies, Maxwell, Yetley and Dickerson, 1998). Since this is the case, building in informal breaks during class time, as well as, planning and varying instructional strategies to suit the learners and their behaviors.

Benefits of Recess

Sindelar (2004) said that recess is beneficial to students, as well as, teachers. She recognized five benefits of recess: social benefits – students practice the skill of sharing, cooperating, communication and respect; emotional benefit – it can be used to release any pent up stress or anxiety from spending hours concentration on academics; physical benefits – students are able to develop their muscles and coordination; cognitive benefits – students can use this time to problem-solve, make decisions and be creative thinkers. As for teachers, they too use this time as a breather after supervising students and focusing on deliver instruction to various learners. She said that teachers use this time to attend meetings with staff or parents and to prepare for the next lessons to come. It should not be used as a punishment strategy but be regarded and respected as children’s personal time (Ramstetter, Murray and Garner, 2010).

Reinstate Recess

This mixture of research, analysis and findings-by-experience is leading to lobbyist-style action aimed at bringing about the reinstating and retaining of recess. There are various groups petitioning to reintroduce recess at schools. The International Play Association (IPA/USA) is a non-profit organization, which advocates that play and recess should be returned to the daily school-schedule. Gentry (2012), is fighting for the same objective. She is the founder of Atlanta Taskforce on Play, a foundation that has built playgrounds, improved the spaces of existing playgrounds and even educated the public on play. Parents and teachers are rallying to bring recess back into the schools as they begin to see even more clearly the benefits of play and the need for additional play opportunities. The National PTA and Cartoon Network are part of this cause (titled “Rescuing Recess”), encouraging students to write letters to their local and state officials (Greifner, 2006). Some groups are focused on manifesting a growing concern for

children's health, with iconic figures such as First Lady Michelle Obama involved, by promoting playful-and-healthy lifestyles for children (Adams, 2011). First Lady Obama presents an even more advanced concept about recess— it is not only for the kids but also for the grownups. It affords a great opportunity for adults to be the role models they should be (Shafroth, 2011).

Summary

With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 under President George W. Bush's administration, many schools across the United States replaced recess with instructional time in order to better prepare students for the State's National Standardized Tests. Furthermore, instructional practices have shifted from child-centered, play-based strategies to teacher-centered, didactic strategies. This study will investigate teachers' beliefs related to this change in instructional practice and what they do to keep children engaged in learning process.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

A significant impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) has been the reduction, and in some cases elimination of recess. Because recess typically provides the only opportunity for children to engage with peers in self-directed ways such as play during the school day, this research project compared the behavior of fourth-grade students in a school with both morning and afternoon recess with students in a school with only afternoon recess. In addition, this research project examined the beliefs and practices of the teachers of these students to see how they have responded to NCLB.

I used two methods of data collection: interviews with the class teachers and observations of teachers and students in the classrooms and on the playgrounds. I selected a qualitative phenomenological research approach for this study. My goal is to describe the lived experiences of teachers and students in schools with and without mid-morning recess in great detail. This approach is suitable for this type of research to be able to bring out the experiences and perceptions of the teachers' own perspectives on recess, play, instructional strategies and engagement of the students. Van Manen (1990) says that the goal of phenomenology is to firstly comprehend the meaning of individual's life experiences and to provide a plain, clear picture of human phenomena. He says that one should see more than the surface, but capture the heart of the lived events.

Participants and Settings

For this study, I purposely selected two elementary schools, one with mid-morning recess and the other without in order to make comparisons of teachers' beliefs, classroom practices and student behaviors. In order to seek permission to conduct my study, I researched the schools beforehand, contacted the principals via telephone and email with a follow-up formal letter

explaining the study, the purpose, its benefits and my intentions. With their permission, I then contacted the fourth grade teachers via email to set a meeting date to do informal observation and schedule dates and times to do interviews, classroom and playground observations.

Roberts Elementary School¹

Roberts Elementary School is both elementary and junior high school, with an enrollment of approximately 200 students. As I walk through the well-lit and decorative hallways of the school to get to the fourth grade class, I'm warmly greeted by students of all ages and by teachers, most wearing bright smiles on their faces as they head to various destinations, chatting with each other. The walls are decorated with students' work – art works, science projects, newspaper clippings of students' achievements and colorful stickers on locker doors. The school is buzzing with noises of chatter, locker doors closing, students running to class and calling out to each other to hurry.

I stand in the doorway for the fourth grade room that I am about to study, and quickly scan the layout and the students. The classroom is fairly large and roomy for the students to be able to move around freely or to be able to work on the carpeted floors. The room is brightly lit by the morning sun that bursts through the seven tall windows that are on the east side of the building and cooled by three standing fans in each corner of the class and two ceiling fans. Just below those windows are shelves of reading books, textbooks, teaching resources and manipulative. The students are grouped in desks of fours and fives, facing each other in the middle of the classroom. Along the walls on the north side of the room, are three desk computers, the Smart Board and a television/video machine, which is mounted onto the wall.

¹ All school and participant names have been changed to protect their identity

Three chalkboards take up the north, south and west walls and the teacher's workstation is northwest of the room.

Upon my walk to the teachers' desk, I observed the students chatting with each other, packing away their books, a few were at a computer while others were about to leave the class with a folder in hand. Ms. Ruth is the fourth grade class teacher who has been teaching for more than ten years with qualifications in education and state certification. She teaches 21 students - 57% female, 43% male, 100% White.

At 8.55 am, Ms. Ruth tells her students to be seated in their correct seats and to be ready for the morning announcements. I noticed that the weekly schedule is posted on the right side of the white board, near her workstation and the schedule for the day has already been written in the upper left corner of the board.

According to the school schedule (Appendix F), the school day commences at 9:00 am and ends at 3:00 pm. Within this time frame (six hours), nearly five (5) hours of the day is dedicated to academic work. Core subjects such as mathematics and language arts are scheduled almost daily, while specialized subjects such as science, social studies, technology, and gym are twice a week, with art and library once per week. Each day begins with religious studies and ends with either gym (twice a week) or homework (three times a week) – students receive and record homework that is to be completed. There are two recesses: a 15-minute mid-morning snack/playground/bathroom break at 10.15 am, and a 55-minute lunch break at 12.30 pm, during which students have their meal within the first 30 minutes in the school cafeteria and free time on the playground for the remaining 25 minutes.

The playground at Roberts Elementary is very spacious, consisting of a grassy field, a play equipment section and a paved area where a portion of it is a parking lot for staff, parents

and visitors. A few full-grown trees in the grassy field provide shaded areas for children to sit and relax with each other or to read a book. Some students choose to play ball games, such as soccer, or play tag in the field. In the play equipment section, children can enjoy themselves on the monkey bars, jungle gym, slides and swings. The paved portion takes the shape of a reversed upside down 'L'. The horizontal portion is the play zone where children can play freely, or draw, using various colors of large chunky sidewalk chalk. There is a metal bike-rack that prevents children from going beyond the play area as it leads onto the main road.

New Richmond Elementary

New Richmond Elementary School has a larger population when compared to Roberts Elementary – almost 650 students - Kindergarten to Grade 6. There are many more buildings that comprises of several classes on three levels. After signing in, in the main office, I headed over to the fourth grade class quickly because it was on the other end of the building. The school's atmosphere caught my attention, causing me to slow down. It was 8.50 am and I observed students working in their respected classes. It was quiet. There was a sense of order and discipline especially when I came upon laminated educational posters on the walls along the hallways. There are pieces of artwork done by the students, posted around the doorframes of the various classrooms. The lockers were clean and the hallways were free of students, roomy and brightly lit by florescent lights. Judging from the architecture of the school building, it told a story of history.

I finally got to the fourth grade that I studied, catching my breath, anxious to see the setting of their classroom. Again, silence - the students were busy at work, working independently on a worksheet. The students sit in rows, in two columns, creating a passage for students and teachers to walk freely. Opposite the entrance of the classroom (south), are four

large windows (north) that look out onto the school field and the main street. Below the open windows are shelves of board games and reading books. On the west side, are two white boards and Smart Boards, and television/video that is kept on a stand and just in front of it, is a four-seated table. Presented on the Smart Board, was the schedule for the morning of subjects and activities listed, typed by the teacher, and loaded for the students. On the far right end of the board, is another schedule for the full day – times and subjects. Near the entrance where I was standing, is the teacher’s desk, neat and tidy. Behind her, is a poster board of pictures that told a story about her life. On her left, are two computers for students and teachers. The floors are tiled and clean. On the right side of the doorway, is the sink, two filing cabinets a carpeted area that has a pink beanbag on it. Again, just in front of the carpeted area, is a round table with four seats for students to conduct group work sessions like the four-seated rectangular table up front.

Ms. Natalie is one the four fourth grade teachers who is qualified in education with a state certification and less than five years teaching experience. In her class, she teaches 22 students - 41% girls, 59% boys, 18% Hispanic, 82% White. I observed as students arrive, they place their bags under their chairs, read the information that is on the Smart Board screen and follow the tasks that are required of them.

As at Roberts Elementary, New Richmond’s school day begins at 9:00 am, but ends at 3:25pm. From 8:40am to 9:00am, as the students arrive, they sign-in for lunch and work independently on a T.O.L. (Thematic Oral Language) worksheet. This is then corrected as a whole class after the morning announcements. Some students spend almost 6-hours-and-40-minutes allotted to subject studies (Math, Language Arts, etc.) per day. With regards to subjects, the teacher and students followed a blocked schedule from Monday to Thursday. A 20-minute slot called the “reward/study time” is incorporated into Friday’s schedule.

The fourth graders' days begin with a full block of language arts with Ms. Natalie, followed by social studies. After social studies, students receive a 45-minute break, with 20 minutes of play and 20 minutes for lunch in the school-cafeteria. The fourth graders' afternoon periods are spent with another teacher for instruction in mathematics and science, followed by the specialized class block (e.g., PE, music, etc.). After special, they return to the afternoon class teacher before going to back to their homeroom teacher, Ms. Natalie, for dismissal. The specialized subjects are rotated daily with the fixed time slot.

On Fridays, in the "reward/study time" slot, students who are recognized for good behavior and academic performance are rewarded in the form of a movie, board games or extra recess outside. Students who were unable to maintain positive behavior during that particular week had to work independently in silence for either half the class period or the entire time of 20 minutes of reward/punishment. For those who spent half the class period spent the remaining time in the rewards class.

For play recess, New Richmond's playground is approximately twice the size of the Robert's playground. Their expansive grassy field encompasses a running track, two sheds and playground equipment, such as a swing set, slides, jungle gyms, monkey bars, and two seesaws. Between the school building and the field is a paved area for two areas of basketball. The school building shades portion of the paved area, along the basketball court, and students use it to either delve into a book or to simply hang out with a peer.

Methodology

In qualitative research, many tools are used to collect data, such as, interviews, observation methods, field journals, focus groups and document review. For my study, to suit phenomenological research approach, I conducted face-to-face interviews, observed the teachers'

instructional strategies used in class, observed the students' behavioral responses to teachers' instructions in class and observed the students' behavior on the playground. According to Glesne (2011), these tools create a strong base or foundation to the description and interpretations of what the participants say, do and feel which will provide insight into the phenomenon that is being investigated. I sought class schedules from the teachers in order to weave them into the other data collected. This study was done over a period of six days, three at Roberts Elementary and the other three at New Richmond Elementary.

Teacher interviews. In order to capture teachers' beliefs about play, recess and instructional strategies to facilitate student engagement, I interviewed the teachers, face-to-face, before and after the three-day observations. Interviews are viewed as insightful and useful in qualitative research. Through this mechanism, the researcher is able to comprehend the points of view stated by the subjects and reveal the meaning of their own experiences (Kvale, 1996). Other than collecting facts and simple meanings of topic from the interviewees, in-depth information can be retrieved from open-ended questions (McNamara, 1997). For the pre-interviews, I used a semi-structured, open-ended interview that is used in qualitative research to uncover facts and meanings given by the interviewees (Kvale, 1996), yet directed to obtain particular information that may connect to the literature presented in the previous chapter and the research. This type of interview can be asked to both teachers, which would be easy to analyze and make comparisons. Other reasons for interviewing the teachers include facilitating my assessment of their perspectives as educators—their evaluation of recess and play for children; examination of the impact on teachers of nationwide trends to reduce or eliminate recess time in schools; comparisons of yesteryear recesses and current recesses; determination of changes in instructional strategies used in the classroom during their respective teaching years as

a result of standardized testing and reduced recess time. The first interview was conducted prior to classroom and playground observations (Appendix C). Before conducting interviews, I gave the teachers time to read the Teacher Consent Forms (Appendix A), ask any questions, and sign the forms. The interviews were held in their classrooms during their lunch period. Each interview was audio taped, lasting a little over 30 minutes, and then transcribed.

After transcribing the pre-interviews, I created a list of questions that I planned to ask at the post interview. The purposes of post interviews were to clarify, verify and extend points made in the first interview; “to provide information that was missed in observation” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 94) and to gain further insight into the teachers’ reasoning (Kvale, 1996) behind activities and instructional strategies used in the classroom and their perceptions of students’ play behavior on the playground that I observed for the three days.

As I observed the teachers’ instructional strategies and the students’ behavior in the classroom and on the playground, I developed a different set of questions to ask each teacher and I added them to my initial list of post interview questions. These questions were tailored to each teacher to get a deeper insight into their motivations, underlying the strategies they used in the classroom and their understanding of their students’ behavior in class and on the playground. Hence, the majority of questions I asked during the post interviews differed by teacher.

At the end of the three-day visit at a school, I conducted a post interview with the teachers, Ms. Ruth and Ms. Natalie. I used semi-structured, open-ended questions again for post interviews. The interview with Ms. Ruth was held during her lunch break on the fourth day and the interview with Ms. Natalie was held at the end of the third day, each lasting approximately 30 minutes; they were audio taped and transcribed (Appendix E).

Artifacts. At the end of the interviews and observation procedures, samples of the schools' daily schedules were requested from the Principals and collected from the teachers to show evidence of recess breaks (Appendix F). Another reason for having this material was to bring together and support the information therein with the educators' interview responses and my recordings of observations. Glesne (2011) says that artifacts make findings trustworthy and can be used to support and confirm what was observed and interviews conducted with participants. As I received the schedules, I analyzed them - calculating the hours spent on academic work (per subject, per day), compared subjects and scheduling of subjects of the schools, as well as, the recess times and length of times.

Classroom and playground observations. I conducted my observations in two different settings at each school, the classroom and playground. For each setting, a specific observation protocol was developed to provide a rigorous recording platform. Maxwell (2005) says, "observation often provides a direct and powerful way of learning about people's behavior and the context in which this occurs," (p. 94). Therefore, the point of observing the students was to assess the quality of student engagement in the classroom and on the playground, as well as, the degree to which the teachers' instructional strategies fostered quality student engagement regularly.

With the assistance of the participating teachers, signed informed Consent Forms were sent to each parent/guardian of the children of the fourth grade classes. Prior to classroom observations of the students and having collected the signed parent consent forms, I explained the study to the students and gave them time to read and sign the Assent Forms. Time was allocated for the students to ask any questions they had about the study and my role. Only one student asked me a question – he asked if I could return to their class to tell them what I saw on

my visit.

All observations conducted in the homerooms, special classrooms and playgrounds were entered directly onto a laptop for ease of data analysis. Three full school days of data collection at each school provided sufficient data to allow me to assess students' behavior before and after recess breaks and to compare and contrast the behavior and engagement of those students who had mid-morning recess with those who did not have mid-morning break. The reason for only observing for three days at each school was to capture a snap shot of teachers' classroom practices, students' behavior in the classroom and on the playground. Snapshot observation of children is used to observe an immediate reaction or behavior at a particular moment; "the results are obvious and readily understandable" (Hobart and Frankel, 2004, p. 73).

For the classroom observations, I always positioned myself at the back of the room. In my notes, I noted the day, time, subject and description of the activity at the beginning of each class. Every five to ten minutes (depending on the amount of data I needed to record), I recorded the time and actions and behaviors of the students – their responses to the activities – and the behaviors and actions of the teacher (Appendix D). I paid attention to engagement amongst students and teachers (student to student and teacher to student), students' behavior when an activity was assigned to them (as they were given the assignment, during the task and post task) and the types of instructional practices used by the teachers in the classroom. With students who stood out, for example, inattentive for a period of time or distracting others or focused on tasks, I followed their behaviors closely. In addition, I paid attention to gender differences in behaviors.

With regards to playground observation, at Roberts Elementary, the playground was small and manageable so I walked on the outskirts to observe the students – identifying the groups they were in, the number of students and gender in each group, their behaviors, actions,

emotions and conversations every five to ten minutes depending on my completing of the events and amount of data I needed to record. At New Richmond Elementary, I used a chart with the following headings: swing, slide, monkey bars, jungle gym, ball game, and other, separating the boys from the girls. In addition, I noted the students' actions, behaviors, emotions and conversations that took place amongst them (Appendix D). In the lunchrooms of both schools, I used observation notes, which were typed directly onto my laptop.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of my school visits, I read and re-read all of the data collected – transcriptions of interviews, observation notes and analyzed class schedules. I made brief notes and titles as I read the materials, and referred back to the research question. Then, I created a t-chart under the headings of Roberts Elementary (recess) and New Richmond Elementary (without recess); categorized the data into the following groups: class schedule, lunch recess, playground recess, classroom, teachers and instructional strategies. As I read the categorized information and data, themes and issues emerged from the materials. In addition, I saw similarities and differences between these schools, which raised questions that I needed to examine closely. After a few days, I returned to the data, pulled it all together with the themes, issues, questions of the data and research question and re-read all. Following this step, I created assertion statements (Erikson, 1985). I formed warrants and tested them to ensure that there was validity in the assertions (Erikson, 1985). I linked specific evidence from the data that helped to bring meaning and significance to the study.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

With the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 under President George W. Bush's administration, many schools across the United States replaced recess with instructional time in order to better prepare students for their state's standardized tests. Furthermore, presumably to address more of the mandated standards, the amount of time provided for recess has been reduced (Mulrine, 2000; Henley, McBride, Milligan and Nicholas, 2007; Miller, 2009) and instructional practices have shifted from child-centered, play-based strategies to teacher-centered, didactic strategies (Schoen and Fusarelli, 2008).

To get a better sense of how these changes have impacted teachers and students, I compared teachers' beliefs, classroom practices and student engagement in a classroom that has mid-morning and midday recesses (Robert's Elementary School) with a classroom for which mid-morning recess has been eliminated (New Richmond Elementary School). Interviews of fourth grade teachers of elementary schools, with and without mid-morning recess, were conducted to probe more deeply into their beliefs and practices. Special attention was paid to their beliefs as related to changes in instructional practice and what these teachers did to keep children engaged in the learning process. There was also focus on the teachers' perceived success in improving their students' performances on standardized tests as such performances may have resulted from the kinds of classroom practices used and their value placed on recess. I observed the teachers and students in the classroom to record the range of instructional practices teachers employed and the ways in which students were socially engaged. I also observed children on the playground to record their activities and social engagement. In this chapter, I summarize the results through the lens of major identified themes (Erickson, 1985).

Teacher Beliefs

The teachers at both schools believed that play and recess are important to a child's development. Ms. Ruth at Robert's Elementary saw play as beneficial to children

“I think that it establishes an order to things. I think that it also gives them a chance to express themselves in a way that they probably don't get all the time, it gives them a little more freedom”.

While observing Ms. Ruth's students on the playground it was evident that the students got along well with each other and in their respective groups at both mid-morning recess and lunch recess. For example, during a game of “four square” the boys played with the girls and even played together as mixed teams. Across from this game, a group of five girls were swinging on the swings and I witnessed one of the girls, Carrie, invite another, Leah who was sitting in the shade reading a book near to the swings, to join them in a game of cops and robbers. Leah not only played with them in the game, she stayed with them as they returned to the swings where she pushed the girls. During lunch recess, they chatted with each other, and with the recess monitors. I saw a few students share and exchange snacks with their friends.

Quite similar to the view held by Ms Ruth at Robert's, Ms. Natalie at New Richmond believes, “Recess helps with creativity, keeping students active. It's very important.” She stated that it is a key time for “social interaction with peers”. Also, she holds firmly that play is an opportunity for the students to socialize and interact with their peers and be able to think freely. Besides providing that freedom to think, play she sees as a means of pushing students to be competitive with each other, an outcome which can have its benefits. On the playground during lunch recess, a majority of Ms Natalie's students were on the play equipment—the slides, the monkey bars and the jungle gyms. As they were on the play equipment in small groups, they

were noticeably chatting with each other. For example, I was able to see from the distance four of the students—Abigail, Carla, Jane and Mary—climb to the top of the monkey bars. As they got to the top, they conversed with each other and as they climbed back down, they would stop to laugh and talk with each other again. Adam and Carl joined them on the bars and chatted with the girls. At the lunch room recess, the fourth graders engaged in conversation with each other and the other fourth graders whom they sat amongst at the lunch tables. However, at New Richmond there was less time for socializing than at Robert's, five minutes being allotted to eat in silence so that they could focus on having their lunch.

In tandem with this natural good behaviour by the students, Ms Natalie takes a clear position that recess is an important time for the students to interact and socialize with each other. This was evident, not only on the playground for outdoor recess but also during indoor recess. On one of the days, the students had to remain inside their classroom because of heavy rain showers. What caught my eye were two small groups on the floor at the back of the classroom, one playing a board-game while the other played with Lego© blocks. The board-game group comprised of two girls and two boys who chatted about various matters at hand: the game, who would take the next turn, and word about another student of their class. In the Lego© group, which comprised of three girls and two boys, they discussed the objects each of them would build and showed the final creation to each other. There was general freedom for the students to move around the classroom to play and converse with each other; however, they were reminded a few times by the recess monitor to control their noise level, and to be aware of other classes that were at work.

Another clear belief held strongly by Ms. Natalie is that recess is, “a time for kids to play and take a break from learning. It's a time for them to go on their own and to run around and be

active”. She has also observed that there is a significant difference in students’ behavior when they’re cooped-up in their classrooms and because of weather conditions made to spend even longer time together indoors. She enjoys how students interact with each other on Fridays, her own assigned day to supervise her students on the playground, and she herself uses the opportunity to observe them. In our interview she said that she has played basketball with them, which allows them to get to know her outside of the classroom.

Deepening my own research process, I asked the teachers to reflect and compare the recess of their childhood with the recess of their students. Ms. Ruth commented that recess activities have changed from free play to organized play. She was able to recall her own recess days when they played four squares, which, she says, does not resemble today’s four squares, which is played at extreme and competitive levels. Generally, she has seen children become increasingly competitive and aggressive on the playground more through organized sports such as soccer (the sport in which they participate after school). From what I observed, the students seemed quite intense as they played, putting their focus on the ball.

Similar to Ms. Ruth’s recall of her own student-days’ experience with recess, Ms. Natalie recognized that the recess activities of today are different to the activities of her childhood days. In her time, she said, children either ran around the playground, chasing each other (boys chasing girls, girls chasing boys), or played a pick-up game of basketball and kickball. She remembers recess monitors encouraging students to play, or extending invitations to students to join a game instead of just standing around. Today, as she looks around the playground, she sees fewer children being active—they choose to relax with each other or just stand around. This, she pointed out, is especially true of the children as they enter the higher grades. She has heard them say: “I’m bored with recess”, “I’m too old for recess”, “I don’t want to play on the big toy

because the younger kids play on the big toy”. She has also noticed that there are fewer games being played, and wonders if this is intended to reduce the number of children likely to be injured.

These views expressed by the two teachers led to my asking both teachers about the issue of the nationwide loss of recess in schools on the grounds of seeking more instructional time. Both expressed disagreement with and lack of support for such a concept. Ms. Ruth believes that all children need to be active, especially at this time of a threatened child-obesity epidemic. Ms. Ruth recommends, “Making their school day longer and incorporating more recess times and play times than eliminating recess and still lengthening. Some places still lengthen the days anyway”. She has recognized that the number of recess breaks has changed over the years from three times a day (mid-morning, lunch-time and mid-afternoon) to once or twice a day, depending on circumstances. As for Ms. Natalie, she finds it unfortunate as she remains convinced that students need time away from schoolwork to interact socially and to move around physically. Without this, she says, most students experience negative ill effects. She cites as an example that without enough recess periods, there is insufficient time for students to practice what they have learned in class, thereby failing to grow at various levels of self-development and maturity. Among other examples she gives of negative effects of curtailed recess time is that students are unable to focus when they return to class, being more talkative and restless. She is of the view that these beliefs can guide a teacher’s classroom practices and determine the expectations of students.

Teachers’ Instructional Strategies In The Classroom

Generally, the teachers varied their instructional strategies within each subject period. They would normally begin the class period with a teacher-centered instruction, followed by

whole class discussions or small group activities. Sometimes, a peer activity or an individual activity would be used.

Proceeding with such an approach, Ms. Ruth used a range of instructional strategies in the classes that she taught—Religious Studies, Mathematics and Language Arts. In Religious Studies, in a whole class setting, they discussed various charities and the purpose of charities before researching the information for an upcoming computer lab class with another teacher. In Math, again in a whole class setting, after Ms. Ruth demonstrated adding and subtracting decimals, she invited two students at a time to solve the problems stated on the white board for the class. While they did this, the rest of the class worked independently in their books, after which, they regrouped as a whole class to correct the problems and to give feedback to their peers who got the opportunity to work on the board, showing them ways to improve when errors were made. I also saw students working together in pairs at their desks and comparing answers.

On one of my visits, Ms. Ruth changed the scenery. For example, instead of working in the regular classroom for Social Studies, she used the computer lab, which was cooler with air-conditioning, to review a topic on ‘Government’ for a test. Most of the students were energetic when responding to the oral questions. In Language Arts, the fourth graders worked in small groups where they read a comical skit and had to dramatize it. They got the opportunity to practice their reading skills and fluency, to identify and discuss the intended joke, and give feedback to each other, providing support for those who stumbled on an unfamiliar word. Then they rehearsed the play and performed for each other.

As was done by Ms. Ruth, Ms. Natalie used various instructional strategies to engage her students. She explained in her first interview: “I try to mix it up...” For Language Arts, a one-hour and thirty-minute block at the start of each day, She said that this had been set aside in order

to cover the curriculum. To aid in keeping students attention, Ms. Natalie taught her lessons differently each day. She revealed that she tries to break the lessons up with independent assignments, group activities and peer work. This was evident on my visit to both the Language Arts and Social Studies periods. The first day, she used whole class discussion to correct a worksheet on ‘punctuation’. Students raised their hands if they wanted to give answers to the worksheet. Ms. Natalie always asked the “why” question, and this sometimes led to a discussion. They broke into small groups to work on their group presentation on ‘parts of speech’, using a power point to teach their peers. The following day was different, as she paired the students for a reading fluency activity. They sat with their buddy in various locations of the classroom, on the floor, at the small group tables or their desks to read to each other and give feedback on their reading fluency, including providing assistance when they stumbled upon an unfamiliar word. On the last day, to teach the skills of letter writing effectively Ms. Natalie got her students to their feet, using kinesthetic instruction, enhancing her teaching strategies. Her students got to their feet, followed her movements and repeated her rhyme to “The Parts of a Letter – Heading, Greeting, Body, Closing, Signature.” They touched their heads for ‘heading’, touched their mouth for ‘greeting’, touched their body for ‘body’ and touched their feet for ‘closing’. They did this three (3) times—causing smiles to break out on most students’ faces, with a few chuckles scattered around.

Again, similar to the techniques of Ms. Ruth, Ms. Natalie also made use of technology to get her students interested. The use of the Internet was undertaken in the classroom for Social Studies, on the Smart Board. Ms. Natalie had lined up the website on the daily plan which she posted up that morning. They watched a video on natural resources and together took the quiz that was at the end of each segment. At the end of the entire feature, they reviewed all the

questions and answers and corrected the errors. As they came upon new or unfamiliar words, the students were asked by Ms. Natalie for the meanings, she herself placing hints for them in sentences. An assignment was given for them to reinforce what they learned from the video. This had to be completed independently. Once everyone was finished, they corrected the worksheet as a whole class, using this more teacher-centered approach. She encouraged them to think critically, asking the ‘why’ questions. For those who had difficulties, she prompted them with real life examples in order to respond to the higher-order questions. The overall finding about teachers’ beliefs and methods in both schools was that there was no difference in classroom practices between these two schools—with and without mid-morning recess—since both teachers provided opportunities for their students to engage socially with each other and with their teachers, in order to develop their social skills.

Students’ Behavior in the Classroom and on the Playground

Students generally displayed well-behaved and positive conduct both in classrooms and on the playgrounds. Despite the fact that the school environments of Robert’s and New Richmond Elementary Schools were different from each other, the students at both schools responded positively to tasks assigned them in whole class settings, small group settings, paired settings and independently. Engagement between students and teachers, praise and encouragement from teachers to their students were the key factors to motivate the students to engage in learning, which I observed at both schools.

Behaviors in the classroom. At Roberts Elementary Language Arts class, the students immediately began to read a script that was a comedy given to them, and eagerly asked if they could rehearse the skit with their group members as soon as they had all completed the readings. They displayed the same enthusiasm when they were reviewing the topic of ‘government’ for

their upcoming tests and in religion studies, as they discussed various charities and the purpose of charity. When given time to work independently, they quietly worked on a phonics activity which involved using the dictionary as a reference source. It was a class period after lunch, and they generally worked in silence to well near the end. Besides instructional time, Ms. Ruth casually engaged with her students during mid-morning snack around her desk and before the school day official began at 9 am. In addition, Ms. Ruth was available to her students when they needed assistance in their work. For example, in math class, while the students were working independently on their worksheets, Ms. Ruth worked with her students, one-on-one at her desk, ensuring that they had a clear understanding of the topic. On one occasion, while one of her students was solving a problem on the board – subtracting decimals – he became frustrated as he was having some difficulty. Ms. Ruth gently said to him, “It’s fine, be patient and it will all be explained.”

At New Richmond, Ms. Natalie’s students moved quickly and orderly to a computer in the computer lab to work on their Social Studies research assignment. It was an independent task that required them to fill in the blanks on a worksheet after first researching the information on a particular website given to them. No one strayed from the website, as they quietly conversed with each other about information they found and even shared with each other. In Language Arts, they worked in small groups in different areas of the classroom, and they worked cooperatively and respectfully with each other. Each group received Ms. Natalie’s full attention. She ensured that they were on the right track. Whenever Ms. Natalie’s students needed assistance, they respectfully raised their hands; they consistently addressed her by her title ‘Ms. Natalie’, and gave their full attention when she stood in front of the class. The same way Ms. Ruth provided support and words of encouragement to her students, Ms. Natalie playfully

encouraged her students to project their voices for others to hear easily. During whole class discussion on punctuation, Ms. Natalie could not hear Hailey read her edited sentence. As she moved to the other side of the room, with a smile on her face, she asked Sam, “Can you hear Hailey? I can’t.” “Not really Ms. Natalie,” replied Sam. Hailey tilted her head to the side, broke out into a big smile and, this time, she spoke out loudly and clearly. “Good job, Hailey!” praised Ms. Natalie to Hailey. It was undeniably clear that the tone set by a teacher at the beginning of the day, plus ongoing classroom management, are strong influences on students’ behaviors.

Behaviors on the playground. Moving from a well-managed and appropriately responded-to classroom environment, the entire ensemble of positive behaviors was carried onto the playground. A vast majority of the students at both schools were physically active and socially engaged with each other. On Roberts’ playground, there were the same five girls who swung on the swings together every recess. They would take turns pushing each other, laughing, and screaming with excitement and joy. One conflict arose in the mixed group that played the game called four squares. Jack baulked at the fact that he lost his turn; Sam and Lisa explained to him very gently and calmly the reason why he was out—that it was because the ball bounced outside the line. He was upset, but walked away to the side of the group onto the field area, to calm himself on his own, and then returned to watch the rest of the game. The students amazingly praised each other as they passed the ball to the other person. When Jack was caught out, Lisa said, “It happens, good job though, good job.” They were able to use the life skills of caring for each other, no-put-downs and problem-solving calmly.

A similar observation was made at New Richmond’s playground: I noticed that the students remained within their playgroups, although there were difficulties at times recognizing

them amongst the other three fourth grade classes. I witnessed three boys playing basketball with the other fourth grade boys; two girls chatting with each other under the shed while the rest of their peers were on the play equipment. I watched the students who were on the monkey bar and jungle gym, encourage each other to climb onto other play equipment to chat with each other. The positive behaviors displayed on the playground appear to have been derived from the social skills taught, encouraged and fostered in the classroom and school environment.

Gender differences in behavior. In addition to the students' self-initiated and pursued behaviors, there were moments when I observed both teachers having to provide assistance to the students. This was given to the boys more than the girls to have them refocus on tasks especially after recess. With the girls, at most times they refocused themselves or each other as they sat beside each other. I saw both teachers call out the girls' names softly and ask, "Are you okay?" The girls generally would look at the teacher with a smile and get back to work immediately. After lunch recess, to get the boys to settle quickly Ms. Ruth would stand at the entrance of the doorway, greeting the boys as they come in. A few minutes after the boys had come from the bathroom, Ms. Ruth would set a time for them to get to their seats. She used this same strategy after mid-morning recess when the students had to work on an independent task in word study. On another day after lunch recess, in order to revise as a whole class for a social studies test, Ms. Ruth assigned the front seats to the same boys and stood near to them to ensure they were participating in the question and answer sessions.

In this same task of managing the students' attention span, similar to Ms. Ruth, Ms. Natalie used various ways to bring them back on track. She employed attention-getters such as ringing the desk bell or asking her students to wiggle their pencils in the air, or she counting "1-2-3-zip". These attention-getters were effective with Ms. Natalie's students as they responded

immediately to them. I noticed Ms. Natalie gently touching the shoulders of some of her students as she paced the room to ensure that everyone was on task. In Social Studies, they were completing a quiz online that was displayed on the Smart Board, when Ms. Natalie saw Mary drawing under her desk. Ms. Natalie continued her explanation of the term 'producer', while she quietly stood next to Mary who then quickly put her book away and looked at the screen again. In the first period of Language Arts which was around 9.30 am, Ms. Natalie with a warm smile asked George who sat in the front row: "Is that your morning stare?" With that, he sat up, smiled back at her and packed his books away like the rest of the class. This may be an indication that boys mature and develop differently from each other and at different rates. But the main lesson from this is that teachers should vary their instruction methods to suit their students' needs in order to encourage them to be engaged in activities.

Summary

The teachers at both schools believed that play and recess are important to a child's development. They believe that play and recess are beneficial to children, as they learn how to socialize and interact with each other respectfully, as they explore and exploit the freedom to think creatively, and as they develop their communication skills. With their beliefs, the two teachers employed instructional strategies in their classrooms that were primarily teacher-centered with few or no play-based activities. However, they varied their instructions, utilizing whole class, small group, peer and a few individual activities. As students related to each other, the teachers moved appropriately to engage their students in the various settings. The students generally displayed well-behaved and positive attitudes both in classrooms and on the playgrounds. They demonstrated social and life skills such as cooperation, respect, caring, friendship, organization, and communicating with each other and their teachers.

Even though there were no significant differences in teachers' beliefs, classroom practices and student behaviors, the school environments were different from each other, as at the school with the two recess periods—Robert's Elementary—the teacher Ms. Ruth was able to spend more time observing and managing students at play as well as in the classroom post-play simply because her students were longer at play. That much more attention increases the students' potential for deeper and more rapid development than in the case of students at New Richmond where students have only one recess period.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Summary of the Research

Over a course of two weeks, I conducted a study on the relationship between student engagement, recess, and instructional strategies—in light of a current nationwide trend of the reduction and/or elimination of recess in schools across the United States.

The research question for this study was, “How do teachers' beliefs, classroom practices and student behaviors compare with schools, with and without mid-morning recess?” Two elementary schools were used, one with mid-morning recess and the other without mid-morning recess, in order to observe teachers' instructional strategies used in the classroom, students' behavior and engagement in the classroom and on the playground and learn teachers' beliefs about play, recess and student engagement. In this qualitative research, data were collected through full-day observations of teachers and students in their classrooms, observations of students on the playground, and interviews with teachers before and after my observations.

Schools with and without recess did not have an impact on teachers' instructional strategies used in the classroom and on students' behavior. Although the teachers at both schools believe that recess is important to the development of their students and can articulate and implement strategies to engage students, they do not seem to have greatly modified their instructional strategies to help students reap the benefits that arise through play during recess as the amount of time allotted to recess in schools has decreased. The inclusion of more play-based instructional strategies at both schools, however, would provide students with highly-engaging learning experiences that also afford opportunities to develop the social, emotional and cognitive skills children naturally develop during recess while still addressing the content knowledge teachers are obligated to cover. In Chapter Two, Martlew, Stephen and Ellis (2011) said that

play can enhance students' learning of the curricula, the social skills, their abilities and attitudes towards learning. Assaf (2007) also says that play-based instruction can encourage teacher student meaningful engagement that can be suitable to the child's interest and abilities.

Although playful behavior on the teacher's part is used occasionally as an engagement strategy, especially at New Richmond Elementary, I did not observe play-based instruction to be a strong feature of these teachers' classroom practice. With regards to playful behavior, Ms. Natalie's instructional strategies included elements of playfulness in how she interacted with her students during instruction, whilst Ms. Ruth allowed for more relaxed non-instructional times. Play is used primarily as a break from learning. In fact, with statements like the following from Ms. Natalie, it seems as though the teachers have a misconception as to what play-based learning is:

“the big thing I have done is group projects and that allows the social interaction and those life skills of taking turns, being respectful of others, listening to other people's opinions and not be a know it all, so I think those group activities, that group environment is that area that I've kind of pushed and it is an opportunity where they think it's play time but it's actually academic focused.”

In order to keep students engaged in learning, Ms. Natalie varied her teaching strategies in language arts and social studies. Social engagement occurred in her various classroom practices - peer-reading, whole class discussion in social studies using the Internet on producers and consumers and small group presentation on the parts of speech using power point. The social engagement that I witnessed ties into the literature of Margie (2012) who says that group work can be beneficial to students to teach them that they can learn from each other, how to

communicate with each other effectively, how to work as a community and how to cooperate with each other, once teachers plan and implement it effectively.

In Ms. Ruth's class, there were more whole class discussions than peer or small group or independent activities although she said that she preferred to have her students work independently towards the end of the school-term in order to help students keep their focus. Whole class discussions took place in math, where they added and subtracted decimals (a few students solved on the white board while the rest of the class worked at their seats in their books); and in social studies, where she used Q&A as a way to prepare the students for a test. As a group work activity, the students read a skit and dramatized the play for each other. There were two occasions when her students worked independently – solving a worksheet on math mechanical problems on adding and subtracting decimals; and in Word Study, identifying words that were not root words by using the dictionary as a resource. There was no significant difference between the teachers' instructional strategies. However, the various strategies that I witnessed supports Minogue (2010) who says that a variety of learning experiences can occur when students are allowed to engage with each other in groups.

Overall, the students displayed positive behaviors in both the classrooms, in the lunch rooms and on the playground. Both teachers are of the opinion that regardless of nationality or socio-economic background, or whether the children are on free or reduced lunches (these latter are very few in these schools and are not made known to other children and staff), children have displayed no observable differences in behavior at recess, in their responses to various instructional strategies, or in their engagement with their peers or teachers. Students communicated with each other easily and confidently such as expressing their opinions or giving feedback, respected each other, took turns and socialized with each other in a positive manner.

The fourth graders were just as respectful and socially engaging with their class teachers, Ms. Ruth and Ms. Natalie, as well as the lunch and recess monitors. They responded to tasks given to them by their teachers either orally or in written forms. Ms. Ruth believes in incentives and rewards as opposed to punishment-and-consequences as instructional practice. She has noticed that children respond better to being rewarded for good behavior; and that the more they are rewarded for positive behavior, the less likely they are to develop negative behaviors. This was seen in Ms. Natalie's class – she was consistent in praising her students for their efforts, for asking questions and for academic performance.

Students had some challenges sustaining focus in class, re-gaining it and settling back down after recess breaks. Boys in both schools were still active as they returned to class, talking about the events on the playground. They were more active and restless than the girls, and took a longer time than the girls to settle down, which supports Pellegrini's (1995) findings that boys are more active than girls and take a longer time to settle down to work. Teachers would ensure that their students were on task, by walking around the classroom and asking them questions about the assignments. To avoid loss of time when the students return to class from recess, assignments are laid out for students to work on immediately. These teachers were aware of students who have a hard time re-adjusting to -- it's time for work, play is over — hence the reason teachers posted work on the board before students come back to class.

Play can be regarded as the common thread that runs through the undertakings of student engagement, recess and instructional strategies, to keep the flow of and connection amongst creativity, freedom and joy. Human beings and many animal species from spiders to fish to mammals play. Play, including recess, is viewed by child development experts as beneficial to students' various levels of development—social, cognitive, emotional and physical. Brown

(2009) cites Eberle (2009) who identifies the essence of play—anticipation, surprise, pleasure, understanding, strength, and poise. Eberle (2009) says that “Play is our brain’s favorite way of learning” (TEDxRochester, Scott Eberle, 11/02/09). Frost, Wortham and Reifel (2008) believe that children’s play can be seen as a variegated array of activities. They also believe that people have forgotten what these activities mean to us. For example, the game peekaboo, they say, teaches pretend play. Plus, it is considered the first game in a child’s life, teaching social skills and interacting with others (Frost et al, 2008 cited Bruner and Sherwood (1976)).

In the age-old expression “All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy”, we find a profound and practical understanding of a child’s needs, located throughout all phases of human evolution. Citing a number of references, Frost et al. (2008) conclude that children, who experience little to no play, tend to isolate themselves on the playground or become the bullies of the playground. In addition, they have found that children distracted by organized sport or TV watching are missing out on the pleasure of spontaneous play. They found that children as early as five (5) years of age are participating in sports teams or Little Leagues for soccer, baseball and football. They identified another cause of the loss of spontaneous play as the increasing use of video games and the Internet. Social engagement has changed from face-to-face to screen-to-screen; the real world is being replaced by virtual/fictional/ unrealistic worlds.

When educators think of play in the classroom, they usually think of a kindergarten classroom; however, play can continue throughout the grades of a child’s school life. Classroom space and materials can be planned beforehand to stimulate play in order to engage students in learning any subject. Classrooms can incorporate learning centers to stimulate playful learning in music, art, writing center, book center, math with manipulative (geo-boards, base-blocks, scales, etc.) and science with scientific tools (thermometers, magnifying glass, etc.) that are

child-friendly. These hands-on activities stimulate learning and bring about learning through a fun way. Frost et al (2008) say that this kind of play can persuade learners to problem-solve more effectively, encourage them to be more creative and engage with each other. Board-games not only can reinforce a topic learned in class but also teach rules and how to respect and learn from others' perspectives (Frost et al, 2008) which I witnessed at New Richmond's indoor recess.

What is school without play for children today? Denvir (2011) reported that children today find school boring—the results of budgets cuts that have affected music, art, library, physical education and recess. He went on to say that the state tests and budget cuts reduced time spent on social studies and science. He said that kindergarten today has changed to place more emphasis on worksheets being completed in order to be better prepared for the state tests in the later grades.

From another perspective, one can ask: don't adults take morning-breaks, lunch- breaks and afternoon-breaks? So why shouldn't children? Isn't a break meant to provide a short rest, free time to relax and recharge? What are the cons of recess? It is argued that children get hurt physically and emotionally. But isn't that part of life? Given that fact, children have to learn how to deal with situations when they arise, how to problem-solve. Schools provide the optimum place for children to gain experience dealing with the complications of getting along with others and teachers are well equipped to facilitate the process.

Recommendations

From my research, there may be misconceptions of play in the classroom or the image of a play-based classroom. This research has also led me to wonder what were educators' decisions based upon, to not include additional play in the classroom as part of their instructional practices.

Professional development in schools can educate principals and teachers on play and play-based learning. It can also provide support for teachers on how play-based learning strategies can still be used in all grades, despite the pressures of ensuring that teachers themselves have covered the curriculum and students are prepared for state and national standardized tests to meet the state standards. Frost et al (2008) state that the topic of play in the classroom might be ambiguous especially at this time where teachers are focused on state and national standards and tests. Pellegrini, Huberty and Jones (1995) acknowledged that there was insufficient information on children's behavior on the playground at recess time. There are also very few studies on the effects of students' behavior and academic performance with the reduction and/or elimination of recess in schools. We need to continue to carry out research on the loss of play in the classroom and on the playground to ascertain its effects on student behavior and learning, as well as its overall impact on child development.

- 1) Policy-makers and other leaders in education need this knowledge in order to make informed decisions about school policies and instructional practices. Supporters of play and recess believe that: human beings need a break and are entitled to free time;
- 2) children should be given the opportunity to re-gain free play which is being lost to sports clubs, cable, video games and Internet; and
- 3) learning through play can capture, sustain student engagement and possibly ease the stress on students and teachers in their drive to achieve higher test-scores.

However, supporters need evidence to help convince school and district leaders that play and recess are necessary elements of effective schools if we want to develop the whole child.

In my US studies I have come into close contact with the American education system—its achievements, its challenges and its directions. I have felt very attracted to these conditions

and the opportunities they present for me to make a contribution in the US while simultaneously gaining from this host-country experience so as to transplant my learning to upgrade my home-country education sector.

I see education—incorporating teaching—as the means by which any country can rescue itself, restore itself, and re-direct itself along a pathway of authentic deepening, broadening and lengthening of the processes which must be distilled to achieve national growth and individual development.

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APPENDIX A



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**Consent for Interviews on
"The Relationship between Student Engagement, Recess and Instructional
Strategies" and Student Observation in the Classroom and in the Playground**

Introduction: My name is Rhonda Aguiton and I am a graduate student in the School of Teaching and Learning at the Bowling Green State University of Ohio, conducting research on the relationship between student engagement, recess and instructional strategies under the supervision of my thesis advisor, Dr. Eric Worch.

Purpose: The purpose of this interview is to assess your values of recess and play for children as an educator; examine the nation-wide trends to reduce or eliminate recess time in schools; make comparisons of yesteryear recesses and current recesses and play; and note changes and types of instructional strategies used in the classroom over the past 10 years.

The purpose of observing the students is to assess the quality of student engagement in the classroom and on the playground, as well as, instructional strategies used in elementary schools that allow quality student engagement regularly. The results of this study will deepen my understanding of your perspectives of play-based learning, the instructional strategies used in the classroom, together with, the issues that you may face which affect your pedagogical practices.

Benefits of study to participants: The outcomes of this study can be of great benefit to the stakeholders in the field of education (students, teachers, principals, district administrators, parents, policy makers). They may be influenced to reconsider the possible re-implementation of the mid-morning recess and child-centered, playful learning strategies as they reflect upon the value of recess and play and review the last 14 years of the NAEP Scores.

Procedure: I will pose open-ended questions for you to respond. The interview session will take place at your school and will be recorded to ensure that we have captured accurate thoughts and opinions. This will be no longer than one hour.

I will be an observer in your classroom and on the playground, for a full day. The duration will be three days, a full school day. I will follow observation protocol and recording notes on what I observe throughout the day.

Voluntary nature: Participation is completely voluntary. You are free to withdraw at any time without consequences. Your participation or withdrawal will certainly not affect your existing and future relationship with Bowling Green State University.

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121 Life Science Building
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Bowling Green, OH 43403-0223
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Confidentiality/ Protection: All appropriate measures will be taken to safeguard confidentiality. The names of the schools and participants of the interviews and class observations will be given pseudonyms throughout the research. The recording of interviews will be kept in a locked cabinet and destroyed (shredded) after one year. Files that pertain to notes and other information will be stored on a password protect computer. Only members of my research team will have access to your responses.

Risks: There are no risks to participants associated with this study. Risk of participation is no greater than that experienced in daily life.

Age: Participants must be at least 18 years old to participate in the study.

Contact Information: If you have any questions on comments about this research protocol, kindly contact Dr. Eric Worch at (419) 372-7365 or eworch@bgsu.edu. You can reach me at (419) 494-1880 or raguito@bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu, regarding the rights of a participant in this research.

I have been informed of the purposes, procedures, risks and benefits of this study. I have had the opportunity to have all my questions answered and I have been informed that my participation is completely voluntary. I agree to participate in this research.

Participant Signature

Date

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APPENDIX B



May 2012

Dear Parents/Guardians,

My name is Rhonda Aguiton I am a graduate student in the School of Teaching and Learning at the Bowling Green State University. I am conducting research on the relationship between student engagement, recess and instructional strategies under the supervision of my thesis advisor, Dr. Rick Worch.

The purpose of the research is to compare student engagement in classrooms that have mid-morning recess and classrooms that do not. It will also explore the types of instructional strategies used in elementary schools that allow quality student engagement regularly. The results of this study can inform parents and educators as they consider the impact of mid-morning recess and child-centered, playful learning strategies on children's academic and behavioral development.

This study will take place over a course of three days in May, 2012. If you provide consent for your child to participate and he or she agrees to participate (please see enclosed letter of student assent), I will include him or her in my observations of student engagement in the classroom and on the playground during recess. I will record how engaged your child is during regular classroom instruction and on the playground. The data will be recorded by hand in a notebook without names to identify your child. No video/audio recordings or still photos will be made.

All appropriate measures will be taken to safeguard confidentiality. Your child's name will not be recorded in any of my notes. Any child specifically discussed in order to illustrate general trends in the data will be assigned a pseudonym throughout the written report. Fake names will also be used for the schools. The notebook with my observations will be kept in a locked cabinet and destroyed (shredded) after one year. Files containing notes and other information will be stored on a password protect computer. Only members of my research team will have access to your responses.

Your child will not be expected to do more than participate in normal school activities. There are no risks to participants associated with this study. Risk of participation is no greater than that experienced in daily life.

Your child's participation is completely voluntary. If you and your child agree to participate, you both have the right to withdraw at any time without consequences. This decision will not affect any existing and future relationships you may have with Bowling Green State University or your child's school.

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If you have any questions or comments about this research protocol, kindly contact Dr. Rick Worch at (419) 372-7365 or eworch@bgsu.edu. My contact information is (419) 494-1880 or raguito@bgsu.edu. You may also contact the Chair, Human Subjects Review Board at (419) 372-7716 or hsrb@bgsu.edu, regarding the rights of a participant in this research. I thank you in advance for your support and cooperation and look forward to your positive response.

Sincerely,

Rhonda Aguiton, A.A., B.Ed.

Tear along the above line and return to the Class Teacher.

Name of Student: _____

Name of Parent/Guardian: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____

____ I give permission for my child to participate in your Thesis Research.

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May 2012.

Hello Fourth Grader,

My name is Miss Rhonda. I am a student at Bowling Green State University. It's a very exciting place for me.

I am working on a project for school and I would like to visit your class for three days. When I come to your class, I would like to watch you as you work. I will also watch you during recess. You do not need to do anything special. I will not ask you questions. I will not videotape you.

I will write notes in my notebook about what I see you do. I will not write your name in my notebook, so no one will know if what I write is about you. I will lock the notebook in my desk drawer. Only my teachers will see it.

I will use what I see to write a report for my teachers. The report will be posted to the university's website and may even be in a magazine someday. I think I'm going to learn many things from you to help me become a better teacher.

If you do not want to be observed, no one will be upset with you. It is completely voluntary. You can even withdraw at any time. If you decide to help me, you can put a next to YES.

Thank you and I hope to meet you soon.

Miss Rhonda

_____ YES, I will take part in the project.

Student signature

Date

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APPENDIX C

PRE-INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR BOTH TEACHERS

How important do you feel play is in the development of young children? What benefits do you think children get out of play?

What does recess mean to you as an educator? Is there value in recess for children? For you as their teacher? Do you ever watch your children play during recess?

Do you find that recess today has changed in comparison to when you first started teaching? Or when you were a child? Has the amount of time for recess changed? Have the kinds of activities in which children engage during recess changed?

There is a nation-wide trend to reduce or eliminate recess time in schools. How do you feel about that?

Do you find that there is enough time for kids to practice and develop social skills and other life skills that they have learned in class? How might they practice them? Do you think that they have enough time in the classroom? Is recess time sufficient for them?

What changes have you made in the kinds of instructional practices you use in your classroom over the past 10 years? Is playful learning used? Do you think child-centered, play-based learning or teacher-centered, didactic learning is more successful in meeting children's social, emotional, and academic needs? Do you think the changes you have made have been successful?

What sorts of strategies do you use to keep children engaged in learning throughout the day? Do you build in informal breaks within your instruction? Do you use playful learning strategies? If so, please describe them. What other instructional strategies do you purposefully use to promote student engagement?

APPENDIX D

CLASSROOM OBSERVATION

New Richmond

Day 1

Time: 9.05

Subject: language Arts

Instruction: Whole class

Technology: Smart board

Activity:

T.O.L. - Identify capitalization, (TOL – Thematic Oral Language)

raise hands to offer responses

gave reasons why commas are needed

gave reasons why apostrophes needed

acknowledged that the same students put up their hands to volunteer answers

teacher reads the sentence first as the students follow along

SE student receives much attention from teacher, teacher stands near her desk most often

Students pass their two to the end of the row and she selects a student to collect them (boy)

Teacher reviews the activities for the morning

“Who is going to finish their choice book today? Who has already finished their choice book?”

Congratulated them

Ask students to identify the type of graphic organizer

Teacher always encourages students to speak loudly

“Can you hear **? I can’t.” the student is on the opposite side of the class.

Teacher always asks questions, the ‘whys’

Provides one on one for those students whose books do not have a climax

Excites students for tomorrow’s field trip

One student (F) sits on the carpet at the back of the class

At the end of the whole class discussion, the teacher checks on the student who sits on the carpet

Students get to chat with each other (20 seconds)

“Put your thumbs up when you’re ready to move on” students become silent

After a few thumbs, they settle back down

Teacher then explains the activity that is displayed on the smart board

All students’ eyes are on the teacher

They examine the rubric

Two students are slouching across the desk – boy (3rd row to the back), girl(sitting in front row)

“Give me bunny ears when you have your name written”

she gives a time limit for students to decided who is doing what and they had to look at the clock on the count of three, one two three, go” – for students to get into their groups

PLAYGROUND RECESS OBSERVATION NOTES**Roberts Elementary**

Midmorning recess

12 ball game (5 girls)

5 girls – tire swing

2 boys, 1 girl reading

teacher supervises

girls push each other on the swing

readers share what they're reading

reader girl – “S come here, I have something to tell you. Do you know that there are mummies in Arizona?” related to the book she is reading. She calls one of the swing girls

10.54 – one of the swing girls joins the ball game group

reader girl engages in chat with the swing girls “be careful”

teacher having a meeting with another teacher

10.56 – swing girls scream and are corrected by teacher; readers are focused on their books

the quiet girl asked the other swing girls to push her; they seem reluctant but one eventually does; they leave her and chat with each other under the slide

the quiet girl swings by herself while the other three swing girls play on the jungle gym

Interesting that three boys are allowed to wear their shades outside

11.00 – one of the swing girls invites the quiet girl to play cops and robbers; she also invites the readers; the reader girl accepts and one reader boy

a sheriff police car patrols the lot and toots his horn

11..02 – teacher regroups students

they move a cooler spot of the yard – garden lawn area

Activity – story telling; they sit in a circle with the teacher; teacher begins the story “There once was a mouse who lived in a house and loved cheese.” The next person has to continue. They have to memorize the previous lines.

They are having difficulty remembering so the teacher changed it to remember their own line.

Even though she prompted one girl, she still can't come up with a line

11.10 – they are all focused on the game

11.13 – one boy moved away from the class group to read a book at the picnic table; one boy plays with the basketball with a girl, one girl pulls out the grass; two boys are chatting with each other

APPENDIX E

POST INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Roberts Elementary School

Do you find yourself having to plan certain instructional strategies depending on the season?

Do you incorporate more learning playful strategies, again depending on the season in the classroom?

I've noticed the same group of kids playing both recesses, both the mid-morning recess and the lunch time recess, have you seen that throughout the year?

It was interesting to see whenever there was a conflict for example one of the students did not want to accept that they were out, the rest of the group - they're were not aggressive, they firmly would say to each other, "No and this why you were out" Is that...

At this grade level, do you encourage the kids to use their initiative ?

The kids who, the same quiet kids, the reserved kids, do you think that recess has an impact on them?

I noticed that the lunch time recess that there are three supervisors. And if anything happens there, do you and the supervisors liaise with each other, share information.?

It was interesting to see one day where the coach, the physical education coach was teaching them to use positive statements in playing a game and it was nice to see that here they were at a lunch time recess with no you, no other teachers and they were using it the next day .

Whatever they've learnt in class, do they try to use it outside of class?

Do you find yourself having to use less of the student engagement especially coming towards the end of the semester where they are almost switched, ready to go home for school to end?

I noticed that you allow the kids to interact with each other before the morning bell rings and in the afternoon when they're packing their bags and so forth. And so you encourage that? Is that the time that they are able to develop their social skills ?

Now I notice that there was a difference between the boys and the girls. Did I see correctly? For example, the girls are more on task than the boys.

I can see that. I even noticed that the girls settle down faster when they come in from recess, they settle down faster than the boys.

Do you find yourself having to find different ways to help the boys adjust vs the girls? With this group in particular because I know you said this group was different .

Do you find a difference between, are there kids who , for example with lunch, kids who, do you see a difference between kids who are on free/reduced lunches vs those who paid lunches?

Or their socioeconomic backgrounds?

If you have a student who comes in the middle of the year do you see a difference with the instructional strategies that you use with them, how they interact at recess, how they respond to recess?

New Richmond Elementary

In our last interview, I just wanted to clarify a few points:

What do you mean by “appropriate assignment”?

You mentioned that with increased technology, the time for students to practice life and social skills will be reduced. How do you envision this type of future classroom?

You also talked about the fact that the reduction/elimination of recess affects students negatively. Can you give a few examples?

I would like to ask a few questions about your classroom:

What type of instruction would you say you use mostly? Teacher-centered, teacher-student centered, student centered?

I noticed you constantly ask the students questions throughout your lessons. Is this purposefully done and if so, why?

Do you find yourself working to the clock? Do you think this interferes with your style of instructional strategies and student engagement?

I noticed one girl was sitting on the carpet area which you have set up at the back of the classroom. She was allowed to spend time there as you gave instructions, how so?

Language Arts is the largest block first period of the day. Can you tell me why? What factors influence your planning for such a lengthy period?

How do you get them to focus for such a lengthy period?

You’re coming to the end of the academic year. Do you use different types of instructional strategies compared to other times of the year, different to let’s say the beginning of the year or during the term?

Do you think that the seasons affect the students engagement or your instructional strategies?

Do the seasons affect recess and the students? How?

The playground:

How are conflicts resolved on the playground?

Do the recess monitors liaise with you?

Do you think recess has an impact on those students who are on reduced and free lunches? On kids from various socio-economic backgrounds? Or kids who are more active or less active after school?

I noticed that the students respond immediately to your instruction which I consider explicit; was it like that at the beginning of the year? Did you have to teach them this or were they already in the routine from third grade?

Do you purposefully give them many independent tasks one time more than the other? For example at the end of the term vs. the beginning or middle of the term?

What are they expected to do with incorrect answers when you correct as whole class? Do you check these sheets that are corrected as a whole class?

Lunch Recess:

Can you explain the silence during the lunch recess?

Do you think kids have a harder time sustaining attention after lunch than before lunch? Why?

Do you find yourself using different instructional strategies in the afternoon compared to the morning sessions?

Today

Today you praised them by telling them that they are sounding like fifth graders, do you think they will remember what they have learned for next academic year?

I noticed that you allow students to complete assignments into another class, how do they catch up? Why do you allow them to do this?

APPENDIX F

ARTIFACTS

Monday-Thursday:

8:40-9:00- Students Arrive, sign in for lunch and complete morning work
9:00- 10:30- Language Arts class begins
10:30-11:10- Social Studies begins
11:10-11:30- Recess
11:30-11:55- Lunch
12:00 Switch to Mrs. Aspacher
12:00-1:55- With Mrs. Aspacher for math and science
1:55-2:35- Specials class
2:35-3:15- Mrs. Aspacher continued
3:15-3:25- Homeroom and dismissal

Friday:

8:40-9:00- Students Arrive, sign in for lunch and complete morning work
9:00- 10:25- Language Arts class begins
10:25-11:00- Social Studies begins
11:00 Switch to Mrs. Aspacher
11:10-11:30- Recess
11:30-11:55- Lunch
12:00-1:50- With Mrs. Aspacher for math and science
1:50 Switch back
1:55-2:35- Specials class
2:35-3:15- Reward/Study time
3:15-3:25- Homeroom and dismissal

New Richmond

Good Morning!! Today is...

Thursday, May 17, 2012:

- 1. Get your planner out to be signed**
- 2. Sign in for lunch**
- 3. T.O.L. day 5**
- 4. Go to the restroom and get a drink**
- 5. Read silently**