

Abstract

The objective of the present study was to investigate the play behaviour of primary schoolchildren during recess in Hong Kong. A total of 395 primary schoolchildren, aged between 6 and 12 years old from five primary schools completed a questionnaire in an individual interview. They were asked about what they actually played and thought about school recess. A total of 387 parents and 164 teachers of the same schools were also invited to complete the questionnaire about their children or students' play behaviour during recess.

More children indicated that they engaged in non-play (70.6%) than play activities (53.2%). More specifically, they tended to join activities that required no or minimum facilities such as chatting, eating, hopscotch, chasing and hand games. More boys than girls joined play activities and vice versa in non-play activities. Children preferred staying in playground and/or hall during recess. More than half of the children liked to spend recess in small groups of two to four. Most of them liked recess because it was a time for them to play, socialise and eat. Meanwhile, most of them also indicated that they disliked recess arrangement and regulations, unfavourable school environment and being disturbed or disciplined. The major activities children wanted but disallowed to do included chasing and sports activities. They also wanted more recess time. To the children, an ideal recess should be one which allowed them to play, to have longer recess time, to eat and to have more choices of recess places.

Parents and teachers were posed comparable questions. In a way, their responses were similar to the children but the respective percentages were different. Both parents and teachers believed that children's major recess activities were chatting, eating and playing games and that children engaged more in non-play than play activities. The major play activities they believed children joined in recess were chasing games, hand games and hopscotch. They also believed that children liked to stay in playground, hall and classroom during recess. Most of them also stated that their children spent recess in small groups of two to four. Besides, while most parents believed that children liked recess, all teachers reported so. For both parents and teachers, children liked recess mostly because they could socialise, play and eat. Nonetheless, most parents and teachers also believed that children found some unfavourable aspects of recess such as short duration and being disciplined by teachers or prefects.

Parents and teachers were also asked if they supported children playing in school. Most of them supported this because they thought that recess was a time to relax. It should be noted that teachers showed greater support than parents did. When they were asked whether playing in school would affect children's academic performance, teachers also showed stronger faith in the positive impact of play on academic performance than parents did. With respect to recess arrangement, parents and teachers expressed different opinions but many of both agreed that recess time should be lengthened.

The study revealed the current problems in providing quality play services for schoolchildren during recess, including inadequate allocation of time, facilities, and varieties. Recommendations on recess arrangement and facilities were put forth for schools and school administrators to consider. Reconsideration of the role of school recess was also posed.

