The nature of school break times: Towards an international study

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• UK surveys of break times in primary and secondary schools
  • 2006 – Blatchford & Baines (2006)
  • 2017 – Baines & Blatchford

The 1995, 2006 and 2017 Nuffield recess (and lunchtime) surveys

Aims were/are to:
• provide current, systematic and nationally representative information on a little understood and neglected part of the school day in the UK, and information on changes over a period of 20-25 years.
• collect current information on main features of recess, including timing, duration, supervision and facilities provided and views on its value, problems arising and behaviour
• obtain information on pupil and teacher perspectives on recess and pupil social life in and out of school

Design
• Large scale survey of schools
• Survey of pupils’ views and experiences (2006; 2017)
• Case studies of schools with varying arrangements

• Universality - almost every school had some form of compulsory recreational break.
• Breaks make up between 18% and 24% of school day
• Reductions between 1990-2006 in length of breaktimes — school and pupil concerns about behaviour
• But pupils overwhelmingly positive about breaktimes
• Key differences between primary and secondary schools
• Approx. ¾ of children report that they rarely get to meet with peers and friends outside of school

Towards an international study of breaks in schools...
• Unprecedented levels of knowledge about schools
• Comparison studies e.g. ‘OECD Education at a glance’
• Surprisingly very little is known about breaks in the school day across countries.
• What little knowledge we have comes from a UNESCO data and informal survey by Beresin and anecdotal or ‘grey’ literature. Inconsistencies
• Lack of data is indicative of attitudes to these times?
There is a need for ....

- Systematic representative understanding of the nature, purpose and role of recess/breaks in the school day and views and experiences of them.
  - Descriptions of what goes on
  - Perspectives – pupils, staff, other stakeholders
  - Context/cultural/policy perspectives
  - Implications - for education, play and development

Why needed?

- To provide the basis for national and international debate
- To collect information relative to children’s right to play
- To get a fuller sense of the nature of activities in school and their implications
- To enhance international understanding of the value of play and self directed activity.

Towards an international survey of school breaktimes

Some thoughts

- Assemble a multi-national team/ network
- Review reports and ‘grey’ literature: policies, evidence on the nature and length of breaks
- Coordinated multiple national surveys – representative with same/similar questions
- A set of ‘representative’ case studies
- Pupils’ and staff views and experiences of breaks

How?

There are models out there:

- Shaw et al. (2015). ‘Children’s Independent Mobility: an international comparison and recommendations for action’.
- Collaboration across 16 countries examining the ‘freedom that children have to get about and play in their local neighbourhood unaccompanied by adults’

Funding?

How you can help ...

- Show an interest to be involved and to work with us
- Suggest areas of focus, perspectives etc relative to your own country
- Identify funding channels
- Feedback and discussion about the strategy, thoughts on:
  - School survey/ questionnaires
  - Pupil survey/ questionnaires
  - Case studies