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The nature of school break times: Towards an international study

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- UK surveys of break times in primary and secondary schools
- 1995 – Blatchford & Sumpner (1998)
- 2006 – Blatchford & Baines (2006)
- 2017 – Baines & Blatchford

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

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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

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Design

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

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Findings (1995+2006)

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- 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. ¼ of children report that they rarely get to meet with peers and friends outside of school

[Reference: Blatchford & Baines, 2006]

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Towards an international study of breaks in schools...

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- 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?

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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

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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 .

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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

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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?

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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