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A Study of the Purpose and Value of Recess in Elementary Schools as Perceived by Teachers
and Administrators

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Education and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Education Leadership

by

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August 2018

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Keywords: Recess, Physical Activity, Physical Education, Free Play, Break

ABSTRACT

A Study of the Purpose and Value of Recess in Elementary Schools as Perceived by Teachers
and Administrators

by

Vickie McRee Beard

Children spend at least seven and a half hours or 46.9% of their waking hours in the school setting, which brings a unique responsibility to schools (Beighle, Erwin, Morgan, & Alderman, 2012). School systems are expected to educate children according to adopted state standards and encourage a healthy, active lifestyle. The concept then is to increase knowledge by putting focus on academic achievement as well as promoting good citizenship by developing children's social, emotional, and physical development, which happens during recess. Yet, recess and free play opportunities are on the decline in school systems across our nation. This reduction or elimination is being attributed to the federal and state accountability measures being instituted on state assessments. The growing trend is for schools to increase the amount of academic time and reduce the amount of time children can experience recess or free play opportunities. Research is being conducted through qualitative methods to assess the purpose and value of recess in the elementary school setting in a rural school district in southern middle Tennessee. Findings from this study will be useful in establishing school and district recess policies and evaluating recess practices within the district.

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my son, James Lane Erwin. I have strived to teach you the value of education and how important it is to always do your best in everything you attempt. Thank you for supporting me and encouraging me through this journey.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Brandon, as well as my parents, Edwin and Ann McRee, who have allowed me to complete this journey. They have patiently taken a back seat during this endeavor and given me the opportunity to pursue my educational dreams. Without their support and help, this would not have been possible.

I also must thank my Lord and Savior for allowing this opportunity. With Him and through Him, all things are possible.

*“If you have built castles in the air, your work need not be lost;
that is where they should be. Now put the foundations under them.”*

Henry David Thoreau, Walden

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Recess has traditionally been an expected, scheduled part of an elementary school day for as long as the institution of public schools has existed and is one of the most favored times in the school day. Although research has shown that recess impacts children's physical, emotional, cognitive, and social wellbeing in a positive manner, keeping recess in the school schedule has caused an uprising among stakeholders and policy makers (Chen, 2017). So, why all the fuss over recess? Recess has been defined as the cessations of an activity for rest or relaxation (Merriam-Webster.com) or as a regularly scheduled time during the school day for students to engage in physical activity that is supervised by adults ("Strategies for Recess in Schools," 2017). Recess has been labeled as a complete waste of time and the time allotted for recess is better spent on academics ("Value of School Recess," 2007). According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2013), recess is called necessary for individuals to be productive, much like a coffee break or a break from an assembly line for adults. Research has shown that recess helps students learn and that its benefits outweigh its disadvantages and costs (Pellegrini, 2011).

The reduction or elimination of recess in many elementary school settings is a topic of much debate and an issue of much concern for today's students, parents, teachers, and administrators. Recess, as most of us remember, was a time of outdoor activities where we would chase each other, ride the merry-go-round, sit on the see-saw, swing in the swings or monkey bars, invent our own games, and make our own rules for at least an hour during our typical day at school. According to Jambor (1999), who fondly recollects his own recess time, stated that for him and his friends, recess was one of the reasons they went to school. With the push for more

academic time, most elementary aged children are lucky to get 10-15 minutes of outdoor playtime (Jarrett & Waite-Stupiansky, 2009). Recess time diminishes even more as children get older (Messina, 2007). The recommended amount of time for children to have in recess is greater to or equal to 20 minutes per day (Barros, Silver, & Stein, 2009; “Strategies for Recess in School,” 2017), while the National Association for Sport and Physical Education recommend 60 minutes of physical activity per day. Why then are schools across the United States reducing or eliminating recess?

With the increased demands of improved academic performance on standardized tests and state and federal mandates like response to instruction and intervention (RTI²), teachers and administrators feel the pressure to reduce or eliminate recess altogether even though research shows findings that contradict more time in the classroom being equivalent to increased test scores (Bornstein, 2011b; Cromwell, 2009). To increase test scores, teachers and administrators try to maximize every possible minute of instruction thereby reducing or eliminating recess from the school schedule. In the *2016 Shape of the Nation* report, only 16% of states were reported to require elementary schools to provide recess on a daily basis (Reilly, 2017).

There has been little research recorded about the history of recess (Clements & Jarrett, 2000). Recess and its importance date back to Piaget who believed that children discovered the world through free play or recess by assimilation of the outside world being defined with what they already know (Bornstein, 2011b; Pellegrini, 2011). Friedrich Froebel, also known as the father of kindergarten, defined play as being extremely significant (Bornstein, 2011b). Plato also believed that children needed to grow in a playful atmosphere to become productive citizens (Bornstein, 2011b). Vygotsky placed an emphasis on social interaction and instruction, which is

a part of the social emotional benefit of recess (Blake & Pope, 2008). Pictures that come from the latter part of the 19th century and early part of the 20th century showed children outside playing indicating that recess was most likely a normal activity (Clements & Jarrett, 2000). Pellegrini (2011) reported that there is little evidence to show recess was considered important during the early 20th century; however, it has been practiced in the form of providing a break from learning or work for as long as the institution of schools has existed (Pellegrini, 2011).

Though practiced as far back as the 19th century, recess has been a controversial topic. The debate over recess being considered a waste of teachers' instructional time dates back to 1885 with the Superintendent in Lansing, Michigan, David Howell, publishing a "no recess plan" (Clements & Jarrett, 2000). This policy included health concerns, safety concerns, bullying, moral contamination, time efficiency, and concentration (Clements & Jarrett, 2000). The idea of moral contamination arose because Howell believed that children were too readily exposed to obscene language during recess. Howell also stated that if students did not participate in recess, they could be sent home to their parents earlier, which was a convenience to the educators as children could go home and begin their chores earlier. The controversy also can be traced to the Puritan/Calvinistic views on work ethics. They viewed work as being good and play not being good. Being slothful was one of the seven deadly sins so prevalent during those times. Karl Marx was also a contributor to the work being good and play not being good philosophy (Pellegrini, 2000).

Today at least 11% of states and 57% of districts require schools to provide students with a scheduled recess period during the school day, which has increased from 4% of states and 46% of districts in 2000 (Adams, 2017). Seventy-nine percent of elementary schools nation-wide

reported that they provided daily recess even though they were not mandated to do so (Adams, 2017). American students, on average, get 26 minutes of recess per day (Bornstein, 2011a). The National Association for Sport and Physical Education and the American Academy of Pediatrics both recommend at least 60 minutes of “moderate to vigorous activity per day” and that recess should be a part of this requirement (Reilly, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

Recess, physical activity, physical education, free play--all descriptive words to define a respite from the cognitive functioning activities required daily in a school setting. But, do they all convey the same kind of respite? The State of Tennessee, Public Chapter No. 99 was approved April 4, 2017, and requires each LEA to integrate:

- (1) For elementary school students, a minimum of one hundred thirty (130) minutes of physical activity per full school week; and
- (2) For middle and high school students, a minimum of ninety (90) minutes of physical activity per full school week (State of Tennessee Public Chapter 99, House Bill No. 45).

The act further defines physical activity as including “walking, jumping rope, playing volleyball, or other forms of physical activity that promote fitness and wellbeing; however, walking to and from class shall not be considered physical activity for purposes of this section” (State of Tennessee Public Chapter 99, House Bill No. 45). Though providing children with a needed break from cognition, these activities listed above do not promote or contain the same social, behavioral, educational, and academic benefits as does recess. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2013), recess provides a very necessary break from the rigorous academic challenges students face in the classroom daily. Recess differs from free play and

physical activities in that it is defined by the Centers for Disease Control as being “regularly scheduled periods within the elementary school day for unstructured physical activity and play” (“Crucial Role of Recess,” 2013, p. 183). Physical education and physical activities generally require rules and standards by which the children should abide, which does not allow for the *unstructuring* of the activities as does recess. Research shows that recess provides students with “a time to rest, play, imagine, think, move, and socialize” (“Crucial Role of Recess,” 2013, p. 183).

Policy changes regarding recess are being implemented on a routine basis because the value of recess is being debated, putting recess at risk in elementary school settings of being reduced or eliminated altogether (Dagli, 2012). With more and more instructional time being demanded, many school districts are eliminating recess or reducing the amount of time students have for recess (Adams, 2017; Anderson-Butcher, Newsome, & Nay, 2003). Recess provides a much-needed break for students as the brain needs some downtime to process and rebuild to foster long-term memory. Physical activity that students are engaged in during physical education classes does not provide the same social learning opportunities to which children are exposed during recess and should not be a substitute for recess (Dills, Morgan, & Rotthoff, 2011). During recess, children’s activity levels are higher than during physical education time; therefore, recess and PE have two different purposes (Jarrett & Waite-Stupiansky, 2009).

School districts nation-wide are being faced with the reduction or even elimination of recess dating back to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which was signed into law by President George W. Bush in 2002 (Deruy, 2016). More recent mandates of RTI² and increased emphasis on state testing have also impacted the possibility of the elimination of recess in

schools. Administrators and teachers feel the pressure to reduce or eliminate recess from their school schedules even though they feel recess has a positive impact on the school climate (“The State of Play,” 2010).

Recess has remained a threatened asset to students in both the private and public-school sectors even though it has been defined by Vialet and Wilson (2013) as an opportunity for students to develop critical life skills, including teamwork and conflict resolution in addition to the social and emotional training that students are engaged in while playing at recess. Policy makers across the nation have decided that recess merely detracts from the instructional time that is necessary for students to learn and have implemented “no recess” policies with cities like Atlanta building new elementary schools without playgrounds (Dills et al., 2011). Recess has always been considered an essential part of a student’s school routine that contributes to normal growth and development, with three main benefits being promoting social interaction and physical development and improving academic achievement (Dagli, 2012). Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the purpose and value of recess in elementary school settings and demands further research to support the retention of recess as a necessary part of a child’s school schedule.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be utilized during this qualitative study to further examine how recess is utilized and how teachers and administrators perceive recess in the elementary school setting.

1. What are teacher perceptions regarding the purpose of recess in the elementary school setting?

2. What are teacher perceptions regarding the value of recess in the elementary school setting?
3. What are administrator perceptions regarding the purpose of recess in the elementary school setting?
4. What are administrator perceptions regarding the value of recess in the elementary school setting?

Significance of the Study

As research shows, recess is still a very relevant part of students' schedules in many elementary school settings ("Crucial Role of Recess," 2013). However, its importance and relevance are being scrutinized and put under much debate. What happens during recess is often viewed as not serious, thus interfering with the educational mission of schools and leading many districts to question the value of recess being practiced in the school setting (Pellegrini, 2008). Research will be conducted concerning the purpose and perception of recess and how recess is valued in elementary school settings to reiterate and reinforce the policy that recess needs to remain in the school setting despite numerous claims that recess needs to be reduced to accommodate additional instructional time for the sake of increased test scores.

Definition of Terms

The following terms are defined for this study.

1. *Recess*-Recess is defined as a break period for children that typically takes place outdoors (Pellegrini & Smith, 1993). Jarrett (2002) defines recess as a time when children have the freedom to choose what they do and with whom. The American Academy of Pediatrics states that recess is "a necessary break from the rigors of concentrated, academic

challenges in the classroom” (p. 183). The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2013) define recess as a regularly scheduled period in elementary school settings for unstructured physical activities and play.

2. *Physical Activity*- Any body movement that works the muscles and requires more energy than resting. Physical activity in general refers to movement that improves health (www.nhlbi.nih.gov). “Physical activity may include: walking, jumping rope, playing volleyball, or other forms of physical activity that promote fitness and well-being” (State of Tennessee Public Chapter 99, House Bill No. 45).
3. *Physical Education*-Instruction in the development and care of the body. This instruction ranges from simple exercises to training in hygiene and performance and management of athletic games and functions (www.merriam-webster.com).
4. *Free play*-The engagement and participation in activity for recreation and enjoyment instead of being serious or purposeful (Deruy, 2016); any activity freely chosen that is not serious (Goldstein, 2012).
5. *Break*-To suspend or interrupt an activity or occupation for a brief period of time (www.merriam-webster.com).
6. *Cognitive functioning*-intelligence or the ability to reason; includes the skills of concentration and attention; academic achievement (Biddle & Asare, 2011).

For this study, recess and free play were used interchangeably. Physical activity and physical education were not considered recess or free play due to their being structured and purposeful activities based on curriculum and standards.

Delimitation and Limitations of the Study

This study is limited by there being only two Pre-K-8th grade schools with like demographics within the county where the research was conducted. Another limitation is that of time with the study being conducted within one academic year; however, perspectives will be sought from currently employed teachers and administrators from within the setting of the research. Data collected will be important to the overall research involving the purpose and value of recess in the elementary setting as perceived by the teachers and administrators.

Overview of the Study

The focus of this research is to know the purpose and value of recess as practiced in the elementary setting as perceived by elementary school teachers and administrators. This study includes five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the study, containing the statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, definition of terms, limitations of the study, and an overview. Chapter 2 is a review of the literature that supports the purpose and value of recess being included in the elementary school schedule and includes support of recess not being eliminated or reduced. Chapter 3 presents the research methodology and design. A presentation of the interpretation of the data and the findings of the study are found in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for further study and practice.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The History of Recess

The history of recess has little documentation in the form of formal research with little information being recorded prior to the 19th century (Clements & Jarrett, 2000). The definition for recess meaning a period of rest from one's work dates back to 1620. A time set aside for recess in American schools is traced back to at least the 1800s (Kahan, 2008). Even though recess dominates an appreciable amount of time in the school day, it has not been studied extensively (Pellegrini & Smith, 1993). However, several theorists are credited with the implementation of recess as practiced in public elementary schools in the United States. Frederich Froebel is known as the "father of kindergarten" as he coined the term kindergarten when he created materials for playful learning (Frost & Sutterby, 2017). Froebel had a strong belief in humans and nature being connected on a spiritual level and therefore felt that outdoor games were vital to his kindergarten concept (Frost & Sutterby, 2017). With the introduction of kindergarten in the United States in the 1850s, outdoor play became an important way to meet children's needs, especially those who resided in congested neighborhoods (Frost & Sutterby, 2017).

Froebel's insight and research lead to the playground movement, which focused on "the importance of play, exercise, and vitality for the development of young people" (Frost & Sutterby, 2017). Playgrounds were established, filled with heavy manufactured equipment, in many cities, and by the 1920s, parks and playgrounds were a norm and had widespread political support. However, these ideals rarely made it to the outskirts of large cities during this time

period. During the 1950s, the safety of playground equipment came into question resulting in the regulation of safety for playground equipment. The establishment of safety regulations resulted in many playgrounds being found out of compliance and needing restructuring or even being rebuilt (Frost & Sutterby, 2017). With the historical importance of recess being shown, by the 2000s, parents and professional organizations encourage whole-child development, which includes outdoor play and exploration. This has led to the increase in well-structured and well-built playgrounds so that children can be exposed to a healthy balance of structured, academic instruction with outdoor experiences (Frost & Sutterby, 2017).

Another individual, Joseph Lee became known as the “father of the playground movement” because of his strong beliefs concerning children’s need for play. He stated, “There must be creation, song, wonder, inquiry, and adventure. If these are slighted we shall have committed once again the ancient crime against childhood, of which practically all education has been guilty-the crime of not letting the child live as well as learn” (“Joseph Lee”). In addition, he believed in the seriousness of play being the factor that gave play its educational value, as he stated, “Play is the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in a child’s soul” (as quoted in Goldstein, 2012). He was influential in creating Harvard University’s School of Education in 1920, which helped give rise to the inclusion of recess in the school day for children (Ramstetter & Murray, 2017).

Jean Piaget is also known for his contributions to the field of play, as he and Lev Vygotsky are known as the most famous play theorists (Pellegrini, 2008). Piaget proposed that children learned best through cooperative, social play and through this social play came moral reasoning (Bjorklund & Douglas-Brown, 1998). Piaget also stated that children discovered their

worlds through play (Bornstein, 2011b). For Piaget, children's development was motivated by a constant battle of maintaining mental balance and minimalizing mental conflict. For him, children's play was a perfect example of assimilation because when children play, they assimilate what they encounter in the outside world and define it in terms with which they are already familiar (Pellegrini, 2008). Lev Vygotsky emphasized social interaction and instruction which lead to mental function development (Blake & Pope, 2008). According to Vygotsky, social interaction, which is often learned through play, was a very important aspect of student learning (Blake & Pope, 2008). Vygotsky also believed in "pretend play" because this was children's way of learning to use socially defined symbols to represent concepts. An example of this would be that a child uses a broomstick to represent a horse (Pellegrini, 2008). This practice is important for children's oral and written language development. For him, children's play connects their desire for the unattainable with the realization that their behavior should conform to the expectations of society. Children's desire to attain the unattainable is highly motivating because what they are seeking to do should bring pleasure (Pellegrini, 2008). For most theorists, play is viewed as being beneficial to children as it prepares them for adulthood. Play is the way children learn the skills necessary for success in adulthood (Pellegrini, 2008). Additionally, Plato believed in the power of play and for children to be productive citizens. He felt they must grow up in an atmosphere of play (Bornstein, 2011b). He too believed that play can influence the way children function as adults and that intellectual play provides a stimulus to understanding (D'Angour, 2013).

Though promoted by the previously mentioned theorists, play has not always been a constructive component of the school setting. As far back as 1885, David Howell, a former

Superintendent in Lansing, Michigan, published a “no recess plan” (Clements & Jarrett, 2000). He wanted children released home earlier to get to work on their chores and release the school from liability and the need for supervision (Clements & Jarrett, 2000). Play, even then, was a waste of instructional time to administrators and teachers.

Although there is little recess history recorded, recess or play has been practiced for at least two centuries and has remained a controversial topic. Numerous benefits exist for having a break time from the cognitive functioning required during the day to day activities in a school setting. Play is recognized as an important part of the whole child development and nourishes all facets of children’s development including “physical, social, emotional, intellectual, and creative” (Barros et al., 2009; “Crucial Role of Recess,” 2013; Hewes, 2006, p. 4; Myers, 2012). An intrinsic value is found in play for children and long-term developmental benefits that “paves the way for learning” (Hewes, 2006, p. 4). According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2013), there are four benefits of recess: (1) increased physical activity, (2) improved attention, (3) improved cognition, and (4) practice of peer-to-peer social skills. The fourth benefit is often overlooked, yet it is the fundamental skill set that leads to success later in life (Ramstetter & Murray, 2017). Physical, social, and emotional health are major pieces to classroom learning and 21st century careers (Noam, 2017). Other research shows recess to be beneficial by promoting “physical and emotional safety at school; positive relationships with peers and adults; support for learning; and an institutional environment that fosters school connectedness and engagement” (Parker, 2015). The benefits for the sake of this research are divided into physical benefits, cognitive and social benefits, and emotional benefits (Chen, 2017).

Physical Benefits of Recess

Children attend school from six to seven hours per day, as much as 30% of their waking hours, and are not made to sit still for that length of time (Beighle, Erwin, Morgan, & Alderman, 2012; Hinton, 2016; Perera, Frei, S., Frei, B., & Bobe, 2015; Slater, Nicholson, Chriqui, Turner, & Chaloupka, 2011). In addition, students take an average of 112 mandated standardized tests from entering pre-K and going through twelfth grade (Reilly, 2017). Due to the nature of children spending so much time at school, schools are expected to provide children with the opportunity to become healthier and more active and are the ideal setting for the promotion of physical activity, especially since children are not made to sit still in a classroom all day (Castelli, Glowacki, Barcelona, Calvert, & Hwang, 2015; Hinton, 2016; Ishii, Shibata, Sato, & Oka, 2014). Schools generally offer two opportunities to encourage physical activity, which aids in the prevention of obesity, high blood pressure, and type II diabetes. These opportunities are physical education classes and recess (Hayes & Van Camp, 2015). Physical activity gained through recess is positively associated with increasing the children's psychological well-being, improves bone health, and enhances motor skills (Ridgers, Salmon, Parrish, Stanley, & Okley, 2012). Children can gain up to 40% of their daily physical activity through recess (Kohl & Cook, 2013). With only 36% of children in the United States achieving the recommended daily 60 minutes of physical activity, the provision of recess makes a great deal of difference to these students (Huberty, Dinkel, Coleman, Beighle, & Apenteng, 2012). By providing children with recess, they are exposed to growth and development that comes from the physical activity. The physical activity provides children with opportunity to maintain a healthy weight, which can eliminate or reduce diseases later in life, and improves their bone mass, lowering fracture risks

later in life (Chen, 2017). Recess promotes movement opportunities that increase other health benefits and children do not even realize they are improving their exercise habits (Chang & Coward, 2015). Even if children do not play vigorously at recess, they are active, and their activity levels are higher during recess than during physical education classes. Children have opportunity to choose their own movements and activities, which promotes joy in not being controlled (“Crucial Role of Recess,” 2013; Jarrett & Waite-Stupiansky, 2009). Minor movements during recess counterbalances the sedentary life of children at school (Ramstetter & Garner, 2014). Children who are active at school are more likely to be more active after school (Jarrett & Waite-Stupiansky, 2009). School recess is the optimal setting for providing physical activity because it can reach all school children regardless of background or socio-economic status (Pawlowski, Andersen, Tjornhoj-Thomsen, Troelsen, & Schipperijn, 2016; Woods, Graber, & Daum, 2012). When recess happens before lunch, children enjoy the benefit of a healthier appetite and waste less food (“Why Recess is Important,” (n.d.). Recess is the one play opportunity that is not stratified by income (Bornstein, 2011b). Through play, children have a means to exhaust some energy, which strengthens and refines fine and gross motor skills and allows for the body to grow and develop (Myers, 2012). Diagnoses of “ADHD, obesity, depression, and anxiety” are increasing as is the amount of time that children are expected to sit in classrooms (“Impact of Recess,” 2015). Without the physical benefits of recess, students do not have the necessary outlet to release their frustrations, refine motor skills, or burn excessive energy (“Impact of Recess,” 2015).

Cognitive and Social Benefits of Recess

According to research documented in “Strategies for Recess in Schools” (2017), physically active students have better grades, better school attendance, improved classroom behaviors, and enhanced cognitive functioning. Recess helps students by improving their memory, concentration, and attention (“Strategies for Recess in Schools,” 2017). Recess can also help students reset their brains and retain more of what they are learning (“Recess Helps Kids Learn,” (n.d.). Learning at recess is different from learning that takes place in the classroom (Johnson, 2013). As children interact at recess, they are using language and non-verbal communication and learn to deal with the issues from their interactions (Jambor, 1999). Performing movements that involve moving the body “like dancing, throwing a ball, or playing tag” is found to involve “the same area of the brain as problem solving, planning, and sequencing” (Calvin, 1996, as cited in Waite-Stupiansky & Findlay, 2001). During physical activity, the brain is provided with necessary oxygen which causes mood-enhancing chemicals to be released (Waite-Stupiansky & Findlay, 2001). Brain research demonstrates that play scaffolds development and that active brains make neurological connections that are critical to learning (Isenberg & Quisenberry, 2002). For children to have optimal cognitive processing, they need a break period after a period of concentrated instruction, which is best served in the form of unstructured breaks called recess (“Crucial Role of Recess,” 2013). The idea of shifting from one cognitive task to another, such as moving from a language arts assignment to a math assignment, does not provide the necessary interruption for children to remain attentive and productive (“Crucial Role of Recess,” 2013). Younger children do not process information as effectively as do older children. This is mainly due to the immaturity of their nervous system and their lack of

experiences, which does not enable them to perform higher order cognitive tasks as efficiently as older children (Pellegrini, 2008).

In addition, recess aids students in the social context by allowing them opportunity to become involved in peer interactions where they can practice and role play necessary social skills (“Crucial Role of Recess,” 2013). Recess also provides students with the opportunity “to initiate, negotiate, cooperate, share, and build relationships with one another—skills that are highly valued in the adult world” (Chang & Coward, 2015). Recess creates a rare opportunity for children to show a varying range of social competencies in the context in which they see as meaningful (Jambor, 1999). Immediately following an unstructured recess break, children are better able to concentrate on instruction, which enhances learning (Castelli et al., 2015). Other social and cognitive benefits, according to Chen (2017) include the provision of time for self-directed play that cultivates their imagination and understanding how behaviors can affect their playtime. Further research indicates that recess “cleans out the mental cobwebs and sharpens the brain” (Walsh, 2009). Students focus better and comprehend more of the instruction being presented when they are provided with unstructured breaks between mentally challenging tasks (Sohn, 2015). The cognitive processes that children use to play are very similar to those involved in learning (Goldstein, 2012). Through recess, children develop communication skills, strengthen their self-control, negotiate, and cope with things not always going their way (Sohn, 2015). Children need to learn how to manage their unstructured time and to use it well and activities from recess provide students with skills that help them with time management (“Recess: Necessity or Nicety?”, 1998).

Pellegrini (2008) argues that activity on the playground, known as recess, is a positive venue for measuring cognition. Recess is cognitively and socially demanding on children while being motivating at the same time. He also states that giving children the opportunity for free choice in their play environment and their interacting with peers provides them with more sophisticated social-cognitive measures than when children choose to interact with adults (Pellegrini, 2008). By children interacting with their peers, they are more likely to disagree with each other and when this happens, they are faced with other points of view rather than their own point of view. So, if children want to continue playing and interacting with their peers, they must learn to accommodate other points of view. Children need to learn to cooperate, communicate, and perspective taking. If children interact primarily with adults, the adults often take over the difficulty in the interaction and children are socialized not to question or challenge the adults. Children, therefore, when put into an enjoyable environment, like recess, show higher levels of competence. Psychologists who have studied peer relations report that a good indicator of social skills is the degree a child is popular among his peers or rejected by them. Learning and practicing social skills is how children become popular with their peers and deficits in social skills often lead to peer rejection (Pellegrini, 2008). Popular children are seen to be more cooperative and have the ability to see different points of views, whereas rejected children exhibit aggression and are generally withdrawn. These rejected children often become behavior problems in school, perform poorly, and have social emotional problems (Pellegrini, 2008).

Brain research involving recess and unstructured breaks shows that the brain tends to operate on a time cycle of 90 to 120 minutes. During the cycle, the brain becomes more and less efficient in its ability to process more information. As the cycle wanes, a mental break is

necessary because the brain does not function well at high levels of attention (Waite-Stupiansky & Findlay, 2001). According to Petrey (2016), children suffer in all areas of their development if they are not exposed to adequate play time. They grow into teens and adults without the needed skills necessary to meet their full potential (Petrey, 2016). Children who know how to entertain themselves are learning how to adapt to challenges and are not even aware of this learning (O'Connor, 2017). Children develop additional competencies through unstructured play that will assist them in resiliency necessary to face challenges later in their lives (Ginsburg, 2017). As children learn to navigate their world, the positive stress of unstructured play such as recess allows the brain to rewire itself (O'Connor, 2017). Jarrett (2002) stated that the brain must have downtime to allow for the renewing of chemicals in the brain to enable long-term memory. Recall is then improved when learning is distributed over time rather than given all at one time (Jarrett, 2002). Goldstein (2012) reported that play “establishes new neural connections” and essentially makes the child more intelligent (p. 5). Jaak Panksepp, a neuroscientist, shows through research that play, freely chosen, stimulates the production of a protein in the amygdala and prefrontal cortex. This protein is known to assist in developing organization, monitoring skills, and planning for future events (Goldstein, 2012). Pellegrini (2008) reported that younger children do not process information as effectively as older children and benefit most from breaks in instruction. Their nervous systems are not as mature, and they lack the same kinds of experiences as older children; therefore, they are not able to perform higher cognitive functioning tasks as efficiently as older, more mature children or adults. Additionally, this explains why recess provides the essential change in activity that is different from simply changing activities and helps children avoid overload or a buildup of interference (Pellegrini,

2008). Movement assists the brain in development especially in the first and last stages. With this in mind, it is important to recognize that children need to be provided opportunities to move frequently. The movement that is possible only during recess, especially if outside, plays a critical role in the healthy development of children's brains (Sutterby & Thornton, 2005). Hamilton (2014) states that time in classrooms may be less important than time spent on playgrounds. The most unexpected way to enhance a child's learning lies outside the classroom and instead lies on the playground at recess ("The State of Play," 2010). Children who do not have the opportunity to play or do not choose to play have an increased risk of abnormal development along with an increased risk of deviant behavior (Goldstein, 2012). Cognitive functions and normal social functioning may not mature properly if children do not play (Goldstein, 2012). Physical activity, in the form of unstructured recess, feeds the brain by activating most all areas of the brain. Movement, through the form of physical activity, increases the number and capacity of blood vessels in the brain, which expedites delivery of oxygen, water, and glucose (Pica, 2010).

Additional brain research shows that the experience of playing "changes the connections at the front end of your brain, and without play experience, those neurons aren't changed" (Pellis, as quoted in Hamilton, 2014). These prefrontal cortex changes that take place during childhood assist in wiring the brain's executive control center, which is crucial in regulating emotions, planning, and solving problems. This further leads to play being the preparation for "life, love, and even schoolwork" (Pellis, as quoted in Hamilton, 2014). In order to produce this kind of brain development, children must engage in free-play, such as recess, where there are no rule books and no coaches. Children must learn to negotiate and create their own rules

experienced through recess opportunities. Taking turns, playing fair, and avoiding causing pain all lead to children becoming more socially versed. The best predictor for an eighth-grade student's academic performance has been said to be that same child's social skills that are evident in third grade (Hamilton, 2014).

Although many people are conditioned to see time off-task as a waste of time characterizing laziness, many educators are realizing that downtime helps students by giving the brain opportunity time to process and make sense of the information it has learned. This provides students with a time to refresh so they can avoid frustration by returning to cognitive tasks with improved focus (Smith, 2013). According to Smith (2013), idleness is no longer being considered a completely bad habit. Research shows that there are benefits of taking a break to allow the electrical activity in the brain opportunity to synthesize memories. This process is more productive when the brain is experiencing "downtime" (Smith, 2013). Research on unconscious thought has shown that activities that take away from the conscious mind without stressing the brain give more insight for solving complex problems (Smith, 2013). Downtime in the form of physical activity experienced through recess provides children with the essentials to development because it contributes "to the cognitive, physical, social, and emotional well-being of children and youth" (Ginsburg, 2017, p. 182). Beni (2016) reported that many teachers discovered that recess helped their students focus better when they returned to the classroom after having recess. Teachers reported that students had fewer behavior problems, were less fidgety, and talked less (Beni, 2016). With schools restricting talking opportunities for children before and during class, during lunch, and idle time, such as waiting in the hall in line, recess is the only time children

have to interact without adults restricting them or intervening, which makes recess even more important to children's social development than previously thought (Jambor, 1999).

Emotional Benefits of Recess

Not only does recess improve physical, cognitive, and social aspects for students, it also improves self-esteem and self-confidence, enhances students' ability to overcome negative peer pressure, and increases students' chances of general community acceptance (Biddle & Asare, 2011; "Why Recess is Important," (n.d.). Through recess, children are also given the opportunity to develop emotional regulation skills, such as: "sharing, communication, cooperation, problem solving, coping skills, self-control skills, imaginative skills, compromise, resolve conflicts, perspective taking and following rules of games" (Petrey, 2016; "Why Recess is Important," (n.d.). Whigham (2013) also states that children learn perseverance and withholding recess from children will limit the development of necessary coping skills in our children when they need them to be successful citizens. Children are also learning to communicate to settle disputes rather than fighting (Adams, 2017). Since recess is an activity setting, it builds cooperation and interpersonal relationships, which is seen by teachers and principals as an opportunity to reduce the aggression in students and reduce school bullying (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2003). Children who play outdoors experience less stress and anxiety, have an improved sense of self-worth, and it provides children who need time to themselves that opportunity for a break (Chen, 2017). Children learn about fairness and how to appropriately express emotions such as anger, frustration, fear, and find ways to deal with these emotions (Myers, 2012). Recess also reduces the tension that is often felt when children are achieving or learning. When playing at recess, children can relax without the interference of adults ("Value of School Recess," 2007). Recess or

play is a way children are able to make sense out of a complicated, complex world in which they live (Hurwitz, 2002/03). It is through recess that children take risks and challenge themselves mentally and physically, which is at the heart of learning for them (Hurwitz, 2002/03). Free play teaches children how to effectively work together and how to work independently as well; it teaches children how to be human (O'Connor, 2017). Recess is the only time during the children's day at school where they are in control and direct their own activities and actions, which provides them with a sense of control and creates positive self-esteem (Waite-Stupiansky & Findlay, 2001). Even though there are many documented physical, cognitive, academic, and emotional benefits to children having recess, there are continued battles to be fought to keep recess in schools. Recess has little value according to our accountability driven society (Blatchford & Sumpner, 1998; Simon & Childers, 2006).

Removal or Reduction of Recess

Pellegrini (2008) and Jarrett (2013) state that many states have laws and policies in place for limiting the number of hours truck drivers and airline pilots drive or fly without taking breaks along with employees in factories being required to take a break to promote mental alertness. The term recess is also used as a formal break in court and congressional sessions thereby supporting that breaks are generally built into a normal work day for adults (Jarrett, Maxwell, Dickerson, & Hoge, 1998). Tennessee state law requires that employees be provided with at least a thirty (30) minute meal or rest period if they are to work six (6) consecutive hours and failure to provide this is a violation of state law ("tn.gov/workforce/topic/wages-benefits-breaks"). Yet, policy makers and administrators are continuing to limit the amount of time children have recess or even to participate in recess at all. Elimination is especially true of many districts as children

get older, with schools in the United States who do not have recess ranging from seven percent of first and second grades to 13 percent by sixth grade (Messina, 2007). There is also a trend that the increased number of minority students present in a school, along with a lower income level, creates a decreased time allotment for recess (Day, 2012). Several arguments exist for why this is happening. The first argument focuses on recess being a waste of instructional time and an activity that leads to nothing learning or gained by students (Pellegrini, 2008; Petrey, 2016). Another argument focuses on increasing instructional time to enhance academic performance and raise test scores, which means reducing the time allowable for recess (Beni, 2016; Jarrett et al., 1998; Pellegrini & Bohn-Gettler, 2013;). Another argument for reducing recess is that it disrupts the children's work patterns and causing excitability in children and inattentiveness (Jarrett et al., 1998). Pellegrini (as quoted in Day, 2013) reports that attacking recess from the standpoint of reducing it or eliminating it creates an "intuitive feel: If you give kids more time doing something, they'll do better in school. When in fact the opposite is probably the case." Cromwell (2009) reports that the pressure from international competition, arising from *A Nation at Risk* report from 1983, is to blame for the demise of recess in public elementary schools. Deruy (2016) states that the reduction stems from the enacting of the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act, which stressed test scores and accountability in the form of meeting average yearly progress. This prompted many schools to put a stronger focus on math and reading, leaving little time for the arts and recess (Deruy, 2016). Rather than reforming the educational system and seeing the need for differentiated instruction, NCLB fostered the idea of "one size fits all" that did little to improve education ("Impact of Recess," 2015). The NCLB educational law also created a situation where school administrators had to perform a balancing act between the rising

academic standards and allowing time for students to have an unstructured break in the increasing rigor present in the classroom (Schachter, 2005). According to Bornstein (2011a), almost half of all school districts in the United States changed their school schedules to shift more time toward math and reading instruction to improve test scores. Caplan and Igel (2015) state that many administrators reduced recess due to the introduction of the Common Core academic standards since there is a component that ties student performance on standardized tests to teacher's pay and job status. With this inception, the time allotted for recess had to be reduced so that class time could be increased. The bar has been raised and academic expectations are higher; therefore, students should spend more time in academics because play can occur outside of school (Cromwell, 2009). Increased time engaged on a task does not guarantee increased learning (Norvell, Ratcliff, & Hunt, 2009/10). Work that includes breaks proves to be more effective than long stretches of work. Young children do not process information as effectively as older, more mature children due to their nervous systems not being as mature and they have a lack of experience (Pica, 2010). People are reported to function better when they have had a change of pace in their daily activities. When people, just like students, are engaged in an activity long enough for it to become habit, they get bored and restless. Therefore, the principle of long periods of practice versus distributed practice shows that distributed practice allows for better memory recall (Jarrett et al., 1998). New Jersey Senator Shirley Turner, as cited in the American Heart Association News, states that law makers have ignored the fact that children need more than the three R's and need the four R's, which involves recess ("Recess Helps Kids Learn," (n.d.). Children are shown to be renewed by recess rather than disrupted by

participating in it and that adding more instructional time without giving children a break is counterproductive (Jarrett et al., 1998).

Another threat to recess is the overall perception that the breaks provided through unstructured recess tend to be problematic with an increase in fears of unacceptable behavior in the form of aggression or antisocial behavior (Blatchford & Sumpner, 1998; Pellegrini & Smith, 1993). According to Bornstein (2011a), nearly 90% of discipline problems take place during recess or during the transitions before and after. Other opponents of recess state that the students are more hyper or excitable after recess and are less attentive in class (Simon & Childers, 2006). Jarrett et al., (1998) also states another reason school administrators give for not having recess is that it interrupts children's work patterns, which leads to high excitability and inattentiveness. They too cited another reason for the reduction in recess being related to recess encouraging aggression and antisocial behaviors in children (Jarrett et al., 1998). Still there are teachers and administrators who believe that because children are provided with the necessary non-cognitive brain break, they return to class ready to learn, are less fidgety, and more attentive (Rochman, 2012; Strauss, 2016). Gonchar (2014) also reported that two-thirds of principals polled by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation as reported in *The State of Play* felt that students were more attentive and had improved listening skills following recess. When students have had at least 15 minutes of recess, they have been rated by their teachers to be better, academically and behaviorally, in class. Teachers can get to know their students better when supervising them in an unstructured environment like recess, which assists teachers in curriculum planning and bullying prevention (Day, 2012; Jarrett & Waite-Stupiansky, 2009). The longer students are held to task, the less likely they are to retain or process the information; therefore, students need an

actual break, not just switching subject matter (Rochman, 2012). Jarrett et al., (1998) also report that children who have not had recess are much less attentive, and it is counterproductive to simply add more instructional time without the provision of a break, such as recess. According to Wong (2016), students who have to wait on recess often experience inattentiveness. Students have notably increased attentiveness following the recess period. Pellegrini (2011) reports that students' attentiveness is increased following recess because their tasks are being distributed over a longer period of time rather than chunked into one long time period. Pellegrini (2008) states that students do get bullied on playgrounds, but that can happen anywhere there is little adult supervision. Statistics show that only two percent of the total of playground infractions involve bullying (Pellegrini, 2008). Simon and Childers (2006) report that one of the reasons supervision is a problem at recess is due to poor training or no training for the adults who are assigned this responsibility, which can be easily be fixed.

Other reasons for the reduction or elimination of recess in the school schedule are concerns for student's safety and contact with strangers who may be trespassing onto school grounds, potential lawsuits over injuries, and limited adult supervision (Kohl & Cook, 2013). Administrators often fear legal liability of children falling or getting hurt during recess and use this as justification for cutting it from the school schedule (Pytel, 2009). Elementary school principals who responded to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation survey also cited liability and safety issues along with space, appropriate equipment, and weather being reasons for eliminating recess ("The State of Play," 2010). Pytel (2009) also cites strangers accessing playgrounds, sexual predators, and bullying as reasons for the elimination of recess. Bullying, according to Pytel (2009), generally takes place in unstructured environments like playgrounds,

so if recess is cut, there is less time for bullying. However, there are critics who feel that there is so much bullying taking place due to children not being allowed recess time and children cannot get along and cannot resolve conflict because these things have been taken away when children are not provided recess time (Sexton, 2018).

In addition to the safety concerns on the playground, there is the belief that children do not have a desire to play, which adds to the concerns that are already in place (Huberty et al., 2012). With an increase in crime, unsafe playgrounds, increased traffic and pollution, and insect-born illnesses, parents are uncomfortable allowing their children to play outside (Sutterby & Thornton, 2005). Children also have less support for play than earlier generations due to the hurried lifestyles, changes in family dynamics, and increased focus on academics and enrichment activities (Goldstein, 2012). Many children spend countless hours inside watching television, playing video/computer games, and involved in passive entertainment, which has harmful effects on them physically and cognitively (Ginsburg, 2017; Sutterby & Thornton, 2005). Many children are also home alone in the afternoons and are restricted to “solitary indoor activity” (Jambor, 1999). Due to this lack of desire to play, children do not know how to develop games and keep them progressing because they are growing up without practice. Resolving conflicts, choosing teams fairly, and knowing and respecting rules are learned activities that must be practiced (Bornstein, 2011a). According to Pica (2010), children do not engage in the “neighborhood play of earlier generations”; therefore, when children go home, there is little opportunity for children to experience “unstructured, natural social development.” If children do not know how to play, the answer is not removing recess from their day; the answer is to teach them how to play (Bornstein, 2011a).

In addition to the above research, children's obesity rates have been documented to have increased "three-fold between 1980 and 1999" (Jarrett, 2013). This is the time period most affected by the reduction or elimination of recess. Research by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation shows that "physical activity is higher during recess than at other times of the day, with 42% of the activity occurring at recess, 32% during physical education, and 26% during after-school programs/activities" (Jarrett, 2013). Therefore, deprivation of recess can be detrimental to the healthy development of all children.

Withholding Recess Punitively

Even though there are numerous documented benefits to students having recess, children are still denied access to recess due to discipline reasons. Recess is the one period of the school day that students do not want to miss, yet teachers see this as a privilege that can be pulled when students are not behaving appropriately (Gonchar, 2014). According to Pica (2010), parents are protesting the school policies that allow the withholding of recess due to students' misbehavior. The University of Rochester Medical Center states that students should not be denied recess as punishment for misbehavior or failure to complete school work. According to Ramstetter and Murray (2017) the practice of withholding recess punitively "deprives students of health benefits important to their well-being" (p. 20). Teachers often continue this practice because there are no other options that are as effective and are hesitant to change their practices (Turner, Chriqui, & Chaloupka, 2013). Gonchar (2014) states that 77% of school principals who responded to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation survey report that recess as a punishment is practiced in their schools even though they feel that recess is a benefit and has a positive impact on achievement and attention. Jarrett and Waite-Stupiansky (2009) compare withholding recess from students to

that of depriving a child of lunch. They state this is an unfair and unhelpful practice for teachers (Jarrett & Waite-Stupiansky, 2009). Students who are hungry cannot concentrate and neither can children who are deprived of breaks (Jarrett & Waite-Stupiansky, 2009). Premack's principle, which states that a preferred behavior may be used as a reinforcer of a less preferred activity, is often used as a basis for withholding recess. The opportunity to play at recess may be withheld to get students to complete work or stay engaged in the classroom setting (Geiger, 1996). Other misbehaviors include tardiness to class, acting out as well as failure to complete homework, which are considered everyday childhood behaviors (Pica, 2010). Reilly (2017) states that the Atlanta Board of Education, who once eliminated recess, is now considering enforcing a rule that would prohibit teachers from withholding recess for punitive measures.

Research involving "Premack's Principle," dating from 1965, shows that recess can be a positive means for enhancing students' motivation to learn and perform better in the classroom. "Premack's Principle" focuses on students in grades five through eight and providing them with the opportunity to have recess on the playground, which is an inexpensive, positive reinforcer that can increase student learning, focus, and self-regulation (Geiger, 1996). The principle states that preferred behavior, or behavior that has an increased probability of happening, can be used as a positive reinforcer of a less preferred behavior. Applying this principle to classrooms where problem behaviors are occurring has been shown to be successful. Students who are allowed to participate in recess at the end of an activity have been shown to perform more efficiently and with fewer behavior problems than students who have had no such incentive (Geiger, 1996). Therefore, pulling recess for punitive measures is not promoted with the application of

“Premack’s Principle.” Recess acts as a reinforcer and motivator for improved student focus and self-discipline (Geiger, 1996).

Adolescents, or young teenagers, are no different from younger elementary students. They too need the opportunity to develop social skills, and the opportunity to have recess provides them with the same therapeutic effects of stress release. However, less time is provided for students in the middle and high school areas because it is deemed unnecessary and a waste of time much like some view elementary recess (Geiger, 1996).

Recess versus Physical Education

The National Association for Sport and Physical Education recommends that students ages five to twelve participate in a minimum of 60 minutes of activity daily and to avoid long periods of inactivity (“<https://pgpedia.com/n/national-association-sport-and-physical-education>”). They further recommend that elementary schools provide students with 150 minutes of physical education each week and that middle school children receive 225 minutes per week (“<https://pgpedia.com/n/national-association-sport-and-physical-education>”). Railey (2016) reports that Connecticut, Indiana, Missouri, Virginia, and Tennessee have passed legislation requiring recess for elementary school children. Tennessee’s Governor Bill Haslam has enacted a law that gives teachers more flexibility over recess. The law mandates recess and requires 130 minutes of physical activity per week (Tatter, 2017). All local education agencies in the state of Tennessee must provide elementary school students with a minimum of 130 minutes of physical activity per week with middle and high school students receiving a minimum of 90 minutes of physical activity per week (State of Tennessee Public Chapter 99, House Bill No. 45). The grade levels align with how the district identifies the school, so if a school houses elementary grades

(K-5) and middle school grades (6-8), it is considered an elementary school and must meet the elementary school requirement (Hollifield, 2017). This poses a problem because recess periods are often pulled from children to complete homework or to be provided one-on-one instruction (Chin & Ludwig, 2013). According to Jarrett (2002), recess cannot be substituted for physical education classes. Kahan (2008) stated that physical education is the traditional means whereby physical activity is provided in school settings. According to Kahan (2008), only 17 to 22 percent of elementary schools offer daily physical education, totaling 85 to 98 minutes per week. This amount of time falls quite short of the recommended 60 minutes of physical activity *daily*. Physical education is a structured, instructional program that is related to physical activity and performance standards, where children are expected to participate in specific activities and achieve definite results. Recess, on the other hand, is unstructured. Children have choices in what they do and with whom. They get to develop their own games and rules and get a break from all of the expectations (Jarrett, 2002; Pica, 2008). Physical education in and of itself does not provide a sufficient amount of weekly physical activity that recess provides (Kahan, 2008). Recess provides children with the opportunity to socialize, choose their level of physical activity, and choose their activities and companions without the direction of adults (Dills et al., 2010; Pica, 2008). It also is a planned respite from cognitive tasks, which affords children “time to rest, play, imagine, think, move, and socialize” (“Recess Helps Kids Learn,” (n.d.). Physical education class is a planned instructional curriculum with specific objectives that does not provide all children the same kind of freedom as recess (Schacter, 2005). Both physical education classes and recess provide an opportunity for children to be freed from the rigorous activities of the classroom; however, there are real differences in the programs (Schacter, 2005).

Daily physical education is a rare occurrence in most school settings due to staffing and increased demands on academics and serves a different purpose for children. Recess provides children with the opportunity to develop and enhance large motor skills like running and jumping; manipulative skills like throwing and catching a ball; and gymnastic skills like climbing and balancing (Pica, 2008). Both physical education classes and recess are arguably necessary and should be part of students' daily schedule (Reilly, 2017). Quality physical education classes and daily recess are essential parts of the school curriculum that assist students with the development of "physical competence, health-related fitness, self-responsibility, and enjoyment of physical activity so that they can be physically active for a lifetime" (Reilly, 2017).

Summary

Recess is a vital time for children to fully develop and truly have a break from the rigors of the classroom ("Crucial Role of Recess," 2013). The value of recess is often underestimated and overlooked, which causes it to remain under constant threat (Hewes, 2006). It is a vital time that should be protected that is as important as the time dedicated to math and reading (Rochman, 2012). It is on the playground, during recess, that children actually "define and enforce meaningful social interaction during the day" (Jambor, 1999). Policymakers should maintain the practice of daily recess in the school schedule and find a balance between the academic standards and recess activities (Dagli, 2012). Though under much scrutiny and debate, research has shown that recess is necessary for the complete development of a child and a lack of play causes cognitive as well as behavior problems (Goldstein, 2012; Myers, 2012). Recess should be treated as a child's personal time much like the time adults spend in a work break and should not be used as a replacement for physical education or physical activity requirement

(Ramstetter & Murray, 2017). Recess is not a distraction from the educational setting but rather an important component necessary to allow students to grow and reach their full potential (Deruy, 2016; Ramstetter & Murray, 2017). Children need recess as much as anything else they are afforded while in school (McCarthy, 2013). Without recess, children are not allowed to reach their academic or emotional potential, and they lose an important educational experience (“Impact of Recess,” 2015; Jambor, 1999).

The idea that children need breaks between classwork to compensate for long periods of sitting and being exposed to academia is a prominent reason that breaktimes have been part of the typical school day throughout history. The idea stemming from Currie’s quote,

If then, in school, we take from him, to a great extent, his power of spontaneous locomotion, we must compensate for it with periods of exercise both in school and out of it. The younger the child the more does he require (Currie, 1862, p. 137, as cited in Evans & Pellegrini, 1997).

This point made well over 100 years ago stands the test of time and still rings true today. According to many educators, the most common reason for allowing recess is that it provides children with a much-needed time to release pent up energy and “recharge their batteries” (Evans & Pellegrini, 1997). By children having this opportunity, research shows that children return to the classroom ready to take on more cognitive tasks after being provided with a break from the rigors of their academic day (Evans & Pellegrini, 1997). Therefore, recess should not be viewed as simple recreation but rather a necessary component for children in the development of critical attention and social emotional skills that lead to their being productive, adult citizens.

CHAPTER 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Three kinds of data collection for qualitative findings are “in-depth, open-ended interviews, direct observation, and written documents” (Patton, 2002, p. 4). Interviews are intended to provide a person’s direct quotes that reflect his or her opinions, feelings, experience, and knowledge. Observations include detailed written documentation that reflect the activities, behaviors, and actions of those being observed. Written documentation includes any written responses gleaned from surveys, questionnaires, or other publications (Patton, 2002). Surveys are useful when data collection is necessary and when the researcher gathers data from larger groups and standardization of the data is necessary (“Overview of Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection Methods,” (n.d.). Data was collected from currently employed teachers and administrators who are employed in the rural elementary school setting.

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the purpose and value of recess as practiced in the elementary school setting as perceived by elementary school teachers and elementary school administrators. This study was conducted in a rural, Pre-K through eighth grade elementary school setting in southern middle Tennessee. Interviews and surveys are the primary methods of data collection. The following research questions were utilized to analyze the purpose and value of recess as practiced in an elementary school setting.

Research Questions

1. What are teacher perceptions regarding the purpose of recess in the elementary school setting?

2. What are teacher perceptions regarding the value of recess in the elementary school setting?
3. What are administrator perceptions regarding the purpose of recess in the elementary school setting?
4. What are administrator perceptions regarding the value of recess in the elementary school setting?

Phenomenological Study

Phenomenology is known in one sense as a “philosophical tradition” and was first used in this way “in the development of a rigorous science by the German philosopher Edmund H. Husserl” (Patton, 2002, p. 105). Husserl (1913) used the word phenomenology to indicate the study of “how people describe things and experience them through their senses.” (Patton, 2002, p. 105). This created Husserl’s most basic assumption, “*We can only know what we experience by attending to perceptions and meanings that awaken our conscious awareness*” (Patton, 2002, p. 105-6). To aid in the understanding of the experience, the experience must be described in detail, analyzed, interpreted, and presented (Patton, 2002). Phenomenology utilizes a variety of methods that include “interviews, conversations, participant observation, action research, focus meetings, analysis of diaries, and other personal text” (“Phenomenology Methods and Data Collection,” (n.d.). The methodology is less structured by design in an effort to encourage true sharing of participant experiences (“Phenomenology Methods and Data Collection,” (n.d.). Creswell (2007) defines a phenomenological study as a study that “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 57). It is “a person’s perception of the meaning of the event, as opposed to the event as it exists externally to

that person” (Van Manen, 1990). The purpose of using phenomenological studies in research is “to understand an experience from the participants’ point of view” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001, p. 157, as quoted in Williams, 2007). Phenomenology describes the phenomenon that all participants have experienced, such as participating in recess either as a child in elementary school or as a teacher or administrator supervising recess. The goal of the researcher is to answer the question of what it is like to experience a specific phenomenon. Multiple perspectives of the same situation are viewed by the researcher in order to make generalizations of what it is like to experience the phenomenon from the insider’s perspective (Van Manen, 1990). Patton (2002) uses the foundational question: “What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?” (p. 104). According to Patton (2002), the researcher must thoroughly capture and describe “how people experience some phenomenon—how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (p. 104). In order to be able to capture the information in the manner as described by Patton, the researcher must utilize in-depth interviews with those who have directly experienced the particular phenomenon, which in the case of this research is recess (Patton, 2002). Secondhand experience is not acceptable.

Patton (2002) stated that there are two implications regarding qualitative studies. The first implication is that it is important to discover what it is that people experience and how they interpret the world around them, which becomes the focus of the phenomenological inquiry. The second implication then is that for someone to truly understand what a person experiences is to experience the phenomenon being studied as straightforward as possible. Thus, the researcher

must have personal experience and a passionate interest in the phenomenon to be studied (Patton, 2002).

According to Creswell (2007), there are five steps in the conduction of a phenomenological study. The investigator first determines if this approach is appropriate and then identifies the phenomenon that is relevant to the research question. The researcher then collects data primarily through in-depth interviews with participants who have experienced the phenomenon being studied. The fourth step involves data analysis where the researcher will begin to document significant statements, which will later become codes. The fifth step is the presentation of the findings (Creswell, 2007; Van Manen, 1990). Charmaz (2014) stated that intensive interviewing is one means of generating data for qualitative research and that the interviews are typically one-sided conversations to explore the participants' perspectives based on their personal experiences with the topic to be researched. Important characteristics of intensive interviewing include:

- Selection of research participants who have first-hand experience that fits the research topic
- In-depth exploration of participants' experience and situations
- Reliance on open-ended questions
- Objective of obtaining detailed responses
- Emphasis on understanding the research participants' perspective, meanings, and experience
- Practice of following up on unanticipated areas of inquiry, hints, and implicit views, and accounts of actions (Charmaz, 2014, p. 56.)

To establish credibility of this research study, the researcher tape recorded all interviews and transcribed each interview verbatim. Member checking was then utilized to ensure accuracy of the transcription. Teachers and administrators were provided with a copy of the transcribed interview and asked to evaluate for accuracy.

Role of the Researcher

For qualitative studies, the researcher is “the instrument” (Patton, 2002, p. 14). The role of the researcher for this study is that of observer, collector, and interviewer. Williams (2007) stated that the researcher must spend time interacting with the people being studied. The researcher must have “some connection, experience, or stake in the situation” (Williams, 2007, p. 69). The researcher must set aside all prejudgments and biases in order to accurately report the findings. The researcher will collect data that leads to “common themes in people’s perceptions of their experiences,” specifically recess for this particular study (Williams, 2007, p. 69). The researcher obtained permission to conduct research from the Internal Review Board (IRB) at East Tennessee State University (ETSU) as well as the director of schools in the district in which the data was collected. Interviews were conducted based on Charmaz’s (2014) guidelines of choosing the appropriate participants who have first-hand knowledge and experience with the research topic. Participants should be carefully chosen and should be individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2013). Written informed consent forms were provided to all teachers and administrators who agreed to participate. For the survey participation, an on-line informed consent was utilized, which is included in the recess perception survey. In order to follow IRB protocol, participants were given the option to refuse to participate, withdraw from participation, or change their participation without recourse.

Participants

Participants for this study included the teachers and principal at the school chosen as the research site. In addition, five of the other seven administrators within the district were interviewed. Two of the administrators within the district serve the two high schools, and the researcher's focus was on the perception of recess in the elementary school setting; therefore, they were not included in the data collection. The five administrators interviewed serve schools in the following grade bands: Pre-K through second grade, third grade through fifth grade, sixth grade through eighth grade, Pre-K through fifth grade, and Pre-K through eighth grade. The administrator of the middle school encompassing grades six through eight was asked to be interviewed because of the similarity of the grade bands with the school chosen as the research site, which houses Pre-K through eighth grade. The school chosen as the research site is very similar in demographics to the school in which the researcher currently serves as administrator. Teachers and administrators who were interviewed were assigned numbers to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Participants for the online survey were currently employed elementary school teachers involving grades Pre-K through eighth grades who teach academic subjects within the same school district.

Population

The population chosen for this research study was ten teachers and five administrators. There are 30 teachers, of which ten were selected for participation in the in-depth interviews. The teaching experience of the teachers selected ranged from one year to 30+ years. Professional relationships have been established with all personnel participating in the research study through professional development experiences, in-service presentations, and other required meetings. An

electronic survey was sent to elementary teachers serving kindergarten through eighth grades who teach an academic subject. Although specialty teachers, those who teach physical education, fine arts, and computer science classes, have standards and a set curriculum as well as academic teachers, they were not included in the survey because this is one of the less structured times for students and often seen by them as a break from academic time. This survey was conducted through Google Forms. All answers were anonymous, and email addresses were not collected. Qualitative researchers have to remain conscious of their own bias and keep it from affecting the research; therefore, member checking, and peer reviews were utilized to maintain the absence of researcher bias (Creswell, 2013; Patton, 2002).

Setting

According to Patton (2002) and Creswell (2014), qualitative studies occur in natural settings, so this research was conducted at the school site during scheduled times. Interviews were conducted during teacher's planning times or times that were convenient for their schedules. Appointments were made with the administrators to schedule the face-to-face interviews to be conducted in a private setting of their choice and at their convenience. Follow-up meetings were scheduled with the teachers and administrators for review of the transcribed recordings at which time a copy was provided to each participant.

Sampling Strategy

People are often the units of study in qualitative designs. The primary focus of the data to be collected is related to what is going on with individuals in a particular setting (Patton, 2002). Sampling can involve people as well as time period strategies, which is important to this study because people may perform or function in a variety of ways at different times during a specified

activity (Patton, 2002). Qualitative research is primarily focused on small samples but studied in deep detail (Patton, 2002). The sample size is determined by what the researcher's purpose for the inquiry is and whether the purpose is useful and credible (Patton, 2002). Purposeful sampling is recommended for qualitative research so that the researcher may learn more about the issues that are the primary focus of the inquiry and those that will help reveal the research questions being investigated (Patton, 2002). The participants are chosen because they are "information-rich" and can illuminate the questions being studied (Patton, 2002, p. 46).

A purposeful sampling of teachers and administrators was chosen as those who can best answer the research questions to assess the purpose and value of recess in the elementary school setting. The school site, encompassing Pre-K through eighth grades was chosen because of the similarity in demographics as the school in which the researcher is employed.

Sample

This study reveals qualitative data from one school site; however, multiple teachers and administrators were interviewed and surveyed for the data collection. The qualitative data was obtained in the form of face-to-face interviews with teachers and administrators, and surveying of teachers. According to Patton (2002), "there are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry" (p. 244). The size of the sample revolves around what it is that the researcher wants to know. As long as there is "in-depth information," a small sample size "can be very valuable" (Patton, 2002, p. 244). Purposeful sampling of elementary school teachers through a survey was conducted to ensure that the researcher had a good understanding of the purpose and value of recess across the district. This was done due to Creswell's (2014) statement that purposeful

sampling is utilized because the participants chosen need to have experienced or are experiencing the phenomenon being studied.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collections are generally conducted in three ways for qualitative research with most of the data coming from the field where the researcher spends time within the setting being studied (Castellan, 2010). Qualitative data take the reader to the time and place of the phenomenon being studied to enable them to know what it feels like to experience that person's "story" (Patton, 2002). To fully understand the purpose and value of recess, the researcher spent time in the classroom setting, on the playground, and in the gym where recess was conducted according to weather and other various circumstances. This allowed the researcher to have first-hand knowledge of the interactions and experiences of children, teachers, and administrators at recess. In depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with the five administrators and the ten elementary school teachers to provide a thorough understanding of their perceptions. Data was also collected through a survey from district elementary school teachers to provide a more thorough understanding of the purpose and value of recess.

Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis is considered an ongoing process where data are sorted, studied, read, and reread (Castellan, 2010). Data is separated, sorted, and synthesized through qualitative coding where labels are connected to parts of the data that tell what that segment is about (Charmaz, 2014). Qualitative inquiry is "oriented toward exploration, discovery, and inductive logic"; therefore, the data analysis began with inductive analysis (Patton, 2002, p. 55). Through coding, categories and themes emerged which assisted the researcher in understanding the purpose and

value of recess from the teachers and administrators who were interviewed and surveyed. Inductive analysis also allowed for the emergence of important dimensions without the presupposition of what those dimensions would be prematurely (Patton, 2002). The data from this study were coded and recoded as needed as new themes emerged. Member checks were utilized to maintain accurate and appropriate representation of the participants' thoughts and opinions to correctly present the purpose and value of recess.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

The researcher is the instrument in qualitative inquiry; therefore, careful reflection and researcher self-awareness must be incorporated to avoid bias and potential error. Multiple data sources, triangulation, member checking, and external reviews were utilized in this research study to ensure credible, trustworthy information regarding recess in the elementary school setting (Patton, 2002). Creswell and Miller (2000) report that qualitative research uses a "lens" that is not based on scores or instruments but the views of the people who perform, participate, and review the study (p. 125). One of these lenses is the lens of the researcher herself. The researcher decides the time limit in staying in the field and whether the data are saturated enough to develop appropriate themes and categories. A second lens to establish trustworthiness is the lens of the participants. This lens focuses on the accuracy of the participants' viewpoints and how they are presented in the final narration of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Triangulation is another procedure used in this study to add strength. Triangulation, according to Patton (2002), is the use of various kinds of data or methods. In particular, data triangulation was used in this study by using multiple data sources to conduct the study. Member checking was also utilized to ensure accuracy of the participants' interviews. Lincoln and Guba

(1985) stated that member checking was “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” in a research study (as quoted in Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 127).

Ethical Considerations

Research must be designed to be useful as well as ethical (Harwell, 2011). East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board approval was obtained for the conduction of this study. Informed consent was utilized for the teachers and administrators who participated. No personally identifiable information or data was used to ensure anonymity of the participants. Secure storage of data collection was also maintained to ensure confidentiality. Participants were assured that all interview notes and tape recordings were destroyed with the completion of this study.

Summary

Qualitative inquiry through the method of a phenomenological study was chosen so that the researcher could explore the activity of recess in the elementary school setting and learn more about its purpose and value as perceived by elementary school teachers and administrators. The researcher serves as the instrument herself and must set aside all elements of personal bias. Various methods to ensure credibility and trustworthiness were utilized for this study, such as: triangulation, member checking, and external review. Careful attention was placed on reporting teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions accurately as well as ensuring their anonymity. Data analysis and findings will be presented in chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4
ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to examine the phenomenon of the purpose and value of recess in the elementary school setting as perceived by teachers and administrators within a school district in southern middle Tennessee. The research was guided by the four research questions utilized for qualitative data collection for this study.

1. What are teacher perceptions regarding the purpose of recess in the elementary school setting?
2. What are teacher perceptions regarding the value of recess in the elementary school setting?
3. What are administrator perceptions regarding the purpose of recess in the elementary school setting?
4. What are administrator perceptions regarding the value of recess in the elementary school setting?

Findings of this phenomenological study were gathered through the process of qualitative inductive inquiry and will be presented in this chapter. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with administrators from various schools within the same district allowing for data collection from multiple elementary administrators. Face-to-face interviews were also conducted with teachers from one site within the district. Teachers were chosen based on their level of experience to see if there is similarity in beginning teachers and veteran teachers' perception of the purpose and value of recess. Participants were given the opportunity to openly discuss their

perceptions of the purpose and value of recess in the elementary school setting. All other elementary teachers of academic subjects within the district were sent a recess perception survey electronically to seek their perception of the purpose and value of recess to strengthen the research.

To strengthen the credibility of this research study, triangulation was utilized for the individual participant interview responses, review of the researcher's notes, and member checks. Triangulation strengthens studies by combining methods and increases the validity by the strengths of one source compensating for the weakness of another source (Patton, 2002). Data were collected and coded into categories and themes. These themes were then analyzed to allow for similarities to be determined and documented.

East Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board granted approval to conduct this research. The interview participants were provided with a written consent form if they chose to participate in the study. The survey participants were sent an invitation via email with an on-line informed consent included as part of the survey. Google Forms was the platform of choice utilized to conduct the electronic survey. Email addresses were not collected as a part of this survey to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of the participants. The interviews were recorded using a hand-held Sony IC recorder. The interviews were then transcribed, coded, and analyzed for recurring themes. Copies of the transcribed interviews were provided to each participant who was then encouraged and asked to review the verbal representations to increase the credibility of this study. The fifteen interviews took place during the month of February 2018 and a few weeks into March 2018. The survey was conducted during the month of February 2018 and left open for eight days to allow time for completion.

Participant Profiles

The five administrative participants were chosen because of their school demographics and grade bands included in their respective schools, which include Pre-K-2, 3-5, 6-8, Pre-K-5, and Pre-K-8. The ten teachers who were interviewed were all certified educators within the same school district and school site. Each participant was chosen based on levels of experience.

Teachers were chosen from each of the following experience levels: 0-5 years, 6-10 years, 11-15 years, 16-20 years, and 21+ years of teaching. The initial plan for interviewing was to choose two teachers from each of the respective grade bands; however, there were not two teachers who fell into the 6-10-year range. The researcher chose three from the 0-5-year range to complete the ten educator participants. The range of education for these teachers includes bachelor's degree to education specialist. Two male educators and eight female educators were interviewed. Each interview participant was assigned a number to ensure confidentiality. One male administrator was interviewed, and three female administrators were interviewed. Each administrative participant was also assigned a number to ensure confidentiality.

Teacher participant 1 has taught in the 11-15-year category and currently holds a master's degree. This participant has taught in a variety of grade levels in the elementary setting. The researcher attended high school with this participant, thus the interview process was nonproblematic.

Teacher participant 2 has taught in the 0-5-year category and holds a bachelor's degree. Although the experience is less than other participants, this teacher has taught a variety of grade levels through filling leaves of absence and full-time employment. The interview went without incident.

Teacher participant 3 has taught in the 21+ category and holds a master's + 30 degree. This participant has mainly taught in early childhood grades. The researcher knew this participant through professional development opportunities held throughout the district.

Teacher participant 4 has taught in the 0-5-year category and holds a bachelor's degree. Prior to teaching this year, this participant served as a special education assistant in another school system. The interview process went very well.

Teacher participant 5 has taught in the 16-20-year range and holds a master's degree. This participant's experience has primarily been in the middle school grades. The researcher knew this participant from previous negotiations committees when collective bargaining was a practice for the district.

Teacher participant 6 has taught in the 16-20-year category and holds a bachelor's degree. This participant's experience has been in various elementary and middle grades in various schools within the same district. The researcher knew this participant from previous professional development meetings and in-services throughout the district.

Teacher participant 7 has taught in the 21+ year range and holds a master's degree. This participant's experience includes junior high in two schools within the district. The researcher attended high school with this participant and has attended professional development opportunities together.

Teacher participant 8 has taught in the 6-10-year range and holds a bachelor's degree. This participant's experience includes junior high in various schools and various states. The researcher knew this participant from professional development opportunities held throughout the district.

Teacher participant 9 has taught in the 11-15-year category and holds a bachelor's degree. This participant's experience includes all grades in an elementary setting. The researcher knew this participant from previous athletic events within the district as well as professional development opportunities.

Teacher participant 10 has taught in the 0-5-year range and holds a bachelor's degree. This participant is working in her first position and has no experience other than student teaching. This participant is currently filling a leave. The interview went very well even though the participant was very new to the idea of recess being practiced in a school setting prior to the leave position.

Administrative participant 1 has been an administrator for fewer than 5 years. This participant previously taught in the middle school grades prior to becoming an administrator. The researcher knows this participant through their serving as administrators within the same district and attending meetings and professional development opportunities together.

Administrative participant 2 has been an administrator for fewer than 5 years. This participant previously taught in the middle school grades prior to becoming an administrator. The researcher knows this participant through being administrators within the same district and attending meetings and professional development opportunities together.

Administrative participant 3 has been an administrator for fewer than 5 years. This participant previously taught in the high school setting prior to becoming an administrator. The researcher knows this participant through being administrators within the same county, participating in the same professional development opportunities, and meetings and previously worked as colleagues in the same high school.

Administrative participant 4 has been an administrator for 15 years. This participant served as an assistant principal prior to becoming a principal and taught in the elementary setting prior to the administrative roles. Again, the researcher knows this participant through professional development opportunities, meetings, and previously worked as colleagues.

Administrative participant 5 has been an administrator for more than 10 years. This participant served as an assistant principal prior to becoming principal and taught in the middle school setting prior to moving to administration. The researcher has known this participant through professional development opportunities, meetings, and athletic administrative events. This participant did not wish to be interviewed due to the nature of recess being absent in the school where this participant works. However, notes regarding their physical education classes and rewards and incentives were provided to the interviewer.

In addition to conducting the participant interviews, the researcher sent an electronic survey to 140 currently employed elementary teachers throughout the district. Sixty-six teachers completed the survey. The survey was conducted through Google Forms and was left open from February 15, 2018, to February 23, 2018. Respondents were given an opportunity to add comments regarding recess, and seventeen respondents did so in addition to answering the ten questions.

Researcher Notes and Memos

The researcher began collecting field notes and memos during the face-to-face, semi-structured interviews that took place in February and March 2018. During the process of transcribing the audio recordings of the interviews, the researcher compiled memos that included

the thoughts and comments of the researcher, which were coded and organized accordingly based upon the emergence of themes and categories.

The field notes of the researcher from the in-depth face-to-face interviews indicate that the teacher participants were open and honest throughout the interview process. All ten of the teacher interviews were easy to conduct, and they seemed to enjoy talking about recess because it is something about which they were passionate. They provided responses to the interview questions that strongly connect to the dominant themes present within the review of the literature in regard to recess being an important, necessary facet to the elementary school schedule.

Administrative participants were also very open and honest throughout the in-depth interview process. The four administrative participants shared in their voice that recess has an important place in their master schedules at their respective schools. They do not have to do much to enforce a recess policy as their teachers are on board with recess and respect the time well.

Interview Results

Based on the coding and review of research field notes, the following themes emerged regarding the purpose of recess as perceived and described by the teachers who were interviewed as well as participating in the survey:

- Unstructured, free time for children to play, to be physically active, and to be themselves without the rigor and demands of academia
- Time for children to explore and have fun
- Time for children to release pent up energy

- Time for a brain break, which assists students in regrouping, refocusing, and returning to class more attentive
- Time for socialization
- Time to process information and maintain academic success

One of the predominant themes to emerge was the idea of recess being unstructured and providing free time where children are able to make their own choices as to activities and how they spend their time. Teacher participant 1 stated that the purpose of recess was to provide, “Free, unstructured time where children are able to play and just be social with each other.” Teacher participant 2 stated, “Recess, to me, means a time for children to be themselves and make their own choices and have that free time to explore themselves and friends and time that they’re not having to sit in their seats and be focused on work.” In connection to exploring, teacher participant 3 added, “They find things out there. When we’re talking about plants, they’re out there looking at the trees, so there’s so much more education out there.” Teacher participant 2 further added, “They need that time to get some physical activity” to avoid difficulties in their staying focused all day long. This theme is further supported by teacher participant 9 who stated, “Recess means kids getting out and playing. They’re working on playing, social skills, and a lot of things at one time.” Teacher participant 10 further clarifies the purpose of recess by stating, “They can play; do activities that they enjoy doing. There is structure; there is not a lesson.” Survey results corresponded with this theme as well. An anonymous comment stated, “Elementary students are still kids!! They need to have time to run and play and just be kids.”

In addition, a recurrent theme is a time for children to release energy and provide a time for a brain break, which assisted students in the ability to regroup, refocus, and return to class more attentive. This is supported by teacher participant 10, who stated, “They need to release the energy that they have. They’re able to have time every day to release all of that energy and to just be out of the classroom.” Teacher participant 1 put it this way, “It provides my students with time to unwind and clear their mind and come back refreshed for more learning.” Teacher participant 3 also supported this theme by having stated, “It means an opportunity for children to release some energy...” Teacher participant 5 stated, “Recess is a time for children to get out the wiggles...” Teacher participant 7 supported this theme as well by having commented, “...students are able to give their brains a break and allow them to you know process some of the information that they’ve already had that day.” This is further supported by teacher participant 8, who stated, “I see a difference in students when they are given opportunity to be physically or in a mental capacity be able to just not focus on school work.”

Another recurrent theme regarding the purpose of recess, according to teachers, was that recess provided a time for socialization. Teacher participant 1 reiterated this concept, “They’re just out socializing and having a good time.” This was further supported by the same participant in that, “...recess gives them time to socialize and talk with their friends and build those skills of socializing together...” An anonymous comment from the survey supported this concept as well, “It allows children to see other children from other classes. It allows children to make new friends.” This theme was supported additionally with teacher participant 6, “...that’s their time to socialize and get to know each other.” Teacher participant 8 supported this theme and added, “You know those breaks may be socializing for five minutes with you know their friends or

something like that. It doesn't have to necessarily be a physical activity" in order to help students take a break from the daily activities of school.

One other theme that emerged is that of recess providing time for processing information and enabling students to maintain academic success. Teacher participant 7 supported this theme by having stated,

...for students that are having trouble academically, we do use that recess time as a time for them to get extra help... We have more students that are missing recess due to academic performance than behavioral problems and so again in my eyes, is not seen as a punishment for them. We're trying to provide time for them to catch up on their studies and provide a little more time with teachers that it's not in the normal classroom environment where they can get a little extra help. That's trying to help them in the long run.

Teacher participant 8 supported the idea of recess being a time to process prior learning and enhance academics.

There's not a whole lot of time if we want those kids to make that work up or get extra help or maybe you know maybe they didn't turn their work in because they didn't understand it. If we don't do it during their time that they get to go outside, then we would not have another time.

Teacher participant 5 further supported the idea of utilizing recess time to improve academics.

"...if they have missed assignments, they can make them up at the end of the day without having to wait another day." According to the participant, as soon as students complete the assignments, they are sent outside to participate in recess and rarely have to miss the entire time to accomplish

the make up work or missing assignments. Teacher participant 1 stated that recess allows “students time to unwind and clear their mind” and was further supported by teacher participant 7, who stated, “...give their brains a break and allow them to you know process some of the information that they’ve already had that day.”

Based on the coding and review of research field notes, the following themes emerged in relation to the value of recess as perceived and described by the teacher participants:

- Stress release for students and adults
- Vital for students’ growth and well-being
- Necessary element in school curriculum
- Reinforcement tool
- Promotes positive environment both socially and academically
- Character building and improved socialization

A recurring theme regarding the value of recess as perceived by the teacher participants was the stress release provided by recess for both the students and adults. This idea is supported by teacher participant 1 who stated, “It provides my students time to unwind and clear their mind and come back refreshed for more learning.” Teacher participant 2 stated, “It’s hard for us as adults to sit all day too,” and “Typically, I’m about as read for the break as they are.” Teacher participant 3 stated, “There was a difference between having them go to PE, which was more of a structured, skill-based classroom to a free social environment. What is so important is that release.” Teacher participant 5 was passionate about the value of recess,

It has an extreme amount of value. We had one year that we did not have recess.

That was because of our schedule that we couldn’t have it, and that was probably

the most difficult year because students had no out. It made a huge difference that year.

This was further supported later in the interview with teacher participant 5 with the comment that, “I think it’s extremely valuable. I think it’s a huge mistake not to have it.” Teacher participant 6 further supported the value of recess by making the comments, “It gives the teachers a break. It gives the kids a break. As an adult, you can work on something for so long and you need a brain break.” An anonymous comment from the survey included, “It allows them to release any stress they are feeling” in response to recess aiding in stress release. By being able to have recess, teacher participant 3 felt, “I think that the children that are more attentive in the classroom coming from recess is because they were able to release energy.”

Another theme to emerge regarding the value of recess was that recess was vital for students’ growth and well-being. Teacher participant 1 stated, “Recess gives them time to socialize and talk with their friends and build those skills of socializing together and being able to work out their own problems and differences and that type of thing.” Teacher participant 3 stated, “I think it’s important outside the classroom to gain some social skills.” This is further supported later in the interview by the additional comments,

We’re lacking so as children are coming from the homes that they have to learn to communicate with one another and solve problems together and when you’re playing with three people or four people, you’ve got to learn how to communicate and how to socialize and converse with them.

Teacher participant 4 also supports the idea that recess promotes student growth by stating, “Students need that socialization. It’s an important part of their training as it is their education

and academia.” This theme is further supported by teachers who completed the survey. Seventy-four percent of the teachers who responded “strongly agreed” that recess played a vital part in children’s development and overall behavior in the school setting. Anonymous comments from the survey also support this thought. “Recess plays a vital role in the healthy physical, emotional, and mental development of a child.” “Recess plays a vital role in the development of a child’s social skills that include problem solving, compromise, and conversation.” And, finally, “Children need to learn how to get along with others, be creative making up games and resolving simple conflicts. All of these can occur during a simple recess time.” An additional survey comment to support this theme included, “Recess helps a child develop social relationships with their peers as well as helps their physical development.”

In addition to promoting growth and improving students’ well-being, recess was considered a necessary element in the school curriculum by teachers. According to results from the survey, 33.8% of teachers strongly agreed and 44.6% agreed that time spent in recess was as valuable as time spent on academic subjects. Teacher participant 4 stated, “I think it’s an important part of the day, and I would call it part of your curriculum.” Teacher participant 7 had the following comment to say in support of recess being necessary, “I think it’s one of the best things that we have done in the last couple of years is to have that time where they can have that 30-minute block of recess.”

Recess, used as a reinforcement tool, according to teacher participant 5, “does help maintain them throughout the day.” “[Recess] helps a lot to have that to look forward to...to have time that I can talk to my friends.” Teachers see that the possibility of withholding recess due to misbehaviors or minor infractions makes a difference in how the students perform and

behave according to the interviews and survey with 63.1% of teachers surveyed reporting that withholding recess punitively changes the behavior in students. Twenty-five percent of respondents were neutral about withholding recess punitively changing student behavior. Teacher participant 1 supported this by having stated, “They don’t like recess to be withheld. It frustrates them. I can tell during the day if they haven’t had their recess; they are not as focused and ready to learn.” Teacher participant 2 stated, “It does seem to improve behavior. I see improvement in the next day because they don’t want to have to walk.” Teacher participant 4 stated, “They’re not very happy about it. They get, you know, they worry about it, and then they’ll try to do what they can to not have it withheld.” Teacher participant 6 further supported this idea with the comments, “They love recess! Absolutely love it and are very disappointed (if recess is withheld). Their whole manner changes. Attitude changes.” Teacher participant 9 stated that students, “...look forward to it, so if they are not getting recess, they’re upset and want to do whatever they can to be sure to regain that.” This theme is further supported with comments made by teacher participant 10, who stated,

My students love recess! They love it. They look forward to it every day.

And, it is the highlight of their day. So, it does increase good behavior with it being at the end of the day because they know they have to be well behaved throughout the entire day. That’s going to affect the way they are going to behave in the classroom because they don’t—they’re missing out on hanging out with their friends or playing basketball or football with their friends, and so it does affect them in the classroom that way.

Another prevalent theme is that recess promotes a positive environment socially and academically. This is evident with teacher participant 7, “The students have benefitted from it and it’s creating a better environment socially and academically for the students as well as the teachers.” This is further validated by teacher participant 8 who stated, “...even as adults and as educators, we need it. Sometimes, you just need to relieve your brain for a few minutes and have the freedom to be able to just let yourself go.” Teacher participant 9 added, “Recess is necessary for every kid nowadays, especially you know, along with a good PE program, it can make a difference in how they perform in the classroom.” Teacher participant 3 felt that recess aids in learning by, “And, it’s amazing how they can come back ready to learn and go on and do the next structured activity.” Teacher participant 4 agreed with students returning from recess in a better frame of mind, “I generally find that they come back better when they have recess”, and “I think that it helps them think better.” Teacher participant 6 further supported this thought, “The kids seem to be in a better mood when they come in and be more focused.” Teacher participant 8 also felt that students benefited from recess by having stated, “I think it’s good for the students. I see a difference in students when they are given an opportunity to be physically or just in a mental capacity be able to just not focus on school work.” Survey results showed that 51.6% of the responding teachers agreed that students behaved better and were more focused upon return to the classroom after having recess. Thirty-six percent strongly agreed that students had better behavior and improved focus upon return from recess.

Recess also adds to character building and improved socialization according to participant interviews and teacher surveys. Teacher participant 10 stated, “I think recess is very important. I think it provides wonderful opportunities for them to grow as a person. So, there is a

lot of character skills in recess.” An anonymous comment from the survey supported this theme by the statement, “I feel that recess time is beneficial to students because it not only gives them additional physical activity time, but it helps strengthen their social skills.” Teacher participant 3 stated support for this theme in, “There are games for them to play with and that’s more social skills in how to play games and how to work with one another and not have fights with it.” This participant further supported the thought of recess building character by commenting on how that by Christmas break, students have learned that they miss out a fun activity by making bad choices. This is supported by the comments, “They’re learning. There are policies to follow. There are procedures to follow. If I don’t get my work done during the day, then I’m going to miss something in the afternoon that I enjoy.” Teacher participant 10 summarized this theme by stating, “They have to learn how to be a sore loser sometimes, and they have to learn how to be a very good winner.”

Themes to emerge from the administrators’ perspective are similar to the teachers’ perceptions in relation to the purpose of recess and are as follows:

- Unstructured time to release energy, relieve stress, and promote better classroom performance
- Time for mental break
- Time for play, exploration, and practice
- Time for socialization

The purpose of recess providing a time for unstructured release of energy, relief of stress, and promoting better classroom performance is supported by the administrators comments in that they stated they can see a difference in students’ behavior when children have recess and when

they do not. Administrator participant 1 stated, “Recess is an opportunity for students to be physically active and burn off some energy so that they can perhaps focus a little better later in the day.” This was further supported at the close of the interview with the comments,

...students that are allowed some time to run off energy when they come back, if they have a teacher that has good classroom management and can reign them back in and you know procedures are established, they are able to get back to work. They are able to be more successful.

Administrator participant 2 stated that recess is beneficial and aids in helping students be more productive and, “would love to see it twice a day.” Further support for this theme was made at the close of the interview with administrator participant 2 with the comment, “I think it’s very beneficial especially for young children...that they be able to release their energy and play appropriately.” Administrator participant 4 stated that recess “keeps the stress levels down throughout the building” because recess provides an opportunity for both students and teachers to unwind for a few minutes. Administrative participant 1 also added that withholding recess is not a good thing because there is often “anger and aggression coming from that.” Therefore, the opportunity to have a recess break, according to the administrators, helps students be more productive.

An additional theme to emerge from the purpose of recess was to provide a mental break for students. According to administrative participant 2, students “tend to be able to come back and regroup after recess. Whereas before recess, they might be restless or unfocused.”

Administrative participant 3 added to this theme, “The ones who don’t [have recess] I can see them being more fidgety and not being able to control their attention and hyperactivity.” This

continued to be supported with administrative participant 4. "...recess gives students a time to regroup, refresh themselves, get up and move, get their body more active; helps the brain to function."

Additionally, the theme of recess being purposeful for play, exploration, and practice also emerged from the administrative team. Administrative participant 1 stated that recess provides a time for students "to practice skills they have learned in PE." This was further supported by administrative participant 3 by the comment that recess "gives them an opportunity to explore, make new friends, and play with people that they may not have normally done so if they're outside playing in an unorganized manner."

The final theme to have emerged from the administrative team was that of a time for socialization. Administrative participant 4 supported this theme by having stated, "They like to be able to associate with their peers." Administrative participant 3 offered additional support by having stated, "It allows them to get away and be with their friends." This was further supported by, "...they love their opportunity to be around their buddies." There was evidence in the administrative interviews that the older students were, the more recess became a socialization time. Administrative participant 1 stated, "whereas by the time they are in xxx grade, it is more of a social time." "The xxx graders tend to enjoy the social element of recess more so than I see the xxx graders."

According to the researcher's coding, there was similarity in the codes that emerged from the administrators' in-depth interviews to the emergent themes coming from the teachers' in-depth interviews and survey data. The following themes emerged regarding the value of recess as perceived by the elementary school administrators:

- Enhances social emotional skills apart from academics
- Builds relationships with peers and teachers
- Promotes students' growth and well-being
- Provides an essential element to the school day

One of the primary themes to emerge from the administrators' perspective was that of the opportunity for strengthening social emotional skills. Administrator participant 2 stated that recess is "a time for play. It means a time for play; a time for students to be able to be involved with each other socially to learn those social and emotional skills apart from academics." This was further supported later in the interview with, "Students do not miss recess for the entire recess period for discipline reasons because we are trying to focus on the emotional and social skills during that time." Administrator participant 1 supported this theme by having stated, "recess is a time for students to have structured free play where they have opportunities to have socialization..." Administrator participant 3 reiterated the importance of social skills with the comment, "It's a time for students to be physically active, socially active...allows them to interact with each other."

A second emerging theme regarding the value of recess from the administrators' perspective is that of building relationships. This is supported by administrator participant 1. "It also though is a chance for them to build relationships with peers, even teachers, to understand and learn more about games and sports and help them interact better with their classmates." This is further supported by administrator participant 2, who stated, "It's the students' out. That is when they are allowed to run safely and express themselves appropriately and a time to teach

them safety and like I said before the social and emotional skills.” Administrator participant 3 commented,

It allows them to get away and be with their friends. At this age, they don’t just get to run and go to each other’s houses...and so school and recess is an opportunity for them to be around their friends in a non-academic, structured way as in the classroom seems to be all the time.

Another theme to emerge from the value of recess was that it promotes students’ growth and well-being. Administrator participant 4 summed this theme up with the comment,

I think it’s crucial for students’ well-being. They need that time for physical activity. They need that time to socialize. There is still a lot of learning to be done during recess: following the rules, getting along with others, so it’s a vital part of the day.

This was reiterated at the close of the interview, “I think it’s very beneficial to our students. They have to have the activity. They have to have it emotionally. They have to have it socially. It helps with the whole child.”

The final emerging theme is that of recess being an essential element to the school day. Administrator participant 3 commented at the interview, “I know that school is not in the business of raising kids, but if this is the only place that they get to play outside and enjoy being a kid with supervision, I think we have to have it.” Administrator participant 1, 2, 3, and 4 all supported the idea that recess is essential by stating, “...the time is built into the schedule”; “We have recess daily, either inside or out, during scheduled times”; “They all have specific places to

go throughout the day”; and “It’s written in their schedule and teachers usually take that time, if the weather is not applicable for them to go outside, then they take that time in the classroom.” These administrators enforce daily recess, inside or outside, by making sure there is a recess time built into the master schedule. Administrator participant 1 stated, “I don’t generally have trouble enforcing (laughs) the fact that we are going to have recess because teachers value that time and want to have them out there...People are pretty on board with having recess.” Administrator participant 4 commented, “Many of the teachers will make indoor recess as fun as outside by playing games and doing things like that.” The administrators interviewed consistently spoke of going outside for recess, especially when the weather is appropriate. By having recess outside, children have more freedom and opportunity to improve large gross motor skills. Thus, the basis for the administrative thoughts for outdoor recess.

Administrative participant 5 did not wish to complete the entire interview process because recess is not practiced at this specific school. Students are provided with 80 minutes of physical education two times a week, totaling 160 minutes weekly. The schedule does not warrant any other opportunity for recess other than incentives and rewards that take place periodically throughout the year. The school is in full compliance with the district and state physical activity requirements. Athletic programs are offered at this school as well, which also provides some students with other opportunities for getting physical activity just not in the form of recess.

Summary of Data Analysis

The role of the researcher in qualitative analysis, particularly phenomenological analysis, is to find “meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of a phenomenon for a person

or group of people” (Patton, 2002, p. 482). “Description and quotation provide the foundation of qualitative reporting” (Patton, 2002, p. 503). The use of direct quotations is necessary to show readers the thoughts of the participants represented in the findings (Patton, 2002). Analysis includes “identifying, coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling” the relevant themes that begin to emerge (Patton, 2002, p. 463). Coding was initially begun when each interview was transcribed. The principal researcher performed the transcription of each interview herself. These recordings and transcriptions are stored in a secure location. Any personally identifiable information is omitted from the transcription to ensure confidentiality and anonymity for each participant. If the interview participant made a reference to the respective school or a certain grade level, these remarks were marked with x’s to ensure anonymity.

The coding process began as the researcher transcribed each interview. Initial codes were documented along with researcher notes and reflections. The researcher’s focus was to identify connections across the participant responses to the research questions that were the basis for the research study. Recurring phrases, words, and thoughts were documented on the transcriptions. Significant themes were then documented and associated text to support these themes was then recorded. Similar themes began to arise among the teacher participants as well as the administrative participants. Repeated comparisons were completed and noted, which revealed similarities among the participants regarding the purpose and value of recess. The final coding of the data involved identifying the significant sections of the text that had been categorized by the emergence of the themes.

The final element in the data analysis was the interpretation of the results to identify the significant themes within the study. The relation between the emergent themes and the research

questions was identified and documented. Continuous review of the data took place throughout the analysis. Member checking was utilized in an effort to strengthen the credibility of the study.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the phenomenon of teacher and administrative perceptions of recess in the elementary school setting within a school district in southern middle Tennessee. In chapters 1, 2, and 3 of this study, the researcher presented an introduction to the research topic, the significance of the study, a description of the phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry, the data production and collection methods, a review of the relevant literature, and the study's chosen research methodology. Chapter 4 contains the interview and survey results and analysis along with a discussion of the emergent themes associated with the research questions. The rich, textual data collected for this particular phenomenological study reflect much of the present research on the purpose and value of recess as depicted in the review of literature cited within this study. A summary of the study's findings, conclusions, and the principal researcher's recommendations for future research are included in Chapter 5.

Discussion

The data gathered through in-depth interviews with the teachers and administrative participants allowed the researcher to construct a theoretical framework to fully understand the purpose and value of recess according to how they participants perceived it at the chosen research site. This study supports recess being an essential part of the school curriculum and positively impacting the students and teachers in the elementary school setting. Teachers specifically enjoy the opportunity for a mental break much the same as the children, which is provided through the recess opportunity.

Data collected from the teachers and administrators allowed for an in-depth look at the purpose of recess and the value it had on the daily instructional climate as well as student attitudes. Teachers and administrators shared their ideas of what recess means to them, the purpose of recess, the value of recess, and the absence of recess and how it affects the students as well as themselves. The data collection was guided by four research questions. Data derived from the analysis of the interviews, the interview transcriptions, review of the survey data and comments, and the researcher's notes provided the necessary means from which the researcher was able to capture the participants' perception of the purpose and value of recess. The findings and conclusions from this study may inform future research and are applicable to the curricular and instructional decisions made by educators, administrators, and policymakers. Considerations from this study could help ensure students receive a daily, prescheduled time for recess in the elementary school setting and assist educators and administrators in coming up with other options for discipline measures instead of withholding recess from students. The conclusions for each of the study's research questions are provided in this section.

Study Findings

Four research questions guided this study throughout the qualitative investigation. These questions examined the purpose and value of recess in the elementary school setting as perceived by teachers and administrators in a rural school in southern middle Tennessee.

Research Question 1: What are teacher perceptions regarding the purpose of recess in the elementary school setting?

Each of the 10 participants of this study reported a positive perception of recess. All 10 teachers perceived recess to be an unstructured time where children could run and play and enjoy

the freedom of being able to make their own choices. They felt students enjoyed the ability to choose their own games, make up their own rules, and pick their teammates. Two teachers felt that recess was actually structured due to adult supervision and intervention if necessary; however, they felt that the constraints of the classroom were not present. There was no lesson and therefore no stress of having to stay focused. Teachers also felt that recess allowed children to be themselves and participate in exploration. This exploration, as stated by the teachers, was to allow students to explore themselves, new friends, and even nature. One teacher in particular noted that there was a lot to be discovered in exploring the outdoors and felt that recess needed to be conducted outside as much as possible. This was connected to their classroom studies related to science. This theme connects to Frost and Sutterby (2017) who felt that outdoor play was essential to the development of the whole child, and good schools are made by balancing the structured, academic instruction with the freedom of experiencing nature. Bornstein (2011b) also supports this emergent theme and is associated with Piaget's findings that children discover the world through play.

Teachers reported that the purpose of recess was to give students an opportunity to release energy and have a brain break. This concept is backed by Beni (2016) and "The Crucial Role of Recess in School" (2013). Pellegrini (2008) and Jarrett (2013) support the brain break concept by having reported that all children need time for a mental reset. Two of the ten teachers stated that they too were as ready as the children were for recess time. According to the brain research that has been conducted, our brains can only take in so much information at one time and that information needs to be offered in smaller chunks and not all at one time (Goldstein, 2012; Pellegrini, 2008). Further support for recess providing a brain break comes from Hamilton

(2014) when he stated that play actually changes the neuron connections in the brain and without play, the neurons remain unchanged. By students having opportunity to have a brain break, teachers felt this also gave students time to process their learning and enhance their academics. This is supported by Strauss (2016) and Sohn (2015) who felt that recess provided a break from the rigors and challenges of the classroom and assisted students in comprehending more of the instruction when they were provided with an unstructured break.

Additionally, teachers reported the purpose of recess to be a time for socialization. Through socialization on the playground, students are learning the skills that will prepare them for life, love, and schoolwork (Hamilton, 2014). By having recess, children learn how to communicate, problem solve, settle disputes, take turns, and see other's point of view (Chang & Coward, 2015). This is further supported by Adams (2017) who stated that children learn to communicate rather than fight. Teachers stated that children enjoy having the free time to talk with their friends and interact with them, even if it is for a short period of time. One teacher felt that some of the children come to school without the appropriate socialization skills and that recess is necessary for these children to learn coping skills. Literature supports the idea that play is a crucial component to the development of children's cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development (Hurwitz, 2002/03). The benefits of recess for improving socialization can also be found in Barros et al., (2009) and Biddle and Asare (2010).

Research Question 2: What are teacher perceptions regarding the value of recess in the elementary school setting?

All of the teachers who were interviewed along with those surveyed perceived recess as being an essential part of the school curriculum. The ten teachers completing the interviews all

valued recess to the extent that they reported they would like to see it happen twice a day; once in the morning and once in the afternoon for at least 20 minutes each time. They valued the stress release provided by recess and the opportunity it provided for students and teachers alike to be up and moving, which is reflected in Hinton (2016). One teacher reported how devastating one school year was due to a scheduling problem and they were unable to have recess. This value for recess is backed by Pellegrini (2008), and Jarrett (2013). Teachers reported that even if children did not enjoy the aspect of the free play or physical activity, they were able to be relieved from stress by just having the opportunity to get outside. Pellegrini (2008) stated that truck drivers are not allowed to drive without taking a break and airplane pilots cannot continue to fly a plane without taking a break. Federal and state labor regulations prohibit employees from working more than six hours without having at least a 30-minute lunch break. Over half of all teachers surveyed and interviewed felt that time spent in recess was as valuable as time spent on academic subjects, which is backed by Rochman (2012).

Further findings showed the value of recess as perceived by the teachers to be necessary for the growth and development of all children as well as promoting a positive school environment both socially and academically. Seventy-four percent of the teachers surveyed, and all the teachers interviewed agreed with recess playing a vital role in children's development and overall behavior in the school setting. This is reflected in Barros et al., (2009), Chen (2017), and Jarrett (2002). Teachers reported that students are faced with making their own choices, what games to play, who to invite, and what or whose rules they follow during recess. All skills that play a vital role in the healthy emotional and mental development of a child. This is reflected by Pellegrini (2008), Pellegrini and Bohn-Gettler (2013), and Noam (2017). With improved

socialization skills, teachers felt that the overall school climate was improved. By being able to practice these skills during recess, students are able to build character and learn how to become more productive citizens, which is reflected in Blake and Pope (2008). Teachers also felt that part of the value in recess was that it allowed students to grow as people because there were many character skills being learned and practiced throughout their recess time. Recess allowed students time to interact with their peers and teachers. This idea is supported in Simon and Childers (2006), who stated that teachers can use recess time to get to know their students better and thereby possibly identify students who may be struggling or at risk for future educational or social problems.

Some teachers felt that there was value in using recess as a reinforcement tool. They reported that if students knew they would not get to participate in recess at the end of the day by misbehaving or failing to complete their classwork or homework, they would be better throughout the day. Teachers felt that recess maintained the behavior of students because students look forward to recess and were willing to do what it took to keep from losing it. Sixty-three percent of teachers surveyed reported that the threat of withholding recess from students made a difference in their students' behavior. Fifty-four percent of teachers surveyed reported that their students walk for a brief period of time rather than sit the entire recess period. Other teachers reported that withholding recess is their absolute last resort. Teachers reported that students do not like for recess to be withheld from them because it frustrates them, causes anger and even aggression. Teachers interviewed stated that recess is the highlight of the majority of their students' day and those students take pride in protecting that time. Teachers reported that with the discipline policy in their classrooms, students had multiple opportunities to regain their

full recess throughout the day. Teachers also reported that if students have had behavior issues that resulted in discipline, students will have to walk for a certain amount of time rather than participate in the recess. This way students are still getting some physical activity along with a brain break and are allowed to participate in recess after the specified time for walking has passed. Four of the ten teachers stated that they saw recess time as an opportunity for students to make up missing assignments, incomplete assignments, or to seek extra help from teachers, which in their eyes, was an academic opportunity rather than a discipline measure. Students were able to complete their work or get help to improve their grades rather than have suffer the consequences of failing grades. This concept is documented in the article by Gonchar (2014) who reported that 77% of school principals had reported that the custom of withholding recess was practiced in their schools. However, the concept of withholding recess as a means of discipline is not supported by the research and Jarrett and Waite-Stupiansky (2009) compared this concept to depriving a child of lunch. Hungry students cannot concentrate. Neither can children who are deprived of their mental break.

Research Question 3: What are administrator perceptions regarding the purpose of recess in the elementary setting?

Each of the four administrators had positive perceptions regarding the purpose of recess. There were many similarities in their perceptions of the purpose of recess with the perceptions of the teachers. Administrators too saw the purpose of recess as being an unstructured time for the release of energy, relief of stress, and promotion of better classroom performance. This is reflected in the Goldstein (2012) and Dagli (2012). Administrators, like the teachers, stated that they could see a difference in the students and could tell if students had participated in recess or

not. They also felt that students who had recess were able to return to the classroom and be more focused, and therefore, more successful academically. This is reflected in Adams (2017) and Barros et al., (2009). One administrator agreed with several of the teachers in that recess should be held at least two times a day for approximately 20 minutes, before and after lunch. Another administrator said the practice of recess helped the stress level throughout the building, which helped the teachers as much as the students. By providing the mental break through recess, administrators felt that students came back to the classroom more ready to learn and that students were able to regroup after recess. This is reflected in Barros et al., (2009), Beni (2016), and Dagli (2012).

Additional findings regarding the purpose of recess as perceived by the team of administrators again is like the perceptions of teachers. Administrators too saw the purpose of recess to enhance play among students. One administrator reported that students do not go home with each other and socialize like they did when that person was in school, and recess provides students with an opportunity to play outside rather than with some kind of electronic device. This administrator felt that recess was the only time many of the students even went outside. This thought process is reflected in Anderson-Butcher et al., (2003) and Frost and Sutterby (2017). Administrators felt that there was purpose in being outside for recess because it provided children with a time to explore nature, make new friends, make up games, and interact in ways they would not normally do so if they were not provided with this unstructured free time.

Recess as a time for socialization was also a finding among the administrators. This again is like the findings from the teachers. Administrators felt that students enjoyed being around their peers and the older students were, the more they enjoyed the social aspect of recess. One

administrator stated that recess provided students with time to learn to interact with each other. This is a time when students learn to understand that other people have a point of view and in order to continue playing and being a part of a group on the playground, students must learn how to take turns and how to compromise. One administrator alluded to the fact that children do not know how to play outside or even how to play together, so the opportunity afforded by recess and through adult supervision added value to their socialization. This is reflected in Myers (2012). An additional comment by one of the administrators stating that not only was recess a time for children to interact with their peers, but also a time to interact with their teachers. This is a good time for teachers to really get to know their students, and teachers can gain valuable information to guide their instruction or be able to identify the possibility of behavior problems, which is reflected in Day (2012) and Jarrett and Waite-Stupiansky (2009).

Research Question 4: What are administrator perceptions regarding the value of recess in the elementary setting?

Administrators saw the value of recess in much the same lens as the teachers. The administrators who are responsible for the younger elementary grades felt that the value of recess was in the opportunity children had to strengthen their social emotional skills. One administrator felt that it was important for children to play and interact with each other apart from the academic setting. Another administrator stated that students having the opportunity to strengthen their social emotional skills during recess was the primary reason they did not make it a practice to withhold recess due to punitive measures. One administrator called recess the “students’ out” and by this meant that recess is an invaluable part of the school day. Another administrator summed up the value in recess by it providing the physical activity and the social activity, and

there was still a lot of learning to be done while students were playing. This was a time for learning to follow rules and getting along with others. The value of recess was further shown by all four of the administrative participants stating that recess was built into their master schedule. While there are some non-negotiables in the school schedule, they all made sure recess had an allotted time period for the children. In most schools, students get at least 20 minutes per day, and all administrators would like to see more, but with the academic and accountability constraints, this was almost impossible. The idea of promoting more recess time is reflected in Dagli (2012) and Rochman (2012). Two of the four administrators stated that they do not promote the withholding of recess for punitive measures and encourage teachers to have some other form of discipline measure. All four participants also stated that if recess is held, it is held for only a short amount of time and that students are still physically active by walking. These thoughts would be supported by Ramstetter and Murray (2017) and Jarrett and Waite-Stupiansky (2009). To further show the value of recess, all four administrators reported that their teachers have indoor recess if weather is not permissible for them to go outside. One administrator even commented on the desire to have better facilities so that students could have a better indoor recess opportunity. All four reported that they did not have to enforce recess because their teachers looked forward to recess much like the children and respected that time well.

Recommendations for Future Practice

Data collected from the researcher's notes, the interviews, the survey, and the review of the literature show that recess plays an important role in the elementary school setting and has the potential to improve the academic setting for teachers and students. The following recommendations are made for future practice for educational agencies and policymakers:

- Recess is an essential break in the school day, advancing children's social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development and should not be withheld for academic or discipline measures.
- Academic performance depends on and improves with regular breaks from cognitive tasks. The required integration of recess should be incorporated into the students' daily schedule to provide ample time for mental decompression.
- Recess policies at individual schools need to be evaluated for effectiveness and assurance of following best practices to enhance all students' development and well-being.
- Professional development opportunities that include discipline options and incorporate best practices to manage recess more effectively need to be established for teachers and staff.
- Physical education is an academic discipline and should not be used as a substitute for recess. Recess needs a designated time and place in the school schedule separate from physical education classes.
- In-class recess can be implemented to provide children with ample opportunity to have free time and make choices to further advance their social development.

Recommendations for Future Research

The findings of this study lead the researcher to propose the need for further research related to the timing and duration of recess within the elementary school schedule. This study was limited to only one school district. To generalize these findings, additional research is needed in other school districts to see if the same results would be realized. If similar results are discovered, it would further support the accuracy of this study. Additional research should be

done in relation to the increased academic rigor and reduction of recess in comparison to the number of children identified with social emotional disorders, such as: anxiety, depression, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), attention deficit disorder (ADD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD) to name a few of the current diagnoses with which the researcher is familiar. The Centers of Disease Control report an increase in these childhood disorders since the inception of NCLB and the vast reduction or elimination of recess (“Impact of Recess,” 2015). This deserves further attention and study for educators as well as psychologists. As noted by the researcher, the participants of this study unanimously agreed on the importance of recess on the social emotional development and overall well-being of children. Therefore, further research regarding childhood disorders could lead to policy decisions that could result in increased learning and academic achievement for all children. Another aspect for future research would be to evaluate students who are denied recess punitively to see if there is a correlation with socio-economic status or subgroup oriented. This would involve a study of which students are being denied and for what reason along with demographic information. In addition, future research could also be done to evaluate punitive recess withholding in correlation to teacher level of effectiveness. It would interesting to see if level 1 and 2 teachers withheld recess more often than level 4 or 5 teachers or a reverse order of the withholding.

While there is a vast amount of literature emphasizing the importance of daily recess, further research on the impact of increasing the time allowed for recess in relation to attendance and discipline statistics is recommended. Research in this area could help provide disciplinary alternatives rather than punitively withholding recess and possibly promote an increase in

attendance and decrease in discipline referrals. Again, further research in this area could assist policymakers with their decisions.

Concluding Summary

The aim of this research study was to study the purpose and value of recess in the elementary school setting as perceived by teachers and administrators within a school district in southern middle Tennessee. The investigator was able to examine the participants' experience of the phenomenon through qualitative research methodology. The interviews from the voluntary participants provided the researcher with good descriptions of their perceptions of recess in the elementary school setting. Chapter 1 defined the rationale for the research with an introduction to the study, the statement of the problem, the research questions, definitions of pertinent terms, and delimitations and limitations of the study. An in-depth literature review was presented in Chapter 2 that included the dominant themes that correlated with the findings of the participants' perceptions of the purpose and value of recess. The research methodology was presented in Chapter 3, which explained the role of the researcher, a description of the participants, population, setting, sampling strategy, the sample, data collection procedures, data analysis methods, credibility and trustworthiness, and ethical considerations all related to the study. Chapter 4 provided the findings and interpretation of the qualitative data retrieved from the study. Participant profiles were also included in this chapter along with the research findings and emergent themes discovered in the transcription of the in-depth interviews and review of the on-line survey. A summarization of the research findings and concluding comments were presented in Chapter 5 along with recommendations for future practice and research.

The findings presented in this study are not to be generalized as the perceptions of all teachers and administrators; however, it is obvious from the teachers and administrators who were interviewed and completed the survey that the inclusion of recess in the school schedule in an elementary school setting is beneficial and essential to the growth and development of the whole child. Participants felt recess is necessary and should be part of the school curriculum.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

Research Questions

5. What are teacher perceptions regarding the purpose of recess in the elementary school setting?
6. What are teacher perceptions regarding the value of recess in the elementary school setting?
7. What are administrator perceptions regarding the purpose of recess in the elementary school setting?
8. What are administrator perceptions regarding the value of recess in the elementary school setting?

Face to Face Interview Questions

1. What does recess mean to you?
2. What value does recess have for you as an educator? Administrator?
3. What is the current recess policy in your school?
4. What measures are put into place to ensure this is followed?
5. What is the difference in recess practice and recess policy in your school?
6. How is recess utilized in your classroom? School?
7. How do physical education classes differ from recess?
8. Describe how your students respond to recess?
9. Describe your students' response or reaction to recess being withheld?

10. When used punitively, what is the usual duration for students to be denied recess?
11. How does withholding recess punitively alter or change the behavior for those children from whom it is withheld?
12. Do you see that the same children consistently lose recess due to punitive measures?
13. Describe other options that you feel you have as an educator/administrator to enforce discipline instead of withholding recess.
14. Discuss the types of behaviors that generally warrant the denial of recess.
15. How often should recess breaks occur?
16. What is the optimal duration for a recess break?
17. At what time during the school day would recess breaks be most beneficial?
18. What is the difference in attention and behavior in children who have recess and those who do not have recess?
19. What is your overall opinion of recess?
20. Are there any other comments or concerns that I have forgotten or missed that you would like to add regarding recess

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