



# INCLUSIVE BREAK

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# Investigation: The school break as a learning space



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## Introduction

Regular breaks throughout the school day—from short brain breaks in the classroom to the longer break of recess—are not simply downtime for students. Such breaks increase their productivity and provide them with opportunities to develop creativity and social skills.

Recent research shows that our brains aren't idle when we take breaks—they're hard at work processing memories and helping us make sense of what we experience. In a groundbreaking 2012 study, Mary Helen Immordino-Yang and her colleagues at USC and MIT used an fMRI scanner to examine neural activity during the brain's "default mode"—a state of rest that's usually associated with taking a break or letting our minds wander. In this state, the brain is still highly active, with a different set of regions lighting up than when we're focused on the outside world.

Further experiments showed that this default mode is crucial for consolidating memories, reflecting on past experiences, and planning for the future—in other words, it helps shape how we make sense of our lives. Breaks keep our brains healthy and play a key role in cognitive abilities such as reading comprehension and divergent thinking. "Rest is indeed not idleness, nor is it a wasted opportunity for productivity," Immordino-Yang and her colleagues write. So breaks are an essential part of learning. Longer breaks—such as recess or playtime—provide opportunities for children to learn important life skills. Research shows that when children play together, they learn how to take turns, resolve conflicts, and solve problems. They also learn how to manage their own emotions and behavior—fundamental skills for life. So dropping recess is a mistake, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics: Recess is a "crucial and necessary component of a child's development," and sacrificing it for more academics is counterproductive.

Unstructured playtime provides an opportunity for imaginary and creative play and allows children to practice divergent thinking. They benefit from the freedom to explore new ideas without fear of failure or the stress of grades, and regular exposure to new experiences can also increase their cognitive flexibility, preparing them for academics challenges.

Recess is many children's favorite part of school, which means that improving inclusion for all students is one of the best things to do. Many children can grow anxious and nervous when recess rolls around if they feel like they can't connect and enjoy the fun space as much as others. It's our job as adults to help children feel valued in various aspects of life, which is why we delve into how to increase inclusion at recess.

Inclusive games involve students with unique combinations of strengths, challenges, and social histories. These activities allow diverse student populations to re-engage and experience success without relying on skills which may be underdeveloped. The same student who couldn't perform in traditional organized sports can experience true learning and skill development.

All children benefit from being outside, interacting with their environment, learning from nature and developing through play. These experiences can be especially powerful for children with disabilities and inclusive play makes these opportunities available to all children, regardless of ability and background. Inclusive play doesn't mean that every element is accessible to everyone, but it does mean that the combination of experiences adds to something equally great for each child. Some children can't climb to the top of a rope, some don't want to, others really need to. The same is true with quieter, more creative activities. Diverse and flexible opportunities are needed.

It doesn't need to be complicated, but it does require thought. It means thinking about what different children can access - what can a child engage with if they use a wheelchair, or if they have autism or get distracted easily? Can disabled and non-disabled friends and siblings play together?

Play is by nature diversity - how does this get missed so often in play design? Play can be physical, noisy and challenging, but equally it can be quiet, creative and reflective. Some children love the social aspects, others need more contemplative space.

Some children want to charge about and others are happier quietly playing in a sand pit. Some will be more prone to injury from others knocking into them.

Some children use wheelchairs, either all or part of the time, and some use walking aids. Children with certain health conditions have reduced stamina or may need to avoid boisterous play.

If we want to have the kids play a game for recess, then we need to ensure those games can include everyone. Nothing should be too complex, or too competitive, as that will leave students feeling unable to participate, and they may even shut down. We have to pick ones the children know, and make sure everyone can join in. Many children struggle with entry behaviors, so they miss out on fun play. Make it obvious where lines start and have a parent or teacher around the game to make sure everyone plays fairly.

Creating a well-designed recess can engage students, improve school climate, build valuable social and emotional skills, reduce behavioral incidents, and promote healthy lifestyles.

## Chapter 1

# What happens to students with fewer opportunities during the school break?

## Socio-psychological implications

The school break represents a not structured space not directed by teachers and educators, in which the group dynamics emerge in a spontaneous way. Since birth, we have been members of groups like the family one, the scholastic one, the pair one and so on. In fact, we can think about school as a social system with its own organization inside, in which we have classrooms with roles, specific identities and their own **psycho-social dynamics** affecting the members and the whole institution. Not surprisingly, the school is the second agency of socialization of the human being, right after the family group.

Classmates and teachers are the closest to students, but in a few cases and during the recess it's possible to socialize with other groups made up of friends or other peers to be comfortable with. There are various scenarios, but in case of lack of integration, the situation can go beyond the regulatory step and be **dysfunctional**. It means that if a student is not well included in some group, he can experience frustration, anxiety, discomfort, social isolation and psychological implications. Actually, everyone belongs to some bigger group based on **classification**. For example, a student with fewer opportunities can be labeled and considered part of some stereotyped and generalized group, like the disadvantaged one or the disabled one, taking on himself all the images related. <sup>1</sup>This phenomenon is called labeling, which relates to the **Labeling theory** developed for the first time by the sociologist Émile Durkheim and based on the roles everyone has in the society, as well as on the latter's need to control the behavior.

The Labeling theory has been introduced in sociology of deviance, but it represents one of the intrinsic **mechanisms** of the society responsible for the creation of **stigma** and **prejudice**, as academics studied in cases of discriminated groups.

We can define the theory as:

*“An approach in the sociology of deviance that focuses on the ways in which the agents of social control attach stigmatizing stereotypes to particular groups, and the ways in which the stigmatized change their behavior once labelled.”* (Nickerson, 2021).

This postulate is connected to another one through which we can see how the classification of the other can affect our behaviors and beliefs: the **Self-fulfilling prophecy** theory developed by the sociologist Merton in 1948. He assumed that a role or a label is made up of expectations that, through social interactions, affect and reinforce so much the person that conceptions are internalized and become true, even if they weren't before. The beliefs can be put in practice in social actions and reactions, influencing the addressed person. The latter will act in the expected way, influencing the beliefs' owner and confirming more and more the expectations-role relationship.

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<sup>1</sup> Nickerson, C. (2021, Oct 09). Labeling theory. *Simply Psychology*. [www.simplypsychology.org/labeling-theory.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/labeling-theory.html)

<sup>2</sup> “The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a false definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true.” (Merton, 1948, p.195).

<sup>3</sup>Let's see an experiment carried out in the light of the Self-fulfilling prophecy theory in 1968, right in a school setting, specifically in an elementary school. Rosenthal and Jacobsen showed how the teachers' expectations can affect the students' learning in a positive or in a negative way. On occasion of an IQ test, the researchers told teachers which students were going to don't exceed the standard and which ones had a good potential. The members of these groups have been chosen randomly without any relation to the test, but after eight months, the academics found out that the group composed by students with the "good potential" had higher IQ scores than the students representing the "standard" scores. The phenomenon took the name of **Pygmalion effect**. Through this experiment, it has been proven how students can incorporate the expectations of educational roles in the self-concept and act accordingly.

It's clear how these dynamics affect the psychological and social areas of people/students, as it's also possible to observe during the school break. In fact, the **stigma** can connect those who bear the burden, they can feel comfortable with who is similar and is handling the same issues. In the school there are specific academic moments in which it's expected the aggregation of students with similar difficulties that stay apart from the rest of the classrooms, for example in case of activities carried out with only one disabled student (or more than one). This way, students spend a lot of time together and the members of the **group** become the persons to be the most comfortable with. The result is that they will especially do it in the time span in which they're not often supervised by educational staff (like in the recess), so they will spend time with who represents the image of friend. Being stigmatized, they can experience all the consequences involved in that, like disrespect or bullysm episodes. They can also live with **fake tolerance** or half inclusion. For example, they can be emphasized and have special attention, but not be fully included by schoolmates. How many times have you seen a student carry out an activity with a classmate with a disability, but he didn't want to spend time with him in leisure moments? Or again, how many students are isolated, even if they haven't fewer opportunities, but they participate in activities with classmates? There are various **psychological implications** which reflect on their identity, on their skills development and on their social circles. Teachers and educators do the best to support every student, with fewer opportunities or not. In various contexts, scenarios can be better than others, but the school break can always be a learning space in which promote values and a real inclusion, as well as obviate the illustrated dynamics.

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<sup>2</sup> Merton, Robert K. (1948) “The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy.” *The Antioch Review*, 8(2), 193–210

<sup>3</sup>Schaedig, D. (2020, Aug 24). Self-fulfilling prophecy and the pygmalion effect. *Simply Psychology*. [www.simplypsychology.org/self-fulfilling-prophecy.html](http://www.simplypsychology.org/self-fulfilling-prophecy.html)

## Chapter 2

### Physical benefits of the school break

#### Physical Benefits

The school break is a space that should be considered part of the curriculum, as it is a learning space where the interaction of all pupils in the school should be encouraged. School break allows for the pupils' all round physical and social development, where they should feel safe, respected and not judged, as on many occasions this feeling does not correspond to reality.

It must be taken into account that not all children interact in the same way. Each child has different needs that vary according to many factors, from whether or not they have a disability to the type of education they have received. Therefore, children in the playground are grouped into different groups differentiated by different reasons similar cultures, same gender, disability or similar tastes.

For this reason, recess should be a safe space where pressure can be released, where stress can be reduced, where self-esteem can be increased, and where integration and interaction between children can be encouraged. We must bear in mind that playtime should be a space where children should feel safe and teachers should ensure that no play can cause physical or mental harm so that not only mental but also experimental development is positive for the child. So, the break school is not only beneficial for normal children, but also for children with special needs, who can improve their physical abilities, help to improve coordination, orientation, balance, prevent illness, improve blood circulation and develop muscles.

Physical activity also helps to build confidence and learn to be able to achieve personal goals as social and occupational integration.

Although it is true that one of the biggest problems, and that in most cases it gets worse at recess, is bullying towards children, especially children with disabilities, because they are often the target of ridicule and sometimes there is abuse among peers.

One of the most important elements that we often do not take into account is the school playground, which is an educational space where, through games, educational processes such as increasing self-esteem, reducing stress or improving cognitive functions are favored.

The construction of play spaces encourages play and movement of children, however, not only favors play, but also favors inclusion either by eliminating barriers, introducing appropriate swings or covering the play needs of students.

The performance of different physical activities favors the development of a healthy body, which, taking into account physiological benefits, favors the prevention of cardiovascular diseases, although cardiovascular effort at recess does not meet the recommended levels to a great extent, it could be sufficient.

One of the biggest problems in children is sedentary lifestyles, as many of them do not engage in any physical activity after school, which can be a risk factor for obesity. So recess contributes to daily exercise, improves the immune system and promotes a healthy lifestyle. Controlled physical activity helps to prevent injuries, improves coordination, improves cognitive functions, and encourages

contact with nature, which helps children to experience the world and encourages their curiosity and knowledge of the world around them.

The performance of different physical activities favors the development of a healthy body, which, taking into account physiological benefits, favors the prevention of cardiovascular diseases, although cardiovascular effort at recess does not meet the recommended levels to a great extent, it could be sufficient.

Another factor to take into account is that recreation promotes concentration, as the release of endorphins helps to improve self-esteem. And it improves concentration, reduces bad thoughts and negative behaviors, as a quality break helps school performance.

At recess there is little variety of games, there is territorial feudalism, which translates into the boys on the football pitch and the girls sitting on the benches. This can lead to little physical and playful activity. Therefore, this project is based on dynamic work, in which activities are generated that encourage inclusive, non-sectarian activities in which everyone can participate, thus promoting social skills. This also relates to children learning to play safe games, as well as the ability to learn to interact with their peers in a healthy way and to cooperate with each other.

Playtime is a therapeutic time where children can develop responsibility, skills, decision-making, problem-solving and be able to interact with their peers. This will favor the optimal development of the pupil by promoting self-awareness, self-acceptance, imagination and creativity, and will even improve the pupil's vocabulary.



## Chapter 3

### Psychological benefits of the school break

In this chapter we focus on the psychological benefits of different types of breaks.

It is now widely accepted that play time promotes development and learning in younger and older children. It should be considered a fundamental characteristic of the school day because it offers children the opportunity to experience and practice emotions, promoting resilience and social relationships. Pupils who struggle in school spend their breaks catching up on homework in class and therefore have fewer opportunities to benefit from the learning and development that occurs during breaks. The reduction and suspension of breaks not only violates the child's right to play, but also affects the child's learning and development. Those who have behavioral problems waste valuable time releasing energy by taking breaks as punishment. Reducing breaks increases class time and takes away valuable recreational and leisure activities that in themselves provide important learning opportunities.<sup>4</sup>

There has been extensive research on break and what impact it would have on kids and teenagers. It has shown that breaks in schools can be used functionally and sometimes improperly. A break is very much essential during continuous studies taking place. Break time helps students in socializing and to get them involved in many activities and games and thus keeps them motivated and energized with an open mind for the next session of classes. Break time with the right kind of system implemented, could be made into moments of beauty that could be treasured in every child as they grow.<sup>5</sup>

In recent decades there have been substantial changes in schools and education in England with campaigns focusing on improving school food and increasing physical activity levels among children and so have concerns about the mental health of children and young people. The BaSiS study (Breaktime and Social life in Schools) collected information on the main characteristics of break and lunch times, on the function of times and on pupils' behavior during breaks. It also carried out a survey on the pupils' experience of social life in and out of school and on the approach to lunch break time and the school education offer. The result of the study represents that every pupil in the school should have the opportunity for breaks during the school day. These times are important as a pleasant short break from learning intensities. But they also provide crucial opportunities for children and adolescents alike to engage with colleagues and friends in fun activities of their choice in a safe and supportive setting. It is important to recognize the valuable contributions that breaks make to the social, emotional, mental and physical development of children and young people. Break times are a necessity in schools and in order to make it more meaningful and in the positive manner should be considered a non-negotiable part of the school day.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>*School break and lunch times and young people's social lives: A follow-up national study Executive -Summary Ed Baines and Peter Blatchford- Department of Psychology and Human Development UCL Institute of Education- May 2019*

*Research funded by the Nuffield Foundation.*

<sup>5</sup>*The importance of school break times 9 March 2020 Article Education systems Learning & Education Play Unstructured play helps students to learn- Author Annie Brookman-Byrne.*

<sup>6</sup>*School break and lunch times and young people's social lives: A follow-up national study Executive -Summary Ed Baines and Peter Blatchford- Department of Psychology and Human Development UCL Institute of Education- May 2019*  
*Research funded by the Nuffield Foundation. The BaSiS Breaktime and Social Life in Schools) study is directed by Ed Baines and Peter Blatchford at the UCL Institute of Education.*

Recent studies have shown that regular breaks during school activities have beneficial effects from a psychological point of view, as they increase student productivity and help them develop social skills and creativity. Regular breaks also help students to be less distracted by maintaining focus and reducing stress. They are an important part of learning. The benefits are not only related to the psychological well-being of students but can be an effective way to reduce disruptive behavior. These pauses, however, should not be understood as moments of inactivity: our brain in fact continues to work by processing memories.<sup>7</sup>

Interruptions keep our brains healthy and they are very importance in the development of cognitive skills, such as understanding a text or the ability to make sense or generate new ideas.<sup>8</sup>

It has been shown that practicing physical exercise, such as yoga, helps to create an atmosphere of confidence, enthusiasm and non-competitiveness, where everyone can be successful.

Several studies have shown that breaks during the school day have positive repercussions in the teaching-learning process, as they develop psychophysical well-being.

Movement is important, as it stimulates the production of endorphins and serotonin, neurotransmitters which, if released in the right quantities, produce states of euphoria, tranquility and well-being.

Physical activity, play, movement in general stimulate neurogenesis, synaptogenesis and angiogenesis. Movement contributes to increasing attention, memory, concentration, building a solid self-esteem, these cognitive factors contribute to improving learning and academic performance.

The World Health Organization points out: *“Regular physical activity has been shown to help prevent and manage non-communicable diseases such as heart disease, stroke, diabetes and various types of cancer. It also helps prevent hypertension, maintain a healthy body weight and can improve mental health, quality of life and well-being”* (WHO, 2010).<sup>9</sup>

The research consulted supports the usefulness of movement as an educational catalyst, favoring cognitive development and the construction of a positive vision of oneself, indispensable factors that support learning.

A research study was conducted in Texas through the Liink Program<sup>10</sup> “Let’s inspire innovation ‘N Kids” with the aim of researching the differences in emotional states, in free play and physical activities, comparing two private elementary schools, in which the school day was structured differently. The results of this program highlight, through *Positive Actions*, the connection between free play and the growth of positive emotional states. The American Academy of Pediatrics calls playtime “*a crucial and necessary component of a child’s development.*” Debbie Rhea, a professor

<sup>7</sup>*Rest Is Not Idleness: Implications of the Brain’s Default Mode for Human Development and Education*, Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, Joanna A. Christodoulou, Vanessa Singhfirst, 2012 in PubMed:  
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691612447308>.

<sup>8</sup> Youki Terada, *Research-Tested Benefits of Breaks Students are easily distracted, but regular, short breaks can help them focus, increase their productivity, and reduce their stress* in <https://www.edutopia.org/article/research-tested-benefits-breaks>.

<sup>9</sup> World Health Organization. (2010). *Global recommendations on physical activity for health*. WHO, Geneva - 2008 Physical Activity. Guidelines for Americans.

<sup>10</sup>“The Liink Project: Comparisons of Recess, Physical Activity, and Positive Emotional States in Grades K-2 Children” (article of International Journal of Childhood Health and Nutrition).

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/2331186X.2016.1233843>;

<https://liinkproject.tcu.edu/publications>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTBgX06Th1g>

of kinesiology at Texas Christian University described the functionality of recreation: “*Recess restarts the system so that when they come back, they are ready to learn, they are focused*”. According to a study conducted in Greece, by Pateraki, L., & Houndoumadi, A. (2001) “*Bullying among primary school children in Athens, Greece*” experiential theatrical activities enhance pupils' social and emotional skills, aimed at combating bullying in primary schools. Pupils first explore themselves and the others, developing cognitive, psycho-emotional and social factors that favor acceptance, awareness, self-esteem, cooperation, empathy, sociability, feelings capable of creating a positive classroom climate suitable for promoting learning and combating bullying.

The third goal of Agenda 2030 “*Health and wellbeing*” is one of the goals that contributes to the implementation of a resilient society capable of supporting individual and social wellbeing.<sup>11</sup>

Daniela Lucangeli, Full Professor of Developmental Psychology at the University of Padova, starting from positive emotions that are the main basis for conscious learning, implements teaching in order to structure intelligences. The breaks are promoters of social and emotional learning and enhance its benefits, developing empathy, compassion, understanding, tolerance, cooperation and collaboration, indispensable factors for being well together. The research consulted supports the usefulness of movement as an educational catalyst, favoring cognitive development and the construction of a positive vision of oneself, indispensable factors that support learning.

A pilot study<sup>12</sup> of the University of Potsdam 21 documented already in the nineties the positive influence of motor exercises for the development of cerebral hemispheres that improve children's calculation, reading and writing skills. Taking up this result, the moving school 21 concept (Erasmus research group 2002-2005) was developed and since 2010 teaching and learning methods that include movement have been tested in several Italian and Berlin schools.<sup>13</sup> The results of this action-research have shown that interspersing the school routine with moments of movement stimulates the attention of children during lessons, improves the ability to memorize and concentrate, increases pleasure and success in learning, promotes relaxation, acts positively on the motivation of students and contributes to creating a school atmosphere based on the psycho-physical well-being of students and teachers.

This greatly reduces the disturbing factors during a lesson (e.g. talking between classmates, frequent distraction, background noises) that create agitation, produce a feeling of loss or lack of time and in some cases result in episodes of aggression.

All this happens because - as several psychological studies have shown - the human being is a set of body, mind and emotions, closely interrelated with each other and school performance is a natural consequence of the correct functioning of each of these parts: each child goes to school not only with the backpack but also with his own experience, your emotions, your senses and your body.

The results of the "Snail Project - training needs health" carried out in Hesse confirmed the setting of the Moving School 21 program, showing that the improvement of physical balance has a positive influence on the scholastic performance of German and mathematics subjects. This shows that the development of reading, writing and numeracy skills also depends on the state of health and general well-being of children.

<sup>11</sup> *Agenda 2030 (Sustainable Development Goals – SDG)*, ONU 2015.

<sup>12</sup> R. Mulato e Stephan Riegger, *MAESTRA FACCIAMO UNA PAUSA? Migliorare il clima in classe e favorire l'apprendimento dei bambini*. Ed. La Meridiana-Partenze.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25 e ss.

By introducing a rhythmic scan of the school day and week, the student becomes the protagonist of the learning process, actively participates in the control and management of school time, developing a greater capacity for self-regulation, responsibility and autonomy and learns to interact positively with others.

In this way the perception of school time changes - no longer a boring moment to avoid but a pleasant moment to share with one's peers - and at the same time the perception of oneself changes because this type of activity allows everyone to recognize and experience their own resources, and to develop the sense of self-efficacy that is the basis of a harmonious development of the human being. In this way, a new conception of learning is emerging, which takes place not only through the mind but also through the body, sensations and emotions.

In this way, participation becomes inclusive, because the different resources of each one are recognized and valued and a resilient environment is built capable of facing difficulties and improving the relationship between students and teachers: the movement, in fact, understood as an integral and strategic part of the teaching / learning method, leads to a different organization of teaching and allows to introduce differentiated activities with heterogeneous tasks and materials, according to the methodology of the active classroom that involves in a participatory way the different actors of the school (teachers, educators, parents and school managers) providing everyone with a working condition of greater psycho-physical well-being.

Studies worldwide examine how personal encounters with nature and with natural organisms during Education and School have psychological effects. Interactions with nature and activities in the garden could be combined with emotional skills also in Inclusive break, that could be a specific time of development of pupils' attitudes and self-perceptions. Emotions are an important part of well-being and the pupils' fulfillment of needs leads to an increased sense of well-being.

A recent Study<sup>14</sup> starts from the Question "What emotions were perceived by the pupils during lessons in the classroom and in the school garden?"

Five classes of the sixth grade were taught alternately, weekly, during a period of 10 weeks, in the school garden and in the classroom under the same conditions. A self-report "emotion diary" was given to pupils after each lesson in the classroom and in the school garden. It is a sort of checklist, a paper-and-pencil test, by which pupils' emotions were investigated weekly during the lessons.

The lessons in the school garden were taught under the conditions of basic needs - competence, autonomy, and relatedness - of the Self Determination Theory (SDT).<sup>15</sup> The basic psychological needs are the following: competence - to experience oneself as a subject able to act, to fulfil tasks on one's own; autonomy - to experience the achievement of goals by one's own, self-determined action; and relatedness - feeling connected and accepted by a group.<sup>16</sup>

The results show that emotions in the school garden are declared 43% more frequently than in the classroom. Moreover, positive emotions in the school garden are intensively perceived - in contrast

<sup>14</sup> Pollin, S., Retzlaff-Fürst, C., *The School Garden: A Social and Emotional Place*, Front. Psychol., Sec. Environmental Psychology, (2021) (<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.567720>).

<sup>15</sup> Deci, E. L., and Ryan, R. M. (eds.). *Handbook of Self-Determination Research* (Softcover Edn). Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press (2004).

<sup>16</sup> Pollin, S., Retzlaff-Fürst, C., *The School Garden: A Social and Emotional Place*, Front. Psychol., Sec. Environmental Psychology, (2021) (<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.567720>) p. 4.

to the negative emotions - and emotions like happiness, pride, and surprise/wonder were perceived more frequently than in the classroom. The intensity of emotions in the classroom is generally low.

The focus, in learning in School Gardens but also in possible Inclusive breaks based on activities with living beings, is on motivation and well-being. Specifically, responsibility for their own plant bed can promote in pupils' motivation and a caring attitude.

As another recent Study<sup>17</sup> shows, Use of pet bottles in the construction of vertical vegetable gardens offers the opportunity of a pedagogical environmental activity in School Garden but also in Schools without Garden and open spaces.

In conclusion, from what has been explained above, the positive psychological effects derive from the breaks organized also in different types of activities. Whether it concerns body movement, role-playing games or contact with nature, the break has positive effects on pupils.

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<sup>17</sup> Dullius, A.I., Dullius, R. L., Anuj Pellegrini, A. et al. *Reuse Technology: Use of pet bottles in the construction of vertical vegetable gardens in early childhood education schools*, International Symposium on technological innovation (ISTI), Aracaju, Sergipe, Brazil (2019).

## Chapter 4

### Social benefits of the school break

Often, the school break is just a period of time when classes are interrupted: there is a break for students and teachers. The routine of a normal school day and the heavy workload of teachers means that the behaviour of students is sometimes not observed. Moreover, this general relaxation leads to conflicts, negative attitudes (sexist, superiority, violence, abuse...), boredom, uncivic behaviour... For all these reasons, it is necessary to reflect on the pedagogical value of school breaks and to achieve the social benefits it brings.

#### What is the school breaks? Some definitions

Here are some definitions of school breaks from recognized authors:

Pellegrini and Smith (1993) define school recess as *a break time for students, typically outside the building. Compared to the rest of the school day, the break is a time when they have more freedom to choose what to do and with whom.*

Jarret and Maxwell (2002) argue that school break *is not only a time in the school day that students look forward to, but a time of great importance, as it provides children with cognitive, socio emotional and physical benefits.*

Although many countries' education laws give little importance to school breaks, they are based on the Convention on the Rights of the Child (2005). The laws are based on two articles that refer to play, breaks and holistic development, in order to provide spaces for recess during the school day.

#### What do we perceive in a school break today?

Although each school is unique, with very different characteristics, recent studies state that there are worrying aspects that are being reproduced in many school breaks at all educational stages: few games, students in corners with their groups of friends, occupation of spaces by some groups, little physical activity, little interaction... This is the situation that needs to change and take into account the positive aspects that can be found in breaks.

More experts say that school breaks should be used as the most desired space and time for students in their school day, in order to continue with the educational line. Moreover, it should not be a space in which the student understands it as "let's see what I can do" but as an opportunity to "do something new" that breaks with theory and with the pressure to obtain numerical grades for everything (qualifications).

Not everything is negative. There are new methodologies that advocate changing the trend of passivity and try to highlight the educational and social benefits of school breaks.

For example, the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (2006) says: *the school breaks should not be seen as a reward, but as a necessary educational support; for this reason, recess should not be denied as a punishment or as a time for homework.*

With these arguments, we can focus on our topic: the social benefits of the school breaks. To do so, we go down to another level within educational values: the social benefits.

## What are the social benefits of the school breaks?

It is important to remember the National Association for Sport and Physical Education (2006) to take into account several premises about school breaks: a space for unstructured play, which has the presence of professionals (teachers, monitors...) and where it is not a Physical Education class.

At this point, many experts allude to the many benefits of school breaks for students. There are many categories: cognitive, behavioral, rest and relaxation, academic performance, etc., all of them related to social ones. Here are some of them:

- To improve in conflict resolution skills.
- To develop communication skills, mainly with peers.
- To encourages cooperation through play.
- To help to develop negotiation skills in dealing with peers.
- To respect for differences, where, under the premise of freedom, everyone chooses what to play, what to spend their playtime on, what space to occupy.
- It is a potentially integrating space, where cultural, religious, ethnic... differences disappear, etc.

These social benefits contribute to the holistic development of pupils. However, educational teams must provide resources, supervise and participate in their proper development and functioning.

The social benefits of school breaks for students are many. Taking into account what a school break is and how it is structured, schools and their professionals have to provide spaces and time, giving great value to the school break. A planning of the spaces, rules, a previous preparation so that all the students make the most of the breaks.

Each student will get a certain amount of benefit. However, we must not forget the right to playtime, as it is part of their education, part of their integral development. Moreover, it can be complemented by moments of lively reflection in the classroom; in other words, it should not be seen as something isolated, but as part of the educational stage in order to obtain greater social benefits.

## Chapter 5

### The role of adults

The role of adults in children's education and perspective regarding reality is very important and in terms of education, has a great impact on the way children are perceiving educational system, with all its components.

The most important adults in a children's life are:

- Parents
- Teachers

Breaktime is “the forgotten” part of the educational system (at least the formal one) and most of the times, both teachers and parents are focused more on the achievements of the children during the classes and less on the way the children are spending their breaks, not only in school, but also the breaks during their homework.

The perspective of a child regarding breaks is influenced by adults (as all aspects in life - and in mind grid, in general) and if they don't receive a healthy attitude regarding it, they will ignore the need of having breaks and the risk is to enter (maybe not in the school time, but also later) in burnout or exhausting work.

How can adults transmit a healthy attitude regarding breaks?

#### 1. Parents

Even if we are talking about breaks at school, the perspective of the parents is very important, because is setting the perspective of the child regarding the way he/she could or should spend the breaks. Most of the educational systems don't have a specific setting of the breaks and then, the children tend to behave as they see their parents behave in their own breaks or free time. That's why, there are big differences in kids' attitude, some of them being very social and involving all the time in the discussions or games with other kids and some of them are isolated, staying most of the time alone and feeling excluded. The negative effect that the isolation in breaks can have is the exclusion feeling, the lack of social skills, dysfunctional relations with peers (most of the time, with rigidity regarding the others opinions), low self-esteem and less assumed responsibility on personal wellbeing.

Recommendations:

- Take in serious the breaks and talk with then child about the activities that he/she is doing during the school breaks.
- Transmit the message that a break is not a “gap” in the learning process, but a healthy habit, normal in everyone's life, that is helping to maintain the mental health and wellbeing
- Reflect on the relations that the child has with the peers in the class group and encourage the relations with all kids, without denigrating some of them, in terms of educational performance, parents' professional life, socio-economic status or health status
- Talk about breaks and help the child to organize the time during homework, in a way that he/she can take 10 minutes break during one hour of working. Guide the kid on how to take the break:



to be outside of the learning process, to take some fresh air if it's possible, to connect with the others from home (other family members, pets), to hydrate and to rearrange the working environment (open the window to enter to enter some fresh air, rearrange the books and notebooks for the next topic etc.

## 1. Teachers

When we talk about breaktime in school, the teacher's role can be hard, because in most of the school, there is no setting on the breaks and the teachers can feel overwhelmed about the number of children they need to manage and also about their own break in between the lessons, break that is normal. That's why, the attitude regarding break is also important coming from the teachers and the risk is of two opposite attitude: a rigid attitude in which the teachers are very strict, very present in the middle of the children, but in an invasive way, limiting the activities that the kids can do for relaxing and a very laissez faire attitude, in which the teacher is not present at all and is not guiding the children to relate in a healthy way, during the breaks.

What is very important to take in consideration on a break time in school, as objectives is:

- To be a time of relaxation, in which the brain to take a break from learning process in terms of curricula
- To be a time of socialization in the group of peers - in this process (that is also a learning process, being an informal education) the kids can learn how to deal with relations with the others (the same or different age), how to communicate, how to approach different opinions of the others or different preferences in terms of activities and hobbies, can make exchange of experiences and can learn from each other different things (even knowledge in different areas).

Recommendations for the teachers:

- To transmit to the children the message (and also the attitude) that the breaks are important, not as "not learning time", but a time of informal learning and opportunity to know better the others
- To have a relaxed attitude regarding "relaxation mode" in which kids should be during the breaks, not imposing what to do, but more, to guide them and give them ideas about what and how to do in breaks
- To have an inclusive attitude regarding the involvement of all kids in the activities and validate the initiatives of some kids regarding the activities they propose, as being important ones for their wellbeing and happiness
- To respect the breaktime, not only for the kids, but also for their own, because this attitude of self-respect is transmitted to kids and when they see a relaxed adult nearby, they can also relax and feel entitled to take breaks

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