

Primary school games and play as inclusive/exclusive situations

Situaciones de inclusión/exclusión mediante el juego en Educación Primaria

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Abstract. The purpose of this study was to explore how primary school children include or exclude their peers in play. Two primary schools in Armidale, New South Wales, Australia, participated in this project. Observations and interactional interviews were used to collect data, and a content analysis approach was used for data analysis. Results suggest that participants employed various strategies to exclude some of their peers from play. It was also established that exclusion may be utilised for purposes of establishing or maintaining friendships among children. Findings of this study have implications on the strategies adopted by adults seeking to promote inclusion in children's play.

Keywords: Primary school children; play; games; exclusion/inclusion.

Resumen. El propósito de este estudio fue explorar el modo en que los niños de la escuela primaria incluyen o excluyen a otros niños en situaciones de juego. Dos escuelas primarias de la localidad de Armidale, New South Wales, Australia, participaron en este proyecto. Observaciones y entrevistas interactivas fueron utilizadas para la recolección de datos, los cuales fueron sometidos a un análisis de contenido. Los resultados sugieren que los participantes emplearon diversas estrategias para excluir a algunos de sus compañeros de juego. También se descubrió que la exclusión puede ser utilizada para mantener o establecer nuevas amistades entre los niños. De los resultados de esta investigación se extraen conclusiones relativas a las estrategias que pueden utilizar los adultos que traten de promover la inclusión de los niños mediante el juego.

Palabras clave: niños de educación primaria; jugar; juegos; exclusión/inclusión.

INTRODUCTION

Cole-Hamilton, Harrop, and Street (2002) describe play as a ‘freely chosen, personally directed, [and] intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child’ (p. 7). This depicts play as something that children and young people do when they follow their own ideas and interests, in their own way and for their own reasons (Howard & McInnes, 2013). Schools however, are adult directed environments where children do not have much choice on what kind of play equipment is available for them to play with, or when and where they play. Play is a voluntary activity and it is never imposed by physical necessity or moral duty (Huizinga, 1950). Children believe adults restrain play opportunities and that play that should be spontaneous and unrestrained (Glenn, Knight, Holt, & Spence, 2012). Adult involvement in children’s school play interferes with the nature of play (Cole-Hamilton et al., 2002; Huizinga, 1950). It is therefore essential that adults’ involvement in designing and organisation of play in primary schools ensures that children’s feelings of choice and control in play are preserved.

Children’s play may be considered as text that provides insights into the transactions that take place in playgrounds during recess, with potential to lead to the inclusion and exclusion of some children in play situations. This study starts from the premise that there are important peer social relations during play at school recess (Blatchford, Baines, & Pellegrini, 2003) and that close observation of everyday activities on playgrounds can reveal something about how children include or exclude their peers in games and play. Playground culture is expressed through ‘performances’ that children engage in and that what happens in the playground is essential to understand peer culture (Sutton-Smith, 1982). Therefore, there is plenty of room to learn about children’s ways of engaging in inclusion and exclusion by studying their performances in school playgrounds. The main performance in school playgrounds, particularly in the case of primary school children, concerns games and play (Blatchford et al, 2003). It can, therefore, be said that while there are various other sites where children’s play and games may be observed, the playground provides a rich source of information for children’s play behaviours.

This study explores children’s playground experiences particularly with regards to inclusion or exclusion during games and play. Two primary school playgrounds in Armidale, New South Wales (NSW),

Australia, were the focus of the investigation. This paper first discusses the concepts of inclusion and diversity. It then describes how games may act as situations of exclusion for children. After that, the methods used for this investigation are outlined. Finally, the main results are presented and discussed, followed by a final conclusion.

1. INCLUSIVITY AND AFFIRMING DIVERSITY

Today, Australia is a non-homogenous mix of cultures and ethnicity. Australian schools include students from diverse backgrounds, for instance, students who speak English as second language (ESL), students from refugee families, students with behaviour or learning support needs and others. Statistics show that 45% of Australians were born, or have at least one parent born, overseas, have immigrated from another country (more than 200 countries are represented), speak at least one other language (almost 300 different languages, including 50 indigenous languages, are represented), and as a result, identify with diverse religious practices, language and customs (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009). Further, in 2009, there were an estimated 292,600 children with disability attending school in Australia. These children were aged between five and twenty years and represented 8.3% (approximately one in twelve) of all Australian children attending school in this age group (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009).

The above statistics are an indication that most Australian schools include students from diverse backgrounds and students with varying support needs. It is important that children in these schools are able to mix and enjoy play, learn about differences, conflict resolution and peaceful co-existence (Aldridge & Ala'l, 2013). All students, regardless of their age, gender, backgrounds and physical abilities, should feel that they are acknowledged and valued.

2. EXCLUSION IN CHILDREN'S GAMES

A number of studies have been conducted on the segregation of specific groups of children by their peers in games and play (see, for example, Blatchford, 1999; Clark & Paechter, 2007; Epstein, Kehily, Ghail, & Redman, 2001; Fanger, Frankel, & Hazen, 2012). Children use various techniques to exclude their peers from play. These may include mitigated exclusion (exclusion disguised by 'valid' reasons), unmitigated exclusion

(direct exclusion), ignoring (when the excluder/s do/es not respond to a peer initiating interaction), planned exclusion (when children make plans beforehand to exclude) and partial inclusion (when a child appears to include another in play but gives them a trivial or less important role) (Fanger et al., 2012). However, exclusion is often a vital instrument for consolidating play communities and friendships (Blatchford, 1999). Peer exclusion is used in this study to refer to different situations in which one peer intentionally tries to prevent another from engaging in a social interaction (Blatchford, 1999). In a school situation where children have to play at designated times and at designated spaces and, where they have to share the play space with their peers, exclusion can take the form of social aggression.

Huizinga (1950) states that 'play promotes "social groupings" which tend to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means' (p. 13). This further stresses the point that it is to be expected that children sometimes exclude their peers in play. Play provides a strong foundation for social groupings and, once these are established, it can be difficult for some others to enter these groups and become part of them. Children form permanent groups with time and they come together for all their games and the games they played usually set them apart as an entity different to those outside the group (Blatchford, 1999).

While the 'freedom' in the nature of play as described by Huizinga (1950) implies that children feel free to choose what to play, how to play and allows for free peer interaction, it is from within this 'freedom' that exclusions emerge, given that freedom in play implies that the children are free to act on the belief that they are not obligated to play with anyone that they do not wish to play with. Following Huizinga's description of play, it is no longer play if children are obligated to play with individuals they do not choose to play with. Choice is essential in all aspects of play engagement, and Huizinga (1950) reveals that there is a close association between play, choice and freedom.

As Marrero (1996) pointed out, adults are often aware of the many social, emotional and cognitive developments that can be realised through inclusive play; children however, do not play to obtain any of the aforementioned benefits, they do so for the enjoyment of play *per se* (Huizinga, 1950). Following this, it can be concluded that some children may be excluded from play situations if their peers felt that their participation may take away from the pleasure of play, which may result in feelings of exclusion in some children. Therefore, there is a

problematic contradiction between the nature of play and adults' expectations on children's interactional patterns during play. It is often anticipated that children include peers who wish to be included in play, yet the very nature of play and games calls for exclusion of some peers. Despite the expectations on children to be inclusive of others in play, it is believed that they still do exclude and they adopt various ways to do so. Therefore, this study explores how some children go against adult expectations of them to be inclusive of their peers during school recess.

3. METHODS

Participants and settings

Two schools in Armidale, NSW, Australia, participated in the study. Letters were sent to the school principals explaining the project and seeking permission to collect data at their schools. Ethics clearance was sought and obtained from both the university and the State Education and Research Applications Process (SERAP) committee. Data were collected specifically from two school playgrounds in Armidale: Oak Grove School and Grandview School.

Oak Grove School has an enrolment of approximately 600 children, including 76 aboriginal students and 90 students with a background other than English. Grandview Primary Schools has an enrolment of approximately 200 children, 44% of them identify as aboriginal and 14% of the students have ESL. There are children from 12 different nationalities at Grandview Primary School. For confidentiality reasons, all names used in the study for both, children and schools, are pseudonyms.

Data were collected twice a day for 20 days at each school. Oak Grove School had two recess periods, typically 20 minutes at midmorning, and one hour in the afternoon. Grandview School had three recess periods: the first recess was at quarter past eleven to quarter to twelve, followed by a short break at quarter past one to half past one, and the last break was at half past two to three o'clock. There were however a few days when data could only be collected during one of the play sessions as a result of wet weather when children stayed inside classroom. There are school rules governing activity in some parts of the play spaces at both schools that participated in this project. Data were collected using observation and unstructured interactive interviews methods; this is explained in the following section.

Observations

Observation was the main method of data collection for this project. Baker (2006) explains observation as involving systematic recording of observable phenomena or behaviour in a particular setting. Further, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) assert that observation offers the researcher the opportunity to collect 'live' data from social situations. It allows the researcher direct access to the subject of interest rather than relying on second hand accounts. As the researchers were mainly interested in the play spaces and children's play activities, observation was considered most appropriate as it allowed for gathering non-verbal information and behaviour.

Through observation it was possible to capture what the children actually did in the observed playground sites, rather than what they said they did (Cohen et al., 2007; O'Leary, 2005). Richards and Morse (2007) point out that observational strategies allow the researcher to gain insight into what is taken for granted in a situation and to find out what is really happening by way of listening and watching. Similarly, Robinson (1982) states that what people do may differ from what they say they do, and observation provides a reality check. Through observations, it was possible to obtain an understanding of playground environments and daily playground activities that may have been accepted, expected or gone unnoticed and taken for granted by the participating schools and the children who attend at these schools (Cooper & Schindler, 2001).

Playgrounds were divided into sections to allow the researchers to concentrate observation on one part of the playground at a time. The division of playgrounds into observation sections was based according to the activities that took part in various playground spaces. Oak Grove School playground was divided into four sections and each section was observed for approximately 15 minutes each day for twenty days. Grandview School playground offered a much smaller area for children to play in and for that reason it was divided into two sections. Each play section at Grandview School was observed for approximately 15 minutes during the first break.

Detailed field notes were organised according to the date data were collected and were entered under play area headings. Each page was numbered. This allowed the researchers to give any piece of data taken from the notebooks a retrieval code permitting quick location of the detailed notes that were associated with a given 'retrieval tag' during the data analysis process (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004). While still mostly engaging in

observations, the researchers interacted with the participants and conducted short unstructured interactive interviews in relation to observed playground occurrences. Short unstructured interviews that took no longer than 15 minutes were undertaken with some of the children and are explained below.

Unstructured interactive interviews

Unstructured interviews were used to gather data from participants, particularly to seek clarification and to confirm some observations. Cohen et al. (2007) point out that in unstructured interactive interviews ‘questions emerge from the immediate context and are asked in the natural course of things; there is no predetermination of question topic or wording’ (p. 353). The researchers approached children for interviews in situations where a behaviour of interest was displayed, for example, where unoccupied behaviour was noted during play time or where a child or children seemed to engage in the same activity for a number of days. Cohen et al. (2007) identify the strength of unstructured conversational interviews to be that they ‘increase the salience and relevance of questions; interviews are built on and emerge from observations; the interview can be matched to individuals and circumstances’ (p. 354).

Unstructured interactive interviews allowed the participants to tell their story with very little interruption by the authors, as it was essential for the researchers to understand playground occurrences from the children’s perspective. Richards and Morse (2007) point out that this type of interview is most suited for studies where the researcher is looking to understand from the subjects what it is that matters. Through interviews the researchers were able to determine whether issues identified during observation mattered to the children or not, and how the play may affect younger students, older students, boys, girls, new-comers to the school, children with disability, etc. Probes and questions were unplanned; they arose from observation and the context of the interview (Richards & Morse, 2007). Interviews were audio-recorded, then transcribed verbatim and analysed manually. In the next section, the data analysis process is explained.

Data analysis

Transcripts from interviews and observation field notes were analysed manually using a content analysis approach (Saldaña, 2009). Content

analysis describes a family of analytic approaches ranging from impressionistic, intuitive and interpretive analyses to systematic, strict textual analyses (Rosengren, 1981). Research using qualitative content analysis focuses on the characteristics of language as communication with attention to the content or contextual meaning of the text (McTavish & Pirro, 1990). Therefore, a content analysis approach was used for this research to include meanings of the content. Two cycles of coding were conducted. To codify is to organise things in a systematic order, to make them part of a system or classification (Saldaña, 2009). According to Grbich (2007), codifying allows data to be ‘segregated, grouped, regrouped and relinked in order to consolidate meaning and explanation’ (p. 21).

Open coding was conducted in the first instance and the amount of data coded ranged from a few words to full sentences. Open coding involves an exploration of the data and experimenting with codes, while breaking down and categorising the data (Ezzy, 2002). For example, “play” was coded in the open coding process. For the second cycle of coding, an axial coding took place. Saldaña (2009) suggests that axial coding is appropriate for studies with a wide range of data forms, such as this one. Axial coding is ‘a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). This stage involves the exploration of codes and the relationships between them (Ezzy, 2002). During axial coding we began to ask the question ‘*What does this comment mean?*’ For example, ‘play as inclusive’ was coded during this second cycle. In this project, several core categories were selected, however, this paper focuses on the data linked mainly under the core categories ‘play’, ‘games’, ‘inclusion’ and ‘exclusion’. Specifically, the paper describes the themes that were constructed from the dominant discourses that were evident in the participants’ comments and in the observation field notes. Data from observations are presented directly quoted from field notes throughout this paper. Interview data are presented as direct quotes from the audio tapes. The most representative excerpts of field notes and quotes for the most significant themes are presented in the next sections.

4. AGE DIFFERENCES IN PLAY

The children in Year 3 to 6 played a game of bull-rush¹ together. The game showed potential to bring children of various ages together. The following was observed:

The game of bull-rush involves over 20 children in Year 3 to 6. They all seem to be interacting at the same level and very much absorbed in the game, chasing and catching so much that age divisions do not seem to matter during the game. Children have been observed to take a break when needed and go back into the game without anyone even noticing. There is a winner at the end of the game making the game very competitive. (Date: 25 August 2015. Grandview School)

This observation was confirmed by one of the children who took part in the game of bull-rush, she said: 'I like this game because everybody is free to play, it doesn't matter if you are not in the same year with the other players, you just join in' (girl in Year 3, Grandview School). According to this girl's quote, a game 'free to play' is considered in this specific situation as a game that everyone is invited to play, rather than as 'free play' as proposed in Huzinga's (1955) above-mentioned definition of play.

Pre-existing relationships among the children seemed to not matter in the game of 'bull-rush'. Although children of various ages participated in bull-rush, younger children in transition to Year 2 did not join in this game. This group of children were observed to withdraw to the corner of the play area characterised by many trees; some of them went to play on the fixed play equipment when this game was being played. The children stated various reasons for their lack of participation in the game, such as: 'I don't like to play with big people' (girl in kindergarten, Grandview School). Similarly, Michelle stated: 'I think it's a game for Year 3, 4, 5, and 6, me and my friends don't like it, and they run too fast they'd just catch you' (Year 1, Grandview School). It became apparent, therefore, that physical competence in the fast paced game of bull-rush was thought of as a barrier to participation by the younger children, as evidenced by some of the children's dismissive attitudes towards the game.

Lack of knowledge of the game rules was also cited as a barrier for younger students to mix with older students in the game of bull-rush. For

¹ Game in which children have to run across the oval without being tagged by those that are in.

example, a boy in kindergarten at Grandview School said: 'I don't know how to play the game'. This could have been because he had not been in school for long enough to have learnt some of the rule bound games. Safety reasons were also mentioned as inhibiting younger children who otherwise would have liked to join in the game. In this regard, a girl in Year 1 expressed: 'There are too many people playing, I don't want to get knocked over' (Grandview School). Similarly, a girl in Year 2 said: 'It's dangerous, you could trip over... I don't like bull-rush' (Grandview School). Even though this game was not relationship or team based, its nature as a large group game resulted in the younger children excluding themselves from play for safety reasons.

Some of the younger children preferred to socialise with close friends over being involved in a large group game. For example, one girl in Year 2 commented: 'I only want to play with my friends, we don't like bull-rush, there are too many people playing' (Grandview School), while a younger girl in kindergarten expressed: 'Me and my friends don't play that game [bull-rush], we play on the equipment or sometimes we have our own games'. In this way, the games the girls chose to play became that of maintaining friendships than interacting and forming new ones as observed by Huizinga (1950) and Blatchford (1999). In a study aimed at investigating primary school children's break time friendships, Blatchford (1999) found that children, particularly girls, reached a stage of consolidation in their friendships. The games they played, over time, defined them as a group different to others. Blatchford (1999) noted that at this stage of consolidation and stability in children's friendships, the opportunities for meeting new friends outside the group became fewer, the children became less varied in their choice of games, and there were difficulties for outsiders wishing to be included once the group had been established. It can be said, therefore, that in their effort to maintain close friendships, children may exclude themselves from large group interactions and exclude others wishing to join them in the process.

In a study of patterns of age-mixing among children, Grey and Feldman (1997) found that age-mixing in play was least common in children aged eight to eleven (which is the age group estimate for children in Year 3 to 6) and that infants were likely to mix and interact with older children aged 12 to 16 years. While some of the younger children in this study indicated they did not wish to participate in games involving large groups of older children, it may be possible that the older children in Year 3 to 6 in turn were not encouraging for younger children to join in their games.

Although Year 3 to 6 boys were observed playing soccer at the play field, there was evidence of age divisions among the children. One of the boys at Oak Grove School stated that: 'Year 5 and 6 [children] play their own game and we play ours, our teams are separated, it's been like that ever since I started playing' (boy in Year 4). Similarly, a boy in Year 6 affirmed: 'We don't play with year 3 and 4 because we don't need to, that's how it's always been' (Oak Grove School). In this way, it appears that age divisions have become a taken-for-granted practice of the game of soccer has been passed down from earlier years.

Younger children were noted at both Oak Grove and Grandview Schools to exclude their peers in play and have plausible reasons to do so. One of the girls was observed watching two of her peers play a game of marbles. The girl who was not taking part in the game revealed that 'I am not playing, there can't be three people in this game' (girl in Year 3, Oak Grove School). One of the girls participating in the game added 'this is a game of two people, so she can't play' (girl in Year 4, Oak Gove School). There was however no indication that the girl who was not participating was going to have a turn in this game of 'two people'.

Similarly, one girl in Year 1 approached the researchers and reported that she was upset because one of her peers was 'playing with my horses' (Oak Grove School). Further investigation revealed that there were three other children playing with the toy horses. The girl first explained that 'she can't play, there is one boy and three of us girls already playing, there is too many girls than boys', and then changed view to: 'There is [sic] not enough horses for all of us, she can't play' (there were 20 toy horses to play with). This could be taken as a sign that children often feel that adults do not approve of their exclusionary behaviours, leading to them being dishonest about it. At Oak Grove School, a girl in Year 1 was overheard reporting to the adult supervising play that one of her peers told another not to play with her. Instances of ignoring peers seeking to join in play were noted at both schools. For instance, three Year 2 girls were playing 'helicopter-helicopter'² at Oak Grove School, when another girl approached them asking to play; they continued to play as if they could not hear her. Interestingly, none of these behaviours were noted among the younger boys. This confirmed Fanger et al.'s (2012) findings that younger children's use of exclusion was linked to gender. In Fanger et al.'s (2012) study, girls excluded other children twice as much as boys, and 38% of the boys in the

² This game requires one child to swing a rope around while others attempt to skip over it.

study never excluded; they also noted that 95% of the girls in the study excluded at least twice in the observation period. It can be concluded therefore, that younger girls tend to directly or indirectly exclude their peers more than their male counterparts and used various techniques to do so, including plausible reasons, ignoring and planned exclusion.

5. ETHNIC MIX IN GAMES

The children at both schools were observed to participate in games across ethnic differences. The games of soccer involved children across various ethnic backgrounds as represented in the school population:

The soccer game involves children from various ethnic backgrounds. The teams are a mix of children from different ethnic groups. There are however class group divisions between the teams; Year 5 boys are playing against Year 6 boys. (Date: 24 August 2015. Grandview School)

There were no ethnic divisions noted among the children, particularly for children who had been enrolled at the school for longer periods. There was also evidence of team solidarity in the game of soccer that seemed to defy ethnic boundaries. Children earned respect for themselves by being 'good' at the relevant the game. For instance, one of the boys (a boy of African appearance) who seemed to be the 'captain' of his team ensured everyone was in the right position for the start of the game. He expressed: 'I like soccer because I am good at it. The boys always want to know what I think whenever there is disagreement about something' (boy in Year 6, Grandview School). At Oak Grove School, new comers at the school who identified as having a minority ethnic background, reported having difficulties finding 'someone to play with' and making friends than other children. For example, a girl of Asian appearance in Year 1 was observed sitting in the margins; she revealed: 'My sister is gone for sports today, I have no friends to play with... It's because I don't know people, I didn't start Kindy here, only Year 1'. On the next day of data collection at the same school, that same girl's sister confirmed: 'I only have one friend in my class that I play with sometimes, or sometimes I play with my sister' (girl in Year 3). The girls expressed that they had been at the school for seven months and had not been successful in making connections with other children. In a similar way, a girl of African appearance in Year 6 at Oak Grove School stated she had been at the school for five months and while she was

observed to be in the company of, and playing with groups of younger children, for the duration of data collection at Oak Grove School, an interview with her revealed that: 'I don't have any friends in Year 6. It's because I'm new'.

With the assistance of the teacher supervising play, the researchers were able to identify and interview children of Caucasian background (who seemed to be the majority group at Oak Grove School) who had been in the school for as long as or for a shorter periods than the interviewed children from seemingly other cultural backgrounds. Four children of Caucasian background were interviewed and none of them reported difficulties entering play groups or forming friendships. Similarly, research carried out by Blatchford et al. (2003) on the social context of school playground games, showed that there were sex differences in the percentage of same- and mixed-ethnic group active and game networks. Blatchford et al. (2003) found that boys more than girls were likely to play in mixed ethnic groups. Previous research by Blatchford (1996) also showed that ethnic differences were less influential than gender differences in affecting children's recess activities. A different study found that boys and girls were equally likely to play in same- and mixed-ethnicity groupings (Lewis & Phillesen, 1998). The finding of this study was, however, based on children's reports and may not be a true reflection of actual recess behaviour. Nevertheless, these results show that playground games have a great potential to bring children of different ethnic backgrounds together.

6. CHILDREN WITH DISABILITY OR BEHAVIORAL SUPPORT NEEDS

At Grandview School, it was observed that an extra supervising adult was always present to supervise children who attended lessons in the special education unit. All of these students were reported to have behaviour difficulties and other cognitive support needs. It was noted many times that these children came together to play with their supervising adult. One of the children played with his younger sibling and they did not socialise or play with other children. One boy said: 'My friend is my mum, I play with my mum, I hang out with her during weekends, after school' (boy with a disability, Year 2). A Year 6 girl reported that she did not have any friends: 'I don't have any friends really, I just like to sit in the sun and watch everyone...sometimes if Mrs C. lets me, I take an iPad to the library and play games on it' (girl with a disability, Year 6). Throughout the observations, she was observed to be sitting on the benches or on the grass

watching others play. If she was not sitting alone, she sat with the adult supervising children from the special education unit.

On several occasions two of the boys with disability did display behaviour problems at the playground, expressed through aggressive, argumentative, teasing and taunting behaviour. During these incidents, the boys were removed from the playground followed by punishment. Punishment for these children was detention during play time which means they had to stay in a classroom and miss out on play for three consecutive recesses. Their behaviour difficulties could have been the reason necessitating an extra adult supervising this group of children, although there seemed to be no clear reason why it could not be just an extra adult available to assist in the playground not specifically assigned to a particular group of children.

Difficulties in the playground situation for children identified as having behaviour support needs were noted for most of the time during observation, particularly in relation to the game of soccer. Observation notes revealed that 13 times out of 20, one or more of the children with behaviour support needs displayed aggressive behaviour during play. Behaviour problems were displayed through physical violence towards peers, verbal aggression towards peers, verbal and physical aggression towards staff, insolence shown through gestures and general attitude. For instance:

Two adults are rushing across the playground towards a group of boys who seem to be fighting. It is confirmed two boys are fighting. The adults break up the fight. One of the boys is responding by swearing to adult directions. He is trying to get away from them. He breaks off and goes after the other boy he was fighting with. He is forcefully removed from the playground. (Date: 27 August 2015. Grandview School)

A comment sought from the adult supervising play revealed that these children were often excluded from play and sent to 'reflection' during recess or sometimes they were sent home for the rest of the day or suspended from attending school. Rough play in soccer almost always resulted in anger and inappropriate behaviour. Drabick and Baugh (2010) found that the unstructured nature of the playground, low levels of adult supervision, lack of space and variety in the choice of games, frequency of peer interactions and diverse network of friends with whom to affiliate, contribute to high levels of aggression in the playground. While it was determined that children with behaviour support needs had support structures available to

them in the classroom, they did not have the same kind of support out in the playground. In consequence, these children often missed out on play and the opportunities presented at the playground.

It was clear from the observations that children with both physical and mental disabilities found it difficult to share play space with typically developing children. Their display of inappropriate behaviour led to their exclusion from the play space through detention during play time. It may be difficult for any child to meet and make friends if they did not play. In general, children with disability had difficulties sharing the playground space and forming positive relationships with their peers.

7. CONCLUSION

The aim of the study was to determine how primary school children included or excluded their peers from play. The results revealed that children employ various strategies to exclude their peers, such as ignoring, mitigated exclusion, unmitigated exclusion and partial inclusion. The results confirmed the disparity between the nature of play and games as described by some scholars (e.g. Huizinga, 1950; Glenn, Knight, Holt, & Spence, 2012; Marrero, 1996) and widely held views that children benefit from play, other than the enjoyment of play *per se* (Baker & Donnelly, 2001; Barbour, 1999; Yantzi et. al., 2010). Exclusionary behaviours noted in this study point to the fact that children find ways to exercise freedom and choice in play. Evidence in this study shows that sometimes children seek to disguise their exclusionary behaviours, which might be because they realise adults expect them to include all who wish to be included in a play situation and not doing so may be equal to breaking school rules. While it can be argued that some children may exclude their peers from play because this power on others generates pleasure on them, there are no significant data in this study to support this proposition.

Children with behaviour support needs were often excluded from the play space as they showed difficulties in the playground situation interacting with their typically developing peers. This meant that they missed out on the physical, social and emotional benefits of play (Yantzi, Young, & Mckeever, 2010). It was evident that these children required as much support in the playground as they got inside the classroom. Children with special needs require training to facilitate their social skill development in playground situations (Nabors, Willoughby, & McMenamin, 2001), which in this case resulted in their exclusion from play. Age divisions were noted

among the children at both schools and data reveal this was mainly due to spatial organisation. There was also some gender segregation within play spaces.

The results of this study have important implications on the approaches adopted by adults seeking to promote inclusion in children's play and games. Understanding of the essence of play will most likely lead to intervention strategies that acknowledge children's choices and freedom in play yet promoting respect and empathy among children without making them feel like they are breaking societal rules. It is also essential to instill skills among children for dealing with exclusion because it is part of play. Therefore, these approaches may have the potential to promote openness among primary school children.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (1994) encourages schools to be accommodative of the needs of all of the children who attend their school and to ensure their right to engage in play and to interact with others of their choice; and further, that children's exercised choice in what they do is respected. It is therefore essential that schools engage in constant evaluation of their play spaces, identify barriers to children's full participation in play and work towards removing them. This is particularly important, as according to Blatchford et al. (2003), the development of successful social relations with peers is essential for children's adjustment to school, and the playground is the main site for everyday encounters that reflect and support these relations.

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