

# **Building Relationships Through Play**

**An evaluation based on Play and Behavioural Projects undertaken  
by Il Covo in Primary Schools in the London Borough of Southwark**



**Goldsmiths' College, University of London  
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This evaluation is written by **David Woodger**, professional and Community Education Department, Goldsmith College, University of London.

The following people and organisations worked on the project

**Angelo Piccigallo**, project manager of Il Covo

**Chris Nembhard**, project developer of Il Covo

**Jon Idle**, project supervisor of Charterhouse-in-Southwark

Il Covo project workers:

**Suzanne Howlett**

**Runa Akhtar**

**Kemi Muir**

**Linton Bloomfield**

**Clelia Marinelli**

**Karen Wijns**

**Caroline Edmonds**

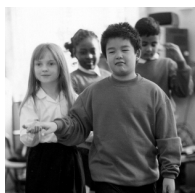
Design by **Katia Beltrame**

Photography by **Roberto Trillo**

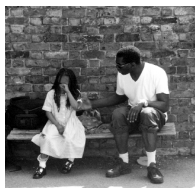
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For further copies of this evaluation contact :

IlCovo at [admin@ilcovo.org](mailto:admin@ilcovo.org); or write to IlCovo, *40 Tabard Street SE1 4JU*



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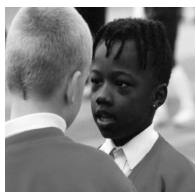
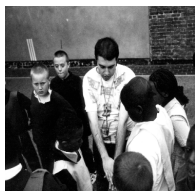
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## Il Covo “Play & Behaviour” Project Evaluation

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"Our lunchtime playtime has been transformed. There is a range of games available for children to take part in. Planning for these activities take place on a weekly basis and the children are given the opportunity to give feed back of their own experiences. Conflict too during lunchtime has been minimized, children across the age groups play together co-operatively and the children are learning a wide range of skills".

*Head Teacher*



**Il Covo works in schools and the community to promote change through inclusive learning, creativity and empowerment.**

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

This project resulted from consultation undertaken by the Elephant Links Head Teachers Group in October 2000 in Southwark. It was concluded that due to limited playground space and in some cases limited staff, break time was not furthering the potential for children to enjoy a constructive and relaxing/active break, which would improve behaviour and develop their academic work back in the classroom. It was therefore decided that a project designed to improve play provision would benefit the schools and their children. Charterhouse- in-Southwark and Il Covo, a community organisation in the London Borough of Southwark, successfully secured the tender to undertake this work.



## 1.1 The Project

The project was initiated in the Single Regeneration Budget 2001 – 2002 with a proposal by Il Covo and Charterhouse-in-Southwark to work in nine Primary Schools. This was approved in March 2001 and the work started in April 2001 with Il Covo being responsible for its co-ordination and delivery. There were two central project workers supported by four assistants who organised structured play. Each school received input twice a week for the duration of one term, which was approximately twelve weeks.

Il Covo, based on their preparatory discussions with the parties involved, identified the following **aims**:

- ▣ To improve and develop alternative approaches to manage behaviour in break-times through organised play provision.
- ▣ To engage the adult staff in the school and parents with the children to develop playtime.  
To enable and allow the children to contribute and take responsibility for their playtime
- ▣ To enhance personal and social development of the children through play.
- ▣ To develop effective play to refresh and prepare children for further classroom study.
- ▣ To support the Mid-day supervisors in their management of the children.
- ▣ To ensure ownership and sustainability are built into the process of the project.

## 1.3 Purpose and nature of this evaluation

The purpose of this evaluation was two-fold, to serve both as a report to the Elephant Links project team to enable the SRB to assess the value of the project and examine the approaches undertaken by the project with school staff, Mid-day supervisors and children to achieve this. The desire is for this evaluation to contribute to the further development of the project in its work with schools and young people.

Although a sample of five schools was selected to introduce the scheme of organised play, evaluation of the work was only carried out in three primary schools. Two were not appraised as in one school the Head was absent for the duration of the project and in the other relationships amongst key staff were strained preventing any adequate evaluation. The final three included in the evaluation were St John's, St Jude's and Crampton primary schools.

An assessment of the work carried out comprised of:

- ▣ Semi-structured interviews with Heads, Deputy heads, teaching staff and play co-ordinators who were appointed as a result of the project's development within the school.
- ▣ Group discussions with mid-day supervisors and small groups of children from different years involved in the project.
- ▣ Interviews with the Il Covo project staff working in the primary schools.



To emphasise the nature, methods and rationale behind the results achieved with organised play, the project evaluation has been subdivided into a number of sections. These include an examination of playtime before intervention, the project interventions, preparation with the key parties, an appraisal of the methodology and approaches of the project and the new experiences of break-time. The report finally draws together some overall conclusions to the project.

The evaluation is largely founded on first hand experiences of all those involved, based on their experiences pre and post project intervention.

## 2.0 Project Evaluation

### 2.1 Observations of play prior to project intervention

Examining and appraising break-times prior to the structured interventions around play provides a comparative model by which to measure the impact of the interventions. Importantly, all the children, mid-day supervisors and Heads were able to recognise and comment on positive differences after the project involvement.

Playtime was initially perceived as an attempt to keep children occupied until the break ended allowing for the rhythm and discipline of classroom activity to be resumed. As a result the overall consensus amongst the children was that they did not enjoy break-times as the games were nearly always disrupted and involved conflict rather than, *"...learning how to get along with each other which I thought school was all about,"* 7 year old boy.



*"We used to argue and fight before, there would always be lots of arguments about games and rules", "Nobody would pay attention to the games, but would get involved with the arguments and fights".*

*"We just used to run around bumping into each other".*

Many children did not feel they had the opportunity to play the games they wanted as football dominated the playground particularly by the older boys. Many children described the break-time as aimless, *"with everyone just all over the place"*.

A number of boys described feelings of boredom, which led them to get into trouble for *"just mucking about"* as they were trying to keep themselves occupied. There was little evidence of children mixing from different year groups, resulting in the older children particularly boys dominating much of the restricted playground space, with the younger children and girls forced to the sides of the playground, for fear of injury.

In one school a number of gangs would regularly cause problems across the different age groups, disrupting activities other children were involved with. These gangs and the difficulties they caused pre-occupied much of the staff and mid-day supervisor's attention during the lunch breaks. In other schools a number of identified individuals, often those without friends who did not engage in play activities, were persistently at the centre of conflicts and disputes within the play area.

The majority of the younger children spoken to in this evaluation reported bullying in one form or another from older children as a daily occurrence in playground life:

***" Other children always call us names" <sup>1</sup>***

***"The older boys would run past, hit you and then swear at you"***

***" You cannot disagree with the older children or they'll threaten you"***

Through the appraisal it became evident that the children felt disengaged from play not as a result of the lack of new games or extra resources but more due to an inability to engage in collective play<sup>2</sup> coupled sometimes with an unwillingness from mid-day supervisors to partake in play activities. The effect of this was the creation of an environment whereby children learned to survive by using antisocial behaviour in order to get through a lunch break, partially supervised. The prevalent behaviours identified were bullying, fighting and exclusive groups 'of boys from years' five and six dominating the space with football games.

Prior to their involvement in this project, mid-day supervisors often did not feel valued by the school and felt unable to manage and control poor behaviour without the need to impose strong disciplinary measures which often were ineffective and counter productive.

They felt their roles were not given any formal status or particular purpose within the school and their low level remuneration reflected this. One mid-day supervisor spoke about how the lunch breaks were not given any recognition as part of the schooling day for children and utilised as an opportunity to develop learning through play, instead what resulted was *" what could only be described as neglect, leaving us to try and pick up the pieces from children frustrated at being in class all morning with very little to do in their break"*.





Many of the mid-day supervisors agreed that prior to the project's intervention they experienced low levels of motivation and enthusiasm for their work. They spent the majority of their time trying to resolve arguments and fights, chasing '*troublemakers*' and attending to small groups of children who were often frightened to be away from adults during break-time. None of the mid-day supervisors participated themselves with any games, some said they were just unwilling "*to get that involved*", others felt they were unable to, lacking in confidence. None of the Mid-day supervisors were aware of any guides or suggested approaches to managing

behaviour leaving them to create and implement their own forms of discipline, which often proved ineffective with no staff backing. They acknowledged that there was a lack of communication between themselves and staff, with different directives given to children. Mid-day supervisors agreed they constantly reacted to situations and often found it difficult to assert themselves to resolve these adequately.

Mid-day supervisors viewed their relationships with the children as fraught with difficulties and limited due to the generally autocratic role they felt they had to play in managing them. They saw themselves resorting to discipline, shouting and punishments all too easily. Those children whom they described as '*trouble-makers*' were challenging and ultimately made some mid-day supervisors consider whether they would continue the work.

<sup>1</sup> Nine year old girl speaking on behalf of refugee children

<sup>2</sup> Exchanging ideas, dialogue and using rules

## 2.2 Project interventions; training and playtime sessions

All key parties involved met with the project co-ordinators prior to its implementation to share both the present arrangements and concerns and to discuss the proposals for the intervention.

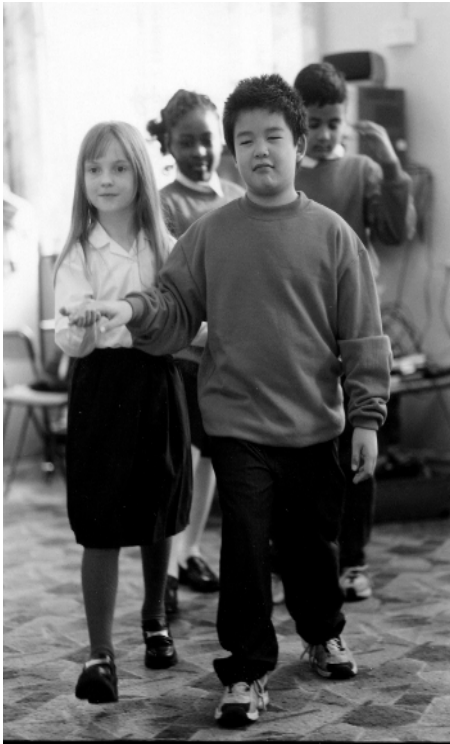
In particular Heads were kept involved and informed throughout the project. They were pivotal to the smooth running of the project and its work, often providing valuable advice and solutions.

Children were informed through school assemblies and individual classroom sessions. Each class were asked to generate their own thoughts and ideas to contribute to the project. This process created enthusiasm and excitement amongst the children both in terms of the project itself and the opportunity to contribute.

Though the process of the work necessitated the involvement of all parties, the project placed particular emphasis on engaging the mid-day supervisors. Research has demonstrated that the position and role that supervisors have within the structure of the school has a determinant affect on the behaviour of children, during playtime. This research has found that playtime is given marginal recognition and therefore little attention and support is given in exploring the work of supervisors' in relation to children's play. (Peter Randall: 1996)



As a result children are less willing to give respect to the supervisors, not acknowledging their authority and role in disciplining them. Many supervisors therefore have resorted to stronger disciplinary measures, listening less to the children, creating increased tensions and frustrations for both parties.



There was initial scepticism from the supervisors regarding their involvement with the project, namely the reluctance to take on additional responsibilities, a lack of confidence to carry out new tasks and being involved in the training process, having not received any previously. These fears were acknowledged and in response the project included an important phase to consult and engage the supervisors to identify specific needs and concerns, highlighting and valuing their experiences within the school. They were further encouraged to discuss the opportunities for their role to become an integral part in the development of the children's learning.

These included:

- ▣ Regular meetings between the supervisors to exchange ideas on work practice
- ▣ A representative being present to liaise with the teachers to discuss children's behaviour
- ▣ Participating in classroom 'circle time'
- ▣ Working together with children from the school council.

The aim of this approach was to raise mid-day supervisors' self-esteem and confidence both with teaching staff and children, improve communication and establish ongoing relationships as working practice.



## 2.3 Training, Principles and Approaches

Training was a fundamental component of this project and considered as the most effective approach by all parties to introduce and engage everyone in a shift to organise structured break-times. The purpose of the training was to introduce an understanding of the role and value of play to break-times and to develop and identify improvements to managing behaviour.

For the training to have maximum impact the project successfully included representatives from all the sections of school staff, children and parents. Training was undertaken both jointly and separately. Joint sessions either included supervisors, teachers, children and the Head or just supervisors and children. Separate sessions were individually held with children, supervisors and teachers. The training then progressed to mentoring in the play ground with supervisors and children to deliver the newly acquired approaches and activities. These approaches were then subjected to further review and discussions after staff had begun to work on them independently and highlighted difficulties, which had arisen during its implementation. The aim of the training was to cultivate new relationships between children and staff based on mutual respect and understanding.



Two key principles were central to the training approach: **Empowerment** and **Sustainability**. These provided the framework of the working methods used. The rationale behind this approach was to ensure longevity of the programme. The holistic approach of involving all parties in the working process meant that all individuals affected had significant input in the project. This participatory group work approach brought out positive individual contributions to the project, whereby those involved fostered a role of ownership encouraging ideas and concerns to be shared. Active participation is proven to render projects sustainable because they rely and develop out of the knowledge, experience and needs of those the project aims to benefit. This approach ensures the learning is embedded within the school and its staff thereby enabling those involved to improve standards to benefit the children's development.



## **The methodology of working was based on six phases:**

### **1. Observation**

This first stage is aimed at developing an internal picture of the individuals involved and the school.

### **2. Consultation**

Prior to starting the project, members of the school are consulted and invited to proactively participate with the progression of the project. This proved successful in facilitating the introduction of the proposed changes through open dialogue.

### **3. Training**

The training programme was devised according to the observations and consultations made with the school and the skills, knowledge and experience of the participants.

### **4. Hand Over**

Participants were then encouraged to practice the new learned activities themselves and implement new changes on-site through continuous support and mentoring by the training team.

### **5. Review**

After a period of work where staff started to deliver independently the work was reviewed in order to identify difficulties and obstacles that arose during its implementation.

### **6. Tuning**

The last phase of the project serves to ensure long-term sustainability and positive impact to the school's development. The team re-visits the school after an agreed interval to evaluate and assess the effectiveness of the project in place and offer advice and further training if needed.

There following are some approaches which were used to encourage active participation, group work and relationship building exercises:

- Structured games of football in a confined space where children themselves acted as referees, supervising and organising co-operative games. This way the less confident children did not feel intimidated by the competitiveness and integrated more willingly through being given responsibilities.
- Name-calling was challenged by engaging the children in dialogue around the meaning and purpose of language, race, identity, sexuality, gender and disability; using games to develop empathy and social skills.
- The use of blind spot<sup>3</sup> space for organising games to open areas for free play and allow easier supervision of the children.
- Actively working with school staff to raise awareness about any problems and exploring different avenues of dealing with bullying other than punishment. This included involving the children in the process by encouraging them to express their needs and difficulties encountered to support them in the reflection of their negative reactions. Bringing all the parties together to provide an opportunity to express their concerns was important, this enabled the identification of a common approach of handling the problems so that all concerned felt that their views and opinions had been taken into consideration.

This inclusive approach of all parties tackling problems allows for constructive solutions to be explored without the possibility of one group being too problematic or given undue attention thereby limiting the potential solutions.

<sup>3</sup> Areas well known to bullies who congregated here



Changing the perspective from problems of individuals to school problems galvanised everyone into taking greater responsibility to finding solutions.

The training focused in particular on two central themes: the role and understanding of play and how behaviour could be better managed.

Play approached during the training involved the participants' direct experience of joining in play activities. This was achieved by taking the participants through a journey, starting from their early memories of experience as children playing in school and in the neighbourhood, talking about feelings and experiences and acting those games out to share with the participants. Through group discussions and personal experiences the benefits of play and its relation to child development were explored.

The training provided a forum to breakdown hierarchical barriers between classroom assistants, mid-day supervisors and teachers and between children and mid-day supervisors. This was achieved by forming working groups whereby teachers and mid-day supervisors were working together in different ways from that which they were used to during school time. For example, engaging in group discussions and problem-solving activities where participants had to work collaboratively to find solutions to the problems.

The overall aim of the training was to develop increased trust between participants and give them an opportunity to exchange ideas through group work and open debate. Participants gained an opportunity to explore new ways of communicating – verbal and non-verbal – whilst also getting to know one another on a deeper level. Creative methods in the training resulted in the successful opening and sharing of experiences between the participants, questioning prejudices and expressing emotions constructively.

The training was adapted to each groups' differences. There were instances where groups were not confident in engaging in physical activities and preferred more theory. On occasions children and adults needed to spend more time with each other to develop trust and friendship. Training was not confined to the classroom but extended to the playground, thereby being able to put theory into practice and learn through 'doing' supported by the project staff.

All the training was based on the principle of discovering, analysing and dialogue, achieving this through group work, role-play and open forums.

## 2.4 Head Teachers

Initially each Head interviewed described their reticence and uncertainty about the project, given the difficulties and resistance to change they felt were present amongst the mid-day supervisors and staff to consider playtime as open to improvement and change. They were aware that changes would involve reconsideration of the job responsibilities of the mid-day supervisors. Heads were also unsure exactly what issues needed to be tackled or would emerge from the project.

Those interviewed despite their concerns increased their workloads to facilitate and support the project to enable discussions with key parties to set up a programme for its development.

The Heads were extremely positive about the project, in particular highlighting the reduction of conflicts between children, the changed roles and monitoring of mid-day supervisors and the developed links of play activities to learning, P.E and PHSE curriculum. Heads in each of the schools had appointed play-leaders as a result of the project. All three Heads were quick to point out the lasting input that the project had made, indicating how mid-day supervisors were now leading the play at breaktimes in conjunction and co-operation with children and staff. In two schools new play resources had been purchased and the third was in the process of purchasing resources.

Those two schools not included in this evaluation were as a result of difficulties in setting up the project. The relationships with the Heads were problematic in making the necessary arrangements to facilitate access in the school for the project staff. These examples demonstrated the significant requirement of the collaboration of both the Head and the project staff working together for the success of the project.

In the three schools included in the evaluation the Heads on many occasions were required to support the project in overcoming obstacles these included negotiating and arranging time and space with teachers in the curriculum for training, sitting down with mid-day supervisors to allow them to voice concerns, leading and promoting the project in staff meetings and with the children, identifying individuals whose co-operation would be essential and generally driving the project within the school. Il Covo staff described the Head teachers as pro-active in relation to the project, responding positively to ideas and suggestions, working hard with all staff to help them gain a deeper understanding of the project and its value.

## 2.5 Mid-day supervisors

The project intervention had a positive impact on the way mid-day supervisors viewed their responsibilities. They were provided with clearer job descriptions, giving greater clarity to their specific roles, some as play leaders. This in turn gave them a greater sense of purpose, as they felt more valued for the contribution they made to the school and to the learning and development of the children.

For the first time the mid-day supervisors underwent a period of continuous staff development and training. Although some displayed a degree of reticence, fearing their job security, the training was received with enthusiasm and largely welcomed. The issue of guidelines and accepted rules also provided greater direction to their duties and new boundaries to further their work, which previously did not exist. Some mid-day supervisors expressed concern of not being able to attend all the training programmes as they had to leave early to cover the lunchtime. In one school there were insufficient mid-day supervisors, so Il Covo supplemented the team with their own project staff.



The training significantly served the purpose of strengthening working relationships and enhancing their confidence to deal with arising matters. It invoked a sense of ownership for their new role, motivating them to give of their best and interact more constructively with staff, children and colleagues. They felt more valued and empowered to make a positive contribution to the project, sharing their own wisdom in the process.

The mid-day supervisors expressed a more assertive attitude towards their work. They became pro-active and communicated more effectively with staff and children. A willingness to share ideas for improving play-time was generated as they started to show a much needed interest in the games played, learning rules and participating in the setting up of play activities and organising schedules.

A further notable change was that the mid-day supervisors worked more in collaboration with the children and each other. They frequently took notes to exchange ideas to create more effective rules and new games, taking into consideration the views of the children to reach friendly agreements. This resulted in an improvement of their communication skills with the children and their ability to interact and deal with them.



Many supervisors reflected that that children who were previously disruptive were influenced to behave better as they had more time to spend with the children as fewer problems arose. In general there were fewer arguments and disputes and those that did materialise could be dealt with more productively. Bullying was also detected more quickly and conflicts resolved more amicably.

Amongst themselves communication levels had positively increased. Their liaison with each other increased as they displayed more unity and a stronger team spirit. They readily shared their relationships they had with the children, considering and adopting more effective methods of handling difficult children, which were less disciplinary.

Their relationships with schooling staff also strengthened. Once again there was a higher degree of interaction, sharing of issues and greater inclusion. This amounted to a reduced need for problem solving in between classroom and playtime, as the children were a lot happier.

One specific area the mid-day supervisors felt could have been further developed was consideration of indoor play on wet days which they acknowledged they had not raised, however they now agreed to discuss this with the Headteachers.

The positive changes can be summarised by the following comments made by some mid-day supervisors:



*"I never enjoyed my job so much"*

*"Very enjoyable"*

*"I look forward to lunch-times"*

*"I feel I have a proper role now"*

## 2.6 Children's Views

The project intervention produced a profound change in the way children viewed playtimes and their relationships with other children and staff.

The organised play activities made break-times more exciting and all children looked forward to them. They were active participants because they had contributed in the planning stage and had seen their ideas and thoughts reach fruition, playing games they wanted to play. Similarly, they were also enthusiastic in learning to play new games that were introduced such as street hockey.



The children also felt that the playground area was more adequately distributed as equal spaces were allocated for a variety of games. Football no longer dominated the surface area, and so younger children were no longer confined to the periphery but able to share play equally as clear boundaries existed and no attempts were made to breach them. Their eagerness was observed as at the start of break times helpers brought out the game boxes in accordance with the rota so that play could begin.

The different range of games and the introduction of new ones ensured that all children were kept actively and happily occupied. "There is always something exciting to do and everyone gets a chance to play everything." They also enjoyed the games when the adults participated.

With organised play all children were aware of the current schedule, timetables were pinned to notice boards and copies retained by the supervisors. The biggest impact this made was that it created less scope for bullying and disruptive behaviour as older boys in particular realised that any attempts by them to push in or take control of games was futile. The schedule gave everyone an opportunity to participate.



The evaluation also highlighted a significant improvement in the quality of friendships being made between children. The managed recreation brought together the different age groups so that they learnt to trust each other, forming more stable friendships, ranging in ages.





This served the dual purpose of also curtailing bullying as older children were more understanding and were more inclined to look after the younger children as they enjoyed the responsibility that was placed on them.

Giving the children responsibility was very popular as they all aspired to be helpers. They felt they were given a sense of purpose and their opinions valued as they were included with the training programme which was conducted with staff, giving them a sense of importance. As a result, they also worked closely in collaborating with other children and the supervisors. The helpers in one school were referred to as "guardian angels" and were identified with armbands. These responsibilities were for a set period of time and were rotated amongst children. Some concern was expressed that children who had started the training were not able to complete the programme due to teachers' concern about their poor behaviour in the classroom.

Significant behavioural changes took place in those children who persistently were 'in trouble,' when given responsibility. They co-operated more effectively and felt a sense of responsibility to the younger children, to ensure that the play organised went according to plan. Once again fewer arguments, disputes and conflicts emerged and of the few that did arise they were settled satisfactorily due to the heightened level of understanding between all participants.



Overall, all children were constructively learning to play together, having fun, enjoying and looking forward to playtimes. They felt break-times were more safe, more co-ordinated to their needs and fairer.

## 3.0 CONCLUSIONS

Importantly the project was well received by the children, mid-day supervisors, staff and Head teachers. A project such as this necessitated the joint working and involvement of all those parties developing together as a team towards shared goals. This was certainly achieved in the schools involved in this evaluation. Relationships within and between the different groups improved dramatically during the weeks together with the project staff. The development and improvement of these relationships were given thorough and rigorous attention throughout the projects' involvement within the school, with particular emphasis placed on the approaches undertaken. This was achieved by:

- ▣ **Ensuring full participation by all participants, involving them in the planning and decision-making process.**
- ▣ **A free-flow of information and communication.**
- ▣ **Open expression of feelings and concerns.**
- ▣ **A belief in shared aims and objectives.**
- ▣ **Invoking a sense of commitment and culture of ownership.**

Central to this was the developed understanding of the role and value of play and exploration of ways to enhance its development. This shared understanding between staff and mid-day supervisors gained through the training process was invaluable in the recognition of the importance of break-times in the school day. Some teachers began to get involved in playtime, involving themselves in the games.

The improved co-operative working between staff and mid-day supervisors provided a consistency in approach and developed support to children who required it. In particular the recognition by Head teachers and teaching staff of the nature and role of mid-day supervisors added to the impetus to the development of play times.

The value of play has been successfully developed by the project with the direct experience of all those involved. The process of group working, discussions with children and understanding the significance of rules and implementing new play and games in the playground gave the mid-day supervisors renewed confidence in their own abilities. They were able to see the results in children taking greater responsibility for their play enjoying and co-operating with each other across ages and being sociable. As they learned to use rules of logic and reasoning by understanding the sense of playing games with the rules that affect themselves and other players, the children were learning to give and take. The children were actively involved in learning about themselves and others in ways that were not possible in the classroom. Mid-day supervisors were able to identify improved development in individual children in their social skills and interaction with others, new peer networks and involving isolated individuals in activities.



**C**ritical to the success of the project were the involvement and agreement of the mid-day supervisors. This was achieved during the training sessions where they were encouraged to voice their opinions and concerns. Their acknowledgement and inclusion in the planning process by Head teachers and the project developed their confidence in the work. The precise roles and responsibilities of mid-day supervisors were identified during the training and playground sessions; this bolstered their self-esteem, increased motivation and enthusiasm towards the changes.



With their participation and decision making role enhanced, their initial resistance to welcome changes in working patterns was overcome through seeking their active involvement and opinions on how the project progressed. Most mid-day supervisors had not experienced training about their work and were unexpectedly refreshed and re-inspired about the work they did. Their increased confidence had a tremendous impact on the planning progress and the implementation of the new games.

Whilst the evaluation is not able at this stage to comment with any certainty on the changes in the academic development of children, it is able to point to significant changes in behaviour with children playing together co-operatively. All the parties concerned acknowledged positive changes in the relationship between children with less arguments and disputes, and when disputes did occur, the mid-day supervisors felt more able to deal effectively with them, resolving matters immediately. This led to a notable decrease in the disputes continuing into the classroom – "I have noticed that I have to see far fewer children after lunch or during the day for bad behaviour" Head teacher.

Children returning to classes after break-times were generally described as calmer and arriving on time. One teacher described how more co-operative in class he felt some of his "difficult children" were since the inception of the project.

Significant changes were identified in all three schools with those children who had often been in 'trouble'. One mid-day supervisor said, "*Few of these children have to be excluded from the playground now*". In particular, these children responded positively to having more responsibility in overseeing games and having co-ordinating roles, being more co-operative with mid-day supervisors and staff and having less difficulties with other children.



All those spoken to report a substantial decrease in bullying, in particular children themselves identified this as a noticeable change with improved friendships preventing the possibility of bullying. Children vulnerable to bullying others were now happier and more involved in playtime activities. Bullying, in the playground was now easier to detect through games and therefore addressed quickly preventing its escalation. Generally there were less conflicts and disputes with children learning to accept each other, play harmoniously and resolve differences and difficulties amongst themselves.

Il Covo's role as an external organisation was pivotal in bringing in both a process and dynamism amongst their staff about the value and impact play can have for children and their social learning. This has had far reaching effects on all staff in the school, in particular realising the potential of the mid-day supervisors in managing interactive play. The process adopted by the project was critical in establishing and consolidating the changes, involving all parties into a 'dialogue' generating solutions, which were subsequently owned by those involved. This has had the effect whereby each school has continued to explore the development of play, building on the learning gained after the project has finished. Key inputs provided by the project can be summarised as follows:

- 1. Developing structured play to reduce conflict and promote culture of inclusion.**
- 2. Training and mentoring children to support their peers.**
- 3. Team building, developing trust, co-operation and communication between all staff and children.**
- 4. Creating a culture of responsibility within the school through participatory development of policies.**
- 5. Developing effective approaches to the management of behaviour.**

Each of the schools involved in the evaluation have continued and developed the work of the project adapting and modifying the initiative according to the school, space, resources, the children and staff. Most importantly each school is learning how best to respond and develop play constantly, with all those concerned confident in taking the initiative to explore possibilities including the children. All the Head teachers have given their support to the development of the project and have continued to take full responsibility for the progress of the work in break-times. They have recognised the value to both the social and academic learning of the children with substantial changes in behaviour.

*"I think the project has raised the self esteem of the mid-day supervisors. In terms of settling down after lunch it has been a tremendous change, with fewer incidents in the playground. Improved resolution of disputes, has meant much less time lost from lessons settling arguments".*

Headteacher

*"The games have helped to show how much the playground can be used to teach good and positive social skills".*

Teacher

*"I now enjoy this work and can see how positive it can be, thanks" .*

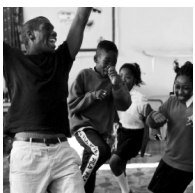
Mid-day supervisor

*"All the children now seem to listen to each other more, everyone can now have a say rather than just the loud ones. It's so good now".*

8 year old girl.

In September 2002 one of the schools that took part in this evaluation, St Jude's Primary was visited by OFSTED; the following is an extract of their report:

*"Extra-curricular provision is much improved.... The Elephant Links programme has resulted in more purposeful and structured lunchtime activities.... The positive attitude of the lunchtime supervisors have contributed to the much improved atmosphere at lunch time and helped to reduce the number of incidents which require teacher attention at the start of the afternoon, resulting in the prompt start of lessons."*



**For more information about Il Covo please contact:**



**40 Tabard Street  
London  
SE1 4JU**

**Tel/Fax. 020 7378 7491  
e-mail: [info@ilcovo.org](mailto:info@ilcovo.org)  
[www.ilcovo.org](http://www.ilcovo.org)**



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