



Long-Term Collaboration to Support Safe, Healthy, and Inclusive Play at School

A Partnership with Playworks



UC SANTA CRUZ | Campus + Community

Rethinking Recess

Creating Safe and Inclusive Playtime for All Children in School



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A Partnership Advocating for Recess

Associate Professor of Sociology Rebecca London has been working with her community partner, Playworks, since 2008. Playworks is a national non-profit organization headquartered in Oakland whose mission is to facilitate safe and healthy play through supporting recess in elementary schools across the United States. A core part of their work involves helping schools to improve playtime through strategies to make recess safe, healthy, and engaging, and provide students with tools to manage their own play, solve conflicts that arise, and strengthen their social and emotional skills.

A 15-Year Relationship

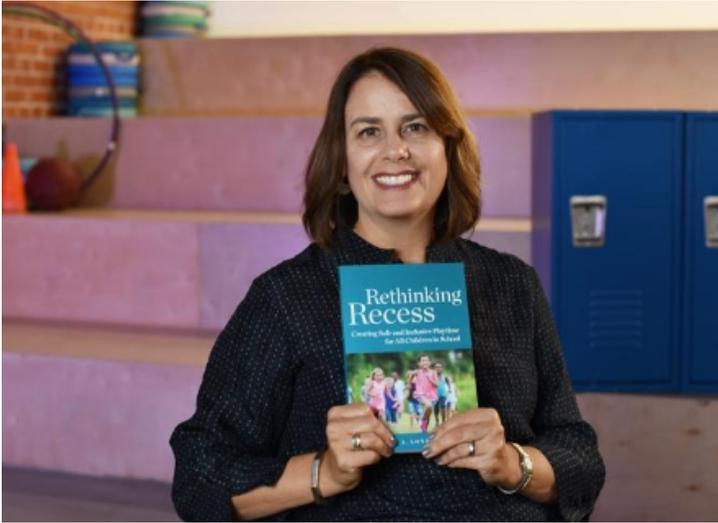
Their partnership began at the John W. Gardner Center for Youth at Stanford University, where London was then Senior Researcher, and to whom Playworks had reached out for an evaluative study. At the time, Playworks had been in operation for roughly ten years and was already adept at data collection around outcomes, with a strong understanding of what their programming was helping to achieve. Given this, London and Playworks decided together on a study that would instead help to describe the contexts that support and deter from a strong program implementation and establish outcome metrics that aligned with the goals of Playworks programming. Using a community-engaged model of research, London worked with Playworks not only to devise the questions driving the study, but also through the process of data collection, drawing on Playworks' pre-existing knowledge to inform what she was witnessing in the field. Using the data they collected, London and her team formulated a theory of change that Playworks came to reference more than the formal report that the study was originally meant to generate, and which they still use today when thinking about their work. This first study set the precedent for a long-term relationship founded on trust and continuous dialogue, where London, as an academic researcher, lent theoretical rigor but in a way that took care to uplift and draw from Playworks' own knowledge, questions, and concerns.

Rethinking Recess

One major outcome of this partnership is London's book *Rethinking Recess*, which was published in 2019 and adopted by Playworks to facilitate wider conversation around recess and recess legislation. The disruption and school closures forced by COVID-19 pandemic prompted Playworks to shift its work toward thinking about the importance of recess once in-person schooling resumed, especially after two years of stay-at-home learning. During this time, London worked with them as a thought partner to help refine their messaging around recess post-pandemic. Together, and with another research partner at Oregon State University, they worked with scholars and practitioners around the world to found the Global Recess Alliance to advocate for the significance of recess to child and youth development. As such, although their partnership was already a close one, the pandemic opened up an opportunity for London to work with Playworks outside the context of a formal study and she supported their advocacy efforts by speaking at webinars and weighing in on training they conducted.

Future Directions

Playworks has long felt that the key to successful recess is to empower those already at schools to support a safe and healthy recess. London is starting a new study focused on this training model for the 2022-23 school year. Also on the horizon is the possibility of California recess legislation. California Senator Josh Newman has expressed interest in sponsoring recess legislation and London a policy brief for his staff to generate discussions of what that legislation could entail. This is a huge culmination of their 15-year partnership and both London and Playworks are excited to see where it continues to go.



“Through the pandemic our work together shifted...because schools closed. I worked really closely with [Playworks] to pivot our messaging and to talk about the importance of recess once schools reopened, to talk about the ways that play would help to combat the trauma that kids were experiencing.”

-Rebecca London

"Academic work can be slow...whereas practitioners need to move. What I instantly found really helpful was that Rebecca was really accessible. She prioritized and valued the practice perspective, which made [our] partnership continue to grow.”

- Jennette Classon, Director of Evaluation at Playworks

For Further Reading

Alderton, Matt. “Recess to the Rescue: COVID means school play for kids is more important than ever.” *USA Today*, August 8, 2021. Available at: <https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/2021/08/08/kids-need-healing-power-free-play-time-school/5457194001/>

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Massey, William. “How Recess Helps Students Learn.” *The Conversation*, February 14, 2022. Available at: <https://theconversation.com/how-recess-helps-students-learn-175986>

Playworks. “Great Recess Framework.” Available at: <https://www.playworks.org/resources/great-recess-framework/>

Questions? Contact us.

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