

Children still delight in playground games

Deprived of Facebook and Wii's and shunted out into the bright light and fresh air of the playground, today's children do not, it seems, stare morosely at the concrete or send texts until the bell is rung.

According to research, children's play in the 21st century is in rude, inventive and occasionally perplexing health.

Traditional games are still popular but children are also incorporating cultural figures including Beyoncé and Simon Cowell into their play.

After spending more than two years watching children play, researchers from the universities of London, East London and Sheffield concluded that popular media are informing, rather than destroying, playground life.

Children not only act out the twisted psychodramas of Britain's Got Talent and the Jeremy Kyle Show and stage scaled-down versions of High School Musical and Harry Potter, but also use their computer games as a basis for acted-out war and fantasy games.

Prof Jackie Marsh of the University of Sheffield said the research demonstrated how children have responded to the new media age. "Today's children have to manage an increasingly complex world of technology and information and the project has shown how these aspects of their lives are crucially important for their social, emotional and cultural development," she said. "The playground provides an important space for children to engage with how their culture is changing in a digital age."

The study, which received £600,000 funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, also found that, far from merely aping what they had seen online or on the TV screen, children pick, choose, combine and reinvent to come up with new games and scenarios.