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AUTHOR McClure, Cheryl; Kinnison, Lloyd R.
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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews historical aspects of play, issues about recess time, and implications for children who have disabilities. It also describes the need for research to acquire information from stakeholders. Play is pleasurable, enjoyable, intrinsic, and the active base for cognitive, social, motor, and language development in children. Experienced gained during the practice of certain activities during play increases the efficiency with which the same responses will be performed in maturity. Recess is important in allowing students with disabilities to interact with their typical peers and in providing the opportunity to express experiences, learn by trial and error to cope with the actual world, develop creativity, address deficits or delays in language development, and strengthen sensory abilities. Options for play advocates intent on saving recess and play time in schools are provided and include: (1) alter the purpose of public schools so that experimental or existential learning is valued; (2) accept the current purpose of schools and call for more research on play's role in student academic outcomes; or (3) select and defend only those play interventions that research have shown already to be achievement producing. (Contains 52 references.) (CR)

Recess in Elementary Schools: Implications for Children who have Disabilities

Cheryl McClure and Lloyd R. Kinnison
College of Education and Human Ecology
Special Education
Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX

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Correspondence to:

Cheryl McClure, LMSW-ACP, Doctoral Student
College of Education and Human Ecology, Special Education, P. O. Box 425769, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX 76204-5769. Phone: (940) 898-2271, Fax: (940)898-2270, Email: txmc@flash.net
or

Lloyd R. Kinnison, Ed.D.
College of Education and Human Ecology, Special Education, P. O. Box 425769, Texas Woman's University, Denton, TX 76204-5769. Phone: (940) 898-2281, Fax: (940)898-2270, Email: D_KINNISON@TWU.EDU

Abstract

The educational value of play for children has often been underestimated by educators, and the contemporary emphasis on academic performance has put a suspect spotlight on all activities that are not directly related to instruction. There is a growing trend where elementary students are being denied time for free play or recess in order that schools have more time to teach the essential elements. The "recess debate" may seem like a frivolous controversy, but for children with disabilities eliminating this school activity can be a subtle move toward creating a more restrictive educational environment and exclusion of opportunity to naturally develop, practice and demonstrate psychosocial skills. This literature review examines historical aspects of play, issues about recess time, implications for children who have disabilities, and describe the need for research to acquire information from stakeholders.

RECESS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS:
Implications for Children who have Disabilities

The purpose of this literature review is to present information regarding the impact of elementary school recess on children who receive special education services. The scope of this review is threefold, (1) to explore the historical data related to the significance of recess and free play for child development, (2) to present the issues that are causing many public schools to eliminate recess time from the school day of elementary children, and (3) to focus on the implications of recess for children who have disabilities. This review concludes with a research question that is the basis for a study being conducted at Texas Woman's University (TWU), Denton, Texas.

Much of the research about the benefits of school recess has been observational data collected on a small target number of children in a few schools (Barbour, 1996; Borman & Kurdek, 1987; Pellegrini & Davis, 1993; & Tomporowski & Ellis, 1988). The results of these studies have given strong support for including recess in an elementary child's school day (Jambor & Gargiulo, 1987; Kimball & Brainard, 1996; Newman, Brody, & Beauchamp, 1996; & Torrey, Vasa, Maag & Kramer, 1992). Data analysis has pointed to the cognitive, social and behavioral advantages that are associated with students who participate in recess play (Borman & Kurdek, 1987; Caplan & Caplan, 1973; Dougherty, Fowler & Paine, 1985; Jambor, 1998; Nelson, Smith & Colvin, 1995; Pellegrini & Smith, 1993; Putallaz & Wasserman, 1989; Vygotsky, 1978). Play is pleasurable, enjoyable, intrinsic, and the active base for cognitive, social, motor, and language development in children. Due to the lack of longitudinal educational studies, scientists have used findings from related disciplines and school administrators have used standardized test scores to consider long term implications of having or

not having an elementary school recess period. Meanwhile, special educators have been consumed with implementing the 1997 reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and have overlooked how the "recess debate" impacts the "least restrictive environment" concept. The play patterns of children who have disabilities can be a rich area for educational assessment and intervention, but the enhancement that recess time furnishes for special education programming has been ignored.

History

Play as an educational enterprise has its roots in the French revolution. The restricted, constrained society of France in the eighteenth century came under direct challenge by persons who attacked the formality and class privileges of the aristocracy. Rousseau initiated the idea of using a student's own inclinations to question, to act, and to explore as a foundation for learning. His book on pedagogy, Emile, was a theoretical discourse about such an ideal education. He believed that a child needed to be active in a natural environment where a tutor would follow the child and respond to the child's questions and movements. Play as a childhood recreational activity sponsored by adults is a century old. In Boston, the American playground was born in 1885. It allowed neighborhood children to enjoy playing in heaps of sand provided by a woman's charitable organization.

Play is natural development and environmental discovery. The ecological importance of play has been evidenced in animal and cross cultural studies. It has been observed that animals use play as an irresponsible apprenticeship to the serious business of life (Muller-Schwarze, 1978, p. 235). The play period of young animals permits the practice of vital responses under conditions where error and incompleteness are not fatal. Experience gained during the practice

of certain activities during play increases the efficiency with which the same responses will be performed in maturity. For example, a kitten's repeated chase and capture of a ball of string is later reflected in improved mouseing. The cognitive benefits of animal play is illustrated in the fact that the brain of monkeys that play with toys are larger and heavier than those that are deprived of play material and the opportunity to play (Caplan, 1973, p. 92). When the play patterns of five culturally diverse groups were studied, Arnaud and Curry (1976, as cited in Yawkey and Pellegrini, 1984, p. 283) found many similarities among rural Appalachian, Mexican, Black, Native American, and urban mixed socioeconomic children. All the children played out common themes; although their play styles reflected the children's unique cultural content. It may add a new dimension of richness to a child's pretend play if props or toys are provided that reflect aspects of the child's environment that are specific to his or her culture and experience.

Prior to the Industrial Era and the turn of the twentieth century, there were two parallel views of the educative benefit of play, (1) a concrete, sensory experience with a natural environment as the predecessor for abstract symbolic thinking, and (2) play as a means to learn the roles of later life. The educational trends of the industrialized era clarified what was the beginning of today's contemporary philosophical clash and educational conflict regarding the value of recess for elementary aged children. Following World War II, the philosophical "tug of war" over where play belonged in the curriculum of schools crystallized. On one end of the rope, play became synonymous with self expression and therapeutic learning. It was marked by educators like Caroline Pratt who established the play school in New York, and psychologist like Anna Freud who first recorded the progress observed in child centered play when treating a girl

with autistic. On the other end of the rope, play in schools was overshadowed by attention to mathematics, science, and global competition. For those favoring more instruction, recess was considered to lack academic meaning and relevance to learning. Today, there are those who represent educational engineering with quantitative objectives, and those representing child-centered instruction with qualitative analysis.

Studies conducted by Piaget at the Geneva Institute, and Bruner of the Institute of Cognitive Studies at Harvard documented the crucial role of early childhood experiences for later learning and the natural vehicle for learning contained in child's play. Projects that were based on the findings of these researchers incorporated three elements of play - pleasure, intrinsic motivation, and active engagement. Laboratory schools were able to connect the link between cognitive research and play in childhood. Play related to academic achievement was confirmed by child study researchers around the world and was justified as essential for learning. Followers of scientists like Piaget and Bruner viewed play as a moral and constitutional right of students to be able to question, to move, to puzzle, and to make choices.

Play is the language of the child and it offers a powerful tool to express experiences. While play is a natural phenomenon in children, it is difficult to define because it changes its form as children mature. In his book Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood (1932), Piaget defined four stages of play that are significant in developmental theory. The first stage is practice play or sensorimotor play. This involves non-goal oriented actions with objects motivated by the child's pleasure in having actions and objects under his/her own control. The second stage is construction play. This type of play is evident when a child puts things together or groups objects by function and shape. The third stage is symbolic or pretend play. Children

in this stage use fantasy to change themselves into people or objects other than themselves, or place themselves into imaginary situations. In the final stage, children begin to play games with rules such as checkers.

The last six decades has created a tremendous educational challenge for the simple play development principles that Piaget proposed. Goodland and McMannon (1997) presented the changing focus of public education in The Public Purpose of Education and Schooling. With each "educational and social era", the support for free play and provision of elementary school recess mirror political issues. In the early 80's, direct instruction became the banner of instruction. Recess has become one of the victims of the "back to basics" movement. Throughout the 90's the political and social climates are essentialistic. Schools are being asked to limit their purpose and to focus on reversing declining achievement scores. Fiscal austerity and accountability for predetermined ends have become the yard stick for measuring school success, and the debate regarding the value of childhood play and elementary school recess has been fueled.

Recess Debate

Two methodologies of learning - play and direct instruction - are two views of education that have been in conflict since the appearance of the play school movement in the early 1900s. Public education's play policies have reflected social attitudes throughout history. Play in preindustrial times was commonly thought of as a child's imitation of adults and the release of surplus energy. In industrial times play was considered a frivolous and nonproductive activity. During the progressive era, play was viewed as active problem solving and socialization. In the

post - World War II era, play was again seen as frivolous. In today's era, play is increasingly considered as an unimportant practice in elementary school settings.

Most adults have too little understanding of how powerful recess and related experiences can be to the child's overall growth, development, and educational program. In April, 1998 the USA elementary school recess debate became publicly visible when the superintendent of schools in Atlanta, Benjamin O. Canada announced the decision to ban recess from the city's public schools (Johnson, 1998). Ironically, in the same metropolitan area, A. D. Pellegrini teaches child development and conducts studies on school playgrounds. This university professor and scientific contributor to be benefits of recess and play among young children is one of the contemporary advocates of the "save recess movement". Another vocal advocate is Ann O'Bar, president of the American Association on the Child's Right to Play, an organization that promotes the notion of play as an essential right of childhood (Glickman, 1984).

While those who are in favor of discontinuing a school recess period allege to have a long range vision to support their position there is not scientific support for the position. Those who proclaim that recess is an unnecessary and a distracting part of the elementary school day do not have theory or empirical fact to suggest that recess takes time away from more productive work time. Although educators and parents would agree that best pedagogy practices derived from scientific study do not drive educational policy decision making, it is significant that decisions to "do away with" elementary school recess are increasingly being made without purposeful evidence. Recess opponents believe it takes time away from instruction and it can be the venue for various forms of aggression. Education policy makers are so obsessed with academic attainment that they have eliminated or drastically reduced other activities which are

important in children's total growth, development and learning. The underlying belief for those who want to limit or eliminate recess in schools is part of what Bertrand Russell termed the "cult of efficiency" (Russell, 1932/1972, p. 24).

If we must compare the academic successes of American children with other cultures, like Asia, it might be beneficial to look at the Asian academic program within the context of their total school day. Chinese, Taiwanese, and Japanese children have an eight-hour school day that includes frequent recess, long lunch periods, and afterschool activities. These add up to one-fourth of their school day; therefore much the longer school day is devoted to non-academic opportunities. Asian elementary schools appear to strive for a balance among academic curriculum, play, social interaction, and extracurricular activities (Stevenson, 1992; Pellegrini & Bjorklund, 1997). In great Britain it is not uncommon to find school children with 15 minute periods of outdoor play in the morning and afternoon (Pellegrini and Smith, 1993).

Recess research studies have included teacher surveys, analysis of observations of students at recess time, and examination of free play effects on classroom performance (Chuoke & Eyman, 1997). Researchers have concluded that play is beneficial to immediate and later social and academic competence (Lindsay, 1994). Play theory research has pointed out the relationship of play and subsequent development in young children. Early childhood educators discuss the importance of play in terms of its payoff in school-related tasks (Pellegrini & Bjorklund, 1996). Newman, Brody and Beauchamp (1996) conducted a survey with 286 teachers from 31 schools who taught grades 1 to 6 and found that there were great differences in teachers' attitudes toward and provision of play. The amount of recess time provided by teachers was related to the attitudes that those teachers revealed toward the importance and role

of play. Teachers of lower grades were less likely to agree that children have ample time for play outside of school than were teachers of upper grades. Beyond school policy, teachers' recess attitudes greatly impact the playground experience for students. One reason given for eliminating recess is the safety concern at school playgrounds. Teachers from urban settings are less supportive of allowing time for recess in elementary school than teachers from suburban and rural settings. Unsafe neighborhoods surrounding schools is often cited as a reason for recess nonsupport (Newman, Brody and Beauchamp,1996). Other concerns relate to the potential for violence and aggression among students during recess period. McKenzie, Sallis and Elder (1997) studied the physical activity patterns and social encouragement for physical activity 115 European American and 172 Mexican American children during school recess. Preschool and elementary school children spent the majority of their recess time being sedentary, but Mexican American children participated in less vigorous physical activity than their European American counterparts. Elementary school teachers gave less encouragement for children to be physically active than preschool teachers did.

In the traditional stance of adults knowing what is best for children and not soliciting opinions from students, there has not been an attempt to identify how children view recess in elementary school. Following the Atlanta ban on recess, Kathleen Parker wrote an April 15 commentary on the issue (In her classroom, 1998) that was carried in several United States newspapers and worldwide websites. Two weeks later, April 29, Parker's column presented the public reaction to her earlier "pro-recess" piece. She stated, "adults may be too busy...to notice...adults have been alarmingly silent". The majority of responses to the writer's commentary came from children; specifically a third grade class. Besides the decreasing

opportunity for free play at school recess, today's children have restricted play experiences after school. They indulge in excessive television viewing and sedentary electronic game playing. Many are home alone and are forced to stay indoors. Urbanization has slowly squeezed out the natural play spaces, and spaces such as park and community playgrounds are often considered unsafe (Jambor, 1998). With a greater emphasis in schools to get "back to basics," the respect for play as a major developmental task and attribute for learning seems to be on the wane (Bethea, 1992). There has not been a cross variable attempt to identify how the consumers view recess. Likewise, the value that free play and elementary school recess have for the child with a disability has been lost in the philosophical debate about the "basics" of childhood development and learning.

Recess and Children with Disabilities

Recess is simply a break in what one is engaged in. It is a period of time away from the task at hand: an interlude, a change of pace (Jambor, 1998). At school, recess is a time to get away from academic tasks and recharge. The recess period represents a unique part of the school day. It is one of the few times when children can interact with their peers on their own terms with minimal adult intervention. The spontaneous peer interaction that can be observed at recess has cognitive-developmental and social-developmental significance for all children (Pellegrini, 1994), but for the child who is disabled, this time in the school day may be the most natural setting for mainstream inclusion. The importance of play is an often overlooked component of many intervention programs for children with disabilities (Brown, Murray & Weiner, 1996).

Play is the language of the child and it offers a powerful tool to express experiences. While play is a natural phenomenon in children, it is difficult to define because it changes its form as children mature. In his book Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood (1932), Piaget defined four stages of play that are significant in developmental theory. The first stage is practice play or sensorimotor play. This involves non-goal oriented actions with objects motivated by the child's pleasure in having actions and objects under his/her own control. The second stage is construction play. This type of play is evident when a child puts things together or groups objects by function and shape. The third stage is symbolic or pretend play. Children in this stage use fantasy to change themselves into people or objects other than themselves, or place themselves into imaginary situations. In the final stage, children begin to play games with rules such as checkers.

Play provides a minimum of risks and penalties for mistakes. Play is a way of learning by trial and error to cope with the actual world. Play is a self discovery activity that teaches as it builds ego and creativity (Kaduson, 1997). Play can provide a rich variety of experience and at the same time is immediately satisfying and enjoyable in itself; furnishing the child's immediate incentive for carrying out the exploration, experimentation, and skill-learning involved in play. Vygotsky (1966) wrote about the developmental benefits that play provides to children. He asserted that children create play episodes within the "zones of proximal development" in which they may practice and extend their cognitive skills, particularly by transferring their play operations from the actual to the imaginative world. The relationship between play experiences and cognitive development was also investigated in a study by Dunn and Herwig (1992). They

found that young children who scored poorly on cognitive measure also scored poorly on observational measures of social play behavior during free play time.

Children do not play in a vacuum; they use and test all their ideas and experiences as they play. Play is the child's most dynamic manner of learning (Caplan, 1973, p. 88). In a play and discovery setting there are no right and wrong answers to a finite number of questions. When children are in control of their own learning, they are not so much concerned with "right" answers as they are with asking the right questions about the setting they are studying. Play is a vital learning process. During the elementary grades, there must be some time for playing, for allowing a child's imagination to forge ahead, for letting children "try the impossible," and for their toying with the infinite. Play, like nothing else has the power to infuse learning with dynamic purpose. The self discovery, educative powers of play need to be part of elementary academic learning. Teaching procedures can be more playful, self learning, and manipulative endeavors. A child's learning of major ideas can arise from a foundation of experiences and interactions with the real world.

Two theories form the basis for the support of recess as a means to improve classroom behavior and task performance. The first is based on a need to physically release. The surplus energy theory describes how prolonged confinement of children in classrooms results in a high probability of fidgeting, restlessness, and subsequent reduction in concentration (Pellegrini and Davis, 1993). Tomporowski and Ellis (1988) suggested that vigorous playground behavior is related to attention to seat work after recess and that exercise increases attention to various cognitive tasks. A similar finding was found with Pellegrini and Glickman (1989) who observed that the longer children spend in classrooms, the longer and more vigorous were their play

outdoors. Recess is a release period that can help facilitate a students attention to more academic tasks and minimize fidgeting and squirming in the classroom.

The second theory is based on our mental need for variety and periodic diversion. The novelty theory considers that it is natural for children to become bored with their immediate environment. When children go outdoors for recess they seek novelty by interacting with different peers in different situations. Once they return to the classroom, they environmental change helps them pay closer attention (Pellegrini, 1991, p. 40). Elkind (1981) believes that play may have a therapeutic effect, because play functions as a respite from stress engendered by adult expectations and pressures. He wrote about the need to allow recess to be part of a child's school day and asserted that substituting structured lessons for free play activities helps create stressed - out "hurried" children. Rest periods in the form of recess enhances subsequent performance, and the nature of the recess activity may affect the extent of the subsequent benefits (Pellegrini & Bjorklund, 1997). Sluckin (1981) and Sutton-Smith (1971) considered social skills learned and practiced on the playground during recess important to later development. Gross (1901), Piaget (1932), Vygotsky (1978), and Sluckin (1981) all viewed children's play as practice and preparation for adulthood. Merrell, Johnson, Merz and Ring (1992) found that social competence among students with mild disabilities was an important foundation for adequate peer relationships and academic success.

The importance of peers in children's social development has been of interest since the 1930's (Yawkey & Pellegrini, 1984, p. 280). The lack of social skills among students with disabilities is frequently noted by teachers and social competence is frequently discussed in special education literature (Merrell, Johnson, Merz & Ring, 1992). Over the last 10 years there

have been numerous attempts to incorporate social skills teaching in the curriculum; therefore measures to decrease recess in elementary schools seems counterproductive. Recess is one of the few times during the school day when children can exhibit a wide range of social competencies. As they interact, they use language and nonverbal communications; they make decisions and solve problems; and they deal with the emotional responses to their interactions (Jambor & Gargiulo, 1987).

One of the critical implications of the recess debate that has received minuscule attention is the long term moral message that is connected with devaluing the need for play in a child's school day. Play is believed to be related to moral and prosocial development (Newman, Brody & Beauchamp, 1996). Children gain exposure to different opinions by interacting with peers and are better able to make moral decisions that are less egocentric in orientation. When disadvantaged preschoolers were randomly assigned to programs emphasizing play rather than formal skills training they were found to be more responsible and less delinquent as adolescents. Recess is a peer interaction setting that allow children to gain feedback about their own ideas and social strategies, and modify them according to this feedback.

Elementary school children can have more positive and valuable recess experiences when interventions are used to increase cooperation. Playground meetings between teachers and children can help build problem solving skills among young children and assist them in their overall social and emotional development (Thompson, Kudson & Wilson, 1997). Teachers who use playground meetings believe that recess is a very important time for children, and occurrences on the playground strongly influence a child's school experience.

Following a student survey at an inclusive Rhode Island elementary school, it was discovered that many students wanted to feel more welcomed at the school environment (Chuoke & Eyman, 1997). To facilitate a sense of safety and community means for allowing students to welcome new students and to make the playground more user-friendly were implemented. As inclusive practices spread, an increasing number of children with mild disabilities are spending most or all of the school day in regular classroom environment with peers who do not have learning problems. Siperstein, Leffert, and Wenz-Gross (1997) studied the quality of friendships among preadolescent children with and without mild disabilities and concluded that the social-cognitive skill deficits make it more difficult for a child with a disability to participate in the development and maintenance of "typical" friendships. The researchers assessed reciprocal relationship status of 373 children, including 54 with mild mental retardation or learning problems. Unlike friendships between children without disabilities, friendship dyads between children with and without mild disabilities were marked by limited collaboration and shared decision-making, a low level of cooperative play and shared laughter, and an asymmetrical, hierarchical division of roles.

Healey and Masterpasqua (1992) studied the academic success and interpersonal cognitive problem-solving skills among 73 elementary school children with mild mental retardation. The research was based on previous findings that deficient social competence in children with disabilities lowers their chances for adjustment to the community, and that decreased interpersonal exchange of ideas, can slow the rate of intellectual development. The results indicated that assessment of interpersonal cognitive problem-solving skills, such as the

ability to generate alternative solutions may determine if educational mainstreaming is successful.

Historically, play has been valued by the childhood development field, but most of its developmental benefits have been associated with "normal" development. Lawrence K. Frank, in 1968 (as cite in Caplan, 1973, p. 89) stated that a child can and will-if not handicapped, impaired or blocked, master sensory experiences through continual play. More contemporary researchers have shown how play can address deficits or delays in language development, social development, emotional development, or sensory integration. Scarlett (1994) noted that play is essential to a young child for organizing and managing feelings. With children for whom talking does not come easily or who are too young to discuss their problems, play can be used to allow them to express their feelings, conflicts, and concerns (Simpson & Zionts, 1992, p. 115). Play has inherent pleasure, it is self-motivating and can satisfy a child's innate need to explore and master his/her environment. When a child has experienced trauma, play may become preservative and seemingly obligatory without any relief or evidence of mastery.

For children who have autism, play can help offset the ritualistic quality that may develop around object relationships. Strengthening a child's sensory abilities through play and practice will build his/her perception in all modalities. A recent contributor to the field of play therapy with autism is Stanley Greenspan (1992). He and his colleagues think that the primary goal of intervention is to enable children to form a sense of their own personhood - a sense of themselves as intentional, interactive individuals. Greenspan emphasizes the importance of following the child's lead and describes a process that moves rather quickly to symbolic communication and representational play using traditional playroom toys and materials. It is

Greenspan's belief that children who have autism often lack the most basic foundation for interpersonal experiences; therefore, the earliest therapeutic goals must be geared to the first steps in the developmental progression (Greenspan, 1992, pp. 4-6).

Although unfolding at a delayed pace, the play of children with Down Syndrome has been observed to progress through the same sequences of decentration, decontextualization, and integration in object and social play that characterize the play of normally developing children . In a replicated study of symbolic play development in children with Down Syndrome, Cicchetti, Beeghley and Weiss-Perry (1994) found that when compared with nonretarded comparison children; significant intercorrelations among symbolic play maturity, level of cognitive development, affective-motivational play style, and social interaction skills were observed within each group. Developmental trends in object play that were similar to those reported for nondelayed children were observed both in children with Down Syndrome and in the nonhandicapped control children. With autism, it is helpful to recognize play development as a transformational process rather than as a series of successive stages or linear process. Play characteristics can be symbolic or social. The symbolic dimension of play includes play acts that are directed toward objects or signify specific events. These range from simple exploration of objects to more complex imaginative play schemes. The social dimension of play focuses on the child's distance to and involvement with one or more children. These include peer-directed social behaviors progressing from brief and fleeting encounters to coordinated and sustained interactions. Play behaviors between a child who has autism and family members or adult caretakers often lack spontaneity in being symbolic or social. While each set of characteristic

behaviors appear to follow a relatively consistent development sequence, they are not regarded as mutually exclusive stages of development (Quill, 1995, p. 204).

Peer relationships are considered to be critical for healthy development; therefore it is important to understand the social acceptance barriers faced by students with disabilities. Ochoa and Olivarez (1995) reviewed 17 studies representing 20 years of research comparing the social difficulties of disabled children and nondisabled student peers. Their meta-analysis revealed that elementary students with disabilities receive less favorable sociometric ratings than their older counterparts and that younger children have limited opportunity for opposite-sex interaction. The results demonstrated that pupils with disabilities have considerably lower sociometric status when compared to their nondisabled peers. Studies indicated that students with disabilities evidence more immaturity, aggression, and personality problems compared to nondisabled students.

Reports about the deficits in social skills and lower social status of children with intellectual disabilities have significant implications for classroom mainstreaming and integration into the community. Torrey, Vasa, Maag and Kramer (1992) examined the efficacy of social skills training with seven students from grade 3 through 6 who were identified as having mild disabilities. The students were observed in the resource room, regular classroom, and recess periods. Recess periods of 15 minutes duration were provided to all subjects twice daily and were under the direct supervision of a teacher or a paraprofessional. There were approximately 100 students on the playgrounds during these times. The researchers found increases in behavioral ratings for all subjects in classroom and resource settings, but improvement during the recess settings were only found with four of the seven subjects. It was

concluded that target behaviors did not seem as socially relevant to the recess setting where negative reputation of target students may have prevented "entrapment" from occurring. Entrapment was defined as a process hereby newly acquired behaviors are maintained by naturally occurring.

John Ronning and Dabie Nabuzoka (1993) reported on intervention methods aimed at increasing interaction between primary school children with intellectual disabilities and nondisabled peers. Zambian children were observed in natural situations without any manipulations and experimental situations where manipulations were made. The findings indicated that play skills training coupled with teacher prompts led to more substantial increases in interactions among the students. A "special friends" approach associated with the nondisabled children taking the role of initiators of interaction, led to increases in social behavior in both the experimental and natural situations. In addition to examining the efficacy of intervention methods, the researchers demonstrated the universality for both Western and Third World settings in issues concerned with integration of children with disabilities in mainstream schools through promotion of social interaction.

Recess can be a time when teachers can have an opportunity to assess social development through informal observations. Pellegrini and Glickman (1989) found that observing children on the playground during recess can assess peer popularity, a proven predictor of school adjustment. Children who consistently spend their recess sitting alone or with adults may be a risk for personality disorders and rejection from peers can be linked to a risk of juvenile delinquency later on. Environmental variables can influence the play behaviors of young children with disabilities. Rettig (1998) identified six environmental factors that can shape children's play

behaviors: (1) theoretical orientation of the program, (2) amount of space available, (3) equipment or material arrangement, (4) length of the play period, (5) effects of social or isolate equipment, and (6) the effects of different activities. The findings support the notion that the benefits of recess time is greatly influenced by the degree for which the adults value play for children. Recess allows children opportunities for crossgender, crossethnic and crossability interactions. It is one of the "least restrictive times" in the school day when the environment can promote inclusion and tolerance of differences among children.

Ann Barbour (1996) studied second grade children to examine the relationship between physical competence, peer relations and motor skills. Results revealed that student's level of motor competence has social as well as physical consequences Students with high physical competence appeared to have more opportunities to develop social knowledge than did those who had low physical competence. Encouraging physical development during recess can enhance social and emotional skills for a child with a disability. Butcher and Hall (1998) studied the benefits of Team Lincolns's recreation services for elementary students who were identified as "at-risk". Team Lincoln was a service learning program implemented at an urban elementary school where the student body consisted of many youths at risk and the program was designed to provide a program of organized recess activities. The project goals were: to provide effective role models for disadvantaged youths, to design meaningful activities for the children that enhance self-esteem and foster positive social interactions, and to provide learning opportunities for participants. Student interviews assessed overall differences in perceptions about recess before and after the Team Lincoln experience. The findings suggested that the children's

perceptions and experiences on the playground were augmented as a result of the program and systematic recreational intervention.

Elementary students with disabilities may have a variety of educational classroom placements - self-contained, resource classes, content mastery provision, and mainstream with modifications. At recess, these students are given the opportunity to interact in ways that the "classroom walls" do not allow. Students without disabilities can gain better acceptance of the diversity of disability and through the natural flow of play, children with and without disabilities can discover what they have in common. Recess provides a time when all children can discover a world that includes competence, cooperation and compassion.

Conclusion

The stakeholders in the debate about school recess are the policy makers, the education administrators, the teachers, the students, and the parents; although there is not an organized effort to obtain direct input from these groups. Policy makers and administrators are focused on increasing instruction time with the expected result of improved standardized test scores and increased performance in the academic "basics". Parents can easily feel powerless or out of the decision making process when it comes to school activities and curriculum. Little is known about organized "save play in schools" initiatives that are available to those at a local level.

Glickman (1984, pp. 268-270) suggests that advocates for play have three options: (1) they can attempt to alter the purpose of public schools so that experimental or existential learning is valued, (2) they can accept the current purpose of schools and call for more research

on play's role in student academic outcomes, and (3) they can select and defend only those play interventions that research has shown already to be achievement producing. When we recall the best of times of childhood; the pictures in the long term memories of adults and the short term memories of adolescents are constructed around the school playground...what we learned, or did not learn with our peers...while the adults looked elsewhere. It is critical that these best times of childhood are regarded with the richness that they offer inquiry and research; an opportunity to discovery and to learn about diversity in a real life way.

For children, meaningful activities are interactions in play, games, and recreation. These experiences promote a child's self-esteem, increased levels of life skills, and enhanced feelings of well-being. These are the goals of most individualized educational plans for disabled students; therefore, the debate over "to have or not to have" recess of special education is more significant than has been yet documented.

The debate over elementary school recess and the value of childhood play will be part of the educational conflicts that will be brewing into the twenty first century. Unfortunately, the public is more concerned about school yard gun slayings than play ground potential for children reaching their physical, social, and cognitive human potential. So far, the few efforts to solicit input from the stakeholders indicates that educators, mental health practitioners, child development specialists, and children agree to the benefits and support the need for free play and recess time in elementary schools. As a few Florida's elementary students reacted to the news of Atlanta's recess ban - "recess is where you free your mind"; "every kid needs to play outside because we are using our brains too much"; "we can learn how to get along with people", "and we need the exercise," (Kids have their say, 1998).

Following the Atlanta's recess ban announcement, researchers from the Texas Women's University (TWU) special education and kinesiology departments collaborated on developing a questionnaire that could solicit information from educators, administrators, parents, and related service personnel about elementary school recess. During the pre-test of the study, it was concluded that a broad based examination of this subject is needed. Participation in this current study being conducted at TWU can be accomplished by contacted Dr. Lloyd Kinnison at D_KINNISON@TWU.EDU.

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Organization/Address: TWU, Special Ed. Div. PO Box 425769 Denton, TX 76204-5769	**Telephone:** 940-8982281	**Fax:** 940-8982270
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