

Students with Speech Impairments Participating in Recess

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Abstract

The participation of students with speech impairments in recess can often be both challenging and rewarding for the students and teachers. This paper will address common characteristics of students with speech impairments and present basic solutions to improve the experience of these students in the recess setting. Initially the definition, symptoms, and prevalence of speech impairments will be presented. The paper will then address the special education classification of children with speech impairments, benefits of recess for children with speech impairments, and recommendations for these children in recess.

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Definition, Symptoms, and Prevalence of Speech Impairments

Speech impairments are disorders including stuttering, impaired articulation, or voice impairments, which adversely affect spoken language. Speech impairments can affect speech language which includes articulation, voice, and fluency. Language impairments differ as they affect the understanding of language (receptive language disorder), the formation of an utterance (expressive language disorder - saying what one intends to say), or both. This paper will focus on speech impairments (American Speech Language Hearing Association, 2012).

The lifetime prevalence of speech impairments is around one in 100, occurring in males and females equally. There are approximately between 6 and 8 million Americans living with some form of speech impairment (National Institute of Health, 2010). It is easy to say that children with speech impairments may lack communication competence, are assumed to have a lack of social empathy, and are often rejected and at risk for bullying (Savage, 2005).

Classification of Children with Speech Impairments

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states that children who are determined to have disabilities under one of twelve categories, receive special education services if the condition negatively affects the educational performance of the child. One such category is Speech or Language Impairments. Speech or Language Impairments is defined in IDEA as follows:

Speech or language impairment means a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or voice impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. (34 CFR §300.8(c)(11) (IDEA, 2004)

As noted, this paper will address one aspect of this special education classification – speech impairments.

Benefits of the Recess Setting for Children with Speech Impairments

Simply stated, the benefits of the recess setting are high for all children. These include a variety of physical and social benefits. In terms of physical benefits, studies have shown that recess leads to the following:

- Improvement of out-of-school activity levels – children usually are involved more in physical activities on days in which they participate in in-school physical activities (Dale, Corbin, & Dale, 2000).
- Improvement of general fitness
- Improvement of endurance levels (Kidshealth.org, 2009)

In terms of social benefits, and often extremely important to children with speech impairments, recess has been shown to lead to the following social skills:

- Cooperation
- Sharing
- Taking turns
- Problem solving in situations that are real
- Comfort in out-of-school play situations

All of these benefits are very important for students with speech impairments, but especially the social benefits, because of the possibility of a lack of social development, often characteristic of these children. Also, especially important in terms of speech impairments, is the fact that a large amount of exercise has been determined to be a natural and effective anti-anxiety treatment. This can help students to communicate with their peers inside and outside of the school environment in addition to the benefits of increasing fitness levels. It also helps to reduce mild to moderate feelings of depression and regulate emotions. Simply stated, exercise can decrease many stresses in which the student may be struggling (Scholesser, 2010).

Establishing the habit of exercising is important for all students, including students with speech impairments. Students with speech impairments will also benefit from exercise found at recess

because it gives an opportunity for the students to clear their minds and increase alertness, which leads them to focus in their classroom, and when working with a speech language pathologist. Exercise has been shown to have a variety of benefits such as relieving tension and stress, boosting physical and mental energy, and enhancing well-being through the release of endorphins, the brain's feel-good chemicals (Helpguide.org, 2012).

It should be assumed that positive reaction from peers and teachers will enable the student to develop a better self esteem. This is crucial for students with speech impairment because some may fear their disability will lead others to assume they have a low cognitive level. These positive interactions with teachers and peers can blossom during recess and contribute to these students' feelings of competence in their schoolwork and social communications.

Recommendations for Children with SL in Recess

To achieve the aforementioned goal of participation in exercise through recess, the following items should be remembered for the student with speech impairments in recess. Some are more specific to recess, but most should be remembered during the entire school setting:

- Provide time for delayed responses, verbal rehearsals (Seaman, Depauw, Morton, Omoto, 2007)
- Encourage and allow to point, gesture, or use explanations and similar words to increase the listener's understanding of expressive language (Seaman, Depauw, Morton, Omoto, 2007)
- Use small, stable groups (Winnick, 1995)
- Teach familiar games to promote social interaction (Winnick, 1995)
- Encourage non-competitive games that promote social interaction
- Exhibit a positive attitude (Winnick, 1995)
- Promote activities that encourage taking turns, guided problem solving, and partner activities (Winnick, 1995)
- Use familiar words and supplement with verbal cues (use a variety of words to describe the same movements if needed) (Seaman, Depauw, Morton, Omoto, 2007)
- Hold the same behavioral expectations for all students (Winnick, 1995)
- Provide directions that are simple and concrete (Seaman, Depauw, Morton, Omoto, 2007)
- Provide a comfortable environment

Conclusion

The participation of students with speech impairments in recess can often be both challenging and rewarding for both the student and teacher. The rewards can manifest themselves in the student's communication with others, relieving tension and stress, and boosting physical and mental energy levels. This paper has hopefully addressed some basic concerns and solutions to improve the recess setting of students with SI.

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About the Authors

Matthew D. Lucas, Ed.D., C.A.P.E. earned his Ed.D. (2007) in adapted physical education with minors in special education and social foundations from the University of Virginia. He also received his M.Ed. (1996) in adapted physical education from the University of Virginia and B.S. (1994) from Longwood College (now Longwood University). Dr. Lucas spent ten years teaching adapted/general physical education in Fairfax County (VA) Schools after the completion of his M.Ed. He is currently a tenured Associate Professor of Health and Physical Education at Longwood University. Dr. Lucas has conducted a variety of presentations and published multiple articles in peer-reviewed journals. His publications have focused on modifying activities for children with disabilities in the recess and physical education setting.

Carolyn Watson studies Special Education at Longwood University. She plans to graduate in the Spring of 2013. Following graduation, she will work towards a Masters Degree in Special Education also at Longwood University. Her passion for teaching students with diverse learning needs comes from experiences with Best Buddies International, as well as classroom experience at Longwood University. She plans on teaching K-3 Special Education as a career.