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Recess: More Than Just Play Time

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Recess: More Than Just Play Time

Erratum

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Recess: More Than Just Play Time

Recess is a healthy asset to the knowledge of young children, and provides a way for them to learn and grow outside the classroom (Stork & Sanders, 2008). It is important for teachers to stay educated on the issue of recess and physical activity in the school. This will allow the teacher the opportunity to share knowledge with the public and justify reasoning behind thoughts and actions concerning this matter. This problem will continue to be exasperated and a decline in children's development will remain if this is not addressed. Recess plays a significant role in children's development and should therefore be utilized in schools (Stork & Sanders).

In order to make our beliefs regarding the issue of recess in schools actionable, we volunteered at the Zachary Arts and Music Festival (Z-Fest). This annual festival consists of several events over the course of four consecutive days. A large part of the Z-Fest was the one-mile fun run and 5K in which all proceeds went to Zachary schools' physical education programs. Due to the fact that our advocacy project is centered on recess in schools (benefits of physical activity during the school day), we decided that this would be a good way to volunteer and spread our message about recess in schools. We constructed a poster and an informational brochure that presented research about the benefits of recess. These resources were available to those who were interested in more information regarding the topic. In addition to this, we implemented physical activity within our respective classrooms and discussed the benefits of staying active throughout the day. The three of us agreed that these were viable first steps to begin our advocacy journey for recess in schools.

Background

The education field has gained a great deal of public attention over the past few years. One issue that has surfaced as a concern of teachers, administrators, and parents is the limited time or lack of recess in schools (Heller, 2009). This critical issue directly affects children's learning experiences and development across all of the following areas: cognitive, physical, social, and emotional. When children are denied recess time, they lose the opportunity to decompress after

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strenuous classwork, socialize with peers, or get proper exercise during the day. People of modern society need to understand the importance and the benefits of giving children recess (Stork & Sanders, 2008). In order for this to happen, children need someone to be their voice and advocate for something that is rightfully and naturally theirs.

According to Stork and Sanders (2008), recess and other forms of physical play contribute to the development of the whole child. They express that recess can promote the three primary purposes of physical activity: stimulating psychological development, creating functional motor abilities, & organizing the brain for cognitive processing. Stork and Sanders also state that due to children's natural physiological limitations, play is vital to the progression of physical, social, and cognitive development. This belief closely aligns with the views of child development theorist, Jean Piaget. Piaget believed that children create knowledge through interactions with the environment (Brewer, 2007). By allowing children time to play at recess, they are given the opportunity to interact with peers and learn through experience.

“Since the 1970's children have lost about twelve hours per week in free time, including a 25% decrease in play and a 50% decrease in unstructured outdoor activities” (Heller, 2009). If this pattern continues, children will have difficulty allocating their attention while in the classroom. This may lead to increased behavior issues, higher levels of stress, and decreased opportunities for creative exploration and social interaction. According to Grondlund (2010), “The absence of play is an obstacle to the development of healthy and creative individuals” (p. 6), therefore this issue should be addressed.

In schools, administrators or teachers typically establish recess time within the daily schedule. This can result in differing amounts of recess in schools and/or classrooms. Currently, there are no laws or mandates that set limits for recess time in schools; however, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, plays a significant role in the issue at hand. This act holds teachers more accountable for student test scores, causing many schools to eliminate or shorten recess time in order to increase direct instruction within the classroom (NCLB, U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

Recommendations from the Field

There are many organizations that support the implementation of recess and physical activity in schools, one being the American Academy of Pediatrics. This professional institution states, “Safe and properly supervised recess offers children cognitive, physical, emotional, and social benefits. It should be used as a compliment to physical education classes, not a substitute, and whether it is spent indoors or outdoors, recess should provide free, unstructured play or activity” (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2012). Furthermore, the National Association for the

Education of Young Children (NAEYC) explains that children exercise leadership skills, collaborate with peers, and practice conflict resolution on the playground (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

In addition to these professional organizations, there are many service groups, both national and local, that promote physical activity in schools. An example of a service group is Playworks, a national, non-profit organization that sends trained coaches into schools to organize play opportunities for children (Why Playworks, n.d.). Instant Recess is also a national program that improves health and productivity by incorporating 10-minute breaks into the daily routines of school and work places (Sparkling a Movement to Energize America, n.d.). Lastly, BREC on the Geaux is a local institution that operates out of East Baton Rouge. As part of this program, a large truck travels through East Baton Rouge Parish to bring children of all ages and abilities a variety of play equipment and provides an opportunity for physical exercise (BREC, n.d.). These organizations provide support that is vital to making these beliefs concerning physical activity actionable.

Divergent Perspectives

There are many sides that can be taken regarding recess in schools; these principles are broadcasted through an ample amount of media coverage. One news article from *The Daily Herald* voices, “Due to shrinking budgets and higher academic demands, playground time in many schools is being cut.” The article states, “Schools that implement the Playworks program show 43% less bullying incidents and exclusion than at non-Playworks schools. They also spent 34% fewer minutes getting children to settle down and get back to work after recess” (Williams, 2014). On the other hand, some believe that many of a school’s disciplinary issues occur during free play, presenting yet another reason to reduce recess time. An article found in *The New York Times* states, “Close to 90 percent of disciplinary problems occur during recess, lunch or the transitions before and after” (Bornstein, 2011). Several situations of teasing and bullying occur during recess time. Children’s games and activities can also lead to injuries, generating a possible liability for the school. Some schools and districts choose to simply eliminate recess to avoid these concerns. While these apprehensions are legitimate, the documented benefits of recess and unstructured playtime suggest that other solutions be considered rather than reducing or eliminating this valuable time.

In order to gain insight on the different perspectives held by our stakeholders (parents of children at our schools and teachers/administrators) two different surveys were created. These surveys were distributed to the stakeholders in a private preschool in East Baton Rouge as well as a public preschool in the Zachary community. Due to the setting in which the surveys were given, the data collected did not show a significant difference in perspective. The teacher/administration survey results showed that 100% of the teachers and administration believe forty-five minutes of

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recess is an adequate amount of time. In addition to this, both parties surveyed agreed that all developmental domains (physical, cognitive, social, emotional) are supported through recess. The two schools that participated in the survey allocate at least forty-five minutes of recess to their daily schedule. This shows that it is more likely for an adequate amount of recess time to be implemented in an environment in which teachers are aware of the benefits of recess.

An additional survey was given to parents of students in the participating schools. This survey showed that 98% of parents felt that recess was a vital part of the daily schedule. The results also indicated that most parents agree that recess should be a part of their child's daily schedule. The data shows that 89% of parents believe that all developmental domains are supported through recess. Though all of the children receive up to 45+ minutes of recess, only 20% of the parents were aware of the actual amount of recess their children were receiving. Finally, the results show that 92% of parents feel that both academics and child development are of equal importance in early childhood education (See Appendix A for graphs of survey results).

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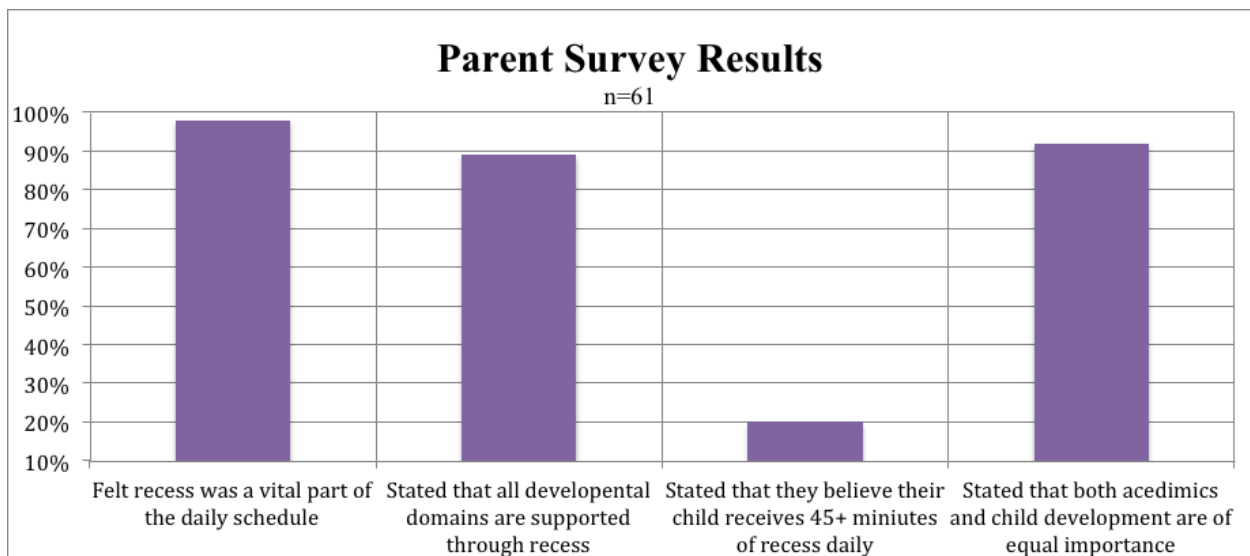
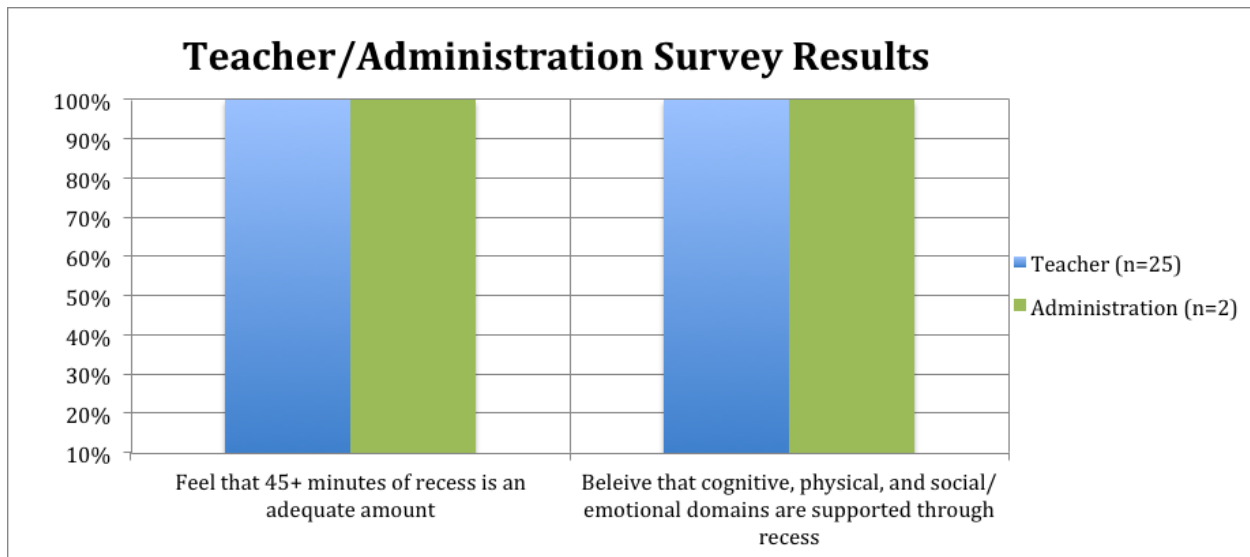
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Appendix A

Within these results, (n) refers to the number of people to complete the survey.



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Appendix B**

Reflection 1

Though my time teaching in the classroom thus far has been short, the impact that recess plays on a child's education is something that was instantly noticeable. Although I have not personally been placed in a school where children are denied the right to recess, I can see the positive impact it plays in the classroom. Recess allows students time to socialize with peers and participate in physical activity. The immense benefits that recess provides in the classrooms I have been placed made me interested in advocating for this issue.

Throughout this process, I have learned many things about the role of recess in schools. I gained knowledge about the reasons why recess is being cut back in schools, these include: liability reasons and to allow more time for both test-prep and direct instruction in the classroom. I learned the benefits of having a regularly scheduled recess during the school day, these include: promoting physical development, creating important motor speech skills, and preparing the brain to manage cognitive processes (Stork and Sanders, 2010). I also realized many things through stakeholder surveys given to local parents, teachers, and administrators. I discovered that 100% of teachers/administrators believe that 45 (or more) minutes of recess is an appropriate amount for students, and 100% of teachers/administrators believe that all aspects of development (physical, cognitive, social, and emotional) are equally supported by recess. I also learned that out of the parents surveyed: almost 100% believe recess is a vital part of their child's daily schedule, almost 90% believe all developmental domains are supported by recess, only 20% knew how much recess their child receives during the day, and about 90% believed both academic and child development play an equal role in their child's education.

One obstacle we faced during this process was not being in a school that was directly affected by the issue of reduced recess time. Although the issue of a decreasing amount of recess time in schools is extremely important and will continue to negatively affect children's educational experience if not addressed, both of the schools my group members and I are placed in utilize recess in a proper way. Both schools allow over 45 minutes a day to active and stimulating recess time for the students. If we were placed in different schools, our advocacy efforts could have been taken to the next level by: initiating changes in the daily school schedule, and informing teachers/administrators and parents on the importance of recess. We overcame this problem by advocating for recess in schools in multiple contexts. We were able to inform our personal students and their parents on the critical need for recess in the daily school schedule. We hope our effort to inform these parties will prove to be beneficial if this issue presents a problem for them in the future.

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It is obvious through the immense amount of research available that the benefits of recess are immeasurable, and I learned this fact through this project. Throughout this semester I have practiced the different steps to take when advocating for an important issue. This will make the advocacy process easier for me as I continue in my teaching career. Looking back I would probably choose an issue to something that would impact a school in which I was in direct relation. This would have allowed my group members and me to make a more meaningful impact with this project throughout the semester. Although my group members and I were not able to radically change a classroom or school policy with our advocacy efforts, this process has been extremely beneficial to me for to utilize with future issues.

Reflection 2

As early child educators, we have a responsibility to each and every child we encounter. While teaching a child math and reading skills is a large part of our job, we also have a responsibility to advocate and speak for them when they are unable to speak for themselves. Last year in my placement school, my students did not have a time designated for recess on the daily schedule. This was very disheartening, because my students were missing out on many wonderful learning experiences and opportunities that present themselves on the playground. While I did my best to get the children outside for some portion of the day, I wasn't being actionable with my thoughts and ideas concerning recess in schools. This advocacy project opened my eyes to what being an advocate really means and how important it is in the life of an early childhood educator.

Over the course of the past semester, my partners and I worked together to gain a wealth of knowledge about the benefits of recess in schools. At the start of this project I was already well informed of these benefits due to my courses and experiences at LSU and placement schools. However, researching literature and surveying stakeholders allowed me to gain a better insight on the issue at hand. For example, Stork and Sanders (2010), express that recess can promote the three primary purposes of physical activity: stimulating psychological development, creating functional motor abilities, & organizing the brain for cognitive processing. In addition to this, I also learned more about the overall process of advocating.

The main obstacle we encountered with this advocacy topic was the setting of our placement schools. When we chose this topic, we were in different placement schools that did not implement recess in the daily schedule. This year however, we are all in developmentally appropriate settings that place a high emphasis on child development and the value of play. Therefore, most of the parents, teachers, and administrators surveyed were already well aware of the benefits of recess. We sent the surveys out and received the expected results, but they still proved valuable to our project. Overall, we concluded that in an environment where teachers are

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aware of the benefits of recess, it is more likely for an adequate amount of recess time to be implemented.

As stated in the paper above, we choose to volunteer at the Zachary Arts and Music festival for a 5k and 1-mile Fun Run. The proceeds from this walk/run benefit Zachary community schools physical education programs. While our efforts at the Zachary Fun Run did not directly relate to our advocacy topic, we still played a part in improving physical activity in schools. As stated above, all of the proceeds of this event went toward benefitting Zachary Schools physical education programs. By volunteering at the Zachary Fun Run, we were inherently helping to improve physical activity in schools.

Through this project, I was challenged to put actions into my words. Of course I knew limited/lack of recess is an issue in our schools today, but I had never truly done something to make a difference. While I have discussed this topic with my peers, on several occasions, the stakeholder surveys allowed me to gain insight from my students' parents as well as talented administrators and teachers. In addition to this, the volunteer experience encouraged me to spread the word to others outside of my school experiences (LSU and placement).

Overall, this has been a valuable learning experience for me. Advocating for children plays a large role in the educational profession, and this project helped me reach past my boundaries to prepare for what is to come in the near future. In hindsight, I believe that my partners and I worked very well together in developing and carrying out this project. We all gained knowledge that will we carry with us throughout our future careers.

Reflection 3

Looking back on this project, I realized that I have learned much on the issue of the decrease of recess in early childhood education. Although I was aware that recess was vital to the development of all developmental domains in children (physical, cognitive, social, emotional), I was not aware of how much recess time children should actually receive. By researching this topic, I found that children should receive at least forty-five minutes of recess.

Stakeholder surveys were created to see how knowledgeable teachers, administrators, and parents were on the topic of recess in the daily schedule. I feel that this was the most interesting and valuable part of the advocacy project. By having teachers and administrators complete the survey, it was brought to my attention that when a school has teachers and administrators that are aware of the benefits of recess, they will be more likely to allow their students an adequate amount of recess time. This survey also showed us that while parents feel that recess is a vital

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part of the daily schedule, they are unaware of how much recess time their children are actually receiving. If I were to have parents complete this survey a second time, I would ask them how much recess they feel their students should be receiving. This would help me to understand how much parents actually know about the importance of recess in the daily schedule.

In order to make our advocacy project actionable, we volunteered at the Zachary Arts and Music Festival (Z-Fest). We helped to register participants for the 1-mile fun run and the 5K, in which all proceeds went to the physical education programs in the Zachary community. One obstacle we encountered with this was lack of being able to actually advocate for our issue. Although we placed a poster and informational brochure on a table near us, we were too busy to actually engage in conversation about this issue. If I were to volunteer again, I would ask the person in charge of the run if there was a certain time we would be able to display our poster and speak with the community about the importance of recess. I would also ask if it would be possible for us to teach a class to parents about the many different ways they could support physical activity outside of school.

While researching the issue of the decline of recess in the daily schedule of early childhood education, we came across many articles within the media. Many articles stressed the importance of recess and gave many recommendations on what could be done within the schools. We also found many organizations that advocate for recess within the daily schedule. These organizations were different from the media in that they were actually taking action in the schools and doing what the media suggested.

This project has helped me to learn many helpful techniques not only about how to bring awareness to issues within early childhood education, but also how to take action and advocate for these matters. I learned to take into account all stakeholders within the issue, and I also gained knowledge on how to create a survey in order to learn about the different ideas and beliefs the stakeholders have. Overall, I am grateful to have completed this advocacy project.

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