

PHILLIPS GROOVE! – INTEGRATING YOUNG CHILDREN WITH AUTISM ON CHILDCARE PLAYGROUNDS

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Background

This paper describes a project integrating children with autism into a childcare playground. Children with special needs, especially those with autism, require support to participate successfully in meaningful play and social interactions in large spaces and unstructured playtime.

Aims

The paper will focus on a research study conducted with four young children diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder who displayed a lack of interest in interacting with their peers. The goal of the study was to improve their interactions with their classmates in the playground through (a) adding an outdoor music center, (b) songs individually composed for each subject, and (c) the implementation of the intervention by the subject's teachers engaging classroom peers as formal and informal helpers.

Methods

The research questions were: (1) Does the use of a song and the music center increase the duration, frequency and quality of peer interaction on the playground for children with autism, (2) Can the classroom teachers learn the principles important to music therapy, and (3) Will peers participate and model tasks? Using a single-subject experimental design (multiple baseline across four children) the effectiveness of the intervention was evaluated. Data were collected in four conditions over eight months.

Results/Conclusion

The results indicate increases in peer interaction and engagement occurred when supported by adults. The findings suggest that the intervention significantly enhanced the children's quality of peer interaction, engagement in playgrounds, and addressed other therapeutic goals as shown in videotaped sequences.