

Articulation - Difference or Disorder?

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Clear articulation (pronunciation) is a key component to successful spoken communication. Sounds within a shared language may vary by age, region of the country (dialects), foreign accents, physical challenges, or simply by habit. So, when does an articulation difference become a disorder that warrants the attention of a Speech/Language Pathologist? The path to an answer begins with the classroom teacher and parents.

An *Articulation/Speech Delay* is characterized by natural sound acquisition that is slightly "behind" the expected age. An *Articulation/Speech Disorder* is characterized by sound error patterns that are significantly beyond age expectancy or differ from typically developing children; significantly interfere with listener understanding; and show minimal or no improvement with teacher/parent instruction and practice. For example, many 3 year old children substitute sounds (w for l and r/th for s and z); however, these errors are not as common at age 10.

GRACE teachers will use a simple picture-based articulation screening tool when there is a concern for a student's speech development. The screener features pictures depicting each sound in the beginning, middle, and ending positions of words. Sound errors are charted and compared to developmental guidelines to establish if the errors are within normal expectancy. The teacher helps a student with identified delays to imitate age appropriate target sounds. When the child can accurately produce the target sound, a systematic, structured articulation intervention plan is developed. Practice at home and school is integrated with phonics, reading, spelling, or other general education activities. *Responses To Interventions* (RTIs) are documented and plans are revised as needed.

Speech requires a complex coordination of muscles just as in eating, walking, and writing. Regular practice trains the muscles to respond with strength, accuracy, and automaticity. Practice changes error patterns to a "habit" of accurate sound production. *There is no substitution for daily practice.*

A referral to a Consultation Team including a Speech/Language Pathologist may be indicated if a child's sound development remains significantly delayed (or atypical patterns persist) and continues to interfere with effective communication despite a variety of documented home-school interventions. Articulation assessment and therapy are offered free of charge in the public schools for children who have not shown improvement with home-school programs and who meet the eligibility criteria.

The following websites offer additional clarification.

<http://www.speech-language-development.com/articulation-therapy-ideas.html>

http://www.superduperinc.com/handouts/pdf/39_creative_artic_practice.pdf

For more information or suggestions for future topics of interest, *pertaining to Speech and Language*, please contact James Cullen at jcullen@gracesystem.org or me via my website at www.waldkircheducationalconsulting.com