

Physical education and dance

Learning environment for physical activities in Finnish day care

Jyrki Reunamo, Department of Teacher Education, University of Helsinki
Anna-Liisa Kyhälä, Department of Teacher Education, University of Helsinki

Background Theories and Purpose of the Study: Children's learning environments in day care are versatile. They include teaching, free and scaffolded play, outdoor activities, basic care and eating situations. The pedagogical style and curriculum have an impact on children's physical activities. A lot of learning and physical activities happen in highly variable and nonstructured learning environment often designed by children themselves. Children's differing rates of maturation and development add to the variance of physical activities in day care. When we evaluate children's physical activity in different learning environments, we need study both the direct education and children's activities in their personal contexts, which they have themselves taken part in designing.

Research Problems: How are pedagogical choices and atmosphere of the group related to children's physical activity? How is children's personal object of attention related to children's physical activities?

Research Methods: 47 teams in day care center and 15 childminders evaluated their learning environment qualities. Children' activities and physical activity level were systematically observed from January to May 2010 between 8:00-12:00 hours. To be able to study the learning environment qualities and their relationship with physical activity the two data were merged together.

Findings: Non-social and an adult as an object of attention diminished children's physical activity, another child or a group of children increased physical activity ($p < .05$). If the educators spent more time planning the activities, children were more physically active. However, if the planning was about group activities, children were less physically active ($p < .05$). If the educators concentrated more on children's social relations, the children's physical activity was higher ($p < .05$).

Conclusions: The results highlight children's own impact in the design of the learning environment. Other children are important in activating children. There is perhaps an important lesson for planning educational activities also. Planning the interaction between children may activate children more effectively than planning activities considering the group as a block or unit.

Keywords:

Learning environment, early childhood, physical activity, curriculum