

Physical education and dance

Children's peer relations and children's physical activity

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Background Theories and Purpose of the Study: In a typical Finnish group there is approximately twenty children and three adults. By their sheer volume peers have a strong impact on children's physical activity in comparison to adults. Children often share similar interests and skills with other children, which makes the activities more motivated and interesting for the children. Thus, to get a whole picture of children's physical activities we need to study children's design of the peer activities.

Research Problems: How are children's attitudes and interaction strategies toward their peers related to children's activities? How are the peer contact qualities related to children's physical activity?

Research Methods: 838 children from Finnish day care centers and with childminders participated in the research. Children were interviewed, and the answer strategies were classified in accommodative, participative, dominant, withdrawn and uncertain strategies. The children's activities including the physical activity level were observed using systematic sampling. The teachers also evaluated children's skills. The three data were merged to study children's peer relations and their interaction strategies.

Findings: Children physical activity tend to be lower if they have weaker social contacts with their peers ($p < .05$). Children that are physically active seek for each others' company ($p < .05$). In company with a more independent and self-directive peer the children tend to be less physically active ($p < .05$). Children with open strategies in relation to peers tend to be more physically active ($p < .05$).

Conclusions: Children's social strategies and the personal qualities of their peers have an impact on children's physical activity in day care. Children active in their peer relations are also active on their physical activities. These children seem to find each other. Peers that are more dependant on others and open to suggestions from others evoke more physical activity. Peers are an important ingredient in activating children physically. The educational consequences are discussed in the paper.

Keywords:

Peer relations, early childhood, physical activity, , children's agency, social strategies