

Physical education and dance

The amount of physical activity in Finnish day care

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Background Theories and Purpose of the Study: Physical activity is an important part of healthy lifestyle. Physical activities in early childhood have long-lasting effects on lifelong behavior. Children's physical activities have direct impact on children's capacity to learn and their quality of life. Children should be physically active with the activities including physical exertion for two hours a day.

Research Problems: How active children are in day care in general? How physically active children are in teaching sessions and outdoor activities?

Research Methods: A systematic sampling was conducted in 62 day care centers and with childminders in Finland. Between 8:00-12:00 AM children's physical and other activities were observed 19606 times. The scale of physical activity was 1) Low (sitting, using pen, eating etc.) 2) Intermediate (walking, whole body movements) or 3) High (includes at least some running, romping or physical exertion).

Findings: Children were highly active physically (with at least some physical exertion) 24 minutes (10% of the time) between 8:00-12:00 hours. Outdoors children's physical activity was high ($M = 2.2$) and during teaching activities low ($M = 1.25$). The physical activity was lowest among children with the most problems with motoric development.

Conclusions: Children's physical activity is critically lower during activities arranged by the teachers. Thus, the physical activities children need are dependant on children's personal choices and their design of activities during free play outdoors. It is worrying that children that need physical exercise the most get it the least. Children's needs to design their own physically active lifestyle is discussed.

Keywords:

Early childhood, physical activity, teaching, free play, outdoors