

# OUTDOOR PLAY ENVIRONMENTS AND ACTIVITIES IN FINNISH AND TAIWAN DAY CARE CENTERS

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# Research Background

- Extension of Jyrki Reunamo's (2007 ) exploration of Agency in early childhood
- This is an analysis of children's agentic perception in the outdoor play environment
- The data comes from observational data collected from Taiwan and Finland using the same methods.

# Research Objective

- ① Analyze data from curricular activities and children's interactions with teachers and peers
- ② Clarify how the data relate to the learning environment in Finland and Taiwan, to further understand the contribution of the environment to learning

# Research Questions

In Taiwan and Finland, concerning outdoor free play:

- 1 What proportion of time are spent on it?
- 2 What kinds of activities occur?
- 3 What do children attend to ?
- 4 How far way is the nearest adult from target children?
- 5 What is the main role of the teacher ?
- 6 How much teacher attention is focused on the target children?

# Participants

3-6 year olds in day care centres

Data Type	Taiwan	Finland	Total
# Centres	8	48	56
# Children	490	892	1382
# Data Points	161	3515	3676

# Observers

- ⦿ Teachers observe children in their own day care centre
- ⦿ Teachers do not observe their own class
- ⦿ 100 observers in Taiwan and Finland altogether
- ⦿ Required to attend 7 training sessions

# Research Instruments

- Observation record sheet

- Observation Item list :

  - What the child needs to do (7 items)

  - What the child chooses to do (11 items)

  - Child's main object of attention (5 items)

  - Child's physical activity level (3 levels)

  - Average distance between child and nearest adult educator

  - Main action of nearest adult (6 items)

  - An adult focuses on target child at least some of the time

# Sampling Method

- ⦿ Time sampling: observe child for 5 minutes then move on to next child
  - 2 minutes to locate child and determine main activity for entire group
  - 1 minute to observe child
  - 2 minutes to record
- ⦿ Observation time: 8 am to noon



# Data Analysis

- Descriptive statistics: frequencies
- Chi square analysis

# Research Difficulties in Taiwan

1. To observe a different class, the teachers must leave her own class, creating scheduling problems and increasing their workload, thus lowering the willingness of Taiwan teachers to participate in the project
2. Each observer must go through 7 training sessions, and the research team must visit each day care centre to assist and solve problems, so the sampling is limited to northern Taiwan, thus reducing generalizability
3. Funding difficulties reduces the sampling size ◦

The outdoor environments of  
Day Care Centres  
in Taiwan and Finland

# Outdoor facilities—Finland



# Outdoor facilities—Finland



# Outdoor facilities—Finland



# Results and Discussion

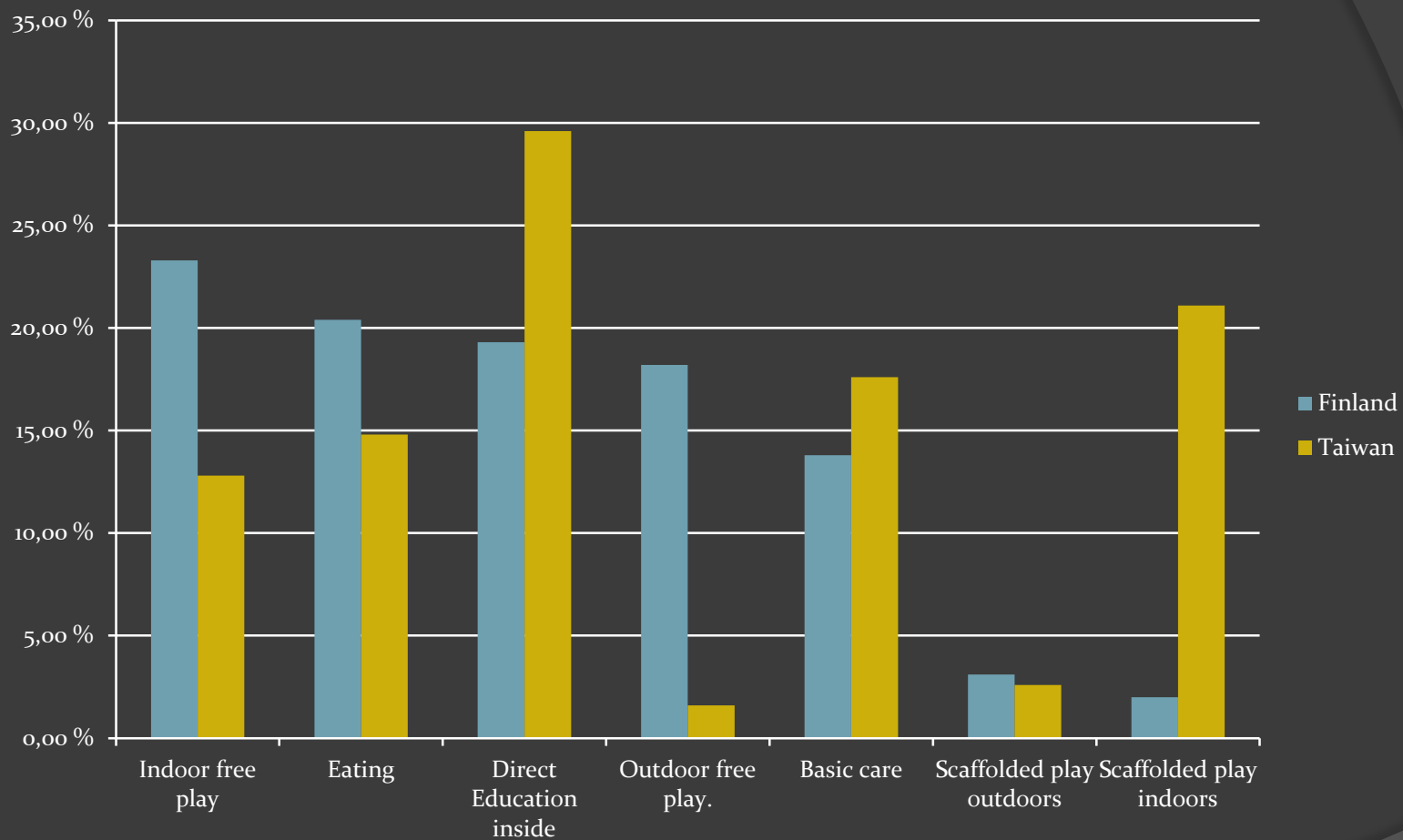


Figure 1. What the child needs to do



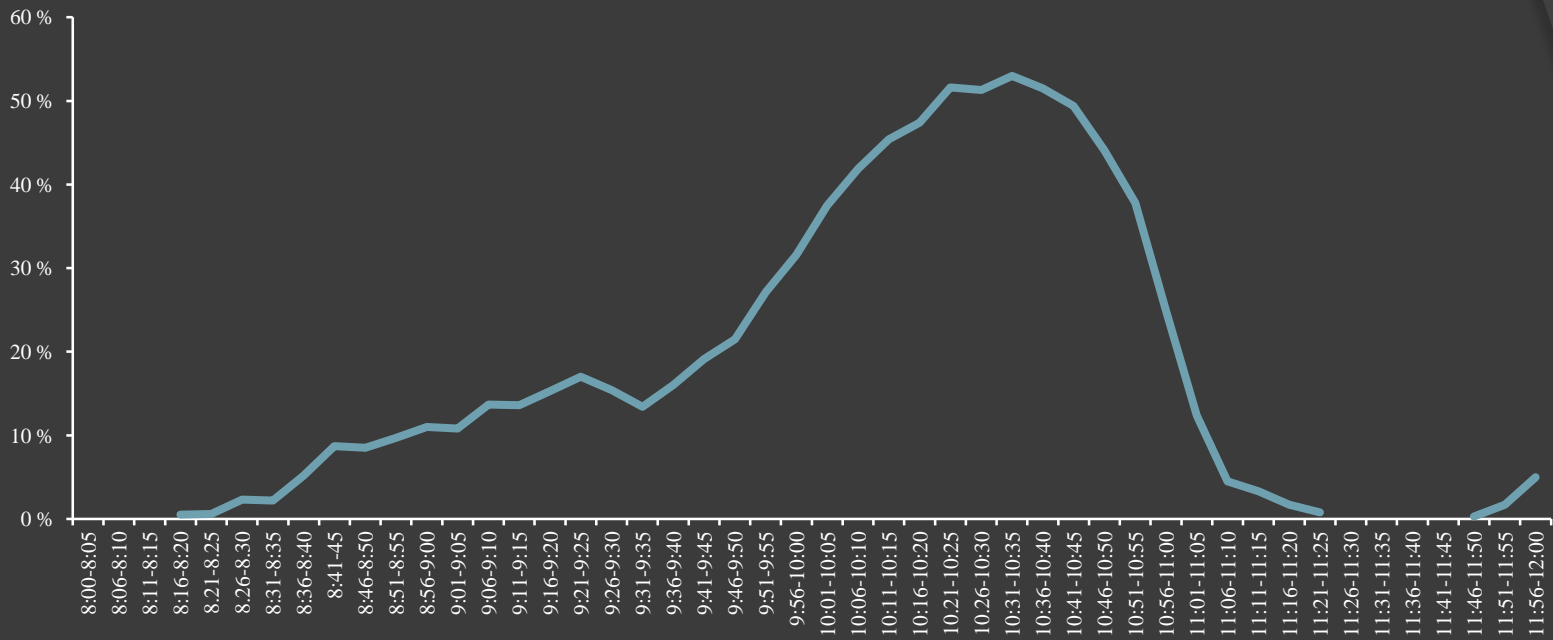


Figure 2. Times for Outdoor Free Play -- Finland

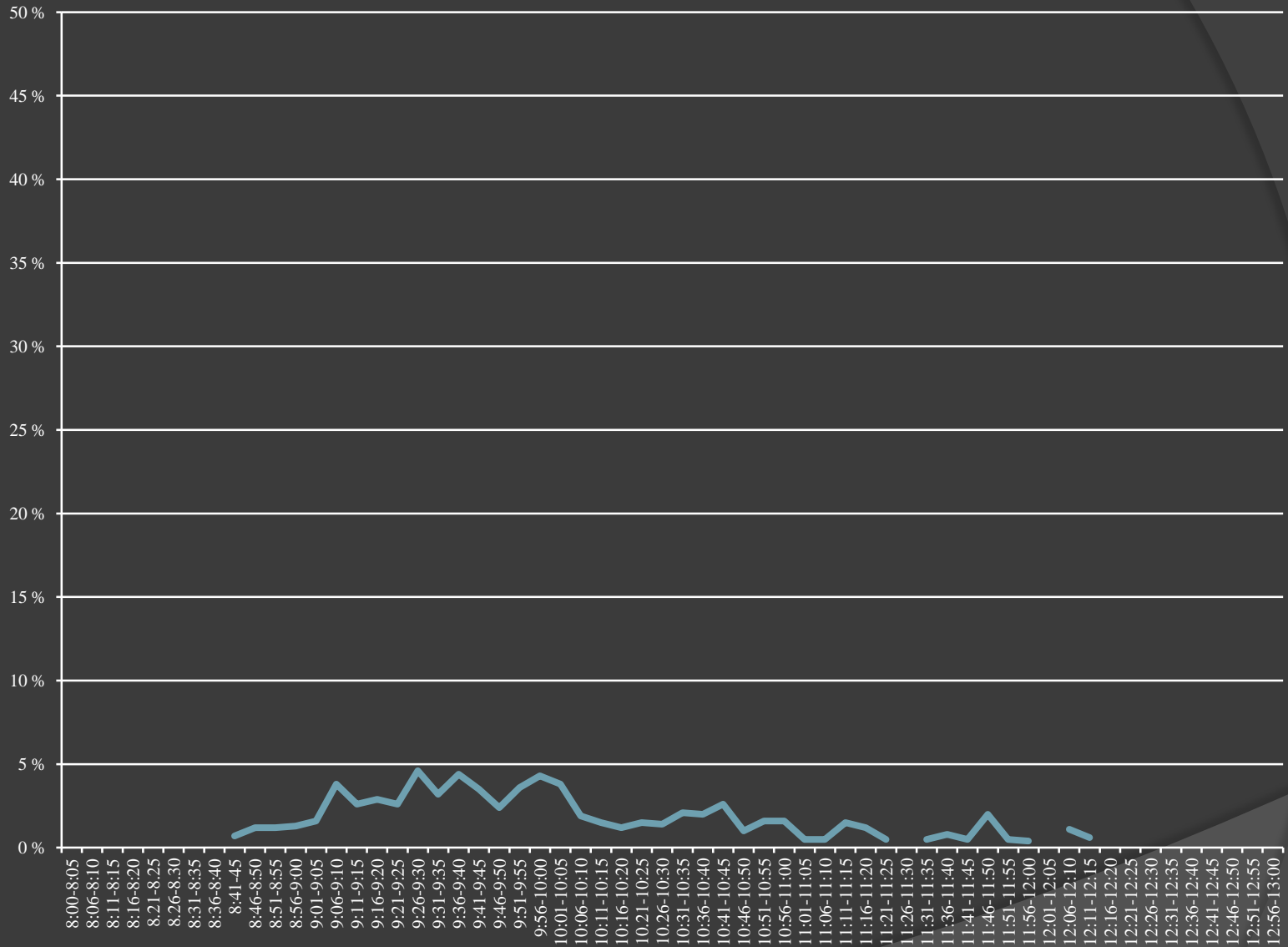


Figure 3. Times for Outdoor Free Play -- Taiwan

# Results and Discussion

- Significant difference between the main activities arranged for children in the 2 countries ( $\chi^2=511.53$  ,  $p <.001$  )
- Curricular activities in Taiwan lean towards teaching planning and structured instruction
- Finnish curriculum emphasize autonomous learning, and has much more time for free play than in Taiwan

# Results and Discussion

- ◎ Taiwan has significantly less outdoor free play than Finland

Finland : 17.9%

Taiwan : 1.6%

# Results and Discussion

- In both countries, the main activities during outdoor freeplay are : choosing toys, materials, or physical activity instruments, or engage in exploration and inquiry

Taiwan : 57.1%

Findland : 43.1%

- In both countries, children pays least attention to adults in the outdoor free play situation.

# Results and Discussion

- ① When planning outdoor facilities, consider giving children more diverse activities, and more choice of activities
- ① Examine outdoor facilities to see if the materials and pedagogy for free play can foster and **deepen children behavior**

# Results and Discussion

- ⦿ During outdoor free play, Taiwan children's main object of attention is non social object
- ⦿ In Finland, children's main object of attention is a social object : one or more

# Results and Discussion

- In Taiwan, 56.5% children have high physical activity levels during outdoor free play
- In Finland, most children exhibit medium levels of physical activity during outdoor free play, 49.5%



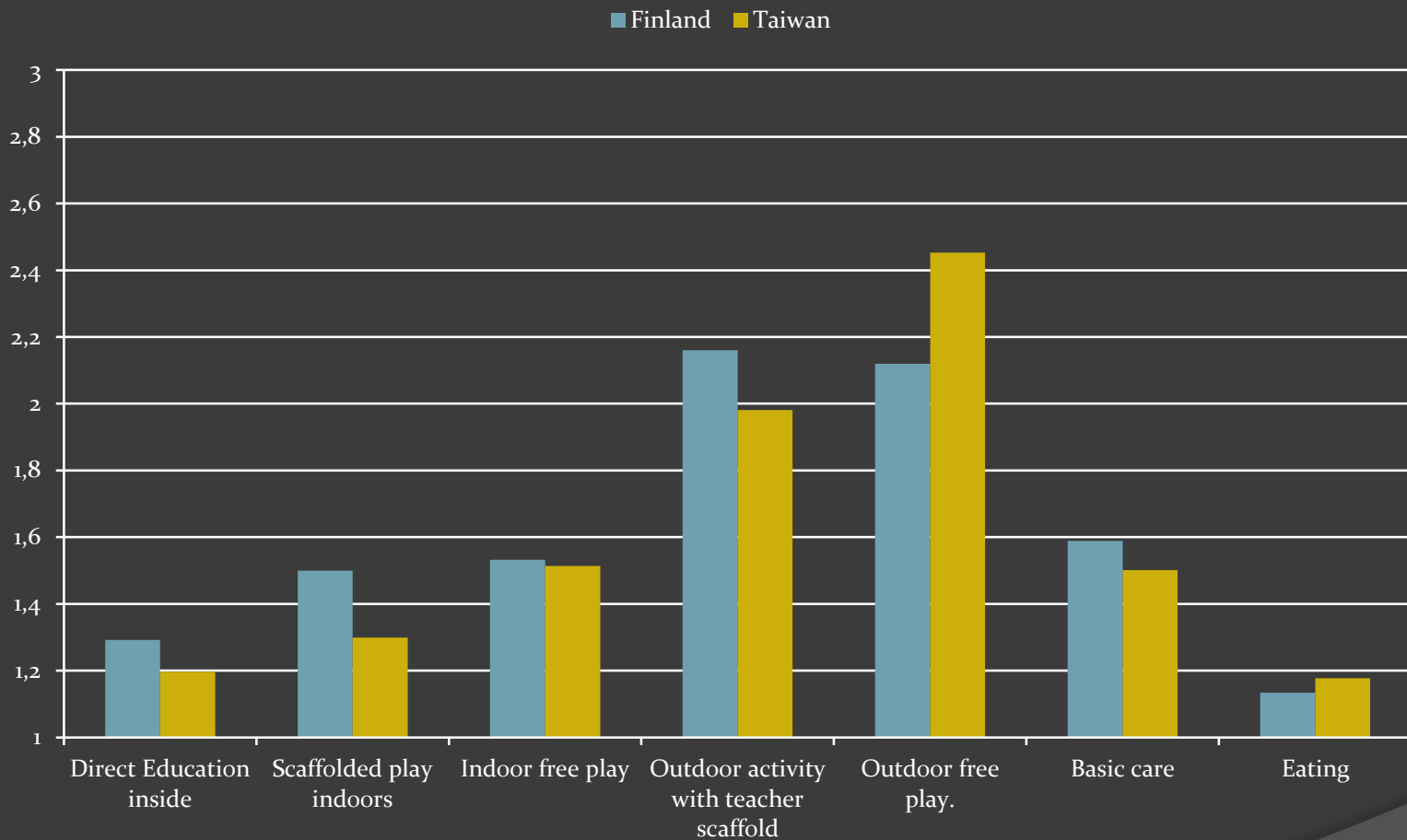


圖4 Physical activity level in different general activities

# Results and Discussion

- During outdoor free play, the mean distance between teacher and child was significantly closer in Taiwan

Taiwan average : 8 metres

Finland average : 2.8 metres

# Results and Discussion

- ⦿ During outdoor free play, the main action of teachers was child observation
- ⦿ Taiwan teachers had higher proportions of interaction with children

Taiwan 32.5%

Finland 7.8%

- ⦿ Taiwan children had a higher likelihood to be the object of teacher attention during the period of observation 49.4%

# Reflections

- ◎ Do results concerning the general activity frame during outdoor free play indicate that children learning is looked upon in different ways in the 2 countries ?
- ◎ Finland day care values free play as a learning experience. Taiwan teachers may need to re-examine the role of free play in the curriculum and consider loosening the heavily teacher guided structure to give children more space for autonomous learning

# Reflections

張佳琳（2004）黃瑞琴（2009） suggest that Taiwan teachers consider the concept of ludic in post-modern theory and :

- ◎ free up the closed, static curriculum structure, transforming teaching to a fluid, flexible, and happy play situation
- ◎ Increase children's choices in activities so that they might see learning as a form of play
- ◎ Increase time for free play
- ◎ Blur the boundary between work and play with more flexible daily schedules

These transformative measures are essential for children to experience the joy of learning

# Reflections

- ⦿ Activities in the outdoors can become varied learning situations, as with the indoor environment
- ⦿ The outdoor environment is not only a place for physical activity; day care teachers should examine their outdoor facilities, the variety of toys and instructional materials in the environment to explore the possibilities for more depth and diversity in children's play

# Reflections

- Free play is a spontaneous learning activity
- Compared to instructional activities, free play gives children more opportunities to experience, adjust, and control the outside world
- Thus, free play might promote the development of agency in young children

# References

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