

IMPORTANCE OF SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES IN CHILDREN'S DEVELOPMENT – ATTITUDES OF FEMALE STUDENTS FROM THE FACULTY OF TEACHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

For the purposes of this research, the Scale of motivation in directing children in sport was conducted, made on the basis of Questionnaire for the evaluation of parents support (Bosnar, 2003), containing ten items. The sample consisted of 300 female students from the Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb, of which 111 students from pre-school teacher and 189 from school teacher studies. Additionally, the scale of enforced ranks was conducted – ranking according to the importance of different activities in children's development. Using ANOVA and Mann Whitney U test, differences were determined among students of school and pre-school teacher studies in two items on the scale of motivation in directing children in sport and one difference which refers to the ranking of the art workshop.

Keywords: motivation, parental support, pre-school education students, teacher education students

INTRODUCTION

Apart from the parents, educators and teachers represent one of the key models in the children's lives. It is therefore advisable during their schooling to devote special attention to precisely this aspect, emphasizing the importance of their own design as a model of healthy behavior in children. Thus, research (Weiss and Barber, 1995) shows that in addition to the parents who have the greatest impact on the involvement of children in sport, a big impact comes from their peers, teachers and coaches. For men, the period of adolescence is greater influenced by the coaches and teachers on the inclusion, and the choice of sport (Kenyon and Mc Pherson, 1973: according to Haywood and Getchell, 2005), and childhood for women (Weiss and Knoppers, 1982: according to Haywood and Getchell 2005). Furthermore, it can be assumed that the experiences that children gained in physical or sporting activities at pre-school or school affect their attitude towards sport and physical exercise. Negative experiences at school can have long term effects on their attitude towards physical activity later in life (Snyder and Spreitzer, 1973: according to Haywood and Getchell, 2005). From the aforementioned it can be concluded that it is the obligation of teachers and educators to foster and encourage physical and sports activities in children. The aim of this study was to determine the views of female students of pre-school and teacher education studies on the role of sport or exercise in the quality of the children's development, and to examine whether there are differences between them.

METHODS

The study was conducted on 300 female students (111 of pre-school and 189 of teacher education study) at the Faculty of Teacher Education at the University of Zagreb - Department Čakovec. The Scale of motivation in directing children towards sport was applied, and which was created on the basis of the Questionnaire for the evaluation of parental support (Bosnar, 2003), with ten particles estimated on the Likert scale from one to five (1 - "not at all important" and 5 is "extremely important"). Additionally, the Scale of enforced ranking was applied for the assessment of activities (learning foreign languages, music school, regular sports activities, attending art workshops, learning the basics of computer science, free time spent playing with children) to assess what activities female students consider to be the most critical to children's development, and which to be the least important.

Data were analyzed in Statistica ver 7. The mean and standard deviation of responses for individual particles were calculated. To determine the difference between the students of Pre-school and Teacher education on the scale of motivation, the ANOVA and Bonferroni pos-hoc test were applied and the differences in the importance assessment on the Scale of ranking were calculated with the Mann Whitney U test.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the mean and standard deviation of responses to individual particles on a Scale of motivation in directing children towards sport. The arithmetic means are high and nearly all exceed the value of four, which means that the respondents regard the stated claims "important" for the children's development. The lowest average score is obtained in the statement "to meet athletes that he can be role models in their life" for which they think is neither important nor unimportant. The table shows how female students of Teachers education value the particle "to develop motor skills through sport and physical exercise, and preserve their health" than female students of Teacher education who value more the particle "to reside in a safe environment due where children will not be harmed to sport." Results of the one-way ANOVA showed that there were statistically significant differences in the particles "to develop motor skills through sport and exercise and preserve their health" ($p = .02$), and that "to reside in a safe environment where children will not be harmed due to sport." ($p = .01$). However, after the Bonferroni correction, it was concluded that the differences were not statistically significant. It is possible that a further increase of the sample would confirm the differences to be statistically more significant.

Table 1 Arithmetic mean (Mean) and standard deviation (SD) of particles of the Scale of motivation in directing children towards sport, and analysis of the variance between female students of Pre-school (PS) and Teacher education (TS) studies

Statement	Mean (SD) PS N=111	Mean (SD) TS N=189	F	p
To develop motor skills and preserve health through sport and exercise	4,75 (0.49)	4.59 (0.71)	5.12	0.02*
To find company and make new friends in sports and exercise	4.29 (0.68)	4.25 (0.69)	0.22	0.64
To acquire work habits and learn to organize their time through training	4.37 (0.65)	4.28 (0.70)	1.29	0.26
To spend free time at the place where there are no drugs and alcohol	4.55 (0.75)	4.59 (0.73)	0.25	0.62
To meet athletes who could be role models in their life	3.61 (0.88)	3.67 (0.82)	0.32	0.57
Not to sit at home in front of a computer or TV	4.38 (0.77)	4.48 (0.67)	1.35	0.25
To maintain optimal body weight (not too skinny nor too fat)	4.28 (0.68)	4.29 (0.73)	0.02	0.87
To develop self-confidence and self-esteem through coaching	4.38 (0.72)	4.50 (0.66)	1.87	0.17
To reside in a safe environment where they will not be harmed due to sport	4.08 (0.81)	4.32 (0.80)	6.20	0.01*
To develop the habit of exercise throughout life through exercise in childhood	4.41 (0.69)	4.43 (0.71)	0.06	0.81

* After the Bonferroni correction ($p = <.005$), the differences were not statistically significant

Table 2 demonstrates the descriptive statistical parameters of the Scale for the assessment of the importance of quality in child development. According to the dominant values and the arithmetic mean, it is evident that female students of both study programs assessed "to freely socialize and play with other children" as the most important activity, and "to regularly participate in sport." Results obtained from the Mann Whitney U test show a significant difference ($p = 0.00$) in the ranking of the art workshops which future teachers evaluate as being more important for children's development than educators.

Table 2 Average ranks (Mean) and dominant values (Mode) of the Scale for assessing the importance of activities in children's development, and the Mann Whitney U test between female students of Pre-school (PS) and Teacher education (TN).

Activity	Mean (Mode) TS	Mean (Mode) PS	Sum of Ranks (TS)	Sum of ranks (PS)	Mann-Whitney U	Z (adj.)	p
Learning foreign language	2.74 (3)	3.06 (1)	27348.00	17802.00	9393.00	-1.55	0.12
Music school	4.35 (5)	4.33 (5)	28224.50	16925.50	10269.50	-0.31	0.75
Regular sport activities	2.53 (2)	2.36 (2)	29479.50	15670.50	9454.50	1.50	0.13
Attending art workshops	4.48 (6)	5.04 (6)	31057.00	14093.00	7877.00	3.80	0.00
Learning the basics of computer science	4.11 (4)	4.28 (6)	27685.00	17465.00	9730.00	-1.07	0.28
Free time spent playing with children	2.24 (1)	2.44 (1)	27258.50	17891.50	9303.50	-1.75	0.08

DISCUSSION

Overall, it can be observed that female students of both directions attach great importance to the role of sport or physical exercise in the quality of children's development. A statistically significant difference was found in a single particle and the ranking of attending art workshops, which the future teachers ranked better in relation to future educators. It can be assumed that the differences arise because of the different approaches (styles) of professor's lectures or a larger amount of teaching hours in related courses. Furthermore, educators evaluate "developing motor skills and preserving health through sport and exercise" slightly more important than teachers. A potential cause could be found in the fact that the female students of Pre-school education encounter many more ill children during their pedagogical practice than teachers, since younger children are affected by diseases more than older ones. However, according to available research (Timmons et al, 2007), direct - consequently causal links between health and fitness for pre-school age cannot be established, at least not for all children, but there is evidence that an increased physical activity in preschoolers is associated with an improved physical health status (Binkley and Specker, 2004; Saaklahti et al, 2004).

Teachers consider the attitude "to reside in a safe environment where they will not be harmed due to sport" more important than educators. The reason for this can probably be attributed to the differences between preschool and school-age children in the interaction with their environment. At pre-school age children are under constant parental supervision, teachers or other people close to the child, and it is less likely that the child's safety will be compromised than it is the case with school children who are independent and not under such a great parental control. It is interesting to note that female students ranked highly "free time spent playing with children." It is obvious that they recognized the importance and the role of play and spontaneous activity for a quality development of children through several courses at the faculty: kinesiology, kinesiological methodology, pedagogy and psychology. On the other hand, in the last ten years, results obtained from scientific studies suggest that children spend less free time playing and interacting with their peers. Ginsberg (2006) states this is due to the busy lifestyle, structural changes in the family, the importance attached to organized activities that parents believe will contribute more to the betterment of their children, and care for the safety of children. Since the game can affect almost all motor skills, it can be concluded that future teachers and educators evaluate free play as a potential to improve all aspects of a child's life: physical, emotional, social and cognitive.

CONCLUSION

In any case, classes should be planned and class content taught in such a manner that they respond to the developmental needs of children. Children should be allowed exercise and play in an environment that is safe and which ensures success for every child. Educators and teachers should design activities and games, and possibly modify them to provide an experience of success for all. Children, however, often leave activities due to events that constitute failure, resulting in a significant loss of confidence. On the other hand, during the game, children are intrinsically motivated, curious and eager to acquire new knowledge and skills. Their attention is focused on the enjoyable activity, not the result. Given the above, both teachers and educators should structure their classes, and raise and teach children in a way that the "ultimate goal" is pedagogical, i.e. building the child's attitude in which exercise and motor play are an everyday need and content.

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