

Children's physical activities according to preschool student teachers' creed

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Abstract

In this article, preschool student teachers' thinking of young children's physical activities is discussed. The study is based on individual "pedagogic creed" texts written by preschool student teachers at a university college in Bergen, Norway, in their first and third years of the educational program. Students describe in detail what they associate with the term physical activity and the formation qualities it possesses. The material is extensive and this article will focus on some of the findings, such as how students see children's physical activity in connection to motor, social, and moral development. How the students' perceive physical activity, as a component in a more holistic thinking of children and formation, is also part of the analysis, as well as their thinking of the role and responsibility of the teaching staff. We find that the arguments for physical activity are different, and students' foci change during the education program, from an I and child perspective in their first year of the educational program, to a more reflective and academic perspective focused more on the role of the leader in their third year.

Keywords

Physical activity; children; preschool student teachers; ECE; pedagogic creed; reflective thinking

Introduction

The aim of this article is to show how preschool students' thinking of childrens' physical activity comes forth in the students pedagogic creeds. The results of our study will contribute to new insight into the students' formation process and particularly to their thinking of childrens' physical activity. Here we use the term *formation* according to the national Norwegian Framework Plan for Kindergartens (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017). This study also indicates the value of writing a "pedagogic creed" as a tool for becoming a reflective future teacher. Young children's physical activity is a well researched domain in Norway (Kunnskapsdepartementet, 2009; Lillemyr, 2008), and research on children's risky play linked to the outdoors, in particular, has received international attention (Sandseter, 2010; Sandseter & Storli, 2015). In the Nordic countries, children's play and physical activities are part of a strong tradition in early childhood education, with different aspects of the topic frequently discussed in our countries (Einarsdottir & Wagner, 2006). This tradition emphasises free play in the Norwegian nature and outdoors as part of the childrens' daily life, and corresponds well with the new Norwegian Framework Plan for Kindergartens (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017):

By engaging with nature, the environment and technology, kindergartens shall enable the children to experience and explore nature in all its diversity, enjoy outdoor experiences all year round, experience, explore and experiment with natural phenomena and the laws of physics and learn about nature and sustainable development. (p. 52)

The number of students' creed texts in our database is extensive, including texts dating back to 1999. This material consists of their written creeds from the first and third years of their study. In this article, however, we limit ourselves to a few aspects concerning physical activity in the texts from 45 preschool student teachers in an educational program from 2009 till 2012. This means that we will omit, for instance, gender aspects, learning, and language development. Where students' texts have cited the Norwegian Framework Plan for the Content and Task of Kindergartens, we have replaced them here with references to the English translation of the framework from the Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research (NMER, 2011). Therefore, the page numbers may differ from those referred to in the students' original texts. We have translated the students' texts from Norwegian to English as carefully as possible.

Pedagogic creed as idea and program

Most university colleges are, in different ways, concerned about students' basic thinking in their educational program. A few university colleges use the concept of "pedagogic creed". For instance *Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences* (2017) and *University College of Southeast Norway* (2017) have the term *pedagogisk credo* (pedagogic creed) in their education program, connected to the students' basic thinking of pedagogy, as NLA University College has also done since 1999, when their preschool teacher educational program started. Internationally, we find the concept used at Monmouth University, NJ, USA (2011).

However, it seems that NLA University College is in a unique position having used the concept systematically for all preschool student teachers for a long period. In connection

to the national evaluation of the preschool teacher educational programs in Norway, the national political authorities have concluded that NLA University College's program on pedagogic creed is significant because it is part of the students' personal formation and professional development (Nasjonalt Organ for Kvalitet i Utdanningen, 2010).

How is pedagogic creed implemented in the Bachelor degree program for preschool-teacher training at the NLA University College? In short, the students have a brief introduction to the concept in their first semester. In the second semester, after their internship in early childhood education, the students each draft a pedagogic creed about what they find to be most important; that is, what they are passionate about and what they find essential in their future work in early childhood education. The text is then read by a mentor, usually a teacher in the Department for Pedagogy, and followed up by a small group conversation about the content of the texts. After this mentored group conversation, the students hand in their more developed individual text electronically as a mandatory paper. During all three years in the education program, the students are in different ways reminded to rethink and reflect on their creed. One of the lectures in the third year of pedagogy is entirely focused on the pedagogic creed and the thinking behind it. It is expected that the students are now able to write a more elaborate and academic text. In the very last semester, students write a new pedagogic creed; this time a more reasoned and extended text linked to academic literature. This last task is also required for students to take their final exam. The pedagogic creed is also part of the final individual oral examination but in an oral and narrative form. Here, the students have an opportunity to reflect deeper on their creed.

What characterizes pedagogic creed as an idea and concept? Originally, the word "credo" comes from Latin and translates to "I believe". John Dewey originally developed the concept in "My pedagogic creed" (1897/n.d.). Here he designs five articles of faith essential for the teacher's role. Each section starts with "I believe ...", and in his last article of faith, he writes "I believe that every teacher should realize the dignity of his calling; that he is a social servant set apart for the maintenance of proper social order and the securing of the right social growth" ("Article Five", para 14). Among students, Dewey is best known for the classic formulation *learning by doing*, which can be interpreted as advocating a practice-oriented teaching. Less known is his strong emphasis on teachers' duties as an ethical calling and education that is, most of all, an ongoing formation project for coping with life. In his educational manifest, Dewey also shows physical activity as a basic learning activity for children. In article two of *My Pedagogic Creed*, Dewey writes: "I believe that the school must represent present life - life as real and vital to the child as that which he carries on in the home, in the neighborhood, or on the play-ground" (p. 77). In article four he elaborates:

I believe that the active side precedes the passive in the development of the child nature; that expression comes before conscious impression; that the muscular development precedes the sensory; that movements come before conscious sensations; I believe that consciousness is essentially motor or impulsive; that conscious states tend to project themselves in action. (p. 79)

Incorporated in Dewey's postulate of *learning by doing* is an overarching thinking that children's learning is the learning that takes place through participation in social life, where the bodily life is also contained. Dewey perceives children's learning as closely related to habits, which also involves the child's bodily and physical habits: "habits are arts. They involve skill of sensory and motor organs, cunning, or craft, and objective

materials. They assimilate objective energies, and eventuate in command of environment. They require order, discipline, and manifest technique” (Dewey, 1922, as cited in Akslen, 2015, p. 166). Dewey does not perceive children’s physical activity as just a learning area the child can develop, but physical activity as part of what constitutes activities like learning and education.

Dewey makes a distinction from Cartesian dualism, and believes that reflection and thinking happen in collaboration with bodily activities, because we are physical human beings who reflect, being situated in the world (Dewey, 1938). We find that Dewey is concerned about children’s physical activity, which he perceives as constituting an essential and central part of their education and formation. This is partly why authors such as Shusterman (2012), Quennerstedt (2013), Stolz (2014), and Standal (2015), have applied Dewey’s thinking about education in the field relating to children and young people’s physical activity.

In the English-language research literature, the term “beliefs” is used in studies on values and teacher’s thinking (Beijaard & De Vries, 1997; Halman, 2008; Helfenbein & Diem, 2008). In Norwegian research, the term *pedagogiske grunnsyn* (“fundamental educational principles”) is used to describe the preschool teachers’ basic thinking (Gunnestad, 2007). The concept of *pedagogic creed* refers to a student teacher’s expressed attitudes, perceptions, values and emotions related to the field of education and professional life. It is an educational concept that touches on fundamental aspects of students’ basic thinking, perception of human beings, views on child ethos, understanding the self, management theory, practice theory, and more. We can also add to this list the students’ views on children’s physical activity.

Methodology and previous study on the material

In this article, we give a qualitative analysis (Repstad, 2007) of 90 pedagogic creeds written by 45 preschool student teachers in the first and last years of their education program. In 2009, these students started their education to become teachers for 1- to 6-year-old children, and they graduated in 2012. The texts reflect the students’ way of thinking, their view on life, and the way they interpret their development from student to teacher. The texts are written as narratives, describing the students’ formation process from the first and third years of the education program. In analyzing the texts, we used the program NVivo 10 to gain a systematic overview of the material, such as the use of terms and expressions. In using a mainly qualitative approach, we seek to bring out the students’ own perspectives, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes related to their education (Creswell, 2008).

A phenomenological philosophy underlies this study: searching for the content of meaning to the individual student as he or she experiences and interprets *within* the world and *with* the world, as Heidegger (2007) explains in his philosophy of thinking. Following phenomenology, the world or reality cannot be grasped in a pure, objective, or abstract way, but will always be influenced by the individual student’s perspective *on* the world. Phenomenological science therefore requires a hermeneutical approach. Unlike the natural sciences with order and laws, a hermeneutic approach interprets and understands problems in relation to a meaningful system (Bø & Helle, 2008). As a basis for discussion, there is the students’ world, the students’ interpretation and understanding of the world

and, in this case, the students' interpretation and understanding of children's physical activity. This is also the students' interpretation of life, which contains the individual student's distinctive formation history linked to their childhood, family, friends, education, professional life, and so on. (Akslen & Sæle, 2014).

Kari Søndena (2002, 2006) has undertaken a similar methodical study in early childhood education, and points out that, in order to be able to take the students' texts, opinions, and perspectives seriously, the researcher's academic discussion has to correspond with the students' *refleksjonscredo* ("reflection creed").

Akslen and Sæle (2015a) have edited a volume in which there is discussion of an empirical study of these creed texts from student teachers in the 2007–2009 cohorts. Other professionals contributed to the anthology with different perspectives towards the educational theme. There are no similar studies of the pedagogic creed concept in relation to preschool student teachers, either in Norway or internationally. Akslen and Sæle have also published other articles based on these creed texts. The texts from the 2009 cohort are the basis for the analysis in this article, focusing on children's physical activity. Although the students sometimes perceive children's play to be identical to children's physical activity, this can be considered as a separate area.

Children's physical activity according to the Norwegian framework plan

The Norwegian Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens (NMER, 2011) clearly expresses that young children are in need of physical activity. In Section 3.2, "Body, movement and health", the framework plan says that children "acquire fundamental motor skills, body control, physical characteristics, habits and insights into how they can protect their health and quality of life" (p. 35). Further, the framework plan says:

Children are physically active, and they express themselves a lot through their bodies. Through physical activity, children learn about the world and about themselves. Through sensory impressions and movement, children gain experience, skills and knowledge in a number of areas. (p. 35)

On the same page, the framework plan emphasizes that physical activity "is important to the development of social competence". The framework plan connects physical activity to numerous aspects of children and childhood, as the development of a healthy body and focus on the importance of varied activities both indoors and outdoors, ensures the development of motor skills and body control. Physical activity is considered crucial for the development of a positive self-image.

The framework plan also gives clear guidelines and requirements for the teaching staff on implementing physical activity in everyday life of early childhood education:

[staff must:]

- ensure that the body and movement culture at the kindergarten reflects the diversity of the children's cultural backgrounds ...

- facilitate and provide inspiration for safe and challenging physical games and activities for everyone, regardless of gender and physical, psychological and social circumstances
- ... inspire all children to seek out physical challenges and to try out their physical potential
- support children's ideas for games, and suggest play and games in which the children are physically active and experience joy through a sense of achievement and community (NMER, 2011, p. 35).

Our findings in the written material

The article looks upon the positive effect that students think physical activity has on children, or which competencies it helps to develop, and clarifies this by looking closely at areas dealing with motor skills, health, and social ethics. Later, we will also look into how individual students link physical activity to greater didactic and educational theoretical thinking and practice.

Finally, we will look at the students' reflections on the staff's role and responsibility in relation to children's physical activity. Personal engagement is important, as we can see in this example from one of the preschool student teachers in the third year of the program:

In our second year of the educational program, many of the lectures were about the child's motor development and physical activity. This is one of the things I might be most passionate about. Why? First and primarily, it is perhaps rooted in my own personality, because I am very fond of physical activity and especially outside of the kindergarten's walls. Through practice periods, I also got the opportunity to work with this theme. (informant 1)

Children's physical activity as play

Physical activity is an ambiguous term that can have a diversity of meanings, even for the students in this study. Johan Huizinga (1955) gives a classic definition of the term "play" that captures something of the diversity of children's physical activity. Discussing children's play, or play in general, Huizinga's play-term is frequently used, often as opposed to adult sports concepts (such as *game* or *competition*). However, Huizinga does not make a clear distinction between play, and games or competition, because these can also be forms of play, as long as they contain the spirit of play. For him, it is not really the content but the underlying motive that determines whether there is play or not. He perceives play as a collective term for human physical bodily activity, as long as this is: a) non-serious ("outside ordinary life"), b) voluntary ("free activity"), c) transcendent ("absorbing the player"), and d) ethical ("according to fixed rules"). These aspects are also addressed here. Play is a central theme of the students' texts and is previously discussed by the authors (Akslen & Sæle, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Sæle, 2012, 2013). Play, as a phenomenon, is commented on in this section only as one of many aspects of children's physical activity.

Several students mention in different ways, that play is central to children's lives. One student from the third year (informant 2) writes that play, as a phenomenon, is basic for

life and a way of learning through which children can express themselves. Other students also emphasize the said characteristics of the game as something voluntary, that it should be an activity the children “choose to take part in”. Students also comment on children’s physical activities or play as a state of flow or a kind of peak experience (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997; Maslow, 1968). A quote from Lillemyr (2004) was often used by students to illustrate that play as phenomenon is linked to imagination and testing out boundaries. Childrens’ play is seen as a self-initiated and comprehensive enterprise:

Children can start a game with others where children decide what they want to play and how. In early childhood education, we play all the time, whether it is passive or active movement. For example, we can play while we sit at the table without much motion (p. 33; our translation).

Another third-year student (informant 3) gives a more subjective, existential, and autotelic understanding of play as a phenomenon in writing: “Play is a basic way of life and learning where children can express themselves”. She refers to Joseph Levy who highlights play as a) internally motivated, b) a suspension of reality, and c) an experience of an inner base of control (Lillemyr, 2004). The student elaborates these criteria further by claiming that when the child masters a situation of play, that that is the expression of such an internal base of control. Children’s physical activity and play as withdrawing from reality or exceeded reality (Gadamer, 2012) is little discussed in the creed texts, possibly because this aspect has received less attention in the students’ education program. There are few examples in the texts of reflections on the consequences of this element in children’s play.

Children’s physical activity as gymnastic or motor activity

Some students link children’s physical activity to athletics. A student in the third year program (informant 4) is writing in her creed that when she was working in early childhood education, she was in charge of sport events for the 3– to 5–year–old children. She put up a variety of activities for the children, such as scooters/tricycles, long jump, ski races and jumping, throwing bags in buckets, and soccer practice. At the end of the day, there was a ceremony, handing out chocolate medals for all the children. The student here equates sports with physical activities, but clarifies that sporting activity must be playful: “When you do sports activities with young children, it is important to have a merry and playful tone to maintain the children’s joy and commitment”.

Referring to the following third year student (informant 5), it was of importance that there was a gym for the children to challenge them both physically and mentally. The student justifies this with current issues of inactivity and obesity:

When it is cold outside, it is not always nice to be out with the little ones. Physical education is important for children; all kindergartens should have a fitness room with trampoline, thick mattress, springboard, parachute, wall bars, etc. Being active almost all the time is the alpha and omega for a child, it is important to show your child that it is nice to be fit, not just sit inside watching movies or playing video games. I think this is particularly important given that many observations and research shows that children are getting more overweight, even here in Norway.

Another student in the third year program (informant 6) writes about a more structured form of physical activity, called bodily activity, and mentions examples such as swimming, walks, stretching after a playful activity, and other outdoor or indoor activities. This student believes that such physical activity may also contain play, but simultaneously sets a distinction between these by claiming that bodily activity is associated with a more structured and planned learning program focusing on “motor skills and body control”. The student adds that even if there are certain plans for exercises, the structure or approach must not be dominated by the teachers such that joy and enthusiasm are absent. The student also considers such deliberate and controlled physical activity, especially with the older children, as good preparation for physical education in schools, making children more “prepared and have an easy transition from early childhood education to primary school”. Such controlled and planned activities can also be done with the smaller kids, but then play must be in focus, the student adds.

Children’s physical activities as an issue for motor skills, body skills and health

Some first-year students refer to the child’s motor skills and expertise in their rationale for why children should engage in physical activity. This first-year student (informant 7) writes:

When it comes to activities and daily life otherwise in early childhood education, I look at motor training as very important. Physical activity will help to promote development and learning.... To facilitate physical activity will help to develop motor skills such as movement ability, strength, endurance, and speed.

The same first year student points out the importance of the teaching staff to let children experience success, and “encounter physical challenges” because “it is important to work with activities that children enjoy and manage”. Another student from the first year (informant 8) writes: “I am concerned with physical education. Give children experiences in using their bodies. It may be to go hiking in rough terrain, such as in the forest. This means activities to strengthen gross motor skills”. As an argument to meet the requirements from the school system, one student in the third year (informant 9) is concerned about the importance of stimulating the motor skills for the clumsy children. Informant 2, from the third year program, refers to the national framework plan that says: “Through physical activity, children learn about the world and about themselves. Through sensory impressions and movement, children gain experience, skills and knowledge in a number of areas” (NMER, 2011, p. 35).

Hansen and Jagtøien (2001) write: “Observation of children’s physical expression in play leaves no doubt that it is a source of joy, satisfaction, cheerfulness and energy that thrives through running, jumping, climbing and so forth” (p. 55; our translation). And “being on the move is essential for good physical health. Experiences through play, dance, sports and outdoor activities may affect the wellbeing and good mental and social health.” (p. 58; our translation). This is cited in one of the creeds when a student in the third-year program (informant 10) experienced, during her internship, physical activity being abandoned in favor of storytelling, music, and art, and in her reasoning for the use of physical or bodily activity, she mentions the importance of safeguarding and promoting children’s health.

A majority of the students are critical of the impact of technological development and how this influences children's daily life. One student from the third year (informant 11) writes:

We must allow the kids to engage with "Playstation" and other games, but the balance between play and physical activity must be organized in relation to children's physical and mental development. Committed and conscious role models know that good health goes above anything else in the whole world.

Children's physical activities as socioethical skills

When children's physical activity connects to the social aspect, this usually takes place in connection to the psychological area, and is less tied up to the child's socioethical competence. There are those who argue that children's physical activity, if it is playful, requires an absence of morality (Øksnes, 2010). Such a position is justified by the fact that play is foremost an existential, autonomous experience, where the "trans-substantial" stands out as the central part. That is, play has an intrinsic value that is not tied to its moral value.

Still, others emphasize children's moral development through social activities in which children learn different interaction rules, which include more demanding forms of interaction such as risky play (Sandseter, 2010; Sandseter & Storli, 2015) and play-fighting (Damon, 2003; Edmiston, 2008; Olsbu, 2009; Sæle, 2012). There are students who emphasize physical activity and play as essential socioethical areas of formation. Few students specifically mention the term moral/ethical development, but more often write that physical activity is related to children's social competence, because children's physical activity usually occurs in interaction with other children.

A third-year student (informant 6) writes: "Through play, children acquire norms and rules within a group of children, and the child gets a frame around himself", and another student in the same program (informant 12) writes in her creed that from her own experiences, the children are physically active in early childhood education, and they use a lot of the same traditional activities, such as "The bear is sleeping" or "All my pigeons came home" (Traditional Norwegian dramatic action songs).

Yet another student from the third year (informant 8) writes: "Through play, children get to know each other and create friendship. This is very important for the children to have a good time in early childhood education".

Informant 2 relates to Lillemyr (2008) who writes that the self can only be developed in cooperation and relation to others. This student also sees how language is stimulated and developed in social and physical activity. In that regard, the keywords are dialogue and shared experience, and the same student here employs the philosopher Martin Buber as support for her argument. According to Buber (1970), the individual is twofold, where *I* is part of *Thou*, and the individual can never be understood as *It*. This student also points out that it is important for the teaching staff to be aware that, for some children, it is challenging to relate to all the different relationships in the kindergarten. Taking part and being social during a full day can also make children insecure and vulnerable.

Another student (informant 13) in her third-year text, highlights different aspects of development and the value of relationships with other children in the group:

I believe that children learn mostly through interaction with others. Then children can imitate each other, discuss, negotiate, conduct a conflict resolution, practice in taking others' perspective, express their own opinions and be listened to. This helps to increase children's social skills, as well as making them better equipped to meet the demands of society later in life. They also learn dialogue perspective, taking turns and learn the diversity of people.

Childrens' outdoor activities

Outdoor activities are part of the traditional culture and way of living in Norway, and a lot of the students' mention this in their creeds. These quotes are in line with what the national framework plan expresses. A third-year student (informant 14) says:

I think it is important that children have a positive experience of being out in the nature. Nature is a place for community, wonder, stimulation and pleasure. The nature challenges the emotional, cognitive, social and motivational processes in the body. Children do wonder in the outdoors. Being an adult, it is important to take care of children's wondering and take time to marvel with the children.

....

By spending a lot of time outdoors, children get a positive relationship with nature, they also will love the nature. As adults, we should help to give children an understanding of the interplay between man and nature. By showing kids how important nature is to us, this can be something the children bring with them later in life. They may be young conservationists that respects and take care of nature.

Some students' also focus on the interaction between the body and nature. One third-year student (informant 15) says: "When children are playing outdoors in the nature they get to use their body and to know the nature and themselves in interaction with the nature". Some student also focus on the gain of being outdoors. The following is from a third student (informant 15):

Children are often not satisfied that they have to play within a certain location. In nature, children need not do so. When children play outdoors there is no need for the teaching staff to say to children that children must use "indoor voice" or not run so fast. There are also opportunities to use their creativity.

As mentioned in the introduction, adventurous and risky play is part of the Norwegian culture. There has already been research into risky play from Norwegian theorists (Sandseter, 2010; Sandseter & Storli, 2015). As the students are naturally also a part of this tradition, they reflect on the importance of risk-taking in their creeds. One student from the third-year program writes (informant 16):

Children must meet risks to restrain risks later in life. Children who are called "cotton wool children", with overprotective parents or daycare staff, miss this ability they will develop by meeting risks. Therefore, children must be allowed to perceive hazards. A risk can be anything from climbing high in a tree, rolling down a hill and try to jump over a big stick. What can be a risk for one child need not be a risk to another. We are all individual people, with different strengths and skills.

Physical activity as pedagogic and formational approach

A third-year student (informant 17) who emphasized physical activity in her first year, can later in her education see such activity within a wider context. She mentions formation in relation to this section from the national framework plan: “children develop independence, as well as confidence in themselves as individuals and in their personal and cultural identities” (NMER, 2011, p. 30). The same student gives a more professional and detailed justification in her third year for why physical activity, and what she describes as physicality, is important to stimulate for children. She again refers to the national framework plan which states: “Through physical activity, children learn about the world and about themselves” (p. 35). We can see that she has a wide educational perspective in her decision to stimulate children’s physical activity. This is the topic she is most passionate about, because she too engages in physical exercise and has been able to work with the theme during her internships, and has had the opportunity to experience the joy it gives both children and teaching staff.

Another third-year student (informant 18) points out that play influences the child’s identity development, and she writes:

One detail in play that in the recent past is considerably emphasized, is the significance to develop and enhance children’s self-esteem and identity. Through play, the child learns to know itself and develop trust and respect in relation to itself and others. Children’s play tells us much about their learning, development and socialization in different areas, and at the same time play adventures and play experiences children get, strengthen their learning and development and helps to make them social.

In this excerpt, we find that the student approaches children’s play more holistically along with learning and formation. In the Nordic countries, this approach to play, learning, and formation has traditionally been emphasized. We also see this as a core value in the new Norwegian Framework Plan for Kindergartens (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017):

Kindergartens shall work in partnership and agreement with the home to meet the children’s need for care and play, and they shall promote learning and formative development as a basis for all-round development. Play, care, learning and formative development shall be seen in context. (p. 7)

The role and responsibility for the teaching staff

In her first-year program, Informant 19 sees the teaching staff as a catalyst for children to get into play activities. She is writing about the role of the teaching staff and their responsibility to intervene in children’s physical play. Otherwise, some children will have trouble in starting an activity:

Adults can be there to engage and motivate children by contributing. By this, children can get an understanding of how the body works. Children “develop an understanding and respect for their own and other people’s bodies, and for the fact that everyone is different” [NMER, 2011, p. 35]. Children get constantly challenged when they are allowed to explore.

We find that in their third year, students tend to see more possibilities for variety in physical activity both indoors and outdoors. They give examples of what can be done to facilitate such play regarding the children's age, and one of the third-year students (informant 20) is writing about the importance of motivated and engaged preschool teachers for stimulating motor skills. Third-year students are concerned about both the individual child and the group, but emphasize that the most important task for the teaching staff is to make sure that "the children themselves feel that they can master the challenges in the different activities".

One of these third-year students (informant 16) writes:

I do not mean that the child should be pushed into play if he or she is standing on the outside. I mean that the teaching staff must assess the situation, why the child is where he or she is. Talk with the child.

Sometimes, the teaching staff can be an obstacle for children's outdoor play, as this excerpt from a third-year student (informant 15) indicates:

As I mentioned earlier, it depends on the weather and the teaching staff. When I have been out in periods of internship in early childhood education, I often notice that the teaching staff will not go out with the kids because it is cold outside or raining very much. I think that it is a poor excuse for keeping children inside. There is again talk about an attitude that children can record from the adults. If this happens over time, children can show the same attitude. It might be that children will no longer go out because it is cold outside.

Conclusion

In our data, we find that students, during their education, come closer to their future profession in early childhood education. In general, the students in their first year are already concerned about physical education, play, and outdoors. However, we find that the students are more knowledgeable, more reflective, and ethically aware of their professional role in relation to physical activities during their third year compared to their first year, as indicated in their creed texts. The way of thinking the individual had as a fresh student, is replaced by more professional and academic thinking closer to the attitudes, knowledge, and professionalism the field requires.

This article clearly shows that the preschool student teachers included in this study develop a more reflective way of thinking about children's physical activities during their education program, and also expand the variety of approaches they have to the theme. When the students' are so focused on children's physical play, we understand this as an expression of a new ability to take on a child's perspective. One of the main reasons for the students' many facets and approaches to the theme can be explained by the fact that physical activity is a main part of a child's daily life. In other words, that physical activity and play are "the hub" in the formation of the children. It would be interesting to see if these former students, now preschool teachers, think differently about physical play in early childhood education. It is a fact that different aspects of physical activity affect each other: for example, language skills and gender aspects can be an integral part of social or moral development (Damon, 2003; Edmiston, 2008; Olsbu, 2009). These aspects can be themes for future research.

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