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Presenting the Selection of Innovative Approaches Taken in Physical Activities in the Pre-School Period

Extended summary

Background: The societal expectations regarding preschool teachers are high, which is why their role is becoming more complex, requiring a higher level of professionalism. Recently, experts have been highlighting innovative approaches in different areas of teaching. Preschool teachers are the holders of initiative and ideas, must be creative, self-initiative, responsible, autonomous and professionally competent. Last but not least, they must be innovative, namely, have the will, knowledge, and the ability to use and realise a good idea. Therefore, preschool teachers need to be trained, educated, and acquainted with various aspects of teaching physical activities. With the acquired knowledge and experience teachers can express their creativity in the field of movement as well.

Problem: The problem dealt with in our research is to determine whether preschool teachers use innovative approaches to physical activities in kindergarten. The aim of our research is to use a questionnaire to establish whether and what kind of innovations are used by the preschool teachers in providing physical activities.

Methods: The sample is non-random and has been intentionally selected. 115 preschool teachers (out of this number 5 are male) from 12 Slovenian regions decided to participate in the research. The average age of men is 29.6 and of women 42.1. There are 32 teachers who are employed in the first age group, 65 teachers in the second age group, and 18 teachers in the combined class.

Results: We wished to determine the correlation between the selection of innovative approaches in the domain of physical/sports activity, planning and conducting a supervised

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physical/sports activity in the gym or outdoors in accordance with the age of teachers. We found that preschool teachers with higher education less frequently plan physical activities in the playroom ($\rho = -0.18$; $p = 0.050$), and that there are more outdoor activities ($\rho = 0.22$; $p = 0.018$). In addition, teachers who work in the first age group perform outdoor activities more frequently than the teachers in the second age group. We also identified the differences in the mean value of the frequency of performing supervised outdoor physical/sports activities in the first and second age group of children, where the latter group has a lower mean value ($\pi=0,006$). The descriptive data obtained from the answers to the open-ended question “What do you understand by innovative approaches to physical activity?” show that two-thirds of teachers (76) view this concept as “something new”. Curricular content was chosen by 37 teachers. Twenty-four teachers opted for “Improving the content of physical activities, including daily outdoor activities”. “Other” was marked by 16 teachers who evaluated the concept of innovative approach as “FIT4kids”, “I do not understand the concept”, “A visit to the sports centre”, “Cooperating with external associates”, “Systematic performing of physical activity”, “Innovative props”, other props, etc. The answers to the question “Which innovative approaches do you choose to improve supervised physical activities?” showed that 73 teachers chose the learning content according to the curriculum. There were 65 teachers who opted for activities in nature, with a wide selection of props, teaching methods and forms of work. The concept of choosing innovative approaches was marked by 17 teachers as “Content is chosen by children”, and 33 teachers opted for “Other” which comprised the options: “FIT4kids”, “Cooperation with a sports instructor”, “I do not choose innovative approaches”, “I use ICT”, “Team cooperation”, etc.

Conclusion: Innovative and/or creative approaches in education are important because they complement the already established and routine professional programmes and instigate us to reconsider the applicability and effectiveness of educational approaches in general. From the analysis of the obtained data, we find that preschool teachers prefer choosing the proposed curriculum contents and activities than innovative approaches. Namely, the curriculum represents the professional basis for work process in kindergarten and introduces the possibilities of how to achieve the intertwined goals from different fields of learning. We also found that teachers who teach in the first age group tend to perform supervised outdoor activities more often than the teachers in the second age group and according to their level of education and the age group of children. The reason for this may be that the teachers in the second age group pay more attention to other supervised activities set by the kindergarten curriculum. The shortcoming of our research is that we created a questionnaire for the purposes of the research.

Keywords: field of activity Movement, creativity, preschool teacher, preschool age

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