

Physical Activities as a Tool of Holistic Education in a few Primary Schools in Oslo

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Abstract

Title of the Thesis

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Background and Purpose

In 1998, I made my decision to enter the field of Physical Education and Sports Science for my academic studies. As an athlete in volleyball myself, at the time, I had realized that physical activity greatly benefits people merely by being active. This idea motivated me to become a physical education teacher in order to contribute to people's well-being through physical activities.

I have been working as a volleyball trainer since 1999 with children, teenagers and adults. In 2012, I felt that my "nature" as a teacher was calling me to extend my knowledge both in the field of education and physical education. Additionally, my concern for groups of people with special needs was another important factor that influenced my decision to attend the master's programme of special needs education.

My purpose after fulfilling the master studies is to combine the knowledge I gained from the two academic fields of physical education and special needs education, in order to work on the promotion of the idea of equal opportunities for all people, through physical activities.

Research Questions and Methods of Collecting Data

My research has focused on the understanding of the teaching methods implemented during four lessons of physical education in a few primary schools in Oslo. The main question I am posing is:

Do physical activities, as conducted in the three visited schools, give opportunities for participation to all children in the selected classes?

The following sub-questions accompany the main question:

- How do teachers and/or PE teachers conduct their teaching so that it is **meaningful** for each child in their classes?
- How do teachers and/or PE teachers create **a motivational atmosphere** for the children in their classes?
- Are physical activities and play important for educating children and are they interconnected?

My research is qualitative and for collecting data, I used observation as my main method. The participants were on one hand, teachers -with or without a background in physical education- and their pupils, on the other hand. Supplementary to the observations I was making, were short, informal talks with each teacher before or after their class.

Findings

With this research, I am looking for findings that will show the value of physical activities as an educational tool and their meaning for the pupils. In the school environment, besides the classroom education, which is mostly related to the academic skills, like reading, writing, and making arithmetical calculations, physical education is also an important field that can contribute significantly to the developmental and learning progress of children.

Acknowledgements

The last 2 years has been a period full of changes and challenges. All the experiences I have gained until now, have helped me explore my inner world and discover abilities and skills, I never thought I had. Studying in English and learning the Norwegian language at the same time, so that I could create opportunities in working as a physical education teacher in Norway, were many times overwhelming.

The path to knowledge is not an easy one and it takes time to reach the final destination; therefore, patience, hard work and faith had been the virtues that I cultivated in my mind to soar my morale and overcome feelings such as loneliness, nostalgia and anxiety. As time was passing by, the seeds of my efforts in various fields started to blossom. This master's thesis will be the seal of my academic journey in the University of Oslo, where I met very interesting and important people, classmates and professors.

The professor I owe gratitude to, for her guidance and support, is Miriam D. Skjørten. I feel very fortunate and honored to have met her and had her as my “veileder”, mainly, though, as she is a person full of wisdom and care for others.

My family has been through many difficulties over the last three years but we have kept fighting and being optimistic. The constant support from my family kept me strong and determined to struggle with all my powers for my values, principles and goals. I want to dedicate this master thesis to my father Sotirios-Charalampos, my mother Aggeliki, my brother Dimitris, and my cousin Ellyanna, who have always stood by me and made me deeply understand how important family is in one's life.

Last but not least, I want to say to Yun-Ju how thankful and lucky I have been to have you next to me. You stood by me and took care of me during these difficult twelve months that I had to struggle by working and studying at the same time, so that I manage to survive and take my life a step further.

The final part of this foreword will be a personal wish. My country, Greece has been in a very strenuous situation during the last 6 years, which changed the lives of many people, including mine. I hope that soon we, Greeks, recover our lost identity, our hope and our happiness, and it all becomes as it was, before the “era” of the economic recession...

Abbreviations

| | |
|--------|--|
| EFA | Education for All |
| IPM | Information Processing Model |
| MER | Ministry of Education and Research |
| NSD | Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste |
| ZPD | Zone of Proximal Development |
| OFSTED | Office for Standards in Education |
| PC | Personal Computer |
| PE | Physical Education |
| SNE | Special Needs Education |
| RMERCA | The Royal Ministry of Education, Research and Church Affairs |

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1 Introduction

Each society has a cultural identity, which is characterized by the history and the formed values of the past, the tendencies of the present and the visions for the future. People act according to the principles of the social context they live in and develop accordingly.

The orientation of young people is based on the education they get and the opportunities they are given, to be creative, productive and capable of unfolding their skills and talents. Individuals are different and education must embrace the idea of diversity since early childhood. Acceptance and respect are values that should be cultivated in the environment of family and school.

During my bachelor's studies, I learned much about the effect of physical activity and sports in health, lifestyle and civilization. A significant number of researches, scientific articles and literature show the interest of the scientific society in the benefits of physical activities (Eichstaedt & Lavay, 1992).

Human communication depends on movements and motor activity since infancy. Each individual is unique and develops according to his/her skills, abilities and experiences. The starting point of my professional career as a physical education teacher in Greece, my homeland, was my desire to work with people, mainly children, giving them guidance for exploring and cultivating their skills and abilities.

My experience has taught me that people can be stigmatized by their social background, their beliefs and/or their health condition. Additionally, my concern for people with special needs motivated me to deepen my knowledge in this field.

By conducting my research in a few primary schools in Oslo, I was given a unique opportunity to experience new educational environments, different teaching styles and processes.

The period of contacting and visiting schools in Oslo lasted three months. Concurrently, for a better understanding of the education system in Norway, I went through the **Core Curriculum for Primary, Secondary and Adult Education in Norway** (2011) and the **Curriculum for Physical Education** (2012).

1.1 Core Curriculum for Primary, Secondary and Adult Education in Norway

The Core Curriculum includes the principles and values of the Norwegian society and the aims of education. Among others, a basic principle is that “society is responsible for ensuring that equality of educational opportunity is a reality and that inequalities are not allowed to develop” (RMERCA, 2011, p. 5).

Nowadays many societies, the Norwegian one being among them, are constituted of diverse groups of people. Persons must find ways to live in harmony and accept one another. Diversity can have a positive or negative impact on a society depending, at least partially, on the extent and quality of education people have. Therefore, “education should:

- ...be based on the view that all persons are created equal and human dignity is inviolable...
- ...counteract prejudice and discrimination, and foster mutual respect and tolerance between groups with differing modes of life...
- ...provide training in cooperation between persons of different capacities and groups with diverse cultures...” (RMERCA, 2011, pp. 8-10).

1.2 Curriculum for Physical Education

A significant aspect of physical activity that is mentioned in the core curriculum is that it can also function as a bridge of exploration and joy of nature and its beauties (RMERCA, 2011). Physical activities are taught in primary schools among others, during the lesson of physical education.

Physical education is an integrated part of general education having its own curriculum, where the main idea is that “the subject shall stimulate physical use of the body to enhance individual sensing, experiencing, learning and creating. The social aspects of physical activities mean that physical education is important for promoting fair play and respect for one another” (MER, 2012, p. 1).

The range of activities and the level of their complexity are formulated by the teachers according to the children's age and skillfulness. The objective for every teacher is to create opportunities so that each child can:

- learn and develop mastery
- experience a feeling of joy by participating in the given activities, and
- be socially accepted through the interaction and cooperation with peers.

“Emphasis is placed on movement, play and creative activities that are adapted to the skill levels and aptitudes of each pupil...Fair play and common rules for participation are important parts of the subject. The concept of fair play involves showing respect for one another in different activities. Interaction and working together are key elements of this concept” (MER, 2012, p. 2).

1.3 Research Problem

After the completion of this research project, I aim to seek job opportunities as a PE teacher in a Norwegian school. To prepare myself entering a new educational environment, I considered it necessary to study about education in Norway and collect information by observing how lessons of physical education are conducted in a few primary schools in Oslo.

The main research question is the following:

Do physical activities, as conducted in the three visited schools, give opportunities for participation to all children in the selected classes?

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the processes and the related meanings, which I discovered during my research, I developed three sub-questions.

The sub questions are:

- How do teachers and/or PE teachers conduct their teaching so that it is **meaningful** for each child in their classes?

- How do teachers and/or PE teachers create a **motivational atmosphere** for the children in their classes?
- Are physical activities and play important for educating children and are they interconnected?

The main question and sub questions will be analyzed and discussed in the relevant chapter.

1.3.1 My Pre-understanding

For many years, I have been working with persons of different ages and genders in the field of volleyball. My role as a trainer and tutor was very demanding, because I had to find the balance between the individual skills and the group's needs and expectations. The fact that all participants were sharing the same interest made my work a bit easier, but, still the challenges to create motivational conditions for all were many.

Beginning my master studies in Special Needs Education (SNE), I learned new meanings and pedagogical practices related to educational environments like kindergartens, schools and sport clubs. The studies in SNE could give me insight to new theoretical approaches that could make me improve my teaching methods and enable me to work effectively with a wider range of persons.

As a PE teacher, I am particularly interested in planning and implementing physical activities that can be educative and simultaneously attractive for children. In Norway, I also realized how important it is for a teacher to accept the diversity among the pupils' personalities and formulate lessons with a flexible structure.

The variety of physical activities and the way of their implementation can play a very important role to the development of children. My project focuses on the actual circumstances during four lessons of physical education, while at the same time, considering the educational programs, the role of the teachers, the teaching methods and finally their impact on the pupils.

1.4 Clarification of the Terms

In this paragraph, I clarify some of the main concepts that will be presented and discussed further in the following chapters. The presentation is alphabetical:

Development: As a general term in psychology, it addresses the continuous and life span processes of changes in human beings. Woolfolk et al. (2013) divide human development into the following aspects: physical, personal, social and cognitive.

Experience: Gallahue (1989) describes experiences as the “factors within the environment that may alter or modify the appearance of various developmental characteristics through the process of learning” (p.15).

Child-centered Education: Child- centered education gives the opportunities to children to take part actively in the learning processes and their own development. In addition, “children’s ideas, preferences, learning styles, and interests are considered in the planning for and implementation of instructional practices” (Morrison, 2009, p. 109).

Holistic Education: “Holistic education nurtures the broad development of the students and focuses on their intellectual, emotional, social, physical, creative or intuitive, aesthetic and spiritual potentials” (Hare, 2010, p. 3).

Skjørten (2013) remarks that holistic education can occur “in inclusive and child-friendly schools and societies [if] one is ready to change and adjust the system, environment and activities in relation to and in consideration of all participants’ needs” (p. 19).

Learning: Claxton (2002) refers that “people learn in the process of trying to achieve valued goals...” and “...so we explore and experiment, and if our learning is successful, we gain the knowledge we desire, and develop skills and ‘qualities’ along the way” (p. 21)

Phenomena: The Greek root of this word gives the meaning of an observable event, process or change in the natural or social environment or one’s behavior. In my thesis, the phenomena I refer to have to do with what I witnessed during the observations (processes and behaviors).

Physical Activities: “Physical activity is a complex behavioral variable...of both unavoidable activity (for example, walking to work/school) and voluntary activity (for example, sports, recreation)” (Armstrong & Winsley, 2005, p. 65).

Play: The significance of play is extremely great for children. “Play is the eager engagement in pleasurable physical or mental effort to obtain emotional satisfaction” (Sheridan, 1977, p.13). It can have various forms, but in this thesis we will see the kind of play that is connected to physical activities in the school setting and how this process can also affect the language, the intellectual, emotional and social development (Vedeler, 1997).

Primary School: The years in primary school are very sensitive and important for a child’s development. It is crucial that pupils grow and act in such an educational environment that enriches the “intellectual, emotional, cultural, social and physical development of every child within its care” (Logan & Sachs, 1997, p. 9).

Teachers/PE teachers: For the reader’s convenience, in many parts of the thesis, I substitute the term PE teacher with the common term teacher. However, I keep the distinction when I refer to specific attributes between classroom teachers and PE teachers.

1.5 Disposition of the Thesis

The thesis includes five chapters. The first chapter is the introduction to the topic of the thesis. In this chapter, I correlate the background knowledge obtained via my studies at the bachelor level with the reasons that motivated me to attend the master program of SNE and conduct my research project in Norway.

In chapter two, I present the relevant theoretical approaches related to the processes and phenomena. This theoretical part of the thesis will offer better understanding about the concepts that have been mentioned in the first chapter.

Chapter three is an overview of the methodology I used to collect data from the field work. I also present the purpose of the research in a larger extent, describe the research processes and explain how I constructed my project.

In chapter four, I present the findings from the observation sessions in four classes of three primary schools in Oslo and the informal talks I had with the teachers who participated.

In chapter five the discussion constitutes the “crossroad” for connecting the theoretical approaches from the literature with the findings and my personal reflections. In the last part of

the chapter, I present my conclusion from the total experience I had through this research project.

2 Theoretical Background

In this part, I will present some theoretical approaches, which come from the field of physical education and psychology. It is important to see which areas of human existence they define and how they interconnect with each other. Children become members of larger social contexts like schools, where formal education can take one's learning even further.

In the school setting pupils gain experience by new situations they are engaged in, assimilate knowledge from different fields, form relations with peers and adults, explore their environment, develop their physical and intellectual skills and discover their internal spectrum of emotions. Lemke argues that "as we learn, we gradually become our villages: we internalize the diversity of viewpoints that collectively make sense of all that goes on in the community" (as cited in Wells & Claxton, 2002, p.34).

Every new experience helps children to build their own identity and deeper understanding of the things that occur around them so that they prepare themselves for the demands of their future adult life. Primary schools have a very important mission; to introduce meanings, set the foundations of knowledge through education and prepare each child for the life to come, according to the child's own skills, talents and abilities.

2.1 The School

"Schooling shall provide a multi-faceted and all-round general education with concrete knowledge about the human being, society and nature which can provide a broad outlook and perspective; with know-how and maturity to face life's practical, social and personal challenges, and with qualities and values that facilitate cooperation between people and make it enriching and exciting for them to live together" (RMERCA, 2011, p. 25).

The need for developing and implementing child-centered teaching methods has been for a long time, a serious topic of discussion in the educational community not only nationally but also internationally. An interesting example from Australia in the late 1950s about the pedagogy in the primary school is the following list predicting "seven concerns:

- matching learning to children's individual differences

- activity and discovery methods of teaching and learning
- mastery of basic learning and thinking tools
- including parents in the child's schooling
- utilizing the children's personal interests and social concerns in learning activities
- developing a sense of community
- tone, feeling, environment, culture of the school" (Logan & Sachs, 1997, p.10).

Each education system should be flexible, adjustable, creative and meaningful. All children have the right to education; therefore, teachers should use appropriate educational tools to achieve a holistic education without discriminations.

"An educationally inclusive school is one in which the teaching and learning, achievements, attitudes and well being of every young person matter. Effective schools are inclusive schools" (OFSTED, 2001:7; as cited in Hayes & Stidder, 2003, p. 6).

The philosophy of the contemporary education system in Norway is expressed in the **Core Curriculum for Primary, Secondary and Adult Education in Norway** (2011). Some of its main points are:

- adaptation to the individual needs
- acceptance of the view that individuals have equal rights
- training and cooperation between persons with different skills and groups with diverse cultures
- continuation and further development of pre-existing practices
- learning and acquisition of new experiences and knowledge.

Nowadays, in many parts of the world, including Norway, the environment of classrooms can be multi-cultural and multi-ethnic. Wells and Claxton (2002) mention that "among their individual members, both students and teachers, there are different identities and

values that have their origins in cultural, linguistic, class and gender differences, as well as in individual trajectories of experience and current level of performance” (p. 9).

The structure of the core curriculum shows that Norway acts in accordance with the international standards following several international conventions emphasizing on the rights and socio-cultural diversity of children.

2.1.1 The Convention on the Rights of the Child

Norway is one of the countries that have been active members in an effort to protect the rights of children by ratifying international conventions. The Norwegian Core Curriculum of Education seems to be in line with relevant articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1991):

“Article 28:

1. State Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular:

(a) Make primary education compulsory and available free to all...

Article 29:

1. State Parties agree that the education of the child shall be directed to:

(a) The development of the child’s personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential...

Article 31:

1. State Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts” (pp. 8-9).

Physical education experiences can give children a tool for leisure time activities. Additionally, physical education as part of general education can also offer children

possibilities to learn, to develop skills and mastery, to belong in a group and to share emotions.

2.1.2 The Salamanca Statement

During the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Thailand (1990), two of the main objectives addressed were to get all children into schools and give them the most suitable education, but there was no special reference to the rights of children with special educational needs (UNESCO, published in 1991 and 1992).

After the declaration for the “School for All”, there was a feeling that children with special educational needs were not included. The Salamanca Statement, in 1994, focuses on the needs and rights of children with special educational needs. Representatives of the countries that participated, with Norway among them, agreed on a framework of actions “[proclaiming] that:

- every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning,
- every child has unique characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs,
- education systems should be designed and educational programmes implemented to take into account the wide diversity of these characteristics and needs,
- those with special educational needs must have access to regular schools which should accommodate them within a childcentred pedagogy capable of meeting these needs...” (UNESCO, 1994, pp. viii).

EFA and the Salamanca Statement were in 2000 followed up by the Dakar Framework for Action, including specific regional frameworks for action.

2.2 Learning and Education

The process of learning has been quite a controversial topic for the scientific society with different approaches. Each approach is expressed within a theoretical framework so as to

describe and explain, from a different point of view, how individuals acquire new skills and understanding and assimilate and develop new knowledge.

“The aim of education is to expand the individual’s capacity to perceive and to participate, to experience, to empathize and to excel” (RMERCA, 2011, p. 5). Education though is not only academics. In connection to this, physical education aims are to:

- teach about the value of lifetime exercise,
- promote the idea of a healthy lifestyle,
- give pupils the opportunities to learn by doing,
- keep pupils motivated to participate in activities for protecting and enhancing their health (e.g. cardiovascular endurance),
- impart principles like cooperation, respect, solidarity and fair play,
- enhance pupils’ level of mastery,
- and give satisfaction for the achievements.

An important factor for learning is that the activities given should be meaningful for the participants. According to Lemke, “the meaning comes from a culture: a particular way of doing, believing and valuing that has evolved over times much longer than any one person lives to see...” and “...participation in socially meaningful activities is not just what we learn, it is also how we learn” (as cited in Wells & Claxton, 2002, p. 36).

A meaningful activity for a child is not connected only with his/her cultural background. This means that a pupil should have some pre-requisites (physical, cognitive, social etc.) to gain advantages, learn, and improve from the given activity.

2.2.1 The Information Processing Model (IPM)

Based on the model of information processing (figure 1), learning is divided into three stages where the interaction of individuals with their environment is described.

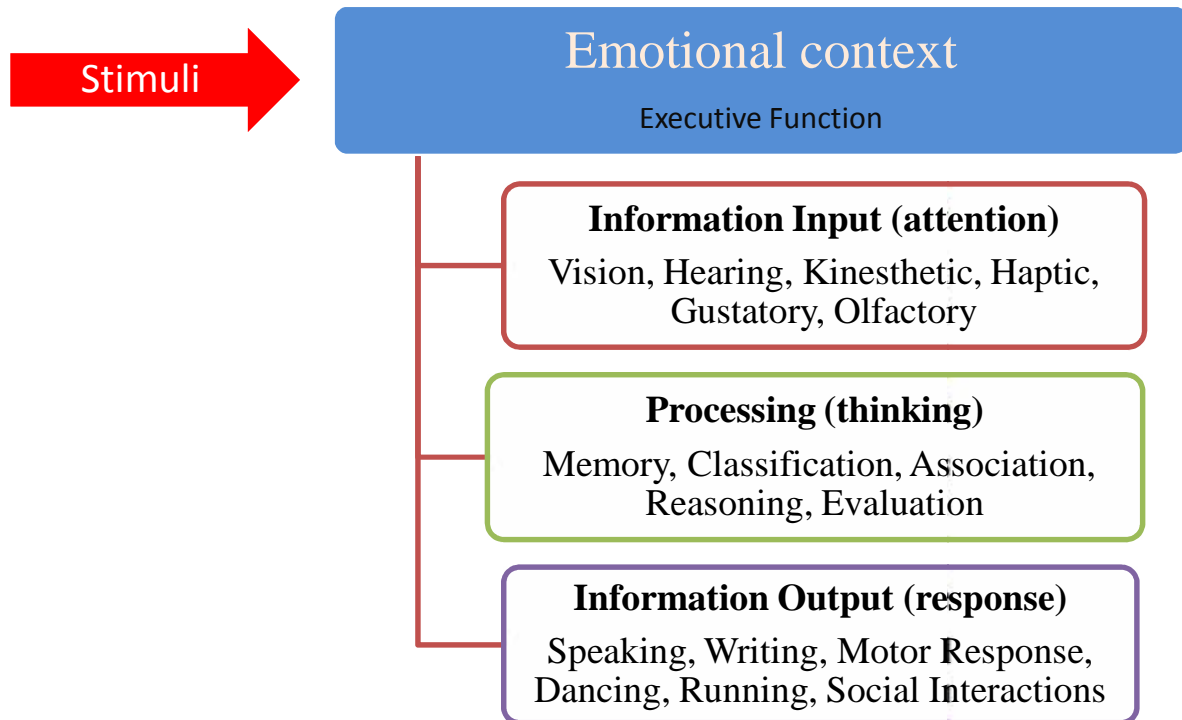


Figure 1- Based on the Information Processing Model (Kirk, 2012, p. 10)

The first stage is the input of information; the input is accomplished through our senses (kinesthetic, visual, hearing etc.) receiving the external stimuli which are transferred to the next stage for processing.

In the second stage, the incoming information is processed and categorized through memory. The new data are associated with former experiences through thinking and then the individual can form meanings and build a better understanding and reasoning.

The third stage is the output; output means the way an individual may react and respond to this information. This reaction may be expressed in various ways such as movements, body posture and facial expressions, sounds or speech, writing or even internal reflections.

During the reception of new stimuli, individuals activate one more function, the executive one, in order to select and decide which information is useful to them. The

information processing sequence is highly influenced by the context of emotional conditions that each person experiences during these interactions.

The Information Processing Model shows that during activities, many functions and processes can often take place simultaneously and learning can be in connection to the individual's engagement into the situation. Smith (1980) describes this process as learning by doing (or experiential learning) that is composed from "...three assumptions that:

1. people learn best when they are personally involved in the learning experience;
2. knowledge has to be discovered by the individual if it is to have any significant meaning to them or make a difference in their behaviour; and
3. a person's commitment to learning is highest when they are free to set their own objectives and are able to actively pursue them within a given framework" (as cited in Rod, 2012, p.55).

2.2.2 Development and Learning

One could say that learning and development are mutually connected and influenced. The development of each individual is related to biological and environmental factors. "Various factors involving movement abilities and physical abilities interact in complex ways with cognitive and affective abilities" (Gallahue, 1989, p. 6).

According to Bronfenbrenner (1979), development is a gradual and life span process depending upon many factors, physical-biological, social growth and maturation, through which the person acquires experiences and knowledge from and about the environment that are accumulated and continuously enriched and can lead into a deeper conception of things, reformation of meanings and engagement in several situations.

Development has also to do with mastery and achievement; achieving valued goals is the focus of the efforts to learn (Claxton, 2002). Thus, we could say that personal interest, curiosity and success are some of the motivational factors for learning and development.

2.2.3 Domains of Learning

Until now, I have talked about some of the factors that activate the functions of learning. According to Bloom (1956, as cited in Shimon, 2011), learning can be divided in the following three domains: the psychomotor, the cognitive and the affective.

The psychomotor domain refers to physical activity – or lack of activity- related to mental process and also addresses the development of movement skills, the protection of health and the enhancement of performance levels in relation to several kinds of physical activity and the motivation of being active physically.

The cognitive domain addresses the function of processing information through memory, thinking, reasoning and then giving a response based on knowledge and experience, which can occur during physical activities and/or games.

The affective domain reflects the emotional status and the behavior of pupils when they participate in activities. Additionally, it helps children be confident and engaged socially.

The three domains of learning are also interconnected with the domains of development as presented by Kirk shown in figure 2 (Kirk, 2012).

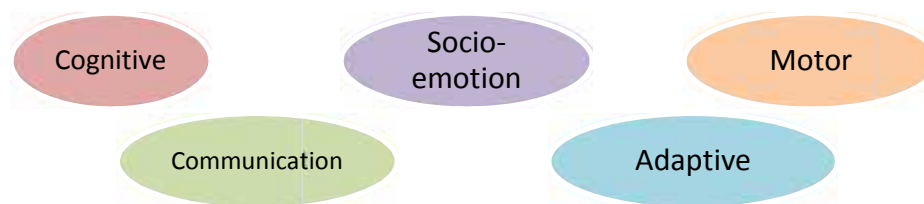


Figure 2 – Based on the Five Critical Domains of Development (Kirk, 2012, p. 78).

In this figure, the domains of communication and adaptation have been added:

Communication is based on the interaction of two or more individuals in a verbal or non-verbal ways with gestures, movements and facial expressions as long as the codes, signals and/or symbols are common and can be understood by those who communicate. Through communication, people can share thoughts, ideas, feelings, opinions etc (Skjørten, 2007).

Adaptation can be described as the adjustment of the individual to his/her environment and the assimilation of experiences within a constant and active process

(Vedeler, 1997). Practically, as individuals interact with their environment, they get accustomed to routines and gradually they build their understanding and learn how to adjust themselves and their actions accordingly. It also means that the skills can be used adequately in different situations.

2.3 Motivation

Not all children express themselves in the same way, learn and develop in the same way and within the same pace, or share the same interests with others. Something, which can be interesting and attractive for one child, can be stressful and/or indifferent for some other. Claxton (2002) mentions, “if we are successful in pursuing our interests, we have learnt not only how to secure a particular goal, but how to engage more effectively with a kind of uncertainty” (p. 21).

During a lesson, teachers can give a variety of options, ideas and suggestions that could become motivational for each individual. Shimon (2011) underlines that “motivation is an important part of learning...” but since teachers “...can’t make students be motivated to learn and be active...”, then, they “...can modify the learning environment to enhance the motivational climate” (p.102). This means that teachers create opportunities and give choices to the pupils to use their abilities and skills in order to get satisfaction from achievement and mastery of things.

Children show their desires and emotions in many ways when they want to be engaged in a situation; sometimes it can be orally, some others with body language, some others by doing something. This is described as **intrinsic** motivation during which personal interest and the joy of being active lead to exploration and discovery, finding ways to overcome a challenge and finally reach the goal (Deci, 1985; Ryan, 2002; Reeve, 1996, as cited in Kirk, 2012). One can also describe it as internal motivation.

Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, is not always related to the personal interest of the child in the subject and may not even be related to the subject itself. A practical example is when children are given a reward or a grade as a motive for participation in some activity. One can also describe it as external motivation.

In real conditions, in many schools, intrinsic motivation seems to be ignored and instead, measurement of students' skills by grading, level of achievement and acknowledgment according to specific standards and norms is considered more important.

My experience as a pedagogue has shown me that results of extrinsic motivation can be very poor and superficial; this is why, in the next paragraph, I refer to the theory of the interest-based motivation, which is related to my study and my personal approach in teaching.

2.3.1 Interest- Based Motivation

According to Chen and Darst (2001), “tasks that challenge students to think and become cognitively engaged spark situational interest and enhance motivation” (as cited in Shimon, 2011, p. 103).

The main aspects that could describe a motivational situation in a lesson with physical activities are the following:

- 1) a joyful and creative atmosphere during the lesson,
- 2) a confident teacher who can inspire and encourage pupils to express themselves and overcome difficulties,
- 3) an adjustable and meaningful plan that can offer opportunities for several socio-emotional experiences, achievements and mastery, challenges and a variety of choices for every child.

2.3.2 The Role of the Teacher and the Importance of Guidance in Physical Activities

A basic principle that a teacher needs to follow for meeting the needs and potential of his/her pupils is to care about them, encourage them, be open and communicative, and have knowledge and fast reactions. Several authors mention that the creation of a positive and healthy motivational climate is based on the constructive interaction between teacher and pupils and teacher's guidance in the best interest of the pupils (Solmon, 2006; Owens, 2005; Ennis, 2005, as cited in Shimon, 2011).

Guidance of the pupils is a task that requires a child-centered focus. Roberts, Kleiber and Duda (1981, as cited in Papaioannou et al., 1999) support that the teachers should try to unfold the meaning(s) of every new experience that the children can gain through physical activities and play.

Teacher's focus on the individual needs can help children build their self-esteem. "The following headings may provide a useful policy outline:

- Teach pupils to value individual differences and celebrate diversity
- Value personal qualities as well as academic and sporting performance
- Show trust and provide opportunities for responsibility
- Show respect for the pupil when discipline is necessary
- Show warm personal regard towards every pupil" (Hannell, 2004, p. 11).

Teachers who use physical activities as an education tool should be observant on individual skills in order to help all children gain confidence and experience and have a pleasant time during the lesson. In physical education, teachers should also try to find the balance between the tasks that their pupils can manage themselves without extra guidance and these ones that the pupils could do with assistance from their teachers or peers, so that they could overcome difficulties and move further.

This is in line with Vygotsky's theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which addresses "...the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86).

Problem solving tasks are very often found in activities related to play. Play gives unlimited opportunities for stretching one's cognitive and physical skills but it also creates several social-emotional situations. Moving to the next paragraph, I will give some reasons, which make play so important for children.

2.4 Play as a Motivational Factor

Play is exploration, creativity, and most of all, a natural need of expression for children. Children seek, imagine, experience and learn through play. When they play, they are given the freedom to form their own rules without right or wrong. Goals can change anytime but the joy can still be the same. Motor activity is the one of the aspects of play that also expands to the cognitive and the socio-emotional domains.

Children like to be in play situations because a playful activity ignites a motivational mood for interaction of the participant with a variety of elements, which are meaningful for externalization of their ideas, imagination, and creativity, expression of emotions and discovery of things and relations around them. To summarize, according to Moyles (1989) play helps to:

- facilitate interpersonal discovery and competence
- build understanding and confidence in one's own abilities
- enhance learning by putting efforts physically and mentally
- create feelings of satisfaction, internal balance and well-being.

Since the nature of play can often be physical, physical activities in primary schools are combined with activities of play aiming to a balanced development, health protection and well-being.

The following paragraph gives the overview of the essence of physical activities as a tool for learning and development.

2.5 Physical Activities as a Tool for Learning

In primary schools, children can experience two main forms of play: the free play or the directed one. In the first case, they have the choice to create their own world, act spontaneously and voluntarily, alone or with others, and decide about their own rules, boundaries and goals. Environment has a significant role in play, since it can give plenty of ideas and stimuli to the children to start being creative and playful.

Directed play is mainly connected to instructions and goals in a way that pupils will use their skills in a more structured way and the play is not for its own sake but for another specific goal. The teacher often bridges the directed play with the explorative-learning during free play. This process can prepare the grounds for better understanding and enhances the skills for problem solving based on experience, knowledge and memory of past events (Moyles, 1989). In this case, children can have possibilities to use and develop their psychomotor and cognitive skills, adapt to the environments they act in, attain several socio-emotional experiences and develop meaningful interactions with their peers and teachers.

Physical activities can enhance the process of learning and development of the whole person, mind, body and soul (Shimon, 2011). A meaningful plan of physical activities can become a motivational factor for all pupils, especially when their needs and benefits are well-understood (Eccles, 1983; Pintrich, 1989, as cited in Papaioannou et al., 1999). Therefore, classes in physical activities should - among other things- contain play, partnership, and rhythmical experiences with or without music in order to stimulate children's interest and concentration (Zounhia, 1998).

Shimon (2011) supports that physical education "is about helping students gain confidence in their abilities and allowing them to enjoy moving and being active independently or within groups" (p. 37). It could be said that physical activity can become an important anti-stress factor for pupils with learning difficulties, emotional instability and social insecurity (Papaioannou et al., 1999). For example, a physical activity related to balance could improve concentration. A possible improvement of concentration could affect positively the pupil's academic skills like reading, counting and problem solving, and by giving self-confidence and satisfaction.

The meaning of physical activity is without doubt particularly important for primary school children, because the children are still growing and physical activities help to retune their whole developing system. In the Norwegian primary school system, the objectives of physical education as presented in the curriculum (2012) emphasize on:

- the activity of human body as a way of learning and development through experiences, individual conception and creative expression, and
- the promotion of fairness during play and mutual respect.

The National Curriculum of Physical Education combines elements from Norway's cultural heritage and from the current social tendencies and needs. In connection to that, Befring (2005) supports that physical activities and "sports have become a strong popular movement, which means that they can be a major future resource for attitudinal learning and preventive action" (p. 160).

3 Methodology

In this chapter, I will give a description and justification of the methodology that I implemented in order to enlighten my research questions. I will also present the research methods for data collection and name some factors that have had an impact on the progress of my project.

Figure 3 represents the structure of the research process.

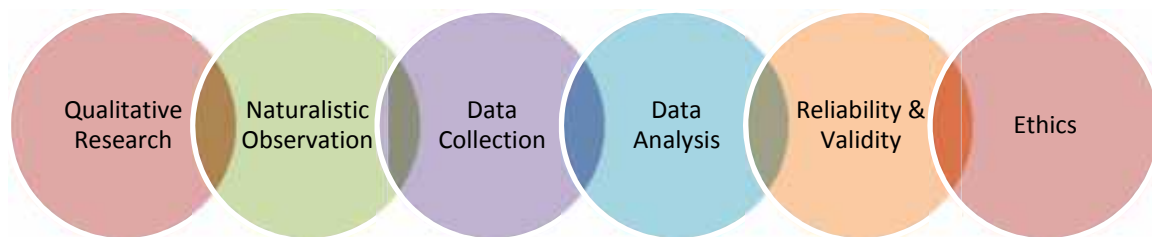


Figure 3.

My interest as a physical education teacher is to develop a deeper and wider understanding of the ways physical activities can be implemented so that all children can have opportunities to participate, learn and develop mastery.

Having had my training and experience as a physical education teacher in Greece, I had two main reasons for doing this research:

- 1) My intention is to become a physical education teacher in a Norwegian primary school and I needed to collect practical information and knowledge from the “field”.
- 2) My desire is to understand the relevant Norwegian culture that is new to me, including various teaching methods in a different education system where I aim to be integrated.

My theoretical knowledge from the bachelor studies in Sports Science and Physical Education was the starting point for my research. By conducting my research project in Norway, and more specifically in a few primary schools in Oslo, I wanted to find information for the research question that follows:

Do physical activities, as conducted in the three visited schools, give opportunities for participation to all children in the selected classes?

The width of the main question led me to form three sub-questions for examining my topic in detail. These sub-questions are:

- How do teachers and/or PE teachers conduct their teaching so that it is **meaningful** for each child in their classes?
- How do teachers and/or PE teachers create a **motivational atmosphere** for the children in their classes?
- Are physical activities and play important for educating children and are they interconnected?

3.1 Doing research

When conducting research in the field of education each project can derive from the desire of the researcher to collect new data that can give further knowledge and understanding about phenomena. The researcher focuses on a topic of his/her own interest and under a systematic and logical way, he/she collects data that can be the basis for discovering new situations, analyzing and explaining processes, checking current practices and bringing new knowledge (Rajasekar et al., 2013).

3.1.1 Qualitative Research, Design and Methods

The research approach I chose is qualitative, because, in my point of view, it seemed to be more suitable to the nature of my project. Maxwell (2005) describes that in qualitative studies there are "...five intellectual goals:

1. Understanding the meaning, for participants in the study, of the events, situations, experiences, and actions, they are involved with or engage in...
2. Understanding the particular context within which the participants act, and the influence that this context has on their actions...

3. Identifying unanticipated phenomena and influences, and generating new, “grounded” theories about the latter...
4. Understanding the process by which events and actions take place...
5. Developing causal explanations...” (pp. 22-23).

Developing the project, the researcher needs to choose the appropriate design and method(s) for reaching the objectives of the research. The design of my project is naturalistic observation, because I wanted to find what takes place in the real setting I am interested in and describe the observed behaviors (Bordens & Abbott, 2011).

3.2 Observation in Qualitative Research

Trying to figure out which research method could help me collect meaningful data for my research questions, I decided that I had to be present on the location where physical activities took place. According to Gall, Gall, and Borg (2007), the method of observation gives the researcher the opportunity to “observe directly the behavior and the social and physical environment of the individuals being studied” (p. 263).

The observation was conducted in real-life contexts while the individuals who participated were aware of my presence as an observer. When an observer is in the actual setting, then he/she has the experience of attending various new and stimulating phenomena occurring simultaneously in real time events in the actual setting. In this case, the interpretation of the observed facts can often include personal elements deriving from the observer’s own emotions and experiences (Gall et al., 2007).

During the observation sessions, I had the role of a **complete observer-non participant**. The reason for that was that I wanted to keep myself independent of the participants’ group in order to reduce my effect on their behavior and be able to keep as many field notes as possible during the lessons.

3.2.1 Pilot observation

Before beginning collecting the data from the “field”, I had to assess the quality of the observation guide I had created and try to gain some experience as an observer since I had never done it in the past. To achieve this, I arranged a pilot observation session with the first teacher who agreed to participate in my research.

The pilot observation session lasted one hour, during which I had the opportunity to gain the first experiences as an observer and organize properly the observation guide for the next observations.

3.2.2 Observation Guide

The creation of an observation guide was of high significance (*attachment 1*). Before visiting the schools, I prepared a “map” with components I was interested in examining. Then, I made five categories where I placed the relevant data:

- Class Organization
- Physical Skills
- Cognitive Skills
- Social and Emotional Experiences
- Training and Supportive Equipment

In order to collect my data, I kept as many field notes as possible trying to have detailed descriptions of the processes that would be useful for the content analysis and my understanding. Gall et al. (2007) list “the features of good field notes in a qualitative research study [which should]:

- be descriptive and reflective...
- be detailed and concrete...
- include visual details when appropriate...” (p. 281).

3.3 Data Collection

I visited the selected classes only one time due to the big workload of the teachers. The duration of the lessons I observed varied; the lessons in both 2nd grade classes were 45 minutes and in both 6th grade classes were 75 minutes.

Three of the lessons were held in the school gyms and one in a sports hall. During the observations, I tried to be at a place where my presence would not influence the pupils or the teacher. However, all the teachers explained the reason for my presence in their “environment” to their pupils, before the lesson.

In each setting, I had the opportunity to observe different teaching styles, various facilities and procedures, human relations and the atmosphere during class. While observing the classes, I kept detailed field notes that would be the material for analysis and further study.

Complementary to the observations, I had also informal talks of short duration with the teachers in order to gather some additional information or clarify details about the lesson. At this point, it is worth mentioning that I also wanted to conduct interviews; however, because of their heavy workload, the teachers preferred informal talks, which they felt, required less commitment.

The experiences I got through observation as a researcher had an impact on me, so much so, that they triggered thoughts and introspective reflections about my own teaching methods and my role as a teacher of physical education.

3.3.1 Selecting Schools and Participants

To conduct my research, I had to find schools in the area of Oslo due to transportation reasons. Initially, I searched for primary schools online and I made lists with relevant information (names, addresses etc).

I continued with the selection of some schools randomly located within a reasonable distance and I contacted the school principals through e-mails describing the purpose of my research, details about the processes of collecting information, and a request for getting permission to contact teachers.

The method of sending e-mails proved to be ineffective; out of the fourteen schools I had e-mailed, I received no answer back. Then, I decided to reform my plan adapting myself to the circumstances and I took the initiative of going to the schools in person, so as to find available participants.

After having visited various schools in the flesh and having made several efforts to contact school principals and teachers, I managed to find four teachers who accepted to participate in my research. The otherwise limited options gave me a convenience sample that was available to me by chance (Bryman, 2012): three schools and two teachers of 2nd grade and two teachers of 6th grade.

The four teachers received an informative letter and, in addition, they signed a letter of consensus keeping the right to withdraw at any time, if desired (*attachment 2*).

The observations were accomplished within a period of three weeks (October-November 2013).

3.3.2 Information About the Participants

The list of the participants included three female teachers and one male. Two of the teachers worked in the same school but taught different classes.

School 1

Teacher 1A- 2nd grade

Teacher 1A was female and had academic training in both classroom and physical education teaching. She was quite new in this school but, overall, she had long working experience as a teacher in another primary school.

Teacher 1B- 6th grade

Teacher 1B was male and worked in the same schools as teacher 1A. He had taken education as a classroom teacher with expertise in teaching mathematics and social sciences. He had also taken a one-year course in sports and he was responsible for five classes in physical education.

School 2

Teacher 2A- 6th grade

Teacher 2A was an experienced general teacher, PE teacher and worked also as a contact teacher. She had recently taken over this class but in general, her policy had been to follow her classes from grade one up to grade seven.

School 3

Teacher 3A- 2nd grade

Teacher 3A was female and her academic background was that of a classroom teacher. However, she also conducted the lesson of physical education with her own class but also with other classes within the same school.

She had been used to applying elements from her own experiences based on her personal activities mainly from yoga classes.

In addition, she had been working as a resource person for a few pupils with special educational needs.

3.3.3 Weaknesses of the Research

By conducting observation, I managed to enter the actual setting and collect necessary information about the field that I am interested in working in. Nevertheless, the following factors restrained my research:

- The low number of observations and limited sample of participants
- During the observation, at times, the attitude of the participants might have been slightly modified owing to my presence
- The particular day's lesson might not be representative because of several factors.

3.4 Application to NSD

Before contacting the schools, I sent a written application to NSD (Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste) giving a detailed description of the project in order to gain permission to conduct my research (*attachment 3*). The full procedure was:

- to fill out the electronic application that was later submitted online,
- to attach the letter addressing the participating school teachers informing them about the project and the observation guide that I would use, and
- to state and sign that I would comply with all the ethical regulations concerning data protection, anonymity and discretion.

3.5 The Researcher's Role

The main principle I kept in mind during the whole process of the observation sessions was to be open-minded avoiding being influenced by my personal beliefs, my cultural background or my own experience or judgment. The “heart” of my research has been the desire to find information from scratch and gain an insight of the Norwegian reality.

In all four observations, I tried to make my presence in the settings of the activities as discreet as possible so that I would not affect the participants, teachers or pupils.

Besides the observations, I had some informal talks with the teachers during which I was careful with the content of my questions respecting the time they had to share further information with me in and their commitment to confidentiality principles.

The data collected from the observations were saved and organized in my personal computer (pc) in order to present my reflections after having elaborated on the findings. A research project can be a very demanding and challenging task but the experience through the whole process helped me understand the significance of being open, explorative, meticulous and bold.

3.6 Processing the Data

3.6.1 Organizing the Field Notes

When the fieldwork was completed, I gathered all the field notes and wrote them down in my pc (Gall et al., 2007). Afterwards, I created files where I divided my notes into different categories and I wrote four detailed reports, one for each class, having a systematic structure, so that I could go through them for further elaboration.

I did not use any video or audio recordings during the observation sessions or the informal talks, so there was not extra material besides the field notes.

3.6.2 Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The next step was more complicated since the new and “raw” material should be organized and analyzed so as to get a better understanding of the observed phenomena, their properties and functions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

A prerequisite for analysis is the existence of a relevant background. Corbin and Strauss (2008) mention that “without some background, either from immersion in the data or professional/experiential knowledge, the ability to recognize and give meaning is not there” (p. 46).

A typical feature of social sciences is that there must be an “[interpretation of] the meaning of the behavior and its products [under observation]. Interpretation is the process by which the significance of an act or its products is revealed to a particular audience” (Fay, 1998, p. 137, p. 143).

The expansion of knowledge can enrich my activity and resourcefulness in recognizing situations, signals, and behaviors as a physical education teacher. This is why through this research, I want to view situations from an alternative standpoint and reform my approach regarding my teaching style.

3.7 Reliability and Validity

The quality of a research study and the acceptance of its outcome rely on reliability and validity, which are interconnected in qualitative research. Eichstaedt and Lavay (1992) state that “reliability is simply the consistency or stability of results – getting similar results under similar conditions” (p. 86).

The second component, which characterizes a study, is validity. Validity reflects the truth, worthiness, relevance and integrity of the researcher’s conclusions in relation to the real facts (Maxwell, 2005). The purpose of my project was to collect information, relevant to my field in physical education, from a setting new to me by being as open-minded as possible to expand my knowledge.

Another important property of a qualitative research is the possibility of transferring the obtained knowledge to other social groups and settings, under study, with similar features or even beyond. The findings of my research are not enough for formulating general conclusions about all primary schools in Norway; however, they could give me an insight of what I might find in other schools, as well.

3.8 Ethics

A research project should follow some certain ethical principles. “Qualitative studies require a particular kind of intimacy between researchers and participants in order to discover the meanings and settings that define the participants’ lived experiences” (Gall et al., 2007, p. 70).

A description of my project was given to all participating teachers with letters of information and consensus. During our meetings in person, I always presented my background and I gave further details about the purpose of my research and the ways of conducting it.

While observations were taking place, my presence never interfered with the procedure of the lessons. The field notes I kept contained as many detailed descriptions of the processes and behaviors as possible, but without marking persons or sites. Teachers had been informed that these notes were always available to them, if asked.

One more commitment was the absence of use of recording devices (audio or visual) in order to ensure anonymity of schools, teachers and children. Thus, all the information from observations and informal talks were copied in notes, which will be deleted after the fulfillment of the project.

In the application to NSD before conducting the research, I had stated that my project would be in accordance with the following ethical principles:

- my research would not cause any harm to the participants (mental, emotional or physical)
- participation would be completely voluntary
- the participants would receive an informative letter and consensus, while they would have the right to withdraw at anytime, if so desired
- there would be confidentiality and anonymity of persons and sites
- the treatment of personal data would be done with care so as to annihilate the possibility of identification
- the whole process would be transparent and after the completion of the thesis the data would be deleted.

4 Presentation of the Findings

In this chapter, I am going to describe the observation sessions of the four classes I visited in three schools in the area of Oslo. For arranging the findings, I have arranged the observations into two main groups as following:

- School environment, facilities and equipment
- Organization of classes, content and atmosphere of lessons, practiced skills and socio-emotional experiences during the class.

In addition to the findings from my observation, I present relevant information from the informal talks I had with the teachers after the lessons.

At the end of the presentation of each class, there will be a resuming table with the skills and gained experiences during the lesson observed. The lists are given in alphabetical order.

4.1 School Environment, Facilities and Equipment

In all the three schools I visited, I saw that the sporting equipment was adequate so that the teachers could implement various physical activities and/or games. The most basic and common material for lessons of physical education are balls, hoola hoops, gym mattresses, parallel bars, trampolines, gymnastic horses, medicine balls, sticks, benches, ropes and ribbons.

In the following part, I give a short description of the location of the schools and the environments, indoors and outdoors, where pupils can have a various possibilities for games and activities during either of the physical education lessons or the interval.

4.1.1 School One - Grade 1 & Grade 6

The school's location can provide opportunities for physical activities both indoors and outdoors. The natural environment around the school is rich and wide and pupils can have a lot of freedom with their activities.

The gym is located inside the school building and provides quite enough of the necessary sports equipment. Light comes into the gymnasium through a few windows on the walls and the ceiling but there cannot be visual contact with the environment outside.

A modern sports hall only a few meters away from the school is also available, mainly for pupils above the age of ten, in order to be given more space for various physical activities and games. In that school, I observed two classes: one 2nd grade class in the school gym and one 6th-grade class in the sports hall.

4.1.2 School Two - Grade 6

The school is located at a place with a lush natural landscape where pupils can have instant access to the forest. At the schoolyard, there are a few constructions (for example, a climbing wall and so on) for several physical activities.

The internal part of the school is very colorful, with lots of drawings on the walls of the corridors created by pupils of different grades.

The two internal gyms that are at the basement of the building are well organized and sufficiently equipped. Big windows overlooking the natural landscape outside gives a feeling of relaxation and connection with nature. In that school, I observed one class of 6th grade.

4.1.3 School Three – Grade 2

The surroundings of the school are on the boundaries between a few building blocks and a hill. Close to the school, a football stadium can also be used by the school staff and children.

Inside the school area, one can see that many parts of the buildings are quite simple without many colors and the classes are not particularly spacious.

The gym is quite narrow and due to the lack of adequate storage room, many parts of the sports equipment are placed next to the walls reducing the available space even more. There are also windows with an outside view but the gym has grey shaded walls, which gives the impression that it is a bit dark. In that school, I observed one class of 2nd grade.

4.2 Organization, Content, Atmosphere of Lessons, Practiced Skills and Socio-emotional Experiences during Class

4.2.1 School One – Grade 2

Observation

Location: School gym

Number of pupils: 22 (Boys: 13/Girls: 9)

The lesson: Introduction to Indoor Hockey (Innebandy)

Duration: 45 minutes

Organization: Whole class activity, groups

Equipment: Hockey sticks, small plastic balls, colored marking shirts for differentiating the groups and two goal posts

Procedures and experiences

Preparation: While children were in their classroom, they were given instructions on how to head for the gym in an orderly manner. Outside the classroom, the teacher asked the children to make pairs holding hands and walk quietly to the gym through the inner corridors of the school. Some of the boys seemed to be rather less concentrated on following the instructions but without causing any problems to their peers.

Children entered the gym in pairs, the way they had been asked to when leaving their classroom, and were given a short time period to go to the locker rooms and take their shoes off. Soon, they came back to the main gym and sat on the floor close to the wall to hear about the day's lesson. The teacher introduced a new game to them called Indoor Hockey.

The teacher gave a description of the rules and objective of the game and she demonstrated the way of playing; mainly the basic technique of holding the stick and passing

or shooting the ball. At the end, she answered questions and gave relevant feedback checking that everyone had understood the procedures.

Before starting the warm-up session, the teacher picked up a few pupils to demonstrate how they should cooperate with one another. A small group of children, mostly boys, seemed very excited.

Warm- up: The lesson started with circular running so that pupils would prepare their bodies for more intensive exercise and get in a good mood. Then, all the children formed a circle and started the warm-up running around one after the other. A couple of times that there was disorder, the teacher stopped the activity briefly to give feedback and when she gave them the signal to start again, she joined them and gave them guidance.

Activities, games, rules and objectives: When the children were ready with the warm-up, then the teacher divided them into four mixed groups of five, boys and girls. One pupil in each team had to be the goalkeeper and the others cooperated both in attack for scoring and defense for hindering the opponent team to score with the ball to their goalpost.

With the signal by the teacher – that would be the blow of a whistle- two groups played against each other for several minutes and the two other groups were spectators sitting on the benches until it was their turn to play. Each one of the playing teams was wearing shirts of the same colors for distinguishing teammates from opponents. Many of the children were excited and in a very happy mood.

Some of the pupils who were sitting on the benches cheered for their peers but some others seemed to ignore the game and were distracted in doing other things that seemed more interesting to them. The teacher remained close to the pupils who were playing giving them feedback and praise.

The teacher gave the chance to all groups to play and experience the game of Indoor Hockey. At the end of the lesson, the teacher gathered her pupils again and they all sat together on the floor in order to give them a summary of the lesson.

In the meantime, two boys that had not been quiet during this session, despite the constant notices from the teacher, were expelled from the rest of the group and sent to sit

alone a little farther from the group. When they calmed down, the teacher called them back in the group.

The last minutes of the lesson included arrangement of all equipment that had been used and simple exercises of relaxation in a circle. When the whole lesson was completed, the children formed lines again, as when they came to the gym, and they followed their teacher back to the classroom to have a break for rest and lunch.

Informal talk

Before the lesson, the teacher was willing to give me some information about her background and the lesson she had prepared for that day. Additionally, she talked to me about a few crucial points she has to concentrate on in every lesson which are:

- Maintenance of children’s focus and discipline
- Structure and ways of keeping the activities under control

According to her opinion, leadership and structured lessons can create a motivational atmosphere for the children and better possibilities for mastery and achievement. In cases of behavioral issues, it is preferable for her to give constant feedback and talk about good manners, respect and solidarity.

Brief table of practiced skills and gained experiences (1)

| Physical Skills | Cognitive Skills | Socio-Emotional Experiences |
|--|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Balance •Coordination •Speed •Stamina •Strength | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Accuracy •Attention •Estimation •Reaction •Orientation •Spatial Awareness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Consequence •Cooperation •Discipline •Determination •Joy •Lack of Focus •Participation •Patience •Penalty •Respect •Restlessness •Self-confidence •Willingness |

4.2.2 School One – Grade 6

Observation

Location: Sports hall

Number of pupils: 26 (Boys: 11/ Girls: 15)

Organization: Individual, groups

The lesson: Several physical activities and games

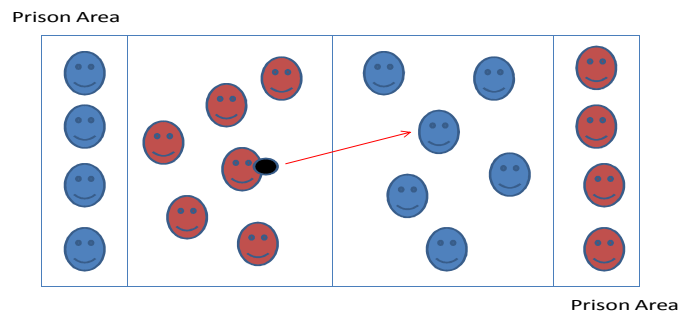
Duration: 75 minutes

Equipment: Benches, mattresses, cones, parallel bars, balls, and bands

Procedures and experiences

The teacher had started the lesson at the designated time but many pupils kept coming in belated. There was not any comment made by the teacher for this delay, so he continued with the warm-up with the pupils who had already been present until all had joined and been appointed to their teams.

Warm- up: two teams played a game called “Kanonball”. There were three benches between the teams for defining the boundaries. Both teams used one ball. The aim was to “hit” and send out the participants of the opponent group. However, the ones hit could continue playing the game from the “prisoners” position located behind the opponent team line cooperating with their team when the ball was in their possession (Picture 1).



(Picture 1)

Since children were familiar with this game, the late-comers were just sent to a team without further instructions. A boy who arrived quite later than the others at the lesson was welcomed by the teacher and told to go change clothes and come to join the class. A prerequisite for participation in the lesson of physical education was that all children should wear sports clothes and trainers.

The physical education teacher was standing next to the children watching them playing. The impression I got watching the pupils was that the game seemed to be interesting only for a few ones (mostly boys).

A number of pupils seemed to be discouraged to continue playing. The reason for that seemed to be the fact that the most active children were dominant and did not give others equal chances of participating enough in the game. The active pupils liked to show to the others that they are better than the rest and the teacher was not involved in this situation. One boy and one girl, who seemed to have difficulties, were gradually ignored and then they pulled out of the game. The teacher did not take the initiative to approach them or put them back in the game.

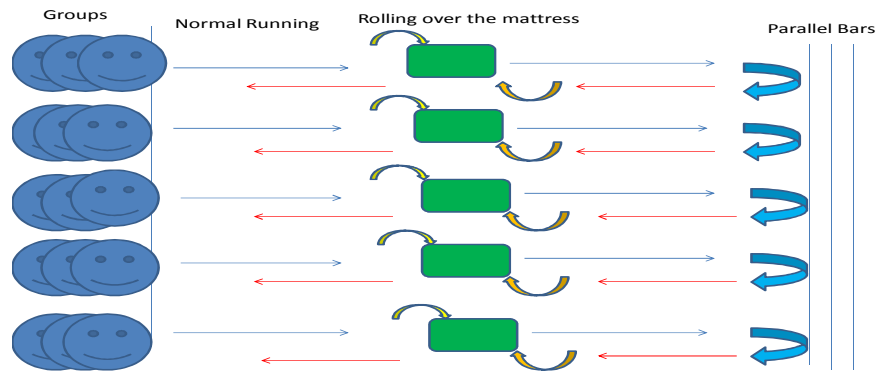
This first game lasted 25 minutes. Afterwards, the teacher called the pupils to another part of the court where he arranged physical activities, which included both individual efforts and also teamwork and cooperation.

Activities, games, rules and objectives: Initially, the teacher asked the children to sit down on the floor in a line one next to the other and keep quiet in order to get instructions. It did not take a long time until the children lost their patience and became noisy. There was a minor friction between the teacher and one girl when the latter did not accept to join the group she was sent to. Finally, the teacher convinced her to go to the group he had initially asked her to go to and they continued with the activities.

The teacher divided the pupils into 5 groups of 5 children each. In each group, the children should stand one in front of the other in a row facing the parallel bars at the other side of the room. The activity had three rounds as follows:

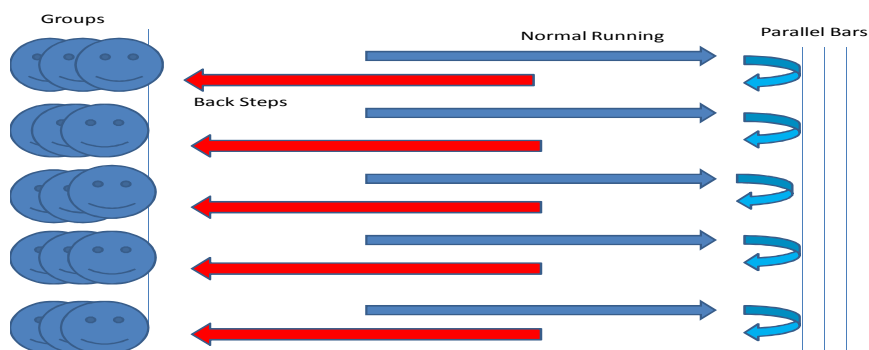
- **First round:** the first child of each team ran towards the parallel bars to the other side. Half way they rolled over on a mattress and continued running towards the parallel bars.

Then, running back, rolling over on the mattress and running up to their group. The next one repeated the routine until everyone had his/her turn (Picture 2).



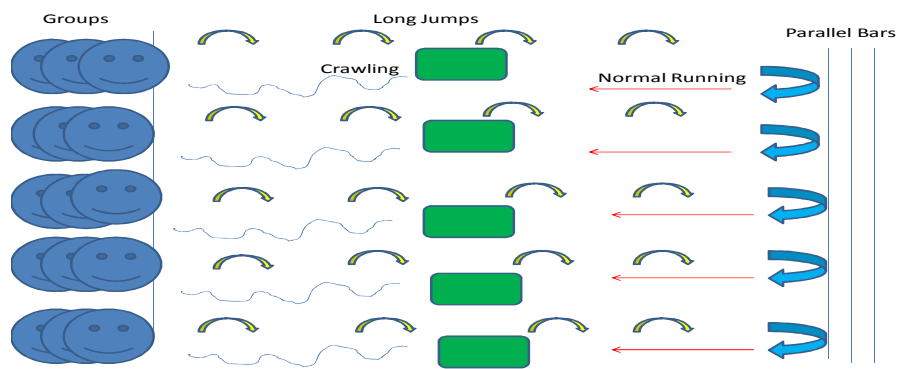
(Picture 2)

- **Second round:** the teams kept the same formations but the mattresses were removed. The routine in this activity would be that the ones who ran until the parallel bars to the other side had to come back to his or her group running backwards (Picture 3).



(Picture 3)

- **Third round:** In this round, to get to the parallel bars at the other side they had to make long jumps, just passing by the mattresses. From the parallel bar, running back to the mattresses in the middle, lie down on their chest on the ground and start crawling back to their groups (Picture 4).



(Picture 4)

All activities offered a nice time to the children as they practiced their individual skills simultaneously with group work. Children motivated each other and seemed to like the idea of cooperation but also of competition.

At the end of these activities, the teacher appointed pupils to put the benches and the ball back into the storage room and bring some cones and ribbons for the final game. After that, he gave them a short break time.

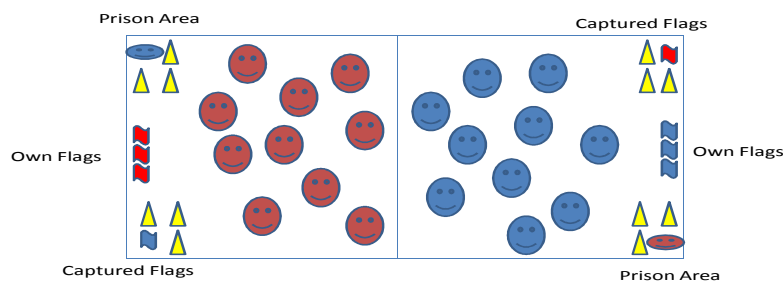
After the break, the teacher prepared the teams, explained the rules and objectives of the final game and gave them the signal to start. There was not any intervention from the teacher letting the pupils have full control of their actions.

Final Game: There were two teams of equal numbers of pupils (13-13). The room was divided into two equal joint territories one for each team. Inside each territory, there were two smaller fields in the back corners. One field was for the “prisoners” captured by the other team and the other for saving the “flags” they had taken from the other team.

Each team had to decide on a common strategy but each member could also act individually. Team members were free to move around the room either running or walking.

The objective of the game was that either all the flags would be taken away from the opponent team or all opponent members would be imprisoned. Individual initiative and teamwork were the basis of the game. The children had to cooperate and find solutions in order to act and reach their objectives. Each child faced the situations in different ways: some seemed to be determined and courageous; some others were extremely careful and observant before doing anything and some others were passive and indifferent to the progress of the game and their team’s condition.

The game had two rounds of a total duration of 30 minutes (Picture 5). Between the two rounds, there was a short interval while the teacher gave feedback to his pupils. During the second round, some children did not yet have a very active role; the long waiting time without action discouraged them to be engaged in the game. Nonetheless, the physical education teacher kept almost the same stance as an observer without making changes to reverse this situation.



(Picture 5)

When the lesson was completed, the teacher asked the pupils to put things back into the storage room and sent them to the locker rooms to take a shower and prepare themselves to go back to the school.

Informal talk

At the end of the lesson, the teacher talked to me about the background of two boys in the class who were having behavioral difficulties. One boy had pulled out of the games and the teacher told me that this boy was very introverted and could easily be irritated with a tendency to hostility towards the other pupils.

The other boy had difficulties in following and complying with the rules of the games and because of that, he used to cause problems to the rest of his classmates.

Additionally, he mentioned a girl with a different cultural and religious background in the class. She was absent that day but, in general, she followed the class showing a remarkable performance in physical activities.

Brief table of practiced skills and gained experiences (2)

| Physical skills | Cognitive skills | Socio-Emotional Experiences |
|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balance • Coordination • Flexibility • Speed • Stamina | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accuracy • Attention • Concentration • Observation • Orientation • Problem solving • Reaction • Spatial Awareness • Thinking | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determination • Disappointment • Ignorance • Joy • Participation • Patience • Respect • Satisfaction • Segregation |

4.2.3 School Two – Grade 6

Observation

Location: School gym

Number of pupils: 20 (Boys: 9/ Girls: 11)

Organization: Whole class activity, groups

The lesson: Various physical activities and games

Duration: 75 minutes

Equipment: Small soft and plastic balls, medicine balls, parallel bars, gym mattresses, benches, gymnastic horse, papers with instructions and a board with some illustrations

Procedures and experiences

The teacher was in the gym preparing the material for the day's lesson. The pupils started showing up one by one 5 to 10 minutes before the beginning of the lesson.

The atmosphere in the gym was calm and happy. The children had taken their shoes off and they were free to do as they pleased until their lesson started. The boys were more active by playing football or chasing one another, while the girls were quieter playing with balls, using hoola hoops or just talking with each other. In the class, there was a girl with a different cultural and religious background who was wearing casual clothes instead of sports ones as did the rest of her classmates.

After all the preparations were made, the teacher gathered the pupils quietly close to a wall; she had them stand in a row one next to the other and called me close to them to introduce myself. Right after that, she made five mixed groups of four children to which she gave names of continents and she had them stand one next to the other to describe the warm-up activity.

Warm- up: The teacher gave some brief instructions and then left the pupils decide how to arrange the exercises of their warm-up. Each group had to follow a group leader that was rotating, so that all the children could have the role of the leader but also of the group member. The physical activities the group leaders chose were free running, climbing, jumping, and doing push- ups and rolling over which could take place in the available space each team could find in the gym.

The pupils began doing their warm-up in groups without any interference by the teacher. In the meantime, the teacher played music from the gym's audio system creating a cheerful atmosphere. Each group followed the chosen activity by its group leader and could use the whole space of the gym. After each activity, there was rotation so that all the group participants could also become group leaders.

The teacher was watching each group carefully and after 5 minutes, she called the pupils close to her in the middle of the gym where they sat on the floor and she continued with the description of the upcoming games and activities.

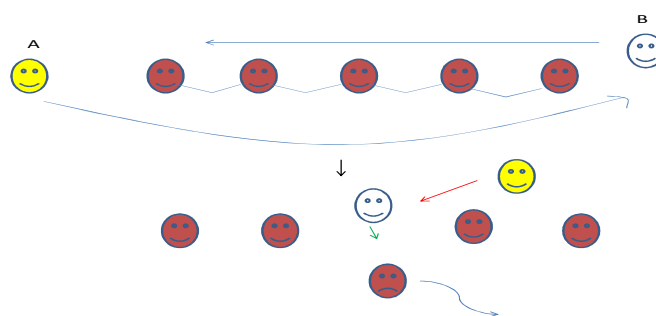
Activities, games, rules and objectives: the lesson of the day included games combined with several physical activities. For each game, there is a description separately in the following part:

- **Game One:** the teacher asked six children to rise up in order to give a demonstration of the game and then she made three groups; two groups consisted of seven children and one of

six. The pupils stood next to one another and kept a distance as long as their arms. They were placed in a diagonal line; pupil **A** from the one end of the group's line would chase pupil **B** who was free at the other end of the same line. If pupil **A** managed to catch pupil **B**, then they had to shift roles. However, if pupil **B** did not want to be caught then he/she could push one of the other children who stood in line and change positions. The duration of the game was 5 minutes (Picture 6).

After the groups' formation, the teacher gave the signal to start. During the game, the teacher's role was discreet and guiding. The teacher needed to stop the game for a short while to encourage more cooperation among some children who seemed to have preferences for the persons they liked to play with. The children followed their teacher's request and they continued playing. The sense of equal treatment and fairness filled the children with confidence and security.

After a few minutes, the teacher stopped the game at hand and called everyone up in the middle of the gym to proceed with the next game. Some of the pupils were asked to help and bring some extra benches from another room. The pupils responded willingly. During the arrangement of the equipment in the gym, some pupils had a short conversation with the teacher and some others were helping with organizing the stuff. When everything was arranged properly, they took a sit on the benches and received instructions for the new activity. Children were encouraged to ask questions if something was not clear to them.



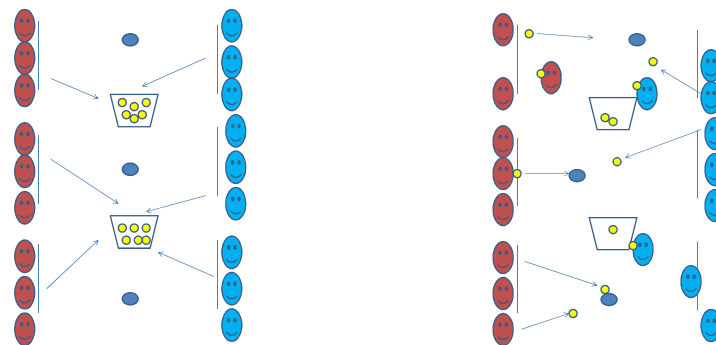
(Picture 6)

- **Game Two:** The teacher divided pupils into six groups: four groups of three and two groups of four. Three pairs of benches were placed opposite each other at a distance of around five meters away. Each group stood behind a bench. In the middle between each pair of benches, there were three big heavy balls (medicine balls). A box was placed in the

space between the ball in the middle and the balls on each side. The two boxes were full of small plastic balls.

With the teacher's signal, all children had to run fast and collect as many balls as possible from the boxes and go back to their initial position behind the benches. From that point, they had to throw the balls towards the medicine balls in order to make them roll closer to the opposite bench. They played two sets and their duration was two minutes each. During the short break between the two sets, the groups rotated and played against another group (Picture 7).

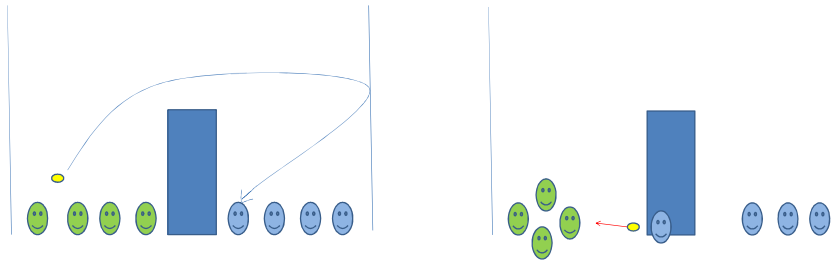
During this activity, two children took their shoes and socks off and kept playing with bare feet and a girl with a different cultural and religious background was allowed to participate dressed in casual clothes.



(Picture 7)

- **Game Three:** Three activities in three fields (A, B, C) took place simultaneously:
 1. In field A, two small goal posts were placed at opposite sides and two teams played sitting football. The basic rule of the game was that the participants should try to move, pass and shoot from a sitting position.
 2. In field B (middle field), two children stood on mattresses on opposite sides holding one cone each. In the field, two teams of two pupils each tried to score to the opponent's basket (cone) by throwing the ball. The pupil who scored a point would change position with the one holding the cone.
 3. In field C, two teams stood behind a big "standing" mattress serving as a "wall". The two teams did not have visual contact. Both teams used a small plastic ball. The team that possessed the ball threw it to the opposite wall behind the other team. If the reception team

caught it right after the bouncing from the wall, then they could “attack” to the opponent team directly standing next to the “wall”. If the reception team did not manage to catch the ball at once after bouncing on the wall, then they had to throw it back to the opposite wall. The objective was to send all the participants of the opponent group out of the game (Picture 8).



(Picture 8)

- **Game Four** The teacher divided pupils into five groups (A, B, C, D, and E). Each group had to accomplish an activity based on written instructions that children found in a box. This session seemed to be related with (a) previous lesson(s).

All activities took place simultaneously for three minutes. The pupils re-arranged the equipment organizing three areas of similar dimensions. After the teacher’s signal, the groups changed and played in another field.

Group A had to run, jump on a trampoline and throw the ball they had in their hands into a basket.

Group B had to hold hands making a “chain”. The last pupil at the end should try to lean aside and reach the floor with his/her free arm, while all had to keep their balance and not fall down.

Group C had to run, jump on the gymnastic horse (a high stand) and land on the blue mattress that lay in front of the horse.

Group D had to find a way to keep their balance on two benches one of which was on top of the other like a “cross”.

Group E had to instantly push a big “standing” mattress, drop it down and fall down themselves on top of it.

During the physical activities, almost all of the pupils seemed happy and motivated to participate. There was a feeling of freedom because of the good communication and trust between the pupils and their teacher that made children responsible, cooperative and helpful. Right after the end of the activities, the pupils put things back in order and the teacher proceeded with the final part.

Final part: In this session, the pupils applied a few techniques of relaxation and concentration. The children were sitting on the floor in the middle of the gym in a circle one after the other. The teacher started the music and joined the circle. The selected tracks were jazz and blues and the atmosphere was peaceful and relaxing.

The teacher kept a low voice speaking in a smooth way explaining to the children how to make massage movements to the child who was in front of them. They practiced a few techniques and each time they implemented a new one, they had to turn to the other side and repeat the routine with another peer. Finally, the teacher asked one child after the other to lie down on the floor putting their heads on the belly of the child lying before them.

The creative idea of the teacher to use the soft music in combination with massage movements gave the pupils moments and experiences of inspiration, peace and joy. Some of them found it a bit strange since they were not used to body contact like that, but, in general, the experience seemed to be positive for the majority of the children.

When the music ended, the teacher talked for a short while about the meaning of cooperation and respect and then dismissed the class wishing all to have a nice day.

Informal talk

After the lesson, the teacher dedicated time to clarify a few things regarding the lesson and the class. She explained to me that this big diversity of activities could be a way to make children learn how to take responsibilities on their own, to be given various choices for participation in different activities and to develop a feeling of belonging in a group.

Another thing she mentioned was that she tries to follow the same class from the first grades up to the higher ones, so that the children can have the same teacher accompanying them through a long-standing period. In this way, the teacher and the children can build a deeper communication and a relationship that can affect their development in a positive and constructive way.

The last information she shared with me was about two children, one boy with behavioral difficulties and a girl with a different cultural and religious background. After many incidents during the lessons, she worked patiently with them in order to integrate them into the class. It was important that she succeeded in establishing good cooperation with the parents, as well.

Brief table of practiced skills and gained experiences (3)

| Physical Skills | Cognitive skills | Socio-Emotional Experiences |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Balance •Coordination •Flexibility •Speed •Stamina •Strength | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Accuracy •Attention •Creativity •Estimation •Expression •Imitation •Orientation •Reaction •Spatial Awareness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Cooperation •Determination •Diversity •Joy •Participation •Peace •Respect •Satisfaction •Self-confidence •Self-realization •Sharing •Trust |

4.2.4 School Three – Grade 2

Observation

Location: School gym

Number of pupils: 21 (Boys: 12/ Girls: 9)

Organization: Whole class activity, groups, individual

The lesson: Various physical activities in five stations

Duration: 45 minutes

Equipment: Mattresses, balls, springboard, benches, sand sacks

Procedures and experiences

In this class, the diversity among children of various socio-cultural backgrounds was obvious. When the time for the lesson of physical activities had come, the teacher went to the classroom to prepare the children and take them to the gym which was a few meters away from classroom building.

Firstly, she arranged the pupils in pairs one after the other, in the schoolyard and when all the pupils were ready, they walked towards the near-by building. Before entering the gym, they had to pass by the locker room in order to change their shoes, from casual ones, into trainers. One girl did not have sport shoes but the teacher allowed her to participate having her socks on. Then, they all went inside and for a few minutes, they were allowed to play freely.

The lesson was of a short duration so the teacher informed me before its beginning that she would implement a program that the children were familiar with because they had done it several times in the past. In this way, they had specific routines to follow and it was easier for the teacher to arrange and manage things in the limited time.

Before starting with the warm-up, the teacher asked the pupils to take a seat on the benches next to the parallel bars and explained to them what they would do, trying to have a quiet atmosphere. After she finished with her instructions, she gathered the pupils in the middle of the gym for a short warm-up in by doing a synchronized group activity.

Warm- up: the pupils made a circle in the center of the gym. The teacher gave a stable rhythmical tempo by counting and making single dancing steps. Each time they were to change direction of movement they had to clap their hands one time.

The teacher became a participant trying to motivate pupils to imitate her movements. This activity had a short duration and children seemed happy working both individually and in cooperation with their peers.

After the warm-up, the teacher asked the pupils to go back to the benches so she could tell them what they would do next. While she was giving instructions, she stopped a couple of times due to the interference of a few children who talked at the same time as she did. When she finished with the instructions, she made five mixed groups (boys-girls); she gave numbers to the pupils from one to three by pointing them, and the pupils with the same numbers joined the same groups.

Before the beginning of the activities, the teacher gave pupils a last reminder of what they should do with a short demonstration. A few times, she needed to blow her whistle to put some pupils back in order. Children seemed to be happy with this program and they showed anticipation to start.

The pupils stood up and began to arrange the equipment. The teacher gave the signal after a few minutes when everything was ready and the pupils took their positions and started.

Activities, games, rules and objectives: the children practiced in the following five stations:

1. Turn somersault and do “wheel” on green mattresses
2. Jump from a bench on the floor, run and jump from a spring-board on a blue mattress
3. Walk and keep balance on reversed benches
4. Continuous jumps with jumping ropes
5. Dribble a ball with hands (left or right or both) in-between small sand packs placed in a row on the floor

The teacher was observing closely and she gave assistance, when needed. The station that she paid special attention to was the balance benches without checking what was happening at the rest of the stations. This gave the chance to a couple of children to be distracted and do irrelevant things to the tasks they were given (i.e. one boy was playing football and a girl had taken a seat on a bench humming).

When the teacher realized that a couple of boys were not executing the instructions of the activities properly, she called them and gave them feedback. Each child could perform

movements in different ways having the freedom to express themselves, as they wanted as long as the activities were relevant to the task of the station.

During a small accident at the balance bench where a little girl had fallen on the floor, the teacher acted very fast and took her aside to comfort her.

At the end of the lesson, the teacher blew the whistle to give the signal that the pupils should put the equipment back to its place. The pupils arranged the things and went back to the benches. Then, the teacher talked briefly about the meaning of the activities and listened to the opinions and experiences of her pupils in relation to the lesson.

After the discussion, the teacher asked the pupils to show their satisfaction or dissatisfaction for the lesson by showing thumbs up or down. Then, the children changed shoes in the locker room and after making pairs as earlier, they followed their teacher back to their classroom.

Informal talk

The teacher introduced herself to me before the lesson describing the activities to me as well as the reason for implementing them. After the lesson, she gave me some information concerning the lesson I had observed.

The children knew the program with the stations. By applying this routine, the teacher said that she could save time without many instructions or new elements that would be time-consuming.

Another thing she noted was that their good cooperation and mutual understanding was due to the fact that they had been together for the last 2 years and they knew one another quite well. Regardless of the diversity among the pupils, she told me that she had a very good relation with all of them.

Brief table of practiced skills and gained experiences (4)

| Physical skills | Cognitive skills | Socio-Emotional Experiences |
|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Balance•Coordination•Flexibility•Speed•Strength | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Accuracy• Attention• Concentration• Orientation• Reaction• Spatial Awareness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Determination•Discipline•Diversity•Joy•Participation•Respect•Satisfaction |

5 Discussion

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings of the observations in relation to the relevant theoretical framework presented in chapter 2 and my personal experiences and approach.

I present the topics of the discussion in different paragraphs according to each of the three sub-questions of my research. My idea is to approach some terms I believe to be important for my understanding and then connect them with the findings of the observation.

The three sub-questions are:

- How do teachers and/or PE teachers conduct their teaching so that it is **meaningful** for each child in their classes?
- How do teachers and/or PE teachers create a **motivational atmosphere** for the children in their classes?
- Are physical activities and play important for educating children and are they interconnected?

5.1 Research Sub-questions

5.1.1 Sub Question 1: How do Teachers and/or PE Teachers Conduct their Teaching so that it is Meaningful for Each Child in their Classes?

When teachers prepare a physical education lesson, they need to make a program combining several variables such as the framework of the curriculum, the diversity among pupils and the individual abilities of the participants. Each teacher has a unique teaching style and his or her own way of implementing his/her lesson(s).

The teaching style can be influenced by the teacher's academic training, cultural background, personal understanding, principles, and working experience. In modern societies, where diversity among people has started to become wider, creating a meaningful activity for a group can be a complicated process.

A critical point during the implementation of a program is how it can become interesting, pleasant and meaningful to the children. As a physical educator, I have been faced with such a situation many times. I found out that what I thought was meaningful according to my standards was not necessarily meaningful for my pupils. The way people may define something as **meaningful** can be quite subjective and interpreted in various ways.

From my observations, I figured out that a teacher can develop a teaching style that appears to be meaningful, when the conditions during the lesson can help in the creation of an atmosphere that encourages children to be engaged in activities. The outcome, though, is debatable; some might feel that what they experienced was meaningful for them and be motivated to continue, while some others might prefer something else. One could argue that the important point is the opportunities and choices a teacher can create so that all the children can experience and learn new things.

According to Fay (1996), “meaning derives from the activity of its creator, but not from the activity of its audience” (p. 143). A planned activity may seem meaningful to the teacher but not necessarily to the pupils. For example, on one hand physical education teachers could assert that physical activities can have many positive effects on health. On the other hand, an unpleasant incident or experience during a lesson can make some pupils have a negative attitude towards physical education

A physical education lesson is usually conducted in places where children can be given a lot of space for free movement. Teachers must coordinate a group of children who have different interests, skills and abilities. At the same time, the lesson must be joyful and educative, while children are, most of the time, in some kind of motion. This means that physical education should have more flexible boundaries than classroom education, though without losing its pedagogical identity and formative purpose.

Finding meaning in doing something can also be connected with another important factor for learning and development, which is motivation. In chapter 2, I have presented the approaches about the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, so in paragraph 5.1.2, I am going to discuss the conditions that created a motivational atmosphere during a lesson of physical education.

School 1- 2nd grade

As presented in chapter 4, the teacher introduced a new game to the children. The initial part of the introduction to the rules and the techniques was quite abstract for the children and some of them had a difficulty remaining focused. However, the part with the visual demonstration attracted the children's attention. Children seemed to understand better what they were supposed to do and the fact that they found the activity meaningful for them, made quite many of them enthusiastic.

The teacher wanted to create proper conditions so that the children would be able to use their individual skills while they would be a part of a group sharing responsibilities and cooperating with one another for achieving their objective as a team.

The way the teacher conducted the lesson included important principles such as respect and cooperation, to name a few. However, I noticed that during the implementation of the program the teacher did not give feedback to the inactive pupils. At the same time, some of the children who were waiting for their turn to play had gotten indifferent and were occupied with other things. Indifference, inactivity and passiveness can be the outcome when someone does not find any meaning in the activity or the role given.

Children that would have successful attempts would be praised but the ones with limited participation did not receive enough encouragement or feedback; yet, at the end of the lesson, all the pupils gave positive feedback about how they experienced the day's lesson to their teacher.

School 1- 6th grade

The lesson included many different physical activities and games. The class seemed to be quite familiar with the routines well, so the teacher assumed that he did not have to intervene often. However, during the warm-up and the final game he was completely neutral when many of the pupils seemed unwilling to continue playing and a few ones even pulled out.

The lesson had a character of "mass participation" but without alternatives for those who were having difficulties. Some pupils were dominant because of their skills, while other pupils could not get chances to participate equally. Gradually, more and more children, especially the ones who could not compete with the "strong" ones, lost their desire to play

under those circumstances. Throughout both games, the teacher kept the role of a spectator without helping the children who stayed aside, to join in the game again. The impression I got was that the games given by the teacher were meaningful only for a few pupils, the ones with good physical skills and abilities, while the others had no role and resorted to doing irrelevant things.

The individual physical activities gave more possibilities to all pupils to be more active and feel more joy. However, again, the competitive nature of these activities could trigger negative emotions to the ones that had already been disappointed or discouraged since the warm-up game.

The meanings we give to things can be quite subjective. Teachers prepare a lesson taking into consideration the goals the children should achieve. Nonetheless, the outcome cannot be common, since, each person has different experiences and beliefs, and way(s) to learn, so behaviors and reactions can vary (Wells & Claxton, 2002).

School 2- 6th grade

The teacher had prepared a lesson with a great diversity of physical activities during which children could have opportunities to try their physical and cognitive skills in different tasks and share a variety of experiences and emotions.

The communication between the teacher and the pupils was intimate and meaningful and that was reflected upon how pupils showed their respect and trust to their teacher by being cooperative and engaged in the activities.

In this class, I noticed two children, one boy and one girl, the behavior of whom was not ordinary. The informal talk I had with the teacher after the lesson enlightened me about the situation of these children. The boy was dealing with behavioral difficulties and the girl of a different socio-cultural background initially had a negative attitude towards physical education, but gradually she started to be more active through the lessons.

The systematic work of the teacher with those children produced the result of both children becoming integrated in the class and starting participating. Eventually, the two children became more positive and the teacher had given meaning both to their presence and to their participation in the lesson.

After observing this class, I realized that the teacher's interest and caring made her pupils feel secure and those elements were the foundation for a meaningful and constructive relationship.

School 3- 2nd grade

This class was remarkably different when compared to the rest of the classes I visited; it was a class where the majority of students had different socio-cultural backgrounds. In such cases, education is very important so that there can be a common ground and a meaningful framework for all children.

This issue is essential for the integrity and stability of a society and it is worth mentioning the philosophy expressed in the Core Curriculum for Primary, Secondary and Adult Education in Norway.

“Newcomers to a country who are not immersed in its frames of reference often remain outsiders because others cannot take for granted what they know and can do—they are in constant need of extra explanations...Common background knowledge is thus at the core of a national network of communication between members of community...” (RMERCA, 2011, pp. 26-27).

The teacher was experienced and the physical activities she implemented seemed to be interesting for almost everyone. The children followed the instructions of the lesson and the atmosphere among them was very good. The only moment some children lost their focus was when the teacher was concentrated only on a few children in one activity (balance bench) having no visual contact with the rest of the children. Almost all the pupils found the activities meaningful since they had active roles and they were filled with satisfaction for participating.

After the lesson, the teacher told me that she had been working for many years with multi-cultural and multi-ethnic groups of pupils, so she knew how to find the balance among them.

Sharing a personal experience as a foreign teacher in a Norwegian primary school

This issue is quite sensitive and complicated and I would like to share and compare a personal experience. Some months ago, I was called upon, by a primary school in Oslo to take over a few physical education lessons as a substitute for another PE teacher. My task was to give lessons to three classes: two classes of 4th grade and one of 5th grade.

The experience could be described as extremely strenuous. Regardless of my efforts to communicate with the pupils, re-organize and explain the meaning of the activities, they did not comply at all and there was not any common ground of contact or cooperation. The disrespectful attitude towards me and the lack of discipline greatly affected my teaching and, in conclusion, I feel I did not manage to fulfill my expectations from the lessons to the desired extent.

This experience taught me that what I took for granted based on my cultural and academic background was meaningless for children in a multicultural environment, especially since they had not met me before. Either the Norwegian children or the children with a different ethnic background did not understand or accept the meaning of what I tried to apply with them. Principles I had been regarding as universal, they suddenly seemed to be unknown. My question since then has been if this situation is general or it was caused because of the different way I conducted my teaching in comparison with their regular physical education teacher.

5.1.2 Sub Question 2: How do Teachers and/or PE Teachers Create a Motivational Atmosphere for the Children in their Classes?

In chapter 2, I presented the theoretical approach about how a person can be motivated to participate in an activity. In real conditions, teachers have several situations to handle simultaneously and, in many cases, they must act instantly in order to avoid unpleasant situations with children who lack motivation.

My personal experience either as a student or as a teacher has taught me that intrinsic motivation can be an important starting point for an activity but it is not enough in itself. Many times pupils who are motivated intrinsically may give up a sport or an activity because of:

- an inappropriate structure or absence of plan
- an unpleasant atmosphere
- a lack of alternative choices given
- a non flexible teaching style allowing for limited freedom.

Awards and grades can function as elements of extrinsic motivation but this may also bring superficial results. For example, a pupil may be concentrated only on how to obtain good grades without, however, going deeper to the assimilation of knowledge. Consequently, there cannot be development of intrinsic motivation and deeper interest. In my opinion, the best option for a teacher is to seek for a balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Motivation can be interrelated with meaningful activities and, successively, with participation. When pupils are motivated to participate in physical activities then they:

- get opportunities for expression
- practice, learn, master and develop, and
- have a feeling of satisfaction and self-confidence.

Teachers play the guiding role by using their experience and knowledge to formulate motivational conditions and lead their pupils to discover the value of participating in the activities. .

School 1- 2nd grade

The teacher divided the pupils into four teams in order to manage the great number of them within the small space of the gym. Her decision was to have two groups playing for a certain period while two other groups were inactive waiting to play.

During the game, I saw children who had idle roles in their teams. The game seemed to fit the strong and fast pupils, while children who could not follow the speed of the game became less motivated. The teacher did not try to reinforce those children; instead, she kept giving general feedback and praise to everyone. In this case, I think that it would be important

that the teacher guide the children according to their ZPD, so that she could help pupils to take their skills further.

Some of the children, who were seated on the benches having nothing else to do but watching, had lost their interest in the game and they were trying to find ways to use their energy by climbing onto some ropes or parallel bars and/or teasing one another. The teacher did not give them some other options, so they were quite restless until their turn came.

In my opinion, all groups could be active at the same time, if the teacher had divided the gym into two parts where the dimensions of the fields would be smaller. This option might have helped some pupils with difficulties to adjust themselves better and probably be more motivated. Another alternative could have been if, for example, she had given the children who were waiting a few observation assignments, so that they would have to remain more focused.

The teacher followed a plan that she believed, could satisfy the majority of the pupils. On the other hand, no one can be sure that planned activities or their alternatives can bring guaranteed results, so the teachers must be flexible, observant and in constant seek for new ideas.

School 1- 6th grade

The large number of pupils and the structure of the games led to the segregation of pupils that did not have adequate abilities or skills. Discouragement, disappointment, sadness and/or anger can be serious factors leading to pupils losing motivation. Especially, since the teacher did not take initiative to make adjustments and give guidance, the possibilities were reduced for many pupils to succeed in the activities and feel satisfaction for mastering them.

Another factor that affected motivation was the implementation of the games. A good idea is not enough by itself. The quality of planning and the implementation is based on the alternatives a teacher has, in case something does not work in practice as efficiently as it had been planned. A game cannot be meaningful if the children do not have a role and therefore stay out of action.

A situation like that may be difficult for teachers who are not particularly engaged but all children need to have attention and support. The feeling of belonging is important for children, so guidance and interest from the teacher is necessary.

School 2- 6th grade

The teacher used the space she had in the gym in a way that many activities could occur at the same time. The variety among the activities could give several stimuli, opportunities and choices to the pupils.

The teacher and the children had a constructive cooperation based on communication and trust. The fact that she had taught them to take over responsibilities, had made the pupils feel quite independent, self-confident and happy during class. Freedom but also discipline, creativity and joy created a very pleasant, happy and motivational atmosphere throughout the lesson. An atmosphere like that can increase the levels of learning and contribute to a multi-sided development.

The focus of the teacher was not only on physical activities but also on music and rhythm, cognitive skills and methods of relaxation for a balanced emotional status. In my opinion, a wide range of stimuli and choices can be an additional motivational factor and a step forward towards holistic education.

The lesson had a clear structure and the personality of the teacher inspired children to express themselves both physically and emotionally. This can create intrinsic motivation and make children try their best not aiming at rewards but thanks to the pleasure they get throughout the process.

School 3- 2nd grade

According to the opinion of the teacher, a plan that pupils are accustomed to can make it acceptable and easier to be implemented.. Time and space management can often be a challenge for the organization of a lesson. If the activities are not well planned, then the children can lose their motivation to follow. In addition, mastery in the taught activities also can enhance the levels of motivation.

The atmosphere during the lesson was very good and the program with five stations gave the pupils the opportunities to do different things, which kept them motivated during the whole lesson. The teacher wanted children to behave in a disciplined way but at the same time, she had set flexible boundaries so that the children did not feel “entrapped”. The important thing for the teacher was to create this feeling of freedom and joy so that all the children had motivation to participate.

5.1.3 Similarities and Differences between the Teachers

Teachers of both 2nd grades

Listening to the opinions of both teachers who had 2nd grade, I found a few similarities: discipline and a structured plan seemed to be common principles for this age group. Both teachers had to organize very well how to move the children from the class to the gym. This procedure can be time-consuming that subtracts time from the lesson itself, but the teachers believed that this is a fundamental part of the lesson’s structure.

A difference I noticed was that one teacher introduced a new game to the children regardless of the time pressure, while the other teacher, when pressed for time, she preferred to apply something already known to the pupils. However, this statement is based only on an assumption since I have been in all the classes only one time and I did not have the opportunity to see how they used their time during other lessons.

Time management in physical education is a very important issue, if we take into consideration the fact that the hours and frequency of physical education lessons in primary schools are few.

Teachers of both 6th grades

Comparing the two teachers of 6th grade classes, I found that their similarity was on the level of freedom they gave to the children. At the beginning of the lessons, the pupils were gathered in the sports hall and the gym by themselves. The communication between the teachers and the pupils was not so much based on discipline but respect.

In my opinion, the differences between the two teachers were many. The teacher of 6th grade in school 1 had a very passive role. The limited actions and degree of reaction to what

was happening during the activities did not give a feeling of trust and security to the children that needed support.

The communication was limited, the cooperation loosened and many pupils were not motivated but in only a few activities. A lesson without orientation and principles may have a negative impact on the relationship between the teacher and the pupils.

The teacher of 6th grade in school 2 was working intensively on helping all the children to participate. The planned activities had an inclusive character and the guiding role of the teacher helped all children to feel security and trust towards their teacher.

5.1.4 Sub Question 3: Are Physical Activities and Play Important for Educating Children and are they Interconnected?

The observation of the lessons led me to the conclusion that, besides the physical activities I should study further the meaning of play, the interconnection with physical activities and their value for educating children.

In chapter 2, I have presented the nature of play and the reasons that make the play so important for children. “To play effectively, children need:

- playmates, play spaces or areas, play materials, play time, play to be valued by those around them;
- opportunities to play in pairs, in small groups, alone, alongside others, with adults;
- time for exploring through language what they have done and how they can describe the experience;
- time to follow through what they begin...;
- experiences to broaden and deepen what they know already and what they can already do;
- stimulation and encouragement to do and learn more; and
- planned and spontaneous play opportunities” (Moyles, 1989, pp. 92-93).

Through play, the teachers and/or PE teachers can make physical activities attractive to the children and adjust them in ways that all children's actions can be meaningful and successful. On one hand, achievement and success in physical activities and games can help children build more self-confidence, participate actively and have experiences that enhance their learning and development. On the other hand, though, "those students who seem to be unwilling, non-compliant or just plain lazy are usually resisting learning because they simply lack the confidence to participate" (Hannell, 2004, p. 21).

According to Corbin, Lindsey, and Welk (2000), physical education is an important part of holistic education because children who train and participate in physical and playful activities in the school:

- can increase their potential resistance to diseases: cardiovascular endurance, blood circulation, muscular strength, flexibility, control of body fat and so forth,
- can have a faster pace of growth and development,
- can build self-confidence and independence,
- can adapt themselves to social environments more easily and have emotional stability
- can show better performance in academic tasks since well-being seems to have a positive impact additionally on the cognitive skills.

The findings from all observations, the literature review, and my own experience have shown me that if the lessons of physical education are not child-centered and the teachers only count the pupils' performance and capacity, then the consequences for the pupils can be negative. Play creates a sensation of freedom and happiness to all children, therefore, physical activities should always have a playful and stress-relieving character.

In the following paragraph, I would like to talk about the role of the teacher and the impact of teaching styles on the process of educating children.

5.2 The Role of the Teacher

During the observations, I noticed that teachers can formulate the structure of the lessons and their implementation but they cannot influence the outcome, which can be different for each pupil.

The teachers have to accept the diversity among the pupils' personalities, give the pupils the proper guidance, show understanding to their individual needs, and cultivate their abilities and skills as developing beings. The success or failure of the implemented programs is related to:

- the managerial skills of the educator,
- the knowledge about his/her group's abilities, and
- the flexibility and resourcefulness at making the necessary arrangements in order to form an environment in which all the children can participate in and develop a feeling of belonging, security, understanding and achievement.

“Where learning occurs in a systematically organized school setting, the teacher has a special role, as leader of the classroom community, in selecting activities that are appropriately connected to the student's interests, and in advance of their current level of independent performance” (Wells & Claxton, 2003, p. 7).

Each teacher has his/her own personality, beliefs and experiences, which are reflected through the teaching style and the atmosphere in the educational setting. In each class, I observed different situations and four teachers with different ways of conducting their teaching. The model of Furu et al. (1994) shows “four types of situations:

- (a) In a permissive and stimulating educational setting, the initiative and activity emanate from the pupils and the teacher functions mainly as a tutor, guiding and supervising without setting the ultimate goal (project mode).

(b) In a permissive and non-stimulating setting, the pupils are free to decide, but may feel that nobody cares about their accomplishments (*laissez-faire mode*).

(c) The restrictive and stimulating setting is characterized by the authoritative teacher setting the goal. At the same time, he/she shows respect for the pupils, listens to them and makes them feel that they exert an influence on the outcome (*authoritative mode*).

(d) The restrictive and non-stimulating setting is dominated by the authoritarian teacher, who is striving towards a pre-defined goal, with little consideration for the interests or personalities of the pupils (*authoritarian mode*)” (as cited in Mattsom, 1998, p. 240).

A child-centered education should be based on a flexible structure and adjustable plans, where everyone can have equal opportunities for learning and achievement. A teacher should listen to voices that cannot be heard in the class and give the children as many opportunities as possible.

According to the situations I observed, my opinion is that the teaching styles of the four teachers combined elements from point (a) and (c). The settings were not restrictive, and there was respect from the teachers towards their pupils. For each activity, there was a given goal, while the pupils were free to choose different ways to reach it and the teachers had mostly a guiding role. Nonetheless, in two of the four observed classes, the teachers did not manage to give enough encouragement or meaningful feedback to the pupils who were inactive.

5.3 Answering the Main Research Question: Do physical activities as conducted in the three visited schools give opportunities for participation to all children in the selected classes?

Physical education has a particular complexity; on one hand, the PE lessons are regarded by many people as a short period of relaxation for children away from the classroom desks and the academic tasks (Eichstaedt & Lavay, 1992). On the other hand, though, a learning outcome must be attained through physical activities and play.

To participate in an activity one should find a meaning in it, as mentioned in parts above. This engagement may lead the participant(s) to find deeper meanings and become even more motivated to obtain more experiences.

The main principle is that the teachers should apply the principles of a child-centered education adjusted to the practical situations, such as the time in the day, the time for activities, the place, the individuality and so on. Nevertheless, even if a teacher tries to follow these principles, at times, this can be proved difficult. Crucial factors that can influence the attitudes of a pupil towards physical activities can be the role a child has among his/her peers, the level of achievement, the feeling of security inspired by the teacher and the atmosphere in class.

My opinion after observing the four lessons is that all four teachers tried to give opportunities for participation to all the children, even though they showed different levels of willingness and resourcefulness in adapting their lesson in relation to the individual needs of the pupils. In each class, I saw some pupils who were not so interested in participating as other pupils. This is an individual matter for each child and teachers need to observe, find alternatives and, most of all, show that they stand by each child giving a sense of security and care to it.

5.3.1 Weaknesses and Positive Outcome of the Research Project

Taking into consideration the weaknesses during the data collection, I think that in order to have better results I should:

- visit more schools and classes
- have more than one observation with each class, and
- add interviews to gather information about things I could not have had the chance to see or find just from observation.

The purpose of my research was to find information from scratch about an educational environment which was new to me, the implemented teaching methods, and the processes during physical education lessons. The findings from the observations cannot be generalized but may have relevance to other similar situations.

The positive aspect of my research is that my academic and professional background helped me understand what I was observing, I expanded my horizons by gaining new and useful experiences and, more importantly, was that I managed to get job opportunities in the field of education in Norway.

5.3.2 Conclusion

Physical activities can be a tool for learning and development, especially when teachers create a motivational atmosphere for the children. Due to factors I presented in previous paragraphs, it is oftentimes the case that some children will not have the same opportunities as others. A school class is a “micro-cosmos” where young individuals collect both positive and negative experiences. Through any kind of experience, individuals can discover what they like, what they dislike, what they want to do and what they do not want to do.

Teachers are the “facilitators” that connect the world of knowledge and experience with the world of children, a world full of imagination, creativity, spontaneity and exploration. Each person tries out new things and either accepts them or rejects them.

In addition to that, children need to feel safe and sense that someone cares about them when, for some reason, they are excluded from the activity or their group. “Solidarity and cooperation go together with tolerance and appreciation of the plurality of individual differences in class, school, and local community” (Johnsen, 2001, p. 169).

My experience, my study and my research have shown me that planning and implementing a meaningful program for an as much large as diverse group of people can be challenging because of the different needs, ideas, interests and expectations each one of us may have. Irrespective of the possible challenges during the lessons, almost all teachers I had the chance to meet and watch were aware of their role and the situations and they made remarkable efforts towards a holistic physical education.

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Appendix

Attachment 1: Observation Guide

Observation Guide

| Physical Skills | Cognitive Skills | Socio-emotional Experiences | Training Equipment | Class Organization |
|--|---|---|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Balance•Coordination•Endurance•Flexibility•Speed•Stamina•Strength | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Accuracy•Attention•Estimation•Imitation•Memory•Orientation•Spatial Awareness | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Cooperation•Creativity•Expression•Disappointment•Dissatisfaction•Independence•Joy•Mastery•Participation•Relations among children•Satisfaction•Self esteem•Self realization | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Benches•Balls•Hoola Hoops•Horse•Marking shirts•Mattresses•Medicine balls•Parallel bars•Ribbons•Trampoline | <ul style="list-style-type: none">•Individual•Groups•Groups shifting•Whole class activity |

Attachment 2: Letter of information and consensus

Letter of information and consensus

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Request to observe your class during physical activities/physical education.

Your consent is voluntary and you will be able to withdraw at any time.

I am a student of the International Master of Philosophy in Special Needs Education. Within the frame of this program I must conduct a research project and write a thesis. My project focuses on “Physical activities as a tool of holistic education in a few primary schools in Oslo”.

The reasons that led me to choose this topic are the following:

- My background is in sports and physical education and my main occupation for the last 13 years includes teaching volleyball to children and adolescents.
- I believe that physical activities can be part of an all round holistic development
- As a teacher of physical education, I'd like to investigate the approaches, methods and types of activities that are applied by the teacher during the activity lesson in order to create an educational environment in which all children are motivated to participate.
- I want to collect data which will help me to combine my knowledge from my former studies from my home country with the approach to physical activities of the Norwegian educational system.
- I have chosen observation as my main method collecting the data followed up with a short conversation with the teacher to clarify possible questions related to the activities observed.

There will be full confidentiality about the issues we will talk about and the data will be presented anonymously and in full discretion. No personal information will be registered about individual pupils.

The information gathered will be stored safely in my personal computer locked with passwords so that there is no access to it by anyone else but me. The data that will be used in

the final publication will not reveal the identity of the schools, teachers or learners and will be made anonymous by the end of the project, no later than 01.05.2014.

During the observation I will be as anonymous as possible. No video or photos will be taken and I will only take notes.

I may need to clarify some things about the lesson observed therefore I hope you will have the possibility to have a talk with me after the class or another time according to your convenience.

Due to my limited competence in Norwegian, you are kindly requested to use English for our communication, if that's not a problem for you.

As mentioned above, your participation is voluntary and if you agree to let me observe your class and talk with me you can withdraw from this agreement at anytime. All data that will be used in the final publication will not reveal the identity of the school, teachers or learners.

The project has been licensed from the Data Protection Official for Research at the Norwegian Social Science Data Services.

Agreement

I have received necessary written information and I am willing for you to observe my class and talk with you, with possibility to pull out if I need to.

Name _____

Signature _____

Oslo, Date _____

Attachment 3: Notification from NSD

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES



Jorunn Buli-Holmberg
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Vår dato: 29.10.2013

Vår ref: 35261 / 3 / ISL

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 28.08.2013. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| <i>35261</i> | <i>Physical activities as a tool for a holistic education in a few primary schools in Oslo</i> |
| <i>Behandlingsansvarlig</i> | <i>Universitetet i Oslo, ved institusjonens øverste leder</i> |
| <i>Daglig ansvarlig</i> | <i>Jorunn Buli-Holmberg</i> |
| <i>Student</i> | <i>Ioannis Tsourougiannis</i> |

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 01.05.2014, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Vigdís Namtvedt Kvalheim

Juni Skjold Lexau

Kontaktperson: Juni Skjold Lexau tlf: 55 58 36 01

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

Avdelingskontorer / District Offices:

OSLO: NSD, Universitetet i Oslo, Postboks 1055 Blindern, 0316 Oslo. Tel: +47-22 85 52 11. nsd@uio.no
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Personvernombudet for forskning



Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

Prosjektnr: 35261

The student will not collect the pupils individual plans. As far as we can understand, no directly or indirectly identifying data will be registered about the pupils. No personal information about third parties will be registered in the data material (cf. the e-mail received on 27.10.2013).

According to the notification form there will be obtained verbal and written consent based on verbal and written information about the project and the processing of personal data. The following must be added in the Letter of information:

- Name and contact information to the supervisor at UiO.
- That participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time.
- That the data material will be made anonymous by project end, no later than 01.05.2014.
- No personal information will be registered about the individual pupils.
- Whether it is possible for the head master, colleagues or pupils/parents to recognize (directly or indirectly) the individual teachers in the final publications.

Please send the revised Letter of information to personvernombudet@nsd.uib.no.

We presuppose that the teachers will be recruited in such a way that their voluntariness for participation is safeguarded. We recommend that several potential teachers receive the Letter of information, and that they contact the student directly if they want to participate.

There will be registered sensitive information relating to health, cf. Personal Data Act § 2, no. 8 c).

The information will be registered on a private computer. The Data Protection Official for Research presupposes that the use of a private computer is in accordance with the routines for data security for Universitetet i Oslo.

When the project is completed, by 01.05.2014, the data material will be made anonymous by deleting directly and indirectly identifying variables and audio-recordings will be deleted. In order for the data to be fully anonymised, all directly identifying data, such as names/reference numbers must be deleted, and indirectly identifying data in the remaining material must be deleted or changed.