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Goncalves, Ricardo (2022). **Touch in interaction between male practitioners and children: a tool for supporting children's care, play and learning and challenging gender norms in ECEC.** Paper presented on the 30th EECERA Annual Conference, Glasgow/Scotland, 25.8.2022.

In an ongoing research project, I examine touch as a pedagogical practice in interactions between male practitioners and children. The aim of the study is to get more knowledge about for what purpose male practitioners touch children and the pedagogical implications of touch for children's care and learning. In research on men in ECEC questions about touch between male practitioners and children are very recurrent (Eidevald et. al, 2018; Pruitt, 2015). The theoretical framework for this study draws upon critical studies on men and masculinities (Hearn, 1997) as well as theory of learning from a pragmatic perspective (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). In this paper I present preliminary results based on a qualitative study using participant observation as method in a group of 15 children and three practitioners (two female and one male) in a Swedish preschool. Fieldnotes and video recordings were used as data collection and the analysis was conducted through a content analysis. This research project was approved by the Swedish Ethical Review Agency and ethical principles as confidentiality, anonymization, informed and negotiated consent have been taken. The findings indicate that male practitioners use touch to help and guide children in care and play situations. Touch is applied as a tool for communication and participation by reorienting children's body towards activities. Touch practices are also regulated based on a policy of children's body integrity. The findings suggest implications for how touch provided by all practitioners can support children's care, play and learning and challenge gender norms in ECEC.

Keywords

male practitioner, children, touch, care, learning

Presenter:

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Touch in interaction between male practitioners and children: A tool for supporting children's care, play and learning and challenging gender norms in ECEC

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Overview of presentation

- Small talk
- Swedish context
- My PhD research project
- Background, method, theory
- Preliminary findings
- Preliminary conclusions



Small talk

Whose daddy are you?

Ricardo: No, I am not a daddy... I am a teacher...

Child seems to think for a few seconds...

Ricardo: I am working here really...

Child: Ah ok...

Child goes and continues to play.

WHO
ARE
YOU?

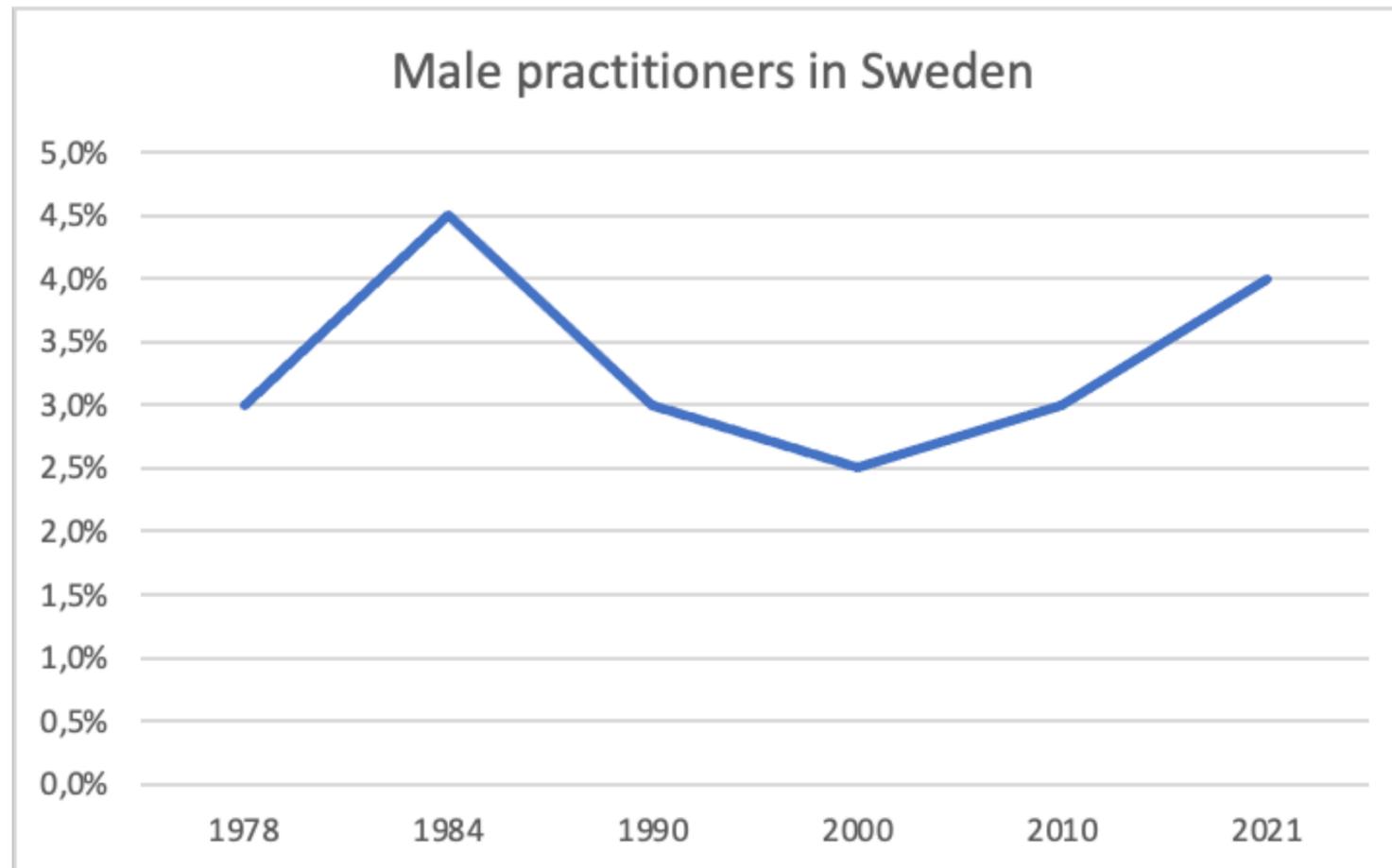
Exotic!

Swedish context

- Preschool is the first stage in the Swedish school system.
- Managed by municipalities.
- Non compulsory. For children between 1 and 5 years old. Over 90% of the children attend preschool in Sweden.
- Guardians pay a small fee depending on their income.
- Part-time or full-time (15 hours per week – unemployed or parental leave).
- 12 – 20 children per group. Usually 3 practitioners per group.
- Preschool teachers (university degree) and caregivers (upper secondary school).

My PhD research project - background

- Women as majority group working in Swedish preschools.



- Arguments: Profession low status, cultural and social questions, paedophilia concerns.

Touch as pedagogical action in the interaction between male preschool teachers and children in preschools

Gender equality in Sweden? How is touch between men and children performed in practice?

Aim: The research project aims to contribute to pedagogical knowledge by studying touch as a pedagogical resource in the interaction between male preschool teachers and children.

Questions:

- 1) When and how is touch used in interactions between male preschool teachers and children in preschool? Which functions does touch fulfil in those interactions?
- 2) To which extent can touch be used as pedagogical resource by male preschool teachers?
- 3) What are the consequences of touch for children's care and learning?

Method and theory

- Fieldwork (August 2021 – June 2022). Participating observation once a week. Field notes and video recordings.
- 3 preschool groups from 3 different preschools (municipalities).
- Qualitative content analysis (abductive approach).
- John Dewey's pragmatism: action, habits, transaction (male practitioners, children, touch and environment).

Preliminary findings

- Based on collected data from one preschool group.
- Fieldwork from August 2021 to January 2022.
- 15 children (1-3 years old) and three practitioners (one male and two female) during everyday situations.
- Families with good socio-economic background. Majority Swedish.
- Daniel, 36 years old, preschool teacher. 10 years experience. 5 years working together in the same team.
- Daily tasks shared equally between the practitioners.
- Active pedagogical work with children's body integrity policy.

Painting activity

Touch as an approach to guide children towards an activity



Touch as an approach to prevent accidents



Circle and fruit time

Touch as an approach to control/reorient children's body towards an activity



Touch as an approach to communicate and make children participate in an activity



Play time

Touch as an approach to comfort children



Touch as an approach to make children participate in a play situation



Touch as a part of a play situation



Preliminary conclusions

- The preliminary findings indicate that touch has a strong potential to support children's care, play and learning in preschool. Touch is used as pedagogical approach by male preschool teachers to guide and make children participate in different activities.
- Touch is also connected to direct care situations when it is used as an approach to comfort and avoid accidents.
- Touch is mostly initiated by practitioners and accompanied with verbal communication.
- Male preschool teachers often use touch when a situation demands it.
- Experienced group of practitioners can support touch interactions between male preschool teachers and children.
- Body integrity policy may have an impact on how much touch children get.

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS?

THANK YOU!

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