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Goncalves, Ricardo (2023). **Touch as pedagogical action: Supporting children's learning and care and men's work in ECEC.** Paper presented on the 31th EECERA Annual Conference, Estoril/Portugal, 31.8.2023.

This study aims to gain knowledge about how touch can be pedagogical action in the interplay between men and children in ECEC. Research has shown that touch between preschool teachers and children has been subject to surveillance due to a societal concern about children's sexual abuse (CSA) and by adoption of policies towards protection of children's body integrity (Pruit, 2015). Men working in ECEC express concern to be suspected of CSA when they are involved in touch situations with children (Hedlin et al., 2019). The study draws upon Dewey's pragmatism by examining touch as an action in the transaction between preschool teacher, children, and their environment (Dewey, 1934, 1981). A field study within a qualitative research paradigm was conducted (Patton, 2015). Participant observation was carried out with 45 children and 3 male preschool teachers from three Swedish preschools. Fieldnotes and video recordings were used as data that was analyzed through a thematic analysis within an abductive approach (Conaty, 2021). The preschool teachers and children's guardians received an information sheet and signed a consent form. Children were informed about the study during a circle time. The names of participants were pseudonymized and a negotiated consent was applied during the observations. The findings indicate that touch becomes pedagogical in five different actions: affective, communicative, supporting, playful and guiding. These findings suggest that touch in form of pedagogical actions create conditions for children's learning and care. Those actions can also support men's pedagogical work in touch situations with children in ECEC.

Keywords

men, children, touch, preschool teacher, pedagogical

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Touch as pedagogical action: supporting children's learning and care and men's work in ECEC

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Overview

- My research project (background)
- Aim and research questions
- Theoretical perspective, methods and methodology
- Preliminary results
- Discussion
- Conclusions



Touch as pedagogical action in the interplay between men and children in ECEC

- Previous studies show how touch has positive effects on children's emotional, social, physical and cognitive development (Barnett, 2005; Field, 2002, 2014; Hansen, 2007; Hertenstein, 2002). Most of these studies were carried out outside educational settings.
- Research has also shown that touch between teachers and children has been subject to surveillance due to a societal concern about children's sexual abuse (CSA) and by adoption of policies towards protection of children's body integrity (Pruit, 2015).
- Questions about child sexual abuse (CSA) and men in ECEC are intertwined (Eidevald, 2016).
- Men as a minority group working in ECEC express concern regarding suspicion of CSA when they are involved in touch situations with children (Hedlin et al., 2019).



Aim and research questions

Focus on touch from a pedagogical perspective.

The research project aims to gain knowledge about touch as pedagogical action in the interplay between male preschool teachers and children in ECEC.

- 1) In which situations and how is touch used as pedagogical action in the interplay between male preschool teachers and children in ECEC?
- 2) What are the purposes of touch and under which conditions does it occur?

Furthermore, I discuss what the consequences of touch as pedagogical action are on children's learning and care, and male preschool teacher's pedagogical work.



Theoretical perspective, methods and methodology

- Pragmatism. Dewey's transactional perspective. Key concepts: transaction, action, experience, conditions and consequences.
- Field study, participating observation.
- Fieldnotes and video recordings. Focus on touch interactions between male preschools teachers and children.
- Three ECEC settings in Sweden. 45 children and 10 preschool teachers/practitioners (3 male preschool teachers).
- Children between 1-5 years old.
- Qualitative analysis within an abductive approach. Coding touch situations in accordance with the research questions.



Preliminary results

- 1) In which situations and how is touch used as pedagogical action in the interplay between male preschool teachers and children in ECEC?**
- 2) What are the purposes of touch?**
 - Touch is used as pedagogical action in several situations such as circle time, reading time, mealtime, play situations and other planned activities in the ECEC settings.
 - Touch is often initiated by adults and is used to fulfill several purposes in different situations.

Under which conditions does touch occur?

- Some situations demand touch as pedagogical action.
- Unpredictable events (children fall or are involved in conflicts).
- Children's needs which demands physical support.
- When a situation demands physical communication.
- Male preschool teacher's and children's agency. Their own initiative to touch.



Discussion

What are the consequences of touch as pedagogical action on children's care and learning, and male preschool teacher's pedagogical work?

- Touch strengthens caring relationships between male preschool teachers and children.
- Touch enables children to participate in various activities in the ECEC.
- Touch facilitates children's learning process.
- Touch becomes an essential communication key.
- Touch strengthens male preschool teacher's pedagogical work by supporting their actions.
- Non-touch policies can restrict how much and which type of touch children get.

Conclusions



- This study contributes to gain knowledge about how touch can be understood from a pedagogical perspective in the ECEC.
- Touch as a pedagogical action strengthens the pedagogical work of male preschool teachers.
- Children get the opportunity to see that touching practices are not connected to a single gender.
- Preschool teachers/practitioners acquire a professional language and knowledge when touch is understood as a pedagogical action.
- It is still a challenge to find a balance between non-touch policies and touch practices that contribute to children's care and learning.

Thank you for your attention!

