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Training strategy for the improvement of Physical Education in pre-school children

Estrategia de capacitación para el mejoramiento de la Educación Física en la infancia prescolar

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ABSTRACT

Physical Education in preschool childhood is an area with potential to achieve the integrality of the educational process from the cognitive, affective and motor areas; the information gathered and the empirical evidence attest to the transformations that must be made in the work of the educators to adapt to this reality and be able to assume a new position around the Physical Education area, in addition, to focus, therefore, on the motor and affective development at the same level as the intellectual, using the expressive and creative possibilities and the experience of the body as a whole for the full formation of the child. Therefore, in order to respond to this problem, the present work is developed, for which a training strategy for educators is being designed to improve the direction of the Physical Education area. The research process is carried out on a dialectical-materialist basis and methods of the theoretical, empirical and statistical-mathematical levels are used, such as: the documentary analysis and the survey, among others. The study involved 35 educators and 10 managers working in preschool childhood in the municipality of Pinar del Río. The research allows to determine the regularities that distinguish the educational process of Physical Education, as well as the needs of educators to promote this process. The training strategy establishes the interdisciplinary nexuses to achieve the integral approach of the direction of the developing educational process of the educators and the training actions dialectically interrelated, on the base of the directed self-improvement.

Keywords: training; integral development; Physical Education; educators; preschool childhood.



RESUMEN

La Educación Física en la infancia prescolar constituye un área con potencialidades para lograr la integralidad del proceso educativo desde los ámbitos cognitivos, afectivos y motriz. La información recopilada y las evidencias empíricas dan fe de las transformaciones que deben operarse en la labor de las educadoras para adaptarse a esta realidad y estar capacitadas para asumir una nueva posición en torno al área de Educación Física, además, centrarse, por lo tanto, en el desarrollo motor y afectivo al mismo nivel del intelectual, al utilizar las posibilidades expresivas, creativas y la vivencia del cuerpo en su integralidad para la formación plena del niño. Por ello, para dar respuesta a esta problemática, se desarrolla el presente trabajo, para lo cual se diseña una estrategia de capacitación a educadoras para mejorar la dirección del área de Educación Física. El proceso investigativo se realiza sobre una base dialécticomaterialista y se emplean métodos del nivel teórico, empírico y estadísticomatemáticos, tales como: el análisis documental, la encuesta, entre otros. Intervienen en el estudio 35 educadoras y diez directivos que trabajan en la infancia prescolar, en el municipio de Pinar del Río. Las indagaciones permiten determinar las regularidades que distinguen el proceso educativo de Educación Física, así como las necesidades de las educadoras para fomentar dicho proceso. La estrategia de capacitación establece los nexos interdisciplinarios para lograr el enfoque integral de la dirección del proceso educativo desarrollador de las educadoras y las acciones de capacitación, interrelacionadas dialécticamente, sobre la base de la autosuperación dirigida.

Palabras clave: capacitación; desarrollo integral; Educación Física; educadoras; infancia prescolar.

INTRODUCTION

It is an aspiration of early childhood, in contemporary society, to achieve maximum integral development in children from zero to six years to develop in them freedom of thought, feelings, sensitivity and creative imagination with a view to their preparation for life. In this sense, the area of Physical Education in preschool childhood has as its premise the motor development, using the expressive, creative possibilities and the experience of the body in its integrality for the full formation of the child from the cognitive, affective, motor and attitudinal spheres to form an active subject, independent, of flexible thinking and deep convictions, with possibilities of participating in the transformations that take place in Cuba.

The Ministry of Education (MINED), based on the transformations and improvements that take place in all its subsystems, has considered Physical Education as one of the areas of study programmes within the early childhood education level curriculum.

According to UNESCO (2015), an important place within it is the development of skills, attitudes and knowledge necessary for lifelong physical and sporting activity (p.7), which allows education through movement. Its purposes are aimed at the formation of knowledge, skills, abilities, feelings and habits enduring throughout life.



Children, in their Physical Education activity, transform their emotions into expressions, where their motor and creative faculties are distinguished; they pour out their spirit and project their individuality through the learning of motor actions or behaviours with a ludic approach, providing them with the edification of motor competence and strengthening the motor skills in each one of them.

In the children's context, there is a diversity of children who must be guaranteed quality educational care, in accordance with their needs and potential, in order to educate them in the principle of equality of human beings, to cultivate and develop the desire to overcome obstacles, to know or face themselves and enjoy competition, channel the different motivations they have with respect to the practice of sports activity, which will contribute to their overall development.

Within this heterogeneous range of early childhood children, which is divided into early childhood, from zero to three years, and preschool childhood, from three to six years, we will refer specifically to preschool children from three to six years, where the area of Physical Education becomes the first base of motor development from children's institutions. Using this space to strengthen it is a necessity from the earliest ages.

These realities place the area of Physical Education before a great challenge as a fundamental component, which has formed part of the pedagogical and cultural development that is carried out in the country, aimed at motor development, biological and social structure, the development of skills, abilities and aptitudes to achieve physical recreation of children through a playful approach to prepare the new generations of preschool children, which will favor their healthy and harmonious growth in accordance with the conditions of society and the transformations imposed on them by the contemporary world.

The above-mentioned elements lead to the assumption of positions that demand new changes in the attention of preschool children, in the strengthening of the area of Physical Education since it does not only concern motor development; it also requires an integral perspective that guarantees a quality education for all children, for which reason it demands the collaboration of other sciences that, such as Psychology, Pedagogy, Sociology, Physiology or Anatomy, provide the necessary information to complete contents that strengthen interdisciplinarity.

These ideas find support in the words of President Díaz-Canel, quoted in Perera, (2018), in the Board of Directors of the National Institute of Sports, Physical Education and Recreation (Inder), when he underlines the importance of good Physical Education classes in the first years of life, on which the successes of the future also depend. As it can be inferred in this study, it is important to cultivate to the maximum all the motor experiences of the child from the first ages, where the programmed activity of Physical Education becomes the ideal space to achieve this purpose and to reach its integral development.



For this reason, international authors such as Gil, Gómez, S., Onofre, Contreras, and Gómez, (2008); Renzi, (2009); González and Gómez, (2010); Gil, (2013), McLennan, and Thompson, (2015), Forero, (2015), Gambau, (2015) and Gamonales, and Martín, (2016), among others, pronounce themselves on the need for a quality Physical Education that is distinguished by its formative, integral character. Cuban specialists such as González C. (2001), López, (2006), Ruiz, (2012) and Agrelo, Bequer, Martínez, Hernández, Amaro, and Hernández, (2013), among others, agree with these criteria.

At present, in the curricular changes that are already implemented experimentally in early childhood, the tendency prevails to call the area of Physical Education as a dimension of education and development of motor skills. This process allows the educator to apply a new way of understanding the child, his or her body, and the relationships of the different areas of the curriculum that may be established.

The term Physical Education has been approached from different fields of science and has received different criticisms regarding its semantic scope. It is for this reason that different meanings and denominations have arisen, among which the following stand out: education through movement, physical-sports activity, corporal education and motor education. In spite of the diversity of words used, Zamora (2009) states that in the course of time there has not been an epistemological rethinking of Physical Education, but rather a semantic revisionism, which has led it to a journey of diversity of approaches of contexts and connotations of significance (p.24).

Taking into account the plurality of terms in function of defining the same process, the term Physical Education is assumed according to Cecchini (1996), as it is cited in the book More education than physics, by López, (2006),

"A process of physical-educational-integral intervention, which does not only focus on the physical but also on educating through the physical, insofar as it constitutes (...) a particular dimension of the educational phenomenon, a process of physical-educational relationship. Pedagogical intervention aimed at the cognitive, affective, motor and socio-cultural spheres of the person, at his enrichment (...) in relation to himself, to other people and to the world that surrounds him". (p.30).

These criteria indicate to us the variety of conceptions that can be found in the child world; therefore, in the final result of this educational process, greater significance must be given to recognizing the right of all to a quality Physical Education, independently of the educational system where it is carried out, of the particularities and of the characteristics of the subjects involved. For this reason, the concept of Physical Education in pre-school childhood is assumed, moving away from thinking about the type of motor activity carried out by the child, to thinking about the educational context in which he or she is integrated in order to learn and develop, which satisfies his or her needs and potentialities in order to contribute to the development of his or her personality in its totality.



In line with the above, the research of Zagalaz, (2001), cited in Rodriguez, (2013), which ensures that Physical Education:

"It is the basis for the child to awaken his motor skills and intelligence in the acquisition of experiences for the development of knowledge, with physical education is achieved to improve interpersonal relationships and group because it is fundamental well oriented physical exercise, which helps to achieve a harmonious development, improve posture, walking, among others. It improves, through physical activities, the basic motor capacity for the development of processes of physical growth, knowledge, personality and social interactions". (p.18).

The criteria of López, (2006), in the book "Más educación que física", allow to declare that "an important part of Physical Education (above all, much broader than that of psychomotor education" (p. 69) pre-school and primary education) must include the methods of psychomotor education, but at the same time transcend them.

In the works of López, (2006), in the aforementioned book, it is clearly shown that Physical Education is:

"an interdisciplinary subject that revolves around the fact of educating with the use of human motor skills. That is why, to contrast education and human motor skills is not to see the dialectic relation between both budgets: educational fact and motor suppose a distorted approach of reality". (p.5)

This idea finds its support in what Gil, Gómez, Contreras and Gómez, (2008), when they express that the implementation or development of motor skills, in its organized form in Physical Education, in Infant Education, follows a globalizing and interdisciplinary perspective.

The study carried out by the aforementioned authors is essential to elucidate this problem. They propose the need to conceive motor skills from the current scientific paradigms, in order not to be confined to biomechanical areas, they advocate a holistic, unitary and global perspective that manifests itself through behavior. Thus, the walls that separate traditional Physical Education from the development of psychomotor or motor skills in the infantile stage disappear.

These authors also value the importance and contribution of Physical Education to the education of people, which acquires, however, a special relevance in certain educational stages, such as preschool childhood, since it seeks the harmonious development of the body as a means or as an instrument of great value to reach human maturity.



In this sense, the area of Physical Education, in preschool childhood, is considered as an educational process that has an integral and quality formative character, that allows the systemic transit, in a conscious way of these children, taking advantage of their experiences, their characteristics, the variability of their development, their levels of learning and the degree of individual intellectual functioning, with the use of flexible and open motor actions; which stimulates their cognitive, affective, motor and social development.

This contrasts with the limitations detected in the educational process of Physical Education, which hinder the development of their personality as a whole, conditioned by the insufficient theoretical-methodological approach of preschool educators.

In this sense, the studies carried out have made it possible to identify limitations in the direction of the educational process of physical education in pre-school children, taught by the educators; it is necessary to strengthen their development as part of the comprehensive and quality educational care provided to these children, in keeping with the curricular changes that are already implemented, in an experimental manner, in early childhood and that contribute to the professional and human performance of the educators.

In view of the foregoing and on the basis of the studies carried out, the authors seek a response to the needs found in the direction of the educational process of physical education in preschool children, for which purpose they propose the design of a training strategy for female educators, in which interdisciplinary links are established to achieve a comprehensive approach to the direction of the educational process and training actions, dialectically interrelated, on the basis of directed self-improvement.

The strategy of training female educators may constitute the path defined for implementing in practice the process of training female educators for the direction of the Physical Education area, as part of the educational process in preschool children, in the municipality of Pinar del Río. The actions developed are inserted within the current educational improvement.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A pedagogical study is carried out, based on the dialectic-materialist method. Methods at the theoretical, empirical and statistical levels are used, as well as two working groups made up of 35 educators from children's circles and preschool classrooms in the municipality of Pinar del Río and 10 directors, based on the criterion of attention of the municipal management structures: directors, subdirectors, who constitute 100% of the declared population.

Theoretical, empirical and statistical mathematical methods are used. The fundamental starting point and guiding method of the scientific research process in question was the dialectic-materialist, together with the experiential, historical and logical, analytical-synthetic and the structural and functional systemic. In addition, survey, observation and documentary study are used as empirical methods. As a mathematical-statistical method, descriptive statistics are used.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Taking into account the results of the methods, techniques and instruments applied in ascertaining the problem, they are identified as main limitations:

- Low training of the educators in the direction of the Physical Education area.
- The individuality of the training actions of the educators decreases.
- The use of specialized literature as a means of training.
- Training actions to improve the management of the Physical Education area, as part of the educational process in preschool children.
- Low integrality in the training actions carried out by the Hermanos Saíz University, in the area of Physical Education.

As a way of solving the problem analyzed, a strategy is proposed, which assumes the definition of Breijo (2009), who considers it as "integrated sequences of actions and procedures selected and organized for the implementation of its foundations". (p.86)

For the structuring of the proposal, the criteria of Armas and Valle (2011) were taken into account in their work on the results of scientific research, where they state that the strategies must have the following aspects: introduction-foundation, diagnosis, general objective statement, strategic planning, instrumentation and evaluation.

The structure of the strategy has been conformed by four stages: (where the design of the forms of organization of the training and the fundamentals of the strategy are established), diagnosis: (in which from the application and processing of a group of techniques, strengths, weaknesses of the object and its environment are identified), execution of the specific strategic actions: (to specify the great activities to undertake, with their corresponding objectives and operations, directed to the implementation) and evaluation of the strategy: (where the process is evaluated and the evaluation of that imply the results the feedback). The effectiveness of the strategy is evaluated in relation to the achievement of the general objective, which allows including, evaluating and/or controlling changes or modifications in the proposed actions.

Stage I: Planning

This stage is related to the actions that are necessary to ensure the design of the forms of organization of training in its dialectical relationship with self-improvement, directed from the diagnosis of the educators and the direction of the Physical Education area, as part of the educational process in preschool childhood, in the municipality of Pinar del Río, in correspondence with the interests of early childhood, of the Theory and Methodology of Physical Education and Advanced Education, as well as the material and human assurance to carry them out.

At this stage of the strategy, actions are projected to transform the training of the educators, from the current state to the desired state.



The design of the strategy is based on the essential ideas for its implementation, based on the following assumptions:

a) The actions and operations for the training in the direction of the Physical Education area, identified and based.

b) The dialectical relations established between the management of the educational process in preschool children and the area of physical education, from the interdisciplinary link in the curriculum at this level of education, as modifiers of attitudes in the educators.

(c) For the training of female teachers, self-improvement led by the coordinating team is a prerequisite for establishing dependent relations between the team and the group of female teachers and the various socializing agencies.

d) The functioning of the strategy is developed from the existing structures in the University of Pinar del Río, but it needs children's institutions as a scenario where the educators are trained, subordinated to self-improvement; this is the basis for greater productivity in the other forms of organization, whose main function is the execution of the process of training the educators. Objectives

a) To design the different forms of training for the educators on the direction of the area of Physical Education in preschool children.

b) Implement the coordinating team and the groups of educators at the centre and/or territorial level for the training.

c) Prepare the directors of the different levels of management for the training strategy.

d) Reconcile study guides and teaching materials for the organization of directed self-improvement.

Actions to be carried out in planning:

- Methodological meeting to prepare and sensitize managers at different management levels on the training strategy.
- Structural and functional organisation of the coordinating team and of the groups of educators at centre and/or territory level.
- Planning of the different forms of training for the educators, related to the direction of the area of Physical Education in preschool children.
- Design of study guides and teaching material for the organization of selfimprovement aimed at training.

It is defined as a general objective: to prepare educators for the direction of the Physical Education area, as part of the educational process in preschool children.

Stage II: Diagnosis

The implementation of the strategy, based on the diagnosis, makes it possible to promote a favorable transformation of the training process for preschool educators, based on adapting the execution of immediate actions to what is proposed to achieve in the long term, aimed at modifying the attitudes of those involved, transforming erroneous behaviors, encouraging motivation and participation from a new perspective, stimulated by awareness of the existing difficulties, the lack of training and the existence of possibilities at the University of Pinar del Río to offer responses to such needs.



Objectives:

a) To determine the needs, motivations and potentialities of the educators for the direction of the area of Physical Education in preschool children, in relation to the training for their professional performance.

b) Identify the level of training achieved by the educators for the direction of the Physical Education area, in the children's circles of the municipality of Pinar del Río. Actions to be carried out in the diagnosis:

(a) To select or develop the instrument that will make possible to diagnose the actual state of the training process for pre-school educators.

Identify the levels of training achieved by the educators for the direction of the Physical Education area in the children's circles of the municipality of Pinar del Río. b) Inform the regularity of the diagnosis in the activities carried out in the children's circles of the municipality of Pinar del Río.

c) To know the needs and potentialities that exist in the educators for the direction of the area of Physical Education of the municipality of Pinar del Río, related to their training; they must be taken into account:

- The dimensions and indicators of the training process for educators for the direction of the Physical Education area during the learning process, assumed and operationalized in this research.
- Profile of the educators for the direction of the Physical Education area.

Application of the instrument used for diagnosis:

The conditions are created so that the educators, at the time the instruments are applied, are in normal conditions for the activity they carry out in the educational process from Physical Education, in the methodological preparation, in the development of the methodological or scientific activity, provided that this activity is carried out in the children's institution, as the scenario where it is carried out. As a result of the diagnosis, the following strengths are needed:

- Recognition of the need to improve the training process for pre-school educators, with respect to the direction of the Physical Education area.
- It is important to develop a strategy that is structured in specific strategic actions that allow the improvement of the training process of the educators for the direction of the Physical Education area.
- Motivation for the implementation of the strategy regarding the training process and the practice of preschool children in the municipality of Pinar del Río.

As weaknesses, the following are raised:

• Insufficient theoretical-methodological preparation of the pedagogical group to face the demands of this educational process in preschool childhood for the direction of the area of Physical Education, to achieve the integral development of the child.

Stage III: Implementation of specific strategic actions

Once the fundamental ideas of the training strategy that are to be implemented have been structured, the diagnostic information makes possible to gain clarity about the



assumptions that initially underlie the need for its implementation, from which four specific strategic actions are proposed:

Specific strategic action I: Preparation of the coordinating team.

Objective: to train the coordinating team that participates in the research from an integrative perspective and the elaboration of an interdisciplinary work in the projection of the actions directed to the diagnosis, to the dosage, to the planning, to the execution and to the evaluation of the direction of the area of Physical Education, as part of the educational process in the preschool childhood.

To this end, the following operations are being carried out:

- Identification of the coordinating team.
- Design of an interdisciplinary training program to train the coordinating team.
- Implementation of an interdisciplinary training program for the coordinating team.
- Evaluation of the development of the training program with interdisciplinary character, to the coordinating team.

Specific strategic action II: guidelines for targeted self-improvement.

Objective: to systematize self-improvement aimed at preschool educators for the direction of the Physical Education area, as part of the educational process from the children's institution, through individual and group activities that allow the learning of the educators during the educational practice.

To this end, the following operations are carried out:

- Identification of the group of educators for training.
- Design of guides for directed self-improvement for preschool educators.
- Implementation of self-improvement guides for preschool educators.
- Evaluation of the development of self-improvement guides for preschool educators.

Specific strategic action III: specialised conferences.

Objective: to systematize the contents for the direction of the area of Physical Education, from the proposal of specialized conferences with interdisciplinary character.

The following operations are developed for this purpose:

- To design specialized interdisciplinary conferences for the training of preschool educators.
- Implementation of specialized interdisciplinary conferences for the training of preschool educators.
- Evaluation of the development of specialized interdisciplinary conferences for the training of preschool educators.



Specific strategic action IV: interdisciplinary integrative workshops.

Objective: to systematize the contents for the direction of the area of Physical Education, from the proposal of workshops with interdisciplinary character.

To this end, the following operations are being carried out:

- To design interdisciplinary workshops for the training of preschool educators.
- Implementation of interdisciplinary workshops for the training of preschool educators.
- Evaluation of the development of interdisciplinary workshops for the training of preschool educators.

Specific strategic action V: "Manual of procedures for the individual preparation of female teachers".

Objective: to offer guidance to educators on the theoretical and practical aspects of directing the educational process, from Physical Education, in order to achieve interdisciplinarity with the rest of the areas of the curriculum.

To this end, the following operations are developed:

- Design of a manual of procedures for the individual preparation of the educators on the direction of the area of Physical Education, from the educational process, to achieve interdisciplinarity with the rest of the areas of the curriculum.
- Implementation of a manual of procedures for the individual preparation of the educators on the direction of the Physical Education area, from the educational process, in order to achieve interdisciplinarity with the rest of the curriculum areas.
- To validate a manual of procedures for the individual preparation of the educators on the direction of the Physical Education area, from the educational process, in order to achieve interdisciplinarity with the rest of the areas of the curriculum.

Stage IV: Overall evaluation of the strategy

Objective: to direct the control of the process and the evaluation of the results implied by the feedback.

To this end, the following operations are carried out:

- Definition of overdue achievements and obstacles.
- Assessment of the approach to the desired state.



In these operations it is determined, from the results obtained in the application of the strategic actions, the level of development reached in these. The description of the process entails specifying each of the obstacles overcome in the fulfilment of the relevant operations and assessing the effectiveness of the strategy in relation to the achievement of the general objective, which allows including, assessing and/or controlling changes or modifications in the proposed operations.

At this stage, it is important to meet the objectives, from both sides: as a process and as a result, by taking into consideration the evaluation of the monitoring of the model and its impact on the exercise of the profession. The evaluation of the strategy is a continuous and systemic process that deals with diagnosis, design and application, which favors the constant reorientation of the different specific strategic actions that are developed, which are defined for each of the operations, in order to contribute to the training of the educators for the improvement of the management of the Physical Education area, as part of the educational process in preschool children.

Based on these results, a final characterization of the educators is carried out, in order to determine the aspects in which they should continue to be trained in order to carry out their social task more efficiently, which is to achieve the integral development of the child. The theoretical validity of the training strategy is carried out by a group of 25 experts, which lead to the following conclusions:

- When evaluating the correspondence of the training strategy with the demands of pre-school training, 88 % evaluate them as very adequate (22 experts); 8.00 % as quite adequate (2) and 4 % (1) as adequate. 80 % (20) accept the components of the training model as very adequate, while 20 % (5) consider them to be quite adequate.
- Regarding the methodological indications for the implementation of the proposed training strategy, 80.0 % (20) of the experts consider it at a very adequate level, while two experts, representing 8.00 %, evaluate it as quite adequate and 12 % (3) as adequate.
- The relationship between the proposed strategy and the specific actions for its practical implementation is considered by 88 % (22), of, very appropriate, 4 % (1) as quite adequate and two (8.0 %) as adequate. When evaluating the practical usefulness of the proposal for the training of female teachers, 92.0 %, 23 consider it very adequate and 8.0 % (2) quite adequate.

On the other hand, the experts consider that the proposed training strategy, in its entirety, is novel and agree on its usefulness and relevance for improving the management of the Physical Education area in preschool children, based on the relationships established between their actions and operations.

- The suggestions and recommendations made by the experts were taken into consideration. These were addressed to:
- Expansion of the methodological indications for the implementation of the training strategy, in order to make the procedure of the proposed actions clearer.
- Improvement of the graphic representation of the training strategy for better understanding and implementation in practice.
- Accuracy of the main ways to evaluate the strategy.



The above-mentioned suggestions were taken into account and included in the final variant of the training strategy which was applied to the educators who work the third year of life in children's circles, in the municipality of Pinar del Río.

The essential aspects analyzed in order to theoretically demonstrate the training strategy allow us to affirm that the educators recognize the contribution of the training strategy in the direction of the Physical Education area, in the third year of life, in preschool childhood, as they show conformity on how to relate the theoretical and methodological contents of this area, in function of the integral development of the child.

The limitations related to the existence of theoretical-methodological insufficiencies in the direction of the Physical Education area, as part of the educational process in pre-school childhood on the part of the educators, have repercussions on the learning of children of these ages, as evidenced by low levels in the development of basic motor skills, as well as the coordination capacities at the time of expressing their motor experiences and the levels in relation to group assimilation that allow the offering of help for the solution of tasks.

The elaboration of the training strategy, which contributes to the improvement of the management of the Physical Education area, as part of the educational process in preschool children, constitutes a necessary response, which is structured taking into account the following aspects: planning, general objective, diagnosis, execution of specific strategic actions and evaluation of the strategy.

The systemic and dynamic articulation between the aspects of the training strategy signifies a basic condition in the educational process of Physical Education in preschool children, which enables the educators to act as strategist in this area, through various forms of creation, so that they contribute to the cognitive, affective and motor development of these preschool children in the municipality of Pinar del Río.

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