

Free Play Activities in Finnish and Taiwanese Day Care Centers

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Introduction

- The cooperative project between Finland and Taiwan is to compare the differences of the two learning environments .
- Teachers evaluate the process quality of early childhood education .
- The main purpose of the paper is to compare children's free play activities of day care centers in the two countries.

Definition of free play activities

- Free play activities is a period that the children could engage in the activities of their choice.
- Activities are children-initiated.
- Teachers did not direct the activities.

Participants

- 3-6 year olds in day care centres

| Data Type | Taiwan | Finland | Total |
|-------------------|--------|---------|--------|
| Centres | 7 | 48 | 55 |
| Children | 490 | 892 | 1,382 |
| Observation data | 10,247 | 18,808 | 29,055 |
| Data of free play | 1,468 | 8,087 | 9,555 |

Research question

- What proportion of day care time is devoted to free play?
- What's the children's main action during free play?
- What are the children's objects of attention during free play ?
- What 's the children's mean physical activity level during free play?
- What is the main role of the teacher during free play ?

Observers

- Teachers observed children
- Teachers did not observe their own group
- Teacher observers required to attend training sessions

Data analysis

- Descriptive statistics: frequencies
- Chi square analysis

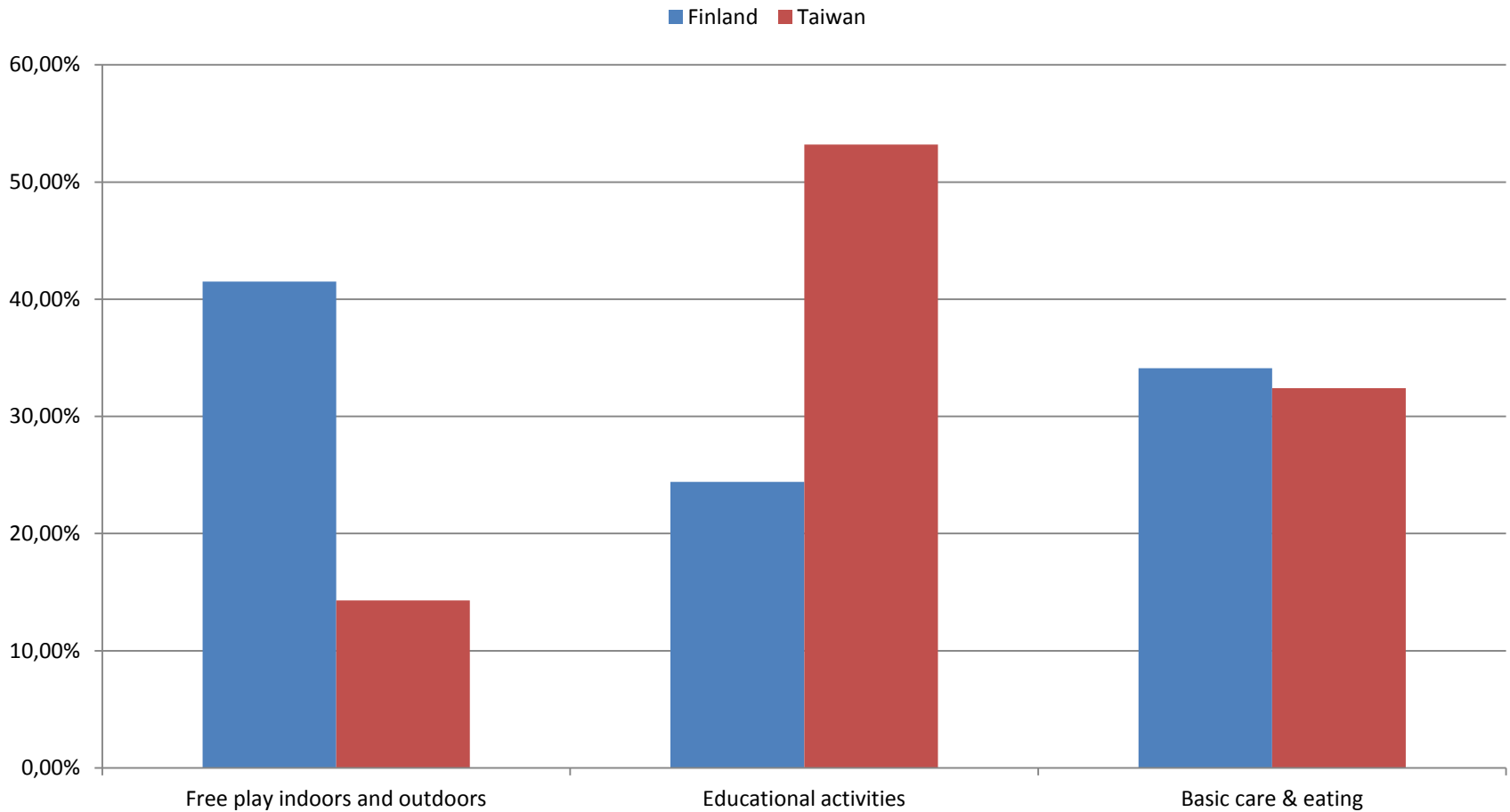
Research instrument

- Observation record sheet
- Observation item list :
 - What the child needs to do (7 items)
 - What the child chooses to do (11 items)
 - Child's main object of attention (5 items)
 - Child's physical activity level (3 levels)
 - Main action of nearest adult (6 items)

Sampling method

- Time sampling: observe child for 5 minutes then move on to next child
 - 2 minutes to locate child and determine main activity for entire group
 - 1 minute to observe child
 - 2 minutes to record
- Observation time: 8 am to noon
- Duration: 7 days within 6 or 7 months

Figure 1: Differences in general activities in Finnish and Taiwanese day care centers



Result and discussion

- Figure 1 shows that Finland has the greater proportion of free play(41.5%).
- There is more educational activities than free play in Taiwan data, with direct education and scaffolded activities taking the largest amount of time(53.2%).

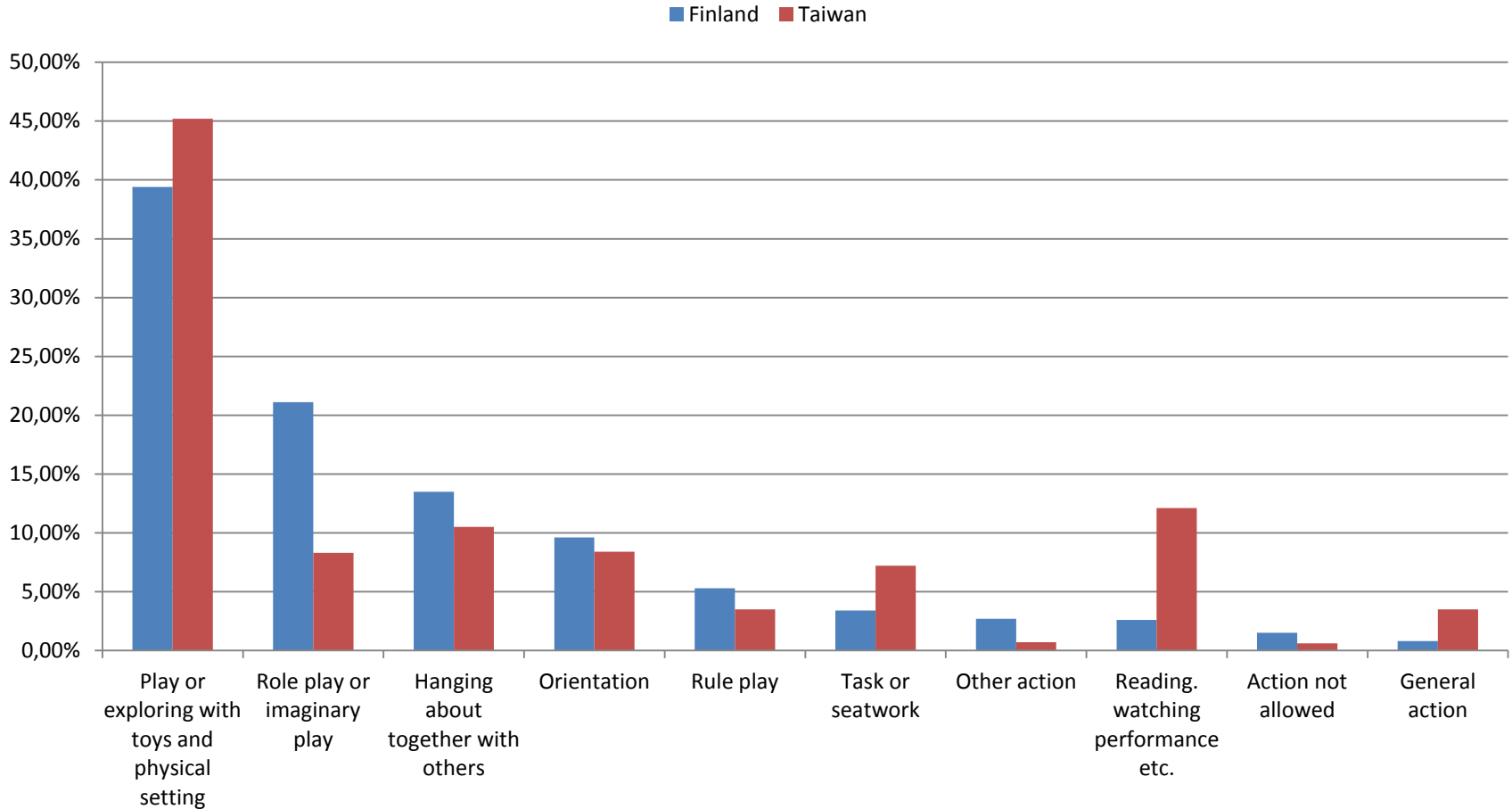
Discussion and reflection

- Finnish day care centers value free play as a important learning experience.
- The Taiwan data show a more structured curriculum that emphasize teacher planning and directed activities.
- Taiwan teachers may need to re-examine the role of free play in the curriculum and consider loosening the heavily teacher guided structure to give children more space for autonomous learning.

Discussion and reflection

- Policy difference :
 1. National curriculum guidelines on early childhood education and care in Finland(2005)
 2. National new curriculum guidelines on Early childhood education and care in Taiwan(2012)

Figure 2. Differences in children's main action during free play



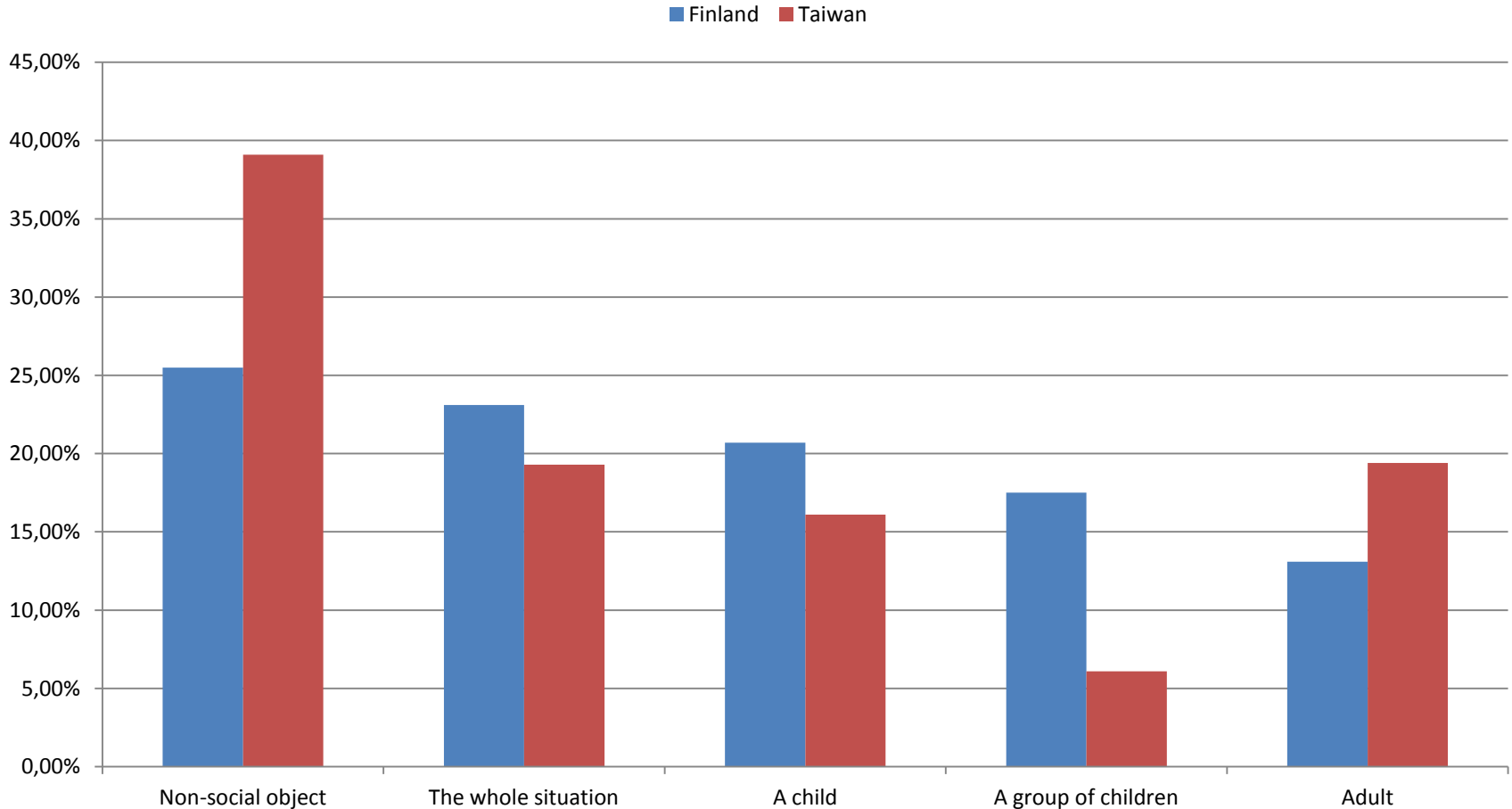
Discussion and reflection

- Figure 2 shows that most children choose to play with available toy and materials, and to explore the physical setting , with a significant highly percentage for participating children.
- There are more role play or imaginary play in Finnish children's free play activities, and Taiwan children choose more reading activities.

Discussion and reflection

- Although free play means that the child is the initiator, the learning environment is still designed by the teacher.
- Teachers should consider the types of facilities, objects and materials that would affect what children choose to do and stimulate their deeper involvement during free play, for example, materials for role play.

Figure 3 Differences in children's objects of attention during free play



All differences are statistically significant

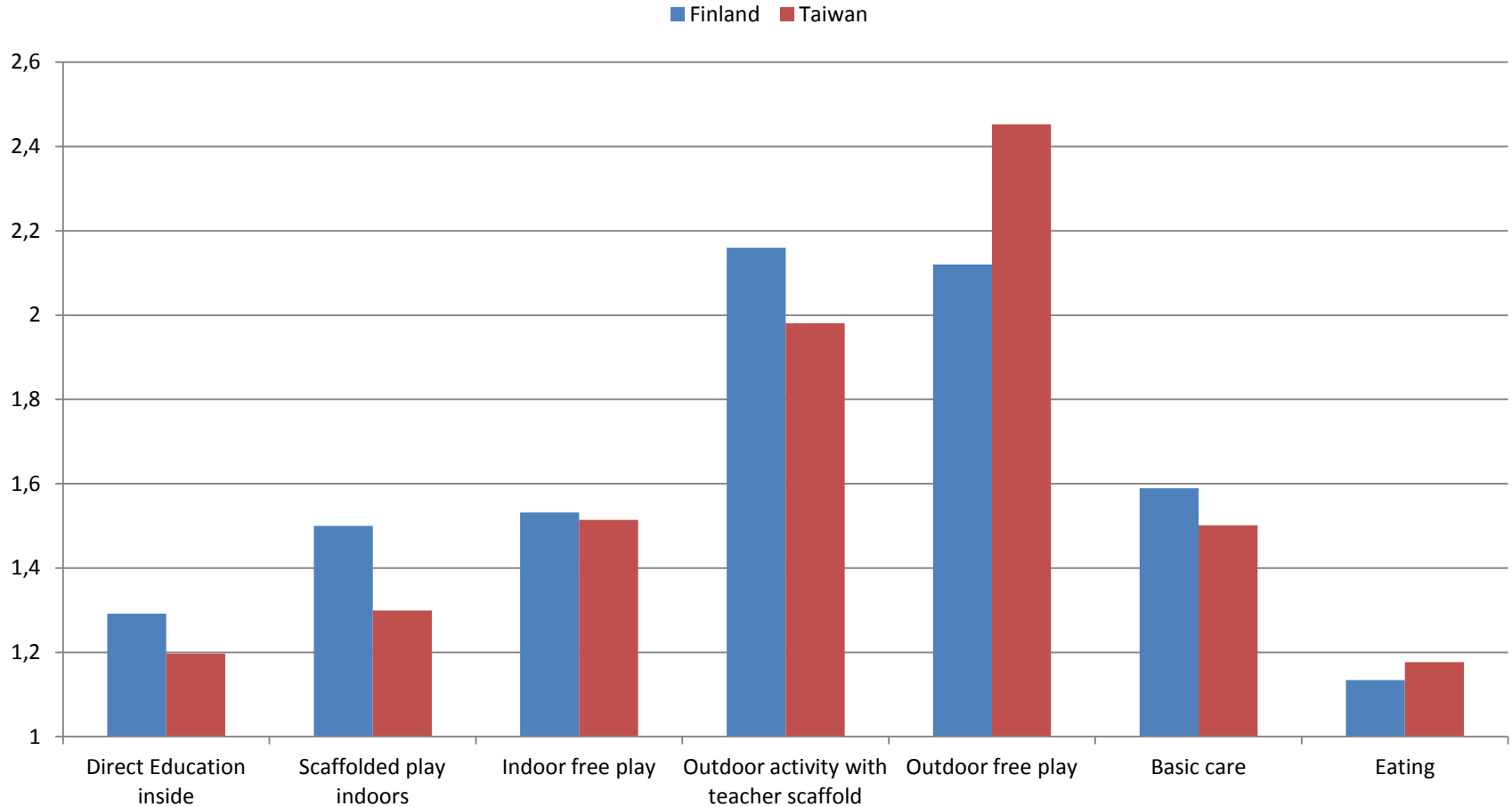
Discussion and reflection

- Figure 3 shows that Taiwanese children's free play are highly object-oriented. They attended to non-social objects such as toys, sand, cars, blocks, significantly higher than Finnish children.
- Finnish children are more social-oriented than Taiwanese counterparts. They attended more to their peers, significantly higher than Taiwanese children.

Discussion and reflection

- Social-oriented play provides a unique and important context for children to promote basic social skills, social-cognitive, and emotional development.
- Equipment and materials should encourage the engagement of more than one child for promoting social-oriented play (Johnson, Christie & Wardle, 2005).
- Do classroom rules influence children's social interaction?

Figure 4. Children's mean physical activity level in general action



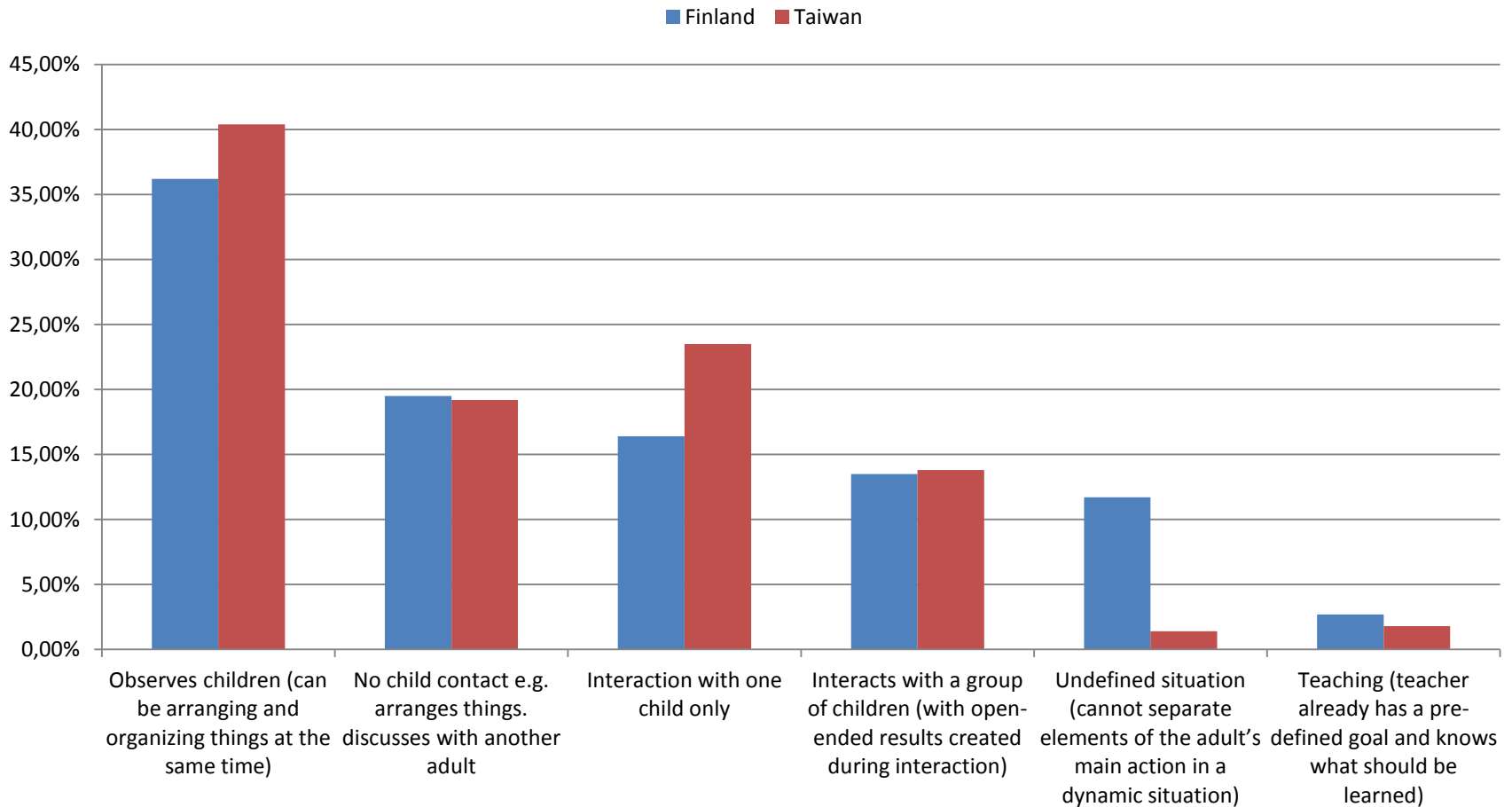
Discussion and reflection

- Figure 4 shows that Taiwan children's physical activity reach a high level is during outdoor play. The only time their activity level is significantly higher than Finnish children is during outdoor free play.
- Taiwanese children, who engaged in outdoor free play much less often than Finnish children, had high levels of physical activity for 56.5% of the time sampled. Such activities included running, romping, and activities that call for high physical exertion.

Discussion and reflection

- It is possible that high physical activity level for Taiwan might be related to the children spent so little time outdoors they have less time to discharge their energy.
- The result provides early childhood educators reflecting on the value of outdoor free play in physical education of day care center.

Figure 5. Teachers' role during free play



Discussion and reflection

- Figure 5 shows that the main action of teachers was child observation during free play time.
- Taiwan teachers had higher proportions of interaction with children.

Practical application

- Give feedback to day care teachers based on the results
- Developmental task: Teachers decide
- Teachers can work for better early childhood education according to the research data.

Outdoor free play in Finland



Teachers decide to change daily schedule of day care center in Taiwan



Statistical significance

Free_not * Country Crosstabulation

% within Country

| | | Country | | Total |
|----------|--------------------------------|---------|--------|--------|
| | | Finland | Taiwan | |
| Free_not | Free play indoors and outdoors | 41,5% | 14,3% | 32,2% |
| | Educational activities | 24,4% | 53,2% | 34,3% |
| | Basic care & eating | 34,1% | 32,4% | 33,5% |
| Total | | 100,0% | 100,0% | 100,0% |

Chi-Square Tests

| | Value | df | Asymp. Sig. (2-sided) |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|----|-----------------------|
| Pearson Chi-Square | 3186,000 ^a | 2 | ,000 |
| Likelihood Ratio | 3316,119 | 2 | ,000 |
| Linear-by-Linear Association | 666,476 | 1 | ,000 |
| N of Valid Cases | 29854 | | |

a. 0 cells (0,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3297,46.

The amount of observations in different activities in Fi & Tw

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---------|--------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Free play indoors and outdoors | 9606 | 32,2 | 32,2 | 32,2 |
| | Educational activities | 10236 | 34,3 | 34,3 | 66,5 |
| | Basic care & eating | 10012 | 33,5 | 33,5 | 100,0 |
| | Total | 29854 | 100,0 | 100,0 | |
| Missing | System | 2 | ,0 | | |
| Total | | 29856 | 100,0 | | |

The amount of children in Finland and Taiwan

Day care c. (Fi), Childminder (Fi), Day care c. (Tw) * Country Crosstabulation

Count

| | | Country | | Total |
|--|----------------------|---------|------|-------|
| | | 1,00 | 2,00 | |
| Day care c. (Fi), Childminder (Fi), Day care c. (Tw) | Day care center (Fi) | 838 | 0 | 838 |
| | Childminder (Fi) | 54 | 0 | 54 |
| | Day care center (Tw) | 0 | 490 | 490 |
| Total | | 892 | 490 | 1382 |