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### **Movement as relations – preverbal, conscious and affected?**

The relationship between physical activity and health has received widespread attention, but despite its documented health effects, physical activity is reduced among the general population, including among children (Aadland et al. 2019). The search for measurable knowledge about children's movement in sports and physical activity is well-established, and this field of study provides an important foundation for this chapter. However, this chapter also poses a challenge to the traditional mode of thought on the subject. Rather than suggesting improvement (Schües, 2014) or an increase in measured effects and outcomes that indicate how children, (in our study aged 0-10 years,) can become more physically active and participate more in sports, I believe it might be more fruitful to turn the question around and look at it from the other side. How do children *learn* to become inactive these days? Do adults (researchers, professionals, and politicians), look at children's movement through a lens of anxiety about inactivity or do they see it as a recourse for discovery and vitality? I do not believe the response to this question can truly be reduced to an either/or answer, but my intention in this chapter is to present a way of understanding children as *lived bodies*. This entails giving movement its due as children's primary mode of being in the world. By adopting this stance, the chapter aims to *complement* the field with knowledge and experience of bodies as a way of being-in-the-world (as subjects), intertwined with cultural discourses.

During the first ten years of life, children are in a constant state of development, socialization and education, subjected to institutional norms and structural frameworks for rights, ownership and participation in a range of different arenas. From a phenomenological perspective, children's movement is a personal, relational, and expressive phenomenon, as well as a fundamental human resource (Bjorbakmo & Engelsrud 2011). Phenomenologically speaking, being a child (or an adult, for that matter) is synonymous with *being in movement*. Giving movement value as a resource means allowing children to live and be engaged in movement as a way of *being-in-the-world*. It means seeing children's movements as a "journey of discovery", a series of explorations that unfold in the course of the embodied processes of being in movement: experiencing, finding meaning in and discovering one's own resources, both alone and in relation to others.

## **The lived body as the subject and object of movement**

Historically there has been a wide variety of ways to treat newborns, ranging from separating mother and child immediately after birth in a hospital, to placing a premium value on touch and continuous bodily contact between the child and its caregiver (mother). From a phenomenological perspective, every human's body resonates with its environment and conveys a direct experience of itself and the world; this is a fundamental premise for development and growth. Even before children can clearly express themselves verbally, they develop feelings, thought, language and reflections through a process of discovery based on movement (Bainbridge Cohen 2018). Bodily communication through sound, touch and the senses exist in the dialectic relation between body and language: the body is the anchor for speech. The ways in which adults and caregivers use language influences a child's experience of the body (Engelsrud, Øien & Nordtug 2018). When caregivers recognize this influence, it may lead them to speak to and about the child as a body subject and value all expressions as ways of being in the world. Consistent with this premise, a child's movement is the foundation of their experience throughout childhood, (as well as during adolescence). As children develop and the lived body becomes the basis for speech, the moving body will continue to be a source of both unspoken, nonverbal communication and explicit, verbal communication and action. The moving body exists in a receptive/passive state intertwined with an active/intentional state. Together these states of movement further form the movement patterns that children develop in cultural communities (Rogoff 2003). Sports and physical activities are culturally fields with their own sets of norms and values that help form expectations of how children should move.

### ***Somebody always experiences movement.***

One of the central perspectives on movement, according to Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen (2018), Maxine Sheets Johnstone (2018) and Sondra Horton Fraleigh (1995), among others, is that *somebody always experiences movement*. Movement is not an isolated noun or object, in itself, but always experienced from a *first-person perspective*. The subject registers movement as kinaesthesia, tactility and affectivity. The three researchers I mentioned above believe that we all *are* moving, touching and feeling beings. The tactile-kinaesthetic body grounds us in the world. Bainbridge Cohen (ibid) and Sheets Johnstone (ibid) also both view movement through the neurocellular patterns that underlie and organize movements. The

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nature of movement is a complex combination of the personal and intersubjective. As Sheets Johnstone (2018 p 3) writes; “We are indeed animate beings, beings that are not just alive, but moving, touching, feeling beings. If we have lost touch with being animate – not to mention if our socio-political world lacks bodily resonance...” She claims that society has “forgotten the tactile-kinesthetic-affective body and its inherent qualitative dynamic realities” (p 4.) Both Sheets Johnstone and Bainbridge Cohen, as well as Horton Fraleigh, remind us to regard children as *moving subjects, surrounded and affected by the movements of others, as well as movement cultures.*

Another of Bainbridge Cohen’s seminal concepts is the recognition of movement as preverbal. Even in the embryological stage, movement develops, informs and structures life and experience. According to Cohen, the newborn orients her/himself towards others and the world through movement patterns that “originate from our cells and fluids; from the energy of the cosmos itself,” (2018, viii). She describes movement as “journeys of discovery,” a series of explorations that unfold in embodied processes of being in movement: experiencing, finding meaning and discovering individual resources, both alone and in relation to others. The body resonates with the environment and conveys a direct experience of itself and the world. Basic neurocellular patterns are potential patterns of movement that depend on stimuli and environment to emerge. It is only through movement that they manifest and become part of our repertoire of action and being in the world with others.<sup>1</sup>

Vibration is the expansion and contraction of rhythmic waves. Vibration occurs in the living body already in the earliest stages of childhood and continues into what Bainbridge Cohen (ibid) calls cellular breathing, which according to her is the basis of a life-producing pattern. Pulsation and rhythm are core movement qualities that exist within and between lived bodies as essential non-verbal experiences. For a child, there are no sharp boundaries between their own body and the body of another. The newborn does not differentiate between scratching her own skin or her mother’s, they are experienced as one body, although separated. In addition to vibration and cellular breathing, Bainbridge Cohen (ibid) includes sponging, pulsation, navel radiation, mouthing and the prespinal as different modes of movement in the development of the human body from the very earliest stages. “We are always within a vibrational field that

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<sup>1</sup> Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen is a central author and reference for the knowledge base in this article. She has produced numerous articles and books. Her latest book is *Basic Neurocellular Patterns: Exploring Developmental Movement.* (2018). El Sobrante: Burchfield Rose Publishers.

encompasses the space and time of our existence. The field itself has no beginning, no ceasing. It simply is - continually changing changelessness” (Bainbridge Cohen 2018 p. 10). From this perspective, the movement of the child is deeply entwined with their surroundings, including human relationships. A child's bodily resonance gives them awareness, it tells them if they are being recognized, made to feel welcome, or not. Their body reacts to this information, these vibrations, with comfort or discomfort, calm or insecurity. Deep human knowledge lives and is expressed in the body. Gradually after birth, movement is directed more towards the world, toys, space, materiality and other people. Moreover, at the same time the child’s surroundings influence their movements. Experienced mothers describe their children responding to names and able to correspond movement with speech from a very early stage (for example, a baby can hear the question “where is dad,” and point in the right direction<sup>2</sup>). Well before they have achieved full powers of speech, children can understand verbal language spoken by family members and others with whom they have a close personal relationship. In the words of the philosopher Edmund Husserl (as quoted by Morley, 2008 p.152,) the body exists at a corporeal “zero point” which is “the bearer of the here and now.” In other words, we can view the *child as a living body that expresses its present meaning in all situations*. (Engelsrud, Øien & Nordtug 2018). Being present in one’s body together with others indicates the relevance for a *relational understanding* of children’s movement. In the words of Fuchs (2016 p 165), "It is mainly *bodily resonance* which conveys an intuitive understanding of others' emotions in our embodied engagement with them”. Fuchs, together with Hanne De Jaegher (2009) developed the concept of *participatory sense making*, arguing that being in the world in specific and concrete situations is both subjective and intersubjective. *Participatory sense making* refers to the way that people participate in each other's life with their own subjectivity expressed through the body, action and speech. In the context of this chapter, we can say that children participate with bodily subjectivity in producing knowledge.

The first ten years of a person’s life are extraordinarily eventful, developmentally speaking. During the early stages of this period, children move from a symmetrical and homologous pattern to an asymmetrical and homo/contralateral one. They find their way, using support

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<sup>2</sup> See also Trevarthen C. (2011). What is it like to be a person who knows nothing? Defining the active intersubjective mind of a newborn human being. *Infant Child Dev.* 20 119–135. 10.1002/icd.689 Findings from how neonatal selves coordinate the rhythms of their movements and senses, and how they engage in intimate and seductive precision with other persons' movements, sensing their purposes and feelings.

(from the floor) and reaching out (into space) to learn to stand, walk, run and jump with a wide range of movement qualities. Suominen (2018) conducted a study in which she explored the movement perspectives of 10-year-olds who participate in a school-based intervention program. Suominen pays attention to *the affective aspects of their movement*, as well as how and why the children wish to move and what they do, think and experience in movement. Additionally, she investigates how their actions, ideas and experiences vary over time and in different contexts where they encounter descriptions, rules and instructions. Her study shows that children like variation in movement. She identified some conflict or reciprocal interplay between rules, descriptions and instructions on the one hand, and children's own "natures", desires, interests and ideas on the other. She also discovered varying degrees of balance and imbalance between pacifying structural forces and children's own agency, growth and development. The children explain that they prefer being in motion to sitting at their desks. Although children want to move, they experience many activities as boring and repetitive with little opportunity to follow their own sensations and interests. (p.3). Suominen concludes her study with a recommendation that schools which desire to provide children with learning environments for movement that are both socially safe and supportive should be aware of the tensions and ambivalence that inevitably arise when children are in motion, whether alone or together with others.

Beni et al. (2018) and Suominen (2018) emphasize that the experience of *meaningfulness* in movement relates to social interactions. Movement and meaning are social, experiential phenomena that arise in and from a lived, sensing and sensible body that is always engaged in learning processes, both formal and informal. The concept of meaningful movement therefore indicates an intention to see every child as a person who knows and learns (this perspective is nearly absent in literature about sedentary behavior and physical activity). This differs from a more traditional perspective in which moving and a specific learner who learns from a first-person perspective must perform learning. Meaningful movement requires us to think about how the child as knower engages with the known, and it implies that children can learn to value their own engagement with themselves in the process of *the being of learning*, based on an ontological understanding of human knowing and human bodily existence.

Sports and physical activity are a field of human knowledge where children *always learn* through movement. Put in a different way, it is impossible *not* to learn through movement. Throughout our lives, we are constantly learning. Paradoxically, as Hanne de Jaegher (2019)

has observed, we gain relatively little knowledge about what is most important for us in life through education or research. As she argues, the most sophisticated *human knowing* lies how people engage with each other, in relating. Awareness of the emotions, thoughts and sensations that generate diverse moving experiences requires not just a knowledge object, but also a “learning subject.” Learning about oneself in relation to others is implicit in movement, sports and physical activity. When relating to others, a child can gain awareness—consciously or subconsciously—of how their movements are embedded in power structures and values. Exposing oneself to others can have many possible “outcomes” for the child. These outcomes can shape a child’s identity and indeed the course of their lifetime. In sports and physical activity contexts, children may feel “forced” to learn. Human beings are “doomed to be learners—we cannot avoid accumulating an enormous amount of learning throughout our life. Furthermore, in contemporary societies, we are also forced to learn. In nearly all countries, compulsory education lasts for several years and in addition we must all learn a great deal of things to deal with our daily life.” (Illeris, 2007/2017, p. 1). Not everything that children are “forced” to learn has a salutary effect on them. I will explore the dark side of learning in greater depth in the next section.

### **When children learn that their own movements do not matter**

As Azzarito argued (2012) and Hill and Azzarito (2011) have pointed out, learning subjects may learn that some people consider their movement to be “low,” or “inferior,” and they may even learn to share this opinion. The idea of inferior movement indicates a disparity between the type or quality of movement that a person values or aspires to achieve, and the reality of the movement that a body enacts. There are numerous unintended and informal ways that movement is count and valued both in institutional and daily life. Children learn about the emotional experience and social status that bodies can acquire in physical activity and sport. Neglect of own value, discrimination, and feelings of exclusion/inclusion and power can be produced and played out in bodily relationships that involve a mutual exchange of power. What happens when we move together, breathe together—and for whom? When children move, they do so from within human relationships in which the participants can sense their relative values—they know when they are recognized and made to feel welcome, just as they know when they have become inconvenient and unwanted. This deep *human knowledge* lives and is expressed in the body, in movement, in the gaze and the breath, as well as in language. One girl I interviewed expressed a feeling that I’ve encountered many times over the years.

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“It doesn’t matter what I do, or if I try,” she said. “I can’t seem to learn to move the ‘right’ way [in my instructed movement lessons,] everyone thinks I’m just ‘one of the passive girls.’” Through her participation in movement classes, this girl acquired insight and developed an acute perception of how *her teacher saw her, and how she saw herself in this situation*. Her bodily perception is an example of deep human knowledge, a human knowledge she had acquired through the movement discourse and relationships. The informal, non-formal and even undesirable aspects of movement learning are described as "the dark side" of learning, noted by Andreassen, Lysgaard, Bengtsson and Hauberg-Lund Laugesen (2019), “Dark pedagogy” is a name for what people learn that they would prefer not to know. For example, they might learn that others do not recognize the value of their movement, their body. Participating in sports and physical activity can sometimes reveal a discrepancy between a person's self-perception and the formal aspects of a learning situation. “Dark pedagogy” can result in a person denying their own feelings and existential bodily conditions if others devalue their movements. These negative learning situations are highly relevant to a thorough understanding of children’s movement. Therefore, to study how the cultural and institutional values that give context to developmental movement patterns is essential. However, simply studying learning contexts as they are may is not enough—steps can be taken to improve a learning environment and make it more positive for the learners. In the next section, I propose the inclusion of ethical communication in sports and physical activity to support children in movement and help them see that they are “good as they are” (Engelsrud 2006).

### **Letting the other be**

The credos "let the other be" and "be enactive" have a relevance to bodily learning and children’s movement. In her article *Intercorporeality, Intersubjectivity and the Problem of "Letting Others Be,"* Kym Maclaren (2002) invites us to explore the possibilities for deep human knowledge that arise from "letting the other be." If she is correct, then adults and professionals together with children (0-10) can learn to see the children as receptive and in “passive presence,” and recognize the importance of “letting them stay as they are.” This will allow the children to be at ease in the state they are in without trying to transform them into a pre-conceived notion of the way movers should act. Adopting a philosophy of "letting others be" would help us as educators to provide students with peace of mind recognize them in all their differences and get them involved as they are. This requires receptivity, in a bodily and reflective sense.

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“Letting someone be” is not at all the same as not caring, on the contrary, it indicates a deep respect for each child’s bodily actions and movements. An adult professional trainer who lets children be is well equipped to notice and respond to behaviors such as retreating, not answering a question or thinking about the next break. Gaining insight into the nuances of the children’s world provides a deeper understanding of each student as a unique human being in a specific context. This kind of knowledge goes beyond learning goals and meeting assessment criteria. Instead, deep knowledge reveals the complexities of experience. One child said, “I am always a little ahead of myself, it’s hard to be here and now.” She was not describing what she was learning, but how she learns (or does not learn) it. Access to the world of personal experience gives parents and teachers the opportunity to understand the child as an individual human being. This information is difficult or impossible to measure or quantify, but it can be an essential tool for an adult/teacher seeking to give children the best possible learning environment. Participation in a learning environment with one’s own subjectivity expressed via the body’s communication with other bodies and the symbiotic development give potential for further action and verbalization. Put another way, bodily learning takes place through engaging with one’s own bodily subjectivity in interaction with others. We must learn to perceive things and people in ways that allow them to be.

Being in human relationships is an essential precondition for bodily learning. This is the gist of the concept of *interkinaesthetic affectivity*, as described by Benkhe (2008). According to her, kinaesthetic experience flows through and inside the body and can provide a point of entry to the notion that the interkinaesthetic field is the basis for being alive and aware.

Like these researchers, I believe that the idea of “letting the other be” means simply seeing children as moving bodies, the way they *are*. In contrast, prevailing practice views individuals according to the way we would like them to be or how we would like them to move. A sport may claim that children should move in a specific way and try to transform children into a homogeneous group, or it may view movement from the “outside”. “Letting others be” allows children to achieve *peace of mind in the moment* and be recognized and recognize themselves in all their differences, as well as their potential similarities to classmates. Learning to appreciate whatever happens and *just be* can be a struggle. Maclaren (2002) argues that letting things be is not a spontaneous approach. In teaching PE, we must reorient our habit bodies. The habit body might resist its own wellbeing, by causing a teacher to hold her breath,

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experience tension and not revealing itself. Can we encourage children students to learn to *follow their own movement?*

Maclaren also writes that we will “never escape the struggle by which we learn to let any particular other be and find our own free space in relation to her” (2002 p. 188).

There are several important concepts to glean from this. First, Maclaren makes the point that learning to let others be must be a bodily learnt and not a purely intellectual achievement. If our primary concern in sport and physical activity is short-term achievement outcomes in measurable skills, then “letting others be” might create some dilemmas. However, ideally, being physically active should contribute to long-term joy of movement. Having that as a goal would deepen the argument for the relevance of children’s bodily learning in sports and physical education. According to Kym Maclaren’s argument, the process towards achieving this must be understood to be propelled by both the particular way in which we are intertwined with others and the implicit metaphysics, that *each of us has come to enact in our bodily taking up of the world, ourselves and others*” ( *ibid.* p 188).

One argument against adopting a “letting others be” approach is that this method of teaching remains relatively underexplored; it is unthematized, compared to the enactive approach. However, the danger of ignoring the sensing, sensory, somatic and perceiving body and the children’s self-organizing potential is that it tends to reduce their movements to a means of “fixing oneself”. The argument formulated by Maclaren inspires us to revise thinking of the body as an “instrument” or as a static object that professionals in sport and physical activity instruct to move in predictable ways. According to Fuchs (2013), to ensure the recognition of the body as a subject, the enactive concept must not exhaust the possibilities of empathic understanding and intersubjectivity. He argues that primary bodily empathy enables us to be able to imagine or to question the other’s situation. This happens when the behavior of others seems ambiguous or leads to irritation or a misunderstanding. Such situations can be excellent tools for learning “to let the other be.” In these cases, neither life nor research can provide objective knowledge about children; only our own perspective can tell us what we wish to know. To understand children’s movement, one needs to “take the child in”. This requires *receptivity*, which is more a physical state than an intellectual one. Participation in sports and physical activity (and education) involves a continuous tension between opposing attitudes: “letting the other be” and “enacting.” Recognizing this interaction is particularly important because it is easy to overlook the “letting be” aspect of children’s movement. This can be

seen by the volume of the research literature written about the enactive style, compared with the relative paucity of research on “letting the other be.”


### **Conclusion:**

I have described children’s movement as a series of complex “journeys of discovery,” in which they are both challenged and stimulated. I elaborated on this concept by calling attention to the ambiguities that arise from children’s embodied being. Problematizing these assertions, we discussed how children encounter a multitude of different ideas about how they move or are expected to move in the varying contexts of sports, physical education and daily life. We are encouraged to ask how they experience relationships, environments and ideas, as well as their own agencies, intentions and desires. We might use this perspective to discuss some of the challenges and possibilities that we face as researchers in our efforts to enrich our general understanding of children at different ages and in different social positions.

Ideally, all of the qualities involved in balancing solidity and liquidity in movement should be present in the sport and physical activity, and when teachers and adults engage with children. As children begin developing embodied ways of being even before birth, and this movement pattern will, in the normal course of things, continue to evolve throughout infancy, there is a huge movement repertoire that the child can use to learn about him/herself in relation to others. My goal for engaging in research about teaching and understanding children’s movement is to learn to perceive the body as educational and dynamic, rather than to “use” the body as an “instrument” or a static object to be made to move in predictable ways. Instead of steering children towards defined skills and physical activities, I have argued for encouraging expressivity, spontaneity, ownership and the freedom to move with reference to a pre-professional bodily relationship that we acquire in our own lives, our own history and our relations with others and ourselves. Children’s movement relates to human wisdom, in the sense that it is a relationship between *bodily perception and sensory receptivity* on the one hand, and *bodily action* on the other. I have argued that there are no sharp boundaries between our own body and the bodies of others. The argument in this article is that when children participate in sports, they also participate in each other's lives through their own subjectivity, expressed through their body, action and speech. Moving involves relationships, rather than directly measurable knowledge. However, since measurable knowledge about movement, sports and physical activity is a well-established field that will continue to exist, the challenge is to *complement* that field with knowledge and experience of bodies as a particular,

subjective way of being-in-the-world: a dynamic state of being in constant interplay with dominant cultural discourses as well as personal surroundings, evolving from moment-to-moment. Our greatest task as teachers and learners must be to encourage this expressivity, spontaneity, and freedom to move, think and learn.

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