

Being Pulled into the Drama - How Early Childhood Educators Motivate Children by Way of Bodily Contact and Movements

Ole Lund*

Faculty of Education and Social Studies, VIA University College, Aarhus

*Corresponding author: ollu@via.dk

Abstract Movement lies at the core of what it means to be human. Our most primary mode of relating to others is by way of movement. However, existing research literature has not sufficiently investigated the role of bodily interaction in the promotion of motivation in kindergartens. Typically, verbalised and intellectualised communication is emphasised with less attention paid to what can be communicated by way of bodily movements. The purpose of this article is the promotion of motivation in concrete bodily interactions between educators and children during educator-controlled activities. The study is based on a fieldwork study conducted in a Danish kindergarten. Two examples from this study are used to illustrate the profound and dramatic effect bodily interactions can have on children's motivations. The study concludes that educators' bodily 'manipulative' and dramatised engagement with children during pedagogical activities can be an effective and profound way of affecting children's immediate experiences and motivations for participating.

Keywords: *motivation, kindergarten, pedagogy, movement, embodiment, body manipulation, suspense, fieldwork, educator participation*

Cite This Article: Ole Lund, "Being Pulled into the Drama – How Early Childhood Educators Motivate Children by Way of Bodily Contact and Movements." *American Journal of Educational Research*, vol. 5, no. 12 (2017): 1200-1207. doi: 10.12691/education-5-12-5.

1. Introduction

The term motivation originates among other things from the old French term *motif*, i.e. moving and from the Medieval Latin term *motivus*, i.e. moving or impelling. This suggests that bodily movement lies at the core of what it means to be motivated. Also, to be motivated is often related to the feeling of being put in motion like being drawn to, animated or affected by something or someone. These etymological understandings indicate that motivation is about attending to the body in motion and that such attention may emerge from moving one's body or being set in motion (kinaesthetically, affectively and existentially) by others and the environment. This paper intends to explore these aspects of the motivational process in the context of kindergarten.

Common assumptions within studies of children's motivation is that excessive educator-control and regulation risk draining children's motivation, as it may make children feel that behaviours are imposed on them [1]. This does not mean that educators are recommended to stand back and not intervene in children's activities, but typically bodily restricted forms of intervention are suggested such as oral manipulations ([2], p. 127). That is, standing on the sidelines advising and explaining how and why children should participate in certain activities and leaving it up to the children to put the educator's words into practice.

Thus, common ways of thinking about motivation seem to encourage educators to motivate children through verbal encouragements and explanations [3], but at the same time encourage them to be inattentive to the possibilities of promoting motivation by way of bodily *manipulations* [4], i.e. the ways educators may operate on and affect children's immediate perceptions and feelings with bodily contact and movements.

Although, experienced educators may intuitively recognise the importance of relating to children with contact and movement, not much attention is given to how this may affect children's motivation. Some studies emphasise the importance of being an inspiring motivational role model [3] or organising environments of challenge and flow [1,5]. However, these studies do not go into detail with how a role model should touch or move children, nor how an educator's movement and bodily manipulations can inspire challenging, suspenseful and absorbing situations. According to Brinkmann [6], a child's motivation is not only a mental state that is influenced through coaching and pep talks. To motivate is to flesh out the current environment surrounding an activity, so the children immediately experience it as meaningful, attractive and inviting. According to Bjørgen [7], educators may play a significant role in children's involvement in physical activities – when educators are being playful in a sensitive and stimulating way. The energy radiating from their expressions and movements as they take part in the activities are likely to rub off on the

children, and thereby affect their motivation [8]. In the context of physical education in schools, Andersson et al. [9] identify different techniques of bodily contact, such as “the denotative touch” (ways of touching that will encourage children to attend certain movement qualities) or “the relational touch” (ways of touching that make children feel recognised and acknowledged), which educators may use to affect children’s immediate experiences during movement activities. These techniques are not directly related to the promotion of children’s motivation, but indicate that being in close bodily contact with children may be effective in influencing children’s feelings about pedagogical activities. Andersson et al. show that touching a child may infuse ambiguity in the interactions between children and educator, because the educator’s touching can be interpreted in many different ways and ultimately runs the risk of being interpreted as a sexual advance. However, the present study looks at this ambiguity from another angle and argues that creating ambiguity or uncertainty by way of bodily interaction may also be important in educators’ efforts to promote excitement and motivation.

Educators may feel reservations against engaging in close bodily interactions with children as they may feel that they run the risk of restricting the children’s autonomy and thus their motivation [1]. In the Danish kindergarten tradition, this may also be related to the widely assumed ideal that free play in the sense of free of adult observation and intervention is important if the children are to get the full benefit of their play activities ([10], p. 459). Also, the prevailing and internally persuasive logics and discourses of our times may make educators favour ‘brain-based’ activities, control, risk avoidance and for instance encourage children to verbalise feelings (such as anger) instead of expressing it with their bodies [11]. Moreover, studies suggest that the focus on paedophilia has had a disciplining effect on educators predisposing them to interact with the children in more bodily restricted ways [11,12,13].

The present study is not about predatory touching or pedagogical violence, but instead, it explores and elaborates on how educators may affect children’s motivations for participating in pedagogical activities by way of bodily contact and movements. These are ways of motivating which do not primarily originate in educators’ attempts to verbally persuade and explain. Thus, the study aims to suggest a way to motivate children through bodily interaction as a professional tool of the educator.

2. A Body-oriented Characterisation of Motivation

Following a body-oriented characterisation, the state of being motivated cannot be properly understood without attending to the dynamic interplay between our body and the world, which lies at the core of what it means to be human, and which has fundamental influence on the way we experience our worldly surround ([14], p. 630). In this perspective, motivation has to be regarded as an embodied response to a concrete environment.

Established accounts of motivation often characterise the motivational process as a matter of reasoning - either

the reasoning that we inflict on ourselves or the reasoning that others may use to influence us. Thus, the promotion of motivation seems to be either a matter of intellectual influence or manipulation of the mind. Furthermore, the motivational process is often characterised as a matter of physiological and biochemical mechanisms, psychological needs, or external stimuli that force us to respond in predetermined ways time and time again. Thus, the development of motivation is thought to be “the blind and mechanistic workings of material causality” ([15], p. 111). Phenomenologists [14,15,16,17] claim it to be reductive to characterise motivation as either a matter of reasoning or causality. Such characterisations neglect the embodied constitution of experience and presuppose that the human body is only understood and experienced in physiological and objective terms ([14], p. 626). According to a phenomenological characterisation of motivation, the body must be acknowledged for playing an active role in the articulation of human experience, and therefore such characterisation has to depart in the non-intellectual and non-mechanistic meaningful relation that is constantly - and often silently - negotiated between our body and the world [14,16].

This also means that our motivation emerges from bodily felt meanings [15]. Situations draw our attention and spur our motivation, because our particular body-world-relation makes them feel fascinating and attractive. One may argue that the constant exchanges between our body and the world lay out “spaces of motivations” [17] that *moves* (and motivates) us rather than providing us with reasons for why we should move ([15], p. 118).

The work of Sheets-Johnstone [18,19] may help us reach a more detailed characterisation of the bodily felt meanings that seem to lie at the core of experiences of motivation. Sheets-Johnstone emphasises that human beings are fundamentally animate forms of life. Thus, our primary mode of relating to our surroundings and others is in and through movement. Therefore, our mother tongue is that of articulating movements and our primary consciousness is that of thinking in movement [19]. We are able to understand the world and others by way of movements, and this will often inform us in edifying ways. Even though we may only be marginally aware of it, an awareness of our own body-in-motion is an insuppressible fact of life ([18], p. 46). But we do not experience the articulation of movements as isolated sensations. Instead, it melts into certain flows of movements or felt movement dynamics where particular areas may be tonally dominant in our awareness ([18], p. 65). Whether we brush our teeth, walk the stairs, dance, or play a game, our activity is always characterised and guided by felt movement dynamics, which are kinaesthetically present in our experience along the range of being marginal to salient. In habitual practices, we are most commonly only marginally aware of such kinaesthetic qualities. This may be one of the reasons why mundane practices may be experienced as trivial, unexciting, and – at times even - boring. In contrast, the following example, a description of rowing by veteran rower Craig Lambert, illustrates the state of being excited and deeply engaged in what one is doing:

“The boat is perfectly level. Set up beautifully, we skim the surface on an invisible laser beam running from horizon to horizon. There is no friction; we ride the

natural cadence of our strokes, a continuous cycle. The crew breathes as one. Inhale on the recovery, exhale as we drive our blades through the water; inspiration and expression. *In. Out.* Row with one body and so with one mind. Nothing exists but: Here. Now. This. Rushing water bubbles under our hull, as if a mountain brook buried within the Charles flows directly beneath us. I have never heard this sound before, but I know it means we are doing something right. Rowers have a word for this frictionless state: swing. The experience of swing is what hooks people on rowing. The appetite for swing is limitless.” (Lambert 1998, p. 124-125, quoted in [20], p. 263-264).

This shows that our experience of being deeply motivated may implicate a heightened awareness of and involvement in certain felt movement dynamics, which are enacted within our concrete activity environment.

The close relationship between motivation and movements may be further illustrated by the way Crossley explains Durkheim’s puzzlement about how ecstasy develops and spreads among a crowd of people:

“Durkheim writes with a sense of wonder at the manner in which a collective mood of excitement overtakes the participants in the aboriginal totemic festivals, in an almost magical way. Merleau-Ponty, in my view, offers an account of that magic, rooting it in the bodily nature of the rituals involved. By performing ‘ecstatic rituals,’ that is, rituals which mimic ecstasy, agents are able to tap into their corporeal potential for ecstatic ways of being, putting themselves into an ecstatic state. And they perform the ritual as a way of inducing the state.” ([21], p. 43)

As already suggested motivation cannot be produced by an act of will. Our motivation has roots in bodily processes that lie beyond our conscious awareness or control. And yet transitions in our motivation is not completely beyond our power ([15], p. 121). As the above quotation shows, we can attempt by indirect means to act upon these bodily processes and thereby trigger transitions in our state of being. This suggests that we may summon our own motivation in regard to some activity by way of movements and imitation, e.g. moving in accordance with the movement patterns and affective expressions of that activity, and by recalling and imitating the expressions and movements of previous situations in which we have been motivated by this or similar activities.

Wrathall ([15], p. 115) introduces another aspect to the characterisation of motivation by suggesting that situations become motivating because they are perceived as ambiguous and cannot be fully determined or intellectualised. The classic phrase from sport philosophy, “the sweet tensions of uncertainty of outcome” [22] clarifies how ambiguity becomes motivating. The phrase defines the suspense that athletes feel during their sport when they are faced with the uncertainty of a true challenge. This can be illustrated with the undecided, gridlocked, and tense moment when, during a tug of war, two teams counteract and even out the other team’s pulling. Such moments in which the outcome of the game is uncertain can give rise to felt tensions and suspense, and a captivating borderline-feeling of ‘I (or we)-may’ or ‘I (or we)-may-not’ succeed. Thus, when experiencing the sweet tensions of uncertainty of outcome, one lives ambiguously toward a challenge ([22], p. 25), balances on the borders between for instance ability and inability, comprehension and bewilderment, or comfort

and frustration. However, one precondition for this is that the outcome of the activity is perceived as being important [23] Meaning, the promises of the outcome concern us, and demand us to respond in ways that is perceived to satisfy this demand ([17], p. 584). This also suggests that our potential for being excited and motivated is closely related to the way incorporated capabilities and norms shape our perceptions [17].

The experience of sweet tensions of uncertainty is not specific to the conduct of sport. One may be caught up in similar sweet tensions of uncertainty when playing a game, watching a movie, reading a novel, or - as I suggest - when participating in pedagogical activities.

As already stated, motivation arises from the dynamic interplay between our body and the environment. Given that we are pre-thematically attuned to and concerned with the bodily expressivity of others, they seem to occupy a special place in our environment. We directly perceive intentions and feelings in their gestures and movements, which immediately affect the way we perceive the world [24,25]. Thus, our motivation is not only relative to what we as individuals can and do in a particular activity environment, but also relative to what the others - with whom we share the environment - can and do. As such, our space of motivations is founded on the way we immediately respond in expressions and movements to the expressions and movements of the others (and vice versa). This suggests that an educator’s bodily interactions with children may be an effective way of shaping and manipulating the space of motivations that children experience during pedagogical activities.

3. Methods

When it comes to exploring lived and existential phenomena, such as kindergarten children’s experiences of motivation, one must consider how to get access to such qualitatively felt experiences. At the heart of ethnographic methods lies the assumption that the fieldworker can get in touch with the lived experiences of other people by situating oneself in and exploring the ‘natural’ settings of these people [26]. Thus, being in the concrete practice and paying close attention to the ways educators and children interact were assumed to be suitable methods for exploring the aims of this study. The qualitative data was generated through a short-term ethnographic investigation [27]. This branch of the ethnographic tradition is characterised by focusing on selected and specified aspects of practice, and by creating depth of data in close dialog with theoretical concepts. Thus, the fieldwork of the present study was focused on exploring situations in which educators initiated pedagogical activities and on their ways of maintaining the children’s participation and engagement during these activities and, furthermore, on using the abovementioned theoretical insights as analytical entry points into the children’s lived experiences of motivation.

3.1. Selecting the Right Context

In the search for a kindergarten which would allow me to explore good practical examples of how educators may

influence children's motivation, I outlined the following selection criteria. The kindergarten had to: (1) have a high reputation among peers; (2) have a 'high performance', i.e. was acknowledged and recognised for creating an engaging environment for children; (3) allow me access.

BUPL (Danish Union of Early Childhood and Youth Educators) suggested two kindergartens, which they thought matched my search-criteria. I presented both of them with the study and invited them to participate and one agreed. The kindergarten is located in an older apartment block in the heart of Copenhagen. At the time of the fieldwork it housed 30 children and six educators (four were formally educated and permanently employed, two were temporarily employed assistants). The kindergarten is a self-governing institution with leadership shared by the permanently employed educators. The permanently employed educators had a large amount of experience with working in this institution. Two of them had worked in the institution since it was established in the 1970's.

3.2. The Fieldwork

I conducted the fieldwork over ten days in April and May 2016. I participated primarily as a passive to moderate participant [28], which meant I was primarily present as a bystander. During the fieldwork I was primarily looking for situations in which the children's motivation seemed to be influenced by the educators. Thus, I was looking for expressions of excitement and changes in the children's levels of engagement and participation. Inspired by my theoretical framework, I was particularly interested in the educators' ways of moving, gesturing, toning their voices, using eye-contact, and their ways of being in direct bodily contact with the children during these situations. Fieldnotes were taken at the time, mostly in the form of cues and short sentences, and these were further developed into more detailed descriptions within hours of making each observation. The detailed fieldnotes (73 single-spaced pages) also included preliminary theoretical reflections and reflections on my own participation in practice.

3.3. Analysis and Interpretation

After the fieldwork, I read through the fieldnotes multiple times. The intention was to achieve an overall feel for the wholeness of the material and to write down memos with preliminary interpretations and theoretical reflections [29]. These memos contained: further contextualisation of events; preliminary attempts to connect events across the material; and attempts to deepen the empirical observations by analysing them in context with theoretical questions [30].

During the circular process of reading fieldnotes and writing memos, I identified patterns in the ways the educators attempted to motivate the children and grouped excerpts and memos from the fieldnotes under overarching themes. Within this process, I chose to further explore and elaborate on themes such as 'dramatisation', 'physical scaffolding', and 'uncertainty' as these are rarely - or only superficially - related to the process of promoting motivation among kindergarten children within existing research literature. The analysis and interpretations in the

present study are not intended as definitive explanations; others might interpret the events differently. However, by going into depth with (under researched) aspects of a complex phenomenon, the study attempts to nuance and expand our popular ways of understanding the development of motivation and pose questions about our basic assumptions about this subject. Even though the interpretations are constructed, they should not be regarded as purely subjective fabrication or fiction. The interpretations reflect real observed situations and events. Furthermore, the interpretations were validated by inviting the educators of the kindergarten to comment on the interpretations in what could be described as member-checking [31]. Altogether, the educators confirmed the interpretations even though they remarked that I used uncommon words to describe their practices and, furthermore, that I sometimes was able to give words to practices that they had no words for.

3.4. Fieldwork Excerpts

In this section, I will present two illustrative and exemplary excerpts from the fieldwork study that show the bodily interactions between an educator and the children and how it affected the children's motivation for participating in the pedagogical activities.

3.4.1. Excerpt 1: Being Moved

During fieldwork I observed how the educators' bodily contact with children could facilitate participation in activities. I observed how the educators often supported children's performances physically. For example, one educator was seen stabilising a bike as one of the children rode without training wheels for the first time. This physical support not only seemed to expand the child's ability to ride, but also the child's interest in riding it.

In one remarkable example, an experienced male educator used touch and movement to affect a new boy's motivation for participating in a game of tag. The boy had his first day in the institution on the day prior to this situation. The boy had transferred from another institution in which he had posed too much of a challenge to the educators. Also, on this particular day, he had resisted the educators and some of the other children on several occasions:

We are in a nearby park. The educators have decided that the children should play tag. The experienced male educator approaches the new boy and briefly explains the rules of the game to him. Then, the educators and the children gather around the two chasers and begin to repeat a rhyme. The end of the rhyme tacitly marks the beginning of the game. The chasers remain standing counting to ten, while the other children run away - many screaming - and all of them trying to create distance between themselves and the chasers as fast as possible. Only the new boy hesitates. For a moment it is like he considers whether or not he should participate. The male educator sees this. He grabs the boy's hand and pulls him away from the chasers. Again and again, the educator looks back at the chasers while unreservedly yelling: "OH NO! OH NO! WE HAVE TO GET AWAY!". This does not seem to be an expression of actual anxiety or fear for the chasers, but rather a deliberate attempt to imitate such

experiences. They run hand in hand for a while and every time the chasers approaches, the educator starts to yell and imitate anxiety and fear. I notice that the boy starts to smile. A bit later, the educator has released his hold on the boy's hand. But the boy continues to run and seems preoccupied with the game and with avoiding and escaping the chasers (fieldnote).

The above excerpt indicates that the boy's level of participation and engagement was transformed, and not primarily by way of instruction and explanation. Instead, the transition in the boy's motivation for the game seemed to arise from the way the educator was in physical contact with the boy and his way of (literally) pulling the boy into the game, but also from his way of expressing and imitating what it means to be caught in the game.

3.4.2. Excerpt 2: Moving Dramatisations

As seen in the above example, dramatic vocal and bodily expressions seem to play an important part in the educator's efforts to create motivation. This may be further elaborated by using the example of improvised storytelling, an established routine at the institution. The stories often borrow elements from well-known fairy tales and the educator, the same experienced male from the previous example, always makes the children characters in the plot. The following example features one of the older boys in the institution. In the story, the boy ate a seed from an apple, which made an apple tree grow inside him:

The educator tells how branches with apples started to grow out of the boy's mouth, ears and nose, and how his dad hoped to make profit from selling the apples. In connection to this, the educator imitates the sound of bells of an antique cash register while mimicking the turning of the hand crank as a symbol for the thoughts that ran through the dad's head. The educator asks the children if they know what he is trying to express. The children immediately and impatiently reply "NO!?" The educator explains that it is a cash register. Later on, he talks about the amount of money that someone had offered the dad for the apples. Before revealing it, he pauses, leans forward, looks the children in the eyes, and raises his finger while accentuating and stretching his words: "... [HE] OFFER-ED HIM TWEN-TY-THOU-SAND KRONERS!" The children respond with a "WOWWWW!" that contagiously spreads among them. The educator pauses his flow of words, leans back, looks around, and silently observes the children's reactions. After a short while he raises his hand once again and with a clear and pitched intonation he continues the story (fieldnote).

The excerpt presents a situation in which the educator was not just telling the children his story in words, but also in expressions and movements. The latter happens in the educator's way of controlling the intonation of his voice, varying his tempo of speech, making breaks, and accentuating certain words or phrases; and in the educator's way of leaning forward (towards the children), attempting to establish eye-contact, and visualising the content of his speech with bodily gestures. It seems that these vivid and dynamic vocal and physical expressions enabled the educator to grab hold of the children's attention, piqued their curiosity, and made the story exciting. However, the above also indicates that the educator had to maintain contact with the children and

therefore carefully observe and attend to their responses and sense how he needed to express himself moment-to-moment in order to keep the children captivated by the situation.

4. Body-oriented Interpretations

I will now elaborate how the educator may affect motivation by way of physical contact and movements in the above examples. From this perspective, I suggest that the educator's pulling of the boy (in the first example) did not only cause the boy to run along in a behavioural sense, but the educator's movements became tonally dominant within the boy's perceptions of the situation. The educator's movements made claims on the boy's lived experience and directly shaped the bodily felt meanings that animated him in the situation. Thus, the pull not only seemed to be an effective way to attract the boy's attention to the game of tag, but furthermore, the pull provided the boy with a kinaesthetic experience of the basic movement patterns and dynamics that characterise the game. More specifically, the educator's way of pulling the boy away from the chasers seemed to insert the boy in an activity environment (or space of motivations) charged with contrasting forces of attraction and repulsion in between the chasers and the chased. Thus, the pulling made the boy experience what it feels like to be on the run and be repelled by the chasers. In addition, the educator's dramatised and emotionally charged expressions seemed to filter through to the boy, making him concerned with escaping the chasers and be aware of and be caught up in the uncertainties of the game.

In other words, the educator set the boy in motion and moved him in keeping with the social dynamics of the game and thus demonstrated in a bodily fashion how the boy could mimic and be a part of it. And, the educator fleshed out the game's drama, it's "in-play"-feeling ([32], p. 11) or "illusio" ([33], p. 156-163) by mimicking a deep-seated belief in the game, it's risks and promises. He thereby enabled the boy to enter the state of make believe that is necessary for playing along and be affected by the game's tensions of uncertainty. Additionally, I suggest that by lending the boy his hand, the educator provided the boy with access to the game and the feeling of being supported while he entered an activity environment occupied by an – thus far - unfamiliar group of children. It may have contributed to the boy experiencing the uncertainty of the game as *sweet* and attractive. In short, the educator's ways of touching and moving the boy can be seen as an attempt to make the boy feel, in a tangible and existential way, what it meant to be caught up in and motivated by the game.

This situation exemplifies that it is possible to make a shift in children's motivations towards more engaged participation without first explaining the reasons for doing so. The shift between being in opposition and being caught up in the game seemed to happen because the educator manipulated the boy's *feel* for the game environment. I interpret that the intervention changed what the boy felt he could and had to do with it. Also, the educator awakened and necessitated practical capabilities and concerns which were already inscribed in the boy's

body-world-relationship but had been overshadowed by the inclination to be in opposition. His adept participation in the game later suggests that the boy was familiarised with the distinctive social movement dynamics of the game, and had developed the basic practical capabilities needed for participating, such as the ability to run and coordinate his movements in relation to others. Hence, when being pulled into the game, the boy seemed to be encouraged to clear his head or body in terms of his oppositional attitude and begin to be concerned about certain kinaesthetic, affective and existential qualities of the game. In this way, the educator seemed to ready the boy's mind and indeed his whole body for the game and at the same time deprioritised the boy's opposition.

As already suggested, the anxiety and fear that the educator enacted and expressed in relation to the chasers helped to put the boy in contact with the drama and uncertainties of the game. The second example may further elaborate on this form of intervention because it shows how the educator affected the children's motivation without being in physical contact with them. The example shows that the educator was not only preoccupied with telling the children a story, but also enacting it in an animated and dramatic way. I suggest that this was not only about getting the children's attention and urging them to listen, but also about moving them emotionally and existentially, so they felt themselves taken and carried away by the story. Another way of creating drama was the educator's habit of – every now and then - presenting the children with expressions (verbal and bodily) that they were not familiar with. While expressing the 'cash register-metaphor', the children seemed incited by the educator's attempts to express and convey something significant from his energetic and dramatic expressions. Concurrently, they seemed unable to comprehend the intellectual meaning of the metaphor, which left them bewildered and uncertain about what to think. They may simultaneously have felt 'I can' and yet 'I cannot' comprehend what the educator is trying to express and where the story is going. Such moments of being on to something and yet uncertain about what to expect, may have fed into their curiosity and interest, and urged them to further engage the story

The two examples show an educator that went *out of his way* to engage and motivate the children. This happened in at least two ways. First, he applied himself and his body in the children's activity environment, and he exerted himself in order to make the bodily felt and existential meaning of the activities tangible to the children. He did not just approach the children from the sideline of the activities and relied on verbal instruction and explanation. Secondly, he staged himself, meaning he took on a facade and acted out for instance drama and uncertainty. Thus, the educator's pedagogical strategy was not a matter of completely indulging himself in the activities or being authentic, nor was it about keeping the children at a distance. Instead it seemed to be a matter of acting out *as if* he was engaged in the activities while hiding any possible instrumental purposes or professional reasons that he may have had in advance. In this sense, it might be more accurate to compare his pedagogical strategy with a theatrical performance, meaning a staged or pretended way of being, and thus a deliberate attempt to manipulate

and seduce the children to become engaged in the current activity environment.

5. Discussion

As exemplified, the educators' participation and ways of moving and touching the children seemed to promote engaged forms of participation. This suggests that such forms of intervention may be important for developing motivation in pre-school. And yet, educators may be encouraged to interact with children in bodily restricted ways. In the following section, I intend to discuss common assumptions about how motivation is promoted, which do not consider the non-intellectual and non-mechanistic meaningful relation between our body and the world, and therefore risk promoting a disembodied approach among practitioners. The aim is primarily constructive and thus to suggest how common assumptions about motivation may be qualified and nuanced by the findings of the present study.

5.1. Bodily Manipulations

A common assumption is that motivation may be promoted among children by conveying reasons. As an example, it has been emphasised that educators should provide children with personally meaningful reasons. The belief is that such reasons can aid children in understanding how an activity, which they do not experience to be inherently interesting right away, can be of personal value and concern [1]. Such assumption implies that there must be some form of reason behind an action in order to become meaningful and motivating. Thus, educators have to clarify this reason in order to persuade children to act. Typically, the format that is emphasised for this process is that of spoken words or oral manipulations ([2], p. 127). This gives the impression that motivation may effectively be promoted by standing on the sideline telling and explaining to the children how and why they should participate and leave it up to the children to transform words into practice.

This characterisation may be criticised for not addressing how children may be motivated by way of bodily contact and movements. Indeed, one could argue that it is particularly important to put emphasis on bodily communication when motivating young children given that movement is their primary consciousness. Thus, they may be expected to 'speak' the wordless language of movements more fluently than linguistic language [19]. In many cases, they may lack the practical experience that would enable them to transform the verbalisations and intellectualisations of an adult into the feelings and actions that these imply. As exemplified in the present study educators may inform the children in edifying ways when expressing themselves in movements, and thus be able to put children in direct contact with the felt meanings and existence, which lie at the core of what it means to be motivated by a given activity. Consequently, the study suggests that motivation is not only about preparing children in advance by explaining them the goals or reasons of some activity. Rather, motivation arises from the practical and dynamic interplay between the children and the concrete activity environment

that they are supposed to be motivated by. Thus, to motivate is to lie out and handle the concrete activity environment so it is experienced as immediately attractive and inspiring [6,34]. One way of doing this is for the educator to intervene in the ongoing activity, and *manipulate* (literally operate with his/hers hands and body) the movements and impressions of the children. Being a practical rather than intellectual matter, the motivational process is about getting the children to move along and directing their lived experiences to kinaesthetic, affective and existential qualities – such as an activity’s movement dynamics, tensions, uncertainties and drama.

In the case of activities that the children know well, the time from when they start to move to when they are deeply engaged may be very short, because the educators - by the mere initiation of the activity - tap into ingrained capabilities and (sweet) memories from previous engagement in the activity. Thus, the mere initiation may make a powerful request of the children to engage. However, as exemplified in the first excerpt, one cannot expect that children respond to the same activity in the same motivated way again and again. In these situations, educators may help reestablish children’s motivation by resorting to more movement-based interventions that *move* the children (both kinesthetically, affectively and existentially) into the drama of the activity. Accordingly, the empirical findings suggest that an educator’s physical regulations - or manipulations - of children’s behaviour need not always be a liability to children’s motivation. Applied in a tactful way [35] children may feel the bodily manipulations of the educator as animating and inspiring. Such manipulations may profoundly change and enrich the way children experience the activity environment and, thereby motivate them to participate in it. On this basis, it can be argued that to motivate is not just an internal mental or intellectual affair. In fact, it is a matter of shaping the actual activity environment, make the meaning and qualities of a given activity tangible to the children and providing them the feeling they can and must participate in it.

5.2. Creating a Suspenseful Activity Environment

Another dominating assumption is that motivation is likely to emerge from activities in which children feel both competence and challenge. It is suggested that the experience of being able to overcome a challenge can be highly motivating. Therefore, educators are encouraged – for instance by proponents of Self-Determination Theory - to confront children with “optimal challenges” [1,3], that is challenges that are attainable with increased effort and concentration, but at the same time, are not overly stressful or demanding. Similarly, flow-theory [5] suggests that highly motivating experiences of flow are likely to occur when challenges are well matched by the individual child’s capacities. The term flow may commonly be associated with sensations of ease and total absorption in what one is doing. By connoting the movement qualities of water, flow may be compared with the act of floating and being carried away by a stream to a desired destination (or state of being). But along the way one may float into unknown, unclear or troubled waters, which give rise to uncertainty about when or if the

destination can be reached. This may be felt as a (temporary) suspension of one’s handling of the task and encourage renewed effort and involvement. The latter describes an aspect of optimal challenges, which is not addressed by neither the Self-determination Theory nor the Flow Theory [36]. By claiming “the motivating object has ‘an ambiguous presence’” Wrathall ([15], p. 115) underlines that the experience of ambiguity or uncertainty is an important source of motivation, and he suggests that motivation often emerges from encountering situations with unclear and unsettled features. This is substantiated by the present study, which zooms in on the unsettled phase during challenging activities in which the children are kept in an uncertain state of being. In this phase, the children live ambiguously towards some anticipated outcome, for instance sensing that something important is happening without knowing what exactly will happen or when it will happen, or whether or not they will be able to make it happen. In addition, the study shows that an educator may induce suspense in pedagogical activities by bringing the children into a state of make believe that absorbs them in the promises, risks and drama of a particular activity environment. As shown, this may happen when the educator mimics its in-play-feeling and acts out its drama, and when he puts forth dramatic and eye-catching expressions, while at the same time mystifying their meaning.

6. Conclusions

Educators’ verbal explanations and intellectual persuasions were not the only sources of children’s motivation in the fieldwork study despite the large amount of speaking taking place. In particular, this study emphasises that motivation arises from the non-intellectual and embodied interplay between children and the concrete activity environment that they are supposed to be motivated by. Thus, a significant part of educators’ motivational work is about affecting and manipulating children’s concrete activity environment so it is experienced as immediately attractive and inspiring. This suggests that working with children’s motivation is about developing an awareness and feel for the kinaesthetic, affective and existential qualities that excite children during different pedagogical activities, and staging one’s participation in ways that will help bring these to the fore. In general, the study indicates that children’s motivation cannot be completely planned in advance, nor can it be achieved once and for all. It requires customised (bodily) efforts, which not only put demands on educators’ abilities to move and dramatise, but also their abilities to sense what goes on with the children in the particular situation, to tap into their experiences, and to act for their sake of good.

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank educators, children, and parents in the kindergarten that formed the basis for my fieldwork study. I am very grateful for their kindness and willingness to open and share their practice with me. Also, I would like to thank my proof reader, Kristen

Groves, and my colleagues, Lise R. Andersen, Anette Boye Koch, and Jens-Ole Jensen for many helpful and inspiring comments.

References

- [1] Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 25(1), 54-67.
- [2] Deci, E. L., Eghrarli, H., Patrick, B. C. & Leone, D. R. (1994). Facilitating internalization: The self-determination theory perspective. *Journal of Personality*, 62(1), 119-142.
- [3] Carlton, M. P., & Winsler, A. (1998). Fostering intrinsic motivation in early childhood classrooms. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 25(3), 159-166.
- [4] Brinkmann, S. & Tangaard, L. (2010). Toward an epistemology of the hand. *Studies in Philosophy of Education*, 29, 243-257.
- [5] Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1985). *Emergent motivation and the evolution of the self*. New York: JAI Press.
- [6] Brinkmann, S. (2007). Motivation gennem handling og gøremål – et pragmatisk perspektiv. *KvaN*, 78, 91-101.
- [7] Bjørgen, K. (2015). Children's well-being and involvement in physically active outdoors play in a norwegian kindergarten: playful sharing of physical experiences. *Child Care in Practice*, 21(4), 305-323.
- [8] Bjørgen, K., & Svendsen, B. (2015). Kindergarten practitioners' experience of promoting children's involvement in and enjoyment of physically active play: Does the contagion of physical energy affect physically active play? *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 16(3), 257-271.
- [9] Andersson, J., Öhman, M. & Garrison, J. (2016). Physical education teaching as a caring act—techniques of bodily touch and the paradox of caring. *Sport, Education and Society*.
- [10] Broström, S. (2002). Børns lærerige leg. *Psyke & Logos*, 23, 451-469.
- [11] Tobin, J. (2004). The disappearance of the body in early childhood education. In L. Bresler (Ed.), *Knowing bodies, moving minds* (pp. 111-125). Springer Netherlands.
- [12] Munk, K.P., Larsen, P.L., Leander, E. B. & Sørensen, K. (2013). Fear of child sex abuse: Consequences for childcare personnel in Denmark. *Nordic Psychology*, 65(1), 19-32.
- [13] Burke, R.S. & Duncan, J. (2016). Culturally contested corporeality: Regulation of the body in New Zealand and Japanese early childhood education. *Global Studies of Childhood*, 1-11.
- [14] Smith, B. (2013). Depression and motivation. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences* 12, 615-635.
- [15] Wrathall, M. A. (2005). Motives, reasons, and causes. In T. Carman & M. B. N. Hansen (Eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty* (111-128). Cambridge University Press.
- [16] Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Routledge.
- [17] O'Conaill, D. (2013). On being motivated. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 12(4), 579-595.
- [18] Sheets-Johnstone, M. (2003). Kinesthetic memory. *Theoria et Historia Scientiarum*, 7, (1), 69-92.
- [19] Sheets-Johnstone, M. (2011). *The primacy of movement*. John Benjamins Publishing.
- [20] Kretchmar, R. S. (2000). Moving and being moved: Implications for practice. *Quest*, 52, 260-272.
- [21] Crossley, N. (2004). Ritual, body technique and (inter)subjectivity. In K. Schilbrack (Ed.), *Thinking through rituals - Philosophical perspectives* (pp. 31-51). Routledge.
- [22] Kretchmar, R.S. (1975). From test to contest: An analysis of two kinds of counterpoint in sport. *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 2, 23-30.
- [23] Guidry, J. A. (2005). *The experience of... suspense: understanding the construct, its antecedents, and its consequences in consumption and acquisition contexts* (Doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University).
- [24] Dolezal, L. (2017). The phenomenology of self-presentation: describing the structures of intercorporeality with Erving Goffman. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 16(2), 237-254.
- [25] Gallagher, S. (2008). Direct perception in the intersubjective context. *Consciousness and Cognition*, 17(2), 535-543.
- [26] Atkinson, P., & Hammersley, M. (2007). *Ethnography: Principles in practice*. Routledge.
- [27] Pink, S., & Morgan, J. (2013). Short- term ethnography: Intense routes to knowing. *Symbolic Interaction*, 36(3), 351-361.
- [28] Spradley J. P. (1980). *Participant observation*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- [29] Emmerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I. & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. The University of Chicago Press.
- [30] Pink, S. (2009). *Doing sensory ethnography*. Sage Publications.
- [31] Kvale S., & Brinkmann S. (2009). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.
- [32] Huizinga, J. (1949). *Homo ludens: A study of the play-element in our culture*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- [33] Crossley, N. (2004). *Key concepts in critical social theory*. Sage.
- [34] Thøgersen, U. (2010). Desire as response to experience: Reflections on motivational aspects of adult learning. In M. Horsdal (Ed.), *Communication, collaboration and creativity: researching adult learning* (53-67). Syddansk Universitetsforlag.
- [35] van Manen, M. (1991). *The tact of teaching: The meaning of pedagogical thoughtfulness*. State University of New York Press: Albany.
- [36] Abuhamdeh, S. Csikszentmihalyi, M. & Jalal, B. (2014). Enjoying the possibility of defeat: Outcome uncertainty, suspense. *Motivation and Emotion*, 39(1), 1-10.