

# Chapter 2

## Children are bodies in motion

### *The body and physicality*

The human body is built of tissue and cells. The skeleton, along with ligaments and muscles, keeps us upright. A child's skeleton contains cartilage that makes it pliable and elastic, qualities that—at least to some degree—defend against broken arms and legs in case of accidents (Jagtøien & Hansen, 2007). The issue, though, is that a child's skeleton does not tolerate heavy loads. Varied and comprehensive physical activities help the child build a robust and strong skeleton. The body contains 650 muscles connected to the skeleton. Movements begin with and are regulated by the nervous system. The nervous system consists of the brain and the spinal cord, and of the peripheral nervous system, which reaches to every part of the body. In order to control movement, the nervous system coordinates with our sensory apparatus.

Children communicate through movement, motions and body language. Children primarily live physical and sensory lives. They run, jump, climb, crawl, build and draw. They experience and perceive through their bodies. The concept of “physicality” encompasses much more than the human motor skills and physical activity. In circumstances where children experience joy, mastery and passion, they forget time and place. At kindergarten, there is a focus on various aspects of the child's physicality, such as the mastery of certain skills, teaching the child about the body, expressing oneself physically, and that physicality is key to health. In the daily running of the kindergarten, children's physicality is expressed in a number of ways, and perhaps most distinctly during unorganized play (Moser, 2013). Children's physicality lays the groundwork for their ability to communicate. In addition, children often enjoy physical challenges, which is natural as they take joy in movement. In the introductory chapter to the Framework Plan for Kindergarten, under *Mastery of Life and Health*, it is stated that “The kindergarten should be an arena for physical activity on a daily basis and should promote children's joy in movement and motor development.”

Motor skills can be divided into two groups: gross and fine motor skills. Children need many opportunities to practice their gross motor skills at kindergarten

every day. Gross motor skills develop through major physical movement such as running, jumping, throwing, tossing, hopping and so on. In the Framework Plan's field of knowledge *Body, movement, food and health* it is stated that "the kindergarten should contribute towards children getting to know their bodies." It further states that children shall develop motor skills, body control, coordination and physical qualities. According to the plan, staff should help the children have access to varied and challenging sensory experiences: "staff should provide the children with a variety of impressions and the opportunity to express themselves in different ways." There is also a section on the importance of movement and joy in movement (Ministry of Education and Research, 2017). Young children must be given the opportunity to practice movements repeatedly, and to explore those movements in order to develop them further.

A few years ago, some of my students met an eleven-month-old kindergarten child who mastered no moves or motions at all. This absolutely passive child was placed in a corner supported by pillows. The students did not know what to do. The kindergarten teachers and employees, too, were put out, never having experienced something similar before. Every time the child was laid stomach down, it began screaming. Students and teachers began running the child through a 'training' program. In order to increase the child's neck and back muscles they laid the infant stomach down, a few more minutes every day. Slowly the child learned to crawl, creep, and finally to walk.

Research workers believe that the particular way of moving represented by crawling and creeping is very important for children's physical development. Balance is another function central to children's development of physical competence, and their ability to experience joy from moving around. Toddlers walk with their feet wide apart in order to keep their balance, and for the same purpose they keep their arms out from the body. With their feet apart they keep their balance better. A child's ability to balance is produced by necessity: Walking around on a floor will not improve a child's balance much but walking around in the woods will.

Children's physical competence is the source of their identity, emotions and self-concept. The child's body is an all-important vehicle of learning. I do not use the concept of learning very actively in this book; I prefer to concentrate on the concept of play. Still I am of course professionally interested in how children learn; I have written an article about the holistic view on learning (Løndal & Fasting, 2016), where I and my co-author emphasize the importance of a holistic view on the child.

Moser (2013) claims that early childhood pedagogics / early childhood education for long seemed unable to acknowledge their bodies' holistic importance to

toddlers. Physical activities need not be vigorous, vehement or strength consuming; when the child lies on the ground studying ants or flowers, or watches the stars in the sky, those are physical activities, too.

## PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IS WHAT IT'S ALL ABOUT

Kindergarten children are physical beings. As physical beings they learn to know themselves and the world. A major kindergarten task should be to give the children rich and varied opportunities to perform as physical beings, over and over again (Osnes et al., 2015). Physical activities and physical play in kindergarten must be legitimized. Children are in this world as physical beings. By means of their physicality they investigate and play their lives! What looks like chaos to adults may not do so to children. The intervention of teachers and parents in order to tidy up may ruin children's lively and frolicsome play. Kindergarten employees of all kinds, and parents, too, should bear that in mind. Let the children play, let them use and expand their bodies and minds, today and tomorrow.

The title *Physical activity is what it's all about* is taken from an article (*Bevegelse er meningen*, 2013) written by Gunvor Løkken. Much of Løkken's work is founded on the work of French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961) (1962), who also claims that our physical activity is what it is all about in this world. Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1994) views Man's natural urge to move about as fundamental:

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy holds perception as a key word. The living human body is in this world tied up to a concrete time and a concrete place. Merleau-Ponty emphasizes that Man's most direct experiences and adventures in the world take place in a bodily perception of what happens (Løkken, 2013, p. 45).

Phenomenological understanding is about finding words for spontaneous and unreflected experiences, and how to thematize them, Løkken says. Children's frolicsome lives are above all physical lives (Moser, 2013). They experience and perceive by means of their bodies, and thus they learn about themselves and the world around them.

Children learn and experience by means of various kinds of physical actions. Impulses transmitted by the nervous system become more accurate when movements are repeated. The child's body learns, by and by, exactly how much strength it takes to make a specific movement precise and appropriate. What we learn and experience by means of our bodies are stored as memories in our minds. When the child's mind is ready for some new kind of physical action, it has a lot of background material to draw upon. Our human senses, or rather faculties, are very

important to our physical development. Our primary faculties are the tactile, the vestibular and the kinetic faculties, developed by our physical experiences (Jagtoien & Hansen, 2007). Children's possession of their faculties is essential to their experiences and adventures, and to the development of their physical abilities (Osnes et al., 2015). Balance, for instance, has to do with coordination. Other coordinating qualities are rhythm, sense of direction, adjusted use of strength, response ability and the ability to coordinate eye and hand – and eye and foot – movements. These qualities are essential for achieving satisfactory body control. Children with well-developed body control and physical subtleness thanks to a lot of physical play and practice are likely to pursue a lifestyle including an even more physical way of life as they grow up (Fasting, 2012, 2013).

In image 1 we see kindergarten children taking advantage of nature around them. They play around with each other, using what the surroundings have to offer. We see rocks and vegetation and differences in heights, all of which make the

**IMAGE 1:** The kindergarten should introduce the children to nature and outdoor activities. Photo: Merete Lund Fasting.



space challenging and exciting to move around in. We see a great deal of loose material which the children can make use of and talk about. This playground invites the children to play and it gives them a lot of possibilities. Here the children can learn to cope and to enjoy themselves.

We experience and learn by means of our bodies and physical activities. Merleau-Ponty (1994) declares that we learn to know our bodies ‘by living in them’, or rather: because we are our bodies. Children are human beings in their golden age because they learn new ways to move much more easily than adults do. A child’s nervous system is still flexible and capable of developing. Their flexible and still developing bodies and faculties enable children to learn about just about everything. Catchwords here may be mirroring, mastering, cooperation, expanding and presence. Let us remember, however, that physical skills can be learned and developed as long as we live.

Children need practice time. Children love to walk, run, jump, throw and a lot more, outdoors and indoors. When a body has executed a movement sufficiently many times, it can do it again without thinking about how the movement is automated. It is stored in the cerebellum for use whenever it is needed or wanted. The child can move about effortlessly. To be able to do things effortlessly is essential to every individual’s everyday performance in life.

In addition comes the value of having a cerebellum storage of physical activities to pick from when occasion rises. I have had ski course students who have not been skiing for 15 years, but they always regain their abilities after a couple of days in the tracks. The memories of childhood experiences come back to them. Anyone who learned to ski, skate, swim or bike during childhood possesses abilities the adult can resume.

## **HOW WE PERCEIVE THE BODY AND ITS SURROUNDINGS INTERACTING**

We often talk about the physiological, biological and psychological functions of the body. From a phenomenological point of view, we tend to look upon the body as a whole. Active children will interact with their surroundings. In my opinion adults must relate to children and pay attention to their bodily expressions. A physical child is an interacting child. The child’s physicality naturally makes the boy or girl take interest in the world around them. The child instinctively wants to investigate this world.

Adults as well as children cannot be separated from their physical surroundings, the world they live in. Concrete experiences during the various seasons of the year, with materials typical for summer, winter, spring or autumn, are manifold. Our

perception of the world takes place in a dialogue between our bodies and the world. Our faculties cooperate, overlap and communicate. Perception is a bodily process that takes place in a context.

Perception is both experiencing and interpreting our surroundings. Our faculties enable our body to gather and interpret information simultaneously (Løkken & Søbstad, 2006, p. 110). Perception takes place in the interaction between body and world. *How* we are in this world depends on *where* we are.

The responses of the body cannot be explained. The body of a human being and this body's relation to the world is neither mechanical, biological nor intellectual – it is existential. The body is a synthesis, all its parts are related to each other (Merleau-Ponty, 1994). The human body can make itself familiar with spaces which are essentially unfamiliar to it by 'installing' itself in those spaces. The body establishes an existential relation to the space, it inhabits the space. When this happens, you can truly say that this space, this room, is 'yours'. In a similar way you and your body can establish an existential relation to an activity; this particular activity becomes a part of you, you do not need to think or reflect when practicing this activity. Parents and teachers must understand that children need time to get acquainted with new activities and new places. Children need to learn how things are in this world: Are these branches strong enough? Is it safe to jump from here? Will those stones roll away under my feet? Children need time to find out about these things. If they have been there before, perhaps a long time ago, they need time to recall what they once knew and get used to the place again. The kindergarten teachers must allow children to achieve outdoor experiences in surroundings of different qualities, in the mornings and in the evenings, at all times of the year. Children learn that there are all kinds of weather, and there is nothing more to that. They learn that different seasons of the year demand different abilities when it comes to outdoor life. Kindergarten children may be walking in the woods in the rain when the ground is slippery and muddy, and under such conditions walking can be an almost painstaking operation. After a few more rain-walks the children get toughened, they move about with less pain and more ease and are capable of enjoying the surroundings and the activities they take part in, in spite of 'bad weather'.

## THE JOY OF MOVEMENT

The Framework Plan (2017) advocates children's right to exercise their bodies in play and playful activities. Under the headline *Life skills and health*, we find this: "Kindergarten shall be an arena for daily physical activity, and it shall promote joy of movement and motor development in the children."



**IMAGE 2:** True joy! The child manages to jump across a ditch. Photo: Merete Lund Fasting

As a professional I have always had a keen eye on children's play. Bjørgen (2017) has written a thesis about physical action producing joy in the kindergarten. She concludes that the combination of just about everything the pedagogically well-run kindergarten can offer children, in addition to the children's personal resources and the competences and qualifications of the teachers, will contribute to children's joy of physical action.

Toddlers as well as older children very often communicate that they just love moving around. This kind of joy is essential for wanting to move around more, again and again. Lyngstad (2010) adds that the joy of physical action is situational.

The happiness that varying kinds of physicality give children emphasizes the intrinsic value of physical activity (Lyngstad, 2010, 2014). By body language they express their everlasting love for play. Play is very often movement. Kindergarten children are often spellbound by playing and activities involving movements. Nothing beats jumping over the ditch, jumping into muddy puddles, or biking

around with friends. They radiate with joy when they come out to play outdoors. They run to the tool shed or to the woods or the swing. The joy of outdoor activities is matched by almost nothing else.

The body is a live thing, and speed and excitement represent this lovely sense of freedom for most children. But, of course, children differ as individuals, too. Some like to challenge themselves, they enjoy the feeling of danger (within limits) and risk taking. Others prefer safety. What we, their parents and teachers, must understand, is that children who have to develop their motor faculties, their balance and their coordination abilities cannot sit still too often, and they cannot always walk around on flat floors.

Asbjørn Flemmen (2003) has children's playgrounds as his main interest. He has, among other things, studied all the *sitting opportunities* children are offered in the outdoor areas of kindergartens; they are too many in his opinion.

Kindergarten teachers, and parents, too, are nevertheless responsible for offering the children a variety of playing opportunities, opportunities which will give the children a manifold of experiences.

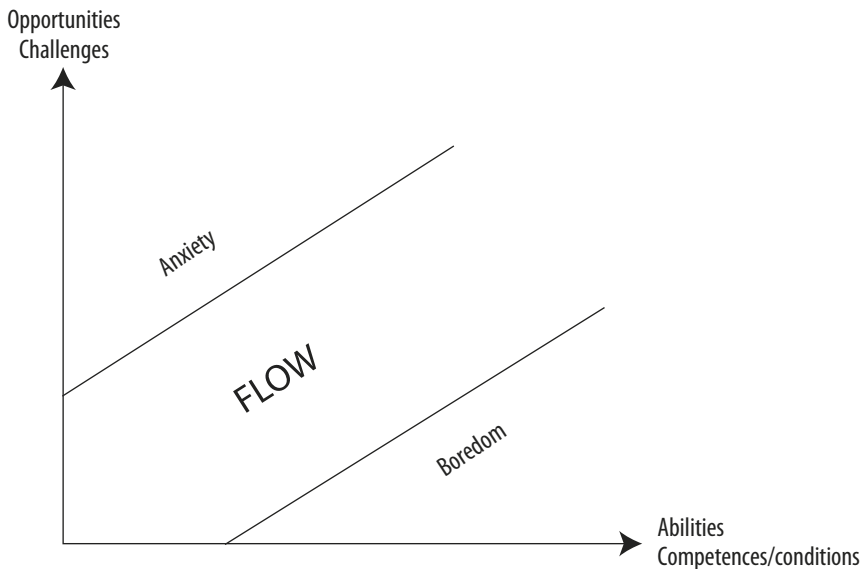
How do we encourage children to play? Perhaps we can ask the child what he or she would like to do, as simple as that? Perhaps the child should be allowed to decide what to do next, or where to go for a certain kind of activity the next day? Do we know what the child finds interesting? How can we exploit the child's interests pedagogically?

In order to develop their physical competences, children need physical challenges. A child's ability to enjoy physical activities depends on the child being able to perform a number of various movements. Kindergarten teachers must possess a professional consciousness enabling them to *see* each child and what kind of help or incentives that particular boy or girl needs in order to further develop their physical competences and qualities. For the children these processes should be accompanied by joy and happiness, making them want to test themselves over and over again. Movement, motion, is something fundamentally human. The joy of it should be commonplace. The kindergarten and its teachers are responsible for offering the children as many moments of joy and pleasure as possible, depending on the status of each individual child.

## FLOW

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1934–, American, born in Hungary) is a professor of psychology whose opinion is that *flow* is a mentally very focused condition. In my opinion Csikszentmihalyi's figure (1990) is relevant because it gives us an





**FIGURE 1:** The experience of flow in play (Csikszentmihalyi).

understanding of the connection between competences and challenges. Quite many children enjoy challenging themselves, trying to perform as well as their capacity allows, or a little better. In figure 1 the child, boy or girl, is moving upwards towards the upper part of his/her float zone. When the challenge seems too large, the child (or any person, of course) may feel intimidation or anxiety. A child who prefers safety tends to avoid challenges. If it happens anyway, let us say the child finds itself on ice, slippery and giving way, far from the nearest shore, then the child almost certainly will feel afraid and uncomfortable. In such a situation the child will need help and advice from us, teachers or parents: Move slowly, do not stamp your feet, slide them slowly across the surface of ice, keep calm.

Csikszentmihalyi's approach professionally is that of a psychologist. If you prefer a phenomenological approach you may find that the psychological perspective is relatively narrow and partial. I nevertheless want to include figure 1 because it can prove useful when it comes to making pedagogical arrangements for children. I, among others (like Bentsen, Andkjær & Ejbye-Ernst, 2009), choose to interpret and understand figure 1 in a more holistic way. Choosing that kind of approach, flow is not merely something psychological or something in your mind; flow is an overall, manifold and physical experience.

The Framework Plan (2017) emphasizes the kindergarten's overall approach to children's development. The kindergarten teachers must take into account the

abilities and competences of each child when it comes to letting children face challenges. Some like to think that the float line is really a stairway, where you gradually progress upstairs in proficiency. You advance two or more steps, then you have to take a break, and after a while you can advance upwards some more steps. Suddenly the child manages to make a joint leg jump, and suddenly he manages to hop on one leg. The child has exercised a lot to get there, but all of a sudden, he is there!

Flow is a concept often connected to sports, play and outdoor life. The concept refers to the individual (psychological, physical, *overall*) experience connected to an activity. It is popular nowadays to talk about outdoor life flow. You forget about time and place because you are tuned in on this one thing. When the balance is right between challenge and ability, you may experience an almost intoxicating sensation, write Bentsen, Andkjær and Ejbye-Ernst (2009).

What challenges do these demands or expectations present to kindergarten teachers? A quite huge pedagogical challenge is the fact that children are different from each other (like adults are). Norwegians appreciate that children, too, are separate individuals, with separate wishes, demands and needs. Yet all children are expected to have their say in the daily business of the kindergarten, something which is emphasized in the Framework Plan (2017). As pedagogues we have to take into account the needs of the timid little boy as well as the wishes of the tough little girl when it comes to letting them face challenges in the kindergarten playground. The physical environment of the kindergarten should offer something for all. In addition, we need rules regulating physical activities as well as making them possible. It is necessary that the kindergarten teachers as well as the assistants are present during outdoor activities, preferably just in order to observe, but also in order to intervene, help or contribute when need be.

This book is about activities like running, jumping, climbing and riding a bicycle. I have chosen these kinds of activities because they are something almost every child performs every day in the kindergarten. These activities are all about movement, and they take their toll physically. I am going to describe children's physical functions connected to various movements, both functions well developed and those less well developed. As I have already mentioned, our central nervous system, and its ability to plan and control movements, is crucial for how well the individual succeeds in coping with various physical activities. Our physical properties like agility, strength, stamina and rapidity are decisive for our capability to perform various movements. In addition to the physiological aspects of physical activities, there is *the feeling* of being in motion in all these activities. You move around, and the movements themselves are challenging, thrilling,

exciting, frightening, relieving or ecstatic to you. What you actually feel, depends on how much you are in control.

A schoolboy taking part in one of my studies told me about *almost* crashing into a tree. He flung himself onto a swing hanging in a tree, and the movement he caused by doing so *almost* crashed him into the stem of the tree: "It really made my tummy tickle!"

This is about being in motion and being in motion very often is a central part of playing. When you ride a bicycle, you feel the wind in your hair (well, perhaps not, if you are wearing a helmet), you feel the sensation of riding rapidly downhill. When you jog or run, you feel the rhythm that helps to propel you forwards, and you feel the ground you're jogging on, every little hole, every little piece of gravel.

When a little boy jumps down from something, he feels his stomach tickle as he prepares himself for the landing. A boy climbing a tree searches for the next branch, with his whole body he concentrates to avoid falling down and to succeed in advancing further upwards. We, the pedagogues, must understand that there are a number of the right kind of factors that have to be present to produce motivation and possibilities for coping and developing abilities, such as the right kind of attire, surroundings, time of the day, self-consciousness, physical competence, and the right kind of playmates and attending adults.

Children are expected to possess many of these competences and abilities when they attend school. Their kindergarten teachers and parents are responsible for making it happen.

## RIDING A BICYCLE

Riding a bicycle presupposes balance. Children usually learn to ride a bicycle between the ages of three and nine. If a child cannot do it by nine, the little boy or girl will have trouble learning it later in life. The motor development golden age tends to fade away after twelve years. After twelve children in general find it more difficult to learn more complicated and complex movements.

My studies of kindergarten children confirm that they are very fond of bicycle riding. And not just bicycles, they knock about on tricycles, scooters and various other kinds of vehicles at their disposal. At the kindergartens I studied, transporting things was a very popular activity; the children rode around with dolls and flowers and boards and planks and god knows what, and giving one or more mates a ride obviously was great fun. There were more children than bikes, so they had to let playmates take hold of the handlebars from time to time.

At one kindergarten the children could ride rounds. They had a rather rugged track especially built for bicycle riding at their disposal. The rider often had to be pushed in order to advance over the first bump, but thereafter he/she could gain enough speed to ride the next bumps themselves.

At another kindergarten the riders' starting point was on top of a steep hill at the back of the main building. Here the children raced down the steep asphalt road and around a curve, to continue along a track through the playground. This kind of action made them scream with joy. I observed at both kindergartens that there were few rules regulating the children's bicycle riding; on the contrary they enjoyed a great deal of freedom while racing about.

I studied bicycle-riding school children a lot, too (Fasting, 2013). Children often think the world of their bicycles. Their bicycles give them freedom. Some children regard their bicycles their friends, literally speaking! Your bike is always ready for you.

When I rode my own bicycle on my way home from school in the afternoon, I often noticed that the children rode along the bumpiest parts of the road, or where there was a lot of gravel. It did not seem to matter if they once in a while ended up in the ditch, or in the thicket along the road. Back on the road they continued as if nothing had happened.

Children of all ages love to ride a bicycle. The reason why, as I see it, is the children's ability to produce by themselves the power that propels them forwards, and they can achieve quite impressive speeds. For kindergarten children biking is a social thing, too, which is very important to them. The children often ride side by side, or two or more together on one bike.

At *Skauen* ("the Wood") kindergarten I observed that the children very often transported things on their bikes. Some boys told me they were 'workers', and one day I observed them transporting planks from their bikes onto the top of a boat which lay there. I also often registered that the children brought their bicycles with them into the wilderness close by. It was hard work getting that far, uphill, but of course easier to ride downhill afterwards, after a spell of playing.

Nowadays there are two-wheel scooters which may be of good help when children are learning to ride a bicycle. Kindergartens may find such scooters useful.

Norwegian kindergarten children do not usually wear helmets while riding bicycles or tricycles. A few years ago, a Norwegian kindergarten suffered a great loss when a girl wearing a helmet lost her life while climbing in a tree. The helmet's strap got snagged on a branch and the girl was literally hanged. Teachers and assistants will never, unfortunately, be able to exercise complete control over children who constantly move about from one activity to another. This is also the

reason why helmets are not in use in kindergartens. Toddlers on tricycles achieve very little speed anyway, and neither, usually, do five- or six-year-olds on their bicycles. Should they fall, they seldom seriously hurt themselves.

## CLIMBING

The children of both kindergartens enjoyed climbing. Both have natural areas close by. Skauen – “the Wood” – has a natural area of its own, within its own boundaries, while the children at *Sletta* – “the Plain” – have to find their climbing opportunities at a neighboring site.



**IMAGE 3:** A toddler climbs expertly – practice produces champions!  
Photo: Merete Lund Fasting

Climbing activates the performer's whole body. Climbing stimulates the individual's tactile, kinetic and vestibular faculties in addition to coordinated crossings of limbs. Many coordinating qualities, like adjusted strength, balance, reaction, eye/foot coordination and eye/hand coordination are put to the test. I have observed the climbing abilities of both toddlers and older children. Climbing stimulates all physical qualities like agility, strength, stamina and rapidity. All muscles take part in the process of climbing. Your body's strength is the sum of the strength of each and every muscle. Climbing develops the large muscle groups, and the movements develop the children's overall physical functions.

Neither Skauen nor Sletta had climbing frames or jungle-gyms. Instead the children climbed trees and slopes, shack-tops and boats. A good climber is good at coordinating arms and legs crosswise. A less good climber is less dynamic. A less



**IMAGE 4:** Climbing is fun and exciting! Photo: Merete Lund Fasting.

good climber does not so easily cope with changes in momentum turns or changes of direction. Climbing trees and slopes helps to develop such abilities.

Quite often the children seemed caught up in their imagination while climbing; they can, for example, pretend to take part in a climbing competition. At other times the process of climbing was activity enough in itself.

## RUNNING

Children love running around. At Skauen the playground, wide and flat, has an excellent lay-out for running. Skauen's children run always and everywhere. Very often several children run together. At times they run as part of a role play, at other times they just move from A to B. Running increases physical qualities like stamina and rapidity. Children begin as toddlers or a little later. There are many ways of running, there are various kinds of technical skills involved, and an experienced runner performs technically in quite another way than a novice of the art.

Chasing each other is obviously great fun, but within the kindergartens' boundaries I did not observe any systematic kind of playing tag. The children's running around seemed rather unorganized and unsystematic, difficult to observe and often difficult to understand. They never ran for long, and they often paused to engage in other kinds of play.

Sletta's children went on excursions once a week, usually to some nearby woodland area. These woodlands contained grass plains which allowed running. It was interesting to notice that when one child started running, a lot of the rest started, too. Often and quickly they achieved a rhythm, they forgot about time and place, they just ran and ran and ran; their body language revealed they had a marvelous time.

I remember well my own childhood, running around the house back home. I and other children played tag. We ran around the house at maximum speed, taking our chances. At times our play was well organized, and we knew exactly who had the tag and was chasing the others, but at other times we did not know so well. Where were the others? Who was taking part in the game? Great fun, great excitement!

When I observe kindergarten children running, I sometimes see them following each other, chasing each other, often mimicking each other. The boy in front stretches out his right arm, and the boys following him do the same. I observe that the front girl begins wagging her head from one side to the other, and immediately the girls chasing her begin doing the same thing. The children perform almost like one physical organism.

A technically good runner moves his (her) arms and legs in a relaxed, traversing and coordinated way. He obtains a brief floating phase for each forward step, and a vertebrae rotation. He lands on his heels and then his feet roll forwards towards his big toes. With less ability his feet will twist inwards or outwards. The runner will have a side to side rolling gait, landing his foot heavily without the rolling movement from the heel to the big toe. In addition, he may be a pacer, that is with a lateral gait, or he may just let his arms hang passively down (Jagtøien & Hansen, 2007). The more skilled the runner is, the better coordinated are his arms, his rhythm and balance while running.

Many have tried to describe this special feeling running may give you. Some compare running to flying; you forget everything except the flight itself. Others concentrate on their relations with their surroundings and environment. When I observe running boys and girls, I often see children spellbound. They are concentrated, energetic and full of joy. They are happy children!

**IMAGE 5:** Running is fun! Photo: Merete Lund Fasting.





## JUMPING

Kindergarten children love jumping around, too! Nothing beats jumping around in water and mud. Children express a physical sincerity, presence and happiness when allowed to jump about in various ways.

Later on, in chapter 6, I will to some length describe two situations including jumping: one is about jumping in water and mud, the other is about jumping back and forth over a narrow creek. The way I see it, water is on both occasions the reason why jumping is fun! I also observed children jumping from their swings, from rocks and slopes, and from self-made steeplechases made of boards and planks. One day I observed two boys and a girl jumping down from a steep slope. They did it over and over again, jumping down and climbing up. There was more to it than just the jumping, one boy said: “I am a bird!” He spread his arms like the wings of a bird and jumped. Next he said: “Now you jump on top of me!” He laid down on the ground, his backside up, and the second boy jumped on top of him. At last the girl jumped, too, and landed on top of both the boys.

Jumping is a demanding activity. You have to mobilize maximum concentration, adjusting your body to the jump itself and preparing for a successful landing. Toddlers are not skilled jumpers; they tend to land with their legs too erect and too rigid. Children of all ages challenge and develop their motor faculties by various kinds of jumping activities.

Children can jump and leap almost anywhere. Still we, their teachers, may help them see the opportunities. How safe is it to jump right here? How is the landing ground?

One day I observed two boys who practiced jumping off a swing rotating at great speed. The younger boy sometimes asked me to hold his hand, he obviously thought this jumping operation was quite eerie. After a while he took his shoes off, probably to feel the ground better when landing. I could see boys and girls alike daring themselves with risky jumps and leaps from the kindergarten boat and from slopes and rocks.

In order to perform a successful jump, you have to take off with your arms swinging in pendulum movements. After a slight initial bend, you stretch your body, keeping your hip-, knee- and ankle joints straight as you fly. You land with flexible joints. A child who is not so good at jumping usually fails to stretch his ankle joints sufficiently. A child like this keeps his hips, knees and ankles bent during the flight, landing heavily flatfooted with no or little flexibility.

Such imperfections can be mended through practice: Try jumping with joined legs, try hopping, and try jumping from heights (Jagtøien & Hansen, 2007). Bits and pieces of material, as shown in image 6, may also inspire jumping games.



**IMAGE 6:** Bits and ends of planks and boards are often useful to a lot of things.  
Photo: Merete Lund Fasting.

Jumping and leaping often include rhythm, which always is a wonderful feeling. Children can test their balance faculties and experience physical challenges. Teachers (and parents) may contribute, too, and participate in all these kinds of activities.

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