



LEARNING BODIES

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By Theresa S. S. Schilhab,
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Introduction

By Malou Juelskjær,
Thomas Moser
& Theresa S. S. Schilhab

This anthology presents a multiplicity of theoretical and disciplinary perspectives, by authors, all engaged in the development or refinement of theories of learning bodies. Therefore, aspects of learning bodies are the common element in the chapters of this anthology. First of all, the idea of the body as a container is challenged, not to say left behind, while other ways of thinking and conceptualising are invented/presented. Furthermore, the common concept, which is meant to bind this anthology together, is learning, but not as a homogeneous and explicit understanding, but as a multitude of many-sided interpretations of both body and learning. It is a shared opinion of all of the authors that learning is not reducible to a pure cognitive or even neurological process, that learning embraces far more than a transfer of knowledge, and that learning concerns not only the cognitive domain, but also other domains like emotion, personality and identity as well as social and cultural processes. Whether we are dealing with such many-sided issues as the neurological foundations of learning processes, skill acquisition, mental health and illness, aesthetics or the physical space where learning is going on, you never will get to the complexity of 'the matter' unless you keep the body in mind. Not only as a biological system, but as the genuine and holistic manner how humans are related, or embedded, in the physical and social world. Body, movement and senses, i.e. corporeality, provide the necessary experiences for change and development in a life long learning perspective.

We hope that by presenting this multitude of interpretations, the reader is inspired and challenged to continuously strive and re-think ways of thinking and knowing, instead of fixing and unequivocalising. In a sense, by forcing the reader to acknowledge a diversity of angles, the anthology also rehearses a central theme in philosophy of science by accentuating perspectives and the need of merging different approaches to achieve further insights.

Research in learning and body

In the beginning of this decade, knowledge and interdisciplinary dialogue in the research fields of 'learning' and 'body' was sparse. Since then the field has grown, and a number of publications have seen the light of day with ambitions of drawing up a field of research.

Among the social sciences, Sociology is truly where the body has gotten and still gets the most pronounced attention (e.g. Petersen 2007). Starting with the ground breaking contributions of Bryan S. Turner (1984; a new edition in 1996) the body has been established as one of the core topics in sociology that still generates a high amount of publications (Cregan 2006; Vannini & Waskul 2006). Recently, a number of volumes containing historically significant contributions to the body issue in social science has been published (Fraser & Greco 2005; The Aberdeen Body Group et al. 2004). A few decades with continuously increasing focus on body issues have seemingly created an interest in earlier texts published before this topic became 'hot'.

With a clear relationship to Sociology, feminist research (Fausto-Sterling 2000; Fingerson 2006; Frost 2001; Niranjana 2001; Young 2005) has significantly contributed to shed light on the body from a new perspective. Feminist research is often inspired by post modernistic perspectives (e.g. Norton 2002), but post-modern research also uses the body to question assumptions about the dominance of language, as shown by Terdiman (2005). And, as demonstrated by Moi (2005), feminist theory and research may also challenge dominant post-structuralist theories of sex and gender, providing a 'third way' between essentialism and constructionism.

Another hallmark in recent times is the emergence of more and more approaches that cut across traditional academic domains. Medical anthropology (Csordas 1994; Lock & Farquhar 2007; Lupton 2003; Worton & Wilson-Tagoe 2004) has traditionally had a broad and inte-

grative view on the body, challenging a pure biological understanding of the body by questioning basic assumptions in medical science by e.g. anthropological, sociological, ethnology, philosophical and psychological means. New topics like organ transplantation (Ben-David 2005; Sharp 2006) underline the necessity to rethink the body in new ways by describing body organs as an exchangeable socio-cultural resource. Even the immune system has been analyzed in a sociocultural context (Wilce 2003) and it has been pointed out that immunity and disease may also on the biological level, be partly constituted by social processes, rhetoric and politics.

Furthermore, new interdisciplinary approaches have been established between the rapidly expanding neurosciences, psychology and philosophy, especially phenomenology (e.g. Gallagher 2005; Gallagher, Pockett & Banks 2006) underlining the importance of embodiment to all kinds of cognitive processes. Recent developments in cognitive science also stress the significance of embodied actions as inextricably related to cognition and language (Gibbs 2006).

To conclude this outline of a growing field, one more interesting border-crossing approach should be mentioned: The reflexions of the body in a semiotic perspective as presented by Thibault (2004), who is trying to understand both the semiotic, discursive nature, activity and the physical context as important prerequisites for meaning-making.

Non-certainty: Dé-/collage – Invitations to the reader

From diverse angles, the individual chapters outline and enter into a constructive and creative in-fight with classical and contemporary thinking and theory concerning body/embodiment and learning. From this outset, new perspectives are developed and presented, and the reader is offered overviews, insights and theoretical thinking-technologies about how it is possible to understand – and analytically engage with – body and learning. A number of the articles draw on empirical research. Thereby, the reader is invited to put the theoretical discussions to work in social practice/the lived everyday in various educational contexts.

We furthermore invite the reader to regard the anthology as “a de-/collage”. At the risk of wearing out a well-worn metaphor, by collage we want to underline the bringing together of disparate elements, of

presenting a field that could have been outlined otherwise, and in this regard, though it presents a 'body' (that we proudly present) it is still to be taken as relatively unfinished and unfixed: The anthology is in no way exhaustive of the possibilities to think the intersections of body and learning – and the “de-” in the collage is put there in order not to become ‘stuck’ with a metaphor/image that could simultaneously be understood as a ‘finished entity’. The dé-/collage is an invitation to the reader both to take on and to ‘tear up’ the image/field presented – since *décollage* (in English: “take-off” or “to become unstuck”) in art, is the opposite of collage: instead of an image (/field) built up of parts of existing images, a *décollage* is created by cutting, tearing away or otherwise removing pieces of an already existing image.

Folded within these considerations is furthermore a modesty regarding the fact, that as it turned out, the articles are primarily produced from within “The global suburbs of Scandinavia”. Certainly this has an impact on the level of generalisation and ‘transferability’ of some of the insights of the chapters. Thus, we invite the reader to such ‘double-movement’; dé-/collage.

Presentation of the chapters

The anthology is separated into three sections, namely The knowing body, The encultured body and The educated body. These themes are central pivots around which any reunion of body and learning is revolving.

The main focus of the first section is the individual body, without denying the fact that the body always is both individual and socio-cultural. The knowing body has a narrow perspective on the learning process from a psychological, neuroscience and phenomenological point of view. In The encultured body section, gender and aesthetics will be discussed in a body perspective as well as in a community of practice. The third section, The educated body, sheds light on various aspects of the body in educational contexts and different body-related conditions for learning. The individual chapters will be introduced in the following.

The knowing body (part one)

The first section opens with a chapter by Theresa Schilhab & Christian Gerlach *Embodiment, corporeality and neuroscience*. They address embodiment from the biological perspective and through the field of cognitive neuroscience. They use empirical research about the effects of brain damage on peoples’ ability to talk, make classifications and

remember to explore how the body is an active component that adds uniquely and indispensably to cognition. Through this analysis Schilhab and Gerlach seek out (traces of) links between cognitive processes and the body, thereby offering new understanding of the constitutive relationship between body and cognition and 'evidence' of embodied cognition.

Reinhard Stelter addresses *Learning in the light of the first-person approach*. This is the first of three chapters by Stelter, dedicated to various perspectives of learning and body from a phenomenological point of view. Here, Stelter describes and presents the first-person perspective as a source of the individual's deeper understanding of his/her interplay with a specific context and environment. This perspective is connected to the concept of the lived body. Embodied knowledge expressed from the first-person perspective can be viewed as the basis for personal and social meaning-making and as an important dimension for the building of communities of practice. Only through the understanding of each others' experiences, thoughts, reflections, values, motives and aims, Stelter argues, can we establish well-functioning learning- and working communities.

In *Body, emotions and learning* Simon Nørby's leitmotif is to investigate whether emotional learning and emotional influences on cognitive learning are critically dependent on the body. Nørby questions and criticises, thoroughly and carefully through-out the chapter. Thereby providing a thorough insight in the neuropsychological approach to the relation between bodies, emotions and learning, showing how central theories and empirical evidence relating emotions, body and learning can be seriously questioned.

The encultured body (part two)

The chapter *Sweethearts – The body as a learning subject* by Nina Rossholt offers a post-structuralist perspective on the (gendered) body, through an empirical analysis of preschool children's play. The article questions how girls and boys create processes of learning in their activities, through expressions of the body and spoken language in preschool context. The analytical strategy of 'troubling' the taken-for-granted opens up the complexity and multiple subject positions through which children are becoming learning subjects in institutions, and within this analytical approach it is shown how play and the pedagogies regulation of play is a source of the constitution of gender and heteronormativity.

Exploring body-anchored and experience-based learning in a community of practice by Reinhard Stelter. The chapter aims to integrate body-anchored and experience-based learning in the theoretical concept of learning in a community of practice. Present moment, epoché, intentional orientation and meaning-making are introduced as the four basic premises for body-anchored and experience-based learning which, in a second step, is presented as part of the social realm and as one of the prerequisites of learning in a community of practice. This integration is established and becomes visible through the following two concepts: 1. Reification as the outflow of co-ordinated action, and 2. narratives as the outflow of speech acts, originally based on embodied and experience-based knowledge.

Where the ordinary ends and the extreme begins – aesthetics and masculinities among young men. On the basis of empirical studies in the city of Copenhagen, Niels Ulrik Sørensen analyses body perceptions and practices among young men who push their bodies to the limit in order to meet contemporary ideals of aesthetized male bodies. The chapter weaves this analysis into conceptual discussions of the dichotomies between the individualized/massified body, the masculine/feminine body and the natural/cultural body. The chapter makes use of the concept of corporeality as a third position – i.e. a position which can bridge the components in dichotomous concepts of the body.

The educated body (part three)

Corporeality, exercise, mental health and mental disorders by Egil Martinsen & Thomas Moser provides an overview of the increasing scientific documentation of correlative and causal relations between a variety of aspects of corporeality, mental health and mental disorders explanations of these relations. Several theories that try to explain how corporeal processes may affect different aspects of mental health (and disorders) are discussed and vague and contradictory findings as well as limitations in the existing body of knowledge are addressed. Today there still is no 'grand theory' that can give a full explanation of these relations.

Cultural body learning – the social designation of code-curricula by Cathrine Hasse. In this chapter, Hasse connects discussions from the disparate fields of psychology, anthropology and philosophy while offering new theory regarding how learning influences the conceptualisation of physical place and the body as well as identities and the

sense of belonging in physical space. Through empirical analysis of newcomers becoming a member of an institutionalized community (university students), Hasse develops the concept 'cultural code-curriculum', which is learned pre-discursively through bodily interaction and reaction to bodily presence and actions. Learning the code-curriculum, Hasse argues, can influence who becomes a physicist and who does not.

Approaches to enhance body-anchored and experience-based learning is the final contribution by Reinhard Stelter. As the first two chapters have been theoretical, this one is practical/empirical in the sense that he develops ideas for the application of body-anchored learning. The main focus is on empirical examples from physical education. Body-anchored learning is conceptualised and analysed as integrated in a cultural setting and as part of learning in a community of practice.

Embodied learning in movement by Liv Duesund, is a philosophical exploration of the relation between the body as an object and the body as a subject. Duesund bases her discussion on the field of APA (Adapted Physical Activity). As she develops a body/phenomenological approach to understand adapted physical activity, she challenges existential dimensions in the field of APA. The chapter presents a theoretical outline of possible conditions needed to avoid objectification of participants engaged in APA.

The body as narrator by Helle Rønholt. Rønholt analyses complex negotiations of bodily in- and exclusions in a social context – in a Fourth Grade PE-class. Rønholt's empirical/analytical framework stems primarily from phenomenology, and the analysis offers perspectives on learning premises for children and teachers in an ethnic racialized space. Furthermore, by introducing the key analytical concept 'the silent body', Rønholt questions whether a bodily inertia in some places and cases might prevent learning.

In *Movement analyses and identification of learning processes*, Mia Herskind works on empirical material based on observations in two kindergarten institutions, and she presents an approach to legitimate and differentiate an interpretation of how focus on bodies and movements can qualify the understanding and interpretation of children's learning and well-being in kindergarten. Her frame of reference is hermeneutical/phenomenological, i.e. related to research questions that concerns learning processes, not only as reflective and discursive, but also pre-reflective, corporeal and emotional.

Finally, in the chapter *Body bildung – an essay about learning and corporeality* Søren Kjær Jensen & Thomas Moser point out that in future corporeality and embodiment in educational settings should be reflected in a much higher degree and more differentiated than today. They claim that body and corporeality, as core components of Bildung, need to lay the foundation for an active, engaged and genuinely embodied educational practice which may support a balanced ‘being in the world’ in children.

In the closing chapter of the anthology, *Post Scriptum – On ‘Learning bodies’*, the editors sum up the themes of the anthology with special attention to the problems of addressing the body from a single perspective i.e. within a single scientific field. With the chapter we hope to emphasise that truly accepting and stimulating the reunion of body and learning cannot be accomplished from within a single perspective. It is our hope that at a meta-level this anthology exemplifies why.

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