The Body in Education

Joris Vlieghe

In this chapter I deal with a topic that only recently became a serious subject of study for educational theory and philosophy, viz. the human body. As a rule, the very fact that learning and teaching are events in which we are involved as bodies, i.e., as people made of 'flesh and blood', has been disregarded, if not repressed. If educationalists have paid attention to the physical dimension of human life at all, the body appeared in a stereotypical, negative way. That is, the body is regarded as an object of distrust that should be kept under control by installing harsh disciplinary measures. As of recently, however, a revaluation of human corporeality seems to have occurred. Increasingly, corporeality is taken to be an important factor to take into account when theorizing education. As such the body has been (re)discovered by educational philosophers, even though in the day-to-day practice of learning and teaching it often remains forgotten.

In the first part I discuss the traditional view on the body within educational philosophy and theory. I go on showing, in the second and third sections, how a more positive attitude vis-à-vis corporeality has gradually emerged, and why it is of potential relevance for education. In the fourth section I return to the question why after all the body has been (and, very often, still is) neglected, suppressed or dealt with in a condescending way. Here, I discuss the most recent research on the body and education, and show how we can take an enduring debate in an entirely new direction. In the last part I zoom in on a case where education and the body are closely intertwined: physical education. The analysis I present here relates primarily to the Western educational and cultural context, and the examples and authors I discuss are to be situated against this background. However, corporeality is an educational issue all societies should deal with, and as such this chapter is more broadly applicable.

J. Vlieghe (✉)
KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium
e-mail: joris.vlieghe@kuleuven.be

P. Smeyers (ed.), *International Handbook of Philosophy of Education*,
Springer International Handbooks of Education,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-72761-5_71

The Body Within the Traditional View on Education

According to a traditional account of education, there are good reasons to assume that the physical side of human existence has no (or only a negative) meaning. This is partly the result of an *intellectualist* view that has prevailed for a very long time. This can be seen, for instance, in the *liberal education* approach, which has been dominant in the Anglo-American world of educational philosophy. In the work of theorists such as Peters and Hirst, education is fundamentally about initiating the new generation into valuable domains of knowledge (and skills related to knowledge) (Hirst and Peters 1970). The criterion to define what is of value regards the possibility of extending, deepening, and refining one's knowledge – and to make connections with other fields of knowledge and science. In that respect, it is a worthwhile endeavor to impart scientific knowledge *about* the body, as it happens during a biology lesson, whereas the body *itself* has no specific educational significance. Learning how muscular tissue is composed, and teaching the biochemical and mechanical processes that explain why we can move our bodies is of educational relevance. We see something new and unexpected. And, we are challenged to relate these insights to Newtonian mechanics, to learn more about anatomy, to make comparisons with locomotion in other species, etc. However, what it means to experience our ability for movement, let alone improving on them (e.g., by excelling in long-distance running or rugby) is of no concern to education (Cf. Barrow 2008).

Obviously, even according to supporters of this view it is important to pay at least some attention to our bodies. After all, the body needs to move, to rest, and to be fed at appropriate times. But, this also means that the body only has a secondary and instrumental role to play. Granted that a healthy body is a necessary precondition for the well-functioning of the life of mind, corporeality still has no meaning in and of itself. Therefore, it makes no sense at all to speak about physical *education*. At most one could sustain that within educational contexts time is spent for physical *training*. In other words, even if it is sensible to pay attention to the physical side of human existence (in the educational realm as well as elsewhere, for example at work), there is *no specific educational reason* to pay attention to the body as such.

To another tradition which has informed continental philosophies of education and which defines education in terms of *Bildung* (Cf. Løvlie and Standish 2002), the body also has no, or only a secondary, meaning. To this view, education is first and foremost aimed at cultivating the properly humane, i.e., at letting flourish that what sets humans apart from the rest of nature. As far as we have bodies, there is nothing which distinguishes us substantially from plants and animals. Nonetheless, thanks to the development of the unique mental capacities we possess, we might elevate ourselves and transcend the order of nature. To the extent that we are physical beings, we are and will remain subject to the laws of nature which are beyond our control. The task of education is to set us free from this servitude and to turn us into truly *free* human creatures. A small example might clarify this.

The need to drink when the body is short of fluids, but also more culturally modeled desires such as hankering after lemonade to satisfy this urge, is caused by

biological and psychological mechanisms that are ingrained in human nature. When I feel thirsty and when the means for me to meet this need are at my disposal (e.g., because a vending machine is available and I have enough change), satisfying this need can hardly be called an act of human freedom. After all, it is not I who has chosen to have thirst in the first place, and the reasons why I prefer lemonade over water are not (necessarily) clear to me. On the contrary, it is only when I would choose not to consume lemonade (out of good reasons, for example, because I believe my money could be better spent to charitable goals or because I don't want to drink what commercials tell me to), that I demonstrate that I am truly a *free* human being: then I verify that I can go against the instincts my body has put me up with. My choice to resist bodily inclinations sets me apart from sheer biological and psychological necessity.

However, for this to be possible education is required. As Kant (1982, p. 11) puts it: humans are the only creatures that can and should be educated. From birth, we are already more than animals, and yet we do not come to full humanity automatically. So, the educator must assume that there exists something in every human being that is not fully subject to the order of nature and that this capacity can be brought to fruition as the result of the right education. More exactly, education should aim at developing the properly humane capacity for self-determination (Cf. Langeveld 1971). As a consequence, a large part of education consists of learning to master our bodies in view of an ideal that has nothing whatsoever to do with the body. Far from being a mere theoretical point of view, this account has underpinned for centuries the day-to-day educational practice, in which the body has been subject to sometimes extreme disciplinary and disciplinary measures (Cf. Rutschky 1997). I will come back in greater detail to this issue later.

Towards a More Positive View on the Body

Since the second half of the last century, this dominant view on the role of the body has started to change fundamentally. This is, first, due to significant societal changes, and especially due to spectacular evolutions in medical science. As a result, our dependency on the realm of nature has changed forever. Hundred years ago, the average life expectancy in the West was about 55 years, breaking a leg brought about a lifelong lack of mobility, having a bad body odor often meant social isolation, and except for those who lived a celibate life pregnancy was an almost inescapable fate. With the exception of a certain death, we have more or less got control over the inconveniences and risks the body has put us up with, and for a majority of people in the Western world living a comfortable life in harmony with the body has become the rule (Juvin 2010).

Alongside these social and cultural changes, we have also come to a more accurate understanding of the processes that support what education is fundamentally about. Whereas the traditional account would argue that genuine education requires a break with the order of nature, it has become increasingly clear that the very

abilities of gaining knowledge and making sound judgments are at least partly rooted in our bodies. It is now generally accepted that neurological processes are a necessary condition for cognitive processes and that moral reasoning presupposes the proper functioning of certain brain areas. For instance, it has been shown that the malfunctioning of the ventromedial prefrontal cortex makes it impossible to respond swiftly and appropriately to moral dilemmas (Damasio 1999). However, it is not just our brains that are of crucial importance. For example, learning abstract concepts seems to be supported by a teacher's physical movements. This happens, for instance, when in order to explain that the heart functions as a complex pump-device, a biology teacher might illustrate this by using her two hands performing the widening and shrinking of the heart chambers (Pozzer-Ardenghi and Roth 2007).

A similar evolution took place within Western philosophy. For a long time, humans were believed to consist of two separate substances, body and mind – the so-called *dualist* account, which goes back to Plato, and which has become very influential especially since Descartes (1996). According to the latter, body and mind have nothing to do with each other. After all, one can grasp parts of the body, whereas the mind remains ungraspable. Also, like any material thing bodies can be split up into parts, whereas our consciousness is one and indivisible. On the basis of these and other arguments, the mind was considered not only as essentially different from the body but moreover as superior to it. This view is fully in line with what I have been calling the traditional view on education, i.e., the elevation of humankind above physical nature.

From many different theoretical perspectives, this long-standing and pernicious depreciation of the body has been heavily criticized. For instance, at the end of the nineteenth century, Freud already argued that large parts of our conscious life are determined by unconscious drives which aimed at bodily satisfaction. And, Nietzsche (1961) contended that the dualistic view of humankind is related to a deeply rooted hatred of and even disgust for our own physicality. Hence, a plea to remain 'faithful to the earth' and to affirm the bodily side of life to the full. During the twentieth century, this reappraisal of the body has been steadily intensified. It would be impossible to give a comprehensive overview of this evolution here, and so I only discuss some important milestones.

Within the Anglo-American world, Gilbert Ryle (1945) has drawn attention to the difference between knowing *that* and knowing *how*. With this distinction, he wants to show that many important things we learn are not a matter of pure knowledge. Much intelligent human behavior does not follow from a cognitive grasp of reality – for example, the knowledge of the rules one needs to take into account during a discussion. Rather, such behavior is dependent upon strongly embodied habits and sensibilities acquired during our education. A 'mindful' participant to a dialogue must know how to respond to others in a quasi-automatic way.

Another important school of thought that originated in the late nineteenth-century American context and that undoubtedly contributed to a revaluation of the body is *pragmatism*. A basic creed of this movement is that the human capacity to have conscious representations of the world is not some super-natural and exceptional phenomenon that needs to be explained. It is just part of the world we live in.

As James (2007) argued, our cognitive faculties are the result of evolutionary processes, i.e., they are part of making our way in life – in the same sense that all animals have developed specific features in order to survive safely in their natural environment. As such, conscious phenomena should be understood as emerging from natural history and in relation to the context in which knowledge is used and applied. This also means that all knowledge is firmly *embodied*. Pragmatists are therefore strongly opposed to any form of body-mind dualism.

More recently, Lakoff and Johnson (1999) have developed an *embodied cognition paradigm*, which is based on the simple observation that in the practical day-to-day life there are no disembodied minds that are opposed to the mere material reality of the body and the rest of the world. Instead there are only interactions between organisms and the environment. 'Body' and 'mind' are then only convenient 'shorthand' descriptions of two aspects of those interactions. We are however mistaken to regard these descriptions for ontologically separate entities. According to Lakoff and Johnson, our thought is structured with the help of image schemas and conceptual metaphors which are based on recurring bodily experiences. Essential notions such as part and whole or the very idea that processes have beginnings and ends are not imaginable if we wouldn't have bodies – bodies that have parts themselves and that can make journeys from point A to point B. This also means that pragmatists are not just making the trivial claim that there is no thinking without brains. Rather, our whole bodies are involved in embodied cognition.

Within continental philosophy, the most important theoretical contribution to giving the body its full due is to be found in *phenomenology*. In Husserl (1973) we already find a most helpful distinction between two fundamentally different ways of experiencing the bodily side of human life: there is the objective outsider's perspective which makes the body appear as a *Körper* (a complex machine in the way Descartes defined it), which is opposed to the subjective insider's experience of corporeality as *Leib* (the lived-through body). Very often the two are unrelated. The velocity measured by the chronometer is something altogether different from the directly lived swiftness (or slowness) while running on the beach. So, it could be argued that the traditional view which believed that the body could not possibly possess any intrinsic educational meaning is predicated on the erroneous idea that body is mere *Körper* (and therefore mere organic processes that belong to the order of biological necessity). More than anyone else, Merleau-Ponty (1962) has taken up the challenge of arguing that we *are* also *Leib* and of explaining why it is of the greatest importance to take this dimension into account.

He argues that the very possibility for the world to appear as a coherent and meaningful whole to our consciousness is dependent upon a primordial *bodily* engagement with things. Even in areas that seem completely disconnected from the corporeal side of our existence, e.g., in mathematics, the body cannot be let out of consideration. We count to ten because we have ten fingers. Even though there are good reasons to rely on an 8- or 16-part number system (as computers do), we prefer to work with a decimal system. This shows that even abstract activities such as mathematics are ultimately rooted in very practical and physical experiences (e.g., counting on one's fingers) (Cf. Sheets-Johnstone 1990). More generally,

Merleau-Ponty (1962) maintains that our bodies, before we can start to think, already possess a pre-reflexive grasp of the world. My hand 'knows' where to find and grab my pen – without first having to make a mental picture of the desk I am sitting at. Moreover, the body *itself* found all meaningful connections with the world. The way in which the world appears to us is given shape by the characteristics of our being physically embedded in the world. So, for instance, for a toddler the upper side of the table has no meaning: for her it is nonexistent, as due to her small body size, it is a part she never encounters. Corollary, the physical constitution of the adult makes that for her the underside is normally no part of her world – unless of course she is looking for a way to get rid of chewing gum.

The Educational Meaning of the Human Body

These shifts in the appreciation of the body are closely related to major developments in the world of education itself. Analogous changes are to be found in the work of progressive thinkers who advocated a shift from a teacher-centered to a child-centered approach. This already happened as early as the late eighteenth century with the rise of the so-called *Reformpädagogik* – which was a reaction to the above sketched tradition of *Bildung* in the German-speaking context (Benner and Kemper 2003). Central to this movement was the idea that education should respect the child in the entirety of its being, and therefore that natural and bodily inclinations (for instance towards play) should be taken as learning opportunities rather than as impediments to education. In the Anglophone world, and fully in line with the pragmatist turn in American philosophy, *experiential learning* gained a firm foothold during the twentieth century. For one of its major founders and spokespersons, John Dewey (1981), we should pay heed to the aesthetic, practical, and social dimensions of education. This is, in order to have genuine command over something, our knowledge and skill need to be based on lived experience of the world. People learn by actively doing things in the world, not by sitting still and passively soaking up what a teacher tells them about the world. Moreover, we only learn if we fully understand the practical relevance of the stuff that used to be buried in boring handbooks. Also, learning is never a solitary affair. It happens in the presence of other human beings. As such every educational situation is potentially one of cooperation. The basis of Dewey's reformist (but by today also very commonplace) ideas is the 'principle of continuity': there exists a continuum between organic (bodily) activities and education. Higher cognitive abilities are based on the way the body perceives, moves, and manipulates objects. Also, it is thanks to our embodiment that we are essentially social creatures rather than solitary minds (as Descartes would have it).

More recently, but wholly in keeping with Dewey's main intuitions, Richard Shusterman (2004) has developed a *somaesthetic* approach. For instance, he argues that aversive phenomena (such as the common abhorrence for mathematical formulae, but also xenophobic fears) are embodied habits that are caused by distressing events in our personal lives, and more exactly events that went together with tight

muscle contractions, and which gave rise to conditioned behavioral patterns of reacting in an inhibitory manner (e.g., to mathematical formulae or people with a different skin color). Educators, so Shusterman claims, should take this lesson, as it should be clear that more needs to be done than merely convincing that formulae are beautiful and that there is no objective reason to fear others because they look differently. Instead, we should offer students the opportunity to *fully* reflect on their feeling scared, which also involves an awareness of the bodily experiences of muscle constriction that go together with their fears. Only then can we retrain, step by step, more desirable habits of conduct.

Another important movement in which the body has been taken to have a major educational significance is the so-called *humanistic* approach to learning, which has its origin in the post-war client-centered psychology and which has found its strongest defender in Carl Rogers (Rogers and Freiberg 1994). Not unlike the *Bildung* tradition, Rogers starts from the idea that education should aim at the fullest possible development of the potential that sets us apart from the animals and that turns us into genuinely human beings (hence the name 'humanistic'). The key mistake, however, is to believe that the bodily side of life would stand in the way of this achievement. Instead, Rogers claims that the body possesses its own 'wisdom' and that we need to learn and trust it again. Education is indeed a matter of regaining something we lost: in the footsteps of Rousseau, Rogers holds that a lot of what goes wrong in modern Western culture directly follows from the suppression of our authentic, and more exactly our bodily human nature.

Obesity, to name just an example, is not so much caused by a lack of education (i.e., because one lacks discipline and cannot resist and rise above physical tendencies). On the contrary, it is brought about by a wrong-headed education. It is part of human nature to look after ourselves and to be concerned with fitness and agility. The fact that so many of us give in to noxious behavioral patterns is the result of having 'learned' that the consumption of large quantities of food equals a satisfied life. Therefore, the main task of the true educator is not merely to teach about the risks that come with an unhealthy diet and about the pitfalls of consumerist culture, but to restore contact with our innate orientation towards a good life, so as to develop more sound and natural standards of what counts in life. Likewise, we are born with an inclination towards seeking contact with other people, towards enjoying and sharing with them. In our society, this natural pro-social tendency gets repressed, again as the result of the existing educational system which promotes individual success and turns us into ruthless competitors (Ibidem). Spontaneous inclinations towards cooperation are suppressed and authentic human relationships are neutralized. This is a good reason for defending physical education in schools, as it offers opportunities for restoring an authentic connection with our bodies, but also for learning to work together. I return to this topic in the last part.

To conclude this section, I draw attention to two more recent perspectives within the humanities and the social sciences which have turned the body into a serious and central object of educational concern: *feminism* and *post-structuralism*. The basic idea informing the latter school of thought is that common ways of thinking and speaking are often based on sharp binary and hierarchical oppositions which, in the

end, are not defendable (Cf. Derrida 1992). The antagonism between mind and body (and the supposed superiority of the mind) is one of those. If we want to change the way our lives are ordered, we should blur these oppositions. Analogously, feminist scholars have shown that so-called essential differences between men and women have little to do with the body in a biological sense. Instead, they draw from our gender identifications, i.e., socially and culturally constructed ideas about being male and female. We come to assume these identifications as the result of an upbringing which prioritizes stereotypical representations of masculinity and femininity over many other possible ways of giving shape to our gender (Cf. Fraser 1989). Therefore, we need to critically deconstruct prevailing gender conventions and give new meanings to our gendered bodies. This would be a challenge for a truly critical education.

It should be noted, however, that these approaches have also met with the critique that they reduce the body to a pure effect of discourse, i.e., something which only exists thanks to our thinking and speaking about it (Cf. Carozzi 2005). Therefore, we lose sight of the body in its full physicality. Nonetheless, some post-structuralist thinkers such as Judith Butler (1993) have stressed the importance of interrupting dominant discourses on (gender) identities in a 'performative' way. This means that we publicly put on display that prevailing constructions of (gender) identity are without any ground. And, we do this by playing with the bodily routines that support these fixed identities (for instance, by gender parodies and cross-dressing). As such the theme of power and resistance has been raised, to which I turn now in greater detail.

Corporeality, Power, and Resistance

The account I have been giving so far has not taken into consideration one very important observation: although there seems to be a growing awareness of the importance of the body in educational theory and philosophy, in the real-life world of education corporeality remains to be neglected or dealt with in a deprecatory way (Cf. Vlieghe 2014). This is an indication that there is going on more than just the preponderance of intellectualist and dualist prejudice. In order to come to a more accurate understanding of the problematic status of corporeality in educational practice, I turn to another approach which is based on the work of Michel Foucault, and which conceives of corporeality in terms of power, oppression, and resistance.

One of Foucault's central claims is that in the eighteenth century a significant shift took place in the way in which Western societies are organized (Foucault 2010). Before that time social order was based on the power sovereign rulers exerted over death. They could execute anyone arbitrarily. By inducing fear and obedience in this way, social order was ensured. However, all this changed with the rise of *biopolitics*: rather than reigning over death, social order is from now on secured thanks to the government over life. Instead of sacrificing life as a means of deterrence, every human life counts. Or, more exactly, every life should be made

maximally productive. Each individual should contribute to the optimal and smooth functioning of society. As a result, sophisticated control mechanisms meant to ensure optimal contribution of all to society originated. More exactly, the human body became a direct target of biopolitical government. This is because the body is visible and its performance is easy to measure. The body thus became the object of continuous observation, recording and reporting. This, in turn, allowed for large-scale comparative analyses. For the first time in history, the idea that there could exist such a thing as a 'normal' body came to mind. Hence, bodies that were exceptional were termed 'abnormal', i.e., they were seen as a problem and as a threat to the well-functioning of society.

Foucault has further shown how particular institutions such as hospitals, prisons, and especially schools have played a capital role in this exercise of power over life and body (Foucault 1978). At school, the body of young people is drilled to the extent that they are able to function optimally in a productivity-oriented society. The abnormal is detected, mapped, and rectified. All unproductive aspects of physical life are adjusted or get neutralized. The overactive body is tamed, whereas our lazy bodies are encouraged to take up useful work. Bodies that crave for sexual gratification are taught that there are more worthwhile things to do. And our whimsical bodies learn to adapt unassumingly to fixed arrangements such as timetables (Cf. Deacon 2006). At school, everything is put in place to ensure that spontaneous, yet unproductive bodily tendencies get suppressed. In essence, schooling comes down to an unyielding imposition of discipline – instead of being (primarily) concerned with transferring knowledge and skills or with the formation and flourishing of the human person (Cf. Rutschky 1997). The ultimate purpose of going to school is to learn to get up every morning at an early hour, to face wind and rain in order to get to a place where one is not allowed to eat or urinate when one feels the need to do so, and where one is willing to perform repetitive, yet pointless work in a meticulous way. As such 'docile bodies' are created, getting people ready to devote themselves to do productive, but not really engaging work when they reach adulthood.

Furthermore, the purpose of these disciplinary mechanisms consists of making external control over our bodies progressively redundant: schooling is most successful when students no longer need teachers to observe them all the time to sit still and to forgo the impulse to drink whenever they feel thirsty. That is, schooling fulfills its true aims when the disciplining function is internalized to such an extent that one comes to possess maximal *self-control* (Cf. Elias 1994). Not surprisingly, this objective is close to the goal set by the traditional account of education which I discussed at length in the first section – transcending the realm of mere nature to achieve true freedom (understood as the capacity for self-determination).

The traditional account and a biopolitical analysis of the true aims of education are opposed in that to the latter approach the ideal of self-determination through control over the body is a form of oppression. Nevertheless, there is an interesting parallel to be made between these two approaches, which also sets them most markedly apart from the body-centered views discussed in section 'Towards a More Positive View on the Body' and 'The Educational Meaning of the Human Body' (Cf. Vlieghe 2014). To these views – pragmatism, phenomenology, and humanism –

the body is supposed to be in and of itself a source of meaning and knowledge, a resource which can ensure cooperation and harmony between people, as well as the site where genuine freedom can be achieved. Over and against such a view, both the traditional and the biopolitical account of education hold that the body, rather than being intrinsically oriented towards the greater good, is a nuisance which is constantly at risk of interrupting the order of things. It could be claimed that the traditional view on the body in education takes the body more seriously than other views do: it accepts the body in its full 'bodiliness'. This is because it draws attention to the many aspects of the corporeal side of life that are not conducive to the greater good and the well-functioning of society. This is in stark contrast to the humanist, pragmatist, and phenomenological approaches which substitute the real bodies we have with a nonexisting body ideal, i.e., with the genderless body of angels that – as the theological tradition wants it – never get drunk, nor ever need to transpire or defecate (Agamben 2010).

Some authors have tried to give a positive reading to these unruly and nonproductive aspects of bodily life. Following Bataille (1991), it could be argued that there is always something to our bodies that can *never* be captured by any social order – 'rebellious flesh' to use here an expression coined by the Dutch philosopher Henk Oosterling (1989). Our bodies are the container of an ineradicable revolutionary force which, he argues, is the condition of possibility of all social change. I have argued elsewhere (Vlieghe 2014) that occasions during which we entirely coincide with the bodily side of existence, e.g., when we are taken by a fit of laughter or when we make the same (repetitive) movements at the same time (during the exercise of calisthenics), it is no longer possible to define what it means to be together in terms of fixed roles and positions: at those moments we affirm to be fully 'flesh', and this constitutes a moment of radical equality. All existing ways of identifying and positioning ourselves vis-à-vis others become utterly meaningless. These moments are of great importance for education, as they allow for an interruption of an established order of things, and moreover for a new beginning – in the sense that the future is open for unforeseeable ways of living together. Corporeality is thus not only a hotbed of resistance. It also possesses a community-building, democratizing and transformative potential. As Deleuze (1978) – following Spinoza here – suggests, we do not know what a body – or for that matter a collective of bodies - can do. Corporeality thus implies a danger to any societal order, and this might explain why the body has such a problematic status in the word of education as customarily conceived (i.e., as aimed at maintaining the world as it is).

The Case of Physical Education

To conclude, I would like to zoom in on what is perhaps the clearest crossing point between education and the body: *physical education*. This subject is often not taken seriously. From its very introduction as a compulsory course in schools, physical education has been the object of suspicion. Moreover, it always had to be defended

against subjects that seemed to have far greater educational relevance, such as math, history, and languages (Cf. Vlieghe 2013). This is completely in line with the intellectualist account I discussed at the beginning of this chapter: from this perspective, it is far from clear *what might be educational about physical education*. This negative attitude has been reinforced by the fact that P.E. teachers mostly received a specialized instruction in the medical and biomechanical aspects of locomotion instead of being trained to become educators (Tinning 1997). This, of course, reinforces the dualist prejudice that the mind is substantially different and educationally far more important. Moreover, for many it is not clear why one would organize P.E. at school as oftentimes (and especially since the 1960s) the P.E. curriculum predominantly consists of doing sport. Today, P.E. and *sport education* are habitually seen as synonymous (Cf. Renson 1997). One might argue then that there are numerous (and very often much better) occasions for performing sport outside of school (Barrow 2008).

Together with the emancipation of the body as described in the second and third section, there have been many attempts to come up with an account of P.E. which takes it to be intrinsically worthwhile and to have a proper place within the walls of educational institutions. From a phenomenological point of view, it could be argued that the very term 'physical' education is itself a problem: it reduces the body to a mechanical device that needs maintenance (*Körper*), rather than that it would cultivate the lived-through body (*Leib*). As Carl Gordijn (1968) wants it, we should have *movement education* (and not physical education) in schools. And, as Margaret Whitehead (2001) has argued, we should even raise 'physical literacy' in our children. To understand this concept correctly, it is important not merely to define it in terms of specific abilities (e.g., running 100 m within a certain amount of time) but more generally (in the sense that alphabetic literacy is not merely about being able to read and write, but to have a whole world at one's disposal which is lacking to the illiterate). The physical literate possesses a wide and adequate register of movements and gestures for responding to the world, and this contributes to her life quality and sense of self-worth. Furthermore, movement education could instill many important values, such as teamwork, fairness, honesty, courage, endurance, learning to cope with winning and losing in a sane way, but also learning to respond in a tactful way to weaknesses in others (Cf. Kirk 2006; Skillen 1998). As already noted, from a humanist perspective (which takes human being to be a bodily creature through and through), it could be added that physical education is of supreme importance because it can – or must – support the full flourishing of our human potential, and as such it will contribute to a happy life for all (Cf. Hellison 1995). However, this would require a particular P.E. curriculum which prioritizes collaborative activities over competitive ones.

Now, along the lines of the critical reading of schooling in terms of disciplinarization, as expanded on in the fourth section, it could be claimed that many activities that take place in contemporary P.E. are aimed at bringing the body under biopolitical control. It might be clear form history that P.E. has often served the purpose of preparing the bodies of the young for a military career: subjecting them to collective forms of drill (e.g., marching exercises and calisthenics), making them

all doing the same things at the same time and according to a rhythm imposed by the blow of the whistle, bodies were created that functioned mechanically and automatically. As such, people were drilled to blindly obey orders and to become mere instruments of warfare (or for industrial production for that matter) (Gleyse 1997). A lot has changed since the 1960s, with the substitution of sport and games for army-like training schemes. Nonetheless, it could be claimed that P.E. is still about instilling control over our bodies, be it in far less explicit ways: by engaging and striving to excel in sport youngsters are made responsible themselves for controlling their own body, in a sometimes scrupulous and no less harsh manner (Cf. Kirk 1998). External control has become fully internalized. Moreover, Jean-Marie Brohm (2006) argues that today sport has become the new opium of the masses. With this he means that many of us are brought to take an instrumental relation towards our bodies because we strive to be like the sport heroes that are ubiquitous in popular media – people that all possess a perfect, narcissistic body and that seem in full control over it. Therefore, if school sport is a mere copy of what youngsters see happening at the television screen, this is bound to stimulate them not to shun ruthless competition and to measure their own self esteem in relation to the superhuman performances of sport celebrities.

Therefore, some maintain that we need a "socially critical physical education" (Tinning 1997), which aims at social and political transformation. This could happen by – among other things – raising consciousness regarding implicit power mechanisms behind certain forms of physical activity, and sport performance in particular. Or, it could be argued that physical education should be turned into a "moral practice" which stimulates respect for standards, authentic (rather than blind) reverence of successful sports(wo)men, and a sound appreciation for competition and striving towards excellence (Kirk 2006). Clearly, these suggestions have the benefit of explaining what is *educational* about P.E., but the risk is here that it is no longer clear what is *physical* about P.E. After all, one can easily (and maybe even more effectively) acquire the aforementioned values during a collaborative geography or history project, and one doesn't need to be physically active in order to learn and see how an unjust and oppressive societal order is imposed.

Elsewhere I have argued that we might do a service to physical education by going against this tendency to justify it in terms that have nothing to do with the body itself. Instead, we could take P.E. literally, i.e., as a practice that is entirely and uniquely focused on the physical (Vlieghe 2013). In line with what I said earlier in regards with the transformative and democratizing dimension of being gathered as bodies, a case could be made for conceiving again of P.E. in terms of collective movement exercise (during which we fully affirm to be bodies). Even though, as I discussed, this type of activity can be exploited by belligerent and biopolitical regimes, the reverse argument could also be made: when a collective of bodies moves together in time (Cf. McNeill 1995), the possibility of a radical change is present. And, this is felt as a danger to the established order. Hence, the danger is averted by giving collective physical activity a clear (viz. belligerent or productive) destination. Again, at that moment physical education is no longer *physical* education in a literal sense.

This last illustration shows that human corporeality remains to have a problematic, if not unsettling quality to it. In spite of the many good arguments that have been developed to give the body its full due, and in spite of undoubtedly very well-intentioned initiatives to approach the body more positively in the world of education, it seems that a genuine appreciation for the body in its full bodiliness poses an ongoing challenge for future educational theory and practice.

References

Agamben, G. (2010). *Nudities* (D. Kishik & S. Pedatella, Vert.). Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Barrow, R. (2008). Education and the body prologomena. *British Journal of Educational Studies, 56*(3), 272–285.

Bataille, G. (1991).The accursed share: An essay on general economy (R. Hurley, Trans.). New York: Zone Books.

Benner, D. & Kemper, H. (2003). *Theorie und Geschichte der Reformpädagogik*, 3 Bde. Weinheim/ Basel: Beltz.

Brohm, J. M. (2006). *La tyrannie sportive: théorie critique d'un opium du people*. Paris: Beauchesne.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. New York: Routledge.

Carozzi, M. (2005). Talking minds: The scholastic construction of incorporeal discourse. *Body & Society, 11*(2), 225–239.

Damasio, A. (1999). *The feeling of what happens: Body and emotion in the making of consciousness*. San Diego: Harcourt.

Deacon, R. (2006). Michel Foucault on education: A preliminary theoretical overview. *South African Journal of Education, 26*(2), 177–187.

Deleuze, G. (1978) *Lecture transcript on Spinoza's idea of affect*, http://www.scribd.com/doc/14483585/Transcript-of-Deleuzes-Lecture-on-Spinozas-Concept-of-Affect. Accessed 12 Apr, 2016.

Derrida, J. (1992). *Positions* (A. Bass, Trans.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Descartes, R. (1996). Meditations on first philosophy (J. Cottingham, Trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dewey, J. (1981). Logic: The theory of inquiry. In J. A. Boydston (Ed.), *John Dewey, the later works, 1925–1953* (Vol. 12). Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press.

Elias, N. (1994). *The civilizing process: Sociogenetic and psychogenetic investigations* (E. Jephcott, Trans.). Oxford: Blackwell.

Foucault, M. (1978). *Discipline & punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). London: Penguin.

Foucault, M. (2010). *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979* (G. Burchell, Trans.). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

Fraser, N. (1989). *Unruly practices: Power, discourse and gender in contemporary social theory*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Gleyse, J. (1997). *L'instrumentalisation du corps. Une archeologie de la rationalization instrumentale du corps, de l'Âge classique à l'époque hypermoderne.* Paris: L'Harmattan.

Gordijn, C. (1968). *Inleiding tot het bewegingsonderwijs*. Baarn: Bosch en Keuning.

Hellison, D. (1995). *Teaching responsibility through physical activity*. Champagne: Human Kinetics.

Hirst, P., & Peters, R. (1970). *The logic of education*. Routledge & Kegan Paul: London.

Husserl, E. (1973). *Zur Phänomenologie der Intersubjektivität I* (Husserliana XIII). Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff.

James, W. (2007). *The principles of psychology* (Vol. 1). New York: Cosimo.

Juvin, H. (2010). *The coming of the body* (J. Howe, Vert.). New York: Verso.
Kant, I. (1982). *Ausgewählte Schriften zur Pädagogik und ihrer Begründung. Besorgt von Hans-Hermann Groothoff*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh Verlag.
Kirk, D. (1998). *Schooling bodies. School practice and public discourse 1880–1950*. London: Leicester University Press.
Kirk, D. (2006). Sport education, critical pedagogy, and learning theory: Toward an intrinsic justification for physical education and youth sport. *Quest, 58*, 255–264.
Lakoff, G., & Johnson, M. (1999). *Philosophy in the flesh: The embodied mind and its challenge to western thought*. New York: Basic Books.
Langeveld, M. (1971). *Erziehungskunde und Wirklichkeit: Studien und Gedanken zur Theorie und Praxis der Erziehung*. Braunschweig: Westermann.
Løvlie, L., & Standish, P. (2002). Introduction: Bildung and the idea of a liberal education. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 36*(3), 317–340.
McNeil, W. (1995). *Keeping together in time: Dance and drill in human history*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception* (C. Smith, Trans.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
Nietzsche, F. (1961). *Thus spoke Zarathustra* (R. J. Hollingdale, Trans.). London: Penguin.
Oosterling, H. (1989). *Zarathustraaam*. Amsterdam: SUA.
Pozzer-Ardenghi, L., & Roth, W. M. (2007). On performing concepts during science lectures. *Science Education, 91*(1), 96–114.
Renson, R. (1997). The reinvention of tradition in sports and games. *Journal of Comparative Physical Education and Sport, 19*, 46–52.
Rogers, C., & Freiberg, H. J. (1994). *Freedom to learn*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall.
Rutschky, K. (1997). *Schwarze Pädagogik. Quellen zur Naturgeschichte der bürgerlichen Erziehung*. Berlin: Ullstein Buchverlage.
Ryle, G. (1945). Knowing how and knowing that. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, New Series 46*, (pp. 1–16).
Sheets-Johnstone, M. (1990). *The roots of thinking*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
Shusterman, R. (2004). Somaesthetics and education: Exploring the terrain. In L. Bressler (Ed.), *Knowing bodies, moving minds* (pp. 51–60). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
Skillen, A. (1998). Sport is for losers. In M. McNamee & S. Parry (Eds.), *Ethics and sport* (pp. 169–181). London: E & FN Spon.
Tinning, R. (1997). Performance and participation discourses in human movement: Toward a socially critical physical education. In J. Fernandez-Balboa (Ed.), *Critical postmodernism in human movement, physical education, and sport* (pp. 99–119). New York: SUNY.
Vlieghe, J. (2013). Physical education as 'means without ends'. Towards a new concept of physical education. *Educational Philosophy and Theory, 45*(9), 934–948.
Vlieghe, J. (2014). Corporeality, equality and education. A biopedagogical perspective. *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies, 36*(4), 320–339.
Whitehead, M. (2001). The concept of physical literacy. *British Journal of Teaching Physical Education, 6*(2), 127–138.