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Embodiment: Philosophical Considerations of the Body in Adaptive Physical Education

Øyvind F. Standal

Faculty of Education and International Studies

OsloMet – Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway

ORCiD: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0464-7875

Abstract

In this chapter, the concept embodiment is introduced. This is done by taking the perspective of phenomenological philosophy, a school of thought that emphases lived experience and theorizes the body as something more than a biological object. By drawing on relevant research in the area of adaptive physical education, practical consequences of this theoretical perspective are described. More specifically, by focusing on embodiment, it is argued that teachers and specialists of adaptive physical education need to attend to their practice as context-sensitive and persons-centered.

Introduction

In this chapter, I will introduce the concept embodiment. This will be done by taking the perspective of phenomenological philosophy. This philosophical school of thought emphasizes lived experience and theorizes the body as something more than a biological object. Embodiment in this perspective helps us see how the body is intimately connected with things in the world and with other people. By drawing on relevant research in the area of adaptive physical education[1], the practical consequences of this theoretical perspective are described.

In the German language, the body can be spoken about using two different words: *Körper* and *Leib*. The founder of phenomenology, an important philosophical school of thought in Continental philosophy, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), used this distinction to ground his philosophy of the body. Roughly speaking, *Körper* refers to the body as a thing or object and *Leib* refers to the lived-through body. While the word *Leib* has the same root as the word *Leben* which means living and life, *Körper* can be translated to corpse (i.e., the dead body). It is, however, a crucial point that these two words do not imply a separation between a living and lifeless matter (Slatman, 2016). *Körper* can also refer to the living, physical body. The two words are in that sense referring to different aspects of the same body:

> The experience of one's *own* body necessarily assumes the difference between *Leib* and *Körper*. If this difference would not be there, it would imply that my body is either purely a *Leib* or purely a *Körper*. In the first case, the body is robbed of all its

[1] Traditionally, the field of study that this handbook covers has been named adapted physical education. However, there has been recent suggestions for a shift in terminology towards adap*tive*, rather than adapt*ed* (e.g. Connolly & Harvey, 2018; Goodwin & Howe, 2016; Standal & Rugseth, 2016). The difference in terminology is intended to capture the difference between flexible, person-centered approaches to teaching and professional practice (adaptive) as opposed to pre-determined, expert-driven programs (adapted). In this chapter, I use the term adaptive. This reflects my conviction about the nature of professional practice in our field, and – as will become clear in this chapter – it also reflects the theoretical position I draw on in presenting the role of the body in adaptive physical education (and adaptive physical activity, more broadly).

> corporeality because a pure *Leib* is nothing else but a pure spirit, and one may wonder whether such situations occur in the real world. In the second case the body is robbed of its dignity. This experience, whereby one's own body is reduced to a pure being-*Körper*, does occur indeed. Mostly it involves extreme situations such as rape, humiliation, excessive violence, and traumas. In these cases one will want to dissociate oneself from one's own body. (Slatman, 2016, pp. 75-76)

Originating from philosophical insights about the body, the concept of embodiment has become a key term in many disciplines over the last couple of decades (Cheville, 2005). Embodiment provides a way of describing, analyzing, and explaining the body, which is richer and different from what has been called the Cartesian understanding of the body. Cartesianism implies that it is our thinking, or our mind, that makes us human. The body on the other hand is a mere thing, an object governed by the same causal forces as other things in nature (i.e., it is a *Körper*-body). In this picture, it is our thinking mind, or the soul, that makes us human, while the body is denigrated. The Cartesian image of the human body is a disembodied image, where "the body is felt more as one object among other objects in the world than as the core of the individual's own being" (Laing, 1965, p. 69 as quoted by (Sheets-Johnstone, 2018), p. 9).

In this chapter, the body will be viewed as not merely *connected* to our subjective experiences, but indeed the very ground of our subjective experiences. Embodiment highlights how the body and the world are intertwined in our experience. A quote from the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty highlights this: "Inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside of myself'' (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). By introducing a number of analytical distinctions, the aim of this chapter is to explicate the concept of embodiment, lay out its philosophical background and show how the

concept has been utilized within the area of sports and physical education for people with disabilities / impaired bodies.

Embodiment: Initial Considerations

Phenomenology has been applied to physical education in general (Arnold, 1979; Connolly, 1997; Stolz, 2014; Standal, 2015) and to adaptive physical education in particular (Connolly, 2008). Embodiment is connected to a host of other concepts from phenomenological philosophy. In this chapter, only embodiment will be covered, but we have to make explicit that other concepts, such as the first-person perspective, intentionality, and the phenomenological method are all interrelated. To fully appreciate these concepts, we would refer readers to Dan Zahavi's (2018) introductory book as one of many useful introductions written by qualified philosophers. However, a short explanation is provided.

The first-person perspective (i.e., I or we) is important, because it underscores the crucial difference between the phenomenological approach and the traditional third-person scientific approach to understanding human beings. Physical activity can serve as an example. The common definition of physical activity is: "any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that results in energy expenditure" (Caspersen, Powell, & Christenson, 1985, p. 126). While this definition is useful for physiologists, it is meaningless for a phenomenologist (Standal, 2015). For the physiologists, this way of understanding physical activity is useful because it allows them to study the physical activity of *anybody* in a third person perspective. For the phenomenologist it is meaningless because under that definition, it does not matter if the person engaging in physical activity is running on a treadmill with a gun to her head, or enjoying a run in the beautiful sunset. That is, the definition overlooks what it is like for *somebody* to be physically active (the first-person perspective).

Intentionality is not to be confused with having intentions, for instance a student's intention to read this chapter. Rather, intentionality is a fundamental characteristic of the directedness consciousness. When we are conscious, our consciousness is always directed at some object. Analyzing the structures of intentionality is at the heart of the philosophical project of phenomenology, because it helps clarify the relation between the mind and the world (Zahavi, 2018). Here, it is important to note that Zahavi (2018) refers to the embodied, and not a disembodied, mind.

The phenomenological method is a description of the way phenomenological philosophers go about when they study phenomena. This is not to be confused with various qualitative research methods that use the term phenomenological. Central to the phenomenological method is the concept bracketing, which involves suspending one's theoretical or common sense assumptions about the phenomenon under study. This allows the phenomenologist to attain a so-called phenomenological attitude, which allows her to describe the phenomenon as it appears to her, in order to give an account of experience without theorizing or explaining the experience.

In terms of embodiment, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1996) distinguish between three dimensions. The first is the *facts of our embodiment*, by which they mean the simple and seemingly universal facts that human beings have the bodies we have. We have hands that can grip things, heads that can turn (but not eyes in the neck), knees that can bend and so on. Another important fact of our embodiment is that human bodies are vulnerable. The always open possibility of not having two hands is also a fact of our embodiment. These facts of embodiment enable and constrain our interaction with our environment: our knees can bend, so certain objects afford sitting down. The position of our eyes gives us a specific perspective on our world, which is different from if we also had eyes in our neck. Because we have the

bodies we have, mountains appear to be large and flying is impossible. The world shows up for us in the way it does, due to our bodily constitution. This also means that changes in our vulnerable, bodily constitution can result in changes in our world (Leder, 1990; Toombs, 1992).

The second dimension of embodiment is that human beings can develop skills, habits, and dispositions (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1996). This is a central point, because it suggests that the body is not only a thing (*Körper*), but it is also performative, something we do. Thus, embodiment implies that we are both *having* and *being* our bodies. A common misconception is that since phenomenologists are critical of Cartesian dualism (i.e., the body as something one has, *Körper*), they tend to focus only on the subjective part of the body (i.e., the body as something one is, *Leib*). This, however, is not correct: one of the main insights of phenomenology is the duality of both having and being a body. The subjective and the objective sides of our bodies are always intertwined. Embodiment also suggests that the body extends beyond the surface of our skin and into the surrounding world. We can make use of things, such as a hockey stick or a wheelchair, and these objects can become experienced as a part of our body (Standal, 2011). Through socialization and learning, we therefore refine our embodiment, and in so doing we come to experience the world differently.

The third dimension of embodiment described by Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1996) is its cultural dimension. Our bodies become cultivated, for instance in that some gestures are meaningful in one culture, but rude or meaningless in other cultures. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s in Norway, hardly anyone except sailors had tattoos. Today, this practice of ornating the body is a common practice, a way of cultivating the body, making it an expression of one's own individuality (Crossley, 2006).

In relation to disability, the cultural dimension means the impaired body has a history and is as much a cultural phenomenon as it is a biological entity. One aspect of this cultural history is the idea of what constitutes a normal body and what is considered an abnormal or deviant body. We should, for instance, object to the statement made regarding the first dimension of embodiment (i.e., that it is a fact of our embodiment that we have two hands). Such a statement might be considered as an unwarranted normative consideration about what counts as a proper human body. As Scully (2008) states "beliefs about normal embodiment become normative" (p. 58). In other words, what we perceive as a normal body is influenced and shaped by our cultural context and the often implicit norms we hold. The cultural dimension of embodiment thus takes into account how our bodies are always shaped by cultural influences. This is not only a matter of lived experiences of the body, but also a matter that enables and disables what bodies are allowed to do.

The Body and the World: A Phenomenological Perspective

As already mentioned, phenomenology is a branch of philosophy developed in Europe in the early parts of the 1900s. Phenomenology has developed into different directions (e.g., realistic, constitutive, existential, and hermeneutical phenomenology; (Embree, 1997) and has had an impact in other disciplines such as sociology, psychology, and the cognitive sciences. While Husserl clearly paid attention to the body in his development of phenomenology (Zahavi, 2003), it is generally agreed that it was his successor, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who first developed a full blown account of the body from a phenomenological perspective. So, what does a phenomenology of the body mean?

Phenomenologists investigate experiences as these are presented to the subjects who are having the experiences (Romdenh-Romluc, 2011). Merleau-Ponty (2002) held that phenomenology:

> . . . offers an account of space, time and the world as we 'live' them. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is, without taking account of its psychological origin and the causal explanations which the scientist, the historian or the sociologist may be able to provide. (p. vii)

As this quote implies, phenomenologists are trying to describe the *what it is like* qualities of experiences rather than trying to explain the origin or cause of the subject's experience. This is an example of the difference between a first-person and a third person perspective, respectively. For instance, if we want to understand the experience of breathlessness while exercising, phenomenologists would try to describe how it is experienced for the subjects to be out of breath, rather than trying to find a cause for the breathlessness (pulmonary infection? vigorous activity?). This aspect of embodiment is oftentimes referred to as the lived body: how the body appears in experience.

The Body and Things

By focusing on the lived body, phenomenologists find that a strict separation between the body and the world cannot be upheld. Normally - in what phenomenologists refer to as the natural attitude - we believe that the body ends at the surface of our skin. The skin is the boundary between an individual and the surrounding world and other people. By adopting a phenomenological attitude, however, we come to see that the skin is not the boundary between the body and the world. Merleau-Ponty (2002) discusses this in relation to blind people's use of a cane: "The blind man's stick has ceased to be an object for him, and is no longer perceived for itself; its point has become *an area of sensitivity, extending the scope and active radius of touch*, and providing a parallel to sight…" (p. 165. Italics added). In the same passage he also notes how - when we are proficient at driving – one can drive through a narrow opening "without comparing the width of the opening with that of the wings, just as I

go through a doorway without checking the width of the doorway against that of my body" (ibid.). Thus, in the phenomenological perspective this means that "to get used to a hat, a car or a stick is to be transplanted into them, or conversely, to incorporate them into the bulk of our own body." (ibid.).

These quotes need some unpacking in order to make sense: Through use, tools and objects become incorporated, taken up in the body. Standal (2009) has analyzed how the wheelchair becomes incorporated - experienced as a part of one's own body - through the dual process of both learning how to use it and learning how to become a wheelchair user. However, Merleau-Ponty also points out that we become "transplanted" into these objects. One way of interpreting such a sentiment is to say that objects are not neutral things. Things become the objects that they are by us using them. A ball, for instance, could be a joyful piece of PE equipment or a lethal object (Quennerstedt, Almqvist, & Öhman, 2011). Objects intended to be played with can appear as strange and meaningless, while objects that are not intended for that purpose can be enthralling pieces of play (Evensen, Standal, & Ytterhus, 2017). The point here is that our intentions are transplanted into the objects, thus making them what they are.

The Body and Movement

The original phenomenological analysis of things as use-objects can be found in the German phenomenologist Martin Heidegger's (1996) *Being and Time* where he elaborated on a carpenter's relation to the hammer. According to Heidegger, the hammer is understood through hammering, not by looking at or observing its different parts. It is through using the hammer that it is given its meaning: it is used in order to strike a nail, in order to build a house, in order to get shelter from the rain. As Dreyfus (1991) says, the hammer is "defined

by its function (in-order-to) in a referential whole. … to actually function, equipment must fit into a context of meaningful activity." (p. 91. Italics in original).

This way of thinking about things as primarily use-objects highlights two issues that are captured by Merleau-Ponty's (2002) notion of bodily space. First of all, our engagement with the world is primarily practical rather than theoretical. In other words, it is a matter of knowing how before knowing that (Ryle, 1949). Second, bodily space is not only revealed, but also structured by bodily movement. Two examples will be used to explain the idea that bodily space is revealed and structured by movement. The first is Merleau-Ponty's (1963) analysis of a football player (that is, a soccer player in American parlor - however, the general point is the same), and the second is taken from Kay S. Toombs (1992) analysis of the lived experience of disability. The football field, says Merleau-Ponty:

> … is pervaded by lines of force (the 'yard lines'; those which demarcate the 'penalty area') and articulated in sectors (for example, the 'openings' between the adversaries) which calls for a certain mode of action and which initiate and guide the action as if the player were unaware of it. The field itself is not given to him, but present as the immanent term of his practical intentions. The player becomes one with it and feels the direction of the 'goal', for example, just as immediately as the vertical and horizontal planes of his body. (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, pp. 168-169)

As an example of bodily space, the football field is partly constrained by objective structures, such as the penalty area, the side lines and so on. They are objectively given in the sense that they are measured geometrically. However, through engagement on the field, the player also creates space, sectors in which runs can be made (or where runs are not feasible) or where passes can be made. This is what is meant by the expression that the field is "not given", but is present to the players due to their "practical intentions". Through engagement on the field,

a dialectic between the actions of the players and field is established, so that movements, passes, dribbles and so on, modifies the character of the field establishing "in it new lines of forces which in turn unfold and are accomplished, again altering the phenomenal field" (Merleau-Ponty, 1963, p. 169). The more skilled the footballers are, the more nuanced and detailed the bodily space becomes. This is why Mohammed Salah and Lionel Messi are able to see openings and act upon them in ways that the average hobby footballers cannot.

A second example of movement and bodily space is from the philosopher Kay S. Toombs' (1995) article on the lived experience of disability. She outlines how acquiring a disability through a progressive illness influences her experience of space. Similarly to Merleau-Ponty, she takes movement as opening up space "allowing one freely to change position and move towards objects in the world" (p. 11). However, she goes on to explain that the loss of mobility that she experiences "anchors one in the Here, engendering a heightened sense of distance between oneself and surrounding things" (ibid.). Again, there is a relationship between the practical intentions and the experience of bodily space. When getting from A to B becomes problematic or even impossible, this influences the experience of bodily space: for Toombs it is about being stuck in a Here, rather than getting to There.

These two examples illustrate how embodiment is intertwined with the surrounding world. van Manen (1990) refers to four existentials, that is, heuristic guides that help us in reflecting on lived experience: these are lived space, lived body, lived time, and lived relationships. While the term embodiment foregrounds the lived body, the two examples just given helps us see that embodiment can only be foregrounded with the other existentials in the background. The foreground/background relationship is to be thought of as a gestalt relationship, such as those we see in gestalt-figures like the duck/rabbit picture: you can only see either the duck or the rabbit at one time, but seeing either the duck or the rabbit is

premised on the other figure being in the background. Embodiment is likewise foregrounded on the lived experience of space, time, and other people.

The *lived* dimension is also important. As the two examples highlight, geometrical distances, that is the distances that are measured in meters and that are the same for everybody, loses their importance. Toombs (1995) describes how what used to be an "unremarkable" walk from her office to the classroom, completely changed its character as her illness developed into a loss of mobility. The geometrical distance had not changed, but the lived space constituted by her movement from the office to the classroom shows "how the subjective experience of space is intimately related both to one's bodily capacities and to the design of the surrounding world" (p. 12). While the example of the football field suggests that developing skills and playing these skills out in relation to space and other people (teammates and opponents) changes how the world shows up for the player, Toombs points out how loss of mobility constricts space. Together, these two examples have implication for adaptive physical education in the sense that they show the centrality of embodiment for understanding space, time, and relations with other people in movement activities.

Embodiment and Disability

In the field of adaptive physical education there is some literature that deals with different understandings of disability, and the consequences these have for adaptive physical education (Grenier, 2007; Haegele & Hodge, 2016). Drawing on work in disability studies, this literature refers to the difference between medical and social models of disability. In both models, the difference between impairment and disability is essential. While impairment refers to changes in body functions and structures that deviate from the statistical norm, disability is about limitations in activities and participation. The medical model sees the relationship between impairment and disability as a causal one: the impairment is what causes

the disability. This leads to the idea of rehabilitation and medical interventions on the individual (Grue & Heiberg, 2006): By fixing or reducing the impairment, the disability will consequently be reduced. The medical model has historically been the traditional way of thinking about disability, but during the latter decades of the 20th century, scholars and activists endorsing the social model of disability criticized the medical model for being a form of oppression (Oliver, 1996; Shakespeare, 2006). Their key move was to sever the causal relationship between impairment and disability: disability is not caused by deviations in body functions or structures. It is rather the result of an unaccommodating society. Impairment is a normal human variation and disability then becomes a political issue: why are societies not accommodating these variations?

More detailed explications of the conflicting relationship between the medical and social model of disability can be found elsewhere (Shakespeare, 2006). The point here, and which is also taken up by Haegele and Hodge (2016), as well as within this handbook by Haslett and Smith (under contract) is how embodiment can be an alternative way of understanding disability, which addresses weaknesses found in both the medical and the social model. More specifically, these weaknesses are that both models ignore the lived experiences of the individual living with a disability. The medical model, as Toombs (1992) has shown, emphasizes the medical profession's third-person perspective on impairment and disability. According to Toombs, the third-person, medical perspective represents "abstractions from lived experience" (p. 42) that are "distinct from and not identical with" (ibid.) the experiences of the person with a disability. Similarly, the social model has also been criticized for ignoring the lived experiences of people with disabilities. In order to focus on the political side - how social arrangement produces dis-abling conditions - social model activists explicitly rejected the importance of attending to lived bodily experiences. According to

Hughes and Paterson (1997), “there is a powerful convergence between biomedicine and the social model of disability with respect to the body. Both treat it as a pre-social, inert, physical object, as discrete, palpable and separate from the self” (p. 329). In other words: both models promote a third-person, perspective with Cartesian dualism.

The concept of embodiment helps us further realize the intersection between body and world in disability. In simultaneously criticizing the medical and the social models, critics point out that disability cannot be attributed to the body or the environment respectively (Weiss, 2015). It is more appropriately understood as located in the relationship between body and environment. By locating disability there, we can see why the concept of embodiment has been employed in theorizing the dual critique of the medical and social models (Paterson & Hughes, 1999; Weiss, 2015).

Exemplary Studies of Adaptive Physical Education

So far, embodiment has been theorized from a phenomenological perspective emphasizing the intertwined relationship between body and space (or environment / world) and the importance of lived experience. Through our active engagement in the world, the world becomes embodied and the body’s active engagement is simultaneously enabled or disabled by the design of the surrounding world. As Inahara (2009) reminds us, this design is not solely a physical, architectural matter - it is also psycho-social. Attitudes and responses from other people in the world are also important. Embodiment represents a fruitful approach to disability in the sense that it represents an alternative way between the medical and the social model (Hughes & Paterson, 1997; Paterson & Hughes, 1999). In the following section, I will show how this way of thinking about the body and disability can be applied to adaptive physical education. This will be done by examining the work of Maureen Connolly as exemplary studies of embodiment.

The work of Maureen Connolly is of particular relevance for adaptive physical education since she has been pioneering phenomenologically inspired research in the field for more than two decades (Connolly, 1995; Connolly & Craig, 2002; Connolly & Harvey, 2018; Connolly, 2008). Connolly (1995) holds that the primary responsibility of physical educators is the "responsibility to the body" (p. 26), because the body is "the origin of knowing and being in the world" (ibid.). One of the key features of Connolly's work is her attention to insider's experiences, that is the lived experience of the students and others taking part in physical education. Listening to the stories of insiders and examine what these experiences can reveal as significant can be used heuristically to inform "teaching-learning dialogue, feedback, description, progression, and more" (p. 37).

In two subsequent articles, Connolly goes on to show how these ideas can be applied (Connolly & Craig, 2002; Connolly, 2008). First, Connolly and Craig (2002) consider the lived experiences of autism and the auto-immune disease myalgic encephalomyelitis (ME). In the first case, Connolly and Craig examine how some people with autism might engage in "inappropriate nudity… going outside in cold weather wearing only underwear or nothing at all, or removing clothing and pressing the naked body against a hard or definitive surface, such as a wall or floor" (p. 454). In the latter case, the authors take up how some people who experience ME can feel over-powered by scents from the surroundings leading to headache, nausea, dizziness, and so on. Both cases can, according to Connolly and Craig (2002), be described as *stressed embodiment*. The point from a phenomenological point of view is not to explain what causes the stressed experiences, but rather to devise strategies that emerges from an understanding of these lived, embodied experiences.

As the authors note, the typical strategy in working with behaviors, which normally – and thus normatively – are referred to as deviant, is to manage them. But, Connolly and Craig

(2002) offer an alternative to behavior management, which is that educators should ground their work in the lived experience of those persons they are set to serve. This viewpoint also provides an avenue into understanding how educators may use the eidetic feature of embodied experiences of others in the work. Connolly (1995) argued that eidetic features can be used in the construction of "individualized education plans (IEPs)" (p. 37). She points out that a limiting factor in design and implementation of such plans is the *able-bodiedness* of the persons making and practicing them. Being able-bodied means that those persons have different frames of reference in terms of embodiment as compared to the students they are working with. The advantage in grounding the design process in the lived experiences of the students is that - given that it is properly carried out – it can bracket the assumptions and habits of the adaptive physical education specialists.

Later, Connolly (2008) presented an embedded movement curriculum developed for persons with autism. The content of the curriculum and the pedagogical processes embedded in it is grounded on "the premise that the lived body is the site of meaning-making" (p. 243) and that the behaviors displayed by persons with autism are solutions to stressed embodiment, rather than displays of deliberate deviance. Connolly describes the environmental requirements of the curriculum (e.g., surfaces, obstacles, lighting, objects and equipment), content and process (e.g., attunement for body signs, dignified interventions for calming), instructional strategies (e.g., attention the person's "developmental repertoire" [p. 248]) and gymnasium space and pedagogic intentionality (e.g., how mats soften noise). A more detailed presentation of the embedded curriculum is beyond the scope of this chapter. The main point here is to highlight the possibilities of work from a phenomenological perspective to ensure that the embodiment of the participants are respected and honored.

While the work of Maureen Connolly highlights how embodiment can be a fruitful perspective to parallel, supplement or even replace medically oriented work, it has also inspired others to use embodiment as a theoretical perspective of relevance for adaptive physical education. For example, Evensen, Standal, and Ytterhus (2017) studied the intersection of the lived body and lived things in a special needs education unit. Lived things are in this case objects that are put to practical-pedagogical use in the special needs education unit and thus structure the experiences of the students. By way of close observations based on a phenomenological methodology (van Manen, 2014), Evensen et al. (2017) investigated the meaning of things used in the unit. They found that traditional toys were not favored by the students and the educators, because these toys carry with them specific intentions, for instance by demanding motor skills that were beyond the reach of the children or requiring the imaging of a world that these children had little or no experience of. This meant that the relations between the participants' ways of being in the world and those ways suggested by pre-defined things broke down. On the other hand, things that one might not think of as traditional toys, such as a golden chain or an IKEA bag, provided open, multi-sensory possibilities allowing the participants to play with them in their own way. Much like the work of Connolly, this study highlights pedagogical work grounded in professionals' attunement to students' lived experiences. By seeking confirmation of their pedagogical decisions in the embodied expressions of their students, the professionals let students without symbolic language seek out and play with things that correspond to their subjective way of being.

Closing Comments

In this chapter, I have presented embodiment mainly from a phenomenological perspective. This perspective allows us to understand the intertwining of the body and the world thus overcoming body-mind and body-world dualisms. There is therefore also a strong

affinity between this perspective on embodiment and understandings of disability that seek to be alternatives to the medical and the social models of disability.

One challenge with the phenomenological perspective is that it emphasizes individual experiences. Although phenomenology clearly is not subjectivist or introspective, it is regularly criticized by contemporary scholars for not being able to take up structural issues, such as politics or oppression. As an example, Weiss (2015, p. 80) has formulated this critique as the "male philosopher's tendency to presume that his descriptions of lived experience hold true for all human beings, regardless of gender, race, class, ethnicity, age, ability, etc." Similarly, proponents of the social model of disability would argue in the same way: attending to individual experiences of pain and suffering would derail the political work needed to tear down unjust and disabling political structures.

However, as Standal (2015) has pointed out, the work of phenomenological, feminist philosophers such as Gail Weiss or Iris Marion Young shows how conceptual and theoretical resources from phenomenology can be employed precisely to show how embodied experiences are never exclusively a result of universal bodily structures, but also of gender, race, class, ability and so on. Despite this, there is still an aspect of embodiment that is not covered properly from a phenomenological perspective. This is the discursive aspect of embodiment. As Weiss (2015) points out, experiences and perceptions are shaped by norms that themselves are not explicitly thematicized in experience and perception. How we perceive and experience our own and other's embodiment is formed by perceptual norms about for instance what an appropriate body looks like or what abilities a normal body should be able to display.

In the footnote on the first page of this chapter, I referred to researchers who prefer the term adap*tive* over adapt*ed* physical education. As Connolly and Harvey (2018) points out the

term is used to highlight the "organic and responsive character [of professional practice] and to emphasize that the context and individual sensitive responses required are indeed ongoing and autopoetic, arising from the conditions and contingencies of mundane and intense engagements" (p. 295). Indeed, if the field of adaptive physical education moves from a medical model of disability, the term adaptive can been seen as a response to this move. The concept of embodiment as it is presented in this chapter helps explain this, because when the body is taken seriously as a site of experience and when it is realized that the body is not just something we have – it is also something we are – then we can begin to see the need for a context-sensitive, persons-centered approach to professional practice.

Summary of Key Points

- Phenomenology is an important school of thought in Continental philosophy. It was founded by Edmund Husserl in the beginning of the 20th century.
- Phenomenology as a philosophical discipline has been highly influential for other disciplines, such as sociology, psychology and the cognitive sciences. It has also been important for the development of qualitative research methods. However, it is important to keep in mind the differences between phenomenology as philosophy and as methodology. There are currently on-going debates as to what the term phenomenology means when it is used in the relation to qualitative research. This is a topic which is not dealt with in this chapter.
- A central point of relevance from phenomenology to adaptive physical education (as well as physical education more generally) is the non-dualistic understanding of the body.
- Phenomenologists like Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty have shown that human beings are embodied subjects, which means that the body is not just

something we *have*, it is at the same also something we *are.* In other words: human beings are embodied subjects.

- The concept embodiment reflects the idea that subject experiences the world through the body. Therefore, changes in the bodily capacities changes one's perceptions and experiences of the surrounding world. Likewise, how the world is structured, architecturally as well as attitudinally, enables and disables what bodies can do.
- Embodiment further means that the subject can come to embody objects in the world, such as a hockey stick or a wheelchair. We can also come to embody other people's attitudes towards us.
- In disability studies, embodiment has been a helpful concept, because it has represented a "third way" between the medical and social models of disability. Embodiment has drawn attention to the lived experiences of impairment.

Reflective Questions for Discussion

- What does it mean to *have* a body and to *be* a body?
- What are the most important differences between, on the one hand, understanding the body only as a biological entity and on the other hand, taking a non-dualistic approach to the body?
- Researchers in the area of adaptive physical education who have worked from a phenomenological perspective and have used the term embodiment and seem to come to similar conclusions regarding the professional practice of; for example, adapted physical educators. What are the most important consequences for practitioners?

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