

CHAPTER 15

Giving the Body Its Due: Autobiographical Reflections and Utopian Imaginings

Many conversations that link education and the body make the argument that people have to be healthy in order to get on with the real learning of school or work or life in general. In contrast, Joannie Halas and Jeanne Adele Kentel argue that the physical is integral to a good and worthwhile life per se, and not as a means to achieve some other better end. In other words, they directly challenge the mind-body split so endemic to modern Western thought. Part of their argument is that we comprehend ourselves and the world through our body, and the neglect of the physical impoverishes our understanding in fundamental ways. The body, mind, heart, and spirit are never discrete.

Even more crucial to their case, however, is an exploration of the complex, intimate, and ephemeral relationship we have with our own bodies. Kentel writes, for example: “Running taught me about self-discipline, goal setting, achievement, success, and defeat. Most of all, running gave me the gift of love for movement.” They illustrate their ideas by detailing instances of their own past relationships with their bodies and by imagining a future in which the body is educationally important.

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*Giving the Body Its Due: Autobiographical
Reflections and Utopian Imaginings*

JOANNIE HALAS AND JEANNE ADELE KENTEL

Body Dues

A few years ago I was sitting in an all-day meeting at work, and, unsure of when it would be my turn to speak, I turned to a colleague beside me and asked: "Do you think it's okay if I run out now to the washroom, I really have to go . . .?"

My colleague replied: "Never deny the body."

To this day, those four words have stayed with me. As simple as they are, they hold much wisdom. They are a constant reminder of our need to pay attention to our bodies; to listen to the messages they send, not only about our physical well-being, but about our emotional, mental, and spiritual engagement with the world.

It is a reminder that as a society, we need to create the conditions of possibility whereby our physical selves can thrive.

When we think of the relationships we have had over the course of our lifetimes, is there any that is more intimate, if not important, than the relationship we have with our own bodies? In asking this question, we do not mean to suggest that our bodies are somehow separate from ourselves as human beings, or that we experience them as objects. Rather, we use the term "relationship" as a means to draw attention to the importance of our physical selves as intrinsically connected to the totality of who we are as individuals. Borrowing from the cultural traditions of many indigenous peoples,¹ we see the body as interconnected with the mind, heart and spirit. The physical is intrinsically connected with our thinking, feeling, and being in the world.²

In order to understand what often appears to be a deliberate neglect of the body in much of our daily lives, it is helpful to explore the body's meaning, as well as the meaning of movement, from this type of holistic perspective. Yet even when a holistic stance is assumed, it is human nature to think about mind, body, heart, and spirit as separate entities. They are both four and one and both one and four.

When we speak about the body it is not something separate in being, yet the ways we attend to the world from our bodies are distinctive. In considering the uniqueness of the body, Michael Polanyi observes how “. . . we rely on our tacit knowledge of impacts made by the world on our body and the complex responses of our body to these impacts.”³ Be it our intuitions—that capacity to immediately understand something without conscious reasoning—or our conscious actions, our moving bodies help us to understand the world. And it is in understanding the meaning of movement that we can begin to comprehend the place of our “bodies” in education.⁴ As Fishburne notes, while movement is often viewed as essential to life it is rarely at the forefront of educational priorities.⁵ Within this chapter, we endeavor to make room for different priorities, if only a little.

In the discussion to follow, we dare to step into what Cote, Day, and de Peuter refer to as “utopian pedagogy,” where utopia is not a place we might reach; rather, it’s an “ongoing process of becoming.”⁶ Given the challenges we all face in our day-to-day efforts to live well, we introduce a series of “imaginings” as a thought experiment that prompts us to consider ways that we might reclaim and affirm the relationship we have with our own bodies, such that the possibilities of our being and becoming in the world are transformed. We also intersect personal stories of our own childhood and youth experiences in coming to understand our physical selves as connected with the wholeness of who we are.⁷ The notions of the “body” and somatic understanding are very personal. By sharing examples of how it was through the body in both good times and bad that our engagement with the world has been defined, we speak of both our potential and the obstacles we face when we attempt to honor the physical in our lives.

By connecting these stories with the “imaginings” of the more utopian scenario with which our physical selves are attended across the life span, our goal is to envision a cultural orientation that, in a word, gives the body, as inextricably bound to the mind, the emotions, and the spirit, “its due.” After all, if education is about imagining a better world, then this narrative should be read as an effort to reclaim the significance of our physical selves as holistically connected to our desires for a better world.

Early Life Retrospectives

Imagine birth. A mass of billions of microscopic human cells. Somatic understanding begins as the infant body is cradled in protective arms that

gently rock back and forth in lullaby rhythms that awaken the senses to the external world. Each gentle touch creates new possibilities: legs stretch out to curl up toes, arms reach out, fingers unfold to touch a nose. In an engaged, responsive environment, the infant body grows, its movements nurtured in ways that keeps the singular baby from falling, from movements too drastic or extreme. Bodies of all shapes, sizes, and colors cuddled, hugged, turned upside down and round back again, smiled at and spoken to, each manipulation stimulating neural pathways that produce ways by which we understand and relate to the world.

Movement is indeed basic to all life. Life exists because of movement. We begin moving before birth. In fact, one of the first tangible indicators of life itself is the detection of movement.⁸ Observes Bruce, "movement is the first means a child has of conveying needs and feelings and it remains a way in which the human being expresses" (p. 7).⁹ From the first breaths we take as newborn infants, our senses inform us about the world around us; through sight, sound, touch, taste, and smell, our body is "necessarily involved in all perception."¹⁰ During these early months and years, our complete dependence on caring elders begins to shift as we take our first steps on our own. Raised in loving environments that nurture our growth, our bodies receive the attention required for healthy development.

While the need to awaken, develop, and cultivate the child's inherent sense of movement seems evident,¹¹ our attention to the toddler's moving body appears to wane as the school years approach:

Before a child is born, we refer to his or her movement whenever s/he kicks. Once the baby is born, reference is made as to how the child moves his/her head, holds head up, turns to sound, sits by themselves, creeps, crawls, pulls self up, walks around furniture, stands alone, takes steps, walks, runs, jumps, and plays. . . . From this point on references are usually made to the child's oral language and later the written language so that once children enter school we are dealing with them almost strictly on an academic level.¹²

As young bodies step out into the world beyond their families, they need continued opportunities to explore how their bodies move.

Imagine a group of toddlers, running and laughing, tumbling and hanging, rotating upside down and round again, in play environments designed to excite the imagination. Moving freely, they begin to acquire the basic movement competencies that enable them to mindfully explore the limits and potentials of their growing bodies.

As developing bodies awkwardly run, slide, dash, glide, dart and dodge, stop, start, singularly or in groups, children learn to move safely at different

speeds, in different directions, often applying different actions. Over time and many trials, their bodies learn not to fall, but to run freely without bumping into others, to jump off heights, to experience vertigo, to balance on one leg, without fear of the pain and tears that sometimes come but can as quickly go away.

Imagine how the pleasure of activity is imprinted so deeply that these children can't wait for their next "playtime." Imagine girls and boys playing together in an environment where there are no signs of culturally normalized "boys" games and "girls" activities. There is just play, for play's sake.

In a poignant description of a childhood movement experience, van Manen offers a beautiful illustration of one's longing to reclaim lost childhood moments:

I see a child skipping rope in the street, and I pause and smile. I see a youthful bounce, the commanding rhythm of a rope—and perhaps a memory. I recognize this rhyme . . . When the child stops, I still feel the snap against my feet. Regret fills me. I wish I could revisit my old school playground. . . . I turn away from that child and resume my walk. I saw a child, a rope, a game. Sight and sound collaborated to make me feel the rope against my feet. Then I saw regret.¹³

When we think about movement, in particular playful movement, we are immediately drawn to stories of childhood. The regret that van Manen speaks about is somehow a regret we all encounter. We lose sight of our bodily selves. While the value of play originates in the playing itself, the health benefits of physical activity have been substantiated across the life span.¹⁴ Despite these benefits, the marginalization of the body and the body's access to movement begins early. We are made to sit at desks at much too young an age and as we grow older we know not what else to do.

As a society, we can potentially shift this way of being so that we do not experience the degree of loss encountered when movement disappears from our daily ways of being. In the following sections we share our childhood narratives and connect them to the current childhood milieu with an aim to give the moving body presence and note its value in education.

Adrenaline (Joannie)

My earliest childhood memories are dominated by images of me following my older brother Joe, everywhere. Although separated by three and a half years in age, by size and maturity, and by the contingencies of gender, the consequences of which I didn't fully understand until much later, there was

little to keep me from emulating his every movement. Joe went out to play, I followed behind, chasing after the ball with excitement that far exceeded my ability to keep up. Joe built a snow fort, I was right beside him as his trusted assistant, responding to every instruction with a determined will to do my part. As with indigenous approaches to life and learning, mine was “look, listen and learn”; I’d watch his body moving and follow behind, practicing what I thought was the proper way to kick the ball, lift the boulder, climb the tree.

As our repertoire of play expanded to include cousins, neighbors, and friends, being outside to play became my modus operandi in life. We’d wake to make plans for the day, and our play was adventuresome and physical. It was flexible, not rigid, as our minds imagined new ways to have fun, each day building on yesterday’s escapades. As idyllic as it sounds, that is how I remember it. We learned our limits through physical experimentation that challenged us to confront our fears. It was the adrenaline rush of childhood, and I’m sure we thought it would never end.

Adolescent Retrospectives

By contrast to the above narrative, we think of today’s children, many of whom have little opportunity to engage in physical play. We see cities without playgrounds and playgrounds without children, as fear for their personal safety keeps them indoors. We see toddlers, raised by watching videos, who are now heading into adolescence with their bodies firmly entrenched behind the game boy, computer screen, or television. Ironically referred to as the “playstation generation” because their play is so stationary, it is as though they have moved so little that their bodies just get stuck. These young people, particularly boys, can be found everywhere in front of some kind of plug-in machine. As a consequence, many are not plugged into their bodies, which are responding in kind. According to the latest health indicators, our children are not physically active enough for healthy development.¹⁵ Obesity, diabetes, and heart disease are examples of historically adult conditions now affecting childhood.

Imagine these same children engaging in free play without winners defeating losers, where they excitedly encounter open doors to carefully constructed wonderlands of tasks and challenges designed to enhance their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development. Imagine groups of girls and boys, despite their widely variable physical and social maturity levels, guided by older adults to play well together, cooperate fairly, communicate respectfully. Their play experiences leave them with smiles on their faces and physically satiated bodies

that are more receptive to quieter surroundings, their spirits settling into concentration.

The Race (Jeanne)

On your marks. I was tense, my heart pounding, the uncertainty overwhelming. I jumped into the air a couple of times to relieve some of the tension. I lowered myself to the ground hands first for a brief moment of solemnity before I raced, a small request to do my best. I placed my left leg in the lead starting block that I had previously measured ever so precisely. I placed my fingers along the starting line and lowered my head as I took my last deep breath. Set. I raised my body out of the blocks leaning forward, supremely tensed, completely focused on the finish line. Bang! A sudden burst of energy caused me to fall forward slightly as the gun fired. I paused for a moment waiting for the second call back shot, but it never came. As the other runners had a few steps on me I knew I would have to push hard to make up the difference. I flew. I recall accelerating on the curve, something my faithful coach had trained me to execute just inside the white lane line. I usually experienced difficulty breathing, often wheezing when I ran, but not this time. I pushed the hardest I ever had, looking only straight ahead. As I neared the finish line I plunged forward, shoulders first, knowing I had won. I was completely elated and exhausted. I gasped for breath as I returned to the finish line in my lane awaiting the official results. I was declared the winner but what was most uplifting to me was my time; it was my personal best. I was so excited it was unbelievable.

So why was this action, this sense of being, so important to me? It wasn't the winning, the trophies, the ribbons; the extrinsic rewards. It was what transpired in the struggle, the challenge, the personal victory, even the defeat. Namely, the beauty dwelled in the love of running. It was personal. Although my achievements were small in comparison to those of some, I am convinced the taste was just as sweet. Running taught me about self-discipline, goal setting, achievement, success, and defeat. Most of all, running gave me the gift of love for movement.

In reflecting on our early movement experiences, we become aware of how often we took this gift we had for granted. In our childhoods we were able to move, able to move fast, creatively, and freely, but did we realize then how utterly precious movement is? Did we understand its power, its contribution, its neglect, its purpose, its meaning? How a tired body, sore muscles, bruises from a dive for the ball are indicators of effort expended? How, as a young 13-year-old explained after a physical education class, it feels good to expend energy "cause then you feel all calm and relaxed like half an hour later."¹⁶ Do we also consider

how painful it can be when we hold young people back from the movement their bodies crave, particularly in schools? How we pathologize the bodies of those who have difficulty conforming to class management protocols in order to “fix them” with Ritalin and other pharmaceutical remedies?¹⁷

It is possible to envisage movement as a valued entity in education and not merely as a supplementary activity to be done only when the gym schedule allows, or when it does not interfere with assemblies, classroom behavior, and timetabling. Movement education could occur across the curriculum because bodily presence is required for all elements of learning. In a study that investigated the meaning of movement in education, Anne, a research participant, identified a dilemma in how learning is defined:

Learning has been seen as single, solitary, very quiet, not an activity that involves movement. . . . *Moving is the natural mode* . . . especially for little kids and yet we have brought them into grade one and defined learning as an activity that essentially does not involve movement . . . *We’ve defined learning as exclusive of movement essentially.*¹⁸

An integrated movement focus is accepted by some educators. But do we fully recognize how significant a role the body plays in the whole thought process?¹⁹ That the origins of knowledge are in bodily experience?²⁰

Imagine neighborhoods filled with kids moving about on front lawns and back yards, jumping off steps, throwing footballs, playing catch, creating new rules for old games, sprinting home excitedly in that last round of hide and seek, hearts readied with anticipation as they await the precise moment to rev their bodies’ engines out of invisibility; each weight-bearing step adding crucial bone mass for a strong body.

Imagine everybody’s favorite “Auntie Jane” or “Uncle Pete,” the older neighbor loved by all the kids because she or he spends time with them on the baseball field, laughing, teasing, and cajoling even the most physically awkward to playfully engage.

Imagine families who turn the computer off, who move the television to the garage, who regulate the amount of virtual violence allowed to permeate the minds of their children. Imagine children and youth watching a Hollywood DVD where sexual relations are about relationships; where safe and protected is a common body value irrespective of religion, gender, class or culture; where effeminate, butch, bi and transgendered bodies are accepted, not feared.

[Nun]sense (Joannie)

Like many adolescents, my teenage years offered an unpredictable blend of calm days interspersed with the turbulence of the outside world. Six years of private Catholic school had taught me many lessons about my own body. While the Bible stories talked of the body as a “sacred temple,” the everyday teachings communicated by the nuns left me suspicious about my own and others’ bodies. When one of my female classmates’ bodies matured earlier than the rest of us, we made whispered comments about how she was somehow “sinful” for wearing a bra. We giggled as we self-righteously ran a finger down each other’s backs to confirm that those of us without breasts were still “pure.” When we undressed and dressed for swimming lessons at the local Y, we craftily learned to hide within the closed doors of the narrow steel lockers, lest the nuns walk by and see our naked bodies. I guess you can say I became ashamed of my body without realizing it. In those days, I wasn’t alone.

Shame for our bodies can start at a young age when older, more experienced, therefore stronger adults tell younger, inexperienced, therefore weaker children things like:

Quit crying, quit acting like a baby (who cries, laughs, grins, farts, burps, etc. without much ado about what the mind thinks) . . . stop laughing . . . pay attention, take that smile off your face, etc.

But it didn’t stop at that:

Churches said, “*Bodies are sinful,*” and stopped talking about them.

Schools said, “*Bodies are secondary,*” and stopped educating them.

Parents said, “*Bodies are dirty,*” and stopped touching them.

Friends said, “*Bodies are to be ridiculed,*” and started laughing at them.

Products said, “*Bodies are for work,*” and added slogans like “no pain, no gain.”

So people in modern times grew up not talking about, educating, or touching their bodies and they learned to believe that their bodies were ridiculous and, if anything, they were to be used only for work.

Little girls and women were told that in order to be worthwhile little girls and women, their bodies must be beautiful. And they were given all kinds of pictures and images and descriptions and criteria of what a beautiful body should look like.

No one told them that all bodies are beautiful.

Little boys and men were told that in order to be worthwhile little boys and men, their bodies must not express themselves. And they said to them, "Real men don't cry."

No one told them that the body's expression is beautiful.

Imagine, as young bodies do get picked on by those who would make fun of their size, shape, color, or "uniqueness" . . . a vigilant, sensitive, caring adult steps in to stop the assault, be it on the body, mind or spirit.

Just imagine if everyone's body was affirmed, period.

Beauty and the Beast (Joannie)

By Junior High, I had two seminal experiences as a young teenager; one was very positive, another negative. In the first, I made the Grade 8 basketball team, even though my five-foot-eight frame left me feeling so uncoordinated that I feared I would trip over the basketball lines painted on the gym floor as I walked. Despite my awkwardly growing body, the physical competence of my childhood days was reaffirmed on that basketball court. I had just moved to a large junior high school, and making the team connected me to the school in ways that transcended the shyness that overcame me when I left the safer confines of my smaller Catholic school.

A second experience, however, impacted me in equally negative ways. During one basketball practice, as I ran to the locker room which was located just outside the gym doors, I encountered an older white boy who was walking by me. When I stopped to push open the change room door, he looked up at me and said, "are you ever fucking ugly." The shock of his words registered like an unexpected seismic eruption: rather than dismiss what he said as baseless, I allowed his words to shift every insecurity I held about my developing body to the forefront. Hadn't my cousin recently said I had a big nose? Who could ignore the pimples on my face? My mother wants me to see an orthodontist about the two "vampire" teeth that have recently emerged in what I thought was an otherwise normal mouth. Five words, and that boy, a stranger to me and someone I never saw again, knocked me down with a blow that I let register for years to come. It wasn't until I was in my early twenties that I felt comfortable enough to look in the mirror at my face without shutting my "good eye," the one that if open would reinforce everything that the boy had said to me that winter day.

In the aforementioned narrative, two competing body experiences shape the adolescent's relationship with one's body. One affirms, the other injures and deflates. Both are examples of the ways in which our bodies lay down strong roots, as Hutchison writes in reminding us how bodies can change much faster than body images.²¹ Crucial to this

change, Hutchison notes, is the support of our social world and, in particular, our families, who raise and socialize us according to prevailing standards and cultural values. We know, for example, that young people can resist the negative stereotyping of their bodies; that young women, including those from marginalized youth populations, can interpret the complexities of their own body experiences in relation to dominant media representations of the “ideal body image” in ways that are not always unhealthy.²²

[Ass]hamed (Jeanne)

As a young adolescent I loved to run and in particular race others. I ran for the sheer pleasure of it and often challenged boys as well as girls. It was not until my teen years that the boys could outsprint me. Due to a primarily mesomorphic somatype I was given the nickname “legs.” While I took pride in what my legs could do, namely run fast and jump high, as I grew older I began to realize the pet name made reference to how my legs “looked.”

In a way I got off easy, that is, I was not one of the pretty-faced girls who endured incessant remarks. I will always recall my middle school version of sexual health education when the male science teacher had the prettiest girl in the class stand up on a desk while he used a yardstick to point out her genitalia and other body parts. Many of the boys found it amusing while the girls empathized with the agony of our shy and embarrassed friend. I called up this moment years later when a colleague told me I had a nice ass. I was not impressed by such a remark. In fact I was offended enough to do something about it—the very thing I should have done as a young teen when my friend stood ridiculed on top of a desk. She did not feel pretty in that moment. Yet pretty she was. I was not complimented by being told I had a nice ass. In fact I was ashamed. Ashamed, thinking I must have done something to invite such a comment. Was he ashamed? Was my science teacher ashamed? What does it mean when one is insulted by one’s own beauty? Why is a reference to one’s body parts or “looks” considered a compliment or insult? Appearance, after all, is primarily genetic despite what mass media would have us believe.

I have always found it quite odd that as a female I view my body through a man’s eyes. Throughout my lifetime I have moved from being extremely thin, to muscularly machismo, to voluptuous, to extremely overweight, to battling the bulges . . . never quite satisfied. I suppose I am much more impressed with what my body can do than with how it looks. Yet how my body looks to another and even to myself is predominantly problematic. Media images of airbrushed, nutritionally deprived actors, rockers, and models only add to our perceptions of self through the peripheral body.

Oddly we tend to focus on that peripheral body, on that which we can see. Less regard is given to the heart . . . the part of us that reacts when told our bodies simply do not fit in. They are too thin or too fat. Too ugly or too beautiful. Too gentle or too strong. Always too something and rarely just fine.

Imagine an existence where one lives and works for the health of the body and not its appearance. Imagine that children with flabby, uncoordinated, stilted, or uptight bodies are welcomed, encouraged, and provided opportunities unique to their needs. They aren't seen as odd and they are never left out. Each one has multiple venues to be physically active each day, be it at school, at home, or in the community. Imagine everything beautiful and denigration the beast.

Imagine maturing adolescents raised in communal environments where peers experience the joy of helping each other; where young ones who fall behind are nurtured by indigenous values that communicate "lack of competence isn't bad, it's an opportunity to learn."²³

Imagine that all youth have opportunities to be active. To play organized sport. Imagine young people learning that those movement skills they acquired in early life can now be applied to all kinds of dance, sports, and activities, expanding their repertoire of movement that enables a diversely colorful vista of healthy leisure opportunity.

Here is an example of how the imagined came close to realization. It involves a young woman with a visual impairment in a physical education class. Despite being nearly blind from birth, she was so comfortable in her body that when it was time to demonstrate a particular gymnastics routine on the balance beam, she voluntarily climbed up and performed in front of her watchful peers. She had body knowledge that was appreciated by her teachers and classmates, which she willingly shared. Knowledge comes from the body, Kwant suggests, which on an intellectual level is somewhat inexplicable:

Of course the player has had some kind of theoretical training, but he "knows" more and better with his legs, with his hands, and with his entire body than he knows in theory. . . . He adjusts the entire posture of his body to the approaching ball, without knowing in theory how this came about.²⁴

As the example of the gymnast illustrates, one's physical performance shows the coming together of the body, mind, and senses.

The Wheelchair (Jeanne)

It was not until recently that I became aware of the mobility of the wheelchair. Years ago when I was teaching school I had a class one year that

many educators would shy away from. In the group there were several students with special needs. One young man had multiple challenges bejeweled with too many labels to recall, but the short of it was that he required a wheelchair to move about and could not speak. At the time, inclusive education was the buzz term for what should be naturally occurring sound pedagogy. While we found ways to allow him to be in physical education (both in and out of his wheelchair) the day I asked him if he wanted to play basketball was the most memorable for me. I brought in a modified hoop from home that my children had outgrown and there we were, he and I, taking shots, rebounding, even keeping score. The concentration was evident upon his face as he aimed at the hoop. I will always recall how his bright smile lit up the room when I told him he was a basketball superstar. He was indeed; passing, shooting, rebounding, scoring, celebrating, recovering, challenging, and practicing.

In that moment I saw his heart. It was this that allowed him to move. The wheelchair permits mobility, but it is the heart that moves the body.

As our own autobiographical examples show, there are multiple and diverse ways that people experience their bodies; these embodied experiences interact to shape identities that are formed over time and within specific contexts.²⁵ We need to support the healthy development of these young bodies, particularly those that are easily marginalized. Yet we know that this is not always easy to accomplish, as our societies tend to value the “able” body over the “dis”/abled, the thin over the fat, the heterosexual over a diversity of orientations, the white body above all others.

For it remains that in many places bodies are ranked by color: white trumps yellow trumps red trumps brown trumps black . . . and entire economic systems are organized around colors of bodies. Bodies are so taught to believe in hierarchical rankings that they don’t even know how influential these beliefs are.

No one told them that all bodies are beautiful, without rank. Even if they were told, who could believe it after all those years of learning all those rankings that were reinforced by all those body economies? In a discussion of Michel Foucault’s contributions to our understanding of the body as a social construction, Butler notes that “the body is a site where regimes of discourse and power inscribe themselves.”²⁶ As such, bodies are also sites of resistance, and this resistance takes many shapes and forms. Situated historically in cultural worlds where white privilege exists, all bodies, not just racial minority bodies, are affected by racial hierarchies. When we are conscious of racial inequities, we can affirm the cultural and historical identities of racial minority groups²⁷ while at the same time recognize, interrupt, and subvert the unearned privileges

of white skin color²⁸ that are so often unseen and taken for granted by those with white bodies.

Adult Projectives

Imagine young adults, whether at work, play, school, or home, who interrupt their days regularly to be active. To nurture their bodies not because some advertisement told them to do so, but because they know how good it makes them feel.

Imagine a society free of illnesses, enabled by physical inactivity. Fewer cases of diabetes, obesity, heart disease, or cancer. Imagine all of us encouraged to feel good about our bodies because our bodies feel good.

Imagine the work place with a health living space. A gym, dance, or yoga studio, where employees and employers alike can shake out the day's stress without worrying that the job will somehow suffer. Imagine the productivity of a work environment that provides regular seminars on wellness, and how to care for the body.

And so, as we exit our adolescent years and move into adulthood, is it not worth imagining a scenario whereby the remembrances of our body, coupled with the present day rigors of daily life, enable us to stay connected, to keep moving, to be active? Do we not need to keep listening to our bodies, to attend to the intuitions we receive, and to make time for movement away from that which constrains us, such as the computer screen at work, our desks, our chesterfields, and others who would do us harm?

In closing, we leave one final set of imaginings. It is a utopian image of what might be; one where we create a culture that enables us to stay fully connected with our bodies as much as possible. Of course, we could go on, but it is time to step away from the keyboard and give the body its due. It is body time.

Imagine that this workplace, through its employee relations, encourages workers to look after their bodies. To stay home when their bodies are ill. To come to work feeling rested and ready. To live through, with, and because of their bodies.

Imagine our middle age arrives and we have the energy to do new things. To step into new adventures. To travel by foot. The strength to carry our own backpacks. Imagine no pills, just nutritious food, lots of regular full body activity, and clean water. Imagine a body that is nurtured and what that can do for the mind and spirit.

Imagine the 84-year-old who suffers a heart attack, survives, and takes the doctor's advice to join a wellness centre for rehab. With guidance from a health professional, the aging body slowly lets go of the patient's gown and steps onto

the walking track, not looking back, only forward. One step. Then two, then twenty. Soon a mile, then two. Then everything else starts to fall back in place: shopping, visiting, gardening. Life. A longing for living well. If you can imagine that at 84 years of age, just think what can be done at 70, 60, 50, 40, and so on.

Imagine, just imagine . . . what a world we might create if our bodies were doing well. If we saw all bodies without prejudice. If we learned to hold for life the play patterns of our early childhood, when our teachers/mentors/parents/siblings and older adults encouraged our every move and taught us that when we learned to play well together, it was so much fun. That when we fell, we needed to stand back up. That when we failed, that was just information to be used for the next round.

Imagine we learn to love our bodies. To pay attention to them, to educate them, to touch them in healthy ways, to nurture them with healthy foods, to appreciate them in all they can do. Imagine as old people, we still play because we were taught to play when we were kids. To climb trees. To scrape our knees. To dance. To make love.

Imagine how difficult it might be to hate another if we were so healthy we could stay awake to the injustices in our world. To march against those who would dare to rate and rank our bodies, to discriminate, to send us off to wars where we do irreparable violence to the bodies of others as well as our own.

Imagine, if you will, that our technically modern times embrace the body. Educate and nurture the physical. Reclaim the indigenous teachings that recognize the interconnectedness of the personal with the social; of our cultures, economies and . . . as difficult as it may be in today's day and age to honor the significance of our bodies, it is something we must do, not only for ourselves, but for the common good of our communities and society.

NOTES

1. See J. L. Reading, A. Kmetc, and V. Gideon, "First Nations Wholistic Policy and Planning Model" (AFN Discussion Paper for World Health Organization Commission on Social Determinants of Health, April, 2007): http://www.afn.ca/cmslib/general/07-05-28_AFN_Paper_to_WHO_Commission_on_Social_Determinants_of_Health.pdf (accessed January 11, 2008).

2. B. Redfern, *Introducing Laban Art of Movement* (London: MacDonald & Evans, 1965).

3. M. Polanyi, *Knowing and Being* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), 147.

4. Jeanne Kentel, "Movement and Ordinary Language Thought: Teachers' Reflections on Movement Meanings in Education" (Master's thesis, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1993).

5. G. Fishburne, "Is Reading More Important than Physical Education?" *Elements: A Journal for Elementary Education* 15, no. 1 (1983): 3-5.

6. M. Cote, R. J. F. Day, and G. de Peuter, "Introduction: What Is Utopian Pedagogy?" in *Utopian Pedagogy: Radical Experiments Against Neoliberal Globalization*, ed. M. Cote, R. J. F. Day, and G. de Peuter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 3–19.

7. In sharing our personal narratives, we wish to acknowledge that our positions as white, able-bodied women indicate both privileges and blind spots with regard to the stories we tell.

8. J. A. Kentel and S. Leppard, "A Journey into the Meaning of Movement" (unpublished manuscript, University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1991).

9. V. Bruce, *Dance and Dance Drama in Education* (London: Pergamon, 1965), 7.

10. Edmund Husserl quoted in M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962).

11. Redfern, *Introducing Laban Art of Movement*.

12. David Sande in Kentel, "Movement and Ordinary Language Thought."

13. Max van Manen, *The Tone of Teaching* (New York: Scholastic, 1986), 16.

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16. J. Halas, "Playtime at the Treatment Center: How Physical Activity Helps Troubled Youth," *AVANTE* 7, no. 1:7 (2001).

17. J. Halas and L. Hanson, "Pathologizing Billy: Enabling and Constraining the Body of the Condemned," *Sociology of Sport Journal* 18, no. 1 (2001): 115–26.

18. Kentel, "Movement and Ordinary Language Thought," 76.

19. *Ibid.*

20. M. Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

21. M. Hutchinson, *Transforming Body Image: Learning to Love the Body You Have* (Freedom, CA: The Crossing Press, 1985).

22. T. Orchard, J. Halas, and J. Stark, "Minimizing the Maxim Model? Interpreting the Sexual Body Rhetoric of Teenage Moms Through Physical Education," in *Sport, Rhetoric, and Gender: Historical Perspectives and Media Representations*, ed. L. K. Fuller (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2006), 131–42.

23. L. Brendtro and M. Brokenleg, "Beyond the Curriculum of Control: Reclaiming Children and Youth," *JEB-P*, Winter (1993): 5–11.

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