



Minding the Body: What Student Athletes Know about Learning. Julie Cheville. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2001. 166 pp.

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In *Minding the Body*, Cheville develops a theory of embodied cognition, an interdependence of mind and body, that is grounded in her sensitively told stories of college athletes and in her own experiences as their academic tutor. Challenging the dominant ideology that the mind is the center of cognition--a person's ways of knowing--Cheville argues that bodily activity provides a context for learning, and that the potential of embodied knowing is unrealized in academic institutions because of their privileging of mind over body. Indeed, she clearly demonstrates that universities' division of work (mind-body) operates to keep most student athletes in their place. With little institutional reinforcement for their intellectual work, scholarship athletes are in jeopardy when they can no longer sustain their work as athletes because of injury, and they often see little future in their academic careers.

Cheville builds our understanding that embodied cognition is dependent on the social-historical and physical context of learning. Her focus of interest is women's college basketball with its own social history shaping it as a sport in Iowa. *Minding the Body* is driven by her role as literacy educator and comes out of her ethnographic study of female student athletes, both athlete learners and academic learners who bring their gendered, racial, and ethnic histories to the game and to their sites of learning in college stadiums and classrooms. Cheville shows how, because of the distinction between university athletic and academic departments, athletes who embody thought in training and in matches become disembodied academic learners. When no recognition is made of their need for bodily activity as the basis for learning in their academic programs, many athletes struggle as students. Moreover, her analysis of anecdotes reveals that they often feel marked as athletes, and their feelings of stigma are linked to a fear or dislike of academics.

The body is central to Cheville's thesis of cognition. She argues that it is through the body that experience is felt, that the significance of feeling in human consciousness is emotion, and that perception is the interpretation of emotion. Although it is well accepted that people act toward things on the basis of the meaning that those things hold for them (perception governs bodily activity), the role of the body in thought is little acknowledged.



This book has multiple strengths. As an ethnography it exemplifies rigorous methodology: there is prolonged contact with the participants and the theory is built around rich description of athletes' situated learning and knowing. The athletes' voices are strong. The author provides insights into her developing analysis across time and acknowledges the study's impact on her own ways of knowing, and her practices as a literacy educator. Cheville is honest: she makes readers privy to methodological and ethical dilemmas she faced in negotiating the multiple roles necessary to undertake and sustain such a project.

Cheville makes several contributions: First, the book is a valuable addition to the social history of sport. Second, it provides a theory of learning with which many "body workers," such as sports-studies researchers and school physical education teachers have difficulty articulating when they argue for recognition of a mind-body relationship. Third, it is an excellent model of tight ethnographic methodology. Fourth, it includes policy recommendations for increasing the quality of academic life for student athletes that institutions bent on enhancing their academic integrity should well put in place. Fifth, Cheville applies embodied cognition as a learning theory: there is material from a literacy education course grounded in corporeal activity. These are useful for teachers who struggle with building a mind-body nexus. Finally, this is an artful story that should bring readers to new understanding of their students' learning dilemmas. Readers may well have difficulty withdrawing from Cheville's field.

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