

European Panorama of Body Image and Physical Education: Corporeal Turn in the History of Education

Book Review: Polenghi, S., Németh, A. and Kasper, T. (eds.). (2021). *Education and the Body in Europe (1900–1950). Movements, public health, pedagogical rules and cultural ideas*. In the collection: *Erziehung in Wissenschaft und Praxis*. Herausgegeben von Johanna Hopfner und Claudia Stöckl Band 14. Berlin: Peter Lang GmbH.

The human body has been a prominent subject in medical history as well as psychological and anthropological research continuously over the past three decades. In their introduction, the editors of this volume highlight the works of Norbert Elias, Michel Foucault and Georges Vigarello as early historiographic antecedents, and point out how, in the 1980s and 1990s, sociology and women's research put the *corporeal turn* at the heart of cultural and historical research on the human body. Recent studies (unlike previous traditional anthropological approaches) emphasise the historical and cultural determination of the human body. The starting point is the idea that people in different historical and geographical areas have different attitudes towards their own bodies and the bodies of other people. The research on the human body has also brought new and different approaches to the exploration of educational history in recent decades. The first research results were published related to the exploration of childhood history and women's history, and the influential work of Ariès, Duby, Perrot, Becchi and Julia should be noted. In recent years, thematic conferences, monographs and volumes of studies around the world have shown how widely the works of the aforementioned authors have attracted interest and inspiration in relation to the human body and physical education. Foucault's work on the relationship between the human body and power, which brought a new framework of interpretation and a different approach to research, is highlighted as crucial from the point of view of educational history.

As a result, physical education, health education, women's education, discipline and child abuse, and the history of school space and classroom furniture have all been given different considerations in recent decades. This broad area of research offers opportunities for a wide range of examinations of the human body; in addition to examining written sources, the value of collection and qualitative analysis of historic objects and visual sources (photos, films, cartoons, works of art) have also appreciated in value. Considering the geographical regions and timeframes, educational research on the human body has focused mostly on the past 200 years of Western civilization, although the knowledge of the human body—the comparison of the body of a man and woman—has been a concern of the scientific world and the public since antiquity. Even before the new age, there were much textual and visual resources about the body, and the ideas of Aristotle and Galen had a significant impact on European thinking. The Age of Enlightenment has generated interest in the human body, especially with respect to the characteristics of the two sexes, a

new model and language emerged, according to Thomas Laqueur. The importance of physical education has already been discussed in many countries in Europe. Among the pioneers were Basedow, whose School of Philanthropy had equipment for students to use during gymnastics. Like him, philanthropists who were aiming to cultivate »men« also considered physical education vital. However, it was not philosophical ideas that made a powerful case for gymnastics, but military events; due to the Franco-German conflicts at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, many German authors voiced a clear national interest in training men to become soldiers. It was also during this time that the physical education of girls increasingly became a »national issue« in Europe, and not just as a medical-pedagogical matter. In the early nineteenth century, the habit of participating in gymnastics and the importance of exercise gained a considerable theoretical foundation in many parts of Europe. German and Swedish gymnastics as well as French and English exercise habits gained popularity, and Pestalozzi's *Elementargymnastik* (1807), was noteworthy for its series of exercises for joint-based mobility. His follower, Diesterweg, believed that movement and gymnastic practices were strongly connected to the ideas of philanthropism, since the advocates and school supporters of physical education wanted to put physical education at the service of general education. In the German regions, Johann Christoph Guth-Muths (1759–1839) and Ludwig Friedrich Jahn (1778–1852), the »father of German gymnastics«, were significant in the early nineteenth century; in Sweden, Peer Henrik Ling (1776–1840) and his son Hjalmar Ling (1799–1881) achieved significance in developing the foundations for gymnastics (the latter is also associated with the introduction of Swedish gym equipment in European gyms). While the Germans focused on military exercises, the Swedes preferred a healing focus in their exercise programmes, and both required transformation and multi-step modification to suit the physical education programmes that schools required. English physical education, however, focused more on playful elements and sporting activities.

In the next part of this article, the focus is on the presentation of a recently published book. The volume edited by Simonetta Polenghi, András Németh and Tomáš Kasper focuses on the first half of the twentieth century; however, the authors of the studies also describe the characteristics of the second half of the nineteenth century in great detail, outlining the development of organised, intentional training of the body and the spread of sports, as well as the emergence of special attention to health protection at the individual and state level. The 17 authors of the book represent 12 universities in 10 European countries, thus providing a comprehensive picture of this issue in Europe. The primary source material used for the chapters is diverse; in addition to analysing textbooks, teacher manuals, press articles, teacher reports and curricula, several authors include visual resources. The volume is grouped into three large, closely-related thematic units. The first section is titled *Body Education, Life-Reform, and the Bodies of Young People and Women*; the second section is titled *Physical Education and Sport*; and the third part is titled *Children's Bodies: Emotions, Hygiene and (Ab)normality in Pedagogical Ideas*.

The first thematic block begins with the study of Ehrenhard Skiera, a scholar of the history of life-reform movements and reform pedagogy. It provides an important

summary of Skiera's research and the correlations revealed by fellow researchers in recent years, illustrating how different efforts to monitor the body have affected the theory and practice of education, especially the »New Education« movement. Healthy living, cultivating the body, naturalism, striving for harmony and beauty, and simplicity were seen as keys to remedying social problems, according to many thinkers at the turn of the century. These concepts also put education and the role and responsibilities of educators in a different light. Skiera conducted the comparative study by analysing visual sources and examining the works of Ellen Key, Eduard Bilz, Maria Montessori, Pavel Blonsky and Rudolf Steiner.

Janka Balogh and András Németh analyse dance art aspirations in the early twentieth century for a complex interpretation of body, space and time, showing how they affected dance teaching and renewed pedagogical thinking in general. In their writing, they point out how a new vision of humanity and a new approach to education originated from the Swiss hills of Monte Verità, examining the methods and channels through which the artists and scientists of the era interacted with this idea across national borders. Representatives of »Free Dance« and »New Dance« (especially Isadora Duncan in Hungary) »freed« classical ballet from previous rules and limitations, making way for natural and free movements of the body, which brought new qualities to dance and new opportunities for self-expression to help create a revolutionary interpretation of the human body and its movements.

Agnes Trattner's study explores the context of the centennial youth movements and the body culture movement, and their connections to youth exercise programmes in general and as case studies by analysing the history of Loheland and the nudist community gathered around Charlie Strässer and Alfred Koch. The development of the »New Man« was unimaginable without the cult of »new body consciousness«, beauty, health, and naturalistic ideals. As a result, the importance of the *Wandervögel* (hiking birds) movement within other life-reform movements increased. Being natural and close to nature were expressions of freedom, as opposed to the physical and psychological burdens of the old world, which accentuated regulations and measurements of physical achievements. In general, a strong opposition to racist and elitist thinking and behaviour was becoming the norm.

Dorina Szente and András Németh examine a collection of images from Hungarian women's magazines in the early twentieth century, which includes more than 100,000 items. They provide a content analysis and summarise contemporary opinions about the perception of the female body in the context of changes in the female role repertoire. This subtopic offers an authentic reflection on the social, economic, educational and transformative context for modernisation. The large-scale study focused on the female body, the use of space related to female activities and roles and the effects of the life-reform movement on body image and women's leisure activities and clothing.

Ilaria Mattioni's study shows how Italian women appeared in early twentieth century tales, proverbs, etiquette books and fashion magazines. This research integrates data from diverse sources and illustrates the differences in the content for boys' and girls' childhood educations, focusing on the goals and values associated with their roles in adulthood. The rules and prohibitions on the body were

a cornerstone of the moral upbringing of girls, as their spiritual and physical upbringing had to be in harmony. During the post-war period, however, there occurred a shift; the beautiful female body and the preservation of youth became much more pronounced than in the previous period, as Mattioni's research shows. From the end of the nineteenth century, the new female ideal became more pronounced in Italy. This became vital for the »formation« of a healthy lifestyle, continuous and scheduled exercise and the continued use of cosmetic products. Innovations in the fashion industry aimed at creating a new female model could not escape even the attention of Pope Benedict XV and Pope Pius XII, who both spoke out against clothing that endangered women's morals.

The second part of the book, *Physical Education and Sport*, begins with the writing of Grégory Quin. The author leads us to Great Britain at the turn of the century, pointing out the longstanding roots of exercise in his country. As early as the second half of the nineteenth century, physical education, sports and various tournaments were linked to academic education, as well as personality and character building. Physical education has always been an important component of public-school education in Great Britain, considered the home of sports, where movement and the cultivation of the body were not merely a passive consequence but the agent and inspiration for social and economic development. The study provides an important and thought-provoking overview of what body image and body development mean to the »British collective mind«, and links the *Education Act* of 1870 to the London 1948 Olympic Games, providing a more nuanced understanding of the socio-economic climate that led to Brexit.

The contribution by Michael Attali and Yohann Fortune reports on an analysis of the principles and methods of French physical education between 1900 and 1950. In France, physical education in schools became compulsory in 1880, and from that decade on, the professional development and cultivation of the practice of exercise, supported by scientific results, became increasingly pronounced. The aim was not only to improve physical fitness, but also to cultivate behaviours in schools to meet the expectations of a strict and hierarchical society. The authors examined manuals that had been in use for decades and had a great impact on physical education in French schools. The comparative analysis of the materials makes these aspirations apparent. Even after the 1950s, they went far beyond the physical dimension to serve the moral education and »spiritual training« of French youth.

The essay by Grégory Quin and Christelle Hayoz examines how Switzerland regulated the physical and spiritual education of youth in order to advance the process of becoming a nation state. The research focuses on the twentieth century, and its primary sources are federal textbooks and material from schools that demonstrate the complex phenomena that played a central role in schools becoming »national body factories«. The development of Switzerland's physical education practices and sporting history is not unique; it is a product of the evolution of the social, political, economic and cultural system, which can also be seen in other countries. In addition to highlighting several historical problems, they also explain the 'national drama' (and its impact on physical education and sports) that Switzerland

experienced at the 1964 Winter Olympics in Innsbruck, when the country left the games without any medals.

Paolo Alfieri's contribution presents a study on elementary physical education and the Italian body perception in the early twentieth century. He based his research on the analysis of curricula and teacher manuals, examining body-related thinking in both physical and metaphorical terms, in accordance with the new approach to educational history. Although physical education in schools has been compulsory in Italy since 1878, at the 1900 Congress of Physical Education in Naples, participants found that the country still lacked the »single official curriculum« needed to teach the subject. As in many countries in Europe, the teaching of physical education in Italian schools went far beyond body training and preparation for healthy living; in addition, it helped educate law-abiding moral citizens to accept political power. The teaching materials had a clear »nationalistic« rhetoric. These goals were amplified and given new meaning in 1926, when *The Opera Nazionale Balilla* was founded; it envisioned the physical education of young people, ages 6 to 18, according to the »new« fascist ideal: boys were prepared to defend their country as soldiers and girls were readied to give birth to children. Until the 1940s, this was a decisive element in the construction of the totalitarian dictatorship.

Xavier Torredadella-Flix's essay reviews the Spanish physical education and sporting aspirations of the first half of the century, using Foucault's »toolbox« to point out that the strengthening of the nation's political power also determined the goals and framework of physical education in Spain. Unlike in other European countries, in Spain all this was delayed, and only after the »catastrophe« that led to the loss of the last colonies after 1898 did it have a greater impetus and militaristic tone. In the early twentieth century, the introduction of Swedish gymnastics in schools and the introduction of children's flags, Swedish gymnastics and war games and after school organisations, such as the children's battalions', seemed to be suitable choices for the militarisation of the body (figuratively speaking, for the physical and mental strengthening of the nation). According to the author, this explains (and was preparation for) the subsequent atrocities of the Civil War and the Franco regime. Strong, trained boys and men became the opposite of »bad, degenerate Spaniards«, and this dichotomy was strongly supported by children's literature from this era. From the 1920s in Spain, the *torreador* (bullfighter) as a former male ideal was replaced by the footballer, the national athlete. By the end of the decade, German national socialist propaganda featuring individuals with strong, healthy and beautiful bodies had already had a significant impact on the public. Several details of the study demonstrate that Catalonia had developed a different kind of exercise and body cult closely linked to the life-reform movement as a symbol of protest against the dictatorship. During Franco's time, education was imminently political, Catholic, patriotic and authoritarian.

The third major thematic unit in the volume is *Children's Bodies: Emotions, Hygiene and (Ab)normality in Pedagogical Ideas*. The first study in this chapter is written by Simonetta Polenghi, who explores the characteristics of school health and hygiene education based on Italian textbooks and teacher manuals from the first half of the twentieth century. Guidelines for caring for the body and keeping

it and the environment (school, home, workplace) clean, were closely linked to character education and preparation for military roles for boys and the maternal and housewife roles for girls, which was in line with the prevailing political ideology across Europe. Beginning at the end of the nineteenth century, hygiene societies were established, legislation and research on the subject commenced, schools and municipalities hired doctors and trained midwives and the number of public health officials in the country increased significantly. The fight against epidemics became a central issue, and the construction of modern, bright and airy schools for children were mandated along with the design and production of suitable school furniture. Although, unlike physical education, which was introduced as a compulsory subject in 1878, health education did not become an independent subject in schools, the textbooks did contain much information and guidance on the subject. As Polenghi demonstrates, the modern content and methods of the 1920s developed primarily thanks to the work of Lombardo Radice, but these elements were subordinated to the ideals of fascism from 1934. They began to return after 1945, infused with John Dewey's pedagogical theory.

Tomáš Kasper writes about the physical education of physically disabled children and youth in Czech lands in the early twentieth century. This chapter is divided into two parts, the first being reform pedagogy and child study and the second being health and physical education efforts as a result of eugenics. In the second part, the author introduces an important institution, the *Jedlička Institute in Prague*, with its two directors, František Bakule and Augustin Bartoš. In addition to developing and educating the bodies of their pupils, their educational leadership also introduced children to the concept of »useful« work, helped them form a self-government, organised excursions and many cultural programmes, and supported a student newspaper initiative, which were all exemplary programmes for children and youth with severe physical disabilities, between the two world wars. This is of great importance because the reform ideas related to physical education (based on American child studies and European pedagogy) and the new schools that integrated these approaches mostly had no idea how to handle children with disabilities at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Michèle Hofmann's essay discusses the body concept of early twentieth-century Switzerland. Hofmann focuses on body and health education through the analysis of scientific results and life-reform ideas based on the data of contemporary medical examinations of thousands of school children. Hofmann gives special attention to the question of the (ab)normal body in public school. Soon after the introduction of compulsory education at the end of the nineteenth century, it became clear that schools themselves, with their sedentary nature and inadequate furniture, were responsible for many spinal problems and widespread diseases. Schools thus became a springboard for health education and physical education, not only by providing a framework for hygiene efforts, but also by filling the schools with meaningful projects for students. The hygienic and life-reform movements together reshaped education, creating progressive schools that had a great pedagogical impact on »traditional« schools as well. In the German-language sources analysed by the author, the various forms of exercise (swimming, football), proper eating, bathing, nudism

and freedom of the body appeared frequently at the beginning of the twentieth century. In Switzerland, we can also see the contrast between the unhealthy city and the idyllic countryside; the former became a symbol of modern and unhealthy life, while the latter became a symbol of natural and healthy life.

The volume concludes with a study by Sarah Van Ruyskensvelde and Pieter Verstraete about the forms of physical and emotional education of the Belgian residential youth in the 1910s-30s. Based on an analysis of monthly reports from this period, the research highlights how the moralising, military-based and rigorous physical education of the previous regime was replaced by a more subtle, positive and loving »emotional pedagogy« that built on the personal relationships between educators and children, with adults leading by example. Teachers attempted to focus on students' individual characteristics rather than their shortcomings, helping them learn how to control their emotions.

In summary, this volume is a significant work written from a cutting-edge approach. This book is comprised of studies that address many new results and connections related to physical education, the interpretation and perception of the body and the complex system of power and physical education. The individual chapters provide a comprehensive examination of primary sources to examine the changes in perception and new ideas with respect to the body on the metacognitive level. The studies from the different geographical areas provide a nuanced, yet typical, picture of this topic across Europe during the first half of the twentieth century. A mosaic emerges from the chapters that will provide an excellent basis for future research into the human body, the relationship between the body and power, and physical education in the areas of educational history, political science, sports science and other related fields. One of the many lessons of this book, which is directly or indirectly present in all the research, is the idea that the development of a free and democratic society can only be based on child-oriented education that focuses on both physical and spiritual learning.

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