#### Grégory Quin and Christelle Hayoz

# From the education of soldiers to a promotion of motor skills: changes in the conception of physical education in Switzerland throughout the twentieth century

**Abstract:** As in many European countries, the creation of a Swiss democratic nation-state during the nineteenth century was based on the establishment of a national school system – free, compulsory and independent from the Churches – that could provide the 'intellectual' and 'moral' foundations for its citizens, also including some 'physical' foundations through physical education (then often referred to as 'gymnastics') becoming a mandatory and federal school discipline, and the only one in the Swiss system.

Thus, our ambition with this chapter is to study the several evolution's phases of the concepts governing the construction of the school discipline 'physical education', from the preparation of soldiers at the end of the nineteenth century to the training of future champions in the middle of the twentieth century, especially when in 1964 the Swiss Olympic delegation came back from Innsbruck with no medals, starting a deep and long-lasting change in the way politics was governing the sport field, in the middle of a new approach for PE, centred on motricity and making always more space for the 'sports'.

In fact, our aim is also to go beyond the idea that sports will gradually influence physical and sports education, as the adaptation and transition from the term gymnastics to that of physical (and sports) education shows. It is a singular object, which influences as much as it is influenced, and it is therefore necessary to go beyond the all too often retained hypothesis of physical education and sport being simply a mirror of the social and political dynamics of its time, considering schools as 'national body factories'.

Keywords: physical education, mandatory school years, motor skills, education of soldiers

#### Introduction

Changes in the conception of physical education are deeply interwoven with changes in gymnastics and sports systems, political systems, economic and cultural systems, and from this point of view the Swiss example cannot be considered unusual. Indeed, the evolution of the concepts governing the school discipline of 'physical education' went through several phases, from the preparation of soldiers at the end of the nineteenth century to the training of future champions in the middle of the twentieth century. Thus, after the disastrous Olympic games in Innsbruck in 1964 – when Switzerland did not win any medals at the Winter

games – the victory of Bernard Russi in 1972 is often presented as proof of the good reaction of the political-sport-school system to a 'national drama' (Quin 2018). However, only a few naïve decision-makers then believed that the systematisation of the three periods of physical education throughout compulsory schooling explains the medals and successes in international competitions, with the famous image of the 'sport system' functioning like a pyramid in mind, as Coubertin already thought at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In fact, it is necessary to go beyond the idea that sport will gradually influence physical and sports education – as the adaptation and transition from the term gymnastics to that of physical (and sports) education shows. Sport is a singular concept, which influences as much as it is influenced, and it is therefore necessary to go beyond the all too often retained hypothesis of physical education and sport being simply a mirror of the social and political dynamics of its time. Physical education is a cog of society, which influences as much as it is influenced, and through which we can therefore grasp certain social transformations. Thus, this school discipline can truly be considered a 'national body factory', the effectiveness of which varies from one State to another and from one period to another.

In Switzerland, unlike countries such as France (Arnaud 1991), the history of physical education and sport has been little explored, and studies remain fairly rare. Beyond the great fresco by Louis Burgener, published in 1952, Fritz Pieth (1979) and more recently Jean-Claude Bussard (2007) have laid the foundations of a history but have not succeeded in establishing it in its organisational peculiarities, and commemorative work does not really fill the gaps (Flatt 1945; Eichenberger 1998). Indeed, the coexistence of as many school systems as there are cantons, multiple international influences, and governance at all political levels (federal, regional, cantonal and communal) makes the history very dense and calls for more empirical work.

In this text, at the federal level, our ambition is to propose a diachronic reading of the history of the 'conceptions' of physical education in Switzerland over a long twentieth century. This will be based on the reading of several reference works, but also on a careful reading of different types of sources, from the various federal physical education textbooks to the archives of different institutions in charge of establishing physical education in Switzerland, and on an extensive understanding of the physical education promoters' motivations around the main pedagogical resources, with the modesty that is required due to our participation in certain contemporary processes.

#### Building a federal school discipline

As in many European countries, the creation of a Swiss democratic nation-state during the nineteenth century was based on the establishment of a school system – free, compulsory and secular – that could provide the 'intellectual' foundations for the citizens who were now responsible for electing some of their political leaders (Criblez 2007), and among these foundations, physical education – then often referred to as 'gymnastics' – played an important role. Thus, in 1870, the new British Elementary Education Act introduced 'drill' in primary schools (Mitch 2019); in 1874, gymnastics became compulsory in primary schools for boys in Switzerland (Girardin 2018); and in 1880, France also made it compulsory to teach gymnastics in its primary schools (Arnaud 1991). Of course, the motivation was then primarily military and the threat posed by Prussia to Europe was decisive.

In Switzerland, while many pioneers of German gymnastics went into exile across the Rhine in the middle of the nineteenth century (Geiss 1991), the trend towards a stronger institutionalisation of gymnastics at primary school level was to take place in three stages: in 1858, the *Société Suisse des Maîtres de Gymnastique* (SSMG) was created; in 1874, a military ordinance introduced compulsory gymnastics education from the age of 10; and in 1878, this was supplemented by a second ordinance specifying the conditions for such gymnastics education, both from the point of view of age groups and equipment used (Flatt 1945).

Beyond being a new 'national' discipline, gymnastics at school nonetheless followed (or fell victim to) some social divisions within Swiss society at the turn of the twentieth century, and particularly the opposition between Protestants and Catholics, as revealed by the survey conducted between 1901 and 1905 by the *Commission Fédérale de Gymnastique* (CFG – the governing body for gymnastics in the country). The results of this survey were rather interesting, highlighting the cantons and towns still insufficiently equipped with infrastructure for gymnastics (Burgener 1952, p. 130), some of them having built no gym halls at all and following the map of the distribution of gymnastics clubs in a powerful echo (SFG 1907). Catholic areas were then rather places of resistance, and Protestant towns, like Basel, strongholds of Swiss gymnastics.

In the meantime, the new CFG – officially established in 1875 – published the first federal gymnastics textbook for schools. It was largely militarily inspired and used the same kind of 'orders' as in the new federal army. This manual obviously reflected the ideas of its writers, who envisioned a malleable schoolboy body that would have to transform itself into a strong and patriotic defender of the national borders if necessary. Moreover, in those very first years, it was mainly

military officers (retired or still active) who were in charge in schools, and they did not have any specific training for imparting those new broad teaching tasks.

The second (1896) and third (1912) editions of the federal textbook were in fact 'copies' of the first one and the concepts evolved only very little, also reinforced at that time by the rise of a certain 'conservatism' around Swiss gymnastics. In fact, the conditions of this rise were uncertain, but it must be stressed that gymnastics maintained its rigidity and, with it, its vision of the body of the schoolboy-gymnast. While football and handball made their entrance in the second manual (Burgener 1952, p. 134), they were reserved for moments of 'games', possibly organised at the end of the lessons and only when there was some time left over. They were clearly not directly part of the schooling project, being more a moment of release for the children.

#### The 1927 (missed?) revolution

After the first three very 'gymnastic-oriented' editions, in which 'the military print remains strong' (Cordoba/Lenzen 2018, p. 33), especially in the highest school grades, the 1927 textbook reflected a tangible pedagogical revolution with new consideration given to 'modern sports', but also the appearance of the expression 'physical education'. Beyond the 'gymnastics/sport' antagonism that was exacerbated around 1900 (Bussard 2007, p. 187), the new textbook sought to create the conditions for dialogue between the ideas relating to different forms of movement, also in the light of a better established 'scientific' corpus (Cordoba/Lenzen 2018, pp. 34–35). Indeed, 'under the influence of sport, gymnastics once again took into consideration the natural forms of movement (...). On the other hand, sport also began to pursue educational goals. By combining the various exercises, it tried to ensure a general development of the body, so that it began to attach more importance to general training than to competitions and performances' (DMF 1927, p. 45).

The body that physical education in schools aimed to train was no longer only that of the citizen-soldier. While physical education here again only concerned boys, it was not yet a training ground for future athletes and future Olympic medallists either; this school discipline was to serve more 'cultural' purposes and support the promotion of a new form of public hygiene, given through physical activities for boys of school age. In fact, the new textbook 'has brought different conceptions of physical culture closer together. It is therefore to be hoped that the time is not so far away when the development of physical exercise will approach its culmination, from the popular and biological point of view, but also from a pedagogical side.' (DMF 1927, p. 52).

Pedagogical reform was then also supported by new, better qualified teachers, notably through the new training courses at the University of Basel from 1922 onwards (Burgener 1952, p. 324 ff.). Henceforth, a 'federal diploma for gymnastics teachers' enabled its holder to teach throughout the country, after training that included anatomy, physiology, history, methodology, hygiene, but also numerous personal practices (gymnastics, swimming, games, etc.). Of course, in many cantons, cantonal certifications were then still required, but a more coherent teaching was possible and soon other universities (including Zurich, Lausanne, and Geneva) would follow with the creation of preparation courses for the new federal diploma (Quin 2016).

At the end of the interwar period and despite obvious progress in considering new 'educational' needs, the rise of totalitarianism in Europe (especially at the borders of Switzerland) generated new forms of tensions around the importance of preparing young soldiers. Thus, in 1940 the population voted against the extension of the obligation to practise gymnastics for young people aged between 16 and 19, but in 1941, the Federal Council took advantage of the context, favourable to a certain form of authoritarianism, to move forward with this project despite the popular vote (Burgener 1952, p. 382). Published the following year, the new edition of the Federal textbook updated its scientific foundations, but it also promoted some more ambiguous elements, notably around certain activities that were supposed to promote 'courage' or overcome 'intimate resistance' (DMF 1942, p. 44). While it is not at all a question of over-interpreting the intentions of its promoters, it must be noted that the schoolboy body remained a future fighter's body, the body of a citizen-soldier able to defend (again) the borders of his country. The novelty then lay perhaps in the tools made available to the teachers, with order and discipline as their core.

### Facing new medal races: new conceptions around physical education

At the beginning of the 1950s the context changed, and military motivations were to recede in favour of the development of more sporting, pedagogical and didactic motivations behind the organisation of gymnastics in schools. However, the textbook published between 1957 and 1962 was not yet deeply marked by this new vision of the schoolboy body. It remained focused on the physical aptitudes of the children, on his (or her!) ability to resist, all imbued with moral and spiritual values.

Beyond the textbook itself, the 1950s was a very singular context with a real 'political' fear regarding new potential threats to health and demographics – which

can be found in several debates in the Swiss Parliament. Thus, a postulate of the member of parliament (MP) Bachmann in 1957 was based on the observation of a 'softening of youth' and proposed to reflect on the introduction of 'compulsory gymnastics education at school, which should encourage 'physical development (. . .)' and continue 'after leaving school [in the context of] military service' (Federal Archives, Document from the Federal Council, Bachmann Postulate, 6 March 1957). While Bachmann was aware that physical education already had a 'federal' obligation since the end of the nineteenth century, he advocated opening these goals and intentions to the broader training of the body, motor skills and health of future citizens. A few years later, in 1962, another text - a motion this time - by another MP, Werner Kurzmeyer, expressed concerns about the general physical softening of the population and called on the Federal Council 'to examine in depth the whole problem of combating physical softening and the development of the resistance force' (Federal Archives, Document from the Federal Council, Motion Kurzmeyer, 20 March 1962). It was therefore looking as if all the elements to encourage a reform were slowly coming together to address the problems of the Swiss social body and especially among young people (Tonnerre/Quin 2017).

However, it was ultimately a 'sporting' event that triggered the reform: the failure of the Swiss Olympic delegation during the 1964 Innsbruck Olympic Games. Returning without any medals, Swiss sportsmen and women embodied the dysfunction of sport at all levels (Quin 2018). Following the debacle in Austria, the years 1969–1972 were to mark a real turning point in the history of Swiss sport, since the Confederation and the cantons were then to equip themselves with a veritable body of laws and regulations to organise sport and bring about the best possible results, in terms of competition, education and infrastructures. Accepted by a large majority of the population (542,361 voted 'yes' and 178,283 'no'), sport was incorporated into the Federal Constitution on 27 September 1970, with a new article 27, allowing 'The Confederation the right to issue regulations about the practice of gymnastics and sports by young people' (Burgener 1984, p. 495).

As part of the reflections on the implementation of the new constitutional article, the members of the Parliament discussed in particular the attachment of the promotion of sport to the military administration, and the MP Alfred Bussey emphasised that 'it would be organically false and psychologically a mistake not to make the transfer to the department more particularly in charge of the problems that affect the education of our youth.' However, he added that 'convinced of the interest that this law has for the health and well-being of our people, especially our youth, [he] proposes, on behalf of the unanimous committee,

to vote for the introduction of this law' (Federal Archives, Documents of the Parliament, Parliamentary report on the law promoting gymnastics and sports, 15 December 1971).

Passed in March 1972, the new federal law extended the mandatory feature of physical education to girls, which constituted a revolution within the ongoing legislative revolution, only a few months after the opening of the voting right to women at the federal level (Studer 1996). However, it should be pointed out that this new obligation - already a reality in many cities and cantons - was not accompanied by any recommendations regarding co-education in the classroom (Cattani/Quin 2019). As of 1972, however, the schoolchild's body was no longer just a male body, it was the whole social body that was being addressed through school physical education. Thus, the 1972 law stated very clearly that it 'aims to encourage gymnastics and sports in the interests of youth development, public health and physical fitness' (Federal Archives, Documents of the Parliament, Federal law promoting gymnastics and sports, 17 March 1972). However, beyond political declarations, after the failure of the Swiss delegation at the Olympic Games in Innsbruck, it was 'sports bodies' that we wanted to develop at school. The sports leaders then all had in mind the famous image of the sports pyramid, the base of which would be compulsory physical education and the top of which would correspond to Olympic medals.

Regarding this point, the new textbook published in the middle of the 1970s was really interesting, as its separate parts pointed at specific sports or families of disciplines, as if physical education had received a new mission to prepare the future athletes. In the introductory note, the translators – as the textbook was first written in German – introduced several interesting elements pointing to some new differences within the country, where the German-speaking side was clearly rejecting the concept of 'bodily education' (Commission Fédérale de Gymnastique et de Sport 1981, p. 7) in favour of something more 'sport-oriented', which was also already different from the French-speaking region where 'physical education' had broadened its roots.

## A federal model under threat? From motor skills to 'competences'

In the 1990s, an eighth edition of the federal textbooks still enshrined the principle of a federal model for the physical (and sports) education (PE or PSE) sector, but several factors would come together and create a threat to the federal dimension of the sector. In the space of a few years, the creation of the Universities of Teacher Education (*Haute Ecole Pédagogique*, HEP) (1995), the emergence

of the language regions as a new key area for education (from 2007) and the removal of the possibility to write a textbook in the latest version of the Federal Law on the Promotion of Sport (2011) called into question more than a century of centralised provisions. As Nicolas Voisard and Daniel Deriaz (in press) point out in their contribution to the 'learning and teaching in physical education' project (Lernen und Lehren en education physique et sportive, or LELEPS), these dynamics are gave way to a new 'mosaic of conceptions of the discipline', particularly with the introduction of a competence-based approach in school systems (Weinert 2001). In fact, in the PER (Plan d'Études Romand) as well as in the LP21 (Lehrplan 21) or the Piano di Studio, 'knowledge' is now only one aspect of the school's objectives; 'know-how' and 'soft/interpersonal skills' must also be part of the training, and in this context, the teaching of physical education and sports must be adapted. While homogenisation is desired, particularly around the objectives of health promotion in motion, it does not strongly resist the cantonal fragmentation which continues to be the level of implementation of content and teacher education.

Within the different linguistic and cultural regions, a simple analysis of the name of physical and sports education is already edifying and reveals deep divergences. While the word 'education' appears first in the French term 'éducation physique' in the PER (CIIP 2010), it is absent in the German term 'Bewegung und Sport' in LP21 (D-EDK 2016), which literally means movement and sport. Thus, the cantons of German-speaking Switzerland would teach more on the basis of physical and sporting skills, whereas the French-speaking cantons would give priority to the more strictly pedagogical aspect. Reading the introductory chapter of the LP21 'Bewegung und Sport', we notice that the word education, 'Erziehung' in German, appears only once in the following sentence: 'The Federal Law promoting sport (2011) aims to extend sport participation to all ages and to increase the importance of exercise and sport in education and training' (D-EDK 2016 p. 8).

Thus, for the German-speaking region, one can say that the word 'education' is only mentioned as part of the legal base. On the other hand, the term 'education' is central in the body and movement part of the PER where the terms 'physical education' and 'nutritional education' appear many times, as the two facets of the body and movement domain (CIIP 2010, p. 49). Thus, the early promoters of the PER wished to integrate into the same set of disciplines that contribute 'to the maintenance and development of physical and mental health' (CIIP 2010, Cycle 1, Art – Body and Movement, p. 48) without going so far as to use the national denomination and without directly mobilising the term 'sport'. In fact, while health is clearly a structuring axis in the different regions, it is not yet a

central structure of practices in the field, where competition, motor skills and hygiene cohabit and depend on the availability of infrastructure and generations of teachers. It is then the 'competences' that must create a new homogeneity, but here again, in so far as it requires putting students in learning situations of a certain complexity, this approach bears the seeds of a genuine transformation of instruction and education practices. However, although the institutional message is explicit on this point (CIIP 2003), its translation within the curricula remains incomplete. Thus, the objectives and fundamental expectations of the PER for physical and sports education are more a matter of juxtaposing objectives linked to highly targeted competence resources rather than promoting an integrative vision of the motor, cognitive, social and methodological resources around a competence.

Moreover, it must also be noted that the establishment of Universities of Teacher Education at the turn of the 2000s may lead to a form of consolidation of certain particularities and the reinforcement of certain more 'localist' or 'cantonalist' conceptions, particularly in some cantons where physical education is a pedagogical and didactic laboratory, such as the canton of Waadt, where the branch has not been subject to the same evaluation procedures as the other branches since the 1980s (Quin 2014). Furthermore, physical education, whose evaluation - more than any other subject - must take into account acquisitions made outside the school framework (in the family or the sports movement) (Hayoz/Klostermann/Schlesinger/Nagel 2018), is subject to a process of 'sportivisation' which has been accelerating since the 1960s. According to various studies, the Swiss population is becoming more and more 'polysporty', with a quarter of the sportsmen and women surveyed practising at least five sports (Lamprecht/Fischer/Stamm 2014). With the introduction of the 'Youth and Sport' programmes promoting 'sport for all' in the early 1970s, the modalities of sports practice diversified and became less traditional, with the emergence of 'fun', 'sliding' or 'fitness' disciplines (Loret 1995).

At the end of our analysis, beyond the linguistic distinctions linked to the culture of the regions, it must be stressed that today's curricula are similar in their emphasis on a competence-based approach to teaching, but due to the lack of a real anchorage in the field and a clarification of the conditions for its implementation, it still seems rather vague and we cannot yet postulate the existence (or promotion) of a 'competent body' in physical education in Swiss schools.

A comparison of the practice of physical education and sports in PE lessons shows that there are major differences not only between the different language regions, but also within a language region between the cantons and the different institutions. It is therefore illusory to declare the existence or even the emergence

of a single conception of the discipline. At most, there is a dynamic of transformation which, under the impetus of research and development work in didactics (e.g. the national LELEPS project), can contribute to reflection on the common concepts and differences existing in Switzerland, but can also strengthen the status of physical and sports education as a full school discipline.

#### Acknowledgement

This research has been written as part of the research project 'La Fabrique des sports nationaux', funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (project number: 182399), and of the project 'LELEPS: Lernen und Lehren en education physique et sportive', funded by Swiss Universities. The authors would like to thank Etty Payne for her amazing copy-editing work on this contribution.

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