

## A Romanian book, unjustly forgotten, regarding physical education for children

*O carte românească, pe nedrept uitată, despre educația fizică a copiilor*

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### Abstract

Physical education developed significantly in Romania during the interwar period, a consequence of the progressive alignment of Romania with Western physical education conceptions. Although physical education was indicated then mainly for adults, it was also being implemented for children. Many of the studies and books written on this subject were unjustly forgotten in the communist decades, one of them being the book “Physical education of children”, written by General Alexandru Manolescu and published in 1927. This book was removed from libraries after 1948, because its author became politically undesirable. The aim of our paper is to bring this book to the attention of readers, highlighting its merits. We present the most important data and several programs in this book.

**Key words:** physical education of children, forgotten book, Alexandru Manolescu.

### Rezumat

În România, educația fizică a avut în perioada interbelică o dezvoltare semnificativă. Aceasta a fost o consecință a alinierii României la concepțiile progresiste din Occident. Deși educația fizică era atunci indicată mai ales adulților, totuși au fost făcute progrese și în implementarea acesteia la copii. O parte a studiilor și cărților scrise pe această temă au fost uitate pe nedrept în deceniile comuniste. Din această categorie face parte cartea „Educația fizică a copiilor”, elaborată de lct. general Alexandru Manolescu, publicată în 1927. Volumul a fost scos din biblioteci după 1948, din cauză că autorul a devenit indezirabil politic. Scopul lucrării este de a aduce în atenția cititorilor această carte, subliniind meritele sale. Prezentăm cele mai importante date și câteva scheme din această carte.

**Cuvinte cheie:** educația fizică a copiilor, carte uitată, Alexandru Manolescu.

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### Motto:

“Physical education is not just about character and willpower, it is especially a higher school for health. Physical exercise is an excellent public hygiene method, which is why doctors should know its hygienic effects. Sports represent a positive hygiene, vigorous health and collective education method”

*Iuliu Hațieganu, 1937*

### Introduction

Physical education and sport underwent an interesting development in Romania in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Here, we will not give a picture of this evolution, but will present some landmarks of the interwar period.

The development of sport in pre-World War I Romania continued after 1918. Without detailing, we emphasize the fact that new sports emerged during this period: basketball,

volleyball, rock climbing, table tennis, boxing, rowing, handball. In 1922, the first professional forms of boxing and football were established (1).

The interwar period witnessed the first attempts to crystallize a unitary conception of physical education.

Of great importance was the creation of the National Institute of Physical Education in Bucharest, in 1922. Outstanding professors such as Constantin Kirițescu (1876-1965), Constantin Petre-Lazăr (1896-?), Virgil Bădulescu (1882-?) and Virgil Roșeală contributed to laying the foundations for the status of the physical education discipline, to its scientific foundations and – very importantly – to the improvement of its organization (2). As Kirițescu showed, the reform initiated in 1925 in primary education and in 1928 in secondary education established the role of physical education as part of the Romanian education system. “From the rank of a mere

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neglected skill, physical education (not mere gymnastics) becomes a particularly important discipline for the training of future citizens” (Kirişescu, 1930).

It is noteworthy that in the second interwar decade, methodical medical check-up became compulsory in all institutions and associations where physical exercise was practiced. This measure was taken with the support of the Medical Society of Physical Education in Bucharest, founded in 1932 (Bârsu, 2014).

Physical education knowledge was disseminated by means of lectures, conferences, publication of articles and books, etc.

It is difficult to establish the precise number of specialized studies and books published in the interwar period, because part of these were destroyed during World War II or were confiscated (or destroyed) in the communist period. The cause of this situation was not the content of these books, but rather the wish of communist authorities to remove from libraries the volumes of authors that had become politically undesirable. Such a book is “Physical education of children” by Alexandru Manolescu.

The copy that was available to us was partially deteriorated by moisture and mold from being kept for decades in the store of the Discipline of the History of Medicine in Cluj-Napoca. Even under these circumstances, the fact that it was not removed from the Department’s collections – because of the author’s *politically undesired* status – is to be appreciated. The person thanks to whom this book was preserved is probably Prof. Dr. Valeriu Bologa (1892-1971), who ran the Department from 1930 to 1962. This copy had initially belonged to the Medical Students Society’s Library in Cluj (as can be seen from the label on the book cover) (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1 – The cover of the book “Physical education of children” by Al. Manolescu

### General data about the book

The book has a main title: “Physical education of children” and a more extensive subtitle: “Notions of pedagogy and organization for raising children. Age 1-15 years”. The title and subtitle suggest the wide range of interests embraced by the author in this volume. The

book was published by the “Sunrise Graphic Art Institute” Publishing House in Bucharest, in 1927.

Al. Manolescu noted this dedication: “I dedicate this book to Romanian teachers, as a sign of admiration for their past and future work for children’s good education in united Romania”.

In the *Foreword* to the book, the author explained why he had started writing it. Thus, he mentioned that “this book can give way to a number of comments, of which the first would be that instead of writing about military tactics or history or even about soldiers’ education, an active military man deals with children’s education, an occupation reserved for anyone else but a soldier”. The author reminded that since his youth, as early as 1912, he had been interested in children’s physical education. At that time he had started his career as a teacher at the Dealu Monastery High School. We mention the fact that in 1902, a military orphan school was organized in the former monastery. Then, from 1912 to 1940, the “Nicolae Filipescu” Military High School was based here (3).

Further in the introduction, the author showed that he wished to avoid the education errors he had seen during his school years.

The first chapter of the book refers to general principles for the normal somatic development of children. This comprises notions related to general health, child’s somatic development, the relationship between physical, mental and intellectual development, including notions of anatomy and physiology (Fig. 2).

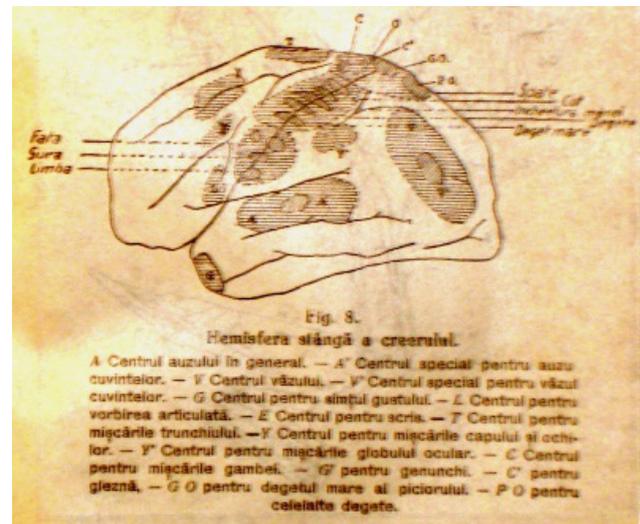


Fig. 2 – The scheme of the left hemisphere of the brain

The author noted some data regarding the educational role of doctors, parents and, particularly, educators. In addition, Manolescu gave a detailed description of the physical examination of children. For this purpose, he included 15 diagrams and tables pertaining to the correlation of weight and height, cranial measurements, etc.

The medical part of this chapter is inspired – according to the author himself – from the works “Le corps et l’âme de l’enfant” by Dr. Fleury and “Les maladies de caractère” by Dr. Flessinger. As a particularity, we mention that in this

chapter, psychological changes such as anger, laziness and mythomania are explained.

The second chapter presents physical exercises depending on different childhood periods, the majority having motor applications, e.g., running, jumping, swinging, etc.

Various riddle games or imitation games are described, which include more extensive physical movements: boys imitate soldiers, firemen, etc., while girls mimic movements with dolls. For older ages, ball games or athletics are described.

The author tries to establish a parallel between the physiological action of these games or exercises and their role on children's physical, mental and intellectual activities.

The third chapter provides data related to hygiene: maintaining physical hygiene in general and hygiene after physical exercise in particular. Data regarding body hygiene, clothing hygiene, indications concerning fatigue manifestations and rest periods, food hygiene, nutritional requirements of children are presented. Also, examples of nutritious foods compared to less nutritious ones are given.

Chapter four describes the general principles for organizing physical education, including intellectual and material preparation. This chapter focuses on the necessary facilities for kindergartens and primary schools, as well as on the organization of play and sports fields.

Chapter five refers to the pedagogy of physical exercise, the so-called physical education training. In addition to different teaching methods and programs, physical movements are explained. Potential errors during these movements are not omitted and their correction is also evidenced. A rare aspect present in such physical education books refers to the handling and maintenance of sports apparatuses. The commands, orders and signals used during the execution of physical exercises are illustrated. This chapter includes a great number of tables with physical exercise plans (Figs. 3 and 4), required for the development of physical programs targeted for different school grades.

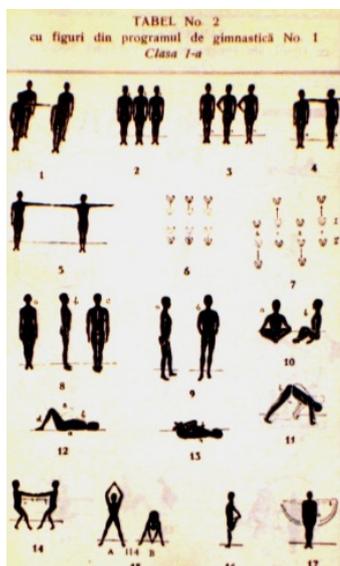


Fig. 3 – Gymnastic exercises for grade 1.

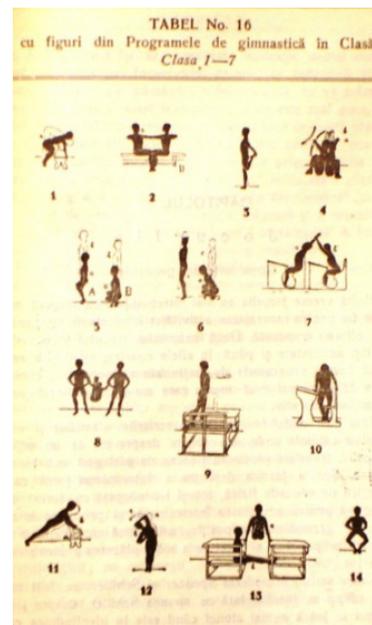


Fig. 4 – Gymnastic exercises for grades 1-7.

Chapter six is exclusively focused on games. General notions, physiological and pedagogical considerations, game rules, examples of active indoor and outdoor games such as ball over the net, ball in the basket and oina are presented. It deserves mentioning that the author did not elaborate sufficiently on the social advantages of this form of physical education or on the fact that games do not allow a precise dosage of effort and strict regulatory technical execution. This is why these aspects can be better achieved by exercises and activities specific to athletics and gymnastics (Bocu, 2007).

In chapter seven, various sports are described: athletics, sprinting, jumping, discus throw and shot put (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5 – Child throwing the shot put.

The final chapter presents the organization of sports training camps in order to put into practice, in an organized manner, the physical education of children.

The book comprises 333 pages.

The following annexes are found at the end of the book: the plan of a kindergarten playroom, the plan of a primary school gymnasium, plans of gymnastics apparatuses and the plan of a sports field.

Although the book's language has some archaic touches, these are adapted to physical education, for example: *cursa de iuțeală* (*speed race*), *tracțiunea cu frânghia* (*rope pulling*), etc. This way of expression was specific to the interwar period and it was not the author's intention to use archaisms.

The following question can be posed: was a special book necessary to serve as a guide to children's physical education? The answer is positive, considering the serious situation of children's health. Comparative data evidence the fact that in the mid-interwar period (1930-1931), Romania ranked first among European countries with the highest infantile mortality rate (176‰). The next places were occupied, in decreasing order of mortality during the first year of life, by Hungary (154‰), Portugal (144‰), Czechoslovakia (138‰), Bulgaria (135‰) (Duțescu, Marcu, 1972). Certainly, sport itself does not directly reduce the mortality rate, but sport is an important factor in increasing resistance and thus, in prophylaxis.

To conclude, we consider it necessary to highlight some data of the author's biography. He was born in 1885. In the period 1918-1922, he was a sports teacher at the Military High School of Dealu Monastery. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel in 1925. In 1927, he trained and led the squad of military athletes to the International Inter-Allied Olympic Games. In 1930, he was promoted to colonel. Only one year later, he resigned from the army. However, he participated in World War II. In 1947, he was sent to reserve, and 3 years later, to retirement (Chiper, 2005).

It can be said that this book was useful for the acquisition of positive skills in the physical education of children. We also believe that this volume should be mentioned when presenting a historical review of children's physical education in the interwar period.

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