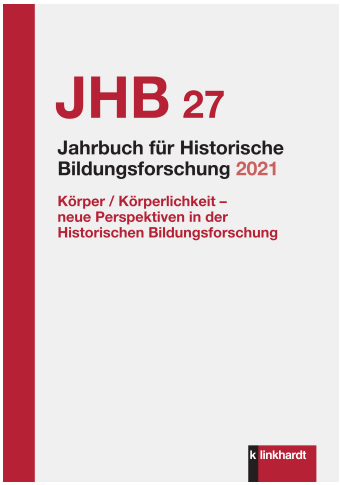
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Paola Alfieri

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Gyms and classrooms as sites for bodily education in Italian elementary schools in the second half of the 19th century

Abstract: Throughout the process whereby gymnastics was instituted as a curricular subject in Italian elementary schools during the second half of the 19th century, the places where they could be taught were gyms and, above all, classrooms. The sources used for this research shed light not only on the physical features of the spaces devoted to bodily education, but also, and especially, on the metaphorical meanings underpinning them and the pedagogical valence of physical education, pupils' corporal experience, the construction of gender and the ideological and educational nature of the spatial transformations.

Zusammenfassung: Während der gesamten Einführungsphase des Lehrfachs Turnen in den italienischen Grundschulen in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts waren die Orte, an denen der Sportunterricht stattfinden konnte, Turnhallen und vor allem Klassenzimmer. Die für diese Recherche verwendeten Quellen beleuchten nicht nur die Einrichtung der Räume, in denen unterrichtet wurde, sondern auch und vor allem die ihnen zugrunde liegende symbolische Bedeutung und damit die dem Sportunterricht zuerkannte pädagogische Wertigkeit, die Körpererfahrung der SchülerInnen, die Konstruktion des Geschlechts sowie den ideologischen und erzieherischen Charakter der räumlichen Umgestaltungen.

Schlagworte: Leibesübung, Unterrichtsräume, Grundschule, Italien, 19. Jahrhundert

1 Introduction

During the second half of the 19th century, gymnastics began its slow and arduous journey towards full integration into the Italian elementary school curriculum. This process – which, as we will see, was undergirded by key legislative reforms – was conditioned by multiple sources of hesitancy. First, it met with resistance from the collective Italian mindset, which associated physical exercise regimens with circus acts or even with behaviours of dubious moral propriety. These reservations were fuelled further by sectors of Italian Catholicism, which – as we will examine – interpreted recognition of the educational value of physical exercise as affirming the equal status of body and soul, corresponding with principles from the French Revolution.[1]

No less hostile to the introduction of physical education as a curricular subject was contemporary school culture, which tended to reject the idea that elementary education should cover not only pupils' intellectual and moral formation, but also their physical development. Indeed, most teachers were convinced that the primary purposes of elementary education were to spread literacy skills and create honest individuals and, above all, loyal citizens. In the newborn Italian state – characterised by widespread illiteracy and a legacy of socio-political differences between various forces that united to form it – exercising the body was viewed as a distraction from schools' most urgent priorities.[2]

The very fact that physical education programmes were drawn up separately from those of other subjects clearly indicates that this discipline was viewed as an add-on to the elementary school curriculum and that its status as a full-blown school subject was far from accepted.[3]

For all these reasons, Pierre Arnaud's observation about France applies even more strongly to post-Unification Italy: from a historical perspective, physical education essentially was „*l'étrangère dans la maison école*" [„the foreigner within school life"].[4]

However, in late 19th century Italy, this alien status was due not only to the aforementioned factors, but also to a further and no-less-serious problem: the need for suitable spaces in which to teach physical education. This was a mainly logistical issue arising from school buildings' generally poor quality, which even slowed the implementation of literacy and basic education programmes. Thus, this paper's primary aim is to document the extent to which

1 Bardelli 2012.

2 Regarding the first three decades following unification, see Alfieri 2017; on the subsequent decade, see Manacorda 1998.

3 Morandi 2015, 2016; see also Ragazzini 2001.

4 Arnaud 1989.

the spaces earmarked for gymnastics classes – gymnasiums, but more frequently classrooms – facilitated the practice of exercise regimens that gradually were incorporated into elementary school curricula.

In describing these spaces in terms of their physical characteristics, we also must – as advocated by scholars of the material culture of education – attempt to identify their symbolic meanings and consequent educational implications because „rather than being viewed as a neutral or passive ‚container', if recognised at all, the school building [is] considered to be active in shaping the experience of schools and the understanding of education".[5]

The influence that space per se wields on the most profound dynamics of school life is even more crucial in the domain of physical education, in which the presence, location and movements of children's bodies within school spaces come even more prominently to the fore. Thus, a further aim of the paper is to analyse the use of the spaces in which gymnastics were taught, in light of the „corporeal turn" of recent decades, which has been characterised by „renewed scholarly interest across the disciplines in the body as metaphor and physical materiality".[6]

Data on gymnasiums' architectural layout and appearance, their position relative to other school buildings and their size can inform our thinking about the educational value attributed to gymnastics as a school subject, children's bodily experiences and the processes underpinning differential education for boys and girls during this time. Furthermore, given that abandoned churches sometimes were used as gymnasiums, an additional line of reflection concerns the ideological meaning of such conversions, mirroring the material domain of the aforementioned opposition of ideals between the education of the body and that of the soul, which was exacerbating an already strong antagonism between secular and Catholic culture in public discourse.

No less revealing were the ways in which gymnastics were practised in the classroom, a setting in which, following the launch of mass education programmes, „the distribution of bodies", „the control of their activities, the planning of time units and the composition of all the different participants through synchronisation [were] some of the operations that organise[d] teaching and g[ave] interactions a recurrent and rhythmised shape".[7]

Analysing the gymnastics practised in this setting – so-called gymnastics among desks – aids our understanding of the underlying vision of the body as „a site of order and control"[8] and/or „a site of opportunity and creativity".[9] In

5 Burke 2005, pp. 489-490.

6 Gleason 2018, p. 7.

7 Caruso 2015, p. 16. See also Dussel/Caruso 1999; Braster/Grosvenor/Del Pozo Andrés 2011.

8 Burke 2007, p. 166.

Foucauldian terms, these classroom exercise regimens may be defined as an educational dispositive that served to reinforce the disciplinary function of the classroom's spatial layout. However, the fact that these exercises were performed between lessons on other school subjects prompts us to examine whether and how they impacted the rules that teachers normally imposed to keep order in the classroom.
Sources such as school legislation, parliamentary debates, teacher manuals and plans or images of school buildings indicate that these factors bore educational, didactic and even ideological implications, both for the teaching of gymnastics itself and for school culture more generally, which was understood to be a set of theories, practices, habits, rules and values that gave life to the teaching/learning process.[10]

2 Spaces for gymnastics in school legislation from the post-Unification period

Prior to Unification, gymnastics had not been introduced into the elementary school curricula of the various states that comprised the Italian Peninsula.[11] The new discipline first appeared, at least nominally, in the government, via the Regulation on Elementary Instruction of 1860, issued pursuant to the Casati Law of 1859, which was extended to the whole of Italy following Unification under the House of Savoy in 1861. Article 139 of the regulation called for elementary school institutions to have a „large room" or an „adjoining porch for recess" and „a schoolyard with the main equipment required to perform gymnastics exercises".[12] However, these guidelines were vague and almost devoid of prescriptive value, given that physical education for elementary school pupils was not among the priorities of moderate liberals who headed the first governments of the early post-Unification period. Indeed, the ministerial curriculum for this level of education, also published in 1860, did not mention gymnastics, nor did it mention education of the body among the goals of elementary education. Instead, it emphasised basic education – reading, writing and arithmetic – as well as religious-moral and patriotic education.
In keeping with these aims, Article 140 of the regulation described the ideal classroom, whose basic furnishings were to include:

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9 Rousmaniere/Sobe 2018, p. 1.
10 See Julia 1995; Depaepe/Simon 1995; Chervel 1998; Viñao Frago 1998.
11 Alfieri 2017, pp. 29-50.
12 This article is cited in Gotta 1957, p. 13.

„1. School desks with seats in sufficient number for all the pupils
2. A table with a lockable drawer and a chair for the schoolmaster
3. A cupboard with a lock in which to keep books, written work, etc.
4. A stove to heat the room
5. An inkwell for the teacher and fitted inkwells for the students
6. A picture representing the basic units and measurements of the decimal metric system
7. A crucifix
8. A portrait of the king".[13]

These guidelines were to be implemented by municipal authorities, whom the Casati Law had charged with running elementary schools. Many municipalities, especially those in rural areas, were not in a position to execute the duties that the legislation required of them – a state of affairs that persisted beyond the years immediately following Unification. In these towns and villages, school premises – wherever they existed – were inadequate for delivering even basic curricular components, as documented in the ministerial statistics and inspectors' reports.[14] Some of the visual sources on elementary schools from this period show bare, poorly organised classrooms in which pupils' desks often were lacking.[15]

While conditions in urban school settings were generally better – at least from the perspective of teaching reading, writing and arithmetic – these schools usually were not conducive to teaching gymnastics either. In any case, given that physical education had not become compulsory in elementary schools yet, it was only taught in some Italian cities where local authorities were particularly enterprising.[16]

Against this backdrop, the City of Turin was a special case, as the home of the Reale Società Ginnastica [Royal Gymnastics Society], founded in 1844 and a leader of Italy's transition from military to educational gymnastics.[17] To give civilians the opportunity to practise gymnastics, the society built a gym, which also was open to some of the city's elementary schools.[18] This amenity contained all the equipment needed to perform so-called German gymnastics – climbing frames/ropes, parallel bars and a vaulting horse (Figure 1) – though these mainly were reserved for use by older members. The building was located in a central area of the city, and the society's board described it as „not especially elegant" but „nice and functional like other amenities for the education of youth". The society's leaders asserted that

13 This article is cited in Daprà 1986a, p. 78.
14 Vigo 1971, pp. 18-23; De Fort 1979, pp. 183-192.
15 Meda 2016, p. 47.
16 Alfieri 2017, pp. 51-98.
17 Bonetta 1990, pp. 58-59.
18 Valletti 1877, p. 18.

from the outside, the gymnasium looked like the „public schools“ of the period (Picture 2)[19] at a time when school buildings in Italy, like elsewhere in Europe, conveyed „a cultural and civic semantics“.[20] Thus, even the gymnasium was conceptualised as a new type of school – albeit one devoted to the education of the body – that would be no less institutional or imbued with patriotic values than other schools.

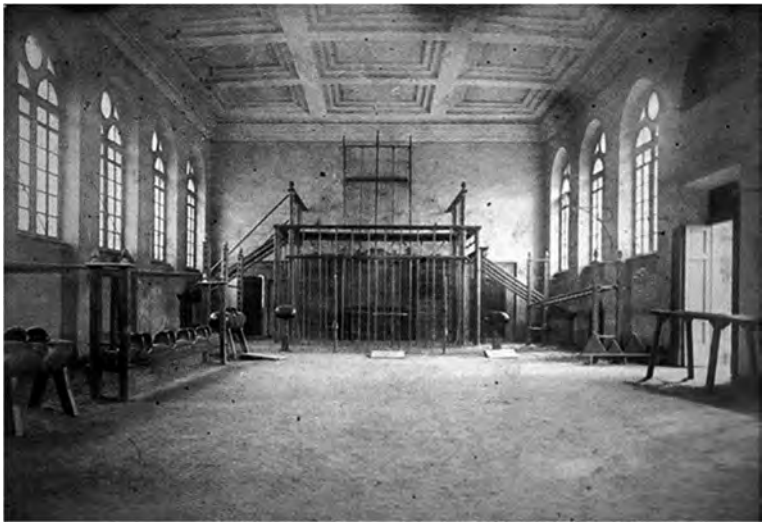


Fig. 1: The interior of the Royal Gymnastics Society's gymnasium in Turin in 1886 (see http://www.museorealeginnastica.it/?q=image/tid/14; last accessed on: 25.07.2020).

Only after the liberal democrats came to power in 1878 did the De Sanctis Law make gymnastics compulsory in all schools across the Kingdom of Italy, including elementary schools. This measure was part of the new government's broader political agenda, which viewed gymnastics, in part thanks to the cultural rationale offered by positivist education theories, as one of several mechanisms for delivering secular civic education in schools.[21]
That same year, a new law on school buildings made the awarding of grants to build new elementary schools contingent on the requirement that the plans include „a suitable room for gymnastics exercises“.[22] However, the gymnas-

19 Monografia 1873, p. 20.
20 Escolano Benito 2003, p. 60.
21 See Manacorda 1998.
22 Regolamento per l'esecuzione della legge sugli edifici scolastici 1879.

tics curriculum for elementary schools in 1878 offered no description of the spaces where physical education was to take place. The only reference in the ministerial guidelines for the spatial positioning of gymnastics was the distinction drawn between physical exercises to be carried out inside the classroom and those to be performed outside the classroom.[23]

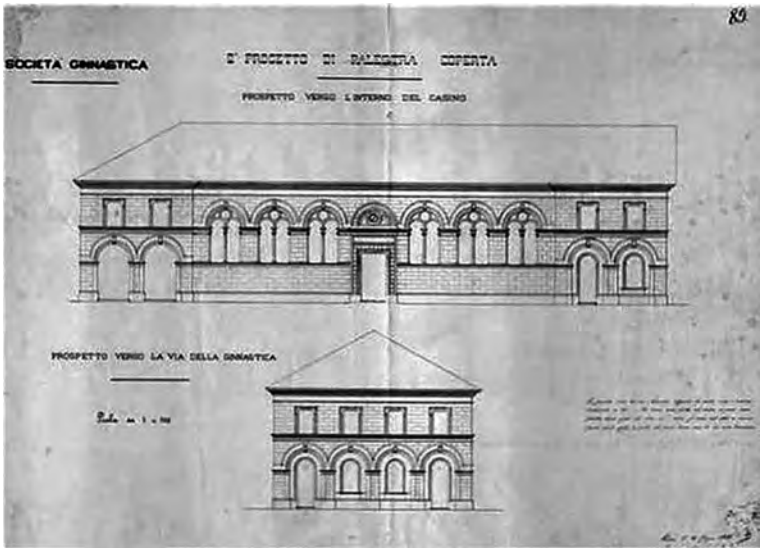


Fig. 2: Exterior view of the Royal Gymnastics Society's gymnasium in Turin (see http://www.museorealeginnastica.it/?q=image/tid/12; last accessed on: 25.07.2020).

The former type of exercise – which we will discuss later in more detail – was first introduced into Italy through schools in Venice and later promoted particularly in the health and education theories of Emilio Baumann, a gymnastics expert, doctor and teacher who lived and worked in Bologna from the 1860s to the 1880s.[24] Simple bodily movements that easily could be performed in the classroom by following the teacher's instructions (such as standing up and sitting down, standing on tiptoes, flexing the arms, clapping, swivelling to the left and right, etc.) represented a viable solution to the lack of alternative settings for basic physical education in Italian elementary schools.

Not until 1886 did the gymnastics curriculum for elementary schools offer concrete guidance concerning the spaces where the subject was to be taught.

[23] See Programmi d'istruzione per l'insegnamento della ginnastica nelle scuole elementari maschili e femminili 1878.

[24] See D'Ascenzo 2010.

This guidance, while again distinguishing between classroom and extra-classroom physical activities, put greater emphasis on the latter. Thus, the new guidelines called for „a special room“ or at least „a yard or entrance hall“ or „any other available area“ for lower or rural elementary schools[25] and „a special room“ or a properly equipped „gymnasium“ for pupils in urban upper elementary schools.[26]

3 Gymnasiums

The 1886 curricula were drawn up with a key contribution from the aforementioned Emilio Baumann. In his ‚Guida illustrata per l'insegnamento della ginnastica nelle Scuole normali ed elementari maschili' [‚Illustrated Guide to the Teaching of Gymnastics in Normal Schools and Elementary Schools for Boys'], Baumann emphasised the need for gymnasiums to „satisfy the need for movement that torments schoolchildren“.[27] In support of this theory, his manual offered an anecdote on London Zoo, where staff had attempted to accustom monkeys to captivity by designing their cages to resemble their natural habitats. Despite these efforts, the animals continued to die until they were taken „out of the cages and confined in a spacious enclosure fitted out with [a system of ropes and poles] so that they could run, jump, dive and climb“.[28]

Comparing children to monkeys – an expression of the evolutionary positivism informing the author's educational perspective – was functional in explaining why only a large room with basic equipment would allow students to have a complete bodily experience and – above all – effectively counteract the negative effects from a sedentary lifestyle. Not surprisingly, both the 1886 curriculum and Baumann's manual viewed gymnasiums as particularly necessary in city schools, where children have fewer opportunities for movement than their counterparts in rural areas. Baumann asserted that gymnasiums were needed even more urgently in girls' schools, writing that „young girls“ – „in comparison with boys“ – were „forced to remain at home and, outside the home, to limit their movements even more“.[29]

To sum up, without a gymnasium or other suitable space in schools' environs, children's bodies would be denied the opportunity to engage in physical activity and reap the physiological and educational benefits that gymnastics

25 Programmi di ginnnastica per le scuole del Regno 1886, p. 215.
26 Ibid., pp. 223-224.
27 Valletti/Baumann 1887, p. 221.
28 Ibid.
29 Baumann 1890, p. 219.

teaching provides. This issue also was brought up by Augusto Pierantoni in an 1887 report to the Senate on proposed legislation for setting up a gymnastics teacher training school in Rome. More specifically, he observed that without suitable spaces, the exercises that the 1886 curriculum recommended for upper elementary schools in cities – particularly „marching, jumping and games" – were, in practice, „impossible to carry out".[30]
According to Pierantoni, the deficiencies in school buildings that were preventing the wider introduction of physical education into Italian schools were „a legacy acquired from past pre-Unification governments", those „anti-national lordships who wanted an imbalance between the powers of the mind and those of the body". In lamenting the errors, he believed that the Italian ruling classes of the past committed, he declared:

> „Italy lost a great opportunity to establish public gymnasiums. All over [the country], selected convents could have been converted into gymnastics arenas; the vegetable gardens long deployed for the friars' little agronomic trials could have become kindergartens, or gymnastics grounds."[31]

Pierantoni's words, which certainly were influenced partly by the strong jurisdictionalism informing his thinking,[32] took up a theme already present in public discourse on physical education, particularly since the introduction of the De Sanctis Law, which worsened the already tense relations between State and Church in the post-Unification years. Indeed, a year before the De Sanctis legislation was approved, the Coppino Law, which made no reference to the teaching of religion in elementary schools, had been enacted. Thus, more-intransigent Catholics contended that the introduction of physical education was intended to replace religion as a school subject. As late as 1897, a Catholic magazine accused the Italian State of „barbarism" for having made „gymnastics compulsory" and the „Catechism optional".[33]
Thus, while gymnastics had been viewed with suspicion by many within the Church since their first appearance on the Italian educational scene, after being made a compulsory school subject, they were perceived even more strongly as an expression of a new moral framework that favoured the physical and socioeconomic advancement of the nation and accelerated the secularisation of schools and society.[34] This morality reflected – in a more extreme form – the content of the civic religion that the Italian ruling class had attempted to construct, particularly from the 1870s onward, not only via the celebration of patriotic rituals and symbols, but also via the provision and use

30 This report is cited in Bartoli 1964, p. 288.
31 Ibid., p. 375.
32 See Mura 2015.
33 Bonetta 1990, pp. 230-231.
34 Verucci 1981, pp. 127-138.

of new urban and monumental spaces intended to supplement or replace places that evoked the spiritual values of the Catholic tradition and buildings designated for Catholic worship.[35] In keeping with this logic, the national gymnastics movement – particularly after gymnastics had become an official part of the school curriculum – also repeatedly asked that churches that were no longer being used be converted into gymnasiums.[36]

These appeals' purpose was to foster the spread of a phenomenon that had been struggling to take hold despite laws passed in 1866-1867 and 1873, allowing for the confiscation of Church assets with a view toward implementing projects in the public interest.[37] Some churches had been converted into gymnasiums, such as St. Agnes' (1871) and St. Lucy's (1873) in Bologna,[38] St. Mary of Mercy's (1872) in Venice[39] and St. Petronilla's (1875) in Siena.[40] However, in other places, such as Como, the conversion of churches had not been possible due to firm opposition from the clergy and their supporters.[41] In the battle against gymnastics mounted by Catholics who were most hostile towards the modernisation of Italian society, gymnastics had become charged with powerful ideological tensions: science vs. religion; secular health guidelines vs. traditional moral values; and physical well-being and national cohesion vs. the spiritual salvation of the soul and a sense of belonging to the Christian community.

Thus, the idea of converting churches into gyms not only represented a possible practical solution for the lack of dedicated spaces for doing gymnastics, but also was laden with symbolic meaning. Indeed, as Thomas A. Markus observed, ideology discloses its „most concrete evidence" in the material dimension of education, particularly when „the form and spatial structure of buildings" remain the same, but their „function" changes.[42] This is borne out by the image of the aforementioned Church of St. Petronilla in Siena (figure 3): the building's internal form – with its pillars, domes and even religious paintings – continued to evoke its original use, but against this backdrop, gymnastics equipment had been installed in place of sacred furnishings. Thus, converting church spaces into gyms meant removing material traces of a past imbued with religious values, or at the very least, juxtaposing them with new objects associated with secular and progressive ideals.

35 See Tobia 1991; Porciani 1997.
36 Pivato 1989, p. 269.
37 See Margiotta Broglio 1973.
38 See Baratti/Remmi Gigli 1972.
39 Ferrara 1992, pp. 140-141.
40 See Ricci 2006.
41 Ferrara 1992, p. 141.
42 Markus 1996, pp. 12-27.



Fig. 3: Interior of the Church of St. Petronilla in Siena following its conversion into a gymnasium in 1875 (Ferrara 1992, p. 116).

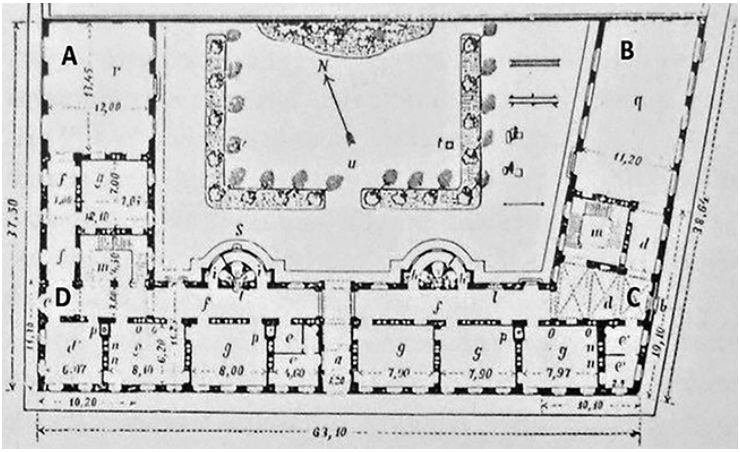


Fig. 4: Ground floor plan for the Silvio Pellico Elementary School in Turin in 1887 (key: A: boys' gymnasium; B: girls' gymnasium; C: boys' main entrance; D: girls' main entrance) (see Daprà 1986b, p. 120).

Meanwhile, plans for new elementary school buildings now were beginning to include provisions for gymnasiums in some cases. Historic floor plans

enable us to make further observations concerning these new spaces for physical education. At Silvio Pellico Elementary School in Turin (1887)[43] – as with Regina Margherita (1888)[44] and Pestalozzi (1889) Elementary Schools in Rome[45] – there were two gymnasiums: one for boys and one for girls. The plan for the Turin school (Picture 4) indicates that each of the two gymnastics rooms, which were located at opposite ends of the building, had its own entrance, in keeping with the fact that boys and girls entered the school building via separate main entrances – an arrangement that was prescribed in principle for all Italian schools.[46]

Thus, the overall rigid separation of the genders was reproduced in the domain of gymnastics, during which even the slightest hint of promiscuity was viewed as bearing greater moral danger than in other school settings. Displaying the female body and executing the movements required by physical exercise were viewed as unseemly, to the extent that even the 1878 gymnastics curriculum for elementary schools stated that, in the case of girls, exercise regimens that could „take on the appearance of a staged or athletic performance“[47] should be avoided. Indeed, both the 1878 and 1886 ministerial guidelines recommended exercise drills for girls that only required a limited range of movement. For example, with a view toward avoiding any showing of legs on the part of female students, girls did not engage in rope climbing or pole vaulting, while the balance beam that was supposed to be provided for their use was lower than that recommended for boys.[48] For the same reason, the boys' gym, as the Turin school's floor plans exemplify, was larger than the girls' one, a sign of the lesser importance placed on girls' physical education.

The Turin school floor plans (Picture 4) indicate that the gymnasiums did not have independent outside entrances, but could be accessed only from inside the school building, a layout shared by schools in Via Galvani (1888) and Via Casati (1890, Picture 5) in Milan.[49]

43 Daprà 1986b, pp. 116-122.
44 Cantatore 2001, p. 105.
45 Ibid., p. 107.
46 Daprà 1986a, p. 78.
47 Programmi d'istruzione per l'insegnamento della ginnastica nelle scuole elementari maschili e femminili 1878, p. 157.
48 See Alfieri 2015; Bonetta 1989; Teja 1995, pp. 9-27.
49 Daprà 1986b, pp. 124-127.

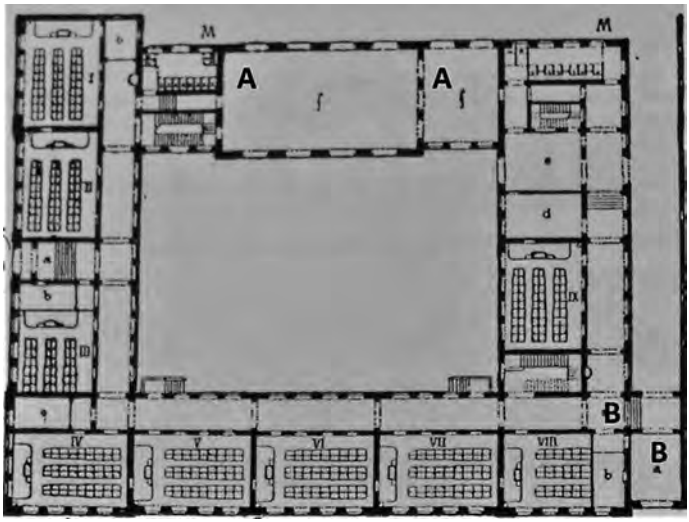


Fig. 5: Ground-floor plan for a school in Via Casati in Milan (1890) (key: A: gyms; B: main entrances) (see Daprà 1986b, p. 126).

However, other schools were laid out in a different manner. In plans for a new elementary school in Voghera (1886, Picture 6), the gymnasium was located in the centre of the schoolyard, while in a planned new school in Cuneo (1889, Picture 7), it was housed in a completely separate building apart from the rest of the school.[50]

The ensuing regulations on the new law on school buildings in 1888 recommended that gymnasiums be located outside the main school building.[51] Constructing an independent gym clearly offered logistical and economic advantages: it would be easy for the amenity to be accessed and used by external parties, such as members of gymnastics clubs or students from other educational institutions, including secondary schools. However, this option's symbolic significance should be noted: similar to the Turin Gymnastics Society's gym, gymnasiums were required to resemble school buildings from the outside, but despite this, and despite being located near schools, they were to remain apart from the school proper, which still was viewed largely as a place for intellectual, rather than physical, activity.

50 See ibid., pp. 127-129.

51 Regolamento ed istruzioni tecnico-igieniche per l'esecuzione della legge 8 luglio 1888 sugli edifici scolastici 1888, p. 5541.

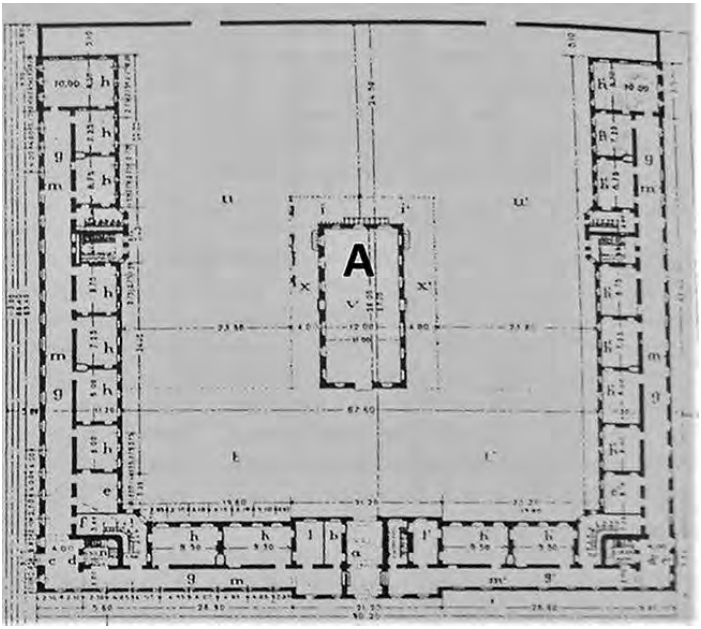


Fig. 6: Plans for a new elementary school in Voghera in 1886 (key: A: gymnasium) (see Daprà 1986b, p. 128).

4 Classrooms

As mentioned earlier, gymnastics, nonetheless, were beginning to carve out a niche for themselves in Italian elementary school settings – not in gyms, where they still were extremely rare, but in the classroom, via exercise drills to be performed among desks. These exercises, which were encouraged in the gymnastics manuals in vogue at the time among teachers, became popular during a time when the prototypical space for elementary education today, both in Italy and elsewhere, was being instituted: the rectangular classroom with a row of south- or east-facing windows equipped with modular two-seater desks.[52]

52 See Acolella 1986; Pruneri 2014; Koutamanis/Majewski-Steijns 2011.

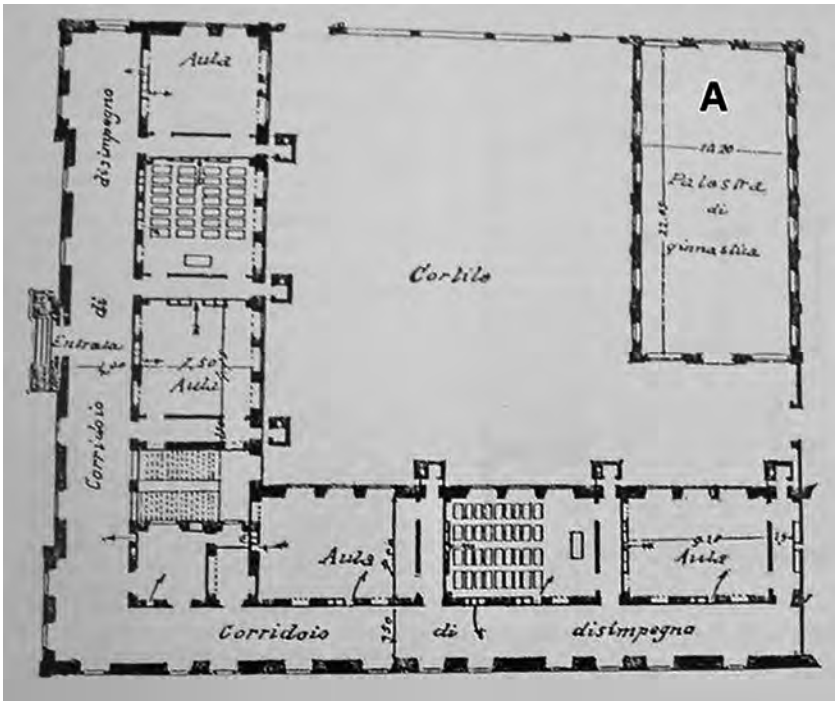


Fig. 7: Plans for a new elementary school in Cuneo in 1889 (key: A: gymnasium) (see Daprà 1986b, p. 129).

This type of desk gradually became dominant as part of a wider acceptance of recommendations intended to improve children's health and simultaneously discipline their bodies.[53] Thus, classroom exercise regimens may be viewed as an instrument for maintaining a focus on disciplinary aims already embodied in the classroom's spatial layout, as the aforementioned 1886 gymnastics curriculum defined these exercise drills' primary aim as „accustoming the pupil to immediate and absolute obedience".[54] This bears out what many scholars, following Michel Foucault, have claimed about the relationship between children's bodies, classroom spaces and school furniture. For example, David Kirk has suggested that the positioning of educational practices within a well-regulated spatial layout is a „dimension of disciplinary technology",[55] while Cynthia Veiga has pointed out that in the 19th century, schools were „characteristically marked by disciplinary strictness, expressed

53 Meda 2016, pp. 39-64.
54 Programmi di ginnastica per le scuole del Regno 1886, p. 214.
55 Kirk 2001, p. 479.

in the school's furniture, in the delimitation of space, time […] and in the submission to adults".[56]

Nevertheless, such interpretations need to be supplemented at least in part by a heuristic approach that also takes into account how the introduction of novel teaching methods impacted the overall educational setting. In other words, we need to ask ourselves whether the classroom's disciplinary function changed as a result of new teaching practices, such as, in our own case, classroom exercise regimens. To this end, it is of value to examine gymnastics curricula themselves and particularly to infer the aims attributed to classroom exercise drills in the leading teacher manuals from this period,[57] which played a role in shaping contemporary school culture.[58]

The principal aim was health-related, not so much in terms of exerting medical control over children, but to exploit gymnastics to address specific physical ailments. For instance, classroom exercise regimens were advised as a strategy for preventing chilblains that children often suffered from in winter, causing them to have sore hands and feet, and impeding their movement.

The school curricula and teacher manuals obviously also spoke about classroom gymnastics' potential effects on pupils' behaviour and moral attitudes: when based on following the teacher's instructions, these exercises were expected to help children form the habit of obedience and develop a sense of working together as a group. However, this second group of aims – which clearly had to do with disciplining pupils – was to be attained in an unconventional way, departing from the traditional requirement for children to remain quietly at their desks for the duration of an entire lesson so as not to disrupt it. Indeed, classroom exercise regimens, at least during their execution, did not require children to remain completely still, but rather gratified children's desire to move around, which was expected to make students less inclined to be disruptive generally and enable teachers to limit their recourse to „moral violence" – as one school inspector of the period labelled it[59] – as well as to corporal punishment, which was deployed widely back then with a view toward keeping order in the classroom.[60]

Thanks to classroom exercise drills, children were allowed to move – at least to some extent – the lower part of their bodies. This was the most challenging and demanding form of movement for teachers to monitor, given the classroom's layout.[61] While strict school rules and spatial arrangements, as Cathe-

56 Veiga 2018, p. 24.
57 Baumann 1867, pp. 8-14; 1880, pp. 8-9; Valletti 1879, pp. 4-21; Valletti/Baumann 1887, pp. 105-114.
58 See Alfieri 2013.
59 De Fort 1979, p. 190.
60 See Bianchini 2017, pp. 48-49; Rousmaniere/Dehli/De Coninck-Smith 1997.
61 See Landahl 2013.

rine Burke has pointed out, obliged children to keep their „feet close to the floor, hidden beneath the school desk and static […] for lengthy periods of time“,[62] classroom gymnastics authorised these same feet to move.
Having the opportunity to perform exercise drills at their desks provided children with an outlet for their natural need for movement. Clearly, classroom gymnastics were designed to channel pupils' energies toward ordered movements, while discouraging spontaneous movements that would generate chaos. Nevertheless, they simultaneously also conveyed the notion that making students stay still all the time was not necessarily the only means of maintaining discipline.
The fact that classroom exercise drills could cause teachers to revisit their usual strategies for keeping order in the classroom is also borne out by an interesting lecture delivered in 1880 by renowned Venetian scholar Ottone Brentari.[63] With a view toward illustrating physical exercise's educational advantages, he addressed a hypothetical teacher for whom „every tiny movement that the child might make at school was a cause for blame, every demonstration of liveliness a crime“: this teacher – while reminiscing about the „good old days“ when one could use the „stick“ – became „an inflexible tyrant“, inflicting „punishments“ and leaving children „stuck on the benches for hours on end“. Brentari advised a radical change in perspective:

> „You, my venerable master, instead of being such a terrorist, and then complaining about the inevitable outcomes of your terrorism, should attempt to extract some profit from your pupils' instinctive need for movement and their youthful liveliness; and instead of suppressing that movement and that liveliness, direct them; […] and instead of steaming straight ahead for hours and hours, according to the Russian method, interrupt the lesson every once in a while, and do some educational gymnastics […] and bit by bit [the pupils], seeing that their need to move is being gratified, will desist from making disorderly and excessive movements.“[64]

The final set of aims that ministerial programmes associated with classroom exercise regimens were intellectual in nature. Classroom gymnastics were viewed as an effective aid in teaching children the scientific names of various body parts, but even more so as a recreational activity with the capacity to restore children's spirits between learning activities, thereby mitigating potential boredom and maintaining students' attention.
On this issue, Brentari asserted that teachers needed to realize that „a brain“ that „with a little movement [had] received from the blood the organic materials it needed to work“ would function better.[65] And so he once again ad-

62 Burke 2018, pp. 34-36.
63 See Guargena 2013.
64 Brentari 1880, pp. 39-42.
65 Ibid., p. 19.

dressed an imaginary teacher who, in this case, was afraid that gymnastics might be beneath his professional dignity and also that they might detract his pupils' attention from the intellectual investment and passion for knowledge that the school demands:

> „When you begin to see a little mouth yawning here, a little face going pale there, a little body wilting here, another slumping over there, do not delude yourself that you will be able to get all these persons back to work by letting out a couple of yells or assigning a couple of punishments; you would be fooling yourself. Rather, make them close their books, make all those little men get up, and off you go, a little gymnastics. […] You can be sure that then you will be able, more easily, and also with greater humanity, to attain that quiet that is needed [to teach] a lesson, and that attention that only minds that are reasonably rested can give."[66]

5 Concluding Remarks

In the early 1890s, even classroom gymnastics began to be targeted for the sort of criticism that was beginning to be levied at methodical gymnastics in general, especially by certain medical/health experts.[67] Among these, the famous physiologist Angelo Mosso[68] accused classroom exercise regimens of being „an artificial medium" that was unable to „remedy the defects of a sedentary life"[69] and „boring and unpleasant" for children.[70] He proposed a complete change of direction, arguing that it was necessary to „accustom young people to the free exercise of games",[71] which were more effective than gymnastics at enhancing children's physical development and „keeping them alert".[72]

Based on these considerations, amongst others, in 1893, the ministry introduced a new physical education programme for elementary schools that placed much more emphasis on play, calling for a reduction in classroom drills, which were to be „limited to those exercises that are strictly and pedagogically necessary for discipline", e.g., „entering and leaving the classroom in an orderly manner, standing up and sitting down, greeting [the teacher], putting on and taking off outer clothing, stretching arms and legs, warming hands and feet".[73]

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66 Ibid., pp. 37-38.
67 Bonetta 1990, pp. 127-133.
68 See Chiosso 2013.
69 Mosso 1891, p. 11.
70 Mosso 1892, p. 258.
71 Ibid., p. 261.
72 Mosso 1891, p. 11.
73 Relazione della Commissione 1893, p. 4101.

However, most Italian elementary schools did not adopt this new programme, as documented in the inquiries that the ministry commissioned during the closing years of the 19th century.[74] Classroom exercise regimens remained – not just during those years, but also over the following decades – as the most widespread form of physical activity in elementary classrooms, particularly due to the ongoing lack of alternative spaces in school buildings.[75]

Therefore, it was inside classrooms where, during the period under study, elementary school teachers began to develop an appreciation for children's physical education, despite the fact that classroom space did not allow them to implement all the physical exercises prescribed in the curriculum. Actual school gymnasiums were rare, and in any case, in part due to their spatial location, teachers perceived them as removed from the setting that they believed best suited their work: the classroom. As documented in the most authoritative pedagogical manuals from the period, the notion that classroom exercise regimens could help achieve traditional elementary education goals most certainly encouraged their use.

The spatial layout of the classroom, a setting designed for developing intellect and controlling behaviour, was not modified for purposes of carrying out these exercises, but thanks to these physical education activities, the classroom took on a new symbolic meaning, becoming a place where even the body was acquiring new visibility and new value, including in relation to the cognitive and moral goals that continued to be viewed as the key priorities of elementary education. Clearly, doing physical exercises in the classroom meant that pupils' movements could not truly be free or spontaneous, while the underlying vision of the body continued to be that of an object to be disciplined. Nevertheless, implementing even this kind of physical education programme meant that elementary schoolchildren were no longer always required to remain completely still.

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74 Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione 1897, pp. 49-52; Ministero della Pubblica Istruzione 1900, pp. CLXXVIII-CLXXXVII.

75 See Brunelli/Meda 2017.

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