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ORIGINAL

THE FREE INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION AND PIERRE DE COUBERTIN: PHYSICAL EDUCATION TO EDUCATE WITHIN LIBERTY

LA INSTITUCIÓN LIBRE DE ENSEÑANZA Y PIERRE DE COUBERTIN: LA EDUCACIÓN FÍSICA PARA UNA FORMACIÓN EN LIBERTAD

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ABSTRACT

This research paper examines the relationship between two educational reforms: Pierre de Coubertin's (1863-1937), with its ambitious "*Rebroncer la France*", and the reform for the renovation of Spain launched by the *Free Institute of Education* (ILE).

With this aim, different primary sources are studied. Among others, the following ones stand out: the correspondence between Coubertin, Giner de los Ríos and Bartolomé Cossío, from 1888 to 1899, and the correspondence between Giner de los Ríos and Aniceto Sela, who was the Spanish spokesman at the 1894 Paris Sorbonne Congress; but also the Bulletin of the ILE, the organ that disseminated its ideals, and Coubertin's own writings.

This research paper includes part of our findings and points out some of the coincidences between both initiatives of social reform. They both promoted a significant renovation of the education of citizens, with special attention to physical exercise, games and sport.

KEY WORDS: Educational reform, Pierre de Coubertin, Free Institute of Education, sport, Olympism.

RESUMEN

Esta investigación analiza las relaciones entre dos reformas educativas: la de Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937), con la que pretendía "*Rebroncer la France*", y la que impulsó la *Institución Libre de Enseñanza* (ILE), para la renovación de España.

Con ese propósito, se realiza un análisis documental de diferentes fuentes primarias. Entre ellas destacan la relación epistolar entre Coubertin, Giner de los Ríos y Bartolomé Cossío (entre 1888 y 1899), y entre Giner de los Ríos y Aniceto Sela, representante español en el Congreso de la Sorbona de 1894, así como el Boletín de la ILE, órgano difusor de su ideario, y los propios escritos de Coubertin.

Este trabajo, resultado parcial de nuestra investigación, presenta alguno de los numerosos puntos de confluencia entre ambas iniciativas de reforma social, promotoras de una renovación significativa de la educación de los ciudadanos, con una destacada atención a los ejercicios físicos, los juegos y los deportes.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Reforma educativa, Pierre de Coubertin, Institución Libre de Enseñanza, deporte, olimpismo.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pierre de Fredy, Barón de Coubertin (1863-1937), was a humanist whose interest in society led him to devote his life and fortune to searching for solutions for the social problems of his time. Apart from the most popular project, due to its media success, the Olympic Games, he developed many other undertakings. One of them is the main topic of this paper: the education reform based on sport. His ambition was to make sport a main feature in the education process of children and youngsters in schools. Seeking that aim, Coubertin set up the *Asociation for the Reform of School Education* in France, and he led it himself as Secretary General.

Coubertin envisaged the nature of his education reform through his travelling and his contacts with different education methodologies. Among those contacts, he got in touch with the Free Institute of Education (ILE) in Spain, which had been promoting a reform of teaching contents and approaches, with particular attention to body activities, since 1876.

This paper is a first step towards some research work focused on the analysis of the characteristics of both proposals for education reforms: the ILE's and Pierre de Coubertin's. Starting from a revision of both undertakings, whose final goal was social renovation, the aim of this paper has been to examine the conjunctions of those principles and common methodology features which had as a core element a new orientation and the acknowledgement of the educational values of physical education and its contents.

2. METHOD: SOURCES FOR A SOCIOHISTORICAL STUDY

This study has the features of a historical interpretation research work, in which one of the key procedures is the analysis of primary sources. In that context, the analysis of both educational reforms and their relationship is based on the study of several primary sources.

On the one hand, the study is focused on the correspondence between Pierre de Coubertin, Giner de los Ríos and Manuel Bartolomé Cossío. These letters, written by Coubertin from 1888 to 1899, are stored at the library of the *Real Academia de la Historia* in Madrid. They are part of the main ILE file, the same as the letters between Aniceto Sela and Giner de los Ríos during Sela's journey with other ILE lecturers to attend the 1894 Paris Sorbonne Congress, where they met Coubertin. These letters, which give evidence of the impression that Coubertin caused on those lecturers at the Congress for the restoration of the Olympic Games, reach a significant value due to the sincerity and confidence with which Sela relates to Giner, his friend and master, the impression of the events he was personally witnessing.

The examination of the contents of these letters seemed to reveal some coincidence of interests between Coubertin's initiatives and the aims of the members of the ILE. In order to check and corroborate these parallel paths, the

issues of the first few decades (1877-1895) of the bulletin of the ILE were specifically revised. We have used particularly those articles referring to the ideology, the motivations and the teaching resources connected with physical activity. But some other sources were studied too –as for instance the many lectures and writings by Pierre de Coubertin– with the aim to find evidence of the conjunctions between *Institutionist* aims and practise and the guidance about the same topics and teaching resources given by the restorer of the Olympic Games.

On the other hand, we have carried out a bibliographical revision of the work of some specialists who have researched into Coubertin's school reform in France, and that has corroborated our arguments for the analysis and has given confirmation of the hypothesis we had set out for this piece of research.

3. ILE AND PIERRE DE COUBERTIN: SOCIAL REFORM THROUGH INNOVATIVE EDUCATION AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

3.1 Educational reforms for modernization and social regeneration.

Both reform movements, the ILE's and Pierre de Coubertin's, began in the last third of the 19th century, though ILE's was on route in the mid 70's, that is in 1876, while Coubertin launched its teaching endeavour in the classrooms in the late 80's, after learning about other alternatives being developed in other countries, as it was the *Free Institute of Education* in Spain

In both cases, after examining that historical moment, it is possible to confirm that these reforms, in their respective countries, came from groups that held critical positions in the face of social problems and the established teaching practices. The ILE, the same as Coubertin, aimed at modernizing the society of their time through a radical change in education. The ILE was one of the initiatives by intellectual groups who in the final decades of the 19th century sought to modernize Spain. In a similar way, within his educational reform, Pierre de Coubertin started his campaign to "*Rebroncer la France*", whose theory he made public for the first time in 1887 (Clastres, 2003, p. 145). As a common principle, they challenged the lack of freedom in schools and put into practise alternatives and reforms with the support of private institutions, since it was impossible to carry them out within public bodies, where the practices and values they sought to change pervaded.

Within that context, the Free Institute of Education (ILE) was born in Spain in 1876, conceived by Francisco Giner de los Ríos and after the initiative of a

group of lecturers¹ who were excluded from the *Universidad Central* of Madrid for supporting academic freedom and refusing to adapt their teaching to moral, political and religious official dogmas. It was an independent undertaking, a secular and private teaching institution, created with the aim of introducing a teaching renovation based on liberty as a starting point for a social change seeking national transformation. As a matter of fact, article 15 of its constitution, passed at the General Assembly of Shareholders, on 30 May 1877, reads:

Art. 15. The Free Institute of Education is completely independent from any spirit or interest of any religious community, philosophical school or political party; and pronounces the sole principle of liberty and inviolability of science, and the subsequent independence of its inquiry and its expression with regard to no authority other than the teacher's own conscience, who is the sole bearer of the responsibility of his doctrine (BILE, 1877, p.62).

Seeking this aim, the ILE became a teaching institution devoted at the beginning to university degrees and, after 1879, to primary and secondary education too. Later on, after some political changes took place, some *Institutionist* lecturers were restated to their university posts and after some time they undertook political responsibilities. For this reason, their ideology and projects managed to permeate many sectors of society, until its activities were discontinued by the 1936-1939 Civil War and were outlawed during the subsequent dictatorship.

On the other hand, Pierre de Coubertin's educational ambitions developed two ventures, each of its own, (Martínez Gorroño, y Durántez Corral, 2012), taking sport as a common tool. One of them, the best known, pursued a reformation of society as a whole: Olympism, of which the key event that draws most media attention is the Olympic Games. The other one was an education reform which also had sport as its tool or leading force, but in this second case, through the teaching process of children and young people at school.

For more than sixty years, Coubertin put all his effort into this education reform project for schools. About that ambition of his, which he maintained throughout his life –even after he resigned from his post as President of the International Olympic Committee, after the 1924 Paris Games–, he said in a letter to his friend Franz Reichel:

...I'll never fail to be involved in Olympism and sports, but my sixty-five years of age are striving for a new task that demands all my effort: the transformation of the foundations and methods of school education (1927, p.3).

¹ Some of the lecturers excluded from *Universidad Central of Madrid* were: Francisco Giner de los Ríos, Gumersindo de Azcárate, Teodoro Sainz Rueda, Nicolás Salmerón and Fernando de Castro.

Coubertin's ambition was to introduce sport games into schools as a new way of teaching, though as opposed to the ILE, he never had his own school, he had to depend on the good support his project received at private educational institutions like *Monge College* or *Alsacienne School*. This was a key standpoint he shared with the ILE, and that meant that some of the methods of both education reforms were the same in their practical development.

Both reformation movements held similar theoretical underpinnings with regard to the need to fight back the repression of the body and give specific attention to physical activity. In that respect, several ILE and Coubertin's publications and lectures tried to persuade the society of their time of the need to introduce body exercises and games as part of the contents at school. Both of them made a great deal of effort to think over the use of such practices in shaping the character and to disseminate their enormous educational potential. Although nowadays that potential is generally accepted, at that time it was a theoretical novelty all throughout Europe.

Likewise, the defense of freedom of education became an underpinning in both reform ventures, and marked the beginning of the later coincidence in teaching resources. As Coubertin stated in 1887, during a lecture to the Social Economics Society in Paris:

Education must be, I insist, the preface of life. A man will be free, a child should be too. The point is to teach them only to make use of their freedom, to become aware of its importance... Freedom for the body, freedom for the spirit, freedom for the character, freedom for everything (1887, p.130).

Freedom of believe, specifically underlined in article 15 of the ILE constitution, was also mentioned by Coubertin:

So far I have referred to the physical, the material point of view only; but there is also the intellectual and religious side. Next to freedom of coming and going there is also freedom of thinking and freedom of praying... (1887, p.133).

3.2 Contacts and relationship between both reform movements

The first contact between Coubertin and Giner de los Ríos we have evidence of took place in 1884. The idea came from the founder of the ILE, who had visited the UK in 1884 and 1886, and was an enthusiast of the innovation represented by sport activities in the British Education System.

The content of Pierre de Coubertin's letters proves that he knew about the educational impact and renovation that the Free Institute of Education had introduced in Spain in 1876. He highly recognized and appreciated the Institute and his main promoter, Francisco Giner de los Ríos. There is evidence of it in

the letter that Coubertin addresses to Giner on 20 May 1889, in which, as Secretary of the “*Conference for the Dissemination of Physical Exercise in Education*”, which he was promoting then, he said:

It is my honor to inform you that you have been awarded the title of Honorary Member of the Conference by the Organization Committee, as recognition of the service you have given to the cause of Physical Education (Document 005-0079-11.006. ILE file. *Academia de la Historia*, Madrid).

However, the first personal contact between members of the Institute and Pierre de Coubertin took place when some University of Oviedo lecturers, who were *Institutionists*, attended the 1894 Sorbonne Conference, organized by Coubertin as an attempt at establishing the Olympic Games. The invitation by Coubertin and the attendance by several ILE lecturers give evidence of the conjunction of interest, since they were the only Spaniards present at the Congress, which was decisive to set up modern Olympism.

Actually, the aim of convening the Sorbonne Conference was to promote sport out of the classrooms. It was another project of Coubertin's. It was unconnected with *Institutionist* perspectives, which focused on school curricula, but the invitation to the Congress gives evidence of the interests and views they shared. Probably, Coubertin's invitation came up when he realized that the Spanish Institute brought together the only pedagogues in Spain that shared his views with regard to education, since they were working on similar reformation undertakings and applied innovative teaching resources since 1876.

A few *Institutionist* lecturers attended the Sorbonne Conference although, according to the sources retrieved by Ángel María Magdalena (1992), they attended on behalf of the University of Oviedo. This author holds that Adolfo González Posada, Aniceto Sela, and Adolfo Álvarez Buylla were present. But Otero Urtaza (1996, p.203) asserts that Juan Uña Sarthou was also present though he could not be registered as a delegate in the Congress. It was probably so, because in the Institute Bulletin (BILE), issue no. 413, August 1894, Uña Sartou writes an article about the “*Paris Athletic Congress*” which later historiography has referred to as the “*Paris Sorbonne Congress*”. He says there:

This Congress has also produced a Project which, if it is carried out, will greatly influence, no doubt, the promotion of physical education: it is the restoration of the Greek Olympic Games, but adapted to the present times... They will take place every four years: the first ones in Athens in 1896; they will have an international nature and will include track and field, nautical exercises, skating, fencing, shooting, velocipeding, etc... (1894, p.250).

In this article Uña Sarthou seems to justify or explain the attendance of the ILE lecturers as University of Oviedo delegates in the following way:

The closing session of the Athletic Congress was held on July 23. It was attended by delegations of Societies and education institutions from most nations in Europe and the Americas: there was, among them, the Delegation of the University of Oviedo and also the Spanish Gymnastics Society from Madrid. That School is promoting physical exercise, cycling, alpinism and hiking and, for the purpose of attending the Congress, had appointed lecturers Mr. Posada and Mr. Sela, who are among the most enthusiast promoters of those exercises. (1894,p. 251)

Afterwards, the relationship between Coubertin and the ILE was mainly by letter with Francisco Giner de los Ríos and Manuel Bartolomé Cossío², because although Giner and Coubertin planned some personal meetings, several circumstances got in the way³. They kept their relationship up till 1899 and, if it was not too frequent, it gives evidence, as it has been pointed out above, of the coincidence of interests, theories and practice of their renovating projects.

3.3 Coincidence in approaches and resources: theoretical arguments about their innovations.

From the standpoint of educating within liberty, giving special dedication to physical activity, games and sports helped both the momentum for education reform and the search for social modernization in the two countries.

Since its creation, the ILE had applied an active approach to school activities, and it consistently gave relevant importance to games and physical exercise periods as a trait of its teaching method. Following Krausist theory, the activity basis of the Institute took a game form, as much for academic as for physical activities. The resources that the game style offered were viewed as unlimited as well as highly useful in education.

As Adolfo Posada –one of the attendants to the 1894 Paris Sorbonne Congress– underlined in his essay *“Present problems of the national school education”*, focus on physical education made one of the underpinnings of their teaching project:

Its goal [that of physical education] was of the highest kind, as high as the ancient Greeks conceived it, that is, to shape a healthy body from a healthy mind: a healthy body, that is to say, with neither physical nor

² Cossío was one of the first pupils of the ILE since 1876. He joined it firstly as a supply teacher and after two years he became a primary school teacher. At the same time he studied for his doctorate degree in Philosophy and Letters, which he achieved in 1879. Later on he became a lecturer in History of Art at University of Barcelona and after that he became professor of High Pedagogy in Madrid as well as Director of the Museum of Pedagogy. He is a fundamental figure in the ILE and reached his highest protagonism after Francisco Giner de los Ríos's death.

³ Otero Urtaza, same source mentioned above.

physiological defects, a beautiful body, enduring, nimble, balanced, calm, full of vitality, clear from organic vice and any other condition that leads to moral disarrangement, ...physical education is the basis and the essential support for moral and intellectual education. (1895, p.6)

The ILE's principles were very different from those the Spanish and European traditions had held till then. It understood leisure, for instance, as in the modern view of an entertaining and regenerating activity, as opposed to the traditional conception that leisure was equal to indolence and laziness, and so it was for both Protestant and Scholastic moral traditions. Against leisure as indolence, the ILE opposed activity as a principle and physical exercise as a means to fight it back.

The Institute included body activities as teaching resources under the principle of integral education. Its 1881-1882 prospectus reads: *"Complete education... which will embrace not only intellectual education, but moral and aesthetics and, as far as our resources can reach, physical and hygienic too."* (BILE nº 105, 1881, p.90). With that idea it broke with the tradition of bodily repression, so common in 19th century education principles.

Ricardo Rubio, Institutionist teacher, defined physical education as *"the claim by bodily rights to achieve their fair due from the integrity of a rational education"* (1898, p.104). This idea became one of the ILE principles which, years before its own creation, had been conceived by outstanding Spanish Krausists who would become members of the Institute. For instance, Sanz del Río, the introducer of Krausism in Spain, in his opening speech to the 1857-1858 academic year, took the chance offered by the Central University of Madrid to declare:

Then, man must respect nature and body on their own dignity regardless of the spirit, and preserve and invigorate the body for itself and its natural goodness only, and not firstly and only for its connection with the spirit (Sanz del Río, 1860, p.93).

The Free Institute of Education Bulletin (BILE) was its prominent broadcasting medium. It is particularly there that multiple references to the inclusion of physical education in school programmes are found. Maybe, the purpose of those articles, on the basis of their teaching and educational inclination, was to explain to certain segments of Spanish society the reason for including contents often taken as extravagant teaching resources. From this source we learn that the Institutionist teaching practise took the need of physical exercise as a duty and a right. These views, which may seem obvious today, were at that time a significant exception that can be branded as pioneering. The Institutionist solid teaching knowledge probably influenced and helped to underpin similar thesis held by Coubertin afterwards, since he had the chance to learn about them from the BILE which he used to receive, as the content of his correspondence ascertains.

Printed reference to ILE's concern with physical education is ample. As an example, in 1884, Giner de los Ríos wrote in the BILE: "*The education of the body is as important for a citizen as any other branch of education*" (1884b, p.361);... "*Games as well as the rest of bodily exercises, etc. are other ingredients, from the point of view of the Institution* (unfortunately, not so much in our country, as it should be desirable), *at least as important as the intellectual training of its teachers*" (1884a,p.350). This concern gained increased importance over the years, as proved by Aniceto Sela's statement: *If they had to be ranked (educational areas), physical education would take exactly the first place*" (1901, p. 354).

With regard to the content of physical education in the Institute, Spanish popular games were of foremost relevance as an educational resource in everyday practise. Teachers of the Institute give abundant references which unveil arguments that seemingly try to justify those "strange resources", having an important similarity with Coubertin's arguments. In 1894, Ricardo Rubio, for instance, made the following statement in the BILE:

...The true school of society for a child is collective game; this is where he gets educated from the principle of liberty (1894, p. 44).

Another relevant Institutionist, Alejandro San Martín, wrote about playing:

At all times and for all peoples, playing has been and is the most adequate school for children to conceive, practice and rectify the notions of rights, duty, liberty, authority, subordination, responsibility, protection, criticism and so many other socializing ideas of the highest importance, which books offer them in an absolutely unattractive way. (1889, p. 273)

The above mentioned Aniceto Sela examined in depth the educational possibilities of games to instil socializing attitudes, and thoroughly explained the potential that organised games offered:

The area of games makes a State in a small scale with its constitution, its laws, its rulers and its judges... [there, children] learn to gladly submit their inclinations and immediate disposition to the rules of the game; they willingly abide by the law; they become used to taking decisions on their rights, on a basis of knowledge and without coercion, which makes the best moral education and the best school for the character (1888, p. 304)

At the beginning, popular and traditional Spanish games took most of the free time. Teachers took part. Ricardo Rubio wrote in the BILE:

The Free Institute gives every Wednesday evening and most Sundays of the school year to bodily games at Soto del Puente de San Fernando, playing teachers and pupils, compulsory on Wednesdays and optional on

Sundays. This habit, with ever more satisfactory results, was introduced here in 1877, the same year we started with our classes. At the time we used to go out for a walk with our pupils and took part in their games of *marro*, jumping, *tin*, etc. (1893, p.147)

About the use of traditional games as an educational resource we can quote some pupils reports. For instance, Agustín Giner, nephew to Giner de los Ríos, said that “*boys and girls played together street games*” (López Serra, 1998 p.180.); and Jimena Menéndez Pidal remembered that teachers were present in games and that these were used as a resource to teach values:

Our teachers... who played *fronton* with us, turned our games into a school of nobility, where tricks, aggression and haughtiness had no place (1977, p. 76).

Every afternoon was given to games, between morning and evening classes. Giner wrote in one of his articles: “*our pupils have been out... every day with their teachers (nothing to do with assistants nor inspectors!) between morning and evening classes, not for a walk, but to play somewhere outdoors*” (1887, p.338)

About this everyday approach Giner wrote:

Institute pupils have 6 daily lessons of three quarters of an hour, but there are no lessons on Wednesday evenings because that time is given to bodily games, and also Sunday mornings, but this is not compulsory (1891, p.199).

When physical education was introduced at the ILE, games shared time with traditional gymnastics, which in the first few years it had hygienic purposes⁴. Later on, as a consistent development, the ILE regarded the coercive side of gymnastics as contradictory with education within liberty and English sports were introduced, the way they were seen at the time. But popular and traditional Spanish games, which had been permanently present in their teaching activities, were not given up.

The introduction of sports coming from England came as a result of a concern with development and improvement which encouraged a great deal of travelling by ILE teachers, with the purpose of taking part in conferences but also to gain first-hand knowledge of teaching methods in different countries⁵. The BILE pages bear witness to the width and depth of Institutionist teachers' concern and knowledge of methodologies and the education systems being developed

⁴ This plan to combine gymnastics contents and sport games was also present in Coubertin's reflections, when he proposed the reform of Physical Education in France.

⁵ We may point out, for instance, that in the 1880s Manuel Bartolomé Cossío visited many schools in Italy, Switzerland, France, Belgium, The Netherlands, Germany, Austria, Chequia, Portugal and England, not to mention the decisive stimulus he gave to the *Junta de Ampliación de Estudios*, fostered by ILE teachers.

in many countries. Among others, Giner had travelled in 1884 and 1886 in order to learn about the British system, and so did Pierre de Coubertin, as we know. Both of them were interested in the British approach to Physical Education. ILE found guidance to redirect some of the contents it was already developing and, as we shall see below, Coubertin found inspiration for the education reform he wanted to start.

Football was present in the ILE since 1881, and it was the first Spanish education institution where this sport was played. It was teacher Stewart Herbert Capper together with Bartolomé Cossío, who invited him to Spain, who introduced *foot-ball* to the Institute. It was after his initiative that the first matches of this today's popular sport were played. Later on, in 1882, teachers and other adults started to take part in the matches.

It is important to stress that even after the introduction of English games like football, the tradition of playing popular games was maintained as an everyday resource. It should be noted that the ILE standpoint was to give value to Spanish popular culture which was an intelligent and open novelty in those years, because they were able to reconcile their interest in alien knowledge with popular culture, without undermining the latter. Using Spanish popular games meant, as it has been said, the expression of a concern and a modern, scientific awareness on an anthropological line. But it also gives evidence of a wide and advanced version of the notion of culture, by means of which the ILE appreciated, regarded and included "the popular" as much as bodily expressions and manifestations. Spanish *fronton* together with football and rounders (a traditional English game similar to baseball) were part of Institutionist physical activities every day.

Likewise, the ILE pioneered the constant and frequent use of educational activities in the natural environment, as the basis for an integral education. Pioneering and innovative resources like trips in the natural environment made an educational tool that no other European institution developed as much nor with such educational intent as the ILE (Jiménez Landi, 1987, p.157). In connection with that environment, Mr. José Medinaveitia, in cooperation with President of Club Alpino Mr. Manuel de Amezúa, introduced and promoted skiing in Guadarrama Mountains (Otero Urtaza, 1996, p. 202).

In short, it can be said that, for the purpose of developing physical education, the ILE "*used typical elements taken Spanish culture and tried hard to learn what was being developed in Europe*" (López Serra, 1998, p. 51), thus making an effort to link Spain to Europe, an idea which was widespread in a section of 19th century educated population. Games and sports, beyond the hygienic function they had in the 19th century, fulfilled a *compensation task* (according to the notion pointed out by Hernández Álvarez, 1996), as well as a *communication and a relationship task* (ibidem), being aware of their potential as an educational resource for the relationship with others. These functions were also an essential element for Coubertin.

Indeed, Coubertin also regarded games as an area for educating within liberty:

Games are the only part of life where one can get enjoyment in freedom. Let a child manage his own games and,.. he will become a man perfectly adapted to social life, on condition that society is understood as a reunion of free men... (Coubertin, 1890, p.129)

However, in his proposal for an education reform an institutionalised form of games stands out, for such is the kind of sport he experienced in his travelling in England. Sport was seen by Coubertin as a modernising, liberating, democratic, motivating and pacifist teaching resource, that could give a very different focus as a school subject to the kind of physical education practised in Europe in the second half of the 19th century. At that time, Gymnastics virtually monopolised all the contents and more and more followed political interests instead of the true needs of society and people. Gymnastics, which was analytic, rigid and disciplinarian, was growingly leading physical education towards military and war like aims which favoured imperialistic and political ambitions. Indeed, in January 1880, in France, the Ministry of Public Education Law, promoted by Minister Jules Ferry, stated:

“Primary Education comprises:...gymnastics;... military exercises for boys...”

Under that Law, gymnastics and shooting⁶ were included as physical education compulsory contents which must be taught to male pupils all throughout France in education institutions run by municipalities, departments or the state.

Coubertin was also worried about the dogmatic bias of what was traditionally taught in schools:

For about a hundred years, our teachers have put all their might on questions regarding instruction, which has been taken for –and at times disguised as– education... a child is a number, everything on which he might exert his initiative is taken away from him, he is exempted from any responsibility: it seems that the aim is to make twenty-one-year-old children. Sport will destroy this, smoothly and without traumas, because it involves indeed a willingly accepted social integration, and produces a spirit of conduct, common sense and character; it ranks and fosters personality types that become a support for teachers and makes children more similar to men (1889, p.4).

⁶ Although shooting began to be included in schools curricula, it was progressively regulated by later Rights, as for instance by 27 July 1893 right, signed by Minister R. Poncaré, which stipulated the creation of a committee in charge of overseeing the teaching of shooting at schools and also in charge of writing a set of regulations for shooting and to decide which weapon should be the most adequate to be used at schools.

Indeed, after a change in the contents of physical education, Coubertin expected that “sport [would produce] *a transformation in that soldierly and convent regime still in force*” (1888, p.58). Here again he was showing his coincidence with the ILE, as mentioned in article 15 of its constitution, regarding the need that education should become independent from political or religious tendencies.

While the ILE put its reformist ideas into practise in its own school, Coubertin had to “sell” his to French schools already running. In 1888 he launched the “*rebronzer la France*” campaign which that very same year gave rise to the renovation of contents, as an exemplary landmark, at *Monge School* in Paris. That school introduced a new curriculum based on very clear theoretical principles taken from Coubertin's beliefs of what the school phase should be like. They also clearly match the principle of educating within liberty of the Spanish ILE.

In the first part of his work “*English education in France*” (1887), under the heading of “*At Monge School*”, Coubertin describes the transformation of that school in terms that reveal great similarity with the ILE:

At Monge School, Sunday is a holiday and Thursday is a day for rambling. Since they did not want to do away with the rambling, new breaks are taken on the other days of the week: Tuesdays and Fridays for the big children, Mondays, Wednesdays and Saturdays for the small ones... Walks are taken in Bois de Boulogne... A penny-farthing teacher is available for those who choose to learn his art; in other places there are all sorts of games: canoe rowing in the lake... Finally, and by the way, they play cricket, in one of the large lawns in the wood. (1889, p.17)

In that very same chapter he ends up reflecting on Giner's same ideas – mentioned above– about the need of games in wide and open places: “*It is essential that our school children find in [walks]... what they lack in Paris, fields for playing and organised games*” (ibidem).

The reform introduced in *Monge School*, in 1888, was offered also to *Herson* and *Alsacienne* schools. We have evidence that the latter was visited by the ILE teachers who attended the 1894 Paris Sorbonne Congress. In a letter with the heading “Paris, (14 Rue de la Sorbonne) 20 June 1894”, addressed to Giner, Aniceto Sela wrote:

“*we are all very glad after our visit to Alsacienne School, which is similar to our Institute in so many concepts*” (Document no. 008-0172-03.01 ILE files. Academia de la Historia).

Coubertin referred to its methods in a letter addressed to Giner in 1888 too. From its content it is also apparent that he was receiving information about the methods and principles of the Spanish ILE:

I am preparing a second work, *L'Éducation anglaise en France*, in which I will give account of all the means we have used to make the school reform successful. *Monge School* is today completely transformed and others will follow suit... I have not received yet the Bulletin issue you mention, but it will certainly arrive tomorrow. I am truly thankful and send you my best wishes of success for your patriotic efforts. Everything regarding your country, as you know, revives sympathetic inspiration in ours. (Documento 004-0069-11.002 ILE files. Academia de la Historia).

Therefore, with regard to the educational context, Pierre de Coubertin at first achieved his purpose, not in state run schools, but in private ones, particularly in those with a marked Protestant influence. Referring to the quasi “marginal” and “private” circumstances of his endeavour, in one of his lectures, “*Le remède au surmenage et la transformation des Lycées de Paris*”, which he delivered during the Yearly Congress of Social Economics, he said: “*As you can see, it is in fact a restricted, precise, limited project, and yet it is difficult to carry through*” (1889, p.19)

In 1889, Coubertin continued with his reform projects by creating the *Association for the Reform of Physical Education in France*. The contribution of this association made it possible that after the example set by *Monge School* other schools followed suit. That very same year, Coubertin undertook the post of General Secretary of the association and put special care into choosing a new type of teachers suitable to develop his ideas about a different kind of physical education, free and secular volunteers, detached from those principles set by the authorities, or from any ideological or religious servitude.

In short, in his tour of teaching institutions, Pierre de Coubertin found all doors closed when he tried to develop sport school associations in schools run by Jesuits and Dominicans. The latter at least until Father Didon was posted Head Teacher at *Albert-le-Grand School* in Arcueil. Contrarily, Coubertin found satisfactory support at two of the main free, non-denominational schools in the capital city: The *Alsacienne School*, whose management board was mostly Protestant, and at *Monge School*, whose Head Teacher, Aimé Godard, was a progressionist educator.

There he could try the substitution of discipline and the introduction of games in physical education, after getting permission from Public Instruction Minister León Bourgeois (5 July 1890 Act and 7 July 1890 Circular) and starting his tour of lycées throughout France” (Clastres, 2003a p.9)

4. CONCLUSIONS

Both the ILE and Coubertin, against the political interests and values in force, launched two education projects with a reformist tendency. Their aim was to promote, by means of changes in methodology and contents, a new focus on

education as a tool to regenerate and transform the society of their time. Both projects were based on patriotic feelings: “modernise Spain” and “*Rebronzer la France*”.

Their ambition for social transformation encouraged Coubertin and ILE members to keep letter correspondence, to travel and to learn about education in different countries. They did not hesitate to admit that they imitated what they found of interest in their search for a kind of education that would foster the potential of human beings and would not be of use to repress them. They launched therefore a private and particular reform which started with minority groups within the progressionist better-off segments of the population, since thanks to their access to culture they were in a better position to understand their proposal. But always with the aim of defending liberty and social justice, with a clear philanthropic intent, the target of which would be to improve living conditions for the whole of humanity.

To achieve the aims of their reform, both movements proposed concept and method changes in education, and besides moral and intellectual education, they shared the idea of particularly promoting a higher and different attention to physical education for school children. One of the meeting points of ILE and Coubertin's education principles was a significant introduction of physical exercises, games and sports, in daily school activities, together with the denunciation of the rigidity, militarization and repression of the human body, present in gymnastics traditional styles.

Although, at the start they accepted gymnastics as a means of bodily education because of its hygienic values, soon the rigidity of its exercises prompted the ILE to give part of its time to Spanish popular games, and later on to completely replace it with games, walks and sports of English origin.

This inclusion of contents of an English style was in the end the element that revealed a clear identity with the resources proposed in Coubertin's reform. Indeed, in a similar way, Coubertin, who did not reject either the mostly hygienic purpose of gymnastics at a first stage, proposed the introduction of games and sports based on the imitation of the English approach, as opposed to the rigidity of gymnastics and the military bias it had taken in France.

Both educational reforms agreed because they especially viewed school age as the opportunity to educate within liberty and, in this respect, they shared the importance that group games had as a true school where children get educated under the principle of liberty.

That attention to some aspects of English education shared by the ILE and Coubertin was already pointed out at that time by Alejandro San Martín y Satrústegui (1847-1908), who out of sympathy with Coubertin's ideas, said:

It is true that Pierre de Coubertin's management, really pedagogical and scientific, is already well represented in Madrid (The ILE has followed an English education for the last 10 years) (1889, p. 260).

However, although the purpose of this article was to examine the similarities between the ILE and Coubertin's reform projects, it may come to the point here to add a remark about San Martín's statement on "English education" in the ILE. Long before the decision to imitate and import English sports, Spanish traditional games had been included in their daily school activity, because they combined together competition, teams and a playful spirit. Nonetheless, the ILE introduced many educational practises which today we can brand as innovative, and which make a clear difference with English education and with Pierre de Coubertin's proposals. For instance, coeducation and its value for a true social transformation.

Indeed, the ILE introduced resources connected to physical education that raised great interest among the zealous European pedagogues, as for instance, hiking and holiday school camps. Coeducation was applied in all these resources. This approach was heavily contested by some Spanish sectors for immoral, among other reasons. They were innovative proposals that neither the English approach, nor Coubertin's educational initiative considered, and which together with other ILE innovations, found a resounding echo all throughout Europe, partly due as well to the international reputation of some of the Spanish teachers who created and promoted them.

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