
The Later Middle Ages: Life, Education, and Patterns of Sport and Physical Activity

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We must keep in mind that seven approaches to education during this period have been alluded to - but not followed precisely in our presentation (E. H. Wilds, *The Foundations of Modern Education*. New York: Farrar Rinehart, Inc., 1936): (1) individual humanism; (2) social humanism; (3) Protestant Reformation; (4) Catholic Reformation; (5) verbal realism; (6) social realism; and (7) sense realism. The educational aim of so-called individual humanism was for a full and abundant life for the individual, whereas the emphasis of social humanism inclined somewhat more in the direction of improving society as a whole as well. With the revolt against the Catholic hierarchy by Luther and others, the aim in education was to maintain a Christian influence by allowing the person to interpret the Scriptures individually. The ideals of intelligence, social virtue, and individual piety were to be integrated with "the best ideals of the past" (p. 284). The counter-Reformation within the Catholic Church corrected many abuses while restoring considerable energy and power to the movement. The long range aims of the Protestants and Catholics were quite similar in education, the main difference in the latter's efforts was the effort to preserve the authority of the Church through indoctrination within the educational system. As mentioned previously, the Realistic movement meshed quite naturally with many of the trends previously described. Those with a stronger humanistic orientation were more concerned with an individual's all-round development, while most of the reformers were concerned with the introduction of a more social orientation into the educational system. The religious reformers, of course, placed the greatest emphasis upon the person's relationship with the Creator.

Insofar as physical education and sport was concerned, the following points may be made:

1. The leading educational theorists of the Renaissance were essentially in agreement about the need for a broadly based curriculum that afforded a prominent role to physical education and sport.

2. Although there was not complete unanimity, a number of these educators appeared to have embraced a concept of education through the medium of physical activity (as opposed to what might be designated as a more limited concept of education of the physical).
3. As the Renaissance Movement spread to other European countries, the inclusion of physical activity and sport in the curriculum to a greater extent than previously became evident. It is not possible to claim, however, that conditions approximated the ideal in save but a few educational institutions.
4. It should not be forgotten that many of these educational theorists were espousing programs for upperclass children, and that the children of the masses were not able typically to take advantage of these improved, imaginative programs that included a variety of physical activities designed to train the young man for warfare; for improved health; and for recreational diversion from rigorous intellectual and religious training.
5. Some educational theorists stressed the importance of rigorous physical activity for youth, but then took a stand against specific athletic games and sports.
6. The more strictly moralistic reformers took a stand against the place of the dance in the curriculum, while those with a better understanding of the Classical Period urged that dance be included from the standpoint of desirable esthetic experience and appreciation.

Now that we have given consideration, albeit necessarily brief to physical activity and sport in the later Middle Ages, what sound conclusions may we draw from this experience? It is immediately obvious that many of our cherished institutions of modern times may be traced to their early beginnings during this period. Here I am referring to the structure of our cities, for example, and also to early ideas about the worth whileness of representative government. Our universities became recognizable entities for the first time during this era through the establishment of such institutions as Bologna, Paris, and Oxford.

Reflection about the status of physical education and sport in any particular country, or culture for that matter, leads one time and again to the realistic, but dreary, conclusion that progress in social affairs has never been a straight-line affair that is, "onward and upward" to an ideal educational program in which all boys and girls receive a broadly based and conceived human movement experience in sport, dance, play, and exercise as an integral part of the entire educational experience.

If we take a long range view, we can possibly take heart from these conclusions about the remarkable development of the Western world (although we dare not lose sight of the 'one world' concept in these difficult years immediately ahead). As sport and physical activity historians, we have a professional duty to tell mankind how sport, dance, play, and exercise have been related to people's development in the past. This discussion of the later Middle Ages has sought to do just that - and nevertheless in conclusion we must express the hope that better times lie ahead for all people everywhere in the realm of sport and physical activity.