



## THE POSITION OF PHYSICAL EDUCATION IN JOHN DEWEY'S REPORT OF EDUCATION IN TURKEY

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### **Abstract:**

With the foundation of the Republic of Turkey, the process of transition from empire to republic was experienced in an intertwined way with modernization efforts, and reconstruction in almost every field of life became obligatory. Education as a phenomenon that disciplines new generations and prepares them for the future took charge of being the locomotive of this transition process, and it was held as one of the basic issues in republican programs. Experts were needed to implement the improvement programs. For this reason, professionals who are experts in their fields should be invited to the country from abroad. The first name to come to the country was educational reformer John Dewey, just 9 months after the foundation of the republic. Addressing the physical and mental aspects of education as a whole, Dewey made examinations for two months and presented his recommendations regarding the Turkish education system as a report. This report, which constitutes one of the main reference points in the efforts of constructing the education system, was a source for many new practices including physical education and sports in the following years. In this study, the effects of John Dewey's education approach and philosophy on physical education will be examined by considering the reports he prepared.

**Keywords:** John Dewey, physical education, sport, Turkey report

### **1. Introduction**

When the Republic of Turkey was founded, the view of "*education and teachers will save the decadent state*" (Akyüz, 2007) was the main starting point for shaping state policies. The organization of education programs that would enable new generations to be educated was one of the most important issues. The need for individuals who would carry out innovation studies and work in the light of new principles accelerated the regulations in this field. Experts from almost every field were brought from abroad. Since

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education in the country was considered the main catalyst, John Dewey was one of the first experts to be called.

The pragmatist structure of Dewey's philosophy was influential in his selection for the modernization work that began. Seeing the school in the center of social development (Bülbul, 2009), Dewey believed that the aim of education is to use schools to shape the social order. This view of Dewey coincided with the views of Atatürk and the republican cadres who wanted to use the schools to give the Turkish society a democratic and modern character, and for this reason American educational reformer John Dewey was invited to the country even less than a year (only 9 month) after the declaration of the republic (Ata, 2000).

John Dewey was expected to form the main strategy for directing revolution reforms to the field of education (Kirby, 1962) and to present a holistic study in this regard. So, Dewey came to Turkey and prepared a report after various studies. The report presented by Dewey constituted one of the main pillars in the construction of the education system during the Atatürk period. He also inspired many reforms related to education (Dewey, 2019). Reform proposals in his report included physical education as well as many other fields such as music, art and librarianship. In this study, Dewey's suggestions in the field of physical education, which he expressed in his report, were analyzed by literature review method.

## 2. Method

In our research, the literature review method (Demirci, 2014; Keser, <http://kisi.deu.edu.tr>), which is defined as the in-depth and systematic research, when possible, and determination of the works and studies published on a certain subject, was used.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1 Foreign experts in the reorganization works of the education system

With the change of regimen, in the 'major transformation' that took place in Turkey, education was located in the center of reforms as an important tool. Since secularism was the basic element of revolutionary ideology, it was obligatory to make education secular. In addition, the aim of the new national Turkish state to modernize and westernize the entire social structure made a state-controlled public education system necessary. It was also thought that the emergence of the national state was possible only by educating new generations in accordance with Turkish nationalism (Lüküslü, Dinçşahin, 2011).

For all these reasons, it was soon predicted that the locomotive of modernization efforts would be 'education' in order to reach the goal of reaching 'the level of contemporary civilizations', which is the main motto for the republican rulers, and the first plans about education were started before the new regime was announced. The Education Congress was held in 1921, and it was emphasized in the program of the Council of Ministers, which was read in the Turkish Grand National Assembly on August

14, 1923, that the individual's moral and social abilities as well as their mental and 'physical' abilities will be developed. The existing institutions were incompatible with the new ideology, and individuals in the newly emerging society had a lack of capacity, so foreign experts were required. Education experts, including American philosopher and educational theorist John Dewey, were invited from different countries to create a modern education system that would regulate both the educational organization structure and educational programs (Şahin, 1996).

### **3.2 Invitation of Dewey and his arrival to Turkey**

Dewey was the first educational expert who were invited to Turkey, and this puts him in a privileged location from a historical perspective. In the first half of the twentieth century, Dewey emerged as a globally recognized name through his books and the activities of educational scientists who put their views into practice (Ata, 2000). Dewey intellectually influenced both a wide variety of disciplines and works in these fields, and a wide geography from west to east (Özsoy, 2009). Turkish educators first recognized Dewey's ideas through their European colleagues (Ata, 2000). After a very short time, articles about Dewey's education approach, which opposed thoughts such as understanding of learning by doing and living, knowledge of traditional education as much as it deals with abstractions rather than concrete reality, negligence of the body (Öztürk, 2008), were included in the Turkish press (Ata, 2000).

Invitation of Dewey to Turkey was not accidental. The founders of the republic wanted to implement many innovations in a short time, and they did not have time to 'deal' with theory and philosophy, which caused them to be influenced by Dewey's pragmatist philosophy. However, it is unclear if Dewey was called to Turkey by Atatürk. Also, the points of whether he was called to conduct a scientific research or to be proposed an official task such as ministry undersecretariat or consultancy remain unclear. Regarding this issue, there is no explanatory information in Dewey's report submitted to the Ministry of Education (Özsoy, 2009). What we know is that Dewey decided to come to Turkey by accepting the invitation via letter (Ortak, 2004).

### **3.3 Dewey's process of studying the Turkish education system**

Dewey came to Istanbul on 19th of July via Vienna with Orient Express and received the first information about the Turkish education system from the undersecretariat of the Ministry of Education, Fuat Köprülü and the Rector of Istanbul University, İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu. Since his visit coincided with the summer vacation, Dewey was unable to observe the student-teacher relationship and the classroom atmosphere, he only examined school buildings, laboratories and educational materials (Ata, 2000). Dewey conducted examinations at Istanbul University, high schools, professional associations and teacher schools in July and August. Then he went to Ankara for one week and met Atatürk at the feast that was prepared for him, where he had a chance to chat at length (Ata, 2001). After his visit to Ankara, he returned to Istanbul, determined some allowances to be put in the budget as a result of all his evaluations and wrote his first

report on where these allowances must be used in Istanbul. Dewey prepared his main report after he returned to America (Efendioğlu et al., 2010; Bal, 1991).

### **3.4 Dewey's report on Turkish Education System**

In his report, Dewey first stated that the aim of the Turkish education system should be determined, and the program should be shaped accordingly. According to his report, this aim is the development of Turkey as a vivacious, free, independent and secular republic among the contemporary nations. Dewey stated that in order to achieve this goal, schools should first give individuals the 'correct' political habits and thoughts, and that these schools should develop individuals' various economic-commercial competencies and abilities, and that they should encourage men and women to advance in national sovereignty, economical independence and art, in other words, they should provide the idea and moral character development that would accustom them to entrepreneurship, independent and scientific thinking, and social cooperation for the common good (Dewey, 1939; Ortak, 2004). Due to all these determinations, it can be said that Dewey resolved the expectations and demands of the founding cadre well during the preparation period of the report. Because *"the Republic requires intellectually, scientifically and physically strong and morally qualified guards"* (Dönmez, 2005). What is expected from education is that *"it turns knowledge into an applied and beneficial element that provides success in material life rather than as an ornamentation, pressure tool or a civic pleasure"* (Akyüz, 2007). In this sense, in the direction of Dewey's pragmatism that emphasizes learning by 'doing and living' and emphasizes the experience (Bender, 2005), in his report, his way of handling physical education and sport issues and their application areas gains importance.

### **3.5 Physical education in Dewey's report**

John Dewey's works before coming to Turkey and during his stay in the country found wide coverage in the Turkish press. There were often reports about his investigations and views in Ankara and İstanbul. In one of this news, we learn that he watched the Zeybek dance, which was choreographed by Selim Sırrı Tarcan, one of the leading sports people of the time, and was influenced by the show (Ata, 2001). He said:

*"Much was said about Turkish folk dances in the USA. I have wanted to get to know the oriental music and dances ever since. I hope that these talents of young people will be shown to the field of lore. I would like to thank the Alumni Association for giving me such a sincere and happy day."*

It is not known whether he was influenced by the Zeybek show or if he was aware that the press was strong (or both), but shortly after Dewey came to İstanbul, he visited Cumhuriyet newspaper and met with Ziya Gökalp and Selim Sırrı (Turan, 2009; Maarif Müşavirimiz, 1924). Although the data on the content of this meeting could not be reached, it can be thought that Dewey and Selim Sırrı had similar perspectives on physical education and sports, because they were fed from similar sources (such as

Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Montessori) in terms of educational philosophy and they exchanged views about it. From this meeting, we can conclude that Dewey also learned about the place of physical education in the Turkish education system and what was done. In addition to being fed from the same sources, Dewey and Tarcan handled the education provided in the villages in the country in a similar way. Dewey talked about the drawbacks of ignoring the peasants' interests and needs when establishing a general education program, and even stated that the times of opening and closing of schools in villages should be matched to the times when children were not working. On the other hand, in his book titled *Physical Education in Village Schools* published in 1933, Tarcan recommended the teachers to consider the village conditions in their activities in the villages. According to Tarcan, "*physical education teachers should be extremely careful about the gymnastics and games they will play to suit the needs of the villagers*" (Arpacı, 2015). When the Republic of Turkey was founded, a significant portion of the population was living in the villages. For this reason, a special attention was paid to education, physical education and sports activities in the villages.

Education to be offered to children in villages where people lived densely would also contribute to the modernization of the village. Contemporary values could enter the village through education at the school, as well as help the peasant's development. For this reason, Village Schools were opened to train village teachers who would work in the villages. Sports and game activities were also included in the Village Teacher Schools program opened in the 1927-1928 academic year (Ortak, 2004). According to Dewey, school was a center for pedagogical, social, cultural and economic change and experiences. Accepting and internalizing new values and habits was of great importance in a country that experienced a major revolution and change, such as the transition from empire to nation-state.

Dewey stressed the importance of the postponement of the preparation of a new program and of an investigation in the foreign countries until the experts that would reorganize the education system were educated for Turkey after experiencing such a big change. He included physical education, sports and games among the topics that the commissions would examine (Dewey, 1939). Since 1926, many people were assigned to study education models in the world. In this context, Mr. Nafi Atuf and Mr. Rıdvan Nafiz Sezai examined the Soviet education system, Mr. Kemal Zaim French education system, Mr. İsmail Hakkı Italian education system as a whole. Mr. Vildan and Mr. Nizamettin prepared a report on Physical Education and Public Schools in Denmark (Ergün 1990). The state, which was in the process of creating its own system in the field of physical education and sports, as Gramsci puts, in the period of twilight, when the "old" disappeared but the "new" did not appear yet (Özsoy, 2009), examined the models abroad.

Dewey recommended that the education models in the world be examined on-site and stated in his report that successful and talented teachers as well as students should be sent to Europe to be trained (Ortak, 2004). The Ministry of National Education sent students abroad in the 1924-1925 academic year to learn the methods followed by European nations on physical education and to train physical education teachers on their

return to the country (Güven, 1996; Aslan, 2014). Dewey, on the other hand, suggested the translation of foreign works, among the topics he listed there were the titles of games and game places, and cheap installation for game places (Ortak, 2004). As can be seen, training physical education teachers and increasing their quality became an important subject of this period.

Seeing increasing teacher qualification as the most important point of vocational education, Dewey also touched on the subject of vocational schools in his report. In his report, he stated that those who graduated from primary school teacher schools, at the beginning, could be appointed as teachers to make the students play outdoor games. However, he stressed that those who completed secondary school teacher schools should be appointed later, and a vocational school should be opened in this field. Dewey thought that specialist teachers, school principals and inspectors should be trained in various fields for advances in education. To this end, he advocated opening relevant departments in at least two teacher schools. Dewey stated that some teacher schools should open departments to train physical education, sports and health information teachers (Dewey, 1939). Even though physical education lesson was added as one hour per week for the grades 1,2,3,4 and 5 among the courses given in teacher schools in 1924 (Akyüz, 2007), in 1926, gymnastics lessons in primary, secondary and high school programs (Dever, İslam, 2015) accelerated the steps to establish a school to train physical education teachers.

Firstly, it was decided to open a college in Ankara to train physical education teachers in 1926, and until the school was opened, the physical education teacher course in İstanbul, Çapa was opened in October 1926, foreign experts from abroad were brought to train in courses (Şinoforoğlu, 2015; Günay, 2013). Schools started to open at the beginning of the academic year of 1926-1927 in order to train teachers for secondary schools. It was the first time that a Secondary Teacher School was opened in Konya, and a year later, a pedagogy department was added to the school and it moved to Ankara. In 1932, the department of physical education was added to the departments in the school named Gazi Secondary Teacher School and Education Institute (Günay, 2017). Therefore, Dewey's recommendation to train specialists accelerated the establishment of the Physical Education School, and although a separate school was not established, a department was established within the Gazi Education Institute. One of the founding duties of Turkey Workout Alliance Society, which was established in 1922 before the declaration of the republic, was to establish a college of physical education for the establishment of a physical education school. At the Science Committee meeting in August 1923, one of the five different commissions were scouting and physical education. In the program, institutions and principles were determined for the opening of 'the Teacher School of Physical Education'. The fact that the school that would train physical education teachers had a priority in education (Günay, 2013) is related to the goal of Turkish revolution to both get rid of the 'unhealthy' structure of the past and to raise individuals who are intellectually and mentally 'healthy' (Kılınç, 2009). Physical education was considered with a principle that both increases physical capacity and improves health.

In Dewey's report, physical education and sports were evaluated in relation to health. Body health and strength is a mandatory condition for progress and development in all areas, and it is more useful to prevent the occurrence of the disease than to treat it after getting sick. Schools, especially village schools, should be the health center of their location, and the village community should be informed as well as educating students. Malaria was prevalent in Anatolia under the conditions of that period. According to Dewey, it was difficult to predict the consequences of malaria, and schools should be included in order to get a good result (Dewey, 1939; Ortak, 2004). Because the founding years of the Republic of Turkey were a period when a state that came out of many wars had to deal with many health problems and epidemics (Özkaya, 2016). Shortly after Dewey returned to the United States, it was stated in the circular issued by the Ministry of Education in September 1924 that one of the aims of education is *"to get the schools to teach the value of public health and the ways to be healthy, and to ensure balanced development of body and mind"* (Akyüz, 2007). Thus, schools and therefore teachers were given a guiding role to carry out disease preventive activities.

In order to protect health, Dewey also suggested that schools be built in gardens where students could play sports and take a stroll. According to Dewey, the establishment of public squares for schools, establishing them large enough for boys and girls to benefit from, and doing sports outside of school were part of the sanitary struggle. School squares should have been equipped with large enough vehicles that would be a center not only for the student's physical education, playing and sports, but also for the public to enjoy and do sports. Young people not attending school should also be encouraged to participate in games and sports, and care should be taken to teach them such things (Dewey, 1939). In this sense, in line with the adoption of habits regarding the new lifestyle after the revolution, Dewey's perspective, which considered the school as a social process, was found to be very useful.

Dewey believed that there was a close relationship between the way school buildings were constructed and the educational affairs at school and school order. In this sense, he emphasized the importance of school architecture and stated the importance of training specialists in this field (Dewey, 1939). One of Dewey's suggestions was the establishment of a structure and teaching tools department within the Ministry of Education (Ortak, 2004). German architect Ernest Egli took the lead in the Office of School Architecture, which was established within the ministry in 1927, and the office attracted attention with its applications that placed special emphasis on gyms in school construction<sup>ii</sup>. Considering the limited possibilities of the period, it is seen that the maximum efficiency and impact were aimed to be obtained from the investments and applications to be made. Dewey considered all kinds of educational work as a social process (Bender, 2005; Yeşiltaş, Kaymakçı, 2009). Therefore, the school came to the fore as a place that provided social cohesion and socialization. Dewey considered the school gardens as a place to participate in games and sporting activities for the local community.

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<sup>ii</sup> For a more detailed reading on the studies of Ernest Egli, Oya Atalay Franck, *Politika ve mimarlık: Ernst Egli ve Türkiye'de modernliğin arayışı*. Ankara: TMMOB Mimarlar Odası Yayınları.

This idea was based on the fact that the school was treated not only as an education but also as a living space. Through the school gardens and sports venues, it was aimed to spread games and other sports practices for physical education in the society. The school was considered as a field for the spread of sport and acceptance of sport as part of life.

#### 4. Conclusion

The reason that Dewey was monumentalized as an important inspiration for the modernization of the Turkish education system is that he provided a comprehensive scientific/philosophical paradigm for educational problems for the first time (Özsoy, 2009). John Dewey made important recommendations on the organization of the Ministry of Education. The unit responsible for the construction works had the idea of structures such as the branch teachers' group (Kıyanç, 2016). The effects of Dewey are seen in planning the education system, training teachers and diversification of teacher schools (Güçlüoğlu, 1985). Physical education and sports were inevitably included in the comprehensive program presented as a report. During the early republican period in which a search for a system was experienced in education, Dewey's recommendation to open teacher schools in various fields and to train branch teachers positively affected existing attempts to train physical education teachers. According to Dewey, as he indicated in his report, it was necessary to have a sufficient capacity of sports fields at all levels of school for health protection, and it was important for public health to provide sports for individuals outside the school. He recommended the establishment of a special unit for school architecture within the Ministry of Education. The Office of School Architecture provided the construction of special and qualified gymnasiums in many schools. It was necessary to include gymnastic / physical education courses in the education program in all schools, especially in primary schools. Accordingly, Dewey's suggestions about training of physical education teachers proves how far he is beyond his age, given the lack of physical education classes in elementary schools and the lack of a garden and indoor hall for children to play. The proposal to make study trips abroad in the field of physical education also positively affected the research of the sports system of many different countries. In addition, after the physical education teachers were sent abroad, they took an important place in the history of Turkish sports as the pioneer names who formed the scientific infrastructure of physical education.

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