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Educating the Body: A History of Physical Education in Canada

University of Toronto Press, 2023. 326 pp.

Co-authored by three giants in the fields of sport history and the history of physical education, this volume traces the checkered career of physical education in both the Canadian school curriculum and Canadian society from the 1840s to the current day. The book can be described as part history, part celebration, part lament, and part prescription. Its strength derives in good measure from the accomplishments and experiences of these three authors, who have shaped the field with their own scholarship and administrative leadership, and have witnessed in their time the transformation of the field and its aims. *Educating the Body* was prompted by two factors. It was overdue: more than fifty years had passed since the last history of the field was published. What's more, there is a sinking feeling that physical education is, once again, under siege. This book is a reckoning.

Educating the Body is organized in seven roughly chronological chapters which, taken together, assert three central points. Physical education in Canada a) has always been rooted in public, state-sponsored schools though its influence has extended outside them as well, in civic institutions such as the YMCA and YWCA, and in government-funded programs such as “Pro-Rec” and ParticipACTION; b) has always been political, contested terrain on which successive generations of thinkers and states people projected their needs, aspirations, and imperatives; and c) has always been less than inclusive, a place where male privilege and “whiteness” has predominated and where Black and Indigenous children, as well as those experiencing disability, have been made to feel left out.

The authors understand that they are publishing this *Canadian* history at a time when the meaning of history (and of Canada) has been upended by the findings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2009–2015). What should national history look like in the wake of the 94 Calls to Action? *Educating the Body* is one convincing answer. It offers a robust description of Indian Residential Schools and their legacy in its introduction, and then masterfully weaves examples from Indigenous experiences with formal physical education into each chapter. (Sadly, but not unexpectedly, they conclude that the IRS curriculum in physical education for Indigenous students was woefully inadequate, as it was in so many other ways.) In the same way, the book balances contexts with topics nicely, occasionally expanding its scope to describe how Confederation, American aggression, world wars, and neoliberalism (and other changes) have influenced the urgency for and shape of physical education. The book is ably written (three authors but one voice) and is usefully illustrated with photographs and a series of insert boxes that highlight (mostly) biographical features of significant figures.

Chapter 1 examines Ontario public school founder Egerton Ryerson's vision for physical education as a universal, compulsory force that aimed to produce morality, health, and national spirit—a new citizenry. Though Ryerson's legacy has foundered

recently in the politics of reconciliation, his idea for physical education survives and was advanced by late Victorian luminaries such as Tait McKenzie and James Naismith. Chapter 2 carries the story of physical education into the early twentieth century, when imperialist martial spirit held sway in English Canada. Widely accepted but poorly implemented, it was boosted by financier Lord Strathcona (Donald Smith), who generously created a trust fund in 1907 to help schools offer physical education and to help train teachers to teach it via trust-funded textbooks such as *Syllabus of Physical Exercises for Schools* (1911). By the 1920s, the rise of the new pedagogy—progressive, child-centred curriculum—posed a challenge to the top-down approaches of earlier physical educators, who taught movement largely as drill. Chapter 3 is a case study of one interesting response—Toronto’s Margaret Eaton School, which, between 1901 and 1941 educated elite, white women in the philosophy and art of movement and the modernist aesthetic (albeit in a traditional, gendered way).

The second half of *Educating the Body* focuses on the spread of efforts to make Canadians physically fit beyond schools. During the 1930s, chapter 4 shows, physical educators professionalized—created their own provincial and national associations and pushed to establish their field as a body of useful knowledge and its members as experts. Though the onset of World War II (and the needs of the state) threatened to revive physical education as drill, the profession’s higher goals resumed in the 1950s and 1960s, as the authors describe in chapter 5, bolstered by the federal government’s interest in bolstering “peace fitness” (126) through bodies such as the National Council on Physical Fitness (1949–52) and the passage of the Fitness and Amateur Sport Act (1961). In these years, an initial interest in charting Canadian children’s fitness through testing was trumped by a growing Cold War era interest in funding elite athletes for international competitions. Though physical education in schools was influenced by foreign-inspired “movement education,” the field in the mid-twentieth century was a busy place, a congeries of influences and aims.

In the final third of the century, the authors show in chapters 6 and 7, the status of physical educators was challenged from two sources. The first of these came from without, when in the 1970s, the growth of curriculum choice undermined the Ryersonian idea of universal and compulsory physical education. Some parents objected to making all kids do gym. The second challenge came from within, when the field’s traditional purpose as pedagogy for the army of teachers who would fan out across the country and impart a school curriculum of health, skills, and self-knowledge was eclipsed by the rise of kinesiology, and generations of scholars whose interests sit mainly in scientific research and publishing scholarship. Though the two halves of the field remain, it is an uneasy coexistence. The final chapter of this book asks: whither physical education in Canada? It acknowledges the real harm that the COVID pandemic wrought on its practice in schools and the new challenges that digital learning poses to the field, but it concludes optimistically. Ryerson’s vision is still alive, the authors argue. All Canadian schoolchildren have a “fundamental right” to a physical education that meets their needs (233) delivered by experts professionally trained to do so.

Educating the Body is an ambitious book that delivers on its promises. It deserves wide readership and will undoubtedly be assigned in undergraduate courses in history and physical education. Its attention focuses largely on English Canadians, however, and it touches only lightly on francophone Canada. Readers interested in school-based physical education in Quebec and church-run civic organizations such as the *Oeuvre des terrains de jeux* (1920s–60s) will have to look elsewhere. This point hardly detracts from the book's overall value as a summary of the field, which is authoritative and impressive.

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Crystal Gail Fraser

By Strength, We Are Still Here: Indigenous Peoples and Indian Residential Schooling in Inuvik, Northwest Territories

University of Manitoba Press, 2024. 384 pp.

Crystal Gail Fraser's anticipated *By Strength, We Are Still Here* does not disappoint. It centres on the history of the large hostel-style Catholic (Grollier Hall) and Anglican (Stringer Hall) residential schools in Inuvik—a planned hub town for Nanhkak Thak/Inuvialuit Nunangit (the northwestern Arctic) by the Canadian government—from 1959–1982. Fraser observes that these Inuvik schools have escaped attention from scholars and that there are distinctions between residential schools in Northern and Southern Canada. Beyond filling those holes in the historical record, this work takes up the call by Indigenous organizations for the use of strengths—rather than deficit-based approaches when working with Indigenous stakeholders. By demonstrating an excellent model for a strengths-based approach to history, this book is innovative. Its geographic scope alone is another since the history of the North in Canada has often been left unexamined. Scholars in fields such as Indigenous studies, sociology, criminology, education, and public policy will benefit from this groundbreaking study.

Refusing “damage-centered” research as elucidated by Eve Tuck, the project instead uses three concepts of strength (t'aih, vit'aih, and guut'ài). T'aih is the Dinjii Zhuh Ginjik word for “personal or mental strength” while vit'aih is the “personal, singular declension of t'aih” that indicates “a public demonstration of strength or strength that arises from people uniting around one cause” (23). Guut'ài is “collective strength” (23). These concepts are foundational for Fraser's analytic frame used to examine the experiences of institutionalized children at Grollier/Stringer Halls and how the parents/caregivers of children acted as advocates and activists “in relation to this state-imposed schooling system” (2). Fraser describes these concepts as “interconnected and [they] underscore people's ability to navigate historical misfortunes and demonstrate personal resilience in light of adversity” (23). How Fraser handles