



Brazilian Journal of Physical Education: Modern Swedish Gymnastics in Brazil (1944-1952)¹

Revista Brasileira de Educação Física:
a Moderna Ginástica Sueca no Brasil (1944-1952)

Revista brasileña de educación física:
la moderna gimnasia sueca en Brasil (1944-1952)

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the circulation of the “Modern Swedish Gymnastics” in the Brazilian Journal of Physical Education, during the period of its existence, 1944-1952. The Swedish gymnastics, created by Pehr Henrik Ling in the early nineteenth century, underwent a reconfiguration in Europe constituting a “Modern Swedish Gymnastics”, which circulated in Brazil. The Brazilian Journal of Physical Education was a communication means through which different subjects dedicated to the teaching of gymnastics pointed to a form of gymnastics that opposed Ling's rigid and monotonous gymnastics. Therefore, a new way to educate the body was possible in Brazil, at a time when Brazilian physical education was discussing about an appropriate method for the field.

Keywords: Physical Education. Modern Swedish Gymnastics. Brazilian Journal of Physical Education.

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Resumo

O presente estudo teve como objetivo analisar a circulação da “Moderna Ginástica Sueca” na Revista Brasileira de Educação Física, no período da sua existência, 1944-1952. A ginástica sueca, criada por Pehr Henrik Ling no início do século XIX, passou por uma reconfiguração na Europa dando forma a uma “Moderna Ginástica Sueca”, que circulou no Brasil. A Revista Brasileira de Educação Física constituiu-se em um veículo no qual diferentes sujeitos que se dedicavam ao ensino da ginástica, apontavam uma forma de praticá-la que contrapunha ao rígido e monótono método de Ling. Circula no Brasil, portanto, outra possibilidade de educar o corpo em um momento que a educação física brasileira debatia sobre a definição de um método adequado para o campo.

Palavras-chave: Educação Física. Moderna Ginástica Sueca. Revista Brasileira de Educação Física.

Resumen

Este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar la circulación de la “Moderna Gimnasia Sueca” en la Revista Brasileña de Educación Física, durante el período de su existencia, 1944-1952. La gimnasia sueca, creada por Pehr Henrik Ling a principios del siglo XIX, pasó por una reconfiguración en Europa para formar una “Moderna Gimnasia Sueca”, que circuló en Brasil. La Revista Brasileña de Educación Física fue un vehículo en el que personas diferentes dedicadas a la enseñanza de la gimnasia señalaron una forma de gimnasia que se oponía a la gimnasia rígida y monótona de Ling. Circula en Brasil, por lo tanto, otra posibilidad de educar al cuerpo en un momento en que la educación física brasileña estaba debatiendo sobre la definición de un método adecuado para el campo.

Palabras clave: Educación Física. Moderna Gimnasia Sueca. Revista Brasileña de Educación Física.

Introduction

This text aimed to analyze the circulation of the Swedish Gymnastics, conceived by Pehr Henrik Ling, in the Brazilian Journal of Physical Education (RBEF), from 1944 to 1952. So, it is based on the understanding that the gymnastics created by Ling in the early nineteenth century, in Sweden, went through adaptations and reconfigurations along its existence, giving rise to a *Modern Swedish Gymnastics* that circulates in different journals in Brazil, including the RBEF.

Different gymnastics systems, such as schools, have been proposed in Europe, most notably in Germany, Sweden and France (SOARES, 1994) and lead intense debates to define more efficient/adequate gymnastics with scientific basis (SARREMEJANE, 2006). The Swedish gymnastics was constituted by this European gymnastic movement that emerged in the late eighteenth century, guided by a body approach anchored in scientific and hygienic discourses, which aimed to train the gestures and control the will².

Its creator, Pehr Henrik Ling, born in Sweden in 1776, developed his gymnastics method influenced by the period in Copenhagen from 1799 to 1804, attending classes at the Nachteggall Gymnastics Institute (1777-1847)³. Inspired by his work⁴, Ling returns to Stockholm and practices fencing at Lund University for 8 years.⁵ In this institution, he teaches gymnastics and meanwhile, he commits himself to the studies of anatomy and physiology that would be essential to the constitution of his main work, the *Gymnastikens allmänna grunder*⁶ (WESTERBLAD, 1909; GEORGII, 1854; LEONARD, 1923; PEREIRA (S.d.); MARINHO, 1958).

In 1813, Ling began to work as a fencing teacher at the Military Academy in Karlberg, in the northern region of Stockholm⁷. At the same time, he proposes to the Swedish government the creation of an institute that would be responsible for the physical training for young people through gymnastics. Thus arises the Central and Royal Institute of Gymnastics (GCI)⁸, in Stockholm, under the Swedish Crown, which develops and disseminates the Lingian system, known as Rational Gymnastics, in different parts of the world (GEORGII, 1854; LEONARD, 1923; WESTERBLAD, 1909; GRUT, 1913; HAGELIN, 1995).

Ling dies in 1839, but his work continues and gains repercussion in several countries, including Brazil. Here, since the late nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century, the circulation of the Swedish Method of Gymnastics happens in various ways, among them: Brazilians (intellectuals and politicians) who became aware of the system and disseminated it

² Several studies have already addressed this topic, seeking to understand the gymnastic methods. Among them we can mention: Moreno (2001; 2003; 2015); Quitzau (2014; 2015, 2016); Soares (1994, 2009; 2015); Quitzau and Soares (2016); Jube (2017); Carvalho and Correia (2015); Góis Júnior (2015); Puchta (2015); Melo and Peres (2014); Goellner (1992); Andrieu (1999); Bui-Xuân and Gleyse (2001); Ljunggren (2011); Lundvall (2015); Rodríguez Giménez (2011); Sarremejane (2006); Scharagrodsky et al (2011).

³ According to Pereira (s.d.), Nachteggall already trained teachers to work with gymnastics, either at school or in the army.

⁴ Ling's other relationships in Copenhagen have possibly contributed to his choices and investment. Leonard (1923) reports on Ling's contact with different subjects during his stay in Copenhagen, both in the field of literature - an area of interest and striking in his career - as well as his investment in gymnastics and fencing.

⁵ According to Pereira (s.d.), Ling was inspired by Guts-Muths, Vieth and Pestalozzi gymnastics, Schelling's philosophical orientation and Rousseau and Locke's pedagogical orientation. Much of this inspiration is due to the contact with Nachteggall, who was guided by these bases.

⁶ This work was started in 1834 and published after Ling's death in 1840. In Portuguese, this work has been translated as "Princípios gerais de ginástica", "Manual de ginástica" or "Base geral para ginástica", as we can observe in Moreno (2015).

⁷ According to Leonard (1923), Ling continued to teach fencing at the Karlberg Military Academy until 1825, and in 1821 he also acted as an instructor in gymnastics and fencing at the School of Artillery in Marieberg.

⁸ We translated Stockholm Central Institute of Gymnastics (GCI) to Portuguese in the original article. For some time, the Institute was called Royal Gymnastics Central Institute. Throughout the text, we refer to the Institute using the acronym GCI, as it is known worldwide.

in different ways and in different spaces⁹; Swedes who came here to work with gymnastics¹⁰; translated works that arrived in the country¹¹; work produced in Brazil but inspired by the Swedish method¹²; in addition to newspapers, magazines and journals specialized in physical education, which put Swedish gymnastics into circulation¹³.

The field of Physical Education was being consolidated with the contribution of a set of specialized journals that emerged in the 1930s, namely: *Revista Educação Física* (1932-1960), *Revista Educação Physica* (1932-1945), *Boletim de Educação Física* (1941-1958), *Revista Brasileira de Educação Física* (1944-1952) and *Arquivos da Escola Nacional de Educação Física e Desportos* (1945-1966) (FERREIRA NETO, 2005). For the author, the RBEF was a privileged place where diverse knowledge about body practices, including Swedish gymnastics, circulated, instigated the debate, found resistance, shaped ways of being and thinking body education through body practices, contributing to the constitution of Physical Education in this period¹⁴.

As a research topic, journals in Brazil have been widely questioned. However, if the journals have already been problematized in the context of research in the History of Education and Physical Education¹⁵, the same cannot be reported in relation to Swedish gymnastics¹⁶, nor in studies that take RBEF as a source¹⁷. How was the process of organization of Swedish gymnastics, between the early nineteenth and the mid-twentieth century, in Europe, which enabled the emergence of Modern Swedish Gymnastics? How did this Modern Swedish Gymnastics appear in RBEF and contribute to the configuration of the Physical Education field?

Guided by these questions, we propose, in this study, to understand how the Modern Swedish Gymnastics was disseminated in Brazil through the Brazilian Journal of Physical Education, contributing to a debate about the constitution of Physical Education in the period 1944-1952¹⁸.

To do so, we used the 82 issues of the RBEF, representing all journals published from 1944 to 1952. Inspired by Certeau (2006, p.81), for whom in history everything starts with the gesture of separating, assembling and transforming in documents some objects

⁹ Rui Barbosa defends Swedish gymnastics in his opinion (1947); Fernando de Azevedo (1920), Inezil Penna Marinho (1958) and Jair Jordão Ramos (1952,1982) in their writings.

¹⁰ The study by Moreno and Baía (2019) shows the presence of Swedes Fritjof Detthow, Mme. Will, Mme. Ester Leo, Sven Kellander, Artur Linderdahl, Mme. Maria Grushka and Curt Johansson, who somehow had their performance related to Swedish gymnastics, whether teaching courses, writing in newspapers and working in a school, or working with the medical dimension of Swedish gymnastics.

¹¹ Baía, Bonifácio and Moreno (2017a).

¹² Avelar (2018).

¹³ To cite some newspapers: *Folha da Manhã* (SP), *Jornal do Commercio* (RJ), *Jornal do Recife*, *O Commercio de São Paulo*, *O Estado de São Paulo*, *Revista Educação* (São Paulo). With regard to specialized journals, we cite: *Revista Educação Physica* (1932-1945), *Revista de Educação Física* (1932-today) and RBEF (1944-1952).

¹⁴ The definition of RBEF as a privileged source of this study was based on the number of articles on Swedish gymnastics raised in a previous analysis. It far surpassed the number of articles on Swedish gymnastics in other specialized journals, which caught our attention. Because the RBEF, among the specialized journals, was the main vehicle for the circulation of Swedish gymnastics in the country.

¹⁵ In the field of Physical Education History, we can mention: Góis Júnior and Mattos (2016); Moraes and Góis Júnior (2015); Góis Júnior (2013); Bruschi and Schneider (2019); Assunção et al (2014); Ferreira Neto et al (2014); Schneider et al (2013); Schneider (2004); Berto, Schneider and Ferreira Neto (2007); Moraes and Fontoura (2011). There are other searches that could enter this list - a task that would require more care and a specific study. But this task is beyond the scope of this text.

¹⁶ Just to cite some of them: Moreno (2001, 2015); Soares and Moreno (2015); Romão and Moreno (2018); Baía, Bonifácio and Moreno (2017a; 2017b); and Avelar (2018).

¹⁷ The work of Moraes and Fontoura (2011) is one of the rare studies that take RBEF as its main source. Other studies, such as Retz et al (2019), Ferreira Neto et al (2014), Cassani (2018), take it in the set of other journals. Even considering these last studies, there are still few dedicated to the analysis of this journal, which contributed significantly to the circulation of knowledge about the Physical Education field.

¹⁸ The period delimitation of the study coincides with the life of the journal. More information about it will be brought along the text.

distributed otherwise, we accessed the RBEF samples at the Library of the Faculty of Education of the University of Campinas and the Institute of Education and Physical Education - PROTEORIA - located at the Center for Physical Education and Sports at the Federal University of Espírito Santo.

The *documentary corpus* consisted of RBEF articles that addressed Swedish Gymnastics and/or Modern Swedish Gymnastics¹⁹. The exploration of the sources allowed us to realize that this Modern Swedish Gymnastics circulated with intensity in this journal during the period analyzed, making it possible, with the comparison with the literature, to understand it as part of a reconfiguration movement that affected Swedish Gymnastics in Europe, circulating around different places, including Brazil.

1. From Ling's Gymnastics to the Modern Swedish Gymnastics

The Swedish gymnastics created by Ling in the early nineteenth century underwent transformations along its trajectory. At the Institute created with his contribution, in which he was director from 1813 to 1839, he took up the work alone until 1818, when he receives the physician Gabriel Branting, who had been his student in the first class at the GCI and his assistant at the Karlberg Military Academy²⁰ (PEREIRA, S.d.; LEONARD, 1923).

In 1929 the Institute welcomes Carl August Georgii²¹, who, together with P. J. Liedbeck²² were responsible for completing Ling's already cited work, entitled *Gymnastikens allmänna grunder*²³, which organizes Ling's experiences in his career with Swedish gymnastics.

In addition to this work, the son of the creator, Hjalmar Fredrik Ling, starts to work at the Institute, in 1843. His contribution to the systematization of his father's work by grouping the movements into "schema", "Lesson", was essential to disseminate Swedish gymnastics in different regions of the world (LANGLADE and LANGLADE, 1970; PEREIRA, S.D.)²⁴.

These three subjects - Branting, Georgii and Hjalmar - more than reproducing the knowledge of the creator, acted for the improvement in his method. The followers task was not smooth - Ling did not leave many writings on gymnastics to assist in the continuation of his work (LINDROTH, 1979). The strong philosophical mark in his above-mentioned major work makes it difficult to understand. Therefore, much of what is attributed to Ling has the mediation and mark of the experiences that Branting and Georgii established with the precursor, a result of decades working together in the same institution.

¹⁹ In the beginning of the research, we accessed the titles of the reports of some of the main specialized journals that emerged in the 1930s, namely: Revista Educação Física (1932-1960), Revista Educação Physica (1932-1945) and Revista Brasileira de Educação Física (1944-1952), through the Catalog of Physical Education and Sport Journals (Ferreira Neto, Schneider, Aroeira, Bosi, Santos, 2002). At this point, we identified that the Brazilian Journal of Physical Education has enabled an intense circulation of articles on Swedish gymnastics, being quantitatively much superior to the articles on this subject in other journals, becoming, for this reason, the main criterion of selection of the Brazilian Journal of Physical Education for this study.

²⁰ He served at the Karlberg Military Academy between 1813 and 1825 (LEONARD, 1923).

²¹ Born in 1808, he was one of Ling's disciples. He published Ling's work in France and England, dying in 1881 (PEREIRA, S.D.).

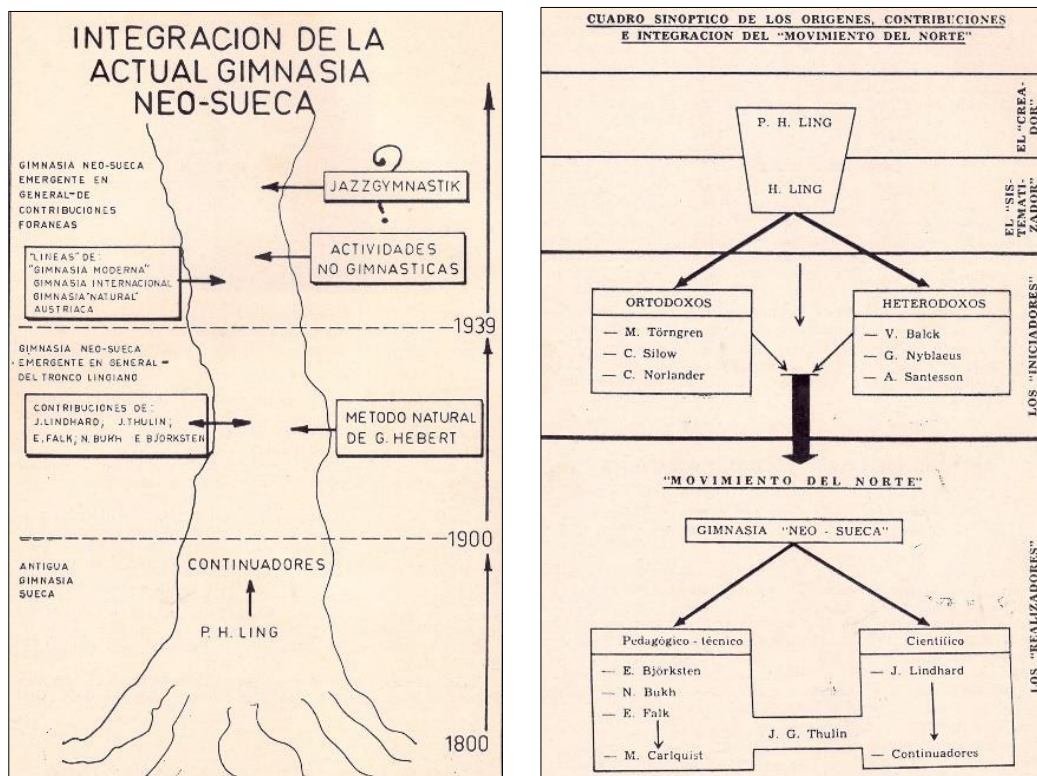
²² Born in 1802, he was Ling's son-in-law and taught anatomy at the Stockholm Gymnastics Institute. He died in 1876 (PEREIRA, S.D.).

²³ It presents the following division: 1) The Laws of the Human Organism; 2) Pedagogical Gymnastics. Foundations; 3) Military Gymnastics. Foundations; 4) Medical Gymnastics. Foundations; 5) Aesthetic Gymnastics. Foundations; 6) The Gymnastics Vehicles. However, during Ling's activity period, the medical gymnastics was the one that most attracted his attention (PEREIRA, S.D.).

²⁴ Scheme, for Hjalmar Ling, was defined as the relationship of families, groups, and subgroups of exercises, according to the order that should be used, for the correct development of a lesson, contemplating the requirement of the complete activity and an adjustment to the principles of continuity, progression, variety and alternation (LANGLADE e LANGLADE, 1970, p. 370).

Shortly before his death, Ling declared that he trusted Branting and Georgii in the continuation of his work, which was possibly built along the years of coexistence in the daily work at the Institute (PEREIRA, S.D.). Therefore, analyzing this first moment of Swedish gymnastics, represented by the performance of these subjects, there was some alignment in the preparation to teach the Swedish gymnastics²⁵ and in the development of Ling's method, following the principles of its creator. To broaden the understanding of those responsible for continuing the work started by Ling, we rely on the subdivision of Swedish gymnastics presented by Langlade and Langlade (1970):

Figure 1 - Organization of Swedish Gymnastics according to Langlade and Langlade (1970)



Source: Langlade and Langlade (1970, pp. 368 and 163)

From 1800 to 1900, P.H. Ling and his successors constitute a gymnastics classified as "Old Swedish Gymnastics". During this period, two groups contributed: the Orthodox, aligned with Branting, Georgii and Hjälmars, who sought to maintain Ling's base as principles that guided the formation and development of the method; and the heterodox, who, supported by a similar justification, proposed the development of the method based on different influences.

The Orthodox group was formed by: Lars Mauritz Törngren, Hjälmars Ling's successor in working with pedagogical gymnastics at the Institute, working with her from 1883 to 1909, being also a director in the period 1887-1907; Carl Silow, who contributed to Törngren in pedagogical gymnastics, from 1883 to 1909; and Carl Anders Henrik Norlander, who was a

²⁵ According to Pereira (s.d.), there were three different training courses offered in three years: in a first year, he trained instructors, preparing them to work in the army and elementary school grades. The second year constituted the teacher training course, preparing them to work in the Lyceums. The third year represented the medical gymnastics course, qualifying the student as a director of gymnastics, or as stated by Posse (1891), a gymnast doctor. The student would learn for one, two or three years, depending on the desired education. The knowledge that was part of these formations can be consulted in Moreno and Baía (2019).

professor at the University and Normal School in Lund and greatly contributed to pedagogical gymnastics, especially with his written works on the subject²⁶.

Among the heterodox, we can cite: Viktor Gustav Balck, who worked with military gymnastics from 1883 to 1909, becoming GCI director from 1907 to 1909; Gustav Nyblaeus, a student of P. H. Ling, was a director from 1862 to 1887 and worked with military gymnastics from 1838 to 1887 and was a supporter of the sports movement in Sweden, considering this sport as essential and complementary to gymnastics; and Anton B. Santesson, who, together with Nyblaeus, were the first critics of the gymnastics organized by Hjalmar Ling, claiming that it was moving away from the ideas of the founder of the Swedish gymnastics method²⁷.

It is possible to infer that these disputes that marked the late nineteenth century - Orthodox vs. Heterodox - represented more than a defense of development forms of Ling's Swedish gymnastics. It also meant a power struggle and the pursuit of hegemony in the constitution of gymnastics. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe are characterized as a time and place where different proposals for body education emerge, with various proposals for gymnastic methods (SARREMEJANE, 2006).

If we consider those involved with Swedish gymnastics in the late nineteenth century compared with those of the first half of the same century, the number of subjects dedicated to the formation and development of this gymnastics increases considerably. That "matrix" Swedish gymnastics, characterized by the effective presence of P. H. Ling in its organization and development, continued by those who lived with him and defended it, such as Branting, Georgii and Hjalmar Ling, began to be reorganized in the late nineteenth century²⁸, giving rise to a renovating movement. This renovating movement of Swedish gymnastics, which began after 1900, is called "Neo-Swedish Gymnastics" by Langlade and Langlade (1970).

The "Neo-Swedish" gymnastics presents as its central characteristic the contributions of different subjects, who start from a common formation in Lingian gymnastics, many of them trained in the GCI itself. The difference is that, beyond Ling's Swedish-based training in gymnastics, the renovators absorbed information from external influences, resulting from the scientific innovations that underpinned the gymnastic methods and the various gymnastic currents that emerged in the late 19th century and early twentieth century, such as George Hébert's natural method, indicated by Langlade and Langlade (1970) as one of the influencers. Central to this Swedish gymnastics renovating movement are: Elin Falk, Elli Björkstén, Maja Carlquist, Niels Bukh, Johannes Lindhard, and Josef Gittfrid Thulin (LANGLADE and LANGLADE, 1970; PEREIRA, S.D.).

Until the late thirties of the twentieth century, all these subjects who contributed to the technical-pedagogical and scientific field, based on their experiences and interventions, dialogued from the Lingian Swedish gymnastics current, giving rise to this new gymnastics expression, the "Neo-swedish". According to Holmström, General Secretary of the Swedish Gymnastics Federation, organizer of the 1939 and 1949 Lingiads²⁹, this gymnastics marked as "Neo-Swedish" by Langlade and Langlade (1970), was called "Modern Swedish

²⁶ Cf: Pereira (s.d., p. 435).

²⁷ About Nyblaeus, cf: Pereira (s.d., p. 403).

²⁸ Lindroth (1979) states that the GCI was reorganized in 1864, when a new set of statutes was issued. This reorganization divided Swedish gymnastics training into three small departments - pedagogical, military, and medical gymnastics - each directed by a head teacher. With the new organization, demarcations between Ling's main gym sectors became even clearer. While this organization could contribute to a better balance of interests and resources, it also tended to stimulate rivalry between its departments.

²⁹ The Lingiad was an international event to demonstrate and debate the cultural practices representing Physical Education in different countries. We will cover it in more detail throughout this paper.

Gymnastics”³⁰. In their book titled *The Modern Swedish Gymnastics*, these subjects reappear as key players in the Swedish gymnastics development process:

La gimnasia há modificado también sus métodos de trabajo. Esto es muy cierto, especialmente en lo que se refiere a la gimnasia pedagógica escolar y a la gimnasia voluntaria. Bajo la influencia de pedagogos prominentes adictos a la gimnasia de Ling en los distintos países escandinavos – Elin Falk y el comandante J. G. Thulin en Suecia, Elli Björkstén en Finlandia y Niels Bukh en Dinamarca – se han modificado, desarrollado y enriquecido las formas de trabajo gimnásticas, em tal grado que ahora es posible variar la gimnasia según el sexo, la edad y las condiciones físicas de los gimnastas. La gimnasia infantil, la gimnasia para mujeres y la gimnasia para hombres se han desarrollado de distinta manera, adaptándose a las distintas tareas educativas que ahora se quieren llevar a cabo mediante distintas formas de gimnasia, así como de los métodos de trabajo gimnásticos. (HOLMSTRÖN, 1949, p. 42-43)

Their investments were based on the “Old Swedish Gymnastics” and represented a break with the orthodoxy and closed-mindedness of Ling's gymnastics. The peak of this Modern Swedish Gymnastics is marked by I Lingiad in 1939 (LANGLADE e LANGLADE, 1970, p. 249).

In the post-1939 period, two events are striking: the first and the second Lingiads, respectively in the years 1939 and 1949. According to Langlade and Langlade (1970), the first was a worldwide opportunity for the expansion of knowledge and the diffusion of schools, systems, methods or lines of work, starting a time of reciprocal influences and universalization of gymnastic conceptions. The second Lingiad represents the objective demonstration of the reciprocal influences of gymnastics schools, systems, methods, or lines.

For Langlade and Langlade (1970), the old Lingian trunk that for more than 130 years influenced every world manifestation of gymnastics, exporting theory, techniques and methodological procedures, became, after the 1940s, a gymnastics more open to receive external influences. These influences come from “modern gymnastics”³¹, “international gymnastics”, “Austrian natural gymnastics” and “jazz gymnastics” and found in the Lingiads, especially in the second one, a space for exchange³².

For Agne Holmström, the Swedish gymnastics of the late nineteenth century was petrified, especially due to excessively military influence. In the place of joy, excitement and

³⁰ We are assuming the name *Modern Swedish Gymnastics* in this study because this is how it is mentioned in the articles found in RBEF.

³¹ When we refer to “modern gymnastics” from Langlade and Langlade (1970), we understand it originating from Germany, characterizing a movement, initially focused on female gymnastics, inspired by the field of theater, music and dance. The variations international, Austrian natural and jazz gymnastics are also found in the same work.

³² For Langlade and Langlade (1970), among these influences, coming from different gymnastics beliefs, the following stand out: a) The organization of the Swedish gymnastics class in the form of “scheme” and “lesson” continued until 1939, when it began to be possible to set up a Swedish gymnastics section based on the work of a theme or circuit work; (b) the use of different handicrafts, with the predominance of ropes, balls of different sizes, hoops and tambourines; c) The use of music in command, preferably, but open to accompaniment through recorded music; d) Organization of exercises in the space, abandoning the idea of gymnastics “in place”, guiding the movement of the performers on the available work surface; e) Creation of movements, which was more effectively concentrated with children, abandoning the idea of an imaginary-imitative gymnastics for the creative-imagination; f) Possibility of organizing the gymnastics section in stations that used different materials, creating a rotation, in which the groups move with a certain frequency; g) Opening space for individual, free, spontaneous play of children, reducing the stiffness and unique direction of the teacher conducting all the session.

originality that must constitute the “true gymnastics”, in the 1900s there was a gymnastics of stereotypical positions, which suppressed joy, contributing to its characterization as “the sad Swedish gymnastics” (RBEF). No. 46, Jan. 1948, pp. 39-43). This was the central point that led to a change in thinking and practicing Swedish gymnastics.

The different influences that Ling's gymnastics went through since its inception intensified in the early years of the twentieth century, shaping a Modern Swedish Gymnastics. This new gymnastics has circled since then. RBEF was a vehicle that contributed to the circulation of Modern Swedish Gymnastics. The second Lingiad had a very relevant space in the journal³³.

2. The Modern Swedish Gymnastics in the Brazilian Journal of Physical Education

In the Brazilian historiography, intellectuals encouraged Swedish gymnastics in the formation of bodies in the school. Since the opinion of Rui Barbosa in 1882, Swedish gymnastics was indicated for the training of students in this space (MARINHO, S / D). Still in the nineteenth century, when the Modern Swedish Gymnastics was not in vogue, Rui Barbosa defended the “Old Swedish Gymnastics” in the Brazilian schools.

Fernando de Azevedo was another Brazilian intellectual who defended the presence of Swedish gymnastics in the education of students in the country:

This method, undoubtedly the best from the pedagogical viewpoint, is called to supply, in the education system, a serious gap that, before the nineteenth century, was left open by governments and individuals, and that, in some countries, has not been filled yet due to unforgivable passivity in view of the prejudice already too rooted. (AZEVEDO, 1920, p. 118)

He criticizes the kind of Swedish method that is effective in a large number of schools in the country, stressing that “they are but a fairly happy genre of Swedish gymnastics, that is, a kind of direct application of the Ling method.”(AZEVEDO, 1920, p. 119)³⁴. He defends the educational gymnastics of the Lingian matrix, disseminated by Lefebure³⁵, a method “molded on the rational principles established by the Swedish genius” (AZEVEDO, 1920, p. 119). The defense of pedagogical gymnastics already shows us the link of Fernando de Azevedo with the moment of action of Hjalmar Ling, responsible for developing this striking dimension of the Swedish method in the mid-nineteenth century. This pedagogical dimension of the method found advocates and disseminators not only in Lefebure, but in the French Lagrange, Tissié and Coste, pointed out by the Brazilian in his work as knowledgeable of the principles governing the Swedish method and based on whom to present the characteristics of the Swedish method: no need for braces, emphasis on breathing, among others. Through Fernando de Azevedo's choice of pedagogical gymnastics, developed by Hjalmar Ling, and for the support from striking Swedish gymnastics advocates of the late 19th century, we can suspect that Fernando de Azevedo, in 1920, was not impacted by the reconfiguration of Swedish gymnastics that had

³³ We found 43 articles that directly addressed Swedish Gymnastics in the Brazilian Journal of Physical Education during the period of its existence. Among these, 22 articles dealt with the Lingiads.

³⁴ Quitzau, Moreno and Baia (2019), urges caution when dealing with gymnastic methods. The *different methods* – German, Swedish, French, etc, written by the *different authors*, although sharing exercises and some purposes, each of these authors focused on the study of the human gesture from a different perspective, and this, in different levels, is reflected in their writings and ideas, in how they select what would be appropriate or not to their methods. So the successors of Ling's method probably did something else of that matrix cell. Different Swedish methods were being reconfigured and circulated in different regions of the world, including Brazil.

³⁵ Born in 1861, he was a member of the Belgian army, sent to Sweden to study Ling's method in the late 19th century. He was one of the important disseminators of Swedish gymnastics. He died in 1928. (PEREIRA, S.D.)

been in progress since the late nineteenth century, led by Elin Falk, Elli Björkstén, Maja Carlquist, Niels Bukh, among others.

But Azevedo was already open to receiving an idea of a reconfiguration of the method when he states that “it would not be rational to reject the resources with which experiments in physiology could improve Ling's gymnastics.” He is in favor of the reforms of Ling's method, “for its ever more perfect adaptation to the purpose it is admirably intended for as educational physiological gymnastics” (AZEVEDO, 1920, p. 124).

This adaptation even appears in RBEF articles and is recurrently addressed, especially by supporters of Modern Swedish Gymnastics, especially Agne Holmström, as Ling's wish. The basis of this argument is taken from the presentation of Ling's gymnastics base book entitled *Gymnastikens allmänna grunder*, in which the Swede states that: “I hope that future Doctors and Educators will continue this work by broadening and deepening the notions contained herein” (LING, 1834-1840, s/p.). The adaptability discourse will allow us to shape another gymnastics, The Modern Swedish Gymnastics, designed for new times, new spaces, with new didactic organization.

Yet in Inezil Penna Marinho, in the early 1950s, Swedish gymnastics appears divided into “Old Swedish Gymnastics”, marked by the works of Ling and its 19th century successors, and “Modern Swedish Gymnastics”, marked by the presence of central figures in its reconfiguration, such as Elin Falk, Elli Björkstén, Niels Bukh, Johannes Lindhard and Major Thulin.

In the 1950s Inezil had already been in contact with the Swedish Modern Gymnastics several times in the context of RBEF. The first article on Swedish gymnastics at RBEF is entitled *The Swedish System based on the Gymnastics of Ling, Adapted to the Female Sex in Argentina*, written by Magdalena E. B. de Mayne, representative of the Argentine National Institute of Physical Education, and translated by Eunice Galvão Antunes³⁶. The article is in issue number 02, in February 1944 and in its first words, we can see the adaptability of Ling's method: “One of the basic principles of gymnastics states that it must be adapted to the age, development and gender of the student”. According to the author, “no one will ever intend to deploy the system that Ling devised in its original form, precisely because that system was devised at another time and for other people” (RBEF, No. 02, Feb. 1944, p. 39).

This investment in adapting Ling's method to gender and age had been on the horizon of Ling's successors since the second half of the nineteenth century. According to Pereira (s.d.), Hjalmar Ling became interested in women's gymnastics in 1860, and in 1878, his sister, Wendla Dahl Ling published a work intended for instructors. However, the continuation and greater investment in this movement of thinking about female gymnastics and adaptation to age, according to Langlade and Langlade (1970), had the contribution and protagonism of teachers Elli Björkstén and Elin Falk, already in the transition from the nineteenth to the twentieth century, extending to the first decades of this. Elli Björkstén, for example, completed her studies at the Institute in the late nineteenth century:

Durante mis estudios en el Instituto Central de Gimnasia de Estocolmo – 1893 a 1895 o encontré que los principios sobre los cuales P. H. Ling trazó sus ideas relacionadas con la educación física, eran geniales y de indiscutible valor. Pero vi igualmente que el sistema desarrollado por sus continuadores dejaba mucho que desear desde el punto de vista pedagógico, al menos en lo que se relacionaba con la mujer y con el niño. Los sucesores de Ling, a mi juicio, mataban el espíritu del

³⁶ Eunice Galvão Antunes, in 1943, was removed from the position of full-time typist at the National Directory of Brazilian Youth to the Physical Education Division (Diário Carioca, edition 4685, year 1943, p. 3). We did not find out what her position was or the function that she performed in that Sector. The Physical Education Division was the first federal government agency to specifically organize the actions and directives related to Physical Education (CUNHA, 2017).

creador de la gimnasia moderna y aprisionaban su sistema en um marco demasiado estrecho y en formas que de ninguna manera nos atrevemos a pensar, hubieran satisfecho al gênio y alma fogosa de Pedro Enrique Ling. (LANGLADE e LANGLADE, 1970, p. 170)

The inaugural investments of the siblings Hjalmar Ling and Wendla Dahl Ling would not have been sufficient in organizing a gender- and age-adapted gymnastics. Thus, Falk worked on the organization of a children's gym and Björkstén inserted rhythm as a characteristic part of women's gymnastics. This performance was stamped at RBEF:

Sweden's excellent Physical Education pedagogue, Elin Falk, introduced new and life-giving incentives for the children's gym reform, thus creating a new era in the development of Ling's gymnastics. Shortly thereafter, Finnish Elly Björkstén, who had attended Ling's Central Gymnastics Institute, devoted efforts to form a special gym for women according to Ling's principles, especially regarding the importance of rhythm for the gymnastics. (RBEF, n° 46, Jan. 1948, p. 42.)

Elin Falk and Elly Björkstén's writings were not found on RBEF pages. Their contributions appear indirectly in some articles, highlighting their leading role in the development of Swedish gymnastics, as in Agne Holmström's text, *La Gimnasia de Ling como base racional de la moderna Educacion Física* (RBEF, No. 46, Jan. 1948; RBEF, No. 61/62, May, 1949). In this text, another character is added to the ones already mentioned, Major Josef Gottfrid Thulin.

In Brazil, Thulin's works circulate in the RBEF in three articles in the 1950s, numbers 74, 75/76 e 77/78³⁷, all of them with the title *The Gymnastics Lesson Scheme*. Contrary to what the title suggests, which would be a practical organization, a *scheme* of a *lesson*, there is a narrative loaded with explanations based on physiology, anatomy:

If muscle work is accompanied by an increase in the volume of blood expelled from the heart every minute, and if, at the same time, the resistance to be overcome by blood pressure, remains unchanged, muscle activity will undoubtedly represent an overload to the heart. This overload varies depending on the effort and muscle work. It may also vary with different forms of work. (RBEF, n° 75/76, Jun/jul, 1950, pp. 4-5)

The three reports constantly draw on the “scientific” knowledge, highlighting this feature of Thulin in working with Swedish gymnastics: “according to the Professor of Orthopedics, J. Haglund”; based on the “gymnastics physiologist, Prof. Lindhard”; in proposing rest as essential to the development between sessions, it is anchored in “E. Asmussen” and “E. Hansen”. Scientific knowledge is the basis of his *gymnastics lesson scheme*, which is not translated by a description of a set of exercises to be followed.

For Thulin, the lesson represents the teachings needed to be worked on over a period, which usually takes 40-45 minutes. In Sweden, they group these teachings under the name of the “Gymnastics Lesson Scheme”, and “when we talk about Swedish Ling Gymnastics, its use and distribution, we think of how to organize the scheme with simultaneously built and functional exercises” (RBEF, No. 74, May 1950, p. 8).

With this basis of thought, he defends the organization of a lesson scheme according to the characteristic of the public:

³⁷ Of these three articles, I found only the one referring to number 75/76, which indicated that it was the sequence of No. 74 and which would continue in No. 77/78.

The daily gymnastics lesson should vary in composition, depending on whether people lead a hard working life, or a sedentary life, whether intellectual or bureaucratic. So the daily gymnastics lesson will have to be different when it comes to people who have to do intense mental work after the lesson, or people who have nothing to do after it. (RBEF, nº 77/78, Aug./Sept. 1950, p. 5)

Thulin's way of presenting Swedish gymnastics and knowledge of the teaching method presupposes an autonomy for the teacher, requiring specific and pedagogical knowledge of Swedish gymnastics. His contribution to the RBEF in the three sequential articles are not indications of an exercise group, although it has the structure of a lesson scheme: it begins with an introduction, in which “animated exercises and games will be adopted.” Then “appears the most important part of the lesson scheme, which is divided into: Formative Part³⁸ and Applied Part (Practical Part). After these, the Conclusion, in case it becomes necessary.” Thulin states that “each teacher will be able to draw up a scheme of his own, considering the different aspects” (RBEF, No. 77/78, Aug/Sept. 1950, p. 5).

Unlike Thulin's path to teaching Swedish gymnastics, in which he presents *a lesson scheme* from questions that must be considered when setting up a gymnastics class, we can find in RBEF other authors who propose detailed, outlined models, ready for use in class.

Two reports by Curt Johansson are found in December 1949. Johansson, Swedish, was an important character in the development of Modern Swedish Gymnastics. He participated in the second Lingiad, in 1949. He received the Brazilian delegation that attended the event, as representative of the Royal Central Gymnastics Institute of Stockholm. Shortly thereafter, he was invited to teach a Physical Education course in Brazil to about 300 secondary school teachers. In 1951, in Santos, he worked at the International Course in Physical Education, promoted by the Department of Physical Education and Sports of the State of São Paulo (PUBLIO and CATALANO, 2006). He took advantage of the visit and was at the School of Physical Education at the University of Brazil, in Rio de Janeiro, teaching a course for teachers and students. In addition to these exchanges, the writings of Curt Johansson became recurrent in Brazilian journals, disseminating modern Swedish gymnastics, as we can see in the RBEF, a few months after the Lingiad, and in several newspapers of the period (MORENO and BAÍA, 2019).

Curt Johansson's reports on RBEF are characterized as screenplays, organized for use by gym teachers in their intervention. The first, entitled *Gymnastics for men: Swedish gymnastics lessons*, was part of a teacher training course in Sweden:

The three lessons that compose this work were taught by prof. Curt Johansson, at the International Gymnastics Course, organized by the Royal Central Institute of Stockholm and translate the most modern features of Swedish gymnastics. (RBEF, nº 69, Dec. 1949, p. 26)

The Swedish gymnastics lessons were divided in three: *Practical Gymnastics Lesson n.1*, *Practical Gymnastics Lesson n.2*, *Practical Gymnastics Lesson n.3*. In common, the lessons described the movements that should be performed: “high jump running by hitting an obstacle”; “Sense, antero-posterior swing of arms with circumference and jump in the same place”; “Legs

³⁸ The *Formative Part* refers to “built, mobilizing and markedly corrective attitude exercises” aimed at “body formation”; while the *Applied Part* refers to the development of *physical* (mobility, flexibility, agility, strength, among others) and *psychic* characteristics (courage, confidence, determination, among others) (RBEF, nº 77 / 78, Aug/Sept. 1950, p. 5).

apart, one arm in lateral elevation and the other behind the back, arm swing in front of the chest (1), lateral arm swing, trunk flexion with upper arm lift and knee flexion (3) insistence (1 -4)". Organized to be part of gym teacher training, these examples show us a technical language and the presence of certain codes that required training to decipher the employed terms in the respective activity. Not unlike the existing manuals, which, by grouping a set of lessons, guided the practice³⁹. The second, entitled *Swedish Gymnastics: exercises on apparatus and dexterity*, was co-authored with Lélío Ribeiro⁴⁰.

The authors of this exercise collection were teachers of the Latin section of the Stockholm International course after the Second Lingiad, which lasted from August 7 to 18 this year. (RBEF, nº 69, Dec. 1949, p. 35)

Following a different structure from the lessons already presented, the authors organize the teaching in the following axes: Jumps; Beam exercises; Exercises two by two: and Dexterity exercises. Each of these axes has dozens of variations, allowing the gym teacher to combine different exercises, assembling different lessons. Therefore, unlike the first report describing the lessons, there are groups of exercises that needed to be combined to become lessons. Thus, a deeper knowledge of the Swedish method was required, in order to enable to operate with theoretical references that would allow an alignment with the pedagogical progression of the method.

These different subjects who defended Modern Swedish Gymnastics, in their various forms of presentation, had one point in common: that the Swedish gymnastics that supported this modern way of organizing gymnastics had their basis in Ling's gymnastics. This seems to be a strategy of using the legitimacy that Ling's Gymnastics acquired in different regions of the world, aiming to continue to guarantee the expansion of its practice:

With these gym reformers over the last few decades, there are already many far-reaching innovations in gymnastics; but Ling's ideas are always the basis of modern working methods. (RBEF, nº 46, Jan. 1948, p. 42)

A constant concern is the discourse about the maintenance of Ling's base. Adaptation is a widely used term when it comes to the need for the development of the method. There is a recurrent intention to make explicit the need to safeguard the principles of Ling's gymnastics as *a priori*.

Applying these fundamental principles as well as many new experiences in medical research, Swedish gymnastics has developed in a rational and determined manner over the last decades. This has been noted especially by the sensational development of voluntary gymnastics in Sweden. In recent years, we can see that, in this field, new and great perspectives for gymnastics are being opened as an increasingly necessary factor for the current cultural progress. (RBEF, nº 46, Jan. 1948, p. 42)

³⁹ Some textbooks circulated in Brazil, such as Pedro Manoel Borges's *Theoretical Manual of School Gymnastics* (1888), the *Compendium of School Gymnastics - Brazilian Swedish-Belgian Method* (1896), by Arthur Higgins and the *Practical Gymnastics Compendium - For Use by the Normal and Primary Schools* (1897), by Antonio Martiniano Ferreira (MORENO, 2015). Most of them organized with an introductory part, with a more theoretical feature, and a practical part, featuring yet another guide to apply.

⁴⁰ Lélío was Portuguese. There is evidence that he was in Sweden specializing in gym teaching. Worked with gymnastics at the Sporting Clube de Portugal (<http://www.sportingcanal.com/?p=4126>). He was in Brazil in the 1970s, as one of the experts invited to discuss the National Physical Education (CUNHA, 2017).

This Modern Swedish Gymnastics is no longer designed for a restricted audience but it is proposed for large groups through a movement called voluntary gymnastics. New meaning has come to characterize this voluntary, twentieth-century gymnastics: gymnastics for all, health gymnastics and their general application. Their organization, exercises, and working methods have been adapted to the needs of appropriate forms of recreational exercise. School gymnasiums became recreational centers, and these centers sought to attract large audiences twice a week, seeking recreation, joy, health and entertainment through gymnastics. According to Holmström, the involvement of the community was such that in a city of 600,000 inhabitants, such as Stockholm in the 1940s, there were approximately 500 voluntary gymnastics groups meeting weekly (RBEF, No. 46, Jan. 1948).

Over the last few years we have seen in Sweden that the current situation of living conditions with their ever-increasing specialization and intensification of work and working conditions of individuals opens up huge new prospects for gymnastics according to current Swedish guidelines. (RBEF, nº 46, Jan. 1948, p. 42)

Among these new gymnastics possibilities, Holmström described sports gymnastics for sports training; Housewives gymnastics, which is characterized as gymnastics for this audience; gymnastics for workshop personnel, designed to meet the needs of this professional space; industrial gymnastics, which is attended by employees of industrial factories; the family gym, which proposed a short-time morning gym; summer gymnastics, which aimed to popularize outdoor gymnastics on sports courts, beaches, etc. (RBEF, No. 46, Jan. 1948, p. 42. Our emphasis).

Housewife gymnastics are presented as growing in the country, and in 4 years, with few participants, it has grown to 4,000 members in groups in different parts of Stockholm (RBEF, No. 46, Jan. 1948, p. 42). The representativeness of this gymnastics appears in the second Lingiad, through a demonstration of 5,000 housewives, between the ages of 20 and 72, as the report highlights (RBEF, No. 75/76, Jun/Jul 1950).

In the work of factories and workshops, a 40-45 minute lesson was not required. Modern Swedish Gymnastics had adapted: “no son ejercicios difíciles los que se ejecutan durante estos ocho o diez minutos” (RBEF, nº 46, Jan. 1948, p. 43). Easy exercises, lateral, forward and backward inclinations, movements to extend the joints and muscles most used at work are the goals of this gymnastics. In factories, the machines are stopped, pushed to the corners, and little time is devoted to “ejecutar ejercicios gimnásticos destinados a contrarestar los efectos de un trabajo monótono y fatigante” (RBEF, nº 46, Jan. 1948, p. 43).

Es un hecho indiscutible, por lo menos en Suecia, que las condiciones actuales de vida crean nuevas bases, antes ni sospechada siquiera, para hacer de la gimnasia un factor indispensable en el trabajo destinado al mejoramiento de la salud pública. En este sentido les están reservados a los representantes profesionales de todos los países nuevas y grandes tareas. Para este labor, la gimnasia, tal como Ling a creó y sus sucesores la desarrollaron, reúne las cualidades especiales que le permitirán realizar un trabajo, cada día más intenso, con el fin de mejorar el estado de la salud pública en todos los países. (RBEF, nº 46, Jan. 1948, p. 43)

Having circulated before the Lingiad occurred, this theme took shape again at RBEF after the event. A report entitled *To Increase the Biological Resistance of our Workers*, portrays an interview by Inezil Penna Marinho, telling his impressions in Lingiad as representative of

the Social Work Industry and Brazil, at the event, especially regarding the role of Physical Education in constitution of a resistance to work. To consider his role as representative of SESI at the event, Inezil points out to the cult of daily gymnastics, outdoor living, typical bicycle transport, proper nutrition as part of Swedish culture, which translates into a “life balance” of the Swedish worker. The resistance guaranteed by Physical Education contributed to a lower absence of the worker at the job, as a result of good health, ensuring a higher yield and greater profitability for the factory: “Prevention is better than cure” (RBEF, nº67/68, Oct/Nov 1949).

Expanding the possibilities of time and space for Modern Swedish Gymnastics, Austin Souchy presents Swedish gymnastics on the radio:

In the mornings, mothers practice gymnastics with their children to the musical rhythm, listening to commanding voices from the radio. To go to their jobs, men and women in large numbers do not use trucks, trams, or cars, but do so on foot to do the exercises. (RBEF, nº31, Oct. 1946, p.16)

It also proposes, just as Thulin, that exercises for peasants should not be the same for workers as they should differ from gymnastics for sedentary people. According to him, “gymnastics, with more or less stagnant attitudes, a legacy of the last century, is lowered today by rhythmic and dynamic gymnastics” (RBEF, no. 31, Oct. 1946, p.16).

The critique of this rigid, monotonous gymnastics, the “Old Swedish Gymnastics”, is presented by Langlade and Langlade (1970) as the centerpiece for new proposals for gymnastics teaching. Not only an internal reformulation was proposed - as carried out by Björkstén, Bukh, Falk and Thulin, among others - but also by other non-GCI thinkers such as Demeny, George Hébert, Lindhard, among others.

Thus, Modern Swedish Gymnastics is permeated by these tensions that marked the internal and external debates on the development of gymnastics, especially in Europe, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The RBEF, in Brazil, presented among many possibilities, the Modern Swedish Gymnastics as a practice capable of contributing to the education of the body of the Brazilian, at a time when the field of Physical Education was debating the need for a national method that would be aligned with the needs of the Brazilian people.

Final Considerations

Swedish Gymnastics, created in the early nineteenth century by Ling, underwent reconfigurations, forming a Modern Swedish Gymnastics that circulates in Brazil in the first half of the twentieth century. Ling's gymnastics brand is recurrent in studies in the field of the history of Brazilian physical education; however, little research and knowledge is known about this form of gymnastics that has been circulating for years in specialized journals in the country.

The RBEF constituted instead of circulation of knowledge about Physical Education, spreading the Modern Swedish Gymnastics as a possible practice for body education. In the 1940s and 1950s, there were intense debates about the establishment of a national method of physical education in the country, in which the adoption or creation of a form of education of the body were recurrently on the scene. Studying the Physical Education journals that circulated in the first decade of the twentieth century helps us build a version of the history of Physical Education of a scarcely researched period.

The Modern Swedish Gymnastics appears with variations of sessions with specific times according to the place of execution. Such place was no longer restricted to the institutes and gym rooms, but entered the factories, workshops, houses, seeking in these spaces to contribute to those who worked in positions harmful to health or who could not leave home. Arriving in these places, it also sought to gain an audience with gymnastics that contrasted with gymnastics

created by Ling, considered at that time by different European intellectuals who were involved in the debate about gymnastics, especially linked to a set of other gymnastic currents that emerged in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a rigid, anatomical, monotonous gymnastics. A new attire was needed for Swedish gymnastics to continue on the scene in the dispute for a place in body education, and circulates in Brazil intensifying the national debate about a method for Physical Education in the country.

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