

## PICTURING THE PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION: IMAGES AND PROPAGANDA IN *THE NEW ERA* (1920-1939)\*

*La Escuela Nueva en Imágenes:  
Fotografía y Propaganda en The New Era (1920-1939)*

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Reception date: 11/02/2018 • Acceptation date: 16/03/2018

**Abstract.** In this article we analyse the propaganda work done by the journal *The New Era* for divulgating and popularising the progressive education movement. The review started in 1920, so it was the first in transmitting the ideas of this movement, and also the first English language journal that became the channel of expression of the New Education Fellowship, for divulgating the innovative ideals in the Anglo-Saxon countries.

We have studied the propaganda work from the images that the journal has published between 1920 and 1939. As a research method we have chosen a combination of content analysis and a grounded theory approach. We have identified a list of categories that are connected with the characteristics of new or progressive education. We have considered as starting point that all the ideals and school practices made more visible by the journal, i.e., the ones that were shown in many images, were those used for building a public image of the New Education.

We have organized the visual discourse built by *The New Era* around six ideas: coeducation, activity, freedom, nature, child-centred, and individualization *versus* socialization. We have quantified the number of images that were published in connexion with everyone of these ideas, making comparisons between spaces and times. The quantitative analysis has al-

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\* This work forms part of the project "Educational Progressivism and School Tradition in Spain Through Photography (1900-1970) [EDU2014-52498-C2-1-P], funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness within the framework of the National R&D and Innovation Plan.

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lowed us to explain general patterns and exceptional features. Finally, we present the most remarkable characteristics of the iconographical discourse about the New Education that was built and propagated by *The New Era*.

**Keywords:** Progressive Education; *The New Era*; Pedagogical propaganda; Photography.

**Resumen.** *En este artículo se aborda la labor de propaganda sobre el movimiento de la Escuela Nueva que realizó The New Era, la revista en lengua inglesa que fue pionera, pues comenzó a publicarse en 1920, y también la primera que se erigió en órgano de expresión de la New Education Fellowship, la organización que aglutinó a los educadores de todo el mundo que compartían las ideas innovadoras del movimiento.*

*Esta labor de propaganda se ha estudiado a partir de las imágenes que la revista publicó entre 1920 y 1939. A través de una metodología que combina el análisis de contenido y la grounded theory identificamos una serie de categorías que relacionamos con los grandes ideales de la Escuela Nueva. Consideramos, como punto de partida, que aquellas ideas y prácticas escolares que la revista visibilizó más —es decir, de las que publicó más imágenes— fueron aquellas con las que pretendía construir en la opinión pública un imaginario de la Escuela Nueva.*

*Las seis ideas en torno a las que hemos organizado el discurso visual construido por esta revista son: coeducación, actividad, libertad, contacto con la naturaleza, paidocentrismo, e individualización vs socialización. De cada una de ellas hemos cuantificado el número de imágenes que se publicaron, diferenciadas por países y por períodos temporales. A partir del análisis cuantitativo, hemos tratado de explicar las pautas generales y los rasgos excepcionales, para concluir presentando las características más destacables del discurso iconográfico sobre la Nueva Educación que construyó y divulgó The New Era.*

**Palabras clave:** Escuela Nueva; The New Era; Propaganda pedagógica; Fotografía.

## INTRODUCTION: PEDAGOGICAL PROPAGANDA AND THE NEW SCHOOL

There is no doubt that the inclusion of the term “propaganda” in a title carries its risks, as it tends to prepare the reader, *a priori*, to bear witness to the relating of a historical event in which an attempt was made to manipulate the masses and steer them in a given political or ideological direction through the use of techniques that, at the very least, concealed

or falsified information. This posture can be explained by the negative connotations that the word “propaganda” acquired beginning with the end of World War I; its negative associations only grew worse after the Second World War, when the world discovered more fully the grim reality behind so much of the Nazi regime’s operations and propaganda.

Yet until the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the concept itself had a basically neutral meaning, one that stemmed from its Latin root and alluded to the propagation of a given doctrine or practice. For instance, this is the meaning that Spanish “institutionists”<sup>1</sup> had in mind when, from at least 1894, they spoke of “pedagogical propaganda”; the term was even used, in 1913, to describe a movement whose objective was to carry out a far-reaching campaign of educational divulgation in order to heighten people’s awareness about educational problems and win their support for top-down cultural renovation in Spain.<sup>2</sup>

World War I saw the use of a new type of propaganda in which the visual image was used as a means for communicating persuasive messages in new technological formats, such as the movies or the political poster. This was also the first time that certain modern techniques of public opinion control from the domain of the Social Sciences were used on a broad scale, especially by the allies. After the war, the greater understanding of these techniques and mechanisms for manipulation as used by governments, together with the systematical practice of referring to an enemy’s communications and messages as “propaganda”, resulted in the word’s acquiring a negative connotation. Its association with practices employed by the Stalinist and Nazi regimes only accentuated this negative meaning.<sup>3</sup>

It was in the 1920s, however, that a number of pioneering publicists tried to confer a traditional sense to the concept, insisting on a definition

<sup>1</sup> With the name “institutionists” we refer to the people that shared the ideas from the *Institución Libre de Enseñanza*, a reform group that was behind many of the progressive educational initiatives that took place in Spain between 1876 and 1936.

<sup>2</sup> Rafael Altamira, *Exigencias de la propaganda pedagógica* (Madrid: Tipografía “La Itálica”, 1913), and Rafael María de Labra, *Discurso pronunciado el día 11 de noviembre de 1913 en el Ateneo de Madrid, con motivo de la apertura de las Cátedras* (Madrid: Est. Tip. de Fortanet, 1913), 6-9.

<sup>3</sup> Colin Moore, *Propaganda Prints. A History of Art in the Service of Social and Political Change* (London: A&C Black Publishers Limited, 2010), 7-8, and Stanley Newcourt-Nowodworski, *La propaganda negra en la Segunda Guerra Mundial* (Barcelona: Algaba Ediciones, 2006).

derived from the realm of information; they considered propaganda to be a mechanism for the widespread dissemination of ideas and as a concerted effort made for divulging specific beliefs and doctrines. Edward Louis Bernays, the Austrian who, in addition to being Freud's nephew, is considered the inventor of the theory of propaganda, described it in these terms in his seminal work from 1928. Bernays used the expression "modern propaganda" to refer to the practice of creating images in the minds of millions of people in order to connect them to an idea, an enterprise or a group, and he saw the legitimacy of such efforts as being determined by the value of the "work" that is being publicized as well as the accuracy of the information used in its diffusion.<sup>4</sup>

In this context of the discovery of public opinion, the first question that this article will address is whether the leaders of the world-wide pedagogical movement that emerged in the 1920s —known in Spain as the *Escuela Nueva* and in the English-speaking world as "New Education" or "Progressive Education"— were aware of the importance of using modern propaganda techniques for spreading their pedagogical messages on a large scale. Admittedly, the question is to a degree rhetorical, as abundant literature from recent years has served both to demythologize the movement and show the adroitness in matters of propaganda of its first and foremost leaders. The fact that Maria Montessori promoted documentary films about her methods and presented them to sizeable audiences in the United States and Great Britain starting around 1910,<sup>5</sup> and that her example was followed by Decroly<sup>6</sup> and many others in the 1920s, justify Ferrière's affirmation that "les films d'Éducation nouvelle ont foisonné" ("films on New Education abounded") in all international congresses of the New Education Fellowship after 1929.<sup>7</sup>

As is well known, the New Education was a transnational movement that received its first important impulse from the celebration in 1921 of

<sup>4</sup> Edgar L. Bernays, *Propaganda* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1928), 20-25.

<sup>5</sup> Gerald L. Gutek y Patricia A. Gutek, *Bringing Montessori to America. S.S. McClure, Maria Montessori and the Campaign to Publicize Montessori Education* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2016), 132 and 141.

<sup>6</sup> Angelo Van Gorp, "The Decroly School in documentaries (1930s-1950s): contextualising propaganda from within", *Paedagogica Historica* 47, no. 4 (2011): 507-523.

<sup>7</sup> Adolphe Ferrière, "La formation des Maîtres à l'aide du cinéma", *Pour l'Ère Nouvelle* XIII, no. 100 (1934): 197.

the first International Congress on New Education in Calais,<sup>8</sup> which gave birth to the New Education Fellowship (NEF), the network into which were integrated all educators who believed in a child-centred education.<sup>9</sup> Three figures were key in the founding of the Fellowship: Adolphe Ferrière from Switzerland, Elizabeth Rotten from Germany and Beatrice Ensor from the U.K. The latter was responsible for the institutional fundamentals of the NEF, the Theosophical Fraternity in Education, which she had helped to establish in 1915, in the middle of the horrors of World War I. Ensor was convinced that the war could have been avoided with a different kind of education;<sup>10</sup> she believed that the new education could change the world, not through politics but by “changing public opinion and the hearts and minds of men and women”,<sup>11</sup> in other words, with acts of propaganda, as the post-war intellectuals understood the concept.

Ensor was seen in her own country as a sort of “super woman”, fully committed to carrying out the “propaganda work” of the NEF, i.e., “to spread ideals in teaching that would make future hostilities unthinkable”. During her lifetime she carried out numerous and varied propagand-

<sup>8</sup> Jean-François Condette and Antoine Savoye, “Une éducation pour l’ère nouvelle, le congrès international d’éducation de Calais 1921”, *Études Sociales* 163 (2016): 43-79.

<sup>9</sup> Celia M. Jenkins, “The professional middle class and the social origins of progressivism: A case study of the New Education Fellowship, 1920-1950” (PhD Thesis, University of London, 1989); Celia Jenkins, “New Education and its emancipatory interests (1920-1950)”, *History of Education* 29, no. 2 (2000): 139-151; Margaret H. White, “The New Education Fellowship: An international community of practice”, *New Era in Education* 82, no. 3 (2001): 71-75; Kevin J. Brehony, “From the particular to the general, the continuous to the discontinuous: progressive education revisited”, *History of Education* 30, no. 5 (2001): 413-432; Kevin J. Brehony, “A New Education for a New Era: The Contribution of the Conferences of the New Education Fellowship to the Disciplinary Field of Education 1921-1938”, *Paedagogica Historica* 40, no. 5-6 (2004): 733-755; Laurent Gutierrez, “La Ligue Internationale pour l’Éducation Nouvelle. Contribution à l’histoire d’un mouvement international de réforme de l’enseignement (1921-1939)”, *Spirale – Revue de Recherches en Éducation* 45 (2009): 29-41, and Joseph Watras, “The New Education Fellowship and UNESCO’s programme of fundamental education”, *Paedagogica Historica* 47, no. 1-2 (2011): 191-205.

<sup>10</sup> Sylvain Wagnon, “Les théosophes et l’organisation internationale de l’éducation nouvelle (1911-1921)”, *REHMLAC+*, 9, no. 1 (2017): 146-180; Sue C. Middleton, “New Zealand Theosophists in “New Education” networks, 1880s-1938”, *History of Education Review* 46, no. 1 (2017): 42-57, and Maxwell D. Lawson, “The New Education Fellowship: The Formative Years”, *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 13, no. 2 (1981): 24-28. Beatrice Ensor identified so much the Theosophical Fraternity in Education with the NEF that in 1937, during the opening session of its VII Conference, that took place in Cheltenham (UK), she clearly stated that she founded the NEF in 1915, and not in 1921, the year in which the NEF was actually founded. “Seventh World Conference of New Education Fellowship”, *Cheltenham Chronicle and Gloucestershire Graphic*, August 8, 1936.

<sup>11</sup> “Education Ideals. Lecture to Teachers at Portsmouth”, *Portsmouth Evening News*, November 17, 1921.

da activities, understood as pedagogical divulgation directed at public opinion as well as professionals from the realm of education; in addition to her role as speaker and ambassador of the New School around the world, she worked as an organizer of “educational tourist traffic”<sup>12</sup> and took part in the biannual congresses of the NEF.<sup>13</sup>

Ensor’s greatest contribution, however, was the publication, starting in 1920, of the journal *The New Era*, the organ of expression for the Theosophical Fraternity. When the NEF was created in July of 1921 she ceded her magazine to the cause and the divulgation of the New School movement in English-speaking countries. The journal would serve as a model for the French-language version, *Pour l’Ère Nouvelle*, established in January, 1922 and directed by Adolphe Ferrière, as well as for the German version, *Das Werdende Zeitalter*, published for the first time the same year and headed by Elisabeth Rotten. These three publications would become the principle source for the ideas of the New School movement for European educators and other audiences, and its subscribers automatically became members of the NEF. Edward Bernays pointed out in 1928 that public meetings were no longer the effective propaganda tools that they had been fifty years earlier, whereas a journal was, in his opinion, an ideal medium; by being able to deliberately select the material “in accordance with a continuous policy”, as a result it “tends rather to become a propagandist organ, propagandizing for a particular idea”.<sup>14</sup> To be sure, there is no lack of literature regarding *Pour l’Ère Nouvelle* and frequently it has been highlighted its militant, propagandist nature;<sup>15</sup> Beatrice Ensor would also speak of the “propagandist character” of her own publication, *The New Era*, in 1934, although she was evidently using a very particular interpretation of the concept, one having to do with the

<sup>12</sup> “She Pulls the Strings” and “Plans for Professors”, *Birmingham Daily Gazette*, July 19, 1932.

<sup>13</sup> Brehony, “A new education for a new era”, 733-755.

<sup>14</sup> Bernays, *Propaganda*, 153.

<sup>15</sup> Daniel Hameline, “Les premières années de *Pour l’Ère nouvelle*: militantisme et propagande?”, *Les Sciences de l’éducation – Pour l’Ère nouvelle* 35, no. 4 (2002): 34-35. See also, Béatrice Haenggeli-Jenni, “*Pour l’Ère Nouvelle*: une revue carrefour entre science et militance (1922-1940)” (PhD thesis, University of Geneva, 2011); Béatrice Haenggeli-Jenni, ““Savoirs” constitués et programmes scolaires: débats au cœur de la revue *Pour l’Ère Nouvelle* (1922-1940)”, *Recherches & Éducatives* 4 (2011): 13-25; and Béatrice Haenggeli-Jenni y Rita Hofstetter, “*Pour l’Ère Nouvelle* (1922-1940). La science convoquée pour fonder une “Internationale de l’Éducation””, *Carrefours de l’Éducation* 31 (2011): 137-159.

magazine's meagre number of subscribers.<sup>16</sup> As for *Das Werdende Zeitalter*, the German publication was shut down in 1932, its contents being in flagrant opposition to the ideas of the grand propagandist machine that was the National-Socialist Regime.<sup>17</sup>

In this article, we set out to study the pedagogical *corpus* of one of the three loudspeakers of the New School movement, *The New Era*, but our analysis will deal exclusively with its collection of images. We will examine how the thirty principles of New Education—which Ferrière presented in an enumerative structure much like a conventional narrative<sup>18</sup>—were represented iconographically, in order to discover which aspects of the linguistic discourse are reflected in the visual discourse and which are not. Our initial hypothesis is that those educational practices highlighted in the journal are those with which the movement wished to build in the collective public opinion an imaginary of the New Education.

Educational historiography has shown a great interest in recent years in analyzing the iconographic record of the New School movement. Joseph Coquoz has shown how the movement's figures used images in a very conscious way to underline its break with the so-called "traditional school".<sup>19</sup> Francisca Comas and Bernat Sureda determined that the innovative methodological approaches included the use of their own iconography as well as a new graphic grammar. In this grammar we find signs of an imaginary that is centred around aspects of children's autonomy, including their ability to learn and assimilate values free from external pressures, freedom as a fundamental educational tool, the importance of games and physical exercise and the discreet role of the teacher.<sup>20</sup> Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor mentioned five defining elements of what they called "the progressive image in the history of education": the mar-

<sup>16</sup> Steffi Koslowski, *Die New Era der New Education Fellowship: Ihr Beitrag zur Internationalität der Reformpädagogik in 20. Jahrhundert* (Bad Heilbrunn: Julius Klinkhardt, 2013), 159.

<sup>17</sup> Dietmar Haubfleisch and Jörg-Werner Link (eds.), *Das Werdende Zeitalter (Internationale Erziehungsrundschau)* (Bonn: Archiv der Arbeiterjugendbewegung, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> Adolphe Ferrière, "L'École nouvelle et le Bureau international des Écoles nouvelles", *Pour l'Ère Nouvelle* 4, no. 15 (1925): 2-8.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph Coquoz, "Un modèle suisse "d'École active" durant l'entre-deux-guerres: images et mirages", *Paedagogica Historica* 36, no. 1 (2000): 369-388.

<sup>20</sup> Francisca Comas Rubí and Bernat Sureda García, "The photography and propaganda of the Maria Montessori method in Spain (1911-1931)", *Paedagogica Historica* 48, no. 4 (2012): 571-587.

ginal position of the teacher, children on their own and concentrated, bodies with varied expressions and in movement, children making art and workshop activities in group settings.<sup>21</sup> Richard Aldrich identified three features found in the child-centred approaches practiced in British education: the location of the school; the use of open spaces; the reliance on active teaching and learning methods that combined individual and group work.<sup>22</sup>

In the only existing study on *The New Era* to date a cursory look is given to the movement's iconography, accompanied by an admonition for a fuller, serial analysis of all the published images to be carried out in the future.<sup>23</sup> This is precisely the methodological approach that we have chosen for this article, as we deem it the most appropriate means for addressing the principle concerns that arise.

## RESEARCH METHODS AND IMAGE VARIABLES

The conferences and journals of the NEF became the stages upon which the supporters of new education could perform and where the growing interest in progressive education could be demonstrated in the form of model practices. To get a look at what the "progressive child" looked like in the first decades of the twentieth century, we turn to one of these journals, *The New Era*, or, to quote the full title of the first issue of January 1920: *Education for the new era. An international quarterly magazine for the promotion and reconstruction in education*. We will look at all issues from January 1920 through December 1939. While we will focus mainly on the printed images, we will also take into consideration the captions and the accompanying texts, in order to get more information about the context. The number of images in 20 volumes of *The New Era* comes to a total of 944, not including the (relatively few and often repeated) illustrations that accompanied the advertisements.

<sup>21</sup> Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor, "The Progressive Image in the History of Education: Stories of Two Schools", *Visual Studies* 22, no. 2 (2007): 159-163.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Aldrich, "The Plowden report, 1967: A visual study in primary school location, space and learning". Paper presented to ISCHE XX, Leuven University, Belgium, 1998.

<sup>23</sup> Koslowski, *Die New Era*, 285-292.



The French-language version of the journal, *Pour l'Ère Nouvelle*, was discarded as a source: although it has been available online from its first issue in 1922 until 1947, it hardly includes images. The German-language version, *Das Werdende Zeitalter*, did contain photographs and drawings, but it was only available for the period 1922-1932. That made *The New Era* the best source for analysing visual content in order to tackle our research question. We ended up with a dataset that covered a time span of twenty years, allowing us to make a comparison between *times*, for example the differences between the 1920s and the 1930s. A comparison between *places* was also an option because the photographs of *The New Era* were taken not only in England, but also in the USA, France, Germany, and many other places around the globe, including Spain, although from this country very few photographs were published.

As a research method, we choose a combination of content analysis<sup>24</sup> and a grounded theory approach.<sup>25</sup> Content analysis is not an uncommon technique for analysing visual content,<sup>26</sup> and it is well suited for the analysis of large amounts of images. The collection and analysis of our visual data was done in several steps:

1) Gaining access to all issues of *The New Era* in the period 1920-1939. The first volumes of the journal were available in the archive of the Institute of Education in London, the more recent volumes in the library of the same institution. For all volumes, except the first one, we also accessed the collection of the Royal Library in The Hague, the Netherlands.

2) Making photographs of all images, including captions and other relevant text fragments. The number of images was 944, the number of photographed pages (image + text) was 1.064.

<sup>24</sup> Klaus Krippendorff, *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology* (London: Sage, 2004).

<sup>25</sup> Anselm Strauss and Juliet M. Corbin, *Grounded theory methodology: An overview*, in *Handbook of qualitative research*, eds. Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1994), 273-285.

<sup>26</sup> Philip Bell, "Content analysis of visual images", in *Handbook of visual analysis*, eds. Theo Van Leeuwen and Carey Jewitt (London: Sage, 2001), 10-34; Annekatrin Bock, Holger Iserman and Thomas Knieper, "Quantitative content analysis of the visual", in *The Sage Handbook of visual research methods*, eds. Eric Margolis and Luc Pauwels (London: Sage, 2011), 265-282, and Gillian Rose, *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials* (London: Sage, 2016).

3) Describing all images with keywords inspired by the previously mentioned literature regarding the characteristics of new or progressive education (open coding).

4) Entering all open codes as three string or text variables, labelled as content, caption, and context, in a SPSS data file.

5) Constantly comparing open codes for arriving at a limited set of axial codes.

6) Adding all axial codes as nominal variables in our SPSS data file.

7) Analysing the bivariate relationships between the nominal variables with cross tabulations, including the calculation of the statistical significance level of these relationships with Chi-square tests.

8) Analysing the multivariate relationships between the nominal variables with multiple correspondence analysis.<sup>27</sup> For performing such an analysis, we have used the statistical programme HOMALS as developed by the Department of Data Theory of the University of Leiden, the Netherlands.<sup>28</sup>

The procedure of adding open and axial codes to images—for enhancing reliability—was discussed with a fellow researcher on several occasions and resulted in the following list of nominal variables:

1) *Gender* with the categories: (a) a single boy, (b) a single girl, (c) several boys, (d) several girls, (e) a mix of genders.

2) *Nakedness*, with the categories: (a) at least one fully naked child, (b) at least one child with bare feet, chest, and/or limbs, (c) all children are fully dressed, including some kind of footwear.

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<sup>27</sup> This technique for discovering patterns between codes attached to images, was used in the following articles: Sjaak Braster, "Educational change and Dutch classroom photographs: A qualitative and quantitative analysis", in *The Black Box of Schooling. A Cultural History of the Classroom*, eds. Sjaak Braster, Ian Grosvenor and María del Mar del Pozo Andrés (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2011), 21-37, and Sjaak Braster and María del Mar del Pozo Andrés, "Education and the children's colonies in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939): the images of the community ideal", *Paedagogica Historica* 51, no. 4 (2015): 455-477.

<sup>28</sup> Giovanni Di Franco, "Multiple correspondance analysis: one only or several techniques?", *Quality & Quantity. International Journal of Methodology* 50, no. 3 (2016): 1299-1315.

3) *Happiness*, with the categories: (a) at least one child is laughing (=teeth are visible), (b) at least one child is smiling (=teeth are not visible), (c) all children have serious expressions.

4) *Teacher*, with the categories: (a) dominant position (=active, in control) (b) tangential position (=passive, hardly noticeable), (c) absence.

5) *Individuality*, with the categories: (a) individual (=children work, play or act alone, but also material objects as a result of individual work), (b) social (=at least two children interact with each other, or children/adults interact with each other, or children/adults are cooperating in a collective project, or material objects as a result of group work).

6) *Activity*, with the categories: (a) the three R's, i.e. reading, writing, and arithmetic, (b) crafts, (c) dance, music, and theatre, (d) free play, (e) gardening, animals, (f) science, (g) gymnastics, sport, and other body-related activities.

7) *Space*, with the categories: (a) inside (=inside a classroom, within the walls of a building), (b) outside (=outside a school, in the open air).

8) *Time*, with the categories: (a) 1920-1924, (b) 1925-1929, (c) 1930-1934, (d) 1935-1939.

9) *Place*,<sup>29</sup> with the categories: (a) United Kingdom, (b) USA, (c) France, (d) Germany, (e) all other countries. Most of the images in *The New Era*, 652 out of 944 to be precise, could be traced back to a specific country. In total 34 countries were detected, but only for the locations mentioned above did we have a substantial number of images available for making comparisons between countries.

## CHARACTERISTICS AND THEMES OF THE IMAGES PUBLISHED IN *THE NEW ERA*

An initial overview of *The New Era* iconography calls for a description of the types of images that were published in the journal during the pe-

<sup>29</sup> About the differences between place and space, see Marjolein Selten and Fleur van der Zandt, "Space vs. Place". [http://geography.ruhosting.nl/geography/index.php?title=Space\\_vs.\\_place](http://geography.ruhosting.nl/geography/index.php?title=Space_vs._place) (accessed on 31-12-2017).

riod of the study. The results are given in Table 1. We have grouped the images, which total 944, into four different categories. The most numerous group is that of photographs, which make up 76.3% of the images published. There is also a significant number of drawings, which account for 15.9% of the iconographic production. Paintings represent only 5.9% of the total, while the presence of graphs, charts and maps is negligible, amounting to a mere 1.9% of the images.

Table 1. Type of image in *The New Era* (1920-1939) by period of time

Image type	1920-1924	1925-1929	1930-1934	1935-1939	Total
Drawing	8 17,4%	26 13,8%	70 13,3%	46 24,9%	150 15,9%
Painting	19 41,3%	23 12,2%	8 1,5%	6 3,2%	56 5,9%
Photograph	19 41,3%	137 72,9%	432 82,3%	132 71,4%	720 76,3%
Graph/table/map	0 0,0%	2 1,1%	15 2,9%	1 0,5%	18 1,9%
Total	46 100,0%	188 100,0%	525 100,0%	185 100,0%	944 100,0%

Chi-square = 157,8; df = 9; p < .001

An analysis of the iconographic production by periods gives the following results: in the first period, from 1920-1924, the journal published very few images. Some 40% of these were reproductions of paintings, generally made by the students, while another 40% was comprised of photos of the schools, the classrooms and of the best-known educators. The following period saw a steep increase in the number of photographs, which reached 70-80% of the magazine's total iconographic production. The number of drawings, almost all made by students, also underwent a relative increase in the period 1935-1939.

An overwhelming majority of the images, 95.9%, was printed in black and white. Colour images appeared primarily in the period 1920-1924, in which they made up 23.9% of the total, while between 1925 and 1929 their presence was reduced to 12.8%. The following decade saw the com-

plete disappearance of colour images from the journal, an indication of the effect that the economic crisis of 1929 had on the publication.

Another element of analysis has to do with the size of the images (Table 2). Over the course of time, the number of images that took up an entire page decreased while the number of smaller images —those occupying less than half a page— grew. The greatest total number of images was printed in the period 1930-1934 (N=525) and more than half of them (52.2%) were large, i.e., they took up the greater part of a page or the entire page. In contrast, the five-year period of 1935-1939 saw a decrease in the number of images printed (N=185) as well as in their dimensions, the majority of them being medium-sized (59.5%) or small (12.4%).

Table 2. Size of the images in *The New Era* (1920-1939) by period of time

Image size	1920-1924	1925-1929	1930-1934	1935-1939	Total
Small	0 0,0%	21 11,2%	29 5,5%	23 12,4%	73 7,7%
Medium	21 45,7%	53 28,2%	205 39,0%	110 59,5%	389 41,2%
Large	21 45,7%	84 44,7%	274 52,2%	46 24,9%	425 45,0%
Full page	4 8,7%	30 16,0%	17 3,2%	6 3,2%	57 6,0%
Total	46 100,0%	188 100,0%	525 100,0%	185 100,0%	944 100,0%

Chi-square = 101,6; df = 9; p < .001

An initial scrutiny of the quantitative data afforded by the images published in *The New Era* shows three iconographic groups that were easy to identify, objectify and classify: images of school buildings, landscapes and portraits of some of the more well-known figures of the New Education movement. (Table 3). In general, none of these three themes were especially important, with one significant exception during the journal's first decade of life, namely, the portraits of some of the New Education heroes.

Table 3. Subjects of the images in *The New Era* (1920-1939) by period of time

Image subject	1920-1924	1925-1929	1930-1934	1935-1939	Total
Buildings	4 8,7%	19 10,1%	23 4,4%	5 2,7%	51 5,4%
Landscapes	1 2,2%	6 3,2%	6 1,1%	0 0,0%	13 1,4%
Portraits of adults	2 4,3%	32 17,0%	44 8,4%	3 1,6%	81 8,6%
Active children	10 21,7%	64 34,0%	288 54,9%	95 51,4%	457 48,4%
Subjects related with children	29 63,0%	67 35,6%	164 31,2%	82 44,3%	342 36,2%
Total	46 100,0%	188 100,0%	525 100,0%	185 100,0%	944 100,0%

Chi-square = 82,3; df = 12; p < .001

Edward Bernays claimed that one of propaganda’s powerful mechanisms was the use of “the vivid dramatization of personality”, and that public figures needed to give very careful thought to what kind of image of themselves they wanted to convey in relation to their objectives.<sup>30</sup> It is therefore of special interest to analyze the selection of figures from the New Education chosen to appear in the pages of *The New Era*.

The first portrait published by the magazine, in 1923, had all the objective characteristics of images that are meant to stand out: it was a large-scale portrait, printed on glossy paper. The person shown was Harold Baillie-Weaver, President of the NEF and General Secretary of the English branch of the Theosophical Society from 1916 until 1921. The second person featured in a portrait in *The New Era*, in 1924, was the famous psychologist Carl Gustav Jung. And in 1925 the third portrait to appear was that of George S. Arundale, who, together with Beatrice Ensor, had helped to found the Theosophical Fraternity in Education in 1915. Ensor, the founder and editor of the journal, first published her own portrait in 1925, in full size. Over a twenty-year period, four photo-

<sup>30</sup> Bernays, *Propaganda*, 156-157.

graphs of her would find their way into the pages of the publication. She invariably appears in the centre of the image, surrounded by other icons of the New Education movement, nearly always men.

The person shown most often in *The New Era* —five times, to be precise— was the Nobel laureate Rabindranath Tagore, the first chancellor of the National University of India, an institution promoted and supported by a group of Theosophists, including George S. Arundale. The school founded by Tagore, Santiniketan, was also the first new school to have its photograph shown in the publication, in 1924, in an image that would be reproduced several times in the following years (Image 1). It would seem more than justified, therefore, to say that Rabindranath Tagore was chosen by *The New Era* to be the icon and the symbol of the New Education movement. The journal's conversion of this Hindu writer and educator into the iconic figure of the movement has several explanations. The first undoubtedly has to do with the close relationship between Tagore's family and the Theosophist Society.<sup>31</sup> The second was the sudden discovery that the spiritualists—as well as the Theosophists, who included many newcomers to the NEF—made of the East as a spiritual repository, with India as the centre of the mystical universe.<sup>32</sup> Yet another reason is related to Tagore's change of identity after his trip to London in 1912, when he began to write in English and to see himself as a link between East and West, one of the “poets and prophets” who was called to help find common spiritual roots and to build a new global modernity based on communication and dialogue between the two worlds.<sup>33</sup> The Theosophical groups helped him with the *mise-en-scène* behind this role as a transnational apostle by circulating photographs such as the one in Image 1, which, in addition to emphasizing an aura of oriental fantasy, were inserted into texts where Tagore expounded on his pedagogical ideals, very similar to those of the NEF. It is curious that the photograph cho-

<sup>31</sup> Mriganka Mukhopadhyay, “The Occult and the Orient. The Theosophical Society and the Socio-Religious Space in Colonial India”, *Presidency Historical Review* 1, no. 2 (2015): 9-37.

<sup>32</sup> Isaac Lubelsky, *Celestial India: Madame Blavatsky and the Birth of Indian Nationalism* (Oakville, CT: Equinox Publication, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Michael Collins, “History and the Postcolonial. Rabindranath Tagore's Reception in London, 1912-1913”, *The International Journal of the Humanities* 4, no. 9 (2007): 71-83, and Daniel Laqua, “Transnational intellectual cooperation, the League of Nations, and the problem of order”, *Journal of Global History* 6, no. 2 (2011): 231.

sen contradicts many of the educational tenets of the New School in the way that it shows the teacher in the centre of the teaching-learning process, surrounded by students who are obediently doing their exercises much as they would in a traditional school. Hero worship seems to be the dominant message of this photograph, in which only the trees in the background suggest the closeness to nature that was so important to Tagore.



Image 1. Rabindranath Tagore in his school Santiniketan in Bolpur, India  
Source: "The Poet as Schoolmaster", *The New Era*, 4 (1924): 84.

After Santiniketan *The New Era* published many images of new schools. Although for the most part schools were only shown once, some centres did get more publicity than others, to judge from the number of times that they were shown in the journal (Table 4). The schools with the most photographs published were those of the suburb of Winnetka, USA (N=16); that of Odenwaldschule in Germany (N=14); the Maison des Petits, Switzerland (N=11) and the Francis Parker School in Chicago, USA (N=9). What stands out from this data is the



fact that *The New Era*, published in Great Britain and run by British editors, published more images of foreign schools than of national schools. And it hardly seems a coincidence that Frensham Heights, in Farnham, would show up in the greatest number of photos among British schools (N=8); its director was none other than Beatrice Ensor, editor of *The New Era*.

Table 4. Most photographed schools in *The New Era* (1920-1939) by country/region

UK	USA	Europe/Africa
	Public Schools Winnetka: 16	Odenwald School (Germany): 14 Maison des Petits (Switzerland): 11
Frensham Heights, Farnham: 8 Holt School, Liverpool: 8	Francis Parker School, Chicago: 9	
	Lincoln School, New York: 6 Grant School, Pasadena: 6	Decroly School (Belgium): 6
Bedales, Petersfield: 5 St George School, Harpenden: 5 King Arthur Sch., Musselburgh: 5	Merril-Palmer School, Detroit: 5 Beaver County School, Mass.: 5	St. Peter School, Jo'burg (SA): 5
Northumberland Heath School: 4		Hamburg School (Germany): 4 Lauterwater (SA): 4
Bierton Road Sch., Birmingham: 3		Ecole des Roches: 3

Clearly, the central theme of the images published in *The New Era* was childhood (Table 3), and the message that was pushed most insistently was that of the child-centred approach of New Education. 48.4% of the pictures show children engaged in learning or other types of activities, either accompanied by teachers or adults, by themselves or in groups with classmates. Another 36.2% of the images also bear some relation to the children in that they show pictures, drawings or other artwork made

by them. Childhood artwork was one of the most visible iconographic themes in *The New Era*, especially in its first five years of existence, when it went to considerable lengths to print full-colour copies of paintings made by the more talented students.

Whereas the images of schools shown in the magazine highlighted the movement's international orientation, the selection of photos of children reveals a clear preference for those from the English-speaking world (Table 5): of the pictures of children, groups of children and adults/adolescents (N=457), the majority are from the U.K. (N=147), followed by the United States (N=88), France (N=27) and Germany (N=21). The non-western world is meagerly represented, the exceptions being India (N=15) and the Soviet Union (N=11).

Table 5. Boys and girls in the images in *The New Era* (1920-1939) by place

	UK	USA	France	Germany	Rest	Total
Boys and girls	87 59,2%	59 67,0%	18 66,7%	9 42,9%	78 44,8%	251 54,9%
Boy or girl	4 2,7%	4 4,5%	0 0,0%	4 19,0%	22 12,6%	34 7,4%
Boys or girls	56 38,1%	25 28,4%	9 33,3%	8 38,1%	74 42,5%	172 37,6%
Total	147 100,0%	88 100,0%	27 100,0%	21 100,0%	174 100,0%	457 100,0%

Chi-square = 28,1; df = 8; p < .001

## ICONOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE NEW EDUCATION IN *THE NEW ERA*

The three journals that served as mouthpieces for the New School movement considered the propagation of their ideals to be one of their fundamental tasks. Texts and images joined forces in the pages of *The New Era* to demonstrate and illustrate the movement's grand innovative principles. We part from the assumption that if the journal's editors gave greater iconographic presence to certain representations, it was because

they believed that certain images would have more of an impact and a greater permanence for the reader. In other words, certain types of images were seen as having more propagandist power. Based on this premise, we have organized our analysis of this photographic series in accordance with six ideas that are universally accepted as features of the New School: coeducation, activity, freedom, contact with nature, child-centred and individualization *vs.* socialization.

## Coeducation

The New School movement maintained that the two sexes should be educated together and should take part in common activities. An analysis of the 457 images with boys and girls published by *The New Era* from 1920-1939 seems to ratify this endorsement of coeducation: in 54.9% of the photographs boys and girls can be seen together. There are, however, differences between countries in this respect; the United States (67%) and France (66.7%) show a considerably higher number of pictures of mixed groups than do Great Britain (59.2%), Germany (42.9%) or the rest of the world (44.8%).

It is worth noting, though, that coeducation is not shown as an exclusive option by *The New Era*. In 37.6% of the images we see boys and girls working (or playing) separately, and in these depictions we tend to find the boys engaged in activities traditionally considered to be masculine, such as manual work, while the girls are most often engaged in “expressive” activities such as dance.

The number of photos in which we see children on their own is negligible (7.4%), and in these photos they can generally be seen in a gesture of marked concentration. Catherine Burke and Ian Grosvenor considered this to be a characteristic representation of the “progressive image” in education history, one that served to attenuate to some degree the tension between individualism and collectivism. At the time, collectivism was susceptible of being associated by the public with the “Utopian iconography of socialist states”, and this was liable to provoke discomfort and even rejection towards the new schools.<sup>34</sup> While this indicator may

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<sup>34</sup> Burke and Grosvenor, “The progressive image in the history of education”, 160.

be observed in photographs from after the Second World War analyzed by these authors, it does not seem to be a significant factor in the images published in *The New Era* prior to 1939.

In comparing the evolution of iconographic representations of coeducation over a two-decade span (Table 6), we discover that they are far more frequent in the period 1925-1929 (65.6%) and that they diminish considerably in the five-year period of 1935-1939 (42.1%), coinciding with an increase in the number of pictures showing children on their own. We may take this to mean that *The New Era* was somewhat less committed to the pedagogical ideal of coeducation in the second half of the 1930s, due perhaps in part to the difficulty in finding schools that applied such ideals in an unadulterated way and that could furnish such graphic material for the publication.

Table 6. Boys and girls in the images in *The New Era* (1920-1939) by period of time

Gender	1920-1924	1925-1929	1930-1934	1935-1939	Total
Boys and girls	2 20,0%	42 65,6%	167 58,0%	40 42,1%	251 54,9%
Boy or girl	0 0,0%	2 3,1%	23 8,0%	9 9,5%	34 7,4%
Boys or girls	8 80,0%	20 31,3%	98 34,0%	46 48,4%	172 37,6%
Total	10 100,0%	64 100,0%	288 100,0%	95 100,0%	457 100,0%

Chi-square = 19,3; df = 6; p = .004

## Activity

The concept of activity was unarguably the backbone of the New Education movement, which was in fact known in the French-speaking world as the “*école active*”. In order to objectify this principle we have created categories for the different educational activities depicted in the visual representations from *The New Era*, differentiating them, for purposes of comparison, by country (Table 7) and by period (Table 8).

Table 7. Activities in the images of *The New Era* (1920-1939) by place

Activity	UK	USA	France	Germany	Rest	Total
3Rs	23 15,6%	6 6,8%	3 11,1%	2 9,5%	27 15,5%	61 13,3%
Crafts	32 21,8%	42 47,7%	10 37,0%	5 23,8%	59 33,9%	148 32,4%
Dance/theater/ music	33 22,4%	26 29,5%	5 18,5%	3 14,3%	13 7,5%	80 17,5%
Free play	31 21,1%	5 5,7%	4 14,8%	6 28,6%	33 19,0%	79 17,3%
Gardening/animals	5 3,4%	4 4,5%	2 7,4%	2 9,5%	15 8,6%	28 6,1%
Science	12 8,2%	4 4,5%	1 3,7%	2 9,5%	10 5,7%	29 6,3%
Gym/sport/body	11 7,5%	1 1,1%	2 7,4%	1 4,8%	17 9,8%	32 7,0%
Total	147 100,0%	88 100,0%	27 100,0%	21 100,0%	174 100,0%	457 100,0%

Chi-square = 58,9; df = 24;  $p < .001$

The first propagandist message that our 457 images of educational activity convey is that the New School did indeed transform the school curriculum (Table 7). Representations of traditional, cognitive content, generally associated with the three Rs (reading, writing and arithmetic) and with science subjects, appear in only 19.6% of the images. In contrast, images of expressive activities related to the arts (dance, theatre and music, 17.5%), free play (17.3%) and especially crafts (32.4%), make up 67.2% of the total. All of these subjects were meant to encourage the children's integral education and help them develop their sense of self. A full third of the students shown in *The New Era* are building something. Often this was a musical instrument, which in a subsequent phase of the project would be used to play songs or partake in recitals (Image 2 and Image 3).



Image 2. Example of an image with crafts as an activity. Lincoln School, New York  
Source: "Fourth Grade Instrument Makers in the Workshop", *The New Era* 8, no. 1 (1927): 10.

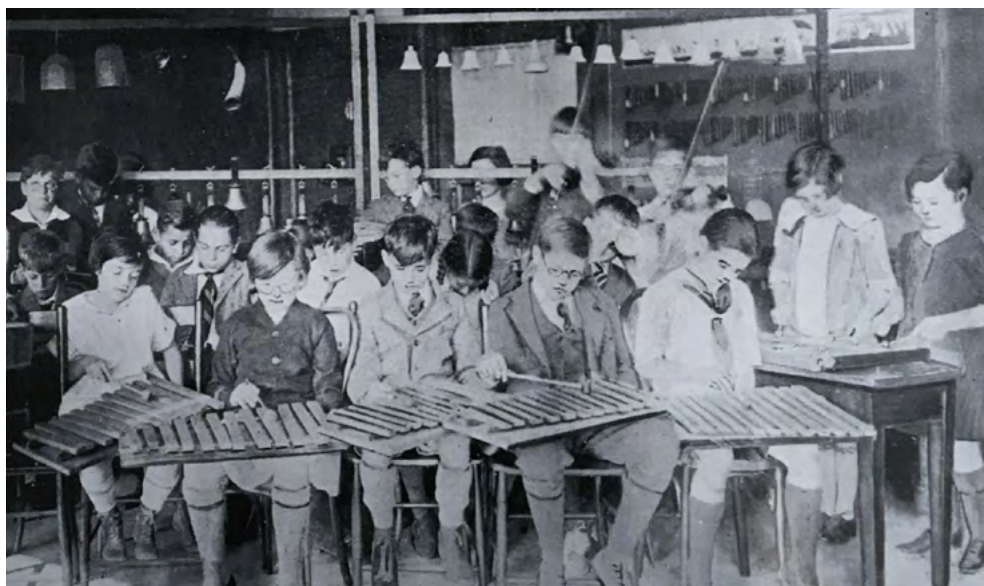


Image 3. Music class in the Lincoln School, New York  
Source: "The Marimba-makers try their instruments", *The New Era* 8, no. 1 (1927): 10.

There are certain observable differences from country to country in the concept of activity. For example, the photographs from the United States show a preponderance of arts & crafts type of work (47.7% of the images from the U.S. depict this activity), more than in any other country. Images of free work, on the other hand, are more prevalent in the photographs taken in Europe. There are very few images from the United States showing children engaged in the rudiments of reading, writing and maths; it would appear that the iconography from the USA wished to illustrate John Dewey's principle of "learning by doing", in the form of learning by projects, an approach that is consistently albeit erroneously credited to Dewey.

Table 8. Activities in the images of *The New Era* (1920-1939) by period of time

Activity	1920-1924	1925-1929	1930-1934	1935-1939	Total
3Rs	4 40,0%	12 18,8%	32 11,1%	13 13,7%	61 13,3%
Crafts	1 10,0%	17 26,6%	97 33,7%	33 34,7%	148 32,4%
Dance/theatre/music	4 40,0%	18 28,1%	49 17,0%	9 9,5%	80 17,5%
Free play	0 0,0%	7 10,9%	54 18,8%	18 18,9%	79 17,3%
Gardening/animals	1 10,0%	4 6,3%	14 4,9%	9 9,5%	28 6,1%
Science	0 0,0%	5 7,8%	22 7,6%	2 2,1%	29 6,3%
Gymnastics/sport/body	0 0,0%	1 1,6%	20 6,9%	11 11,6%	32 7,0%
Total	10 100,0%	64 100,0%	288 100,0%	95 100,0%	457 100,0%

Chi-square = 37,9; df = 18; p = .004

We can also observe differences in the concept of activity over the span of the two decades studied (Table 8). The most outstanding variation is the diminishing number of images focusing on expressive and creative activities such as dance, theatre and music in the 1930s, accompanied by greater emphasis on gymnastics, sports and other physical activities that involved the care and strengthening of the body. In this way *The New Era* seems to have adapted its message to address the growing threat that the rise of authoritarian regimes in Europe represented in the 1930s and the public's anxiety about the possibility of another war, for which its youth would need to be physically prepared.

## Freedom

Freedom is one of the central ideas of the progressive education movement and one of the ideas most used as a motto or rallying cry for New Education. It was also an idea that was open to multiple interpretations. It was associated on the one hand with the concept of childhood liberation and self-expression, and on the other with the self-government of children. In any case, it had a social component as well as an individual one, the two often coming into conflict. This makes it especially hard to establish objectifiable, observable categories or to identify the concept of freedom iconographically. For several reasons, we decided to identify freedom with nudity. One reason has to do with the way this association is so often used in contemporary art; the nude figure, in addition to representing innocence, also symbolizes freedom from clothing. Clothing represents, in a literal sense, all that binds us and separates us from nature, while metaphorically it symbolizes the power that oppresses the human being; hence, its elimination confers individual freedom on us.

This view is backed up by another reason: the editors of *The New Era* seem to have shared this view regarding the connotations of nudity. The concept of educational freedom adopted by the publication initially was that of individual freedom, "implying release from previous restraints and freedom to develop naturally".<sup>35</sup> On the cover of the first issue of the magazine, published in January 1920, is an image laden with symbolism and meant to represent the loftiest ideals of the New Education (Image 4). It consists of a drawing of a child wearing a blindfold and sporting

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<sup>35</sup> Jenkins, "New Education and its emancipatory interest", 141.



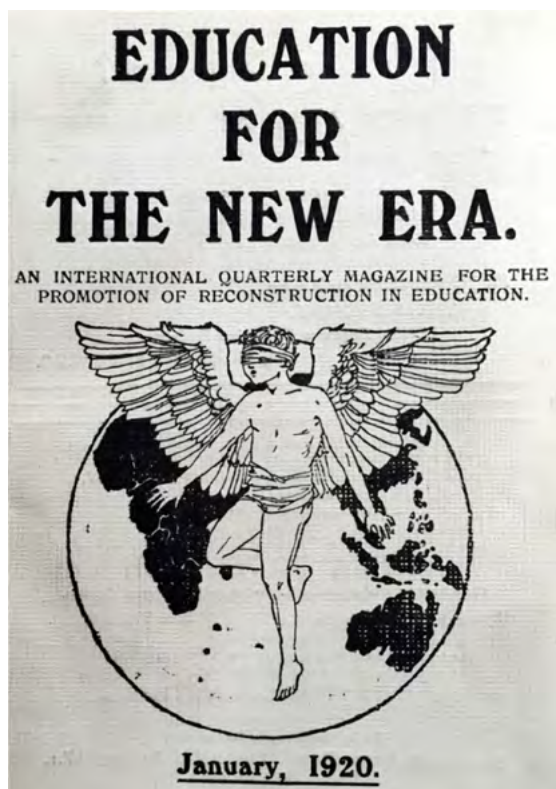


Image 4. The cover of the first issue of *The New Era*  
Source: *The New Era* 1, no. 1 (1920): 1.

angels' wings as he stands in front of a globe of the world. Except for a loincloth, he is naked. The picture, for which many interpretations have been ventured, conveys the idea of paidocentrism—the child as an angel, flying above the world—and freedom—the child who has been liberated of the chains that traditional education had imposed on him.<sup>36</sup> In our opinion, his partial nudity symbolizes the concept of liberation more than any nonexistent chains. What's more, in subsequent years the journal would feature drawings of stylized, naked children, sometimes riding on the backs of powerful animals (Image 5), representing the creative power of childhood and its potential for dominating the world.<sup>37</sup> The allegory of unclad children as a symbol of their growing up free of constrictions and

<sup>36</sup> Jürgen Oelkers, *Reformpädagogik: Eine kritische Dogmengeschichte* (Weinheim: Juventa, 20054), 344.

<sup>37</sup> Koslowski, *Die New Era*, 291.

inhibitions has secured a place in the imaginary of innovative educators. Burke and Grosvenor pointed out how one of the recurrent features of “the representation of the progressive school” was the display of children’s bare legs as they played or worked.<sup>38</sup> Burke recently asserted that “in English progressive state education, the feet, particularly bare feet, were fundamental to the anticipated exuberance of being alive in the modern school”, and that historical moments marked by experimental approaches to teaching and learning may be identified because “the school pupil, alone or collectively, is presented through images of exposed limbs and aesthetically pleasing physical poses”.<sup>39</sup>

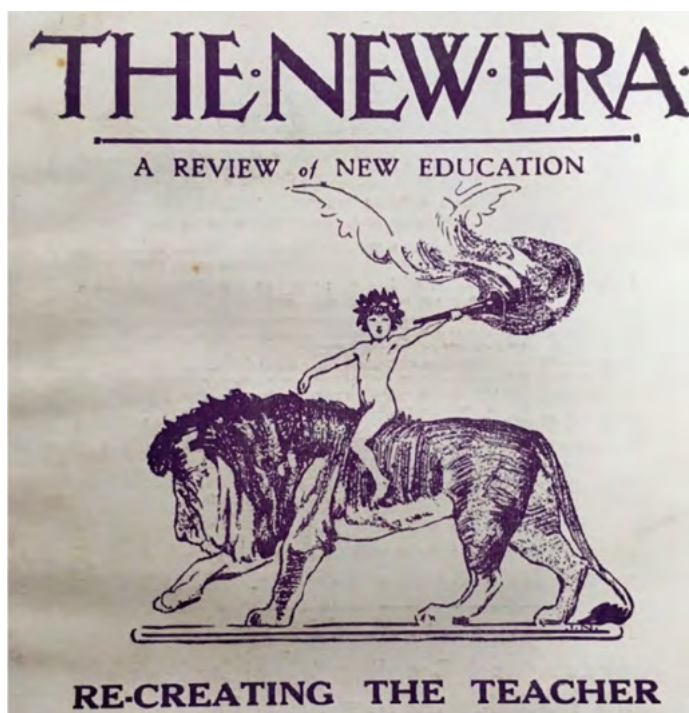


Image 5. The cover of *The New Era* in January 1926  
Source: *The New Era* 7, no. 1 (1926): 1

<sup>38</sup> Burke and Grosvenor, “The progressive image in the history of education”, 161.

<sup>39</sup> Catherine Burke, “Feet, footwork, footwear, and “being alive” in the modern school”, *Paedagogica Historica* 54, no. 1-2 (2018): 43. DOI: 10.1080/00309230.2017.1358287. See also Xavier Riondet, “Élise Freinet: de l’expérience naturiste aux pratiques de l’École Freinet”, *Recherches & éducations* [Open access], 8 Juin 2013, document 9, mis en ligne le 15 juillet 2013, accessed January 11, 2018.

Based on such an iconological premise, we did not consider it too hazardous to venture that one of the propagandist resorts of *The New Era* would be to show children engaged in different artistic activities in different degrees of bareness. In Table 9 we can see the data, which proves our hypothesis dead wrong. In most of the images (82.3%) the children are fully clothed; in a relatively small percentage (15.1%) they are in bare feet, while the number of photographs in which they are completely naked is negligible (2.6%). There are no significant differences between continents or countries, but there is a decrease over time in the number of children appearing barefoot, accompanied by an increase in the number that are fully dressed. Not surprisingly, physical bareness tends to be associated with activities taking place outside of the classroom or with theatre or dance activities. In some cases the children would take their shoes off while engaged in learning activities inside the classroom (Image 6).



Image 6. Bare feet in the library of the Garden school in London

Source: *The New Era* 9, no. 10 (1926): 183.

Table 9. Nakedness in images in *The New Era* (1920-1939) by period of time

Nakedness	1920-1924	1925-1929	1930-1934	1935-1939	Total
Fully naked	0 0,0%	2 3,1%	6 2,1%	4 4,2%	12 2,6%
Bare feet/chest/limbs	5 50,0%	13 20,3%	42 14,6%	9 9,5%	69 15,1%
Dressed	5 50,0%	49 76,6%	240 83,3%	82 86,3%	376 82,3%
Total	10 100,0%	64 100,0%	288 100,0%	95 100,0%	457 100,0%

Chi-square = 14,6; df = 6; p = .024

In any case, full nudity was very rare in *The New Era*. While the editors may have associated it with the idea of freedom, they do not appear to have seen it as an effective propagandist image, presumably because the public was unlikely to understand the underlying symbolism of such photographs. Notwithstanding their commitment to the New Education, parents, as well as society at large, would have been hard put to overcome the moral preconceptions concerning pictures of naked children.

This begs the question, then: what kind of images did *The New Era* use to symbolize the idea of freedom? The answer is that they relied on representations that, from an aesthetic and artistic point of view, were quite traditional, such as the one shown in Image 7. Rather than photographs with a symbolic meaning, they tended to be drawings into which texts were inserted, i.e., iconotexts. This interdependence between text and image, which became popular through the prints of Hogarth and Rowlandson in the 18<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>40</sup> assured that the message, conveyed in a conventional linguistic code, would be easily accessible to all audiences. While there are no precedents of studies on the use of icon-texts in the history of education,<sup>41</sup> Image 7 could very well serve as an example of the possibilities for their analysis. At a loss for symbolic elements that could

<sup>40</sup> Peter Wagner, *Reading Iconotexts. From Swift to the French Revolution* (London: Reaktion Books, 1995).

<sup>41</sup> María del Mar del Pozo Andrés, "Imágenes e historia de la educación: construcción, reconstrucción y representación de las prácticas escolares en el aula", *Historia de la Educación. Revista Interuniversitaria* 25 (2006): 305-306.

be universally identified with the idea of freedom, the journal displays a drawing of a children's protest in which the boys and girls—barely older than babies—hold up signs showing their demands, all centred on the word freedom: freedom through coeducation, through method, through psychology, through the environment, through art, through international understanding,... Again, the word holds sway over the image.



Image 7. Meaning of Freedom in Education

Source: "The True Meaning of Freedom in Education", *The New Era* 8, no. 4 (1927): 1.

### Contact with nature

One of the thirty tenets of the New Education published by Ferrière in 1925 stated that all new schools should be located in the countryside, as that was a child's natural environment and the place where he or she could most fully develop both in body and spirit. But, how does one go about categorizing and making visible a natural education? In order to be consistent with the other codes used in our serial analysis, we chose to place all of the photographs in the categories of "inside" or "outside", depending on where the educational practices were taking place. The conventional image of a traditional school was of course an enclosed in-

door space, a classroom containing the pupils within its four walls, and with certain furnishings that would determine the children’s movements. The New School cultivated an image that was quite the opposite, that of children flourishing in a natural surrounding that allowed for spontaneity and physical freedom and where educational activities took place outside of the classroom.

And yet this ideal is not corroborated by the available iconographic evidence. Table 10 tells us that The New Era published a proportion of photographs taken inside the schools and other buildings that is perfectly balanced by those taken outdoors —on streets, playgrounds, gardens, woods, mountains and countryside. There are noticeable differences in this respect from one country to another; most of the photographs from the United States (69.3%) were taken indoors, while the majority of images from France (63%) show exteriors, as do those from Germany (57.1%). This difference between continental Europe and the USA is likely a consequence of *The New Era’s* interest in what had already become the classic new schools, that is, boarding schools situated in the country, such as Abbotsholme or Bedales, the German Odenwaldschule (Image 8) or the French “l’École des Roches”. Such schools were less common in the United States, where new urban schools located in the larger cities prevailed, making it less likely for school images to reflect natural settings. Furthermore, open-air schools and Forest Schools were a European tradition, begun in Germany at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This helps to explain the wealth of iconographic sources in Europe as well as the predilection for representing natural surroundings.

Table 10. The use of space in the images of *The New Era* (1920-1939) by place

Space	UK	USA	France	Germany	Rest	Total
Inside	69 46,9%	61 69,3%	10 37,0%	9 42,9%	85 48,9%	234 51,2%
Outside	78 53,1%	27 30,7%	17 63,0%	12 57,1%	89 51,1%	223 48,8%
Total	147 100,0%	88 100,0%	27 100,0%	21 100,0%	174 100,0%	457 100,0%

Chi-square = 15,8; df = 4; p = .003

More difficult to explain is the balance between the percentage of photos taken indoors and outdoors, which remains constant over the two decades. Nor does the fact that there is a slight preference for indoor images preclude innovation, as most of these pictures depict activities easily identifiable with the New Education. And finally, although outdoor images do not dominate in *The New Era*, their number had nonetheless grown exponentially in comparison to earlier times, when they had been scarce, even non-existent.



Image 8. An Open-Air Class in Odenwaldschule

Source: "An Open-Air Class. The Odenwaldschule", *The New Era* 6, no. 10 (1925): 118.

## Child-Centred

In traditional classroom photographs it is not unusual to find the teacher in a central position or in that part of the image known as "the divine proportion" or "the golden mean".<sup>42</sup> In general, he appears in a plane above the students. These specific features of the composition are often combined with that of the teacher's gaze, trained directly on the

<sup>42</sup> Herbert E. Huntley, *The divine proportion. A study in mathematical beauty* (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), and Braster, "Educational change and Dutch classroom photographs", 29-30.

eyes of the observer, conveying a sense of control. Naturally, this *master-centrism* is associated with traditional education. The New Education, in contrast, is defined by its *paido-centrism*; here the child has become the centre of the teaching-learning process, while the teacher’s role is that of a guide, one who orients the child’s learning progression. This change in the teacher’s function has been described by constructivist learning as “from sage on the stage to guide on the side”.<sup>43</sup> Our initial assumption is that this change would have been made patent iconographically with a symbolic movement in which the teacher would gravitate from the centre to the margin of the image and would look upon the pupils instead of at the spectator, receding and even disappearing from the picture.

What we find is that this displacement of the teacher from the centre to the margins of the photographs is consistent over time and in different settings, and we take this to be a reliable indicator of their following of convictions and beliefs regarding pedagogical innovation.<sup>44</sup> We assumed that this change would feature prominently in *The New Era* (Table 11).

Table 11. Position of the teacher in images of *The New Era* (1920-1939) by place

Teacher	UK	USA	France	Germany	Rest	Total
Dominant	4 2,7%	5 5,7%	5 18,5%	2 9,5%	12 6,9%	28 6,1%
Tangential	29 19,7%	8 9,1%	3 11,1%	2 9,5%	27 15,5%	69 15,1%
Absence	114 77,6%	75 85,2%	19 70,4%	17 81,0%	135 77,6%	360 78,8%
Total	147 100,0%	88 100,0%	27 100,0%	21 100,0%	174 100,0%	457 100,0%

Chi-square = 15,8; df = 8; p = .045

Sure enough, the data is unequivocal: in 78.8% of the images with children there is no teacher, while in the 15.1% of the photographs with

<sup>43</sup> Alison King, “From sage on the stage to guide on the side”, *College Teaching* 41, no.1 (1993): 30-35.

<sup>44</sup> María del Mar del Pozo Andrés, “La imagen de la mujer en la educación contemporánea”, in *Las mujeres en la construcción del mundo contemporáneo*, eds. Teresa Marín Eced and María del Mar del Pozo Andrés (Cuenca: Diputación de Cuenca, 2002), 251-254.



a teacher present, he or she is in a tangential or marginal position, as in Image 9, in which the teacher is mingled with the students, observing their work. In only 6.1% of the images can the teacher's position within the composition be described as dominant.

Nor does an analysis over time show much variation in this respect; from the first period (1920-1925) through the last (1935-1939) we find a glaring absence of the teacher figure. There are, however, certain differences among countries; whereas in Great Britain there are scarcely any images showing teachers in a dominant position, in France 18.5% of the pictures portray the teacher as a figure of authority, the one in control. This difference may be a reflection of the contrast between the more centralized French school system and the decentralized British one.<sup>45</sup> In any case, the editors of *The New Era* showed a marked preference for photographs from the U.K. and the USA in which the teachers' absence was made patent.



Image 9. Example of an image of a teacher in a tangential position

Source: "Practical Work Room. Rangefield (L.C.C.) School, Dounham State, near Southend Village", *The New Era* 9, no. 34 (1928): s.p.

<sup>45</sup> Margaret S. Archer, *Social origins of educational systems* (London/New York: Routledge, 2013).

## Individualization vs Socialization

The dialectic between the principles of individualization and socialization caused much ink to flow among theorists of the New School. The individual, spiritual, expressive and autonomous development of children, together with their perception of themselves as social, collaborative beings, integrated in different communities and ultimately implicated in humankind's destiny, were the two pillars on which the *paideia* of the New Education was based. And while these two aspects could be perfectly compatible, the discourse of innovation would make them practically exclusive, in large part because many of the new methods were classified as either individualized or socialized, despite the fact that such a categorization was artificial and unrealistic.

For this reason, we believed that an iconographical analysis could provide a new perspective on the tension between these two principles. This required classifying the images from *The New Era* in one of two categories, individual or social. A picture was put in the "individual" category if it showed a child working or playing on his or her own, and not interacting with other children or teachers. The "social" category was for all of those images in which at least two children were interacting with each other or with a teacher, or cooperating in a group project. For example, an image of several children sitting in the classroom, occupied in their own activities and not speaking or interacting with their classmates, would be classified as "individual". Many such photos were published with the label of the Dalton Plan, which was considered the most individualized of the New Education methods and was very popular in Great Britain in the 1920s.<sup>46</sup> The typical iconography of this method can be seen in Image 10, where we see displayed all of the visual symbols associated with it, with the library and books as the central element of the photograph.<sup>47</sup> Pictures of children working together on a project (for example, building a village or a cathedral) or putting on a play or singing together were classified as "social". Many of these were published with the heading of the project method, which the journal identifies in numerous

<sup>46</sup> Piet van der Ploeg, *Dalton Plan: Origins and Theory of Dalton Education* (Deventer: Saxion Dalton University Press, 2013), and Piet van der Ploeg, "The Dalton Plan: recycling in the guise of innovation", *Paedagogica Historica* 49, no. 3 (2013): 314-329.

<sup>47</sup> María del Mar del Pozo Andrés and Sjaak Braster, "The Dalton Plan in Spain: Reception and Appropriation (1920-1939)", *Revista de Educación* 377 (2017): 118.

cases with the Winnetka plan. These images tend to represent activities related to the history and development of humanity,<sup>48</sup> such as building a Viking boat or reconstructing a Dutch village in North America, projects associated with the theory of recapitulation that enjoyed considerable popularity in the USA at the time and which is often considered to be the origin of child-centred pedagogy.<sup>49</sup> Only a few number of photographs are, according to their captions, identified with an specific method of the progressive education. The scarce number of images about well-known methods from Decroly or Montessori, is striking. This is why we did not introduce a separate code for classifying these new education methods.



Image 10. Example of an image of individuality

Source: "English Laboratory, Mahinda College, Ceylon", *The New Era* 5, no. 20 (1924): 126.

Which of the New School tendencies, the individualizing or the socializing one, prevailed in *The New Era*? The results shown in Table 12

<sup>48</sup> María del Mar del Pozo Andrés, "The transnational and national dimensions of pedagogical ideas: the case of the project method, 1918-1939", *Paedagogica Historica* 45, no. 4-5 (2009): 561-584.

<sup>49</sup> Thomas Fallace, "The Savage Origins of Child-Centered Pedagogy, 1871-1913", *American Educational Research Journal* 52, no. 1 (2015): 73-103.

are unequivocal: the images of socialization far outnumber those of individualization, 75.1% as compared to 24.9%. With regard to the provenance of the images, the results are inconclusive, with no significant differences between images from Great Britain, the United States, Germany or France. We had expected the images from the U.K. to show a preference for individualization, given the popularity of the Dalton Plan in the 1920s, and for the photographs from the USA to tend towards socialization, owing to Dewey's influence, to the concept of community and to the association of the University of Columbia's Teachers College with the project method; neither of these hypotheses were confirmed by the data.

Table 12. Individuality in the images of *The New Era* (1920-1939) by period of time

Individuality	1920-1924	1925-1929	1930-1934	1935-1939	Total
Individual	3 30,0%	17 26,6%	77 26,7%	17 17,9%	114 24,9%
Social	7 70,0%	47 73,4%	211 73,3%	78 82,1%	343 75,1%
Total	10 100,0%	64 100,0%	288 100,0%	95 100,0%	457 100,0%

Chi-square = 3,2; df = 3; p = .356

The most significant difference in these categories comes to light when we apply a temporal factor to the analysis. In the early 1920s those features associated with individualization were dominant, not so much in the childhood activities *per se* as in the products and results, as can be seen in Table 13. We can observe here how the publication represented individualization mainly through images of the children's artistic handiwork, fruit of "the creative self-expression of the child", which happened to be the theme of the first congress organized by Beatrice Ensor in Calais in 1921, after which the NEF was founded. Subsequent congresses also focused on the power of childhood creativity.<sup>50</sup> This would change however, when in the 1930s the NEF revised its principles. The congress

<sup>50</sup> Eckhardt Fuchs, "Educational sciences, morality and politics. International educational congresses in the early twentieth century", *Paedagogica Historica* 40, no. 5-6 (2004): 757-784.

that took place in Niece in 1932 marked a turning point, “from individual to social responsibility due to the prevailing political climate”.<sup>51</sup> This change was reflected in the imaginary of *The New Era*. The five-year period from 1935-1939 saw a notable increase in the number of photographs portraying cooperation and collaboration, where girls and boys are working together in creative and expressive activities (Table 12).

Table 13. Individuality in the images of *The New Era* (1920-1939) by period of time (including images of drawings, paintings, and other objects made by children)

Individuality	1920-1924	1925-1929	1930-1934	1935-1939	Total
Individual	27 71,1%	59 51,3%	121 33,8%	50 37,3%	257 39,8%
Social	11 28,9%	56 48,7%	237 66,2%	84 62,7%	388 60,2%
Total	38 100,0%	115 100,0%	358 100,0%	134 100,0%	645 100,0%

Chi-square = 27,6; df = 3; p < .001



Image 11. Example of an image of socialization

Source: “Dutch, English and Scots girls dancing in the grounds”, *The New Era* 16, no. 5 (1935): 119.

<sup>51</sup> Jenkins, “The professional middle class and the social origins of progressivism”, 59.

The response of the NEF to the political climate of the 1930s was to place a greater focus on international understanding, on dialogue between nations and cultures and on introducing pacifism and the League of Nations in the classroom. However, we find scarce evidence of these themes in the illustrations of *The New Era*, one of the few photographs being that shown in Image 11. Here we see an activity involving international cooperation in which girls from several countries, with joined hands and forming a circle—a gesture considered in social anthropology to signify a space of feminine socialization<sup>52</sup>—represent the idea of cooperation among countries.

One can only speculate as to the reasons for such a scarcity of images of international cooperation in the pages of *The New Era*. It may have been due to the fact that the NEF, despite its change of orientation, did not concede much propagandist value to them, or that the editors were sceptical about achieving the desired effect, or perhaps such images simply never made it in to the editorial office. We believe this latter explanation to be the most plausible. In a world that was preparing for war, there was no lack of internationalist initiatives, but they do not seem to have been accompanied by images. In fact, *The New Era* published all the articles it could find having to do with international schools and even, despite having so far completely ignored education in Spain, published two articles in the space of two years about the *Escuela Internacional* founded by José Castillejo in Madrid. These articles described methodological experiments based on adaptations of the Dalton Plan, and in a testimonial photograph we can see elements typical of this method, representing, as would be expected, the idea of individualization (Image 12). The texts, on the other hand, place an emphasis on the ideal of international understanding. They delve into the subject of imbuing pacifist values in the students by teaching history, but instead of through books, through talks by teachers from different countries. These teachers would expound on historical issues from their own, divergent and even contradictory perspectives, leaving the pupils to then freely go on and come to their own conclusions. “Peace cannot be attained by ignoring hatred, but rather by knowing it and suffering it”.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Braster and del Pozo Andrés, “Education and the children’s colonies in the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)”, 471.

<sup>53</sup> José Castillejo, “Modern Languages in an International School”, *The New Era in Home and School* 14, no. 1 (1933): 10.



Image 12. Example of an image of individuality.

The *Escuela Plurilingüe* of Madrid

Source: "Children of the School in the Library", *The New Era* 16, no. 4 (1935): 95.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this article we set out to study the visual discourse used by *The New Era* to disseminate, propagate and popularize the principles of the New Education. We took as our premise the idea that the educational ideas and practices shown most frequently and prominently by the journal were those that its editors believed would be most effective in creating in the public opinion an imaginary of the New School. By means of an open, axial codification system, we categorized the observable, objectifiable elements appearing in the images, identifying their relationship with the abstract ideas they are meant to represent and that are associated with

the grand ideals of the New Education. In this imaginary, the icon or figure chosen as a symbol of the movement was Rabindranath Tagore; the Nobel laureate appears surrounded by a number of Theosophist educators, driving home the importance of the Theosophist origins of the NEF. Our analysis of the contents of the 944 images published in *The New Era* between 1920 and 1939 leads us to the following conclusions:

1) The pedagogical *corpus* of the New School transmitted by the journal had as its central element the idea of activity. The message that the movement tried to convey was that in its schools the children worked, and they worked hard, but that their activities formed part of an updated, novel curriculum in which physical activities, arts & crafts and manual, artistic, expressive and creative occupations all featured strongly.

2) The second key idea was paidocentrism, i.e., the child as the centre of the learning-teaching process; this was symbolized by the displacement of the teacher's position from the centre of the image to the margins—and even his outright disappearance. This change in approach is absolutely dominant in the iconography, corroborating and reinforcing conclusions arrived at in previous research carried out by other authors. We thus have additional evidence that the most characteristic image of the New Education features an absent teacher whose students are engaged in activities that they seem to have chosen spontaneously.

3) Although the New Education was fond of publicizing this idea of spontaneity—suggesting that the children were working on tasks that they had chosen themselves and that naturally they were happier—we cannot claim to see many smiling faces in the photographs. The postures and gestures portrayed are in general relaxed, but the facial expressions tend to be serious, similar to those we might find in a traditional school. It is possible that this is due in part to technical limitations of photography at the time.<sup>54</sup>

4) The visual discourse of *The New Era* attests to the fact that one of the hardest ideas to represent and communicate to its audience was the idea of freedom. Its objectification in the form of nude bodies was decidedly not exploited as a propagandist element; such images appear

<sup>54</sup> Sjaak Braster, "The progressive child: Images of new education in the New Era, 1920-1939", *History of Education & Children Literature* 13, no. 1 (2018) (in press).



only very exceptionally, and those that do appear are accompanied by a caption reading “heat wave”. It seems clear that the journal believed such images would have a markedly different meaning for the general public than for the inner circles of the NEF. The general audience was unlikely to make the association of naked children with a discourse on innocence—an ideal harking back to the Illustration. More likely, such images would be viewed in a context of new, Freudian ideas regarding childhood sexuality, a sure recipe for scandal and indignation.

5) Coeducation was another of the movement’s identifying, emblematic traits. More than half of the photographs in the journal show boys and girls working and playing together, although many images also show them separately, indicating that coeducation was not a universal or exclusive practice in the New Education.

6) The principle of a style of education that was in contact with nature is clearly reflected in the photographs of *The New Era*. While there are still more photographs of indoor scenes than outdoor settings, this change in the surroundings in which some of the educational activities took place is one of the aspects of the New School that shows the greatest contrast with the traditional school. In truth, often only the scenery seems to have changed, the *attrezzo* remains the same; we see lessons in which the desks and chalkboards have been moved outside, only to replicate a traditional classroom, albeit in the open air.

7) The journal resolved the tensions between individualization and socialization by coming down from the very beginning in favor of the latter. In the initial five-year period we do find instances in which the images portray the creative expression of a child working alone, invariably through depictions of his or her artwork. But the overall emphasis on socialization is somewhat surprising, given that most of the Theosophist editors at the journal believed in the liberation of the child’s spiritual potential through a variety of approaches, including individual work. In fact, some of the editors at the publication, such as Claude Claremont and A. J. Lynch, carried out well-known experiments with individualization at their schools. We can even observe a bit of a contradiction between text and images; the magazine’s first decade saw the publication of numerous articles dealing with the Dalton Plan and the Montessori Method—both considered individualized—and yet the images published tend to show

classes engaged in project method-type activities. One possible explanation for this contradiction is that the iconography of individualization, as well as many of its practices, resembled the image of the traditional school too much to serve as an effective propaganda tool for New Education ideas. Neither was the Montessori Method—criticized fiercely in the English-speaking world for its mercantile spirit and already forgotten in the USA—an ideal image for the cause.

The change in orientation in the 1930s of the NEF and its advocacy of pacifist and internationalist values is made quite patent in the discourses of the conferences, in their themes and in the publicity that the movement's journals gave to all European schools labelled as "international". And yet, visually, this change in orientation went practically undocumented in the images of the publication, where we are hard put to find any photographs representing these new values. It may be that the economic crisis resulted in a cutback of *The New Era's* graphic content, which we can see was much scarcer after 1935. It is also possible that the editors were simply unable to find images to accompany the ever-more numerous articles appealing to peace and global understanding. But then, how was one to picture peace in a Europe that was preparing for war? ■

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