

## MOVEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF JAROSLAV FOGLAR'S BOOKS AND HIS PEDAGOGICAL INFLUENCE

**Ivo Jirásek**

*Faculty of Physical Culture, Palacký University, Olomouc, Czech Republic*

Submitted in August, 2008

---

This paper deals with a movement motif in Jaroslav Foglar's books and with the influence of this literature on active experiencing by readers, particularly on a potential increase of their movement activities. Although the results (Jirásek et al., 2007) obtained from the empirical research don't prove any connection at a statistically significant level, we can reasonably assume that such literature for youth plays the role of a real motivational factor.

---

*Keywords: Jaroslav Foglar, instructive literature, movement activities.*

### JAROSLAV FOGLAR AND HIS ROLE IN PEDAGOGY

Jaroslav Foglar (1907–1999) has belonged among the most popular writers of the literature for the youth in the Czech Republic for many decades. At the present time it is possible to obtain very easily detailed information (unfortunately only in the Czech language) on both Foglar's life (Foglar, 2005a; Zachariáš, 2007; Zapletal, 2007), his social influence (Jirásek, 2007), and a description of the origin and development of all his published works (Nosek-Windy, 1999).

More than one hundred years from this, exceptional in Czech history, personality's birthday, we can initiate a more detailed consideration as to whether Foglar's "instructive literature" is still significant as a contemporary pedagogical inspiration or whether it is a closed stage of history. Let's have a look in detail at several arguments that can prove that the ideas and concrete inspirations included in boys' reading material many decades ago can still be inspiring. Even more, they should be utilized much more structurally and systematically at the time when an evident lack of movement activities is understood as one of the most significant reasons for a decrease of the physical abilities of a growing population and thus an increasing number of illnesses (of the kinetic and cardiovascular systems, such as obesity and others).

Despite the fact that there is a sufficient number of "foglarological" reflections in literature, not only in the form of journal studies, but also the comprehensive works of rather a monographic or collection character (Hojer & Černý, 2000; Jirásek, 2007; Mikulka, 1991; Mrva, 1988, 1990; Pírek, 1990; Polák, 2003; Raba, 2005; Sohr, 1968; Toman, 2005; Urbanová & Matýsková, 1992; Zachariáš, 2007; Zapletal, 2007), we are still

missing a purely pedagogical evaluation. Foglar's personal character (the ideal of boyhood, an intensive interest in and substantial experience of nature, fantasy appearing not only in the structure of literary stories, but also in the development of new games and programs, the courage to risk adequately and accept new challenges) came naturally to light in the complex of all his activities. An expressively characteristic aspect for this writer and educator is the fact that he understood all his activities instrumentally – as an instrument of his educational efforts. Whatever activity it was, the scout official, the cooperator or the editor of the journals for youth, the writer of belle lettres as well as instructive handbooks and even the author of comics scenarios, everywhere and always a pedagogical aim at the process of cooperation on the basis of Comenius' "redemption of human things" prevailed. The pedagogical potential of his work is included in the following aspects:

- concentration on a healthy lifestyle, movement activities, physical abilities (we are going to deal with this topic in more details further in the text),
- an interest in nature at the level of its recognition, deep experience and perceiving, stays in the outdoors,
- honesty in actions – starting with the attempt at removing vulgarism from youth's speech expressions to glorifying friendship relations to stressing the point of honesty in any action (for example the spirit of fair play in every played game),
- company collectivity, informal society, members of which can compare themselves to one another, evaluate, influence and contribute to development and, at the same time, to self-development (while putting the stress on the power of friendship, proven by decrees of oaths and unconditional solidarity); this value was maximally realized in the readers' clubs' activities

based on their credence and on the ability of young people to achieve self organization,

- a holistic influence on all personality factors (physical, psychological, social as well as ethical),
- motivation, stressing the point of romanticism, adventures, thrills, the structure of tasks characterized by their challenge to involve all forces (the principal motto of one long term game was: “Alvarez needs only brave and strong persons!”), i. e. the realization of a flow state, a state full of autotelic experience, balanced between stress and boredom (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996),
- utilization of a game to develop aims of all personality factors (physical abilities, motorics, memory, skills, perception, intelligence and fast thinking, etc.),
- support of traditions, making contemporary time more interesting by means of rituals and ceremonies (badges, diplomas, cards, points in any activity, not only the particular program’s one – including tidying up and cleaning).

#### AN INFLUENCE OF LITERATURE ON ACTIVE EXPERIENCE

Foglar’s main interest was included in the challenge, not only to read, but even to experience! He repeatedly draws our attention to the fact that only the person who takes reading as the first degree of effort to change his/her personality, as an opportunity to experience the read topics actively and on their own can really fulfill the instructive literature’s intended meaning.

These days, we must also be interested in the fact of whether it is not just historical reading and if the books, which are several decades old, still carry the impulse addressing also present youth in the changed social, political and technical circumstances (development of and easy access to transport modes, computers and communications technologies, etc.).

Readers even say that, reading the books, they were influenced positively by the heroes’ actions and they care more about their physical abilities and pay more attention to nature, “above standard readers are said to think more often about themselves, about their position among their friends and about possibilities of their self realization” (Urbanová & Matýšková, 1992, 13).

The adventure not only to read, but to get inspired to experience actively in the form of “hunting 13 little beavers”, reaching the windows of “a blue life”<sup>1</sup>, club activities at meetings and trips, is the real secret of the unique success of Foglar’s books, which is not easy to

repeat. This is Foglar’s pedagogical mastership which hasn’t gotten sufficient space in experts’ journals.

Naturally, related to these topics and civilization’s being in jeopardy, caused by a lack of movement activities, we were interested also in the question of whether reading this boys’ literature can become a motivation for real change in their lifestyle. Whether the author is right, when he announces self confidently: “However, after reading one pedagogically instructive book as my books evidently are – regardless of the disputableness of their literary level, really a new, better, gentler life can start and it really – and again evidently – does, now!” (Foglar, 1964, 161). Foglar makes an effort to create a pedagogical ideal of the boy who is not only honest, polite and ethical, but also “can set himself high targets and can aim at them even at the cost of personal asceticism”. It is rather a crucial moment, because, as I think, it is the character in which Foglar differs from the whole range of the writers presenting to youth patterns worthy of being followed, writing about honesty and justice, striving to present and distinguish between goodness and evil. However, to grasp education as a challenge for an educated person himself/herself, i. e. to make education into self education by means of exacting activities requiring all one’s personal forces, it is a real phenomenon, that is brought to the literature by the experienced author who lived with boys and spent with them all his time. Therefore he understands them and can make self educational impulses immensely attractive. Otherwise the substance of Foglar’s romanticism is the will to act and “the braveness necessary for dynamic self education” (Bösser, 1964, 497). A legend turning a dull task into an adventure, a game attracting by the very uncertainty of the winner, a secret invitation to be discovered – these are instruments and methods that have not been surpassed, probably not even until this time. Martin Hybler draws our attention to the value context of the increase of the typical criminality of the youth at this time (drugs, car stealing, firing weapons/setting fires, using guns, raping, or even torturing) as a result of searching for adventures and stimulation at any cost. It is no wonder that he comes to the conclusion: “Understanding the education of preadolescents, to which Foglar invites us, belongs perhaps to the most important civilization tasks of all” (Hybler, 1999, 42). Foglar’s books, popular and read regardless of the change of political and social circumstances, can play (and really do) the role/perform the task of a stimulation impulse to the life self education and self development of young boys, to the more gentle and beneficial spending of leisure time (the insufficient utilization or enjoyment of which is, by the way, the most important factor in the origin of

<sup>1</sup> Two of Foglar’s pedagogical instruments serving youth self development: a romantic legend presented together with a set of tests motivating boys to spend actively their leisure time actively. For more details see the next part of this paper.

not only the drug addiction – Mrva, 1988, 1). They add an original and very inspiring stimulation by the form which encourages in its dramatic and mysterious way to independent activities leading to self regulation of his/her own behavior and acting towards the realization of ethically demanding values.

## MOTIVES OF MOVEMENT

Perhaps in every Foglar's book we can find an ideal pattern that is presented to the readers to be imitated: a model boy as if according to a pattern, ethically mature, physically able, hard working, conscious of his obligations. In this part we are trying to highlight the main motives accenting the beauty of a sporting body, fast, strong, sun burnt, in short trousers. The bodies are used to daily morning exercises, slim, flexible, full of force, weather proof and healthy. Besides a significant protest against smoking and alcohol there is permanent pressure or motivation to do exercises and sports as well as camping, which we can find in every one of Foglar's books. The following motives are worthy of being mentioned in more detail: the challenge for self knowledge and comparison of forces, represented in the form of stimuli to "hunting little beavers", to finding out whether the reader himself/herself has all 13 features that "the model boy should have", is at the beginning of the book "Boys from the Beavers river" ("Hoši od Bobří řeky") (Foglar, 2003). The legend about the boy Roy growing up in a natural wilderness with his father and even with an old Indian man for a certain time who exposes him to various tests is brought to us by the story about 13 rusty nails being beaten into the log for hanging furs of the hunted beavers. Their hunting is an initiating test proving the turning of the boy into the man. The writer takes this legend as a motivation factor for the development of the test that can be passed in our time (or for many decades since the 1930s when this book was published for the first time). Besides "the little beavers", i. e. the tasks aimed at helping others and a social solidarity (the little beavers of the rescue and good deeds), tests developing courage, patience and willpower (the little beavers of courage, silence, loneliness, hunger), the tasks improving their knowledge of nature (flowers) or polytechnical preparation (skills) and at last, even honesty, goodness and politeness (gentleness), we find even four tests concentrating on physical abilities and a healthy lifestyle here: the little beaver of nimbleness (running, high jump and long jump), aiming (cock shot), swimming and force or strength (pull ups).

Another topic is included in the style of the "blue life", introduced for the first time in the book "The port

is calling" ("Přístav volá") (Foglar, 2005b). They are life principles leading to self development, to a gentle life, among which regular everyday morning exercises, at least for a quarter of an hour, belong. A bit different form of the "blue life" is described in the book "Chronicle of the lost footstep" ("Kronika Ztracené stopy") (Foglar, 2001) as seven tasks or obligations (including experienced joys and performed good deeds), where everyday washing in cold water also belongs, besides morning exercises, in the area reflected upon by us.

Despite the fact that it would be possible to mention the notes on individual challenges to movement activities perhaps in every book, for the last example we are selecting a description of a competition in physical skills<sup>2</sup> from the book "Our division" ("Náš oddíl") (Foglar, 1998). It is a set of 42 exercises (forward roll, somersaults, five bent arm rests, knee bend, hand stand, straddle vault, bend forward, jump rope, handspring, climbing a tree, riding a bicycle, swimming, crossing on a log over a brook, jumping over a table, climbing a rope etc.) valued at a total of one hundred points, the right performance of which is checked and confirmed by an appointed "instructor of the exercise".

"Every PE teacher would enjoy it and many camp leaders would surely envy us if they saw how our boys do somersaults, knee bends, bent arm rest, handsprings, handstands or rope jumping and many other exercises with no restraint, with enthusiasm and voluntarily" (Foglar, 1998, 100).

Why is it so? How does it come that at a time in which a lack of movement is perceived as one of the biggest risks of the future of our population, somebody accepts unattractive exercises even with enthusiasm? It is absolutely sure that the growth of motivation to do these activities is decided by the way of their presentation, even of usual activities, as something that serves self knowledge and comparison with others. It means the character of the competition, but also the task presented as a challenge, as an appeal to self involvement: "What is your body like? Every boy's pride is being perfectly grown, flexible, nimble, fast, skilled and strong. The majority of these features can be achieved by everyday regular exercises. The body thus gets not only a better look, but even strengthens its force and skills. Our traditional Competition in Physical Nimbleness (STO) should make you put your winter laziness aside, start doing permanent exercises and persuade yourselves that you are the right boys full of energy and not only lazy home birds, jelly and elephant whelps! Only the boys with a weak will do not participate in our STO and do not make an attempt at taking an honor position. But those who want to look like Indian youth or boys from Ancient Sparta know what to do – try to fulfill as many

<sup>2</sup> In Czech this competition is called "Soutěž Tělesné Obratnosti" – the abbreviation of which is STO which means "one hundred" in Czech.

exercises from our competition as possible. And the honor badge for the physical skills is also a nice prize! Who gets it? Who of the whole division will achieve the most points in STO?" (Foglar, 1998, 101).

However, we can simply object that such challenges and appeals are not very effective, that we have no proof of the effectiveness and force of these topics' fulfillment. Therefore it is the relationship to the movement activities really performed by our readers of Foglar's books that we tried to set as an aim of our partial research.

## **RESEARCH INTO REAL MOVEMENT ACTIVITIES ON THE BASIS OF READING FOGLAR'S BOOKS**

Last year the survey<sup>3</sup> into the relationships between reading Foglar's books and movement activities really performed was carried out (see details Jirásek et al., 2007). Here we will only report on the relationship between the number of the books read and the amount of movement activities performed.

An original intention, i. e. a comparison of readers' movement activities (as the responders expressed through the International Physical Activity Questionnaire IPAQ – long version) with a group of non readers could not be fulfilled: the gained answers (in total 1692) are almost exclusively connected with the knowledge of Jaroslav Foglar and his books (only 4 answers expressed ignorance of the name Jaroslav Foglar, 38 persons had read none of his books). From the results we have come to/drawn the following conclusions: As a motivational instrument for change in their lifestyle, literature has been indicated by the respondents as a relatively significant fact. Readers' belief that, for only 14% of them, reading did not mean any change in experiencing ended up relatively surprisingly. On the contrary, instructiveness of this type of literature is personally proved by significant representation of all observed categories. Although our priority concern was to find its possible influence on movement activity (which has been proved by 21% of the respondents), according to those who read them, Foglar's books have the most significant impact, especially on staying in nature, the adventurousness of experience in a group of contemporaries, and general activity. Wilful agreement with the author's moral appeal, i. e. with readiness to do good turns, has been noted by more than triple the number of readers than of those who were not led to any change by reading. However, our survey could not check whether this declaratively proved impulse has been fulfilled.

We were interested especially in the relationship between reading and amounts of movement activities stated by the respondents themselves.

In order to compare dependency of movement activity on the number of books read, we divided the investigated selection into four groups. Of the total number, 909 persons answered the questions about movement activity. It follows from the results of the table that people who read more of Foglar's books perform more movement activities. However, differences between individual groups are not statistically significant. It is also obvious that in every group there is a high share of an individual's approach to movement activity (high values of standard deviation).

## **CONCLUSION**

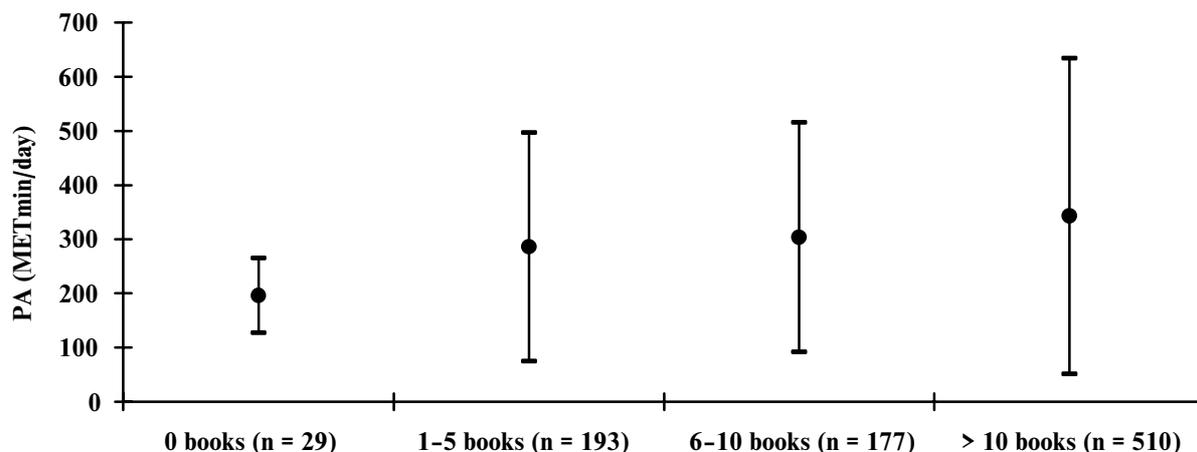
We are not going to overestimate the obtained results in any way. However, as we are aware, a real influence of reading belles lettres on change in lifestyle with impact on concrete readers' activities and actions has been investigated neither in the Czech Republic nor anywhere else yet. We consider our survey as the first attempt to interconnect opinions on reading and opinions on lifestyle, particularly the amount of performed movement activity. Although the connection failed to be proved at a statistically significant level, we believe that the results are interesting, especially in the part concerning a traceable relation between the number of Foglar's books read and the amount of movement activity performed.

In other words: respondents' answers clearly show that reading Foglar's books inspires and motivates them to movement activity, and there is obviously even a relationship between the number of books read and the amount of movement activity there is (even if not statistically evidently). At the same time, we believe that, by means of quantitative research methods, we managed to prove (at the level of 1% weight) that this literature inspires its readers significantly to an active lifestyle and deeper experience. However, in no case can we consider the results surveyed by us as a simple line: the more of Foglar's books a person reads, the more he/she moves, even if such a relationship may be indicated by the respondents' answers. The question as to whether the opposite relationship (i. e. whether this type of literature is read by individuals who perform more movement activities) works, was not considered in the research, nevertheless, respondents' statements prove rather the influence of reading on movement activity, not conversely.

<sup>3</sup> Other co-authors cooperated on this research: M. Elfmark, D. Sigmundová and F. Křen from Faculty of Physical Culture, Palacký University in Olomouc. The author thanks to all of them for their cooperation.

Fig. 1

An average movement activity (MET/min) of the readers of Foglar's books



## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The study has been supported by the research grant from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic (No. MSM 6198959221) "Physical Activity and Inactivity of the Inhabitants of the Czech Republic in the Context of Behavioral Changes".

## REFERENCES

- Bösser, B. (1964). Nejde jen o Foglara. *Zlatý máj*, 8(11), 496-500.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996). *O štěstí a smyslu života*. Praha: NLN.
- Foglar, J. (1964). Dejte mně konečně slovo. *Zlatý máj* 8(4), 160-163.
- Foglar, J. (1998). *Náš oddíl*. Praha: Olympia.
- Foglar, J. (2001). *Kronika Ztracené stopy*. Praha: Olympia.
- Foglar, J. (2003). *Hoši od Bobří řeky*. Praha: Olympia.
- Foglar, J. (2005a). *Život v poklusu*. Praha: Olympia.
- Foglar, J. (2005b). *Přístav volá*. Praha: Olympia.
- Hojer, J., & Černý, V. (Eds.). (2000). *Jestřábe, díky: Jaroslavu Foglarovi Hoši od Bobří řeky a přátelé*. Praha: Ostrov.
- Hybler, M. (1999). Preadolescentní mentalita. *Host*, 15(6), 42-45.
- Jírek, B. (1964). Počítejme s Foglarem. *Zlatý máj* 8(11), 504-507.
- Jirásek, I. (Ed.). (2007). *Fenomén Foglar*. Praha: Prázdňinová škola Lipnice.
- Jirásek, I., Elfmark, M., Sigmundová, D., & Křen, F. (2007). Vztah četby knih Jaroslava Foglara a pohybové aktivity. In I. Jirásek (Ed.), *Fenomén Foglar* (pp. 219-230). Praha: Prázdňinová škola Lipnice.
- Mikulka, L. (1991). *Causa: Jaroslav Foglar*. Ostrava: Amosium servis.
- Mrva, J. (1988). *Úloha literatury pro mládež v prevenci alkoholismu a toxikománie se zaměřením na dílo Jaroslava Foglara*. Kroměříž: OÚNZ - PL.
- Mrva, J. (1990). *Jaroslav Foglar*. Kroměříž: Okresní knihovna.
- Nosek-Windy, V. (1999). *Jestřábí perutě: povídání o foglarovkách*. Praha: Olympia.
- Pírek, Z. (1990). *Čtenářské kluby Jaroslava Foglara*. Brno: Delfin.
- Polák, J. (2003). *Poselství žlutého kvítku*. Praha: Olympia.
- Raba, J. (2005). *Jaroslav Foglar v hádankách a vzpomínkách*. Praha: Ostrov.
- Sohr, S. (1968). *Zase zní píseň úplňku: vyprávění o Jaroslavu Foglarovi*. Ostrava: Puls (ÚS PNS, KPJF, OKZ).
- Toman, V. (2005). *Můj život s ABC - abíčkem mladých techniků a přírodovědců*. Praha: Ostrov.
- Urbanová, S., & Matýsková, B. (1992). *Jaroslav Foglar [tematická jednotka pro základní školy]*. Ostrava: Ítem.
- Zachariáš, J. (2007). *Stoletý hoch od Bobří řeky*. Praha: Ostrov.
- Zapletal, M. (2007). *Záhady a tajemství Jaroslava Foglara*. Praha: Euromedia Group - Knižní klub.

## POHYB V KONTEXTU DÍLA A PEDAGOGICKÉHO VLIVU JAROSLAVA FOGLARA (Souhrn anglického textu)

Príspevek se zabývá motivem pohybu v knihách Jaroslava Foglara a vlivem této literatury na aktivní prožívání čtenářů, konkrétně na potenciální zvýšení pohybové

aktivitu. Přestože výsledky získané z empirického šetření (Jirásek et al., 2007) nejsou průkazné na statisticky významné rovině, můžeme důvodně předpokládat, že literatura pro mládež hraje roli reálného motivačního faktoru.

*Klíčová slova: Jaroslav Foglar, návodná literatura, pohybové aktivity.*

---

### Doc. PhDr. Ivo Jirásek, Ph.D.



Palacký University, Olomouc  
Faculty of Physical Culture  
tř. Míru 115  
771 11 Olomouc  
Czech Republic

#### **Education and previous work experience**

Studied at Palacký University, Olomouc, Pedagogical faculty (Mgr. 1990), Philosophical faculty (Mgr. 1995, Ph.D. 2000) and Faculty of Physical Culture (doc. 2005).

#### **Scientific orientation**

He is interested in philosophical aspects of movement culture (game and play, experience, body, movement), in spiritual dimension of human movement and in experiential education and its methodology.

#### **First-line publications**

- Jirásek, I. (2005). *Filosofická kinantropologie: setkání filosofie, těla a pohybu*. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého.
- Jirásek, I. (2001). *Prožitek a možné světy*. Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého.
- Jirásek, I. (2007). Terms for the naming of movement activities and their significance. *Physical Culture and Sport: Studies and Research*, 1(45), 37–49.
- Jirásek, I. (2007). Constitutive aspects of tourist's and pilgrim's behaviour. In J. Kosiewicz (Ed.), *Social and Cultural Aspects of Sport* (pp. 211–219). Warsaw: The Józef Piłsudski University of Physical Education in Warsaw.
- Jirásek, I. (2007). Extreme sports and the ontology of experience. In M. McNamee (Ed.), *Philosophy, Risk and Adventure Sports* (pp. 138–148). London and New York: Routledge.
- Jirásek, I. (2007). An experience and Heidegger's analysis of authentic existence. In H. Sheridan, L. A. Howe, & K. Thompson (Eds.), *Sporting reflection: Some philosophical perspectives* (pp. 154–170). Oxford: Meyer & Meyer Sport Ltd.
- Hopsicker, P., & Jirásek, I. (2006). Selected philosophy of sport/movement culture texts in English and Slavonic (2005–2006). *International Journal of Physical Education*, 43(4), 140–155.
- Jirásek, I. (2004). From philosophy of sport to philosophical kinanthropology. *International Journal of Physical Education*, 41(4), 163–171.
- Jirásek, I. (2003). Review of essays about philosophy of physical culture? An experience from the Czech Republic: Philosophical kinanthropology. *Sport, Education and Society*, 8(1), 105–117.
-