

Russian Academy of Sciences
S. I. Vavilov Institute for the History of Science and Technology
Saint Petersburg Branch

**STUDIES IN THE HISTORY
OF BIOLOGY**

2019

Volume 11

No. 1

St Petersburg

РЕЦЕНЗИИ И АННОТАЦИИ

DOI 10.24411/2076-8176-2019-11988

Book Review: “Evolutionenbiologie im Biologieunterricht der SBZ / DDR”

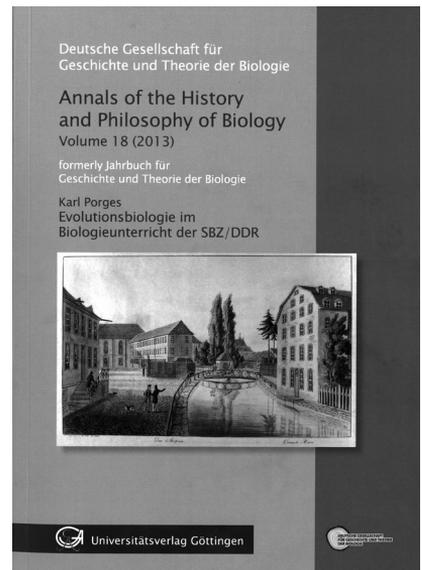
LUISE KNOBLICH¹, GEORGY S. LEVIT²

¹Friedrich Schiller University Jena, Jena, Germany; luisse.knoblich@uni-jena.de

²Institute of Biology, Kassel University, Kassel, Germany; georgelevit@gmx.net

Biology education aims, among others, to improve biology instruction in schools, making it more diverse and engaging. This objective is reflected in curricula and textbooks as means of transferring new achievement into praxis. The school as an institution is in the midst of social and political circumstances, and reflects all historical shifts a society is exposed to. Totalitarian regimes of the recent past tried to use schools for their specific goals. In that sense, the study of educational approaches within such regimes is not only of a pedagogical but also of a general historical interest. These topics were the subject of scrutiny in Karl Porges' recently published book “*Evolutionary Biology in the Biology Curricula of the Soviet Occupation Zone/German Democratic Republic*” (our translation from German)¹.

Porges investigated into the relationships between school curricula and textbooks from one side, and the ideologically saturated discourse in the GDR from another side. The focus of his study was the biology teaching in the post-war East Germany. From a contemporary viewpoint, the GDR was one of the “satellite states” of the USSR and adapted many social-political features from its “big brother”. In the USSR, biology,



¹ Porges K. Evolutionenbiologie im Biologieunterricht der SBZ / DDR. Göttingen: Universitätsverlag, 2018. 310 S.

and especially evolutionary biology, played a significant role within the corps of ideologically relevant sciences, as it was seen as contributing to the materialistic, Marxist-Leninist worldview. Porges' book has intervened into the little research field of biology instruction in the SOZ/GDR.

There are two major hypotheses at the foundation of the book. First, it is the idea of evolving strategic educational goals reflected in textbooks and curricula. Second, it is the proposal that there was a connection between social-political evolution of the state and the genesis of these strategic goals.

The 255 pages of the book are divided into eight chapters accompanied by an introduction outlining the current state of research and conclusions.

At the beginning of the book Porges explained the specificity of science history methods as applied to the history of education seen through the prism of textbooks and curricula. His objective, in this respect, was to retrospectively reconstruct the developments in the GDR proceeding from the current textbook studies. Porges' concentration was on the genesis of teaching and learning materials in evolutionary biology within the context of changing ideological dogmas.

To reach his goals Porges described the evolving biological curricula and textbooks in the SOZ/GDR for grades 8, 10 and 12 on an example of evolutionary biology. He analyzed altogether 19 curricula (five for grade 8 and seven for grades 10 and 12). Part of his description is the empirical analysis of frequencies of crucial names and notions as they appear in the instruction materials in various historical periods. The "word clouds" demonstrating the frequency of basic notions are especially useful. It follows that evolutionary biology had a prominent place in the educational system of the GDR though the whole analyzed period (1945 till 1989).

The analytical outcomes are perfectly visualized in 116 pictures and 63 tables, illustrating that biological issues were presented in the framework of the Marxist-Leninist "dialectical materialism". Porges arrived at the conclusion that evolutionary biology was of special importance for biology education in the GDR. This is explained by the tight connection of evolutionary biology to ideological doctrines. Evolutionism in biology classes followed general political and scientific trends. Thus, Lysenkoism clearly left its mark in the curricula.

Based on his analysis, Porges suggested a periodization of biology teaching in the GDR. The content of teaching materials was supposed to contribute to ideological orientation of pupils supplying them with additional identifiers within the transforming social-political landscape. Thus, immediately after the World War II, biology education was thought to transmit general humanistic values as opposed to the values spread by the Nazi regime. The anti-racist attitude was part of this humanist approach and persisted in the curricula over 45 years until the breakdown of the GDR. In the 1950s one could observe a convergence of the Soviet and East-German biology education which, among others, lead to the growing influence of Lysenkoist "creative Darwinism" in the GDR. After the "Educational Law" (*Bildungsgesetz*) was passed in 1965, the materialist Marxist-Leninist philosophy that required a new "socialist conception of man" took its steady place. This conceptual framework existed until the reunification of Germany in 1990.

As for science education in common, Porges came to a similar conclusion as Berck and Graf², claiming that there is no "biology class" as such and the ways of biology instruction strongly depend on evolving social-political contexts.

Porges' book is generally well-written and represents a perfect logical structure except of a part which discusses various topics around the "Darwin-year" in 2009, including creationism. This part is in sharp contrast to the rest of the book since it deals with issues of contemporary Germany and has just a few references to the main line of the book.

² Berck K.-H., Graf D. *Biologiedidaktik. Grundlagen und Methoden*. 4. Aufl., Wiebelsheim: Quelle & Meyer, 2010. S. 279.

To sum up, the author delivered an impressive and multifaceted overview of biology instruction in the GDR. The personal communication with the contemporary witness Gertrud Kummer provided this voluminous (435 references) study with additional important details. We recommend the book not only to the historians of science, but also to the students of science education, since it includes many observations of general importance. Evolutionary biologists interested in the history of biology education would certainly learn a lot of substantial details as well. Regrettably, the book is available only in German, which narrows down its potential readership.

Рецензия на: «Преподавание эволюционной биологии в Советской зоне оккупации / ГДР»

Луизэ Кноблих¹, Георгий С. Левит²

¹ Йенский университет имени Фридриха Шиллера, Йена, Германия; luise.knoblich@uni-jena.de

² Биологический институт, Университет Касселя, Кассель, Германия; georgelevit@gmx.net

В обсуждаемой книге, доступной, к сожалению, только на немецком языке, Карл Поргес исследовал связи между школьными программами и учебниками и идеологически насыщенным дискурсом в ГДР. В центре его исследований было преподавание биологии в послевоенной Восточной Германии. Содержание учебных материалов должно было способствовать идеологической ориентации учеников, снабжая их дополнительными «идентификаторами» в трансформирующемся социально-политическом ландшафте. Основываясь на проведённом анализе, Поргес предложил периодизацию преподавания биологии в ГДР. Книга рекомендуется историкам науки, эволюционным биологам с интересом к истории биологического образования, и студентам.

DOI 10.24411/2076-8176-2019-11989

**«Во мне назрел душевный перелом,
и я на распутье. К жизни!»**

Г.С. РОЗЕНБЕРГ

Институт экологии Волжского бассейна РАН,
Тольятти, Россия,
genarozenberg@yandex.ru

Это не совсем обычная книга¹. Биография одного из крупнейших экологов XX века Леонтия Григорьевича Раменского, чей вклад в мировую

¹ Перлин С.И., Соболев Л.Н. Л.Г. Раменский: жизнь и творчество / Под ред. В.Б. Голуб. Тольятти: Анна, 2018. 85 с.

