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Olympic Education in Singapore

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Abstract

The inauguration of the Singapore Olympic Academy brought with it the challenge of introducing and promoting Olympic Education in Singapore. Olympic Education focuses on the intellectual, moral and physical development of the individual, and therefore generates close links between the respective learning environments of the classroom and the playing field. On a broader level, it looks beyond the school to spread its philosophy to the general public as a whole and to specialist groups engaged in sport.

This paper outlines the origins of Olympic Education, its objectives as a philosophy of life, and the issues and problems that are its main concerns. Consideration is given to the challenge of adapting Olympic Education to the Singapore environment. Is there really a place for the promotion of a distinctive philosophy, and, if so, how can its ideals best be introduced to the prevailing system.

Keywords

Olympic Education; Olympism; de Coubertin; Singapore; Olympic Academy; School of Physical Education, National Institute of Education.

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Introduction

The advent of the "Sports Excellence 2000" programme in 1993 stimulated the development of an educational plan specifically aimed at promoting the Olympic Movement. The Singapore Olympic Academy was officially opened in August 1994 at a ceremony held within the School of Physical Education at the National Institute of Education. The staff members of the Academy were charged with the task of spreading the philosophy of Olympism to particular individuals and groups. The inaugural session of the Singapore Olympic Academy was held in early September with students of the School of Physical Education (SPE) as the first participants. It was felt that these graduating students should become responsible for initiating programmes focusing on Olympism at the first opportunity. As Olympism transcends the sporting arena, there was an opportunity to provide an element of diversification to the prevailing system in Singapore schools.

The work of Deanna Binder (1994) provides the inspiration for the following view of Olympism in schools. Her ideas were presented at the International Olympic Academy in Greece, with the invitation to all delegates to adapt the scheme for use in the local setting.

Olympic Education: a definition

Olympic Education is the means by which a particular set of ideals can be systematically disseminated to people of all ages, within formal and informal educational settings. These ideals focus on physical and moral development, harmony, friendship, goodwill and excellence. The philosophy of Olympism, which encapsulates these ideals, is the foundation of Olympic Education. Baron Pierre de Coubertin was the figure responsible for revitalising the spirit of the Olympics during the late nineteenth century. His aspirations still represent the basis of the philosophy associated with Olympic Education.

Origins of Olympism

The ancient Olympic Games in Greece provided the foundation for Olympism. The integration of mind, body and spirit was the basis of the Greek conception of life, that was enthusiastically adopted by de Coubertin, the founder of the Modern Games (Segrave, 1988). De Coubertin linked this classical symbol with the nineteenth century English Public School conception of sport. He had observed that the emphasis placed on character building through sport had made a significant contribution to the success of the English upper classes. De Coubertin's immediate educational aims were aimed at halting a long period of physical, social, and moral decline in France. However, the idea was to spread beyond his native environment, to become a global expression of international sport.

Olympism Today

Today, the Olympic Games provide the best known elements of Olympism. Excellence in achievement presents a positive illustration of that section of the philosophy, which focuses on

competition. However, there is more to Olympism than winning and setting records. Indeed, the main, but understated, role of Olympism relates to its educational relevance. The International Olympic Committee's definition of Olympism reveals the optimistic aims of de Coubertin's early aspirations:

Olympism is an overall philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will, and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism sets out to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational values of good example and a respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.

The goal of Olympism is to place everywhere sport at the service of the harmonious development of mankind, with a view to encouraging the establishment of a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.

Fundamental Principles, Olympic Charter, 1994.

A number of important objectives are identified within the Olympic Charter, and naturally they bear a close resemblance to universal principles. Segrave (1988) outlined the main aspirations or goals of Olympism.

1. Education

De Coubertin advocated sport as, the most feasible means for promoting appropriate moral values. However, the experience of competition was seen to have a beneficial educational impact in terms of physical, mental, and social qualities as well. The expectation for schools is that students abide by such ethical values as honesty and sportsmanship. The goal of education is also manifest in the Olympic Creed, a famous dictum, which has been attributed to De Coubertin

The most important thing in the Olympic Games is not to win but to take part, just as the most important thing in life is not the triumph but the struggle. The essential thing is not to have conquered but to have fought well.

2. Peace and International Understanding

For de Coubertin, the Olympic Games were an opportunity for young people, officials and spectators to meet and understand their contemporaries from other countries. Through Olympic Education it is possible to encompass these ideas of patriotism, peace and understanding. In a multi-racial society like Singapore, sporting activities play a considerable part in bringing Chinese, Malay, Indian and Eurasian children together. Just as the Olympic Games provide an opportunity to recognise and respect the national diversity of the participants, so Olympic Education provides local opportunities to cultivate generosity and tolerance towards others.

3. Equal Opportunity

In order to popularise sport and 'to provide opportunities for everyone to participate, de Coubertin encouraged mass participation. The Olympic Games were established "to exalt the individual athlete, whose very existence is necessary for the involvement of the community in athletic sports, and whose achievements provide an example to be 'emulated'. This idea of the 'role model' who provides motivation for young participants to engage in sport has been acknowledged in

Singapore (Advisory Council on Sport and Recreation, 1989). But more relevant to prevailing conditions is the importance of mass participation as an aid to the Healthy Lifestyle campaign.

4. Fair Play and Equal Competition

One of the best known aims of Olympism is to aspire to sportsmanship and fair play. The Olympic Oath underlines the primacy of the aim for those participating:

In the name of all competitors I promise that we shall take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules which govern them, in the true spirit of sportsmanship, for the glory of sport and our teams.

Olympic Charter, 1985, p.62

In Singapore and Malaysia, the recent attempts to eradicate match fixing in the FAM league (kelong) have highlighted an awareness within the sporting environment to create and maintain a positive image. This particular goal receives considerable emphasis within the school environment, where children first experience organised competition.

5. Cultural Expression

For de Coubertin, the Olympics were a vehicle for the successful integration of moral, artistic, intellectual and physical creativity. This goal can be achieved in a number of ways. The performance of aesthetic events, such as gymnastics, is one means. Hosting major sporting events has also become an important means of intercultural communication. The programme of events at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the XVIIth South East Asian Games (SEA Games) held in Singapore in 1993 reflected values associated with harmony and unity. At the community level, the demonstration of traditional art forms, including dance, would be an appropriate illustration of this goal.

6. Excellence

For the competitive sportsman, the pursuit of excellence is the most attractive element of Olympism. However, in view of the broader scope of Olympism, it is clear that excellence is associated with all elements of activities associated with Games festivities. In the school setting, excellence in academic studies receives the most attention, but similarly the importance of aiming excellence in any field is a fundamental of good education. Helping students develop self-esteem by becoming the best that they can be in what ever they undertake has been advocated widely (Binder, 1994).

Aims of the Singapore Olympic Academy

The immediate aim of the Singapore Olympic Academy is 'to equip graduating students of the School of Physical Education (SPE) with knowledge relating to Olympic Education that can be utilized across the broad spectrum of teaching and learning situations, This is achieved in two ways. Firstly, all graduating students attend a compulsory residential course, where lectures and discussions are led by distinguished academicians from Singapore and abroad. This year, for example, Professor Herbert Haag (Germany), Associate Professor Ian Jobling (Australia) and Dr Desmond on were the keynote speakers at a four day session, which was attended by 80 SPE students. Secondly, content relating to Olympism is utilized directly and indirectly within the SPE curriculum modules. For degree students a module devoted to aspects of Olympism is to be introduced.

The medium to long-term aims of the Academy, relating to Olympic Education will attempt to accommodate those individuals, groups and communities with specific or general sporting interests. One particular idea that has been developed successfully in the Netherlands to publicise Olympism has been the use of a Mobile Academy, which visits institutions and organisations.

Within the school context, the main responsibilities of the Academy will be twofold. Firstly to publicise the value of Olympic Education, and secondly to assist with the development, production, and presentation of resource material. One might imagine a collaborative venture, involving interested schools and interested teachers, with the objective of adapting Olympic material to the requirements of the curriculum.

Olympic Education in Singapore Schools

The values and ideals, which often inspire teachers in schools are clearly related to the aspirations of Olympism. As such Olympic Education can supplement work in the day to day teaching of many subjects, not just Physical Education and the Extra Curricular Activities (ECAs).

Binder (1994) identified four reasons to include elements of Olympic Education into the teaching programme. These are optional elements, which can be adapted where necessary to fit the situation in Singapore:

1. Concepts in history, geography, literature and creative writing, art, mathematics, and science can be related to Olympic Studies;
2. Components relating to Olympic Studies can be integrated without interfering with the prescribed curricula;
3. Students learn better because many are interested in sport and the material relates to current events;
4. The Olympic Ideals are worth teaching.

Content

Can Olympic Education produce both desired and desirable outcomes in terms of knowledge-based and value-based objectives. How meaningful are the following to the Singapore situation?

- History and traditions of the ancient and modern Olympic Games;
- Symbols and ceremonies of the Olympic Games;
- Olympic sports;
- Famous Olympic athletes;
- Social, political, and economic issues related to the Olympic Games;
- Biographical information on Singaporean Olympians.

Which age groups can be involved?

Olympic studies can be adapted for use with any age group.

What format would be required for a resource handbook or manual?

Background information for the teacher

Activity sheets for use by teachers

Activities to develop understanding and skills.

Application 1

Olympism provides a theme that can interconnect a number of academic disciplines

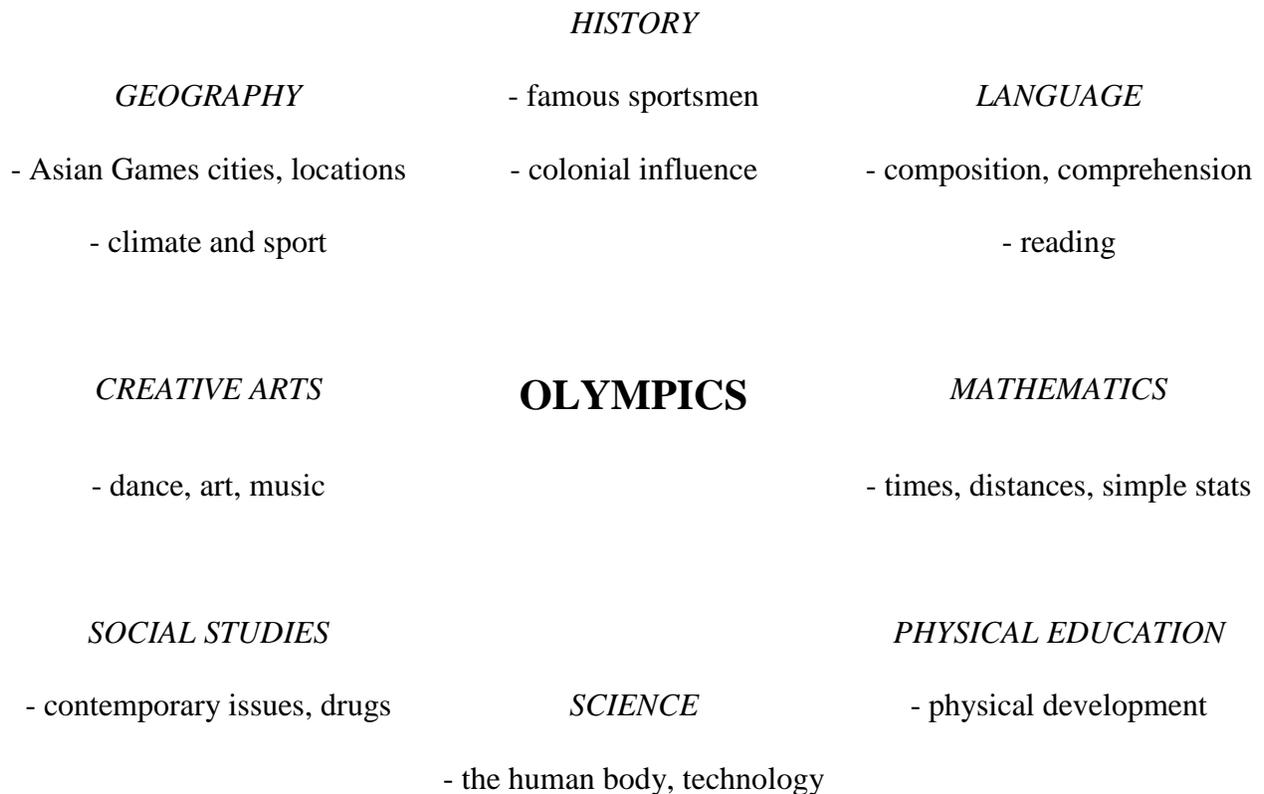


Figure 1: Olympic Education as part of the curriculum

Application 2

Olympic Education creates opportunities to discuss relevant issues within the region, for example, the impact of hosting a major competition like the South East Asian (SEA) Games in 1993. The following example has been adapted from Binder (1988)

Come Together. The Olympics and You, Senior High School Resource Kit, p. OI 33.

ECONOMICS, COMMERCIALISM AND THE SOUTH EAST ASIA GAMES

ISSUE: Do the SEA Games justify the money and effort spent to stage them and to produce athletes to compete in them?

YES

1. They leave a legacy of national pride.
2. They promote health and physical fitness.
3. They inspire youth to pursue sports excellence.
4. They contribute to nation building.
5. They contribute to personal self-esteem.
6. They promote mutual understanding and goodwill amongst the competing nations.

NO

1. They divert money and resources needed for other projects.
2. Their effects are short-term and benefit an elite group.
3. Athletes become pawns in a game of corporate and political one-upmanship.

RELATED QUESTIONS

1. What are the main sources of funds for the Games? What are the major expenditures?
2. In what way does staging the Games contribute to the economy of Singapore?
3. What kind of legacy is left by the Games for Singapore?
4. What services and facilities are essential for the staging of the Games? Not essential?
5. To what degree should the Games be funded by the private sector?
6. To what degree should the Games be funded by government contributions?

'Developing a Resource Handbook'

As Olympic Education is an optional addition to the curriculum, it suggests that teachers become responsible for producing resource material that is appropriate to their particular situation. A number of phases may be required in the production of a resource handbook. Binder (1994) outlined the main stages in the process:

Phase	Description	Activities	Product
1	Concept Development	Consultation Development of content outline	
2	Content Development	Development and design of the content for the modules Writing and editing	Draft 1
3	Field Test	Preparation and administration of test procedure Collect data Complete revisions	Draft #2
4	Final Draft	Revisions	Draft #3
5	Production	Determine format, prepare graphics and design, print, distribute	
			An OLYMPIC EDUCATION HANDBOOK

These resources can be tailor-made supplements to prescribed texts and they can be supported further by means of video-based delivery systems.

Conclusion

A successful Olympic Education programme should result in a number of positive outcomes relating to knowledge and values. The use of a resource handbook or the organisation of an Olympic Day in school enables students to focus on educational products that transcend the classroom, as values associated with Olympism are valid in any setting. Participation in physical activity and sport not only promotes racial harmony, friendship and understanding, but it also serves to enhance self-esteem and encourages excellence.

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