

# HOW TO DEFINE OLYMPIC EDUCATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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## Abstract

The research aims at exploring and providing an up-to-date definition of Olympic education, with the further expectation that this new definition will have theoretical reference for design and innovation of Olympic education in school curriculums, teaching materials and programmes. It exams the definitions of the subject "Olympic education" of researchers and educators from various countries and eras since it firstly appeared in the 1970s, then after a critical analysis of previous definitions within context of social, economic, political and educational development of the international community and the new changes in the Olympic Games, the research suggests a new definition with the consideration of current facts and challenges faced in the Olympic Games and Olympic education practices. Two new viewpoints are presented in the research: the "elite education" function of Olympic education should be valued more than it has been; the influences of media, high-tech and other newly-emerged issues in the Olympic Games should not be avoided but should be discussed in appropriate forms in Olympic education activities, programmes, school curriculums, etc.

*Keyword: Olympic education, Olympism, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.*

## Introduction

The studies of Olympic education have been carried on in many countries all over the world for almost 40 years. However, the definition of Olympic education is still an open question in discussion. The aim of this study is to analyze different various definitions of Olympic education from previous researchers and several elements which should be considered in defining Olympic education, then a new definition within the context of the 21st Century is presented.

Due to the character of the research, historical, documentary research and comparative research methods are applied.

### 1 Pierre de Coubertin, the founding father of modern Olympic Games

Despite his revival of the Olympic Games with the hope of make it a resource for educational reform, Pierre de Coubertin, the founding father of the modern Olympic Games, never used the term "Olympic education" during his lifetime, and the other term "Olympic pedagogy", which will be discussed in later chapters, only had appeared in his "Olympic letters" but never in his academic works. When referred to any educational programme, teaching of Olympic spirit to students at school and other educational activities relevant to the Olympic Games, he usually used the term "athletic education" and "sport pedagogy". In the research of Nissiotis (1987), he pointed out that Coubertin seemed to prefer the former one; actually, the lateral one appeared more in Coubertin's later works, which even is the name of one of his most influential book, "Sport Pedagogy" (Pédagogie Sportive). Nevertheless it may worth notice that the formal one, which he used in a speech on educational reform in France with English education as a reference on January 26, 1889, had been much more used than the later one during his service as the president of the International Olympic Committee. The utilization of this term is not a random linguistic choice—it presented the

role and aim of Olympic education according to Coubertin, because the word "athletics", originally from the Greek word "athlos", means not the activity of sport, but the prize awarded to the Olympians after the contest. It overpasses the simple meaning of sports competition, but bears more moral and social meanings such as a man's duty, honour, loyalty, etc (Nissiotis,1987; Müller, 2004).Although never provided an unambiguous definition of Olympic education in his lifetime, in his other writings and works in Olympism and relevant issues, Coubertin pointed out 5 principles of Olympic education(Naul, 2008):

- Sporting-religious idea ("religio-athletae")
- Permanent striving for the self-perfection, as the motto "citius, altius, fortius" presented in the educational aspect of Olympic Games
- Fair play, "knighthood" in the sports field
- Peace education ("truce")
- Harmonious development of body and mind ("beauty")

From those principles it was confirmed that since the revival of modern Olympic Games, Olympic education has served two equally important and interactive roles: social education and sport education, which made this subject distinct from both the two as individual areas.

## **2 Social education "or" sports education?**

The term "Olympic education" appeared in the 1970s, however, the question of "what it is" is still remaining in argument till now. One of the key points of argument is the nature of Olympic education, in another word, it should be understood and studied as a form of social education, or sport education, a part of each, or something else?

There is a type of definition which emphasized a lot in the sport education function of Olympic education, which might be represented by Grupe. He proposed that Olympic education should be included in school curriculum and sport education in educational systems in all countries, then, furthermore, he defined Olympic education as "sport education directed by the ideas of capability, fair play, solidarity and peace" (Grupe, 1997; Geng, 2009). Despite the fact that Grupe, as well as other researchers of this trend, realized Olympic education is different from other forms of sport education, however, he still defined it as a "sport education", which obviously could not present the difference between Olympic education and sport education or physical education.

Scholars and educationists of another trend of beliefs concentrate more on the social education side of Olympic education. For example, Binder claimed that the first and most important function of Olympic education was the education of values. She listed 5 elements which should be included in the definition of Olympic education (Binder, 2000):

- Body, Mind and Spirit: Inspiring Children to Participate in Physical Activity
- Fair Play: The Spirit of Sport in Life and Community
- Multiculturalism: Learning to Live With Diversity
- In Pursuit of Excellence: Identity, Self-Confidence and Self-Respect
- The Olympics Present and Past: Celebrating the Olympic Spirit

In her definition, although Coubertin's original philosophy of harmonious development of body and mind is listed, sport and physical education is only valued as one of the methods to achieve the goal of teaching values--even though the values are based in Olympism, which obviously devalue the importance of sport in Olympic education to some extent.

## **3 Social education "and" sports education**

A more widely accepted and popular trend of defining Olympic education is the one that indicates Olympic education is a form of education in which the teaching of certain international and national

social and human values and mortalities, as well as the explanation of common human wishes, such as peace in the whole world, are the central goal. Besides general educational activities, scholars and educationists appreciating this trend of definition also clearly point out that the teaching and education of Olympism and general social values presented in Olympism must be through sport activities.

In fact, this trend of "combined" definition of Olympic educations does not have conflicting distinctions with the "social education" trend: Both of them believe that the teaching of social values which are presented in Olympism, is the central task of Olympic education. However, this trend of theories also points out the importance of sport in Olympic education, which made it different, and closer to Coubertin's original description of Olympic education.

Chinese Olympic educationist Ren defined Olympic education as "an educational activity that takes youth as its main target group and uses sports to disseminate the Olympic values" (Ren, 2008). This definition pointed out sport and value education, are two equal parts of Olympic education. However, it did not concretely explain what elements or principles should be included in Olympic education.

A good representative of this trend should be the definition of Olympic education from Müller. In his earlier work in the last century, he stated that besides the values of harmonious development of body and mind, fair play, international understanding and tolerance, Olympic education should also include encouraging children to achieve individual human perfection through sport, the idea of amateurism is not for material interests but training and competing for honour in sport, and the desire of becoming elite and being role model for younger generation of athletes (Müller, 1990). For Müller, sport and sports education is not a channel through which the teaching of Olympic and social values can be achieved, but a necessary element of Olympic education. More recently, he improved his definition of Olympic education within the changes of external (social, cultural, political, etc.) and internal (Olympic Games) contexts in the new era. He listed six features of Olympic education in the 21st century (Müller, 2004):

- The concept of harmonious development of the whole human being;
- The idea of striving for human perfection through high performance, in which scientific and artistic achievement must take equal rank with sporting performance;
- Sporting activity voluntarily linked to ethical principles such as fair play and equality of opportunity, and the determination to fulfil those obligations; there is also included the ideal of amateurism, which has been almost totally abandoned in international sport today;
- The concept of peace and goodwill between nations, reflected by respect and tolerance in relations between individuals;
- The promotion of moves towards emancipation in and through sport.

Müller's latest definition of Olympic education appropriately reflected the original educational idea of Coubertin. He has given clearer explanation of which values should be taught to the younger generation through Olympic education, defined the position of sport in Olympic education, and pointed out the nature of Olympic education. However, there are more elements which need to be considered when attempting to define Olympic education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

#### **4 Elements in argument "Mass participation" vs. "elite education"**

The dilemma between mass participation and the function of elite selection and education actually is not a new topic just emerged in the new century. Since the foundation of this subject, Olympic educationists and researchers have been paying their main attention to how Olympic education can encourage and promote education and improve life among children and youth from comparatively disadvantaged backgrounds, which without any doubt is an important idea of Coubertin's original conception of Olympic education. Nevertheless, Coubertin himself never had denied Olympic education's function of selecting and educating elites for the society. First of all, Coubertin's idea of

reviving the Olympic Games was from his desire of promoting sports education in French schools. In order to reform education in France, in this process of exploring the way of educational reform, Coubertin was inspired by the success of sports education in British public schools (Coubertin, 1901). It has to be realized that the public school system, no matter in Coubertin's years or at current time, is an educational system with the main aim to select and educate social elites. Viewing from another side, the competitive and elite-selecting character of sport exists equally with its character of encouraging mass participation, no matter the sport here is adopted solo as an educational media or a higher call. Although Coubertin emphasized repeatedly that Olympic Games was only an external motive which provided a platform to young people all over the world to present their progress in education to the world every four years (Naul, 2008), he also pointed out that Olympic education should serve the following role: selecting elites and training reserve for sports competitions, such as Olympic Games, and teach the younger generation to find their role models in those elite athletes. He wrote in one of his speeches:

In order to develop the bodies for 100 people, it is necessary for 50 to practice a sport, and in order for 50 to practice a sport it is necessary for 20 to specialize; but in order for 20 to specialize it is necessary for 5 to be capable of outstanding achievement.

This form, pointed out by Müller, it is a "pyramid principle" (Müller, 2004), which actually is a form of elite-selection.

As stated above, elite selection and mass participation should not be contrarious and conflicting, in contrary, admitting and confirming the function and aim of elite selection and education of Olympic education will encourage mass participation. As Coubertin himself and some other educationists as Müller suggested, a key role of Olympic education should be setting up role models for young people--and it cannot be denied that role model actually means elites of the society.

## **5 Meida, high-tech and commercialism**

When Alexander Popov won his gold medal in the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, children and young people all over the world read his story about how hard training and self-discipline had led him to the podium; however, when Michael Phelps won his eight golds in Beijing 16 years later, more children got to know the word "LZR Racer", and its manufacturer Speedo instead of the story about the young medalist as an Olympian. The rapid development of high-tech in the 21st Century provided more methods and platforms for Olympic Games and Olympic education, while the negative influence is also increasingly obvious. The same condition also has happened when talking about the influence of media, as well as commercialism in sport. As Müller criticized, "Olympic education' can teach the lesson that sport, for the majority of those, who pursues it, has not lost its meaning as the striving after perfection in the traditional sense of amateur sport. The influence of business and the media has gone too far if it reaches a point where sportsmen become a 'property' and lose their personal freedom" (Müller, 2004). The negative influences of media, high-tech and commercialism have raised new challenges not only for the Olympic Games, but also for Olympic education, as those influences are directly against the most fundamental ideas of Olympic education, such as joy through effort, fair play and equality of opportunities for all.

As a result, when enjoying the benefits brought by the development of media and high-tech, as well as other areas in the new century, Olympic education also should play an active, positive role in resisting the negative influences. Referring to the aspect of definition of Olympic education, the ideas of striving for human perfection and harmonious development of body and mind through efforts, equal opportunities for young people and children from all nations and social, economical and cultural backgrounds should be more emphasized, in addition, Olympians and ex-olympians can play a more active and important role in this topic.

## 6 A new definition in the new century

To give a simple definition to Olympic education would not be easy. Within the context in the new century, the definition should take three points into consideration: the relation between sport and social education, and balance between mass education and elite selection, original, fundamental philosophy of Olympism and the challenges caused by new factors in the new era. Therefore, Olympic education in the 21st Century should a special form of education impartible from Olympic Games, which bears the following features:

- The harmonious development of body and mind;
- The desire and determination of striving for human perfection in sport, academic studies and daily life;
- Olympic values and mortalities presented in sport activities, such as fair play, equal opportunities for people of both genders from all nations with various social, economic and cultural backgrounds, international understanding, respects and tolerance;
- The desire of being elites and role models for the younger generation, not only in sport, but also in other areas, and through sport activities to understand this goal must be achieved by persistent efforts, and to enjoy this process;
- Sport education, which is not only applied as a channel of teaching Olympic values, but also aims to select sports elites and provide children and young people with sport talents opportunities to explore their potentials;
- The knowledge about Olympic Games.

### Conclusion

When talked about the influence of philosophical and ideological traditions in sports and Olympic Education in China, Brownell argued about the influences of western classicalism and Orientalism :

*Classicism was the West's way of defining "who we are," while Orientalism was the West's way of defining "who we are not."*

To define Olympic education in the context of the 21st Century, one most fundamental question (or dilemma) we are facing now is the seemingly endless argument about "who we are" and "who we are not". On one hand, the principal task in re-defining Olympic education is to conceptualize and confirm what Olympic education is, as the attempt above to present a few points which should be considered when re-defining this concept.

On the other hand, we also have to make a clear decision about what Olympic education is not. It is highly difficult--almost impossible to require a set of standardized guidelines applicable for all countries and regions where Olympic education is practised, however, one belief should be confirmed, that is, the definition of Olympic education should be a multi-aspect but not a single-aspect one. Moreover, the "multi-aspect" here does not mean several aspects in its function of social, value or mortal education, instead, there must be a more comprehensive definition that equally include two tasks of Olympic education: social education and teaching of Olympism and Olympic values; sports education. In addition, the new definition shall also specially include new elements in the 21st Century, caused by the challenges we commonly face in the international community.

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## **JAK CHARAKTERIZOVAT VÝCHOVU K OLYMPISMU VE 21. STOLETÍ?**

Výzkum je zaměřen na zkoumání pojmu Olympijská výchova a definování jeho aktuálního významu s očekáváním, že tato současná definice bude mít teoretický vliv na formu a inovaci olympijské výchovy ve školních osnovách, učebních materiálech a programech. Výzkum zkoumá definice předmětu Olympijská výchova výzkumných a pedagogických pracovníků z různých zemí a období, od kdy se tento pojem poprvé objevil v 70. letech 20. století, po kritické analýze předešlých definic v kontextu společenského, ekonomického, politického a vzdělávacího rozvoje mezinárodní společnosti a nových změn v Olympijských hrách. Výzkum navrhuje novou definici pojmu s ohledem na současná fakta a náročné úkoly, se kterými se musejí vžité praktiky olympijských her a výchovy k olympismu vyrovnat.

## **WIE KANN ERZIEHUNG ZU DEN OLYMPISCHEN SPIELEN IM 21. JAHRHUNDERT CHARAKTERISIERT WERDEN?**

Die Untersuchung konzentriert sich auf den Begriff Olympische Erziehung und auf die Definition Ihrer aktuellen Bedeutung - in Erwartung, dass die gegenwärtige Situation einen theoretischen Einfluss auf die Form und Innovation der olympischen Erziehung in Schulplänen, Schulmaterialien und Schulprogrammen haben wird. Die Forschung untersucht die Definition des Schulfaches Olympische Erziehung von Forschungsmitarbeitern und Lehrern aus verschiedenen Ländern und Zeiten, als dieser Begriff zum ersten Mal in 70er Jahren des 20. Jahrhunderts erschien – nach kritischer Analyse der vorherigen Definitionen im Kontext der gesellschaftlichen, ökonomischen, politischen Entwicklung sowie der Bildungsentwicklung und der aktuellen Änderungen in Olympischen Spielen. Die Untersuchungen bieten eine neue Definition dieses Begriffes mit Hinsicht auf die aktuellen Fakten und anspruchsvolle Aufgaben an, mit denen sich erfahrene Praktiken der Olympischen Spiele und der Erziehung auseinandersetzen müssen.

## **JAK DEFINIOWAĆ EDUKACJĘ OLIMPIJSKĄ W XXI WIEKU**

Badania dotyczą sfery edukacji jako przygotowania do olimpiady oraz znalezienia współczesnej definicji tego typu kształcenia z uwzględnieniem teoretycznego zarysu propozycji i innowacyjności edukacji olimpijskiej w programach szkolnych, materiałach i zajęciach dydaktycznych. Artykuł porównuje różne wersje definicji "edukacji olimpijskiej" przekazane przez naukowców i dydaktyków z różnych państw i dziedzin, których historia sięga do lat siedemdziesiątych minionego wieku. Po krytycznej analizie tych definicji w kontekście rozwoju społecznego, ekonomicznego, politycznego i edukacyjnego rozwoju społeczności międzynarodowej i zmian rozgrywek olimpijskich zaproponowano nową definicję, obejmującą obecną sytuację oraz wyzwania, z którymi się spotykamy na olimpiadach oraz w trakcie procesu kształcenia ich dotyczących. Przeprowadzone badania pokazują dwa nowe spojrzenia: funkcja "elitarnego przygotowania" edukacji olimpijskich powinna być bardziej doceniana, aniżeli ma to miejsce dotychczas, wpływ mediów, technologii i innych nowych cech olimpiad nie powinien być pomijany, należy go uwzględnić w zajęciach i programach szkolnych prowadzonych w ramach edukacji olimpijskiej.