

Olympic education

University lecture on the Olympics

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1. Introduction

"Olympic education" is a term which first appeared in sports education and Olympic research only in the 1970s (Müller, 1975a). Does "Olympic education" mean the revival of the educational ideals of ancient Greece, or is its purpose merely to bring credibility to the marketing of Olympic symbols? The question must be answered in terms of principles, and the answer ranges deep into the history and concept of the modern Olympic Movement. Its founder, the Frenchman Pierre de Coubertin (1863-1937), saw himself first and foremost as an educator, and his primary aim was educational reform (Müller, 1986a:1-34). His aim, initially restricted to France and the French schools, was to make modern sport an integral part of the school routine, and so introduce into that routine a sports education which would embrace both body and mind. He had learned from modern sport in England, and especially from his knowledge of public school education at rugby, that the moral strength of the young can be critically developed through the individual experience of sporting activity and extended from there to life as a whole. Coubertin did not use the term "Olympic education", but referred initially to "sporting education", and indeed that was the title of the book he published in 1922, *Pédagogie sportive*. Since as early as 1900, and not exclusively within schools, he had been encouraging the idea of making sport accessible to adolescents and even to older people as a newly discovered part of a complete education (Coubertin, 1901).

2. Peace education as a starting point

As a young man, in 1892, Coubertin had had the idea of renewing the ancient Olympic Games, which duly took place in Athens in 1896. Whereas his educational aspirations had additionally been confined to France, the success of these first Olympic Games marked, for Coubertin, the internationalization of his educational visions, where his main priority at first was the idea of *peace among nations*.

In his early writings, he refers to international sporting encounters as "the free trade of the future" (Coubertin, 1892) seeing the participating athletes as "ambassadors of peace" (Coubertin, 1891) even though by his own admission he still had to take care, at the time of the founding of the IOC in 1894, not to say too much about this, not wanting – as he says in a document that has come down to us – to ask too much of sportsmen or to frighten the pacifists. With his ideas of peace, however, Coubertin associated an ethical mission which, then as now, was central to the Olympic Movement and – if it were to succeed – had to lead to political education. On the threshold of the 20th century, Coubertin tried to bring about enlightened internationalism by cultivating a non-chauvinistic nationalism. (Quanz, 1995)

It is precisely the relationship between nationalism and international peace – a one-sided one hitherto, because invariably regarded as a contradiction in terms – that forms the challenging peace ethos and fascination of Olympism. From the beginning, Coubertin's sights were set upon interplay between nations united by enthusiasm for peace and an internationalism that would set a ceremonial seal on their peaceful ambitions. In these ambitions he was influenced by his paternal friend Jules Simon. Simon had been a co-founder of the Interparliamentary Union, established in Paris in 1888, and the International Peace Bureau, founded in 1892. (Quanz, 1995:170-178)

Coubertin's plans thus extended from the outset beyond the organizing of Olympic Games every four years. He wanted mankind in the 20th century to experience sport in the harmonious interplay of physical

and intellectual skills, so that – set in an artistic, aesthetic frame – it would make an important contribution to human happiness. The participants in the Olympics were, to Coubertin, the models of a young generation that changed every four years.

3. "Religio athletae" as an anthropological foundation

The question of the content and purpose of an "Olympic education" can only be answered if we consider Coubertin's call for a contemporary application of the "religio athletae". (Nissiotis, 1987)

Coubertin advocated the knowledge of Greek and other European philosophy. The return to antiquity was his starting point, though with the option of adapting it to the modern age as far as possible. Coubertin was an eclectic: he read a little of everything, hunted out subjects that interested him and so formed his own opinion. He engaged in a continuous "dialogue" with the events of his age, from which he formed his "Olympic ideal".

Three aspects played an important part in this:

1. Coubertin's age no longer had any schools of philosophy of its own. Hegel had been the last proponent of an all-embracing philosophical system. Coubertin followed Hegel in his ideas about the application of philosophy to life, actions and morals.
2. The social issue came to a head in that period with the ideas of Karl Marx and the Russian October Revolution of 1917. Previously, Coubertin had already absorbed the ideas of the French social reformer Frédéric Le Play and the English historian Arnold Toynbee. Coubertin considered himself to be travelling a road between idealism and social philosophy towards a new realism, with romantic overtones, which had displaced the philosophy of positivism and become established as a "new science" within the universities.
3. The spirit of internationalism, or universalism as it was not infrequently known, went hand in hand with the development of the mass media and transport and telecommunications links. World exhibitions (Paris 1889 and 1900, St. Louis 1904) promoted international exchange and comparisons.

As Coubertin saw it, this new world called for a comprehensive worldwide "philosophy", which could better be described as an "ideology" (Malter, 1969). The Dominican friar Henri Didon, probably the strongest influence on Coubertin apart from Simon, introduced him to the spirit of ecumenism propagated by his Order (Müller, 1996a). This was the origin of Coubertin's idea of universalism, to which by syncretic transfiguration he gave the name of "Olympism".

But Coubertin's postulate was and remained Greek philosophy. He was a philhellene (Müller, 1986b:24-76). As a result, his ideas were at odds both with the non-philosophical aspects of antiquity and with modern European philosophy. In his view, Greek philosophy was not a theory of life but life itself.

In his reconstruction of Coubertin's ideas, the Greek religious philosopher Nissiotis points out that, according to Coubertin, the right "mean" arose from an unending struggle between the upholders of principles and their detractors (Nissiotis, 1987). Values as such were therefore unattainable extremes for most philosophers, and the same applied to the Olympic ideals. But those ideals were to be set up by a

conscious effort as something to be striven for. It was from this basic concept that Coubertin then developed his "sporting ontology" (Nissiotis, 1987:138).

Instead of the word "sport", however, Coubertin often uses the term "athletics". Sport as he sees it is not something innate in man: rather the athlete pursues the Greek *athlos*, meaning the prize awarded after the contest. The athlete, then, needed instinct, character and movement. These formed the essentials of the perfect man, the "homme sportif" (Nissiotis, 1987:139).

In this version of anthropology, muscular strength is linked to strength of will – in other words, the athlete must consciously make a sacrifice and not merely indulge in the unthinking exercise of strength. It is man's striving to go higher and farther that is what makes him man in the first place. According to Coubertin, then, man is not what he is but what he can become. If man could be defined, that would be the end of him, so that he must always look ahead to see what comes next. This definition is basically a contradiction in terms, since it denies the possibility of defining man; so it is not so much an attempt at a definition as a new style of "philosophy", an "explosive philosophy of life" (Nissiotis, 1987:140).

4. Coubertin's Olympism between education and ideology

From Olympism to Olympic education

Coubertin says, "Athletics and the Olympic Games are the manifestation of the cult of the human being, mind and body, emotion and conscience. Will and conscience, because these are the two despots that fight for domination, the conflict between them often tearing us cruelly apart, because we must achieve equilibrium" (Müller, 1986b:418). It was for this reason that Coubertin was unwilling to provide an unambiguous definition of Olympism, but calls upon us to reflect on the meaning and value of the human body. Olympism is the entire collection of values which, over and above physical strength, are developed when we participate in sport (Malter, 1996). This principle contains the basics of a modern theory of sport education on an anthropological basis (Grupe, 1968, 1984, 1985; Meinberg, 1987, 1991).

It is from Coubertin that we have the following paraphrase of the word "Olympism": "Olympism combines, as in a halo, all those principles which contribute to the improvement of mankind" (Coubertin, 1917:20).

Coubertin's "Olympism" is therefore aimed at *all* people, irrespective of age, occupation, race, nationality or creed. Its general characteristic is that it brings together all men of good will, provided that they take their commitment to humanity seriously. It is, in Hansch Lenks's phrase, "multi-tolerant", allowing no ideological conflicts to arise (Lenk, 1972).

"Olympic education" endeavours to provide a universal education or development of the whole human individual, in contrast to the increasingly specialized education encountered in many specialized disciplines. Consequently, it can only be based on the fundamental values of the human personality.

Coubertin understood the Olympic Games as being the four-yearly "celebration of the universal human spring" (Müller, 1986b:288) followed that both participants and spectators had to be prepared for the

festival. His concept of the process of training the Olympic athlete was based on the following pyramid principle: "In order for 100 people to develop their bodies 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" (Müller, 1986a:436).

Thus, the "sports education" propagated by Coubertin encompassed all young people and the population at large insofar as its members included sport in their search for the *expérience personnelle*. He saw no contradiction here with his Olympic idea and Movement, since he had from the outset combined his educational and organization aims. Back in 1897, at the second Olympic Congress in Le Havre, those attending had been surprised to find themselves dealing not with details of future Olympic Games but with the propagation of sport and physical education in schools. Even in the aftermath of the unsuccessful 1900 and 1904 Olympic Games, Coubertin used the 3rd Olympic Congress of 1905 in Brussels to discuss models for the practice of sport and physical education in schools and other areas of life. After the breakthrough eventually achieved by the Olympic Games at Stockholm in 1912, Coubertin ventured to take on the universities, with a 1913 Congress in Lausanne on "Psychology and physiology in sport". Although this was asking too much of his IOC colleagues, concerned only with international sporting relations and the four-yearly Olympic Games, this was yet another demonstration of his more ambitious educational mission and his independence (Müller, 1994). "We must reach the masses" (Müller, 1986b) was the motto with which he reacted to the impression made by social revolution.

Consistently, he said in 1918, "It cannot be enough that this *Pédagogie Olympique* – of which I recently said that it is based simultaneously on the cult of physical effort and the cult of harmony – in other words, on the taste for excess combined with moderation - should have the opportunity to be celebrated in the eyes of the whole world every four years. It also needs its "permanent factories"(Coubertin, 1918a). This quotation contains Coubertin's first reference to "Olympic education"; clearly, he was at this time convinced of the need for, and the conceptual strength of, his complex educational ideal.

Away from his home country, he used the Olympic Movement for an international Olympic education network. When he wrote in November (Coubertin, 1918b) that "Olympism is not a system but an attitude of mind", he called at the same time for the consistent pursuit of an "Olympic education" in contrast to the traditional educational models which, in his eyes, were alien to sport. In 1921, when Coubertin tried to extend an urgently needed technical Olympic Congress in Lausanne to include a parallel event on sports education for the workforce, he failed to gain the support of a majority on the IOC.

Coubertin pursued many schemes outside the IOC designed to create examples of such "production facilities"(Müller, 1975b). Before the First World War had ended, he had founded an Olympic Institute in Lausanne, offering practical education in sport and more general subjects to interned Belgian and French prisoners of war. He repeatedly called for the building of urban sports centres on the model of the "gymnasia of antiquity", and stressed the democratic role of sports clubs in which, he said, inequality between men did not exist (Müller, 1986b:592-593).

His programme of Olympic education comprised including sport as a matter of course in the daily routine, to give the individual the opportunity "to adapt the good and bad aspects of his own nature to exercise"

(Coubertin, 1920:223) and to orient his life in accordance with this experience. The public at large, as he proclaimed in his 1925 speech taking his leave of the Presidency of the IOC, should not be expected to indulge in the noisy worship of sporting idols without participating in sport themselves (Coubertin, 1925).

He devoted the remainder of his life exclusively to new educational schemes. In November 11 1925, he founded *the Union Pédagogique Universelle* in Lausanne, which would hold conferences, seminars and other events connected with the educational mandate of the modern city. He also drafted a Charter of Educational Reform (Müller, 1986a:636-637) which in 1930 was passed through the League of Nations in Geneva to all Ministries of Education – without, of course, receiving any significant response (Müller, 1975b:75).

As a specific counter to the decline of sport as a significant factor in education, Coubertin in 1926 launched – again from Lausanne – the *Bureau International de Pédagogie sportive* (Müller, 1975b:80) which published an annual bulletin and a number of books, including Coubertin's *Olympic Memories* and a new edition of his *Pédagogie sportive*.

All of this passed almost unnoticed by the public, although Coubertin wrote more than 1100 articles and 30 books (Müller and Schantz, 1991). Even within the IOC, Coubertin was able to recruit only a handful of enthusiasts, and often criticized the leaders of the sports world as being technical consultants rather than defenders of the Olympic spirit.

The educational aspect of the Olympic ideal only became public knowledge during the protracted debate about amateurism. For Coubertin, this very question was of no more than secondary importance: looking back, one might believe that the Olympic Movement spent all those years using this problem as a demonstration of its high ethical standards, in the same way as the doping problems of the present day. Coubertin thought differently: he was interested in the inner, moral, responsible attitude of the athlete to which the "Olympic education" was to contribute.

As a repository of his educational efforts, Coubertin during his lifetime expressed the desire for a *Centre d'études olympiques*, which in fact came into being in Berlin between 1938 and 1944 under the control of Carl Diem, using funds provided by the Reich (Müller, 1975b:108-111).

Reception of Coubertin's educational concept

The International Olympic Academy (IOA), which has steadily developed at ancient Olympia since 1961 as the main centre of Olympic education, professes a comprehensive commitment to Coubertin's mandate (Müller, 1998)

It is surprising to see how this educational programme has survived over so many years despite widespread incomprehension of its fundamental ideas. It is surprising, too, to see the various ways and forms in which this commitment finds expression today in so many countries and continents, in line with the Olympic tradition and the current status of sports education. The seventy National Olympic Academies (NOAs) which have sprung up since 1966 have in various ways given a new emphasis to the Olympic

concept in schools and universities and among the public (Müller, 1994, 1997) although their substance has often been masked by structural issues.

The IOC Charter (IOC, 2000), in force since September 11, 2000, refers on several occasions to the content and form of Olympic education:

- Even in the Fundamental Principles which introduce the Charter (Article 2) reference is made to the blending of sport with culture and education as the foundation of Olympism.
- The Olympic Movement aims to contribute to building a peaceful and better world, especially through sports education (Article 6).
- The IOC is committed to the sporting ethic and particularly fair play (Rules 2, 6-7), and, to that end, supports the IOA and other institutions dedicated to "Olympic education" (Rules 2, 14-15).
- The IOC Charter obliges the National Olympic Committees to promote Olympism in all areas of education and, for example, to adopt independent initiatives for "Olympic education" through national Olympic Academies (Rule 31, 2.1).

For many years, the Cold War overshadowed the Olympic Games and – like the First and Second World Wars before it – posed endless new challenges to the Olympic ideal of peace. The manipulation of the Olympic Games for political ends, especially in the case of the boycotts at Montreal 1976, Moscow 1980 and Los Angeles 1984, cast doubt on the Olympic ideals and, at the same time, highlighted the need for Olympic education.

Prompted by the successful efforts of the IOA, the National Olympic Committees recognized the need to begin "Olympic education" at the grass roots, partly to testify to the credibility of the Olympic Movement in the face of increasing commercialization. The efforts of the IOA, organizing some one hundred thousand people to participate in about eight hundred seminars and conferences between 1961 and 1998 on a very wide range of subjects relating to Olympism, have provided important stimuli for efforts in the field of Olympic education in many countries since the 1970s. The National Olympic Academy of the German NOC was founded in 1966 under the name *Kuratorium Olympische Akademie*. In addition to specialist conferences, the Kuratorium has organized school and university competitions on Olympic subjects since 1984, and has since 1988 developed multi-disciplinary Olympic education programmes through its specialist educational committees. Since 1986, education in fair play has been prescribed as an essential aspect of an Olympic education, the target group including not only schools but also, especially, sports clubs and associations, and the general public as well. Well-attended teacher training seminars run by the *Kuratorium Olympische Akademie* with the support of the education ministers and schools senators of the German Länder to broadcast the idea of Olympic education with particular emphasis on fair play show not only that teachers are keenly interested in projects relating to the Olympic Movement but that the world of the Olympic Games is one that repays the long-term involvement of both teachers and pupils.

The Olympic Movement is an educational mission which is becoming increasingly topical as a result of media coverage. The fact that its values may seem unattainable does not mean that the idea is obsolete or misguided. Olympism contains visions which offer an ever-changing field of opportunity to athletes and everyone else concerned.

5. Olympism as part of the school curriculum

Among Coubertin's copious body of writings is an essay entitled "L'Olympisme à l'école. Il faut l'encourager!" (1934). In it, Coubertin expresses his preoccupations at the end of his life.

It is of little use to schools today to offer Coubertin's interpretation of Olympism as an educational subject without practical examples. In particular, his much-quoted philosophical retrospective of 1935 entitled "The philosophical Principles of modern Olympism" can only be understood by picturing this value structure of Olympic education as the end product of a process that continued over many years. If we are to answer the question of what Olympism can mean in educational terms and what an "Olympic education" can contain, we must seek a starting point, once again, in Coubertin, since nothing has been done since his time to revise its content. The IOC Charter adopted Coubertin's principles to that effect. This makes sense, since otherwise there was a danger of exaggerated adaptation of those principles to the spirit of the age.

In the case of the Olympic Movement, too, there is the danger that external forms will completely overwhelm issues of content. On the other hand, in the attempt to implement the Olympic ideal in school curricula, there are no circumventing topical issues and problems of the Olympic Games, since they are familiar to the pupils. So the Olympic ideal as Coubertin's educational vision must be retained, but it must also be continuously reviewed and revised.

The topicality of "Olympic education" in schools on the beginning of the 21st century

Under this heading we can group the following six features of an "Olympic education", all of which can be traced back to Coubertin's philosophical legacy:

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

These educational conclusions, derived from Coubertin's writings, appear at first sight somewhat theoretical and problematical for a practical programme in schools. They will be discussed in more detail below (Müller, 1996b; Grupe, 1997)

The concept of harmonious development of the whole human being

The education of the young focuses not only on the mind and intellect but also on the body. "Olympic education", then, means both physical and mental education. It endeavours to make children and young

people aware that the lifelong pursuit of sport is an enrichment and necessary complement to other endeavours, in order to develop and sustain a fulfilling sense of identity.

This is the starting point for the ideas and activities making up "Sport for all". What Coubertin wanted for Europe at the end of the 19th century – physical education as a mandatory part of school education for boys and girls – has not yet become a reality in 50 of the world's countries, according to UNESCO statistics. In the remainder, the issue is the importance of school sport by comparison with the "academic disciplines" and ways of improving its quality and quantity. School sports days, for example, are an important part of the experience of school pupils, particularly as regards fostering the sense of community. Just as the Olympic Games provide a model on the global scale, so too school sports days, if they are properly planned and run, become educationally important landmarks in school life. This is particularly true of comparative competitions within the framework of the Olympic development programme. This offers a particularly good opportunity to act on Coubertin's call for the involvement of art and music as an aesthetic setting for sporting competition, with a view to perfecting the ideal of harmony.

The idea of human perfection

Every human being, and every school pupil, wants to do his best, and sport – especially the Olympic Games – provides a documentary record of supreme human achievement. A comparable academic area is the awarding of the Nobel Prizes, whereas the arts are unsuitable for such objective yardsticks. The achievement of new personal bests and the desire to compete with fellow pupils reflects a natural endeavour on the part of the individual, encouraging others to emulate him.

Top-level Olympic achievement and optimum sporting achievement at all other levels encourage young people, too, to excel themselves, not to be content with the average or a past performance, and to set an example. This principle is often contested today, and it can only be credibly maintained if this form of human perfection is achieved by honest, independent means. Manipulation and interference with the natural development of the young (genetic engineering, growth inhibition, etc.) exploit them instead of contributing to their "self-perfection" in the human sense. Coubertin constantly urged, "Ne troublez pas l'équilibre des saisons!", because even in the early years of this century he regarded premature specialization as a serious danger to the educationally appropriate development of children in accordance with their age.

"Olympic education" is intended for all, including "poor students" and the handicapped. Article 2 of the IOC Charter says that Olympism aims to further a lifestyle in which the pleasure of physical achievement plays an important part. So the experiencing of achievement, in the Olympic sense, contributes to the development of the personality of any athlete, not just those at the top level.

The voluntary commitment to ethical principles in sporting activity

None of the Olympic values is better understood in sport than the concept of fair play, for which Coubertin always used the French term *esprit chevaleresque*. Even though Olympism is based on the culture of the Christian West, and hence that of Europe, comparable ethical values also form the foundation of human life and coexistence in other religions and social systems, too. In an "Olympic education", the utmost

importance must be attached to the pursuit of sport on the basis of fair competition. Students must learn, not only in their own sporting activities but also in the critical reflection of other disciplines:

- That rules in sports and games (and in life, too) must not be broken;
- To practice fair play, so as to train their characters for all areas of life;
- And to use fair play in sport to improve the personal worlds in which they live, so that the pressures of the school routine (and later the working routine) play no part.

But it is not appropriate to appoint supervisors to monitor all this, within a concept oriented towards education; the need is for a voluntary commitment and a personal endorsement of fair play.

For most participants in the Olympics, this ideal no longer exists, nor does the Olympic Charter now make provision for it. In many countries, especially the less industrially developed ones; top-level sport has in many cases remained the preserve of amateurs. "Olympic education" can teach the lesson that sport, for the majority of those who pursue it, have 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. This aspect of the old amateur ideal is still relevant and educationally important.

Peace and harmony between nations

Apart from fair play, the Olympic value to which most attention is paid today is the idea of peace. Olympic internationalism can be taught in many ways as part of an "Olympic curriculum"; it encompasses the following aspects:

- It seeks to promote understanding of the specific cultural features of other nations and continents;
- It seeks to help familiarize people with the forms of sport played by others;
- It seeks to improve familiarity with the cultures of those countries which organize the Olympic Games;
- And it endeavours to assist and promote internationally sporting contacts and personal contacts between individuals.

Almost all schools in Germany have highly multiracial student bodies. This is a microcosm of an extensive field of action, because sport speaks all languages. Olympism, as a part of world culture, is unaffected by financial resources, colour or creed. The Olympic Games are the greatest of all peaceful global gatherings, taking place every four years. Coubertin's idea of peace education as a core area of Olympism is more real today than ever.

Promotion of trends to emancipation in and through sport

To be credible, the Olympic Movement today is committed to a substantially emancipatory approach. Taking as its starting point Coubertin's guiding principle of "all games, all nations", it stands for equal rights not only among nations but also among sports, not just equal rights for all races but equal rights for both sexes. While the protection of the environment is becoming an increasingly important commitment for all applicants to host the Olympic Games, the Olympic programme – and, as a result, equality between forms of sport – are increasingly being called into question by the issue of telegenicity.

Transposed to the school environment, there are some important educational lessons here: tolerance for the opposite sex, acceptance of the most varied forms of physical education and competitive sport, and the development of the pupils' sense of responsibility within and through sport.

Forms of practical implementation

The ability to bring the many different aspects of "Olympic education" into the school environment calls for consideration of all school disciplines. Apart from sports education, which is determined not only by club sport but also by the early practical experience of children and the young, the main focus in elementary schools is on general knowledge, art, music, German and (where provided) religious education. At secondary school level, the curriculum is broadened to include social sciences, history, biology and foreign languages.

Topics relevant to the Olympic Movement can be dealt with in different ways in the various disciplines, though a better way is to present them as a multidisciplinary educational project (or part of one). An Olympic exhibition is another way of stimulating interest within the school community, as was demonstrated by the poster series "100 Years of the Olympic Games" produced by the German NOC in 1996.

The interest taken by schoolchildren will be particularly strong in the weeks preceding the Summer and Winter Olympics, and during the period of the actual Olympic Games. The six-to-twelve-year-old age group can be particularly highly motivated by Olympic themes. The involvement of pupils in a reasoned development of opinions on problems confronting the Olympic Movement is desirable as pupils get older, in view of extensive television consumption. This may be a way of reaching a consensus on the Olympic values which pupils should endorse.

The Olympic Games as an event and educational model

Gessmann, among others, emphasizes that "Olympic education" must be capable of the most positive association possible with the Olympic Games as an event. This is not self-evident, since the public - in view of the violations of the Olympic philosophy and the tangle of political, commercial and drug-related intrigue surrounding top-level sport - perceives the Olympic Games as an event that is rarely exemplary and is not to be taken seriously educationally. The negative examples cannot basically erase the validity of Olympic values as an educational idea. Ideals are never completely achieved – there are always compromises. So the battle for meaning has to be constantly re-thought.

What educational models can be created by the Olympic Games as an event? People of all nations come together, some as competitors and others as spectators, in the utmost spirit of friendship. Through the media, the Olympic family at the venue of the Games becomes the symbol of the Olympic concept of universalism. The great achievements of the participants symbolize the striving and achievement of all humanity. If this symbol is also associated with fair play and mutual respect, the athletes set an example of successful coexistence between people in critical situations. The ceremonial character of the Olympic Games gives their achievements particular significance. It is in this context that the Olympic Games, as an event, must be critically considered and put to educational use (Gessmann, 1992; Schantz, 1996). This

also avoids the risk of reducing "Olympic education" to nothing more than improved sports education although some aspects of the values described above are traditionally inherent in the teaching of sport and can be effective in sports education even without any Olympic reference.

An "Olympic curriculum" must highlight what is specifically Olympic and, over and above historical considerations, involve Coubertin's ideals in a contemporary form. These educational fundamentals are what has characterized the Olympic Movement and the Olympic Games to date, raising them high above the status of world championships.

6. The future of an "Olympic education"

Television links the general public to Olympia every two years. Exerting an Olympic education influence on the public is something that can only succeed through the media. The media, however, are under pressure to achieve high advertising figures, and their intentions are hardly educational.

This makes the role of top-class athletes as models even more important if "Olympic education" is to succeed. This also applies to coaches, doctors and officials. But only if the Olympic athletes are involved can the standards be given a binding quality. Both in their actual sporting activities and in their public pronouncements on fair play, top-class athletes show a sense of commitment to a "sporting ethic" and hence to the basic values of Olympism. This opens up a broad field for potential activities, such as Olympic discussion sessions and spare-time lectures during the months of training.

The future is not without hope. The much-prophesied abandonment of Olympism and hence of the "Olympic education" has not come about, nor are there any signs that it will do so. We must speak more about the "Olympic future", and to do that we have a vital need for "Olympic education", especially after Sydney 2000 with wonderful examples of the Australians. Anyone who thinks in terms of perfectionism and makes the total achievement of his aims a basic condition has failed to understand Coubertin and his Olympism.

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Related web sites

Pierre de Coubertin
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International Olympic Academy
<http://www.ioa.org.gr>

National Olympic Academy of the German NOC
<http://www.nok.de/>

Sydney 2000 Information
<http://www.gamesinfo.com.au/>