Pedagogical Values of Olympic Education

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Summary
Olympic education is currently perceived as one of the most effective forms of upbringing, which is why it should be included in modern pedagogy. It is important because of the values of Olympism and education through sport. When speaking of Olympic education, its origins and precursor should be studied as well. It is worth knowing that it was Pierre de Coubertin's philosophical and pedagogical concept that played the key role in the development of Olympic education in the world. The values of Olympism, including equality, fraternity, collaboration, friendship, respect, solidarity and striving for excellence are now commonly accepted. The timeless and universal nature of those values, the generally accepted fair play rule that is important not only in sport, but also in everyday life, looking at sport through the prism of social and human values, as well as the common global recognition of the Olympic Games, all may contribute to Olympic education becoming a marvel of modern education.

Keywords: Olympic education, upbringing, Olympism, Olympic idea, sport pedagogy, Pierre de Coubertin.

Introduction

Almost eight centuries before Christ, an idea of cultivation of the human body and spirit emerged. That idea led to the organisation of the first Olympic Games in history in 776 BC. With time, it started to be called the Olympic idea, one that carries values pursued by many: respect, tolerance, fairness, equality, fraternity, friendship, the will to become a better person thanks to one’s own work and not at the opponent’s cost, fair play. The ancient Olympic values and rules have survived for approximately 3000 years. They served as a source of inspiration for Pierre de Coubertin, who revived the organisation of the Olympics in the modern world. It is because of him that since 1896 (with the exception of the period of WW1 and WW2), we have been able to witness the greatest sports event of all time, the Olympic Games.

The dawn of the 19th century saw not only the long-lasting and effective efforts of Pierre de Coubertin to revive the idea of organising the Olympics (according to him, they were to morally refine sport and make it universal), but it was also a special time, when Olympism gave start to a new concept of education, later known as Olympic education. Contemporary Olympic Games and the accompanying idea of Olympism have become the cultural marvel of the 20th century. Every four years, millions of spectators gather at the stadiums and in front of their TVs to watch the best athletes from all continents compete. Breaking records, the perfect technique of motion, the corresponding moral standing of the athletes show us the beauty of sport, both from the physical and human perspective. The human sphere of sport adds moral and intellectual content to the Games, at the same time creating a huge opportunity for the development of Olympic education.

According to many researchers of Olympism, Olympic education should find an important place in the contemporary mainstream of pedagogy. This paper aims at pointing to the pedagogical values of Olympic education. It also touches upon the values that sport and Olympism bring, as well as their role in the educational process.

I. Sports pedagogy by Pierre de Coubertin

The pedagogy of physical culture is an element of pedagogy as a science of education and, despite its theoretical nature, it is a practical science [Suchodolski 1969]. Therefore, which subjects belong to the physical culture pedagogy, and which to the sport pedagogy? The first one deals mostly with the practical and theoretical sides of educational and didactic issues: physical education, health, sport, tourism and recreation, and physical therapy, whereas the other one is all about the same issues, but it looks at them from the sport activity perspective [Blajet 2012]. Stefan Wołoszyn defined sports pedagogy in the following way: “It is the state of theoretical reflection and knowledge about the place and role of physical education and sport in the general education of a human being. The knowledge involves not only the way sport and physical education act together to ensure a complete education of an individual, but also the way in which pedagogy helps physical education and sport in
fulfilling their tasks and specific functions, characteristic of physical culture [Wołoszyn 1988]."

Physical education and sports competition have a special place in Greek culture. Whenever we look at the history of sport, we refer to the ancient Greece, as it is customarily considered to be the land of origin to sport. However, it was not the Hellenes who invented sport, but it was them who made it an idealised phenomenon that stems from religious rites and is based on the equality between kalokagathia and arete. Harmonious education, meaning a steady development of corporeal and spiritual fitness, used to be the most important principle of education for the ancient Greek children and youth. The ancient Greek principles were reflected in the emerging pedagogical idea.

It is beyond doubt that Pierre de Coubertin, a pedagogue, thinker, humanist, visionary, creator of Olympism, is considered to be the creator of sport pedagogy. According to Miller, he is: "...rather a pedagogue than an athlete, not a politician, but a sociologist - more of an amateur, more of a philosopher than a teacher. But firstly, he is a thought leader, a liberal with a great feeling of history, possessing a vision of the future, even if controversial, as it goes beyond his times..." [Miller 2012]. At the age of 24, he decided to promote a broad movement of education reform, with a particular highlight on sports activity, considering sport not only as a means to strengthen the body, but first and foremost, as a universal method of education for the young generation. He believed that sport was beneficial not only for health, but mostly for shaping the personalities of young people [Kazimierczak 2013].

The inspirations to act for the reform of education, as well as the factors that determined the direction of Coubertin’s pedagogy, were the following: his personal experience - as a student, observing the British and American systems of education (his trips to England and North America), the culture of ancient Greece (kalokagathia, ekecheiria and arete), and the views of some outstanding thinkers (Frederic La Play, Hyppoldyte Taine, Henri Didon).

The Baron’s school memories (he attended a Jesuit school, where conservative methods of schooling and education prevailed) from the times when he was a student made him dislike the routine at schools, intellectualism, encyclopedism and the curricula being overloaded with too much content to be memorised [Müller 2000]. On that basis, he pointed out that the educational system of his time was unable to equip the young generation with the necessary capabilities that could be used in everyday situations. The spreading pedagogical crisis in France was the reason why Pierre de Coubertin, striving to restore the ancient cult of the body and biological regeneration of the society, wanted to create a universal educational system that would prevent social disturbances and other social ailments [Zuchora 2006]. That was when Coubertin compared education to a four-horse chariot. Each horse stood for a different feature: muscle, brains, character and conscience.

Educational success was possible only if all four features could be combined into a whole. The teacher, just like the charioteer should master the art of driving his chariot, and more specifically, should control the forces working in different directions and turn them into a common, harmonious whole [Mlodzikowski 1994].

Apart from his experience as a student, his sport pedagogy was also shaped by his numerous travels. French government wanted to introduce some changes to the educational system and thus commissioned Coubertin to conduct research on the history of physical culture in England and the USA [Müller 1994]. His stay at the Thomas Arnold school in Rugby consolidated his belief in sport and its educational values. Arnold himself (1795-1842) was considered by him to be the best teacher of that time. Even though they never met, as Thomas Arnold was active before Coubertin was born, his rather conservative views had a great influence on shaping Coubertin’s viewpoint. However Arnold has not introduced any new educational methods and he was not a pedagogue himself, he enriched older values with new educational methods. As the head of Rugby School, Arnold gave sport a chance to influence the future political and cultural elites of Great Britain. During his stay in Rugby, Coubertin saw that education can be successfully supported by sport. The focus was not only on the students’ physical fitness; mind and body were shaped simultaneously. According to Arnold, it was sport, even in the form of a spontaneous play, that prepared a young individual for living in society [Lipiński 2012]. It was because of Thomas Arnold that the English sport became an indispensable element of a comprehensive education of a British gentleman. His belief that sport should be included in education gradually reached other schools and educational institutions. The great importance Thomas Arnold had for the development of sport across the world and of how much he influenced Coubertin’s views was proved by a report submitted by the Baron to the French Ministry of Public Education in 1890: “Thomas Arnold was the first person to have used sport to shape a strong will and proud heart within a fit body. He was the one who, through freedom and an order of merits and values, was able to prepare children to their role as citizens of a free country. And lastly, he managed to gather his teachers around him and made them his collaborators. He detested lies and promoted the need of shaping an honest human being” [Coubertin 1890].

The culture of ancient Greece had a special place in the developing pedagogical and philosophical thought of Pierre de Coubertin’s. The French nobleman appreciated the ideals of kalokagathia (the ideal of the complete human personality, harmonious in body - kalos and mind - agathos), ekecheiria (truce) and arete (moral virtue), knowing very well that he would not invent anything better than what Plato proposed ages before: physical exercise for the body and music for the soul [Zuchora 2006].

Coubertin’s idea of reaching to the Hellenic culture was born after archaeological finds in Greece. Research-
ers of Coubertin claim that ancient Olympia, unearthed in his times, was the inspiration for a deeper reflection on Greek culture and the pursuit of his dreams connected with reviving the Games and creating a pedagogical and philosophical doctrine as a foundation of Olympism.

Many years later, the idea of reviving the modern Olympic Games came up, with an accompanying humanistic vision of the world, and Coubertin commented on it as follows: “Nothing in ancient history had made me ponder more than Olympia, this city of dreams, dedicated to a task strictly human and material in form, but purified and magnified by the idea of the fatherland which there possessed a reserve of vitalising forces and which resurrected its colonnades and porticoes in my adolescent thoughts. Long before I even thought of extracting renovation principles I occupied myself in reconstructing in spirit and making its broad outlines relive. Thence came the project, less glamorous but more practical and more fruitful, of re-establishing the Games, and thenceforth it was not a long road, especially since the hour had struck for the internationalisation of sports to be called to play its role anew in the world” [Coubertin 1909].

The influence of the ancient and contemporary thinkers was the last element that set the direction for Coubertin’s pedagogy. Hippolyte Taine, Frederic La Playa, Henri Didon, Herbert Spencer and Jules Simon were the people who had a significant influence on Coubertin and were an inspiration to his pedagogical concept.

Hippolyte Taine made Coubertin become lively interested in the British culture, politics and education. The conservative Frederic La Playa inspired the young Frenchman to get involved in the reform of education and activities aimed at achieving social peace. Henri Didon, a Dominican priest, promoted the idea of shaping young people’s personalities through physical activity and competing according the the motto of ‘citius, altius, fortius’. Probably it was him who had the greatest influence on Coubertin’s views [Müller 1996]. Jules Simon, the then Minister of Public Education, supported Coubertin in the field of extracurricular physical education. An important reading that had fascinated Coubertin and set the direction for his pedagogy was “Tom Brown’s School Days” by Thomas Hughes (a Rugby School graduate) [Kazimierczak 2013]. Furthermore, people such as: T. Arnold, H. Spencer, P. Mahaffy and P. Gardner had become the source of the pedagogical concept that referred mainly to the Greek tradition [Biliński 1990].

In his letters, writings and books, Pierre de Coubertin revealed his dreams, plans and visions connected with Olympism. Based on Coubertin’s views, a definition of Olympism was created and can now be found in the Olympic Charter. According to the above-mentioned definition: “Olympism is a philosophy of life, exciting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example, social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles. The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity.” Olympism should also “contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practised without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, which requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play” [Olympic Charter 2013, p. 11]. Modern Olympism fulfils Pierre de Coubertin’s testament, which included the basic truths and moral messages applicable to anyone who enters the circle of social and cultural influences of sport and the Olympic Games.

Coubertin himself never produced a straightforward definition of Olympism. He preferred to treat it as an open set of new ideas. The lack of any fixed framework in his sport pedagogy makes it possible to adapt Olympism and its rules to the ever-evolving world and changing generations, so that it stands a chance to be used in pedagogical activities of modern times. Although Coubertin never presented a definition of sport pedagogy or developed an educational and didactic proposal properly systematised that would clearly define his understanding of sport pedagogy, his propositions, statements, letters and declarations have become the foundation of the modern Olympic education.

II. Olympic education – selected pedagogical values.

For many years, Olympic education has been the object of scientific research and investigations for many scientists across the world. This subject matter seems particularly interesting to researchers from Germany (Gruppe, Geßmann, Müller, Naul, Wassong, Nicolaus), Canada (Binder), Great Britain (Parry) and Australia (Brownlee) [Zukowska and Zukowski 2003].

When it comes to the global promotion of Olympic education, Poland is still behind the countries that organise or aspire to organise the Olympic Games. However, year by year, the Polish scientific output is growing, which is mainly due to the activity of the Polish Olympic Academy and academic institutions (Universities of Physical Education deserve a special recognition here). Renown Polish experts on Olympism include: Zukowska, Lipoński, Lipiec and the Bronikowscy.

Modern education, as a fulfillment of the process of human evolution, aims at an integral mental, physical, affective, moral and spiritual development of an individual. It is not only about transmitting knowledge, capabilities and cultural values, but it also aims at inspiring a creative, open attitude, independent thinking and an ability of self-education. Furthermore, it also promotes the integration of individuals on many levels of social, cultural and economic life [Wojnar 2000].

The term ‘Olympic education’ appeared in the 1970s. The first person to use it, when referring to Cou-
bertin’s interests related to sport education, was Norbert Müller. It was in 1972. It is also worth highlighting that the term ‘Olympic education’, proposed by Norbert Müller, was officially approved by IOC and IOA in 1992, and started to officially function as part of the Olympic terminology [Nicolaus 2015].

Pierre de Coubertin himself never used the term ‘Olympic education’, he would rather use terms such as ‘athletic education’, ‘English education’, ‘sporting education’ or ‘Olympic pedagogy’. To those terms he related the assumptions of Olympism that he considered the foundation of all educational activities [Naul 2008].

The first time Coubertin indirectly mentioned the term ‘Olympic education’ was in the Olympic letter of 22 November 1918 [Coubertin 1918]. In the letter, he used the term ‘Olympic pedagogy’, so close to the modern concepts of Olympic education. Another work of the French reformer, in which the issues connected with Olympic education were discussed, was “Pedagogie Sportive” from 1922.

Olympic education consists in promoting and popularising the values of Olympism among children, youth, athletes, trainers, sport journalists, doctors, fans and all other people involved in sport. The French nobleman used to claim that Olympism was a way of sport education available to all, accompanied by the spirit of bravery and chivalry, a way of education rich in experiences that strengthen conscience and prepare individuals for living in a society [Müller, 2000]. This direction of thinking is confirmed today by the Olympic declaration that defines the basic rules of Olympism. It should be remembered that Olympism is the carrier of values that are persistent and unchanging (in time), and universal (considered superior no matter the time, location or culture). Thanks to those values Olympic education can reveal its pedagogical values.

Olympic education, as defined by Żukowscy, is to serve as a substantive base for the sport education of youth based on the value of the Olympic idea and Olympism. The Olympic idea and Olympism, according to W. Lipoński, refer to the same area of human aspirations and the philosophical attitudes related to everything connected with the Olympics. However, what sets them apart, is that Olympism defines the pedagogical and philosophical standards of conduct, while the Olympic idea delimits a general area in which those standards should be applied. According to the same author, the Olympic standards include primarily: fair play behaviour in sport and everyday life, knowing how to tame one’s own emotions and desires, self-controlled behaviour, as well as developing the beauty of human body and movement [Lipoński 2000].

The condition for using the values that Olympism brings is promoting and disseminating the Olympic idea. In terms of ethics, the term ‘idea’ means “a model of desirable behaviour or attitude advocated by a given ethical system or actually functioning in a given moral system” [Jedynak 1994]. Therefore, the Olympic idea is an idea of beauty and purity, carrying values pursued by many: respect, tolerance, fairness, equality, fraternity, friendship, the will to become a better person thanks to one’s own work and not at the opponent’s cost, fair play. Coubertin himself never used the term ‘fair play’, but this type of behaviour is present in his concept in the form of mutual respect and noble competition both in sport and in everyday life. It is a beautiful and difficult idea at the same time, as it assumes the existence of an ideal human being, depicted by the symbol of kalos kagathos, who cares for a harmonious development of soul and body and always lives up to his ideals.

The Olympic idea has become universal for the whole world. Because of this idea people of various races, nations, religions and beliefs gather in one place, proving that friendship and collaboration between people is possible. That is why all efforts should be made for it to become a source of education based on the Olympic message. Therefore, the term ‘Olympic education’ should be interpreted as a substantive foundation for the sport education of youth, based on the Olympic idea and its pedagogical values.

Coubertin’s dream was for the Olympic Games to become a means to fulfil his philosophical and pedagogical idea. His desire was that the Olympic Games were owned by the whole world and open for everyone, no matter their origin, race, religion or political party. He believed that the sports field can be an example of how to resolve social conflicts, and responsibility combined with a high level of moral culture were to prevent the development of aggression and hatred towards others. As understood by Coubertin, the starting point of the Olympic idea was its international nature (all nations, all games, i.e. the Games as a place where all nations could participate in all sports disciplines).

Across the years, the goals of Olympic education were variously formulated by experts in the field. Almost thirty years ago, B. Kidd was one of the first people who, referring to the points of correspondence between Olympism and general goals of education, articulated the following points of Olympic education: mass participation - the expansion of opportunities for sport and play to create what Coubertin called “the new code of chivalry”; the integration of the visual and performing arts into the Olympic celebrations; the aiming at creating an international brotherhood that promotes understanding and thus contributes to world peace [Kidd 1985].

Müller claims that the features of Olympic education can be traced back to Coubertin’s heritage. According to him, Olympic education focuses on the following concepts: harmonious development of the whole human being; striving for human perfection; sporting activity voluntarily linked to ethical principles such as fair play and equality of opportunity; peace and goodwill between nations, reflected by respect and tolerance in re-
lations between individuals; the promotion of moves towards emancipation in and through sport [Binder 2010].

On the basis of Coubertin’s writings, Gruppe [1997] concluded that Olympic education should aim at developing body, mind and character through physical performance and rivalry, always according to the fair play spirit, as well as at making sport available for everyone across the world. Furthermore, according to him, Olympic education should promote practising sport with peace, goodwill and understanding towards all participants.

As per R. Naul [2008], Olympic education should be based on transmitting knowledge about the values and ideals related to Olympism. The learnings should create and consolidate the required behaviours both in sport and in everyday life. The author also highlighted that the goals and tasks of Olympic education should always be related to the current issues of children and youth, as well as to the Olympic movement, which differ a lot from what could be observed a decade ago.

According to Wołoszyn [1996], in the system of contemporary educational contradictions, in which the bewildered civilisation functions, Olympism can be considered as a variant of ‘global education’ that, thanks to the pedagogical thought of Pierre de Coubertin, the creator of modern Olympic Games, meets the demands of humanistic globalism and humanist global upbringing. This is where the concept of Olympic education in school was born.

Zukowscy [1991/1992] claim that the values of the Olympic idea are the main content of Olympic education, whereas sport is the main means of its educational influence.

At present, Olympic education is carried out in two ways:
- As the preparation of countries and their societies for the Games;
- As a carrier instrument for the education of youth, with chances for self-realisation and socialisation, partnerships within educational interactions, a deeper ethical reflection and the need for self-improvement, not only in sport.

The following can be considered the main goals of Olympic education [Nowocień 2001]:
1. Shaping social relations, educational situations and means that prepare for the reception and participation in the Olympic Games.
2. Proper preparation of athletes, trainers, doctors, speakers and referees to fulfil their roles from the ethical and moral point of view.
3. Preparation of all people across the globe to participate and witness the Olympic Games.

Olympic education can become the marvel of modern education due to its dynamic development and efficiency. Here are a few arguments to confirm this hypothesis:
1. Common recognition of the fair play rule as an important part not only of sport, but most of all, of everyday life;
2. General approval of the Olympic Games by the whole world;
3. Looking at sport from the point of view of social values: sport has a great influence on shaping the personality of an individual and on social development;
4. Sport serves as a platform of mutual understanding between nations that brings people together;
5. The great popularity of outstanding athletes and Olympians in the society;
6. Universality and acceptance for the values of Olympic education; the timeless nature of those values.

Józef Lipiec [1999] claims that Olympism is a way of preparing a human being for the “extra-Olympic life, while Olympic education is the basis, the content and the set of means for the complete education of a human being.” Furthermore, Lipiec believes that the rules and values related to sport, Olympic sport in particular, create a system of educational methods. By definition, sport can be an area of universal presentation. It can contribute to the intensification of axiological up-bringing. A properly conducted Olympic education can significantly influence the students’ knowledge and the shaping of the desired behaviours, based on the values and rules of Olympism. As a consequence, it can contribute to the improvement of entire communities [Lipoński, 2000].

Sport is a great means of educational influences within Olympic education. As per Zuchora [2014], “Sport creates beauty and serves it, determines its own laws and rules, but at the same time, it teaches respect towards general laws and rules, takes friendships created in a circle, out of that circle, just as it does with the fair play rule. And then, by developing individual talents and perfecting virtues, it teaches how to include them in the common repository of values, in the way in which in a sports field, individual performances of each team member combine into the effort of the entire soccer team. Sports field can be an example of how disputes can be resolved in a peaceful manner, how inequality can be subordinated to democracy, and competition does not need to be similar to a war, but it can lead to a dialogue that brings people together and does not estrange them.”

Conclusion

The effort that we put into presenting sport to young people as an element in the creation of a peaceful, better world, based on the idea of mutual understanding, respect, friendship, solidarity and fair play, brings positive results in the process of education. The sport of today faces many aberrations and risks. Up-bringing in the ‘Olympic spirit’ only seems to be an easy task. Especially today, when the image of the Olympic Games often differs from the assumptions of Olympism and Pierre de Coubertin’s vision. Olympism, as an element of Olympic education, includes moral rules and values that, if used accordingly, can bring huge educational advantages. Their pedagogical functions are still valid and function both in sport and in many areas of life. Those values
have not lost their strength through the years, still uniting people, and their presence in the sports field is one of the most important criteria confirming their role in the upbringing and education of a young human being. A pro-Olympic education is an opportunity to educate a young individual in the spirit of tolerance, friendship, loyalty, equality, fairness, persistence, diligence and fair play. Those are the values many of us pursue and want in their lives.

Olympic education does not guarantee to be the effective antidote to all the evil of modern world. However, it is undoubtedly an attractive form of educational influence on children and youth. By encouraging activity, it gives an opportunity to get in touch with sport with a freedom of action. It also encourages youth to involve in the organisation and execution of various initiatives related to sport and Olympism. Thanks to that children and youth broaden their knowledge, develop their interests and shape their sport behaviours. Furthermore, Olympic education offers means of socialisation that have a great influence on a student’s development, improving his interactions with other individuals and social groups.

References