

A Critique of the IOC's Olympic Values Education Program

Li-Hong (Leo) Hsu / National Taiwan University of Sport, Taiwan

Abstract

The “Olympic Values Education Program” (OVEP) has been endorsed and promoted by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) for several years. It has also been discussed many years by international scholars and physical/sports educators whether this program has a place both in physical/sport education as well as character development education. However, it is still also debatable if the current revised/updated program can be justified as global education. This paper/project will not only investigate the concept/scope of “Olympic Values Education” but also try to explore the potential (if there is any) worldwide position of OVEP and the future global educational movement.

Keywords: OVEP, IOC, Olympic Movement, East Asia

A Critique of the IOC's Olympic Values Education Program

I. Introduction

The Olympic Values Education Program (OVEP) is currently a series of free and accessible teaching resources that have been created by the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Using the context of Olympic sports and the core principles of Olympism, participants are encouraged to experience values-based learning and to assume the responsibilities of good citizenship. It is designed to communicate the benefit of sport and physical activity through an understanding of Olympism and its impact on individual health, enjoyment, and social interaction.

The foundation of the IOC's OVEP is to blend **sport with education and cultural expression**. It aims to interlink with the global education priorities related to promoting skill sets for the 21st century. OVEP uses the universality of sport in the Olympic context to support delivery of curriculum in and outside of the classroom. OVEP is based on the Olympic philosophy that learning takes place through a balanced development of body and mind. OVEP allows young people to experience life values such as **excellence, respect and friendship**.

As OVEP has been endorsed and promoted by the IOC for several years, it has also been discussed by international scholars and physical/sports educators whether they really have a place both in physical/sport education (Petrie, 2017) as well as character development education. However, it is still also debatable if it can be justified as global education. This paper/project will not only investigate the concept/scope of "Olympic Values Education" but also try to explore the potential (if there is any) worldwide position of OVEP and the future global educational movement.

II. Olympic Values Education Program (OVEP)

According to the official document of the IOC, the general scope of OVEP is provided as follows (IOC, 2018):

A. WHAT IS OVEP?

Using the symbols of the Olympic Games, the themes of Olympism, and drawing on the lore of the ancient and modern Olympic Games, the program aims to disseminate a values-based curriculum that will shape the development of child and youth character. Using the context of Olympic sports, participants are taught skills and strategies that will help them to assume the responsibilities of global citizenship and civic literacy.

B. WHO IS IT FOR?

OVEP is designed to benefit youth from all walks of life, and all levels of athletic ability and interest. It is not just for budding Olympic athletes. It can be put into action by teachers and instructors, coaches and sports clubs, governments and educational authorities, members of the Olympic Family, and even parents at home.

C. WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE?

The OVEP Toolkit is an extensive, free educational resource packed with ideas, stories, activities that can be used to teach values and inspire youth. It consists of four parts:

1. The Fundamentals of Olympic Values Education Manual: A Sport-based Program
2. Delivering OVEP PLAYbook: A Practical Guide to Olympic Values Education

3. OVEP Activity Sheets: Exercises to Support Olympic Values Education
4. The Resource Library
5. OVEP Workshop Plan: Learning through Physical Activity - Train the Trainers

The IOC believes that physical activity and sport have significant benefits for health, well-being and youth development. Sport can be a fantastic tool for outcomes such as peace, holistic education and social development. Recognizing the unique potential of sport as an educational and communication tool, OVEP is seen as a practical set of learning resources designed to inspire and allow young people to experience life values such as **excellence, respect and friendship.**

D. OVEP OBJECTIVES

The program aims to realize the Olympic ideal of building a better world through sport by means of a curriculum that uses sport pedagogy and focuses on values-based learning. The cornerstone of the program is the Olympic ideal that 'learning involves the whole body, not only the mind'. OVEP uses Olympic sport traditions and **positive sporting values** as the context for teaching life skills, values and life-long participation in sport for a healthy lifestyle. OVEP also aims to enrich existing educational materials and help improve academic performance in addition to civic responsibility, through its activity-based approach. Respect for cultural diversity and educational systems are integral drivers of the program.

E. THE 5 EDUCATIONAL THEMES OF OLYMPISM

These educational themes, aimed at transmitting a contemporized version of the Olympic principles, are the basis of the OVEP program.

1. experiencing the Joy of effort

2. learning to Play Fair
3. practising Respect for oneself and others
4. pursuit of Excellence
5. living a Harmonious and Balanced Life of Body, Will and Mind

II. Critique: THE GLOBAL CHALLENGE

Based on the brief official description of the OVEP provided by the IOC, a few points need to be clarified. Hence, to provide more conceptual analysis might be a good methodology for Olympic values educators. So the first step and the most important fundamental approach is to address “why” and “how” questions. Here are just a few issues that we as educators or scholars might need/want to discuss.

A. The problem of OVEP’s global initiatives:

Before the programs are implemented in each region, it is necessary to clarify for those educators and policy makers to understand the following terms: What are we going to talk about and to implement? Are we talking about “**Olympic Games Education**”, “**Olympic Education**” in general, “**Olympism Education**”, “**Olympic movement education**” or “**Olympic values Education**”? And how do we link the GAP between the “Olympic Games” and the “Olympic Educational Movement”?

In terms of **cross-cultural issues**: Different countries might have different games/play/sports. So do we also want to discover a few good games/play/practices which contain “Olympic” educational values so that pupils can really “Move, Live and Learn” (part of OVEP programs)? How do we link those practices with modern Olympic events? How do we ensure that more cross-cultural understanding programs can be implemented on a global scale?

In terms of elite athletes' global role-model image: How do we make sure that those world known elite athletes (Olympians) can be educational role models for school children rather than just “**skillful super persons**” (Usan Bolt, Michael Phelps, etc.) ? We might need to find stronger examples to link between Olympic athletes and normal citizens.

B. The problem of the educational content: Which values come first and are valid?

According to a world renowned sports philosopher Professor Kretchmar (1994, P. 111-112), values are goods; they are things that human beings find desirable. Two classes of values exist. Moral values are certain personality traits and human motives. They describe what we often call a morally good person. These are traits like honesty, conscientiousness, affection, prudence, industriousness, and courage. Nonmoral values are things that we desire from life. Rather than describing a person or a person's motives, they identify items that people want – things like pleasure, knowledge, wealth, security, excellence, and friendship.

So for us as Physical Education and sports related people, what will be the most important and relevant values? Kretchmar (1994, P.113) thinks that the best terms he has found to capture these values are **health-and activity-related fitness, knowledge, motor skills, and pleasure**. In his judgment, these are nonmoral goods that have been and continue to be the four most significant values in our profession. Of course, each needs some clarification so that we can see how they rest on very different parent values and how they make their appearance in sport, exercise science, and physical education.

The question here is: if these four prime values are good, how do they fit into our Olympic Values? And how do we prioritize these values in our global Olympic educational values programs? How do we justify the so-called Olympic core values

(respect, excellence and friendship) are better or more suitable than these “four prime values” suggested by Kretchmar?

Modern Olympism here refers to de Coubertin’s views and the IOC’s current Olympic Charter. Of the seven Fundamental Principles in the IOC’s Olympic charter, three are particularly germane (*italics highlight crucial ideas and values for the following analysis*) (IOC, 2015, P.13-14):

1. Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting 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* and *respect for universal fundamental ethical principles*.
2. The goal of Olympism is to place sport at the service of the *harmonious development of man*, with a view to promoting a *peaceful society* concerned with the preservation of *human dignity*.
6. The enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Olympic Charter shall be secured *without discrimination* of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, sexual orientation, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

Now let us look at the following different core values based on Olympism which have been addressed and given by official documents or various sources (Hsu and Ilundain-Agurruza, 2016).

1. The core values of Olympism:

- a. **Excellence**
- b. **Friendship**
- c. **Respect**
- d. **Fair Play**
- e. **Tolerance**
- f. **Solidarity**
- g. **Equality**
- h. **Taking part**
- i. **Non-discrimination**
- j. **Character development**

Besides typical “normal” Olympic core Values (such as friendship, respect and excellence), what about “Paralympic Values” and “Special Olympic Games’ core values”?

2. Para-lympism - The core values:

The core Paralympic values are at the heart of the Paralympic Movement.

The values are:

- a. Courage**
- b. Determination**
- c. Inspiration**
- d. Equality**

3. Special Olympic Games – The core values:

- a. Sportsmanship with joy**
- b. Athlete leadership**
- c. Unity**
- d. Bravery**
- e. Perseverance**

And there is additional issue about Olympic motto, slogan and creed. Look at the special Olympic Games’ slogan:

“Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt.”

The motto is about finding the courage to give it all you’ve got. “Giving it all you’ve got” But if we look at so-called “normal” Olympic motto and creed, there seems to be a contradiction.

4. Olympic Motto:

Faster (Citius), Higher (Altius), Stronger (Fortius)

5. Olympic Creed:

The most important thing in the Olympic Games is to take part, but not winning...

6. Here are two issues:

- a. Olympic Motto: Promoting “*Winning is everything?*” e.g. doping
- b. Olympic Creed: “*Taking part*” is more important than “*winning*”?

So, there seems to be a contradiction here. Would it be better to link “Olympic Values” with more related concepts such as “Friendship” is associated with “peace”, “Respect” is associated with “mutual understanding” and “Excellence” is not all about “winning”, etc.? So the question is: Which values come first and are valid?

III.Does OVEP have a place in Physical Education and other related subjects?

The IOC acknowledged that the majority of the world’s population lives in urban areas, and this proportion continues to grow. Thus, it is important to stress that children and young people deserve the opportunity to play and practice sport in safe and protected environment. Sport organizations often focus on elite sport and not on sport participation or grassroots sport. Though many countries have a national sport policy, few have a sport participation strategy. The challenge for the Olympic Movement is to create a bridge between Olympic ideals and performance - between overall participation and elite performance.

In addition, IOC’s OVEP program aims to go beyond geo-political and artificial boundaries and aims to create a sustainable platform to address societal issues such as:

1. **Healthy life style**
2. **Social inclusion**
3. **Gender balance**

4. Physical and academic literacy

5. Rebuilding of local communities

The IOC also believes that government & educational authorities are key players in the realisations of grass roots projects and national policy. Thus the Program aims to provide tools & tactics to help concretely realize existing policies addressing common issues such as:

1. Sedentary behavior (health)
2. Cultural expression (arts)
3. Getting kids off the streets
4. Urbanisation (space to practice & play)

The program is also claimed to help build **civic literacy** and **global citizenship** through a focus on sport as a tool for peace and cultural understanding. To make this educational mission more complete with all-round or holistic mindset, do we also want to include topics such as “**arts (aesthetics)**”, “**nutrition**” (not just doping), “**media literacy**” and “**environmental issues**” in the programs? And how do we really link them with our schools’ mainstream curriculums (which are very emphasized in East Asian regions) such as mathematics, geography, physics and chemistry? Just to name a few.

Hence, here the point is: How can OVEP really deliver so many powerful or wonderful functions for so many objectives? It seems to be that currently PE/sports lessons/courses in our global education system are the most likely channels to promote these objectives. However, *the problem is: Can our current PE/sports teachers accommodate such “extra heavy loading work” besides their normal routine teaching hours?*

The answer to this question seems to be negative from (Petrie, 2017), as she argues that “with the varied understandings and interpretations of Olympism as an educative project, and the negative perceptions of Olympic Games that impact of the integrity of any Olympic-related messaging, it is difficult to see how an explicit focus on Olympism education would be useful in enhancing the legitimacy of PE” (p.164).

Drawing on the context of New Zealand, Petrie (2017) explored how Olympism education has been used to frame curriculum policy in PE and to what extent this has not impacted on practice. Her analysis is then used to argue against positioning Olympism education as the key to raising the quality and relevance of PE in schools, as it has the potential to add to the layers of confusion that already exist for teachers grappling with PE curriculum.

In conclusion, I argue instead that as a community of educators we should turn our attention to the role Olympism education has in ensuring sport, particularly for youth, is practiced in line with the Olympic ideals and the aims of Olympism espoused by de Coubertin (Petrie, 2017, P.153).

IV. Olympic Education – glocal perspective in Taiwan

In Taiwan, currently Olympic theme related courses are taught only at the University level. While the Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee has been running National Olympic Academy for 41 years (since 1978) with a great achievement to spread Olympic knowledge among school teachers, high educational level students, sports administrators and media reporters, the basic Olympic Education programs are still not widely applied to different levels of schools.

A. Olympic Education as General Education

Founded in 1961, National Taiwan University of Sport (NTUS) in Taichung has initiated Olympic Education as a compulsory course for all the second year students since 2015. It is run by the University's General Education Centre. The decision was made by the current University's President Professor Hua-Wei, Lin, an Olympian, who fully

supports this course due to his previous Olympic experience and educational philosophy. He believes that every student should be given the opportunity to learn and develop their professions. Besides that, we have to enhance the linkage between local environment and the university, so that we are able to contribute, and work our way in becoming an international university.



奧林匹克精神具有五個多面向目標

NTUS also would like to play a leading role in promoting Olympic education study among all Taiwanese Universities. Apart from the Olympic compulsory course, over the last four years (2015-2019), many education programs and events have been successfully organized and assisted by the NTUS students/teachers such as:

1. Olympic Education Seminars
2. Olympic and American Culture Summer Camp
3. Olympic Volunteer workshop
4. Olympic poster exhibition
5. Assisting and Attending NOA sessions
6. Olympic Teacher Training Camp
7. Central Universities Olympic Seminars



Olympic Education Workshops



Olympic Youth Camps



Olympic Teacher Training Workshop



Olympic Poster Exhibition at NTUS

In order to spread the Olympic ideas/spirit more widely around Taiwan's higher education institutions, NTUS has also set up the first student Olympic education studies society in Taiwan. The student society is formed by a group of passionate students. The purpose of establishing the society is to promote the Olympic spirit, help students to build up the international view, and also assist CTOA to cultivate future sports leaders.



Olympic Education Studies Society

B. Vision of NTUS Olympic Education

As mentioned previously, NTUS has established Olympic education related courses and the first Olympic Studies Society in Taiwan to help young talented students to take part related educational events organized by Chinese Taipei Olympic Committee, including international students exchange scheme. In the future, NTUS aims to establish Taiwan's first Olympic education themed museum and build up a Taiwanese Sport Hall of Fame, including Eastern-Western sports culture relics. The exhibition hall can consist of Asian and non-Asian sports events, the relics of Taiwanese aboriginals, and the media of Olympic Games.



V. Concluding remarks: What else can be done?

The Olympic Values Education Program (OVEP) in association with the Olympic Educational Movement are supposed to be based on core values of Olympism, which are designed and aimed to inspire the moral and physical development of children as well as youth through participation in sport and physical activity. OVEP aims to be globally recognized that sport and physically activity can positively contribute to social change. However, a key and sustaining component of this fusion is the underlying human values such as **excellence, friendship, respect** that are the driving forces behind positive social change and emotional growth of an individual.

The active application of learning values through physical movement and play is the cornerstone of Olympic values education. The founder of the modern Olympic Games, Pierre de Coubertin, envisaged the opportunity as an educational reformist to make the change. He also believes that sport is a possible source for inner improvement for each individual. One of the future missions is to challenge young people to become physically active, approach school curriculums based on acquisition of life skills, encourage continuous school attendance, mitigate adolescent risky behaviours, develop a foundation of cultural understanding and socially responsible individuals through the vehicle of sport and games.

On one hand, we still need to be well aware of if there are positive impact that Olympic education, with its values and ideals of personal excellence, fair play and culture understanding, can have on a young person's life. On the other hand, while the Olympic Educational Movement is implemented for all ages and across the curriculum to increase knowledge and inspire personal growth through sport and education, there is also potential negative impact that might mislead our educational stakeholders who tend to think these values are lofty ideals that cannot effectively applied to our local

regions or communities. Especially the Olympics currently face a host of daunting challenges, including the ginormous costs of staging games, corruption in governance, human rights abuse and doping issues.

So, with all the ethical and political problems facing the Olympics, do they still matter? While circumstances change, Canadian Olympic expert/scholar Kidd (2018) still believes that the Olympics contribute a net benefit to humanity.

“...it is fine that people continue to be critical of Olympic practices or blind spots, but to give up on the project because the international sports world is not perfect would be really short-sighted.” (Kidd, 2018)

Thus, it is hoped that OVEP can still play a valuable reference to explain the importance of Olympic values education for the dissemination of the principles of Olympism amongst various target groups. It provides important information relevant for the understanding of Olympism and its application in various contexts. Nevertheless, if *Olympic Values Education Program* aims to be a global initiative, it also requires more **local/regional educators’ long term involvement, commitment and dedication** to the Olympic Educational Movement. Local/regional educators would need passion to develop the “why” of Olympic values are important first and then “how” to implement and promote these essential values in the lives of young people – who address the needs of today’s world in difficult and changing times.

References

- Hsu, L., & Ilundáin-Agurruza, J. (2016). On the compatibility between Confucianism and modern Olympism. *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*. 43:1-2(March-June, 2016), 103-123.
- IOC (2015). The Olympic Charter. (Lausanne: International Olympic Committee)
- IOC (2018). OVEP program. Retrieved from <https://www.olympic.org/olympic-values-and-education-program>
- Kidd, B. (2018, February 5). Do the Olympics still matter? [THE CONVERSATION] .Retrieved from <https://theconversation.com/do-the-olympics-still-matter-90215>.
- Kretchmar, S.(1994). Practical Philosophy of Sport. Leeds, United Kingdom: Human Kinetics.
- Petrie, K. (2017). Olympic/ism Education: Does it have a place in Physical Education? *Diagoras: International Academic Journal on Olympic Studies*, 1, 153-168.