The Implementation of Olympic Education Programs at World Level

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Abstract

The objective of this survey was to collect and validate data on the present situation of Olympic education programs within the Olympic Movement, investigate any related problems and present proposals for their solution. Data were collected by means of a questionnaire, which was completed by Directors of National Olympic Academies and Officials of National Olympic Committees (N=92), from 70 countries from all five continents during the 9th International Session which was held in Ancient Olympia from 1st to 8th June 2007.

The elaboration and analysis of the data leads to the conclusion that Olympic education is an innovative educational activity enjoying international recognition. Its implementation varies from country to country and is achieved, in most cases, through education, in all its tiers. The organizations that assist in the implementation of Olympic education programs are mostly the National Olympic Academies and the National Olympic Committees and, to a lesser extent, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, sports associations, sponsors and social institutions. During their implementation, problems arise mostly related to insufficient funding and, to a lesser extent, to inadequate training of people in charge of implementation, inadequate organization and inadequate promotion.

Introduction

The major and extensive changes taking place today as a result of globalization have also, unavoidably, affected the educational process. People are talking more and more about the need to strengthen the school’s pedagogical role and link it more closely to society. More emphasis is given to the importance of lifelong learning, respect for cultural diversity and the need to develop and renew the individual’s skills to respond to the needs of a dynamic, contemporary society.

Increasingly, people involved in the education process in different countries, focus their attention on the school curriculum as it sets the framework for the many activities that should be promoted in schools.

Today, issues related to health, the environment, intercultural awareness and young people’s social behavior, are closely associated with the school and become part of the curriculum.

These social education aspects have been included in Olympic education programs, in the last two decades, with the view to encouraging a critical stance on contemporary issues and promoting positive attitudes and behaviors.

The term “Olympic education” originally appeared in education and Olympic research in the ‘70s. The first Olympic education program was implemented in 1972 on the occasion of the Munich Olympics in German primary schools. Since then, Olympic education has been developed and extended to other parts of the world.
Germany’s example was followed by the Organizing Committee of the Montreal Olympic Games; during three consecutive school years (1973—1976) it implemented the program “Promoting Olympism in the school environment” in Quebec schools. The objectives of this program were to promote broader understanding of the Olympic Movement and its impact on modern society.

These programs were considered as standard-setting for their time and they contributed to the development of Olympic education worldwide. Today, in many countries around the world, Olympic education programs are being implemented, particularly during the staging of the Olympic Games.

In Greece, with the opportunity of the Athens Games, the program was aimed at all schoolchildren in primary and secondary education, thus representing an innovative educational process. Its basic philosophy was to link the school to the local community and its institutions, emphasizing the humanistic and ethical dimensions of Olympism.

It also wanted to attract and include all those involved in education and training, without any distinction, to inspire and raise students’ awareness, promote positive attitudes and values such as cooperation, empowerment, critical thinking and responsibility.

The program included a series of actions implemented within the school environment, which enhanced the educational and cultural value of the Olympic Games. Sport, culture, Olympic Truce, combating social exclusion and respect for multiculturalism, were the core elements of these activities. The objective of the whole program was to initiate a strong volunteering movement that would cover all the facets of young people’s social life.

In China, on the occasion of the Beijing Games, the Organizing Committee of the Olympic Games (BOCOG) and the Ministry of Education developed the Beijing 2008 Olympic Education Program for primary and secondary education thus offering Olympic education to millions of youngsters and adolescents. The program’s objectives were to propagate and promote the Olympic ideal, to encourage students to explore other cultures, to develop sports and cultural activities in schools and to organize a variety of educational cross-curricular activities around Olympic issues.

For its part, the International Olympic Committee, focusing on Education-Culture-Sport for promoting Olympism (Olympic Charter, rule 2) gives its support to initiatives and activities, in cooperation with different institutions such as international organizations and nongovernmental organizations in order to disseminate Olympic education at world level. A major IOC initiative was the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation with the European Union for the implementation of the program “Sport, Schools and Olympic Values in Europe” in three EU countries. The excellent results of this pilot project, as shown by its final evaluation, have encouraged the European Union to expand this program in the future to all European Union member countries.

UNESCO considers sport to be an educational resource that contributes significantly to promoting respect, mutual cooperation and better understanding among all countries, with the view to consolidating peace. The Memorandum of Cooperation signed between UNESCO and the IOC provides for joint action between governmental organizations involved in physical education and sport and National Olympic Committees, International Sports Federations and the other members of the Olympic Movement for the propagation of Olympism and its values.

In recent years, Olympic education has developed in many countries around the world as a novel education process. However, the programs’ scope and quality, as well as the organizations facilitating their implementation in the education system have not been sufficiently documented.

The International Olympic Academy, since 1961 when it was established, is organizing to this day in Ancient Olympia numerous international events, conferences, sessions and seminars to propagate Olympism and increase the awareness of people within the Olympic Movement who are responsible for and play a major role in educating young people.

Within the framework of the International Olympic Academy’s work, a survey intended for Directors of National Olympic Academies and officials of national Olympic Committees was designed and conducted during the 9th International Session on the special theme of “Olympic Pedagogy”.

The objective of this survey was to collect and validate data on the present situation of Olympic education programs within the Olympic Movement, investigate any related problems and present proposals for their solution.

Method and Procedure

Sample
92 people from approximately 70 countries participated in the survey (63 men, 26 women and three persons who did not state their gender). Of the 89 respondents who gave their age, the largest percentage (60.6%) were older than 50 and most of them (64.1%) had a doctorate or post-graduate degree. The majority of those who stated their occupation (30.8%) were NOA/NOC officials. Participants came from all five continents: 19 (25%) from Africa, 13 (17.1%) from Asia, 14 (18.4%) from America, 29 (38.1%) from Europe and 1 (1.3%) from Oceania.

**Procedure**

Data were collected by means of a questionnaire, which participants were asked to complete during the Session. The questionnaires were anonymous and the procedure totally confidential and included two parts.

The first part included “closed” and “multiple choice” questions intended to record the conditions under which Olympic education programs were designed and implemented in the countries under consideration including: · the method by which they were implemented in education or other institutions, · the way in which they have been integrated in the education system, · their period of implementation, · whether special resource material was developed during their implementation and training provided to the people who were in charge of the programs, · whether the programs were formally evaluated, · the participation of governmental or other agencies who helped during implementation, · any problems that might have been observed during implementation.

The second part included “closed” questions whose purpose was to help identify the broader views of NOA Directors, on aspects like the acceptance and outreach of Olympic education as an institution, whether or not the creation of a worldwide framework for Olympic education would contribute to its development, whether and to what extent information and training of all people involved in the development and implementation of programs was felt to be necessary and whether and to what extent program evaluation was thought to be necessary.

To facilitate evaluation the following personal data were collected: gender, age, country (continent), education level, occupation (profession) and the views, comments and proposals of participants were also noted.

**Results and Discussion**

We can conclude from the survey’s results that Olympic Education is accepted as an institution since of the 70 countries that took part in the survey, 91% have implemented Olympic education programs and only 8 (9%) have never implemented such programs.

This is further confirmed by the fact that to the question whether Olympic education as an institution is accepted by political and educational authorities, 60.68% of respondents agreed (fully or partly) and only a small percentage (20.23%) did not agree (fully or partly) with this statement.

The period of implementation, however, varies among countries from a few weeks to more than ten years, with an average length of 1 to 5 years. We can distinguish two trends in the implementation of these programs. The first trend (40%) seems to be that such programs have been integrated in the country’s education system as they have been running for over 5 years, and some of them (23.75%) for more than 10 years. The second trend (60%) appears to be that countries are trying to establish these programs in their system, since their period of implementation ranges from a few weeks to five years and given the fact that 92.5% have stated that they are implementing Olympic education programs in their country today, this would mean that these programs were developed in the last five years.

This trend is more prevalent in African and Asian countries where a large number of these programs (40%) have been in place for less than a year, a few weeks in most cases.

We then tried to determine whether these programs met the necessary requirements that would ensure their structure and continuity within the education system of each country.

The overwhelming majority of participants (93.7%) have implemented these programs in all education tiers. There are, however, differences regarding their integration in the different tiers as we observed that in Asia the programs were mainly implemented in higher education, in America and Africa in secondary education mostly, in Europe in primary and secondary education mainly, while in Oceania (New Zealand) the programs are being implemented in all education tiers. In addition to education, however, several countries have extended these programs to sporting and social institutions, camps, etc.. The concepts and ideals of Olympism coexist as part of education’s broader objectives in many education systemsxiii. In most European countries, despite existing differences, the main objective of education is the moral, social, physical and intellectual development of youth for a healthy, fair and democratic society with a robust economy that promotes sustainable developmentxiv.
Implementing Olympic education programs in education is therefore recommended as it gives emphasis to educational trends and endeavors and is associated with education’s socio-psychological dimension.

The inclusion of Olympic education courses on the curriculum varies among countries, however, as our results have shown that in 45.5% of cases these programs were presented through the physical education course, in 29.9% through all the courses on the curriculum, in 40.3% as an autonomous course and in 27.3% as another course or activity (seminars, workshops, NOA programs, Olympic Clubs, etc.).

If we look at these differences at continent level, we see that in Africa the programs have been included in education mostly through the physical education course, in Asia as an autonomous course and through physical education, in America as an autonomous course and in Europe mostly through all the courses on the curriculum.

Olympic education is not taught, is not conveyed or experienced in the same way in all societies. The differences among education programs are due to national, social and educational factors, which are decisive for program development. The programs are integrated in education through physical education and other courses on the curriculum: history, civic education, philosophy, biology, religion, art, languages, etc.

Innovative actions like Olympic education in the education process counterbalance, thanks to their proactive methodology and thematic freedom, the absence of flexibility and one-sided approach of traditional teaching, encouraging and promoting creativity, initiative, experimentation and diversification and the imagination of teachers and students. Through their methodological framework, they enable the study of subjects arising from personal interest or present-day reality that cannot have their own separate place on the curriculum. Their principles and practices create a rejuvenating process that brings a breath of change in all the sectors of school life.

Our research has shown that in 74.4% of Olympic education programs problems arose during implementation. The most predominant of these problems were insufficient funding and inadequate information and training of the people involved in program implementation and, to a lesser extent, insufficient support from state agencies, inadequate organization, inadequate promotion, etc.

Another major problem we identified was evaluation as in most cases the programs had not been evaluated. This problem is more frequently seen in America (72.7%), followed by Asia (53.9%), Africa 50% and Europe (33.1%).

Training was not considered to be a major problem, however, as we see that for most programs (75.3%) training was provided. There are, however, differences among continents since the majority of African programs (53.3%) were not associated with training; the corresponding percentages for Asian and, to a lesser extent, for European countries, were 30.8% and 17.7% respectively.

Our research also showed that most countries have produced special resource material for Olympic education programs; there is a rather high percentage (30%) though that does not have such material, which is of course a major problem. If we look at individual continents, the problem is to be found mostly in Africa (60%), followed by America (30.8%) and Europe to a lesser extent (18.1%).

In addition to the inventory of educational programs, we also investigated whether “information-training of political, educational, social and sports institutions was essential for the development and implementation of Olympic education programs” and whether “the evaluation of Olympic education programs is considered essential for their implementation”. To both these questions, the overwhelming majority of participants (about 93%) replied affirmatively, approximately 6% were undecided and only a very small percentage of respondents, mostly from European countries appeared to disagree.

The absence of program continuity and the problems identified above are due to the inability or difficulty of integrating the programs in mainstream school education, to the absence of necessary knowledge and skills among teachers, the inexistence of a systematic evaluation procedure, a lack of clarity regarding the role of this new resource and the shortage of materials and equipment.

Innovation should be the driving philosophy for a school unit if it wants to be what is nowadays described as a “learning organization” or, to use a more modern terminology, “an intelligent school”. The main reason for “resisting change” is that organization members in their attempt to introduce innovations do not take account of the obstacles they may encounter at the level of the school, the educational establishment or central educational policies.

In Olympic education programs, the obstacles that have to be overcome are related to their content that has to be diversified according to the age group and each country’s sporting and Olympic tradition and its adaptation to the school curriculum. It should also highlight the distinctive features of Olympism and explain, in simple terms, its educational principles for otherwise there can be no distinction between Olympic education and sports education.
Coming now to the organizations involved in the promotion and implementation of Olympic education programs, we have established that National Olympic Academies (80%) and National Olympic Committees (75%) are the main supporters of these programs followed by government agencies (43.8%), non-governmental organizations (30%), sports organizations (18.8%), as well as other entities such as sponsors, university grants, church bodies, media, etc. (23.8%).

These entities will also provide the necessary funds for implementing the programs. Most of the programs’ funding comes from the government (30% from the Ministry of Education and 27.5% from the Ministry of Sport) and another 33.8% from other state organizations (NOC, NOA, OCOG, etc.). Different sponsors also contribute to a significant degree (33.8%), followed by other bodies (17.5%), including the IOC, its Commission for Olympic Education and Culture, etc.

This is an understandable development, as confirmed by the activities of the International Olympic Academy during the last 48 years, since the implementation of Olympic education programs at world level is directed by each country’s NOC and NOA.

A problem that several countries face, however, is the lack of know-how and experience in developing Olympic education programs. The creation of a global framework for Olympic education will significantly contribute to the integration of these programs in each country’s educational system. The overwhelming majority of participants (90%) shared this view fully or partly, with a small percentage (8.89%) being undecided and only one participant from New Zealand (Oceania) disagreeing.

During the IOA’s Sessions, this issue has often been discussed in the working groups. In addition, an indicative outline of a global program that could then be adjusted to each country’s requirements and culture, has been proposed and developed.

This framework, in addition to guidelines on the design and organization of the program, should also provide answers to fundamental questions that are essential for the development of any educational program.

- What is the program’s philosophy?
- What should be its educational objectives? (Values?)
- What training experience should be provided so that they can possibly contribute to the attainment of these objectives? (What should be their content?)
- What methods should we follow in order to organize these educational experiences effectively? (What teaching methods should we adopt?)
- How can we determine whether the educational objectives have been achieved? (How should we conduct the evaluation process?)

Conclusions

Recapitulating the main conclusions of the above survey we can observe that:

- Olympic education is an innovative educational activity enjoying international recognition.
- Today, Olympic education programs are implemented in many countries around the world, a trend that has been increasing in the last five years.
- Olympic education is mostly promoted through education, at all levels. On a smaller scale, its practice is also extended to sports organizations, social institutions and camps.
- The way in which it is integrated within education varies from country to country but is achieved, in most cases, through physical education, through all other courses, but also as an autonomous course.
- For its implementation, special educational resources have been developed in most countries, training provided to the teachers who implemented the programs, but no extensive formal evaluation has been performed.
- The organizations that assisted in the implementation of Olympic education programs were mostly NOAs and NOCs and, to a lesser extent, government agencies, non-governmental organizations, sports associations, sponsors and social institutions.
- For the implementation of most programs special funding was obtained, mainly from government sources (Ministry of Education and Sport), as well as other sources (sponsors and other organizations) to a lesser degree.
- Problems arise during their implementation, mostly related to insufficient funding and, to a lesser extent, to inadequate training of people in charge of implementation, inadequate organization and inadequate promotion.
Training and information of organizations that participate in program implementation is considered essential, however, as well as ongoing evaluation.

The creation of an Olympic education framework at world level will help individual countries considerably to integrate in the best possible way Olympic education in their own system.

In conclusion, Olympic education programs are growing into an important activity with a strong impact on a range of permanent aspects of global education. The school should draw upon this wealth of knowledge, experience and representations that students of all ages bring from their life, their family, the environment in which they live, which should be combined with those included in the curriculum, whether planned or spontaneous.

Olympic education programs achieve this objective since instead of teaching students ready-made knowledge they integrate them in a knowledge-generation process, enabling them to understand learning structures. Their content refers to subjects related to the students’ daily life and personal interests (health, sport, culture, etc.) and is connected to several cognitive domains of the curriculum (physical education, history, geography, religion, social sciences, etc.); for their completion, however, cooperation is needed at the level of both educational policies and the school (cooperation with social partners, sports and cultural organizations, etc.). Finally, they transform standard pedagogical practices, through their methodology, as they introduce new teaching methods (project method, cooperative learning, etc.) that encourage students to construct and verify their own knowledge.

Although Olympic education programs contribute to the introduction of changes that improve the school’s efficiency, many of these programs cannot be integrated in the educational system. This is due to a series of problems arising during their implementation in the education process, such as “absence of continuity”, inadequate funding and organization, limited student and teacher involvement and the non recognition of their importance by official government agencies.

Furthermore, the inability to evaluate these programs not only on the part formal educational authorities in each country, but also on the part of the institutions involved in their implementation, which for the most part do not seem to be able to record data related to their implementation, evaluate their results and impact on cognitive aspects, educational practices and school management, represents a serious obstacle preventing any feedback for future development of broader, similar programs.

Finding ways of integrating the innovations offered by Olympic education programs in education will require mobilization and extending institutional provisions to allow their inclusion in each country’s school system. If this is not guaranteed, then Olympic education programs will be implemented outside the framework of national educational institutions and resources, on a limited scale and remain without proper recognition on the sidelines of the curriculum.

Bibliography


i Part of this paper was presented during the 48th International Session for Young Participants, organised by the International Olympic Academy in Ancient Olympia from 11 to 25 June 2008.


iv Muller, N., 1998.

v The German Olympic Committee in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, issued educational material for students and teachers entitled “Olympic reading” whose content was linked to all curriculum courses in order to make students aware of Olympic ideals, cf. Lauerbach, E., 1972, p.107.

vi The program’s objective was to present to the public the implications and effects of the Olympic Games at a sporting, educational, social and cultural level and to encourage people’s participation in special activities, cf. Landry, F., 1997, pp.348-356.


viii Pei dongguang, 2007, IOA.


x Dieuzeide, H. 1985, p.178, as stated in UNESCO’s International Charter of Physical Education and Sport.


xii Participants were people with a lot of experience of the Olympic Movement, while NOAs and NOCs play a central role in the development of Olympic education programs in every country. Furthermore, in order to check the validity of data, from approximately twenty (20) countries, we collected data from two individuals and the analysis of questionnaires did not reveal any differences in the answers.


Muller, N., 1999, pp.77-82.


Flouris, G., 2005, p.11.


Georgiadis, K., 2003, pp.82-84; Muller, N., 1999, p.77; Binder, D., 1994, pp.69-73.

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