Sport as an Education

The creation of opportunities for personal growth through lessons learned on the playing field and through the application of sport in the classroom

Main Aim: To educate young people through sports that gives them a better understanding about each others lives and the world around them, and that encourages friendship to build a better and more peaceful world.

Specific Objectives:

Students will be able to:

- Discuss and understand the links between sport and education
- Participate in a range of academic activities that encompass and instil Olympic values
- Carry out projects in technical subjects (art, music, crafts, etc.) that contribute to developing Olympic values
- Explore activities that show respect for the environment at school and in the community
- Demonstrate an understanding for important global issues such as HIV/AIDS

The founder of the modern Olympic Games, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, from his early youth until his death, maintained a real passion and genuine vocation for educational activities. His aim was always to promote education as a consequence of sports and likewise, sports as a link to culture and education. These two closely connected notions form the fundamental basis of Olympism. Olympic education is a dynamic process, addressing social, intellectual, cultural, ethical and physical issues. Today, both Olympic education and education through sport are increasingly important movements. This Unit – Sport as an Education, will examine the historical development that links sport and education, its place in today’s Olympic Movement and how players and athletes can learn and benefit from Olympic education and education through sport.

When Pierre de Coubertin and representatives from thirteen countries unanimously decided to resurrect the ancient Olympic Games into a modern Games, they wanted more than just bringing the world’s best athletes together every four years to battle for glory. De Coubertin in particular was consumed with the idea that the Olympic Games should be used to “contribute to building a
peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practiced without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit of mutual understanding, friendship, solidarity and fair play”.

“Why did I restore the Olympic Games? To enable and strengthen sport, to ensure their independence and duration and thus enable them better to fulfil the education role incumbent upon them in the modern world and for the glorification of the individual athlete whose muscular activity is necessary for maintenance of the general spirit of competition”.

Pierre de Coubertin

From this initial and fundamental statement, the aims of the Olympic Movement have grown and developed. They are now expressed in the Olympic Charter as Fundamental Principles. Antonios Tzikas, President of the Foundation of Olympic and Sport Education, said:

“The Olympic Games, that are held every four years, enjoy world-wide recognition and bring a vision of peaceful co-existence among all of the people of the world. Let us then dedicate the second centennial to the children, to Olympic and Sport Education…..Let the important messages of the Olympics and of true sport be codified and taught from nursery school, if possible, and let the children of the whole world receive them.”

Many countries support this statement, recognizing that Olympic education and education through sport are two slightly different concepts but very closely linked to one another. Olympic education encompasses learning about and from the Olympics - the Olympic Movement and Olympism – and all the issues therein. Education through sport refers to the lesson opportunities from involvement in sport that can be used to enhance the development of individuals, communities and nations.

The Olympic Movement and “All that is Olympic” has over time, expanded itself to address many important issues of our time. Included in this chapter are global topics like:

(A) protection against environmental degradation
(B) the fight against infectious diseases and in particular HIV/AIDS

The Olympic Movement has made gigantic efforts to help educate the world, providing an informed perspective on how its member nations can collectively combat these issues.

But why does the Olympic Movement take a role in this, why associate a prestigious organization like the International Olympic Committee with such complicated and uncomfortable subjects? The answer is twofold. These global issues are an intrinsic part of the Olympic Games. Athletes participating in the Games come from over 200 nations, few of whom are untouched by one or more of these problems. Secondly, the Olympic Movement has a deep sense of responsibility and possibility. As the Olympics catch the world’s attention every four years, so do its players, the media, the champions and many vignettes of
hardship and intolerance. The Olympic Movement accepts the moral obligation to make the world a better place using sound judgment, decision making, support, and providing an educational leadership for the world to follow.

Gaining an education through sport can be viewed in two different ways. Firstly, there is compelling evidence that active participation in sport and recreation assists in raising an individual’s educational standards. Active participation in sport and recreation is an important contributor to improved health. It also provides opportunity for establishing healthy behaviours. There is a direct correlation between active participation and the reduction of vandalism, drug abuse and petty crime. Active participation in sport and recreation teaches children important life skills and provides a focus and purpose to life when too often they feel trapped or alienated. Active participation can be infectious and contribute to regenerating communities by improving health, productivity, quality of life, facilities and environment. Active participation in sport and recreation helps develop better communication and interpersonal skills, leadership and cooperation, friendship and responsibility and provides a vehicle for learning responsible risk taking. Active participation is fun and builds self esteem and confidence. Secondly, education through sport can take sport as a resource of information and provide a wealth of material to teach academic, social and physiological skills. Whether the subject is language, geography, history, mathematics, science, art, music, drama, or physical education, there are unlimited resources to choose from in order to inspire learning. Sport acts as a catalyst to educate children in subjects not traditionally linked with sport. But because of the popularity of sport and the ability for everyone to participate in it in some capacity, sport is a very powerful tool for education and can be used in one way or another to educate just about anything!

(A) Protection against environmental degradation

Our planet is undergoing a global transformation. Rapid population growth combined with the development of fossil fuel-based industrialized societies has dramatically sped up the impact on the environment. Climate change, the global destruction or pollution of ecosystems and other environmental problems are closely linked to our attitudes and practices. This also applies to sport activities. Like any other human activity, sport is set in a physical environment and has effects on it. Sport can generate various impacts on the environment from insignificant repercussions to major and irreversible damage. The scale and gravity of the impact depends mainly on the kind of sport and the size of the event.

Although the International Olympic Committee has always been conscious of environmental concerns and worked hard to promote awareness, it had never formally adopted an environmental policy of its own. In 1994, recognizing the growing worldwide concern for environmental issues, the IOC declared that the environment was the third pillar of Olympism, behind sport and culture. That same year, the IOC entered into a partnership with the United Nations
Environment Programme (UNEP) in which both parties agreed jointly to undertake international actions to promote sustainable development.

The Olympic Committee established a Sport and Environment Commission to advise its Executive Board on the integration of environmental issues in its activities. Today, the environment has become one of the key criteria in the evaluation of bids to host Olympic Games. UNEP is represented on this Commission.

"The International Olympic Committee (IOC) sees to it that the Olympic Games are held in conditions which demonstrate a responsible concern for environmental issues and encourages the Olympic Movement to take measures to reflect such concern in its activities and educate all those connected with the Olympic Movement as to the importance of sustainable development."

Rule 2, paragraph 13, Olympic Charter

UNEP and the IOC, in collaboration with other sport federations and associations, have collaborated on various projects including; Agenda 21 for Sport and the Environment which provides basic information on incorporating sustainable development, world conferences and regional seminars on sport and the environment. The UNEP also works with Organizing Committees of the Olympic Games, including Torino (2006), Beijing (2008) and Vancouver (2010) to assist them with the environmental components of their work.

The IOC also recognizes its role as an international organization with profile and its ability to affect many young people.

"The Olympic Movement and organizations specializing in environmental matters should cooperate and contribute to the education of the sporting world and young people in such matters"

Final conclusion of the Centennial Olympic Congress in 1994

Olympic Clubs can also support the mission of the Olympic Committee and actively encourage awareness and concern for the third pillar of Olympism – (protection of the) environment.

(B) HIV/AIDS

In the 20 years since its discovery, the HIV/AIDS epidemic has become a major crisis for Africa and increasingly so around the world. According to UNICEF, there are more than 40 million people diagnosed with HIV/AIDS worldwide and today, Africa accounts for over 70 percent of new HIV infections and 80% of AIDS-related deaths globally. Even more alarming is the fact that more than half of the newly HIV infected are young people between 15 and 24 years of age.

There are many factors contributing to the growing HIV/AIDS epidemic. Poverty, lack of education, political instability, inadequate health care and the absence of formal home/community based activities. The list is long. Children and youth face
enormous challenges, and some of them seek refuge in sexual activities, alcohol and drug abuse. Many of these behaviours expose young people to the risk of HIV/ADIS infection. The situation is made worse because many families and communities are failing to educate and empower young people, especially girls, with the life-skills needed to help them cope with the challenges surrounding sexual health and overall healthy development.

Sport and physical activity provides an important means to reach children and youth, and sport organizations have a responsibility to use their influence. Whether engaged in formal or informal activities, being involved in sport gives young people the opportunity to develop skills that can help them make healthy choices and live healthy and happy lives.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) is one of these sport organizations that is using its influence to help fight the HIV/AIDS epidemic.

The IOC and the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) used the opportunity of the Olympic Games in Athens 2004 to further their partnership and raise awareness among the global sporting community about HIV/AIDS. This effort falls within the framework of the Memorandum of Understanding signed by the two organizations.

The Memorandum of Understanding has two main objectives:

- To exchange regular information and lessons learned in order to enhance the role of sports organizations in the fight against HIV/AIDS at local community and national levels
- To organize HIV/AIDS awareness activities with coaches, athletes and sports personalities.

“One third of the 40 million people living with HIV are young people under the age of 25” said Dr Peter Piot, Executive Director of UNAIDS. “It is vitally important for young people to have access to information about HIV so that they can stay HIV-free and lead healthy and productive lives. The sports community is a key partner in reaching out to young men and women, whether in their village, town, or globally.”

IOC President Jacques Rogge said this about his organizations commitment on World Aids Day, December 1, 2004.

“Sport breaks down barriers, builds self-esteem, and can promote life skills and healthy behaviour. This year (2004), the International Olympic Committee along with numerous National Olympic Committees, aware of the increasing social and economic impact of HIV and AIDS, made a number of commitments to support efforts to tackle AIDS.

We committed to promoting AIDS awareness and HIV prevention for all - particularly among the sport community. The sports community is a key partner in reaching out to young men and women, whether in their villages or cities. Fighting AIDS also means challenging any form of discrimination. Discrimination towards a country, or a person on grounds of race, religion, politics, gender, or otherwise, is incompatible with the principles of the Olympic Movement. Each of us in the Olympic Movement, from international sport
institutions to national federations and local clubs in the neighbourhoods, has a responsibility to challenge discrimination, today on World AIDS Day – and every day. Changing our own attitudes, beliefs and behaviour can transform relations between women and men, and make the world a better and safer place for us all.”

Olympic Club facilitators have the opportunity to further the work of the IOC and UNAIDS and address HIV/AIDS in the Olympic Club setting. With a variety of fun and educational games aimed at increasing awareness about the epidemic, Olympic club members should:

- gain an increased understanding and develop skills to make good life choices
- help avoid risky behaviours that could lead to infection
- gain confidence in knowing the facts about HIV/AIDS and be able to share them accurately with friends and family members, and
- understand the disease as a worldwide epidemic

Additional Information and basic facts about HIV and AIDS can be found in Appendix 3.

Pierre de Coubertin, with his pedagogical background, recognized the power of sport as an educational means and believed that the re-establishment of the Olympic Games could enhance its potential. Participation in sport programs and activities has proven to advance educational standards, and likewise, education is easily facilitated by sport. Sport and physical education, because of their unique ability to appeal to the masses, also provide an incredible opportunity to educate about important issues facing our world today - such as the degradation of the environment and the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Using sport as a vehicle for education is as Pierre de Coubertin envisioned the Olympic Movement – and is the rationale for founding the Olympic Clubs in Seychelles. Olympic Clubs have the power to provide a fun and safe environment for the youth of Seychelles to explore Olympic Ideals through a full range of educational subject areas.