


THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

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ABSTRACT

This article addresses the application of the Olympic values, with emphasis on the search for excellence, in the educational context. The central problem of the research revolves around the tension between the traditional concept of excellence, focused on performance, and the need for an educational approach that promotes the integral development of individuals, respecting cultural diversity and ethical and environmental issues. The objective of the research is to analyze how the Olympic values can be applied in pedagogical practices in a critical way and adapted to local realities, without losing sight of the principles of inclusion and sustainability. The methodology adopted was a qualitative analysis based on the literature review, focusing on the contributions of Binder (2020) on Olympic education and Krenak (2019) on the criticisms of the progress and development model. The results indicate that, although the search for excellence is an essential value in Olympism, its application in education needs to be reconfigured to include the promotion of critical awareness and respect for diversity. The research concludes that true educational excellence must be integrated with pedagogical practices that recognize environmental and social needs, proposing training that goes beyond competition and addresses broader issues of sustainability and social responsibility.

Keywords: Olympism. Excellence. Olympic education. Values. Sustainability.

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INTRODUCTION

"The legacy of Olympic Education should serve as a 'bridge' between the pursuit of excellence represented by elite athletes and the pursuit of a child's dreams." (Binder, 2012).

The pursuit of excellence is one of the fundamental principles of the Olympic movement, which claims to promote values that transcend sport and are directly connected to the integral development of the human being. However, in an educational context, the concept of excellence goes beyond physical performance and encompasses ethical, moral, and social training, which aims to build critical and socially responsible individuals. This essay proposes a reflection on the values that sustain Olympism and its application in the educational environment, with emphasis on the impact of the search for excellence as an instrument of personal and collective development.

Based on the theoretical contributions of Binder (2020), who highlights the role of Olympic values, such as respect, friendship and the search for excellence, in the educational process, and the contributions of Krenak (2019), who problematizes the notions of progress and development from a critical perspective, the essay explores how these values can be integrated into teaching in order to promote a balance between academic training and the construction of an ethical conscience. In addition, the work seeks to identify the limits and dilemmas of this incessant search for results, proposing an analysis of the challenges that emerge in the attempt to balance sports performance with education for citizenship.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Olympism claims to promote values that transcend sport and are closely linked to the integral development of the human being. According to Binder (2020), Olympic values, such as respect, friendship and the search for excellence, are fundamental in the educational process and constitute a path for the formation of critical and socially engaged individuals. The author points out that, historically, Olympism has always sought to integrate ethical principles into sports performance, promoting a balance between body, mind and spirit.

These values are essential for building an educational environment that prioritizes not only victory but also the learning process and moral development. In the context of pedagogical practices, the search for excellence goes beyond the limits of physical performance, implying an education aimed at personal and social growth. Binder (2020) points out that this approach has been applied in various educational programs, using sport as a teaching tool to develop cognitive and social skills.



On the other hand, Krenak (2019) offers a critical perspective on the concepts of progress and development in contemporary societies, which can be related to the discussion about the search for excellence in Olympism. Although the author's focus is on sustainability and the need to rethink the patterns of consumption and exploitation of nature, his ideas dialogue with the reflection on the ethical limits of the search for excellence. Krenak's vision invites us to reflect on the extent to which the incessant search for results and performance in sport can lead to an imbalance in the educational process, bringing to light the importance of values that respect diversity and collective well-being.

Thus, when considering the contributions of Binder (2020) and Krenak (2019), it is possible to observe a theoretical convergence that highlights the importance of integrating the concept of excellence into education in a broad way, promoting not only individual overcoming, but also social responsibility and respect for human limitations.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The values promoted by Olympism, especially the pursuit of excellence, are widely recognized for their educational potential. However, when critically analyzing these values in the educational context, questions arise about how such principles are applied in practice and what are their real implications for the integral development of individuals.

As highlighted by Binder (2020), the search for excellence in Olympism transcends simple technical and physical improvement, being intrinsically linked to the development of ethical and social values. However, the increasing commodification of sport and the pressure for results can distort these principles, leading to a reductionist understanding of excellence as a mere synonym for competitive success. This limited view can divert the focus from sports education, placing performance above ethical training, which contradicts Coubertin's original proposal.

In addition, Krenak's (2019) critique of contemporary models of progress and development highlights the importance of rethinking the incessant search for results. His perspective suggests that the search for excellence, if decontextualized from a broader vision of sustainability and collective well-being, can generate imbalances, both in the educational and sports spheres. The pressure to achieve high levels of performance can lead to the marginalization of essential values such as solidarity, respect for differences, and the appreciation of the process, to the detriment of the final result.

By interpreting the results in light of these reflections, it is possible to identify a tension between the pursuit of excellence and the need to maintain a balance between performance and ethics. Although excellence is an essential value in the Olympic context,



its application in the educational environment must be adapted to prevent it from becoming a competitive imperative that compromises the integral education of students. In this sense, the integration of Olympic values into pedagogical practices requires a critical and contextualized approach, which recognizes the limitations and challenges imposed by contemporary reality.

In this context, the implementation of an education that values excellence must necessarily consider cultural differences and the local conditions in which this education occurs. One cannot treat the Olympic values as universal and immutable, without taking into account the particularities of each community and educational context. As Neise Abreu (2009, p. 208) points out, the proposal for a multicultural Olympic education needs to balance the macro and micro spheres, recognizing the coexistence between global values and the cultural adaptations that are necessary:

"[...] In the praxis of any implementation of a multicultural Olympic education proposal, both macro and micro spheres must be considered. Considering the characteristics of the macro concept of a set of values, composed of coding and control, global interconnections and immutable values. These categories are around Olympic universalism. However, the characteristics of the micro concept are composed of particular interpenetrations, plural, conditional and dependent adaptations, cultural differences, composing an Olympic pluralism."

Marta Gomes (2009, p. 173-174), when addressing the need for plural adaptations in Olympic education, suggests a proposal to systematize this theoretical-practical transition, emphasizing that:

"Universal values need to be contextualized in everyday life to be treated and made pedagogically viable; sport should be treated as a sport, a component of the Body Culture of Movement, which has competition as its essential principle and characteristics of conflict generation/aggregation, violence/peace, among other antagonistic emotions that are generated especially in sports situations."

Thus, the values listed as priorities by the Olympic Movement need a pedagogical approach for their adaptation to the various social realities existing in contemporary plural societies. It is necessary to go beyond just proposing the diffusion of values in a single direction, but also to dialogue with these realities about the values that permeate their daily lives. Stigger (2005, p. 73-74) reinforces that:

"[...] Although we must recognize that sport is a cultural phenomenon spread globally in the form of official sports competitions – through which it brings with it meanings hegemonically placed, especially by the mass media – it should also be considered from its particular expressions, when, inserted in different sociocultural contexts, it acquires other meanings."



Although there is no single way of working with Olympic education, there is an effort to create a pedagogy of education in educational themes of Olympism at a global level, by aligning the practices stimulated by the intrinsic perspective of sport with the values that would guide the extrinsic perspective, being improved by the local experiences found.

Deanna Binder, a specialist in curriculum, was guided by the idea that the practical application in Olympic education projects would determine the general understanding of this pedagogical proposal, seeking to explore the dialectics between theory and application in Olympism-oriented projects (Binder, 2012). In each of the projects, specific fields of educational theory were applied, and the insights and findings generated were then applied to the improvement of the following projects, ultimately leading to the development of a "toolkit" for the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Olympic Values Education Program (OVEP). The author suggests that the collective contributions in this developing curriculum have the potential to promote a theoretical foundation for the creation of a pedagogy of education in Olympic values (Binder, 2012).

Several questions were raised during the discussions of the projects, for example: how would children and young people learn positive behaviors and values, and what teaching methodologies would support this learning? Would Olympic values have relevance in cultural contexts different from those of European and American traditions? Are these values universal, as the Olympic Movement professes? Would the methodologies proposed to teach values in European and American contexts be appropriate to be used in other cultural contexts? How could international Olympic education and fair play initiatives represent global cultural perspectives? (Binder, 2012).

Each of the Olympic education projects was developed from the following perspectives: scenario, rationalization, questions, theoretical basis, application, understandings and criticisms. The construction of these projects is treated by the author as an evolution of the "approach to the world of life" proposed by Naul (2008), with these approaches:

The knowledge-oriented approach: seeks to explain the Olympic ideal from its history and educational legacy, being the most widespread in the world and focusing on presenting information about the Ancient, Modern and Contemporary Games, which may include excursions to the historic Olympic sites and emphasizing names, dates and facts;

The experience-oriented approach: seeks to provide experiences of children and young people in festivals and "Olympic" competitions, international cooperation and communication between educational institutions, emphasizing teaching fair play and cultural understanding;



The approach oriented to physical achievements: seeks individual and personal development from physical efforts and competitions with others, promoting systematic physical practices and training, being a platform for the holistic development of mind, body and spirit;

The approach oriented to the "world of life": it seeks to relate sports experiences with the different contexts of life of young people, not only expands the relevance of sport in integral education, but also inserts a reflective dimension in the educational process. In this sense, the concept of understanding, interpretation and reflection, as proposed by Gadamer (1989), becomes essential to understand how individuals attribute meaning to their sports experiences and to the ethical lessons associated with Olympic ideals. These processes of understanding and signification are inseparable from ethical choices and practical actions, since the concrete application of the Olympic values would "co-determine" the understanding that young people have of these ideals.

This choice for the approach oriented to the "world of life" (Naul, 2008) was due to the author's pedagogical perception that she seems to know "what" needs to be taught to students to develop a good character through sports participation, but little about "how" to teach these values (Binder, 2012).

The author admits the various criticisms that the projects suffered during their implementation and that served as inspiration for the improvement of the next ones. One of them would be that the promotion of the Olympic ideal would be an "ideological inscription" (Wamsley; Heine, 1996, p. 88) that would educate citizens for a pre-arranged future for various aspects of Olympic consumption, being a "composition of narratives in an Olympic ethos created and celebrated by its adherents" (DaCosta, 2002, p. 28).

However, facts pointed out as negative could serve as a way to propose improvements, as in the "Fair Play for Children" project, which was inspired by a fact that occurred at the 1988 Olympic Games in South Korea, where Ben Johnson (former Canadian sprinter) tested positive for a performance-enhancing drug, losing his gold medal in the 100-meter dash.

Other reflections were raised when exporting this model of Olympic education to various global realities, such as the representatives of the South African committee, who related the values of Olympism to the concept of "Ubuntu" (respect, understanding, sincerity), and the Chinese Olympic educators, who also related the values of Olympism to a particular concept of 和合 (hé hé, peace, kindness, integration and harmony). In this sense, Binder (2012) provokes us with the question of how to adapt, in a "local" way, values



that initially seemed universal, but that need to undergo local resignifications to be better accepted.

Binder's (2012) proposal for an Olympic education that reconciles the universal and local spheres, respecting cultural specificities and adapting pedagogical practices to the needs of groups, reflects the complexity and challenges of integrating Olympic values in an inclusive and contextualized way. However, this view finds strong opposition in more radicalized criticisms, such as those of Helen Jefferson Lenskyj (2012), who sees Olympism and Olympic education from a more critical and reflective perspective. For Lenskyj, Olympism becomes an instrument for the colonization of children's minds, elevating Coubertin's ideals to an almost religious rhetoric, which calls into question its applicability in a universal and often imposing way.

Lenskyj states that under the guise of moral education or peace education, the development of critical skills ends up being absent due to this dogmatic thinking and simple answers. She recognizes that sports competition is only the tip of the "iceberg" of the Olympic Movement, and sees the word "Movement" as initially positive, as it would denote an intention of continuous change in the curriculum and pedagogy. However, she points to a "tarnished" history of what she considers the "Olympic industry" and argues that relying on Olympic sport and Olympic athletes, without criticizing them, to impart moral and ethical lessons to children and young people is problematic.

Therefore, the criticisms raised by Lenskyj (2012) in relation to the commodification of Olympic educational programs and their relationship with the Olympic industry point to a crucial point: the disconnect between the ideal values of Olympism and its practical application in educational contexts. The author, by classifying the Olympic system as corrupt, emphasizes the incoherence of an education that intends to form critical and engaged individuals in an environment predominantly focused on commercial interests. His recommendation to progressive educators, who seek to challenge this hegemony, highlights the need for a deep reflection on the foundations that sustain Olympic education.

As discussed throughout this study, the results indicate that, for education based on Olympic values to be truly effective, it is essential that it promotes a balance between the search for excellence and the construction of a critical consciousness in individuals. This balance, however, will only be achieved if Olympic education is able to transcend the limits of physical and competitive performance, incorporating ethical reflection, respect for diversity, and commitment to broader social issues, which are fundamental for the formation of responsible and socially engaged citizens.



CONCLUSION

This study sought to investigate the role of Olympic values, focusing on the search for excellence, and its application in educational pedagogical practices. From the analysis of the literature, it was possible to perceive that excellence, traditionally understood as an individual value and focused on performance, needs to be reconfigured to meet the needs of a comprehensive education, which goes beyond personal overcoming and also addresses respect for cultural diversity and social ethics.

The reflection on the concepts proposed by Binder (2020) and Krenak (2019) revealed the tension between the search for excellence in Olympism and the ethical issues that involve the formation of critical citizens engaged with the collective well-being and sustainability of the planet. Binder highlighted the importance of integrating Olympic values into pedagogical practices in a contextualized way, while Krenak provoked a reflection on the limitations of the Western vision of progress and the need to rescue ancestral knowledge, which promotes excellence more aligned with the balance between humanity and the environment.

By integrating these perspectives, we conclude that true arete, excellence today, must be built from a holistic vision that respects cultural diversity and promotes environmental sustainability. The study points to the need to reimagine Olympic education in a critical way, capable of going beyond the mere search for results and aligning with practices that recognize the multiple cultural and ecological realities in which we are inserted.

This move towards a more integrated and critical Olympic education has profound implications for pedagogical practices, challenging educators to consider sport not only as a tool for physical development, but as a means to promote ethical, social and environmental values that are essential for the formation of conscious, critical citizens committed to the future of the planet.



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