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Guiding through the path of sport and Olympic values – it means to prevent excluding youth from educational system

Introduction

Each child has only one childhood. It seems that a cliché has just been put forward. No-one can deny that childhood, as much as other phases of life, happens once only. However, I am far from stating the obvious, on the contrary – I would like to encourage to reflection. Because what does it mean for parents, educators, carers, coaches and multiple other people who carry a child through the paths of their childhood that in this child's life childhood happens once only? It means that nothing should be missed. And so as not to miss "parents – as once said a woman at an alcohol addiction treatment centre for difficult youth – should put a child first."¹ When a child comes along, other things become less important. Not only because caring for this child is so absorbing, but also because this childhood cannot be missed, none of the days can be repeated or revised as a skipped class. Only parents who know what rational love for a child is can put their children first. Such love helps discover the layers of humanity hidden in the child, it inspires instead of limiting, helps to grow up to freedom instead of locking away from it. Janusz Korczak explained where difficult and vicious children come from, he knew it well because he met them all too often every day of his life. This renowned doctor and a defender of dignity of the lowliest ones, said that a child who causes trouble is the one deprived of love. Thus, he claimed that children who cause trouble require patience and understanding from their educator, but the difficult youth need love. Of course, they need wise love, that is such requiring of the educator not just loving a child but also demanding. "Wise love – as emphasised

¹ R. Brett, *Bóg nigdy nie mruga. 50 lekcji na trudniejsze chwile w życiu*, Cracow: Insignis, 2012, p. 221.

by A. Szlązakowa – is the ability to differentiate the subtle border between the real interest of the child and what turns against them, even though it frequently stems from our most noble intentions of a loving heart.”² If we had not “missed”, neglected our obligations to childhood, then perhaps there would not be these difficult children who cause educational problems, perhaps there would not be teenagers lost in the meanders of life? Yet, they are there. And if so, they require help that comes from the sensitive, patient and understanding educators who will help to understand what really matters in life, where and how to find the meaning of life and why it is worth being driven by the values that direct us in our journey through life. A vicious child, as Janusz Korczak calls difficult children, is an ill child, psychologically crippled, neglected because they were deprived of what everyone needs – love.³

Regina Brett, in her book entitles *God never blinks*, which is a compilation of essays concentrated on deliberating about various existential issues, talks about a coach who gave his players a very difficult lesson they are sure to remember for the rest of their life. I would like to quote a lengthy fragment, but I am sure it is worth it. The author brings up a character of one of the trainers known to her, who coach a youth football team. And here is this illuminating story.

Kerry Coombs, a football coach at Colerain High School, Cincinnati, lead his team to thirteen victories in thirteen matches. His boys crushed their previous opponent 49 : 7. The players put their heart and soul into the match and there had only been a few days before the state championships that were like High Schools Super Bowl. Wherever the coach appeared, he was congratulated on his success. Championships was all he thought about throughout the entire weekend.

Everyone was excited about the big Saturday match until one school graduate, while watching sports footage on TV said to his mother:

– Hey! I used to go to eight grade with this guy. I wonder what he’s still doing at high school.

Mother, the high school employee, asked the same question to the school counsellor and it turned out that the player failed the ninth grade, and was at high school five years straight. And that meant he couldn’t be a part of the sport team. He notified the coach, the principal and the curator.

Apart from those four people, no-one knew that the boy couldn’t play. It didn’t matter he’d only been a part of the sports team for two years. Or that he had family problems and was rarely seen at school in the ninth grade. It didn’t matter that his grades were lousy and now he finally was doing better, mad new friends and tried to do something good with his life.

The rules were simple. If the coach reported that violation to the state authorities, his team could not play in the big match.

² A. Szlązakowa, “Korczakowska postawa wobec dziecka”, *Wychowanie Fizyczne i Zdrowotne* 4 (1989), p. 158.

³ Ibidem, p. 159.

- This was not an easy decision - said coach Coombs. - I've got to be honest, there were times when I thought: "But only four people know about it". Eventually, I couldn't live with it. It would be much worse if our students found out that I deliberately did something wrong, that I'd hidden the truth. I couldn't look these kids in the eye.

The school reported the violation of the rules to the authorities. Then the coach called all the players to the hall. All except for one. The other coach took the player in question home to break the sad news to him in private. The team knew that it was serious because coach Coombs asked them to pray. When he told the players what had happened, there were tears in their eyes. Then, the coach took everyone to the pitch to finish off the season. They stood there, in their school uniforms, surrounded by empty stands and threw the ball.

He did what any great coach would have done. He turned this situation into a lesson.

- No-one died or got wounded. Life goes on - he said. - You'll be as upset and disappointed as today many more times. You measure a man by how resilient he is.

These events were widely commented upon by the local community and the name of the disqualified player was frequently repeated in the media. There was even an arrest warrant issued because it appeared he did not pay back for the goods he had stolen once. He did not have the money. The coach took him to the police station so that he could turn himself in. The boy was crushed. So was the coach. It is one thing to end the season before it is due, but to look how a young boy's life goes down the drain is completely another.

- He came such a long way - said the coach. - People forget it's just a kid. Maybe he did turn eighteen, but he's still a kid.

The coaches were so busy giving him a lift to school, helping him do his homework and checking his grades weekly - building up his confidence, by and large - that no-one even thought whether he could belong to the team.

What happened next? Food, faxes and flowers came from all over the state. Even the authorities of other high schools offered support. People sent money so that the disqualified student could cover his debts.

Coach Coombs did not agree to it. He asked something else instead, as a good coach should:

- You'd better give him a job.

He turned it into a winning season for his team, which the players remembered long after they'd finished school. He knew that in five years, when they are at university, the lost football season that could have been the victorious one for the state, would not seem so catastrophic after all. It would prove a lesson of honesty and sincerity that will be more profitable later on in life than any other winning ever would.⁴

Such decisions, choices, and undertakings prove the educator's - coach's in this case - great responsibility for his wards. They make him look further than today, considering what is more important for the young people, what will give them strength to be brave enough to do good things. And such an educator can be seen as an authority. And it is such educators who know what it takes to love youth and children, what it means to be a guide for them in the word that requires making decisions and choices daily. When can they be right and good? Only

⁴ R. Brett, *Bóg nigdy nie mruga...*, pp. 160-163.

when a young person has been introduced to valuable life by their educator.

It is true that today's sport is a complex phenomenon and an indispensable element of contemporary culture. A. Rejzner is of the opinion that

It can be seen in the aspect of mass culture as a spot event, but also deeper values, helpful in rehabilitating youth may be seen there. Much has been written about the educational role of sport and its preventive and rehabilitating values. It has been proven that sport and success one may achieve there, shape the attitude of young people, which is later transferred onto such fields of life as learning and work.⁵

The description of the above event may serve many purposes. For some, it may become a tip on how to approach youth, how to lay a good foundation of education. For others, it may serve as an event worth talking about with youth so as to analyse decisions and choices they are obliged to. It is a case study that may help young people understand why honesty, responsibility, truthfulness in life are worth following – as well as playing fair.

Guiding through the path of values – an original project of classes for teenagers

At the university where I work we prepare students – future PE teachers to be able to apply universal values of sport and the Olympic idea in their work with children and teenagers. During seminars I show students how to engage children in a discussion about sport and Olympism, encourage them to search, assess and value content, make them co-operate during classes that they themselves create because they feel “hosts” of such a meeting while being “with others” and not just “next to them”.

To do so, I elaborated a class scenario that – in my opinion – may be used while working with young people of different environments or institutions. Even if the content is not fully used as suggested, it is possible, after certain modifications and adaptations, to create similar classes both at school and other educational-rehabilitation facility, or at a youth centre. The suggestion below should be treated rather as an inspiration than an obligation.

⁵ A. Rejzner, *Agresja w sporcie jako przejaw zaburzonej socjalizacji*, in: Z. Dziubiński (ed.), *Sport a agresja*, Academy of Physical Education, Warsaw: Salezjańska Organizacja Sportowa RP, 2007, p. 219.

CLASS SCENARIO

Topic: **The Olympic knowledge quiz**

Participants: junior high school youth (age 14–16)

Time: 3 × 45 minutes

Aims:

- 1) to transfer and order participants' knowledge about sport and the Olympics;
- 2) to expose the timeless and transnational values about sport and the Olympics;
- 3) to encourage team work before classes (so as to be prepared for them);
- 4) to support team work during classes;
- 5) to build up the atmosphere of fair competition;
- 6) to develop the sense of belonging to a group and to identify with it;
- 7) to provoke to reflection over morality and to encourage to express moral evaluation.

Methods of work: brain storming, discussion, case study, problem solving, working with text, staging.

Forms of learning and teaching organisation: individual, team, group, lesson, out of school.

Materials and tools: posters (illustrating the modern Olympics that participants would prepare beforehand), political map of the world, sticky notes, sheets of paper, felt-tip pens, a flipchart, magnets, a board, chalk.

PART I: Introduction to the class

Participants are informed about the aim of the class. They are also motivated to be active during classes.

PART II: Content and organisation of classes

1. Olympic Games are... (finish the sentence).

The teacher asks individual participants to complete the above sentence to the best of their knowledge about Olympic Games. The answers are written on the board or a sheet of paper. When all answers are put down, participants discuss as a class in order to work out the definition of the term. They need to be reminded about the differences between Olympic Games and the Olympics. The discussion may be developed by asking questions – problems: Why are the Olympic Games so special? Why participating in them is ennobling for a sports-person?

2. Plebiscite for a slogan promoting fair play

Participants of the classes suggest their original slogans that promote fair play (e.g. "Fair play is my shield against mediocrity"). Suggestions are written on paper sheets. Then, everyone reads their slogan aloud. The teacher organises a plebiscite for the most interesting slogan by asking each participant to vote for three, most interesting ones; participants give a "gold medal" (3 points), "silver medal" (2 points) and a "bronze medal" (1 point). The winner is a person whose slogan received the highest score; the gold medal and the title of the competition laureate go to this person. The other two authors of slogans receive a silver and bronze medals, respectively.

3. Remembering the summer and winter Olympic Games

Earlier, i.e. a few days prior to the scheduled class, participants are divided into two groups and receive a task to prepare posters where they write down summer Olympic Games from 1896 and winter Olympic Games from 1924, pointing to the year, city and country of the organiser (one group prepares the summer, the other winter Olympic Games).

During class, we create a map of Olympic Games. On this map each group sticks sticky notes with the names of cities and countries that hosted the Games, together with the year they took place. Thus, a map of summer and winter Olympic Games is created. We observe it and discuss which continents were the hosts and how frequently. Is there a continent that has never hosted Olympic Games? Which European countries have never hosted Olympic Games? (who decides about it, etc.). Posters prepared earlier help to create a map and after the class they may be placed on display in a common room or in the hall.

A variation of this task:

Plebiscite on OG knowledge: groups test each other on how much they know about Olympic Games. The group that prepared the calendar of summer Olympic Games gives the other group the place of OG, then they respond with the year they took place. Thus, both groups can check each other. There is one point for every correct answer. The team with most points wins.

A ball can also be introduced into the game; participants will pass it to each other, thus suggesting the next person to respond (and the "prompter" who, using the poster, will help their team discover the correct answer within the space of 5 seconds).

4. A mini lecture on International Olympic Committee (IOC), Polish Olympic Committee (POC), Polish Olympic Academy (POA)

Prior to that, during the preparations to classes, the teacher appoints three people who are to prepare a mini lecture on IOC, POC and POA (there may be a draw to establish who does what). The manner of presentation is chosen by the author. During the presentation participants present their findings. In a secret ballot the other participants vote for the most interesting lecture (they consider the content as well as the form of presentation).

5. Olympism quiz

The teacher prepares questions before the class, which concern Olympism and the Olympic movement. During the class, participants are divided into four groups (4-5 people). The groups draw the number of a question they wish to answer. For every good answer, the group receives a point. The groups that has most points wins. Winners may be rewarded (e.g. by giving them a grade in the subject, a diploma, a material prize, etc). The manner of rewarding is determined by the teacher, depending on what kind of a group they are working with.

Modification of the contest (in case of a small number of contestants). A board game may be prepared, where marked areas are those with questions. The person who finishes first and with the highest score wins.

Example of questions: Olympism quiz (note: the teacher should adjust the level of difficulty to the level of knowledge of the participants).

1. Which year was IOC established in?
2. Which year was POC established in?
3. Who is currently the chairman of POC?
4. Jan Parandowski was awarded a distinction in the competition on Olympic art: TRUE or FALSE?
5. Who gives the Olympic nomination to the Polish athletes?
6. Is taekwondo an Olympic discipline?
7. Which year was the first name of ancient Olympic winners noted?
8. What is "God's peace"?
9. How long exactly is the marathon distance?
10. What are the Olympic Games?
11. List the main ideas behind the Olympic movement.
12. How did the ancient winners use to be rewarded?
13. Has right-handed and left-handed discus throw ever been an Olympic discipline?
14. Where were the last winter Olympics held?
15. Was Janusz Kusociński an Olympian?
16. Which year and where did Janusz Kusociński receive an Olympic medal?

17. Janusz Kusociński was a silver medallist in the Olympic Games: TRUE or FALSE?
18. Which discipline did Janusz Kusociński receive his first gold Olympic medal?
19. List three Polish athletes who were the OG medallists.
20. Explain the symbolism behind the Olympic flag.
21. Which continent is symbolised by the yellow circle on the Olympic flag?
22. Which continent is symbolised by the red circle on the Olympic flag?
23. Which continent is symbolised by the green circle on the Olympic flag??
24. What colour is the circle that symbolises Europe on the Olympic flag?
25. What colour is the circle that symbolises Africa on the Olympic flag?
26. How many circles are there on the Olympic flag?
27. Who designed the Olympic flag?
28. Explain who are the Paralympics organised for.
29. Explain who are special Olympic Games organised for.
30. List the Olympic symbols.
31. Adam Małysz is a silver Olympic medalist: TRUE or FALSE?
32. Did Mateusz Kusznierewicz receive a gold medal in the OG in Atlanta?
33. What discipline does Renata Mauer represent?
34. Which of these athletes is not connected with judo: Paweł Nastula, Andrzej Wroński, Waldemar Legień?
35. Which discipline does Rafał Szukała represent?
36. Where will the coming winter OG be held?
37. Which year and where will the coming summer OG be held?
38. Which year and where did the USA representation boycott the OG?
39. Which discipline does Robert Korzeniowski represent?
40. Until which year were the summer and winter OG organised in the same year?
41. Has the Olympic torch ever been extinguished during the OG?
42. Is baseball an Olympic discipline?
43. How many Olympic disciplines were included into the winter OG in 2010: 5, 6, 7?

6. Interview with an athlete, coach or a PE teacher

Prior to the class, the teacher chooses a person whose job is to find someone connected with sport, whom they will interview (the teacher may help in preparing questions for the interview). The interview should concern the issue of doing sport, sport values as seen by this person, benefits from doing sport, the course of this person's career, personality features, etc. The results will be presented during a class.

After hearing the interview, a discussion may be started concerning the fact whether such a person can become a role model for young people and why.

A variation of this task:

Interview is carried out during the class. A person who actually does some sport is selected from among the students and others may ask, e.g. 10 questions concerning values and benefits from doing that sport.

7. Getting to know the winners of the fair play reward

The teacher prepares a presentation of a person who was last year awarded by the Fair Play Committee for special achievements or fair play attitude (it could be a sportsperson, an activist, a journalist, coach or an educator, etc.).

E.g. distinctions for promoting fair play values for the year 2011 went to Ireneusz Śmigielski, initially an educator at the Detention Centre in Inowrocław. Since 2008 he has been working at the youth educational centre (MOW) for girls with a mental handicap in Kruszwica. He works with difficult and pathological youth – bringing closer to them fair play values, organising meetings with the Olympians, teaching how to see life from a better perspective.⁶

Following the presentation of the laureate, the host initiates a discussion on: is it worth playing fair in life and if so – why? Is it only to be rewarded? Is it only for sportspeople? Have you ever played fair? When was it? Describe the situation. How did you feel then?

8. Projection

The art of behaving in the football pitch in a described, very specific situation. The host prepares a description of 2–3 situations that may happen during a sports competition, which concern not playing fair (these could also be short films). After the presentation he initiates a discussion with participants which would aim at evaluating these situations. The discussion should be conducted in such a way so as to pay attention to its course, atmosphere (friendly and kind), way of expressing oneself but allowing independent argumentation and remembering not to be judgemental but rather ask questions that should provoke the participants to a deeper moral analysis and assessment.

A variation of this task:

Participants may present a staging of a situation in which they will show the content of situations prepared by the host.

PART III: Class evaluation. Extending thanks to the participants.

The host asks each participant to finish off a sentence that would present their personal reflections:

In today's class I learn that...

Thanks to this meeting I understood that...

⁶ <http://www.olimpijski.pl/pl/326,laureaci-konkursow-fair-play-w-polsce-1963-2011.html> [accessed: 2.06.2014].

As of today I intend to...

During the classes I particularly liked...

I did not like... (etc.)

The host may also prepare an evaluation sheet that he will distribute among the participants at the end of the class, asking them to fill it in. Collecting evaluation from the participants helps to modify the classes, improve their quality and adjust the needs of different groups.

Final reflections

Contemporary upbringing very easily determines its aims and tasks. Educators do not have much of a problem with describing what they want to accomplish with their wards, assuming of course that he actively participates in this process. It is much more difficult for them, however, to find answers to other questions: how to make my wards do what I want them to do? How to convince them to choose good over bad? How to encourage them to follow moral values? These are questions concerning methods of upbringing and answers are not so conclusive.

There are no ready-made recipes for success in educating and upbringing. It is a process of becoming oneself both for the ward and educator. In this unique meeting, both sides are learning. The educator is learning how to recognise the needs, possibilities and predispositions of the ward and only once he has recognised them, can he search for the ways of reaching the ward, i.e. efficient methods and forms of education. And thus, the educator must constantly ask himself a question: how to do that? Because the answer once given does not have to be the same under different circumstances. Neither education as a process nor the ward as a person who is developing stop, they evolve, always expecting something new. The educator ought to look for inspiration and use the other people's experiences, discuss and question, but he should not treat this process as a phenomenon that is always based on the same scenario. That is why, in every meeting with a child, it is the educator who is the script writer, the director, the actor and the reviewer. By drawing from others, he is learning how to play his own role but differently every time, so as to – as Janusz Korczak said – a child in the process of upbringing could “become what he can be” and not what his educator sees him as.

As a teacher and educator, I also look for ways in which I could encourage my students to various activities that are not directly

connected with their curriculum. I have my own field here and it is the Students' Scientific Association. For many years I have been its supervisor. I like working with students who want to do something for themselves and for others, too. Their presence and belonging to our Association is something very inspiring for me. My wards undertake many initiatives as part of their work in the Association. One of such undertakings was accepting an invitation to a "Fair Play Day", entitled *Fair Play – my vision of happy life*, organised in 2012 at the School No 10 in Warsaw. My students prepared workshops for the students of Economic High School, where aims were determined as follows:

- 1) increasing students' awareness concerning their own life needs and possibilities as well as others;
- 2) developing students' awareness concerning exchange of ideas;
- 3) making students aware of the requirements defined by fair play;
- 4) familiarizing participants with the selected documents promoting ethical values in sport and Olympism;
- 5) inducing reflection among students over their own behaviour in sport and life, and motivating them to fair play;
- 6) broadening knowledge concerning Olympism and the Olympic idea.

I was present during classes and I observed youth who presented quite a big interest in the topic and participated rather actively. Below, there are the conclusions of my observations after the meeting.

Youth presented interest in the problem, they were willing to join the discussion with the host and shared their own reflections and experiences from everyday life they has observed behaviour which was or was not fair play. A group poster that was the result of the workshop activities showed that the participants understood that the decisions and choices is their own in certain circumstances, and that everyday life can easily be filled with good deeds, which in turn may bring much satisfaction.

On the other hand, teachers working with this class, in their report prepared after the meeting, summarised is as follows:

On June 5, 2012 there was a Fair Play workshops entitled "School violence-free" at our school. Children from first class had a chance to meet the members of a Students' Scientific Association "Pedagogical Circle" from the Academy of Physical Education in Warsaw. There was a discussion about the core of the fair play idea and about its meaning not only in sport but also in everyday life. Children had a chance to watch films presenting fair and foul play behaviour. Participants of the workshops also discovered their own differences and the need to respect each other regardless of the differences. Finally, the class Fair Play Code was created.

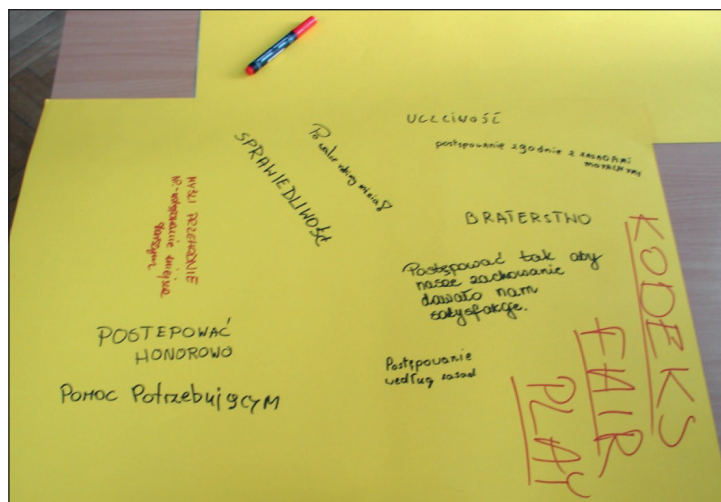


Photo 1. In the process of creating a class Fair Play Code (photo from Jolanta Derbich's own collection)

Interesting projects, educational programmes, workshops where universal values of sport and Olympism may be used, can not only help understand the rules of peaceful and co-operative existence of youth in their natural environment, but they also may support them in the process of entering society, both primary when it comes to acquiring social competences and secondary when it is necessary to concentrate on searching for the right methods and form of rehabilitation. What is needed, is wise educators, sensitive to youth and understanding their needs. Educators who care to undertake the challenge. I am certain that there are many such people and youth that comes across their way is as happy as it is lucky.

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