AND...AND...AND: A Stammering Argument for Olympism Education in Postparadigmatic Times

Introduction

As a teacher of Olympism (as it is part of the PETE and coach education programmes at UC, and is also part of many PE programmes in schools), I wanted to critique what it is that I (and others) are teaching and why, given this current post-paradigmatic context in which we find ourselves. And so I have, perhaps foolishly, delved into the murky philosophical and theoretical waters to try and make sense of the idea of Olympism Education.

Today I am going to ask two questions: Firstly, does Olympism education based on Olympism as a modernist construct have currency within post-paradigmatic times? And, secondly, if so, in what ways can Olympism education be conceptualised that are responsive to this shifting in which we find ourselves?

But first, a couple of notes on the title of this presentation:

Some of you may recognise the reference to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1998) rhizome metaphor, the “AND...AND...AND: A stammering...” I’m going to draw upon their use of this as a cultural metaphor to consider how Olympism education possibilities may be responsive to post-paradigmatic times.

Some of you may also recognise in the title of this presentation, the irregular use of the term Olympism education, rather than Olympic education. In agreement here with Culpan and Wigmore (2010) I’m aiming to highlight the idea of education programmes that place Olympism at the centre, rather than Olympic education programmes which tend to focus on the Olympic Games with Olympism at the periphery.

But first, let’s pause momentarily to (re)consider what is meant by the term Olympism. While the term is healthily debated and at times contested, the official IOC definition is as follows:

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.

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.
McNamee (2006) through an analysis of Olympism, suggests that there are 5 “persistent” features of the concept of Olympism, namely:

- Sportsmanship/fairplay
- Sport for all/mass participation
- Sport as education
- Cultural exchange
- International understanding

Any pedagogical project, therefore, will explore the ways in which this definition, goal and these features may be taught and learned. A philosophical interrogation into any one of these concepts will show just how complex such a task can be. Prior to exploring Olympism education possibilities, we first need to give thought to the post-paradigmatic context in which we are currently situated.

**Post-paradigmatic Times**

We are all now familiar with the plethora of post-terms: postmodernity, postcapitalism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and so on. Prasad (2005) describes these terms as referring to either “a) a set of socioeconomic and cultural conditions that followed in the wake of late capitalism, or b) intellectual positions intended to offer a radical critique of the entire fabric of modern Western thinking” (p. 211). In his text, *Crafting Qualitative Research: Working in Postpositivist Traditions*, he explores the latter meaning. And he focuses in particular, on postmodernity, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism. This distinction (that is between a) and b)), is also made by Andreotti (2010). She considers the implications of postparadigmatic thought being conceptualised as either a) post as after modernity, namely ‘cognitive adaptation’, or b) post as interrogation of, or questioning of modernity; namely ‘epistemological pluralism’.

Andreotti explains that cognitive adaptation essentially requires citizens to be prepared for knowledge societies as an extension of modern capitalist systems. There is a belief in the teleological idea of progress. That is, that we are in the minority world are continuing to advance, develop and progress. Therefore, there is an acceptance of neoliberal, late capitalist practices and an understanding of the need to create within education systems, students who are producers, creators and innovators; and who are able to compete within an increasingly global, competitive world polity.

Epistemological pluralism conversely, “frames the need for the pluralisation of knowledge [through a belief that] the current system is inherently violent in its (mono)epistemic practices and unsustainable both in terms of exploitation of natural resources and human labour and in terms of how relationships are constructed” (Andreotti, 2010, p.8).

So where Andreotti writes of cognitive adaptation, we could say this meaning is reflected in Prasad’s ideas of socioeconomic and cultural conditions following late capitalism. And where Andreotti writes of epistemological pluralism, likewise this
meaning is reflected by Prasad’s observation that the entire fabric of modern Western thinking is being radically changed.

Let’s consider for a moment how Olympism education could be conceptualised within these two contrasting perspectives. Olympism education framed within a cognitive adaptive perspective could be considered instrumental in preparing students as productive citizens of a knowledge society. Students could through the practice of sport learn the values necessary for useful contribution in neoliberal contexts. Additionally, as global migrant flow increases, Olympism education could provide an ideal context for multicultural engagement.

Conversely, Olympism education framed within an epistemological pluralist perspective could privilege the minority voice through mapping the meaning and practice of sport within a specific, diverse context as a starting point with Olympism then plugged as a tracing into the map (Deleuze & Guattari, 1998, p.14). I’ll return to this as a possibility later in this presentation.

Whether you prefer to utilise the idea of ‘cognitive adaptation’ or ‘epistemological pluralism’ in your teaching, the fundamental shifts in conceptualisations of knowledge and learning apply across both these contexts. In Catching the Knowledge Wave, Gilbert, drawing upon the work of Lyotard (1994) and Castells (2000), describe how postindustrial (or knowledge) societies have changed the meaning of knowledge. Lyotard predicted that this shift would occur, saying that knowledge would be valued for its performativity – its ability to do things. Additionally, Lyotard predicted that knowledge would become commodified. In postindustrial knowledge societies, this is the ultimate value, role and function of knowledge: that it can be bought and sold in the market place.

Furthermore, within a postindustrial, technological society, we now see knowledge as partial and contextual; that it is no longer fixed. This understanding of knowledge is valued by those subscribing to a cognitive adaptation view, and also those operating from the epistemological pluralism viewpoint, and in particular, postcolonial perspectives.

The following table provides a simple overview of modernist and postmodernist constructions of knowledge and learning. While in actual practice, the distinctions may be more nuanced, for the purpose of this presentation I want to draw an intentionally simplistic and dualistic picture.

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If we consider some of the modernist constructs above we see how Olympism does fit well here. It has been celebrated for its' universality. There are set ideas about what is valued, what the ideals are, and what is considered moral and right with regards to the practice of sport. Where diversity is encouraged and celebrated, it could be argued that it is essentially more of the same; what Deleuze & Guatarri (1988) would call a *tracing* which contrasts with their idea of *mapping*. I'll return to this distinction later in the presentation.

Young people in the minority world now live (mostly) within postparadigmatic societies. So for many young people their epistemology (what they know) and ontology (who they are) are framed from within these postperspectives. Constant, rapid change; complexity; increasing diversity; challenges to fixed understandings of truth; an acceptance of multiplicity of realities; viewing knowledge as performative and commodified; and discursive understandings of authority and power are all post-constructs. Prasad (2005) writes that postmodernity rejects modern assumptions of social coherence and linear causality in favour of multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation and indeterminacy (Best & Kellner, 1991). He further notes that these are all radical concepts, displacing “the entire fabric of Western thinking” (p.211).

The concepts of multiplicity, plurality, fragmentation and indeterminacy in a way represent a type of *wandering*. Like the slinky, postmodernity is representative of illusive, shifting, changing possibilities. Interestingly, there is freedom in this type of place; the freedom to explore, to create, to construct, and to consider in ethical ways of responsibility - without judgement. A certain kind of wandering may evoke new possibilities and conceptualisations.

**Rhizome as cultural metaphor**

This *wandering* is in part what Deleuze and Guatarri (1988) suggest in their use of the rhizome as poststructural metaphor. So, what is a rhizome you may ask? Perhaps we can best understand this by considering what it is not. Consider here an image of an arboreal tree. What are the adjectives that come to mind when you see this image? (Perhaps strong, established, predictable, certain, fixed, hierarchical) And consider here, a rhizome. What words would you use to describe this? (Possibly complex, unpredictable, underwhelming, non-hierarchical, wandering).

I’m going to draw on the work of Edwards in the text *Complexity Theory and Politics of Education* (2010) in order to explore Deleuze and Guatarri’s (1988) representation of the rhizome. He writes that central to their work is an effort to undermine foundational and fixed views of language and meaning associated with such pervasive arboreal metaphors such as the “tree of knowledge”. The world can be represented, named, and identified. All is ordered, hierarchical, and predictable. The rhizome (*rhi·zome/r̩zœm/Noun: A continuously growing horizontal underground stem that puts out lateral shoots and adventitious ¹ roots at intervals*) is multidirectional, entangled, unpredictable, and non-hierarchical; the rhizome wanders.

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¹ Adventitious – meaning unpredictable, unexpected, unusual.
One could argue that Olympism as a modernist construct is tree-like. It has been throughout the 20th century considered a strong and stable movement. It has been (perceived at least at a surface level) as certain, fixed and predictable. Parry (2006) writes that “the Olympic movement has worked for a coherent universal representation of itself” (p.190). I’d like to ponder in this presentation what Olympism could be if it were rhizomatic? Unpredictable, wandering, adventitious, seemingly messy in its multiplicity?

Deleuze & Guatarri, (1988) write that “The tree imposes the verb ‘to be’, [or we could say ‘I am’] but the fabric of the rhizome is in the conjunction, ‘and…and…and.’ [That is, ‘to become this…and this…and this…;’ or ‘I am becoming this…and this…and this’]. This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb ‘to be’ (p.25).

Edwards (2010) goes on to explain that where the tree – or modernist understandings – “is simply being able to say what is the case, the assertion of an authoritative stance on the nature of the world and the meaning of things and what should be the case…the ‘and…and…and’ of the rhizome [or postperspectives] results in a certain tentativeness, a stammering…”

“…While some may want to root, reduce and purify the meaning of [say for example Olympism], on this understanding of the ‘and’, it is ceaselessly shaken, as there are always rhizomatic possibilities in play of what could be” (p.74). Uncertainty, contradictions, complexities, wanderings – all give rise to other possibilities.

A central question in this presentation is: Does Olympism (education) need a shaking? Is there scope, and the possibility for Olympism (education) to move beyond a ‘to be’, to an ‘and…and…and’? And if this were deemed desirable, or even necessary, what could the possibilities be? What of the essence of Olympism is critical; what could be lost and replaced while still being named Olympism (Parry 2006)?

Perhaps Da Costa’s (1998; 2006) suggestion that Olympism is better defined as a process philosophy may have currency here. He draws upon Hegalian ideas to explain process philosophy as “a speculative construction of philosophical positions or directions with internal coherence that asserts reality is constantly in a stage of change” (p. 157). In a review of Olympism literature, Da Costa (2006) concludes that there has never been a fixed philosophy of Olympism. Acknowledging fluidity and constant change, this idea of process philosophy, Da Costa (1998) suggests, enables a pluralistic version of Olympism to develop. The rhizome metaphor provides, I think, a useful framework for exploring such pluralistic possibilities further.

**Sport as ethical practice or sport as aestheticism**

I would like to return momentarily to the distinction suggested in the table above between a modernist construct of fixed morals and a postparadigmatic perspective of contextual ethics. This distinction has particular relevance to the way that Olympism and corresponding education projects are conceptualised. I’ll premise this section by
borrowing the definition of ethics suggested by Andreotti & Dowling (2004). They provide the following as a useful distinction:

Ethics is commonly defined as “a system of accepted beliefs which control behaviour, especially such a system based on morals” (Cambridge dictionary)…we intend to reclaim this term and redeploy it in the arena of identities and interactions to convey ethics as an ideal of relationship – a way of defining ourselves in relation to others. In this conceptualisation, we also acknowledge that ethics cannot be considered in isolation from the study of knowledge and power and that it relates directly to our understandings of the broader conditions within which human life is situated (Sedgwick 2001). Ethics, then, deals with what type of human relations we envisage as desirable or possible. From this perspective, it is not the same as morality, which describes universalisable principles of normative behaviour (p.606).

Olympism has been both celebrated and criticised for universalising and normalising moral behaviours (McNamee, 2006). The emphasis in predetermining which ideals and morals ought to be practiced, encouraged and esteemed, within Olympism education precludes other possibilities. When we understand ethics as partial and contextual, we are able to be open to constructing Olympism education projects that are responsive to a particular context. I’ll explore this further later in the presentation.

Regarding the centrality or even the omission of ethics from sport and from the Olympic movement, Damkjaer (2004) and Moller (2004) provide a thought provoking exploration of the idea of sport as aesthetics, and not sport as ethics. In Post-Olympism: Questioning Sport in the Twenty-first Century, Damkjaer (2004) explores postmodern possibilities. He firstly suggests that modernist critiques of Olympism are typical of the postmodern era. They are an interrogation of the modern…a critique following the modern. Mostly a partial critique is used; this is where problematics and dilemmas present in the Olympic movement are analysed and alternative possibilities explored. This could be seen as a form of cognitive adaptation (Andreotti, 2010).

Deconstruction on the other hand is a postmodern analytical approach and Damkjaer writes that he is only aware of one such deconstructivist approach of sport; that is the thesis proposed by Verner Moller (2004). Moller puts forward the notion that the value of sport lies in aestheticism, not in morality as modernists would argue. He uses examples of elite sport performance to suggest that what is valued in any elite sport performance is the aesthetic achievement, and that in order to reach a desirable level of aestheticism, transgressions are necessary; as is a rejection of sport with moral foundation. This is a radical perspective and an ultimate postmodern view of sport.

Personally, I struggle with this postmodern conception and deconstructive possibility. Aestheticism with ethical foundation would be contrary to any social context where ethics are present, critical, and foundational. As Damkjaer (2004) writes “The meaning in sport arises in the correspondence between the cultural significance, the
institutional arrangements, the codes and rules of the sports events and the individual sportsperson’s construction of meaning” (p.229).

What I would suggest however, is that the normative and universal morality of Olympism is not relevant across a range of cultural contexts. As a concept of Olympism I think this notion of ethics is critical. Regarding conception, multiplicity of expression relevant to shifting contexts is desirable. Damkjaer (2004) concludes similarly noting that “the real problem of Olympism today is that it is in danger of becoming meaningless if it loses in foundationalist ethics. An aestheticization will not save Olympism because the aesthetics can never be higher than the ethics” (p.229).

Damkjaer (2004) goes on to conclude that sport cannot become postmodern. As a modern construct requiring as Arnold points out an ethical foundation, sport cannot sustainably transgress its essence. However, as McNamee (2006) concluded after critiquing Olympism as a philosophical project, “a singular ethics of Olympism is harking back to a bygone era” (p.186). He recognises the need for a diverse range of ethical perspectives.

A map and not a tracing

At this point I would like to return to the rhizome and in particular, Deleuze and Guattari’s (1988) metaphor and use of the map and the tracing. They write that “The rhizome is altogether different, a map and not a tracing. Make a map, not a tracing. The orchid does not reproduce the tracing of a wasp; it forms a map with the wasp, in a rhizome…the map does not reproduce…it constructs” (p. 14).

The map like a rhizome enables a creating. The tracing, like the tree privileges a reproduction; that is, more of the same.

Remember the cognitive adaptation and epistemological perspectives? I’d like to suggest that disrupting the fixed idea of Olympism, may contribute to a disrupting, that is otherwise at risk of continuing to reproduce itself within a cognitive adaptation perspective. Could Olympism be expressed within an epistemological pluralistic perspective? I propose that we consider this as a methodological approach here, by using the map and a not tracing.

Let me explain myself further. The map could be used as the starting point for considering the meaning of sport within any given context; but particularly in contexts where minority voices have been silenced. For example, in te ao Maori, in other indigenous cultures, with marginalised young people of Christchurch, with mainstream young people in Christchurch, in inner city metropolis. This mapping enables new possibilities, and diverse knowledges to emerge and to be legitimated.

Deleuze and Guattari (1988) take this idea further. After a mapping they write, “the tracing should always be put back on the map” (p.15). In this context the tracing is the tree of Olympism. We can trace the official IOC understanding of Olympism on to the map(rhizome) that has been constructed from a given context, and ask questions: What has emerged that is different? What is similar? What can we learn
from the contradictions and the similarities; What can we learn from this new construct?

If we were to start with Olympism, we are more likely I think to want to trace Olympism onto the context that we are exploring, or enacting. We essentially have a fixed lens through which we gaze in seeking interpretation; thus risking a tracing.

I can give a first hand account of this by relating the methodology for considering a bicultural view of Olympism. I, along with a small team of researchers, were seeking to understand how Olympism is contextualised within a Maori world view (Culpan, Bruce & Galvan, 2008). But our approach was by using Olympism as the starting point, in which we sort to trace a cultural Maori version of Olympism on to the tree, so to speak. While different conceptualisations did emerge, I wonder if a mapping could have enabled more diversity of perspective. For example, one could construct a map by asking what is the practice and meaning of te ao kori (Maori sport)? After which one could place the tracing (of Olympism) back on to the map (Deleuze & Guatarri, 1988).

This same methodological approach could be used in a range of contexts as mentioned earlier. For example, one could ask this question: What is the meaning of the practice of sport among young people within Christchurch? A map is resultant. Then one could trace Olympism on to this map, to allow for diversity of perspective, a fluidity of knowledge construction, and the emergence of adventitious (or unexpected) possibilities.

Could this be Olympism on the move? A wandering enabled through rhizome and resistance to the tree. Perhaps Deleuze and Guatarri (1988) may have thought so. “We’re tired of trees”, they write. “We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They’ve made us suffer too much. All of the arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics. Nothing is beautiful, or loving or political aside from underground stems and aerial roots, adventitious growths and rhizomes” (p.15).

Olympism education wandering

Are the waters any less murky? Or perhaps for you more so? Let me conclude by summarising the key points made in this presentation. Firstly, within postparadigmatic contexts the idea of universal fundamental ethics is contested. There is a resistance to a settling, and a preference toward fluidity, changeability, and partiality.

Secondly, I have not suggested here that ethics are irrelevant in a postparadigmatic era, and that absolute relativism (for example, sport as aesthetics) replace sport as ethical practice. Rather there can be a consideration to shifting and contextual ethical practice, beyond fixed morals and prescribed, “universal” principles.

I have used the metaphor of the rhizome to suggest that variable, unpredictable possibilities that could arise particularly through epistemological pluralistic frameworks that privilege minority voices.
For Olympism education projects, what this means is that there is scope to become more responsive to any given context. I have suggested here that one way we might go about this is through the use of mapping and not a tracing (Deleuze & Guattari, 1998). For pedagogues and researchers, I have made the suggestion that the starting point in constructing an Olympism education programme is to construct a map of the meaning of sport in a given context; secondly, to trace Olympism onto this map, in order to sketch out the similarities and differences; and finally to construct a local relevancy. This process could create a stammering – the “and…and…and” of multiplicity of perspectives.

References


