

EDUCATING THE YOUTH ON SOCIAL COHESION THROUGH PHYSICAL EDUCATION

S.V. Nanayakkara, S.K. Embekke

*Department of Education, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
samimm2@gmail.com*

Education can be a catalyst of the recovery process for children who lived through armed conflicts. Thus, education can protect children in conflict affected situations and contributes to more stable post conflict situations. In order to reconstruct the social and civic integration in post conflict societies, the concept of social cohesion performs an important role. Therefore, carefully planned educational programs can help enhance students' humanistic thinking about social cohesion. Such educational programs need to explore how learners can be challenged to develop a strong sense of social responsibility, humanity and social justice based on social cohesion. In order to develop a strong social responsibility and social justice both within and beyond the classroom, educators can create new strategies to teach social cohesion within different subjects at the beginning of the primary school level. Physical education may be a curriculum area that presents many opportunities to overcome ethnic hatred and could contribute to building harmonious relationships between different people in the community. Therefore, it is required to investigate whether the learning and practical applications of physical education and school sports can contribute in promoting social cohesion in the post conflict societies in Sri Lanka. This study investigated the ways in which Olympism values could strengthen secondary students' social cohesion competencies through learning and practicing physical education. A qualitative research method was used and data was collected by using semi-structured interviews. The research sample consisted (n=41) predominantly of 21 Sinhalese (10 girls and 11 boys) and 20 Tamil (10 girls and 10 boys) year seven students from two randomly selected state secondary schools in the Kandy district, Central Province, Sri Lanka. The study has developed an integrated Olympism education and social cohesion curriculum model which were subsequently taught in above mentioned selected two state secondary schools in a six month intervention program. Data obtained from this study was analysed according to thematic analysis. Results of the study indicate that the integrated Olympism education and social cohesion curriculum intervention model improved students' social cohesion skills regardless of their gender and ethnicity. Results also indicate that the practical strategies of the intervention model improved students' and people's knowledge and social reasoning ability. The outcome of this study strengthened not only the students' learning of social cohesion in a post conflict community setting, but also their social living competencies to be valuable future citizens.

Keywords: Ethnic animosity, Olympism, Peace, Physical education, Secondary students, Social cohesion