



## Food for thought

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There are numerous research projects that have explored the link between eating well and academic performance (e.g. Johal & Singh, 2022; Prangthip, Soe & Signar, 2021). Since the 'Jamie Oliver effect' in the early 2000's we have been increasingly aware that highly processed foods and poor nutrition is detrimental to the level of focus and productivity in the classroom.

We find evidence that educational outcomes did improve significantly in English and Science. We also find that authorised absences – which are most likely linked to illness and health – fell by 14%.

(Belmont & James 2011)

It's not all about the way food is taught to our students though, or how it features in the classroom. A research study in the USA called 'School Food Practices of Prospective Teachers' (Rossiter et al., 2007) explored the way that trainee teachers can influence the culture within the school environment as a direct result of their own habits, nutrition knowledge and positive attitude to food.

Prospective teachers would benefit from policies and programs that support healthy classroom practices and from compulsory nutrition education in the teacher training curriculum.

(Rossiter et al. 2007)

We need to delve deeper and explore how poor nutrition is contributing to a workforce who are already struggling with well-being issues (Mathieson & Hanks, 2021). Perhaps nutrition is an element of teaching and teacher education that we should all consider more closely.

Some suggestions:

- We need to learn from the research and understand the relationship between better nutrition for our teachers and their ability to perform better.
- We need to support the development of a positive food culture in the staff room – make healthier foods more accessible and 'the norm.'
- We need to make positive changes to the way we prepare trainees for teaching and help them to thrive.

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## So why is that odd-looking thing called Wenlock?

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Helen Bushell-Thornalley & Wenlock

As a Senior Lecturer in Teacher Education in Physical Education and School Sport, I am privileged to be able to oversee the often-unchanged current position of PE in our local schools. This overview is made more poignant as I was someone who delighted in the London hosting of the XXX Olympian and believed the rhetoric of the time, that a world class education would be achieved as a legacy of those games, with opportunities created to transform sport in this country (Minster for Olympics, Tessa Jowell, DCMS, 2008; Hunt, HC, vol. 490).

It is disheartening to acknowledge that much of what was promised to UK sport education from hosting the London 2012 Olympic Games did not transpire (Bushell-Thornalley, 2021). For many of us, all that is left from those heady days is a strangely shaped soft toy called Wenlock, left forgotten on a top shelf. Wenlock was the official mascot for the London 2012 Olympic Games, yet ten years on, are we any closer to understanding why that name was chosen? And are we any closer to honouring the promises that were implicit in that naming?

London has a proud Olympic history. The London Olympiads of 1908, 1948, and 2012 are well documented; Great Britain and Northern Ireland (GBR) is noted as the only team never to have missed a Summer Olympic Games and London is the only City to have hosted on three occasions. In addition, 26 of the 28 sports included in the XXX Olympiad originated in England. Conversely, what is not well documented is what happened prior to the inauguration of the Modern Olympic Games in 1896 (Beale, 2012; Cannon, 2012), and it is this that my 2021 doctoral work illuminates.

Back in the mid-19th Century, a local doctor called William Brookes was moved by the 'anxious dull faces and narrow chest, rounded shoulders, and the slouching gate' of the young people he saw around him (Eddowes's Shrewsbury

Journal and the Salopian Journal, August 30, 1876) and in consequence spent much of his energy championing the value of recreational exercise. He lived and worked in a small town in Shropshire called Much Wenlock, and in 1860 he created what he called the 'Wenlock Olympian Games' (Beale 2011; Bushell-Thornalley 2021; Cannon, 2011). He believed that the masses, unable to access the sporting opportunities of the English Public Schools system, could here find sporting activities designed to rekindle the belief in open competition and so experience the therapeutic advantages of physical education.

On October 21, 1890, Dr Brookes invited Baron Pierre de Coubertin, a French aristocrat, to visit his festival of sport for two days in Much Wenlock in order to experience first-hand how to make societies healthier through sport and see how important it was to place PE within schools globally. The rationale for the Frenchman's interest in the education of individuals through physical activities was because he wanted to introduce an esprit de corps [morale of the group] thus, countering the national failings in fitness and wellbeing in his countrymen. In the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) medical data noted significant differences between the British, German, and French anatomies, illustrating which nationality was anatomically better prepared for war (Cannon, 2011). Baron Pierre de Coubertin and Dr. William Brookes had a synergy of thought that the importance of PE and out-door gatherings for healthy recreation would advance wellbeing and academic qualities (Beale, 2011; Cannon, 2011). They both knew this could only be achieved if these opportunities were available to all within societies.

The ideology for the Olympiad mega-event that emerged as the Modern Olympics was born, therefore, from the vision of a GP from Wenlock in the UK. Baron de Coubertin's place in supporting and promoting the modern Games is well documented, but that of Dr Brookes is less so. The sustained written correspondence over three years between these two men was what brought the first Olympiad into being in Greece, in 1896 (Bushell-Thornalley, 2021; Cannon, 2011).

This history remains largely untold to those who teach, and who train teachers, in the discipline of PE and Sport examinations of AQA, Edexcel, & OCR; Brookes' contribution is not found within texts for school examination boards nor even on many degree programmes. The only acknowledgement known to most of us is that the XXX Olympiad honoured this history by naming the official Olympic Mascot Wenlock in 2010 to recognise the inspirational work Dr Brookes did by inspiring Baron de Coubertin to rekindle the Olympic movement (Beale, 2011). I believe that we need to teach this history, to embed this understanding in what we teach, we test, and we examine, across educational stages and curricula, as this is key to the story being advanced.

And why does it matter so much today? When celebrating the awarding of the XXX Olympiad to London, Lord Coe noted that the challenges of his times were not dissimilar those identified by Dr Brookes and Baron de Coubertin concerns:

Today's children live in a world of conflicting messages and competing distractions. Their landscape is cluttered... it's a world we must understand and must respond to.

Coe (2005).

From my vantage point as a teacher-educator in the UK in the third decade of the 21st Century, I fear that this is a landscape that remains all too prevalent. I suggest that our understanding and response are needed now, more than ever.

[NB A shorter version of this article was first published on the BERA blog on 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2022.]

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## Talking Point: teaching during war and peace

**War is a severe ordeal of human will, decency, and adamancy of spirit.** However, this is also an incentive to try to change the world for the better. Therefore, even during the war, educators keep teaching and supporting students, communicating core values and outlining new perspectives.

Lavrysh et al., 2022 p.1

Discussion: Can any good come from something as horrendous as war? Lavrysh et al.'s current research in Ukraine focusses on the importance of peace education, including on the 'general enlightenment that creates a spiritual, cultural, and social environment that prevents the recurrence of war' (Lavrysh et al., 2022 p.9). They articulate their belief that the future of their country depends on education; do we, who have so little to contend with in comparison, always value wider education as highly?

## References

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