

The Biggest Learning Opportunity on Earth

How London's Olympics could work
for young people in schools

Charlie Tims



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The London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games will be about more than just sporting competition. The coming together of nations and the billions of people watching on television at home provide an unparalleled moment for the world to look back at itself. At their heart, the Games are an opportunity for learning.

This opportunity is reflected in the activities schools and cultural institutions are able to engage in during the four-year Cultural Programme that accompanies a host city's Olympiad. However, past experience shows us that in the rush to deliver the Games these activities can often end up being put to one side.

After a bid process that highlighted young people as some of the key beneficiaries of the Games, there is a need to find ways for schools to develop projects that make the most of these opportunities.

Drawing on the experience of past Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, the work of Creative Partnerships London East and South and research in three London schools, The Biggest Learning Opportunity on Earth looks at different approaches and models of activity that schools could adopt.

Charlie Tims is a researcher at Demos.

ISBN 1 84180 176 3

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ISBN 1 84180 176 3
Copy edited by Julie Pickard, London

For further information and subscription details please contact:
Demos
Magdalen House
136 Tooley Street
London SE1 2TU

Telephone: 0845 458 5949
email: hello@demos.co.uk
web: www.demos.co.uk

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to the team at Creative Partnerships London East and South for their support, enthusiasm and insight. Thanks also to the staff and students at Central Foundation Girls' School, Grafton Primary School and Millennium Primary School for taking part in and coordinating our research visits. At Demos, I would like to thank Mark Fuller for his management of the production process, Miranda Bird and Femke van Doormik for their invaluable contributions during their internships and, in particular, Shelagh Wright for her underpinning role throughout the project.

Charlie Tims
January 2007

Foreword

Steve Moffitt

It is estimated that more than 4.5 billion people watch the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. During the summer of 2012, London, and east London in particular, will be the focus of the world. This unique occasion has the potential to bring a new energy and purpose to schools and communities across the capital and throughout the UK. If we shift how we perceive this moment, the biggest show on earth could become the biggest learning opportunity on earth. The founder of the modern Olympic movement, Pierre de Coubertin, was, after all, an educationalist, an athlete and a poet.

Combining this energy with a practical understanding in schools of how to work more effectively with creative practitioners could open the door to a new set of possibilities for young people. The Olympics could provide a catalyst for projects that bring different schools together across the world, to explore new kinds of work and different ways of collaborating to broaden the horizons of young people. But at the moment we're still at the stage of ifs, buts, possibilities and potential.

Creative Partnerships London East and South commissioned Demos to explore and develop an understanding of the experience of previous Olympic cities, and identify how these cities have attempted to engage young people in school in different kinds of creative activity. For us to create a Games that has meaning for young people we must learn from previous approaches.

This research demonstrates that meeting young people on their own terms around the Olympics is not easy or straightforward. In spite of the Olympic ambitions and hopes to involve young people, in reality their experiences can often fall short of adult aspirations.

It is also important not to forget that the world knows so much about London already – through its musicians and artists, its famous sites and sounds, its migrating communities and its international businesses. If London's Olympic Cultural Programme is to have a focus, it has to be the young people of our city.

Some of the ideas and approaches to achieving this are outlined in this Demos report, and are a useful starting point for us to explore how we might embrace the opportunities ahead of us. But making them into real projects and activities is something that we must do together. And we will be able to achieve this only by mobilising our key asset – our collective creativity and imagination.

Steve Moffitt is the director of Creative Partnerships London East and South.

Context

This report was commissioned by Creative Partnerships London East and South. The research process featured interviews with key stakeholders from the creative and cultural sector, policy-makers and teachers. It also included discussion with young people in three Creative Partnerships London East and South schools. The report is of specific interest to those working with Creative Partnerships but will provide a point of reference for anyone developing creative activity in schools and with an interest in London's Olympic Cultural Programme.

Creative Partnerships is a programme managed by Arts Council England, the national development agency for the arts in England. It gives young people in 36 disadvantaged areas across England the opportunity to develop their creativity and their ambition by building partnerships between schools and creative organisations, businesses and individuals. Creative Partnerships aims to demonstrate the pivotal role creativity and creative people can play in transforming education in every curriculum subject for children of all ages and abilities.

London East and London South were established as two of the first 16 Creative Partnerships areas in 2002, delivering programmes with schools in Hackney, Islington, Newham and Tower Hamlets, and Greenwich, Lambeth, Lewisham and Southwark over a four-year period. In April 2006 the two areas merged to form one Creative Partnerships area delivering a joint creative programme in eight boroughs.

1

The Olympic challenge for schools

London's vision to reach people, young people, all around the world; to connect them with the inspirational power of the Games.

Sebastian Coe, Chairman, London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG)¹

The Olympic Games and Paralympic Games are coming to London in 2012. The eyes of the world will be on the capital. Cultural organisations across the city are keen to take advantage of the profile granted by a worldwide audience and new resources for programmes, projects and cultural events.

The establishment of Legacy Trust UK (a £40 million fund to support cultural and sporting activities in the run up to 2012) in October 2006, the opportunities of commercial sponsorship, added investment available for the four-year Cultural Programme and the opening ceremony provide clear opportunities for schools and cultural and community organisations to engage with the Olympics in new and imaginative ways.

However, Dr Beatriz Garcia, the leading commentator on cultural events in the Olympic Games, has recently argued that the Olympic Cultural Programme, the four-year cultural festival that precedes each Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, is 'stuck in the aspiration phase',² unable to realise the hopeful rhetoric of organising committees and leaders of the Cultural Programme.

So far, cultural programming as a part of the Olympics has had two key goals. The first is to position the host city in the eyes of the world, in tightly choreographed activities – such as the opening ceremony, and key festivals during the Cultural Programme.

The second objective is to broaden the ways for people to participate in and identify with the Games by creating projects with schools, community groups and other small creative and cultural organisations. This effectively bridges the gap between a sporting festival and a 'cultural moment' that connects with a city and beyond.

The first objective tends to play to international audiences – potential tourists, investors and the global media. The second objective tends to resonate more with people in the host city and nation – local communities around the Olympic site and schools.

The experience of past Games suggests that the tremendous pressure to 'put on a good show' in front of a global audience means that pragmatic energy is directed towards the first objective, with a focus on very high-profile cultural events that convey a positive brand identity for the host city. The Barcelona (1992) and

Sydney (2000) Olympics, often cited as successful Games, achieved this effectively. As the need to create a good impression takes centre stage, the second objective is often pushed into the background, resulting in programmes that tend to be loosely put together.

A significant part of this second objective involves working with schools. The evidence, evaluations and reporting on past Olympic-related work in this area is limited, but what we do know suggests that there is scope for improvement. Most programmes have defaulted to 'one-size-fits-all' activities distributed to different schools. These have rested on the Olympic message as the key element in working with schools, rather than using the Olympics as a springboard to new and challenging forms of cultural activity.

In order to stage a successful Games in 2012 LOCOG will need to recognise the centrality of both objectives to a successful Cultural Programme. A mismatch between the glitz of the opening ceremony and people's real experience of the Cultural Programme, particularly in schools, will erode trust in the Games. Fulfilling the first objective will create the impression of a successful Games, but fulfilling the second also will ensure that the Games have a sustainable cultural legacy for young people in London.

We know that if the cultural component of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games is to be successful and match the rhetoric of leaders, it will need to connect with people on their own terms. For young people, a large part of this will be determined by the relationship of their school to the Cultural Programme.

Some of the best project-based creative learning that has taken place through the Creative Partnerships initiative encourages people to think beyond themselves by connecting to bigger ideas, other themes and modes of interaction. The message of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games, the networks and connections that come with them and their sheer scale, could provide fertile soil for new projects with creative practitioners.

At the moment, when plans for the Cultural Programme are in the process of being formulated, it is critical to consider what kinds of activity and systems of support schools might need to make this happen to enable them to play an active and leading role. There are three areas that we will turn to in this paper that provide the reference points for telling this story.

- **The mindset of young people in east and south London now**

If the Cultural Programme is to connect with young people, we need to understand their mindset. What do young people expect the Olympics to provide for them? How do they want to see their lives changed by the Games? What position do the Games occupy in their lives? What do they think the Games can do for them?

- **The lessons from work with schools as part of past Olympics**

How have previous Olympic festivals developed work with schools? How has work created connections with other countries? Are there also lessons to be taken from the Commonwealth Games?

- **Models of successful project-based work combining schools and artists**

What transferable lessons can we take from other work that seeks to combine schools and creative practitioners? How could these be applied to the Olympic Cultural Programme?

The Olympics have presented what until now has been an unseen opportunity for new and exciting forms of cultural activity in schools. At a time when communications technologies are changing where and how young people learn, creating new models of work could create new international relationships for schools and provide models of successful working for future Cultural Programmes in the Olympic movement. London has a chance to redefine what a Cultural Programme is for, taking it beyond 'city-positioning', providing models of successful work for future Olympic host cities.

2

High expectations

Children and young people have often taken centre stage in the Olympic Games. In the world's greatest global festival, they provide a symbol of uncorrupted hope and innocence – a reflection of the lofty Olympic ideals of peace, harmony and international unity. The Olympic opening ceremonies in Atlanta 1996³, Sydney 2000⁴ and Athens 2004⁵ all rested heavily on the pure symbolism of children.

Learning from the deployment of young people in previous Olympic bids, London capitalised on young people at the bid presentation in Singapore in July 2005. In a recent BBC Radio 4 documentary, 'Children of the Olympic bid', the children who sat in front of Sebastian Coe, director of London's bid, during his submission to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) described what it felt like to be there. The quotes below suggest the children from east London clearly sensed that they had made a significant contribution to the success of the bid and influenced the way that the IOC perceived it.

It didn't really hit me until the presentation started that we were important – I felt quite proud to be one of the children of the bid.

It's my dream to compete in the Olympics. It's my dream. Representing what you believe in and where you were brought up.

I just think of the difference it's going to make. I think it's going to be amazing.⁶

The cornerstone of the presentation was a three-minute film, *Inspiration*, depicting the capacity of the Games in London to inspire children and young people all over the world to take up and compete in sport.⁷ This short film was so compelling that the director, Daryl Goodrich, has secured support from Paramount/Nickelodeon to turn it into a Hollywood feature film.⁸

The distinctive role of young people in the bid process has been reflected in a series of commitments that have been made to improving their lives through the Olympics. These focus on improving their living environments and their education and creativity.

Improving their locality

The Olympics has been billed as a driving force for improving quality of life, transforming the physical environment of east London and creating new job opportunities in the process. In east London, the location of several of the UK's most deprived boroughs, this is a promise that has special resonance.

The 500-acre site will be transformed from being one of the most under-developed in the country to one with restored natural ecology and new infrastructure providing the setting for sustainable

communities... benefits will be realised through the emphasis on accessibility and inclusion, creating job and training opportunities for disadvantaged people and engaging local people in the planning of the Games and legacy facilities. The community regeneration inspired by London 2012 will provide a springboard for reducing health inequalities in east London.⁹

Encouraging their creativity

But while these promises are harder to connect specifically to young people, LOCOG has been much more explicit in emphasising the role of young people in engaging with the Olympics in their schools and with their own creativity.

Between now and 2012, both in school and outside, there will be heaps of ways in which young people can discover and experience the wonders of the planet. You'll be able to link up with young people in other countries through globe-spanning virtual projects, and find out what their lives are like. Special schemes using cutting-edge technology, such as interactive opportunities to learn new languages, will bring the world into your classroom, your home and your neighbourhood. Seb Coe has made it clear that the London 2012 Games is all about the young people of the world. He's keen that through the curiosity, energy and creativity of today's youth, our country can reach out to other nations in the spirit of friendship and sharing. You will be at the heart of that!¹⁰

Young people in east and south London and the Olympics

If the Olympics in 2012 are to transform the lives of these young people, how do they currently relate to the Games? The following is a set of common attitudes and opinions exhibited by children and young people whom we met as part of this research during Summer 2006. The three groups of young people were aged between 6 and 7, 10 and 11, and 15 and 16. They attended schools in east and south London.

The London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games are important to young people

Almost without exception the young people we spoke to can remember where they were when they heard that London had won the Olympic Games. For them, this was a significant moment. For many it was the first time they were aware that a greater force beyond their immediate family could alter the course of their lives. Most struggled to identify other things that are certain to affect their lives over the next six years, but despite this, most have thought about or have used 2012 as a yardstick to measure their lives with. Most have already thought about where they will be living and what they will be doing.

Young people already exhibit a good understanding of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games

The young people whom we spoke to understood the Olympics. Younger children had an instinctive relationship to the iconography of the Games, the Olympic torch parade and the sense that the Olympics were special and unprecedented. Most had picked up information about the Olympics from television and from talking to their friends. Older children tended to have a more developed understanding of how staging the Games might have implications for the feel of their neighbourhoods and the cost of living.

Young people believe that the Olympics is basically for people who like sport

Most young people believe that the Olympics is a sporting festival: if you're an athlete you might be able to compete in the Games, if you're into sport you might be able to use the facilities and everyone else can watch it on television. They appreciate that the Olympics will bring people from all over the world but they struggle to see how the Olympics can reach out to them on anything other than sporting terms.

Young people understand that it will affect where they live

But although they think that the Olympics is for sporty people, they still understand that the Olympics could profoundly alter their lives. Younger children have picked up from their parents that the Olympics will increase the value of their houses; older children worry about everything becoming more expensive and new developments benefiting wealthier incoming groups.

Young people do not believe they have a voice that will be listened to

Through our consultation we surmised that young people don't understand why anyone would want to listen to them, or how they could make their voices heard. They are unsure whether they have been listened to in the past. But at the same time they believe that they have a contribution to make and are motivated by the chance to express it publicly.

These shared beliefs add up to young people who are excited by the Games, but concerned about how they could potentially alter their lives. This is combined with a perception that unless they are interested in sport or actively playing sport they will have little input or no relationship to the Games. The Olympics will be something they have little control over.

The mismatch

There would appear to be a mismatch between the promises made to young people and the way in which they have been received by young people. Put simply, young people in east and south London have been promised the transformation of their communities, but they regard these transitions around them with suspicion.

They have also been promised that the Olympics will engage with them on their own terms, encouraging their creativity and imagination, but they still seem fairly clear that the Games is a sporting festival for people interested in sport.

This is probably partly attributable to the natural suspicious reaction of young people to decisions they have little control over and that, in reality, probably haven't been taken yet. Nonetheless, it illustrates a disconnection that projects connected with the Olympics in schools will need to respond to.

3

What do we learn from?

Pierre de Coubertin, the educationalist and forefather of the modern Olympic movement, intended the Olympic Games to be a fusion of sport, culture and education. It was hoped that this level playing field between different human interests would bring the Olympics to resonate with people across the world. There would be something in it for everyone.

The IOC's regulations and guidelines for aspiring Olympic host cities reflect this aspiration by stipulating that a 'Cultural Programme' is a prerequisite for a successful Olympic host city.¹¹ This is a programme of cultural activities that will last for the four years of the host city's Olympiad. It is also a key way for schools to interact with the Games.

In spite of this notional commitment to place education and culture on a level playing field with sport, very few guidelines are provided that articulate exactly what a Cultural Programme should achieve, or how it might achieve it. This tends to result in the aspirational rhetoric surrounding cultural activities in bid documents rarely materialising in the form in which they were originally articulated.

London is not the first city to stage the Olympic Games, nor is it the first to stage a major event that will aim to use cultural activity to connect with young people. Along with the Olympic Games, the Commonwealth Games have also attempted to connect cultural activities, young people and major events.

The experience of previous major events

The education projects run in conjunction with the Olympics and the Commonwealth Games can be broadly categorised into the following types:

- connecting projects
- one-size-fits-all-projects
- presentation projects.

Connecting projects

Connecting projects forge links between the participating countries by bringing together young people from different schools and nationalities.

'School2School' is an example of one such initiative that was implemented during the Melbourne 2006 XVIII Commonwealth Games. This project connected various schools in Victoria with young people in other Commonwealth countries with the objective of encouraging pupils to learn about different cultures through the sharing of letters, emails, artwork, stories and poems.¹²

Key features of the project also included the 'Commonwealth Games Reps' (or CG Reps) initiative and the publication *GameZINE*. CG Reps were elected by students from each respective school to help coordinate Games activities linking together different schools across the Commonwealth.¹³

GameZINE gave an overview of the School2School project as a whole, and also provided information about the various activities taking place. Despite being primarily focused on activities organised by and for the students themselves, the publication tended to be written by adults and teachers, thus excluding the pupils in the marketing of their own activities.

One-size-fits-all projects

While connecting projects are founded on a one-to-one relationship between different schools, one-size-fits-all projects are based around one-to-many relationships. These are often established by departments of education and connected to the teaching of the 'Olympic culture' and 'Olympic values' in schools, through information teaching packs, CD-ROMs and the implementation of teaching guidelines.

'Olympiad' was introduced for the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. As an integrated component of the school curriculum for the 2003/04 academic year, the 'Olympic' subject was taught once a week in primary and high schools to help young people understand the spirit and history of the Olympic Games. The principal aim was to encourage the assimilation of Olympic ideals, as well as the 'transcending value of the Olympian spirit and the Olympic movement, so [the students] could welcome the 2004 Games as athletes, spectators, fans or volunteer helpers'.¹⁴ The project also included school trips to archaeological sites of Olympic significance, visits to permanent exhibitions around Greece, and access to libraries and archive material.

'Olympiad' and other such schemes that focus on the promotion and increased awareness of Olympic history and ideals leave little flexibility for schools around the country to adapt to the different circumstances in which they operate; likewise, such projects can end up overlapping with what children already know or have absorbed elsewhere.

Presentation projects

Presentation projects are motivated by a desire to promote the youthful and diverse face of the city to an international audience. They aim to involve young people in the media presentation of the host city during public events that attract large media attention, like televised cultural events and opening ceremonies.

Receiving considerable attention in the national and, to a lesser extent, the international press, the 'Share the Spirit' art programme during the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games is a good example of this type of initiative: 25,000 students across Australian primary schools took part in the project, which involved the production of 'limited edition merchandise from a visual arts programme based around the Olympic themes of "Sport", "Multiculturalism", "Welcoming the World", and "Friendship".¹⁵

Presentation projects tend to be motivated by the creation of public profile over the learning requirements of young people. Students tend to produce 'on command' rather than formulate their own ideas and put them into practice.

These three different project types have either engaged 'the best and the brightest' pupils as ambassadors, or representatives, in innovative high-profile activities or have tended to resort to providing a uniform experience for all young people.

While all these projects have their own individual merits, it is unlikely that these options alone will be enough to reconcile the mismatch between the promises of meaningful cultural engagement and where young people are now.

Alternative models of existing practice

Existing work combining schools and the Olympics has tended to make the mistake of being too focused on the Olympics as subject matter, rather than making the most of the resources, impetus, networks and enthusiasm that the Games bring. In doing so projects have failed to capitalise on the opportunity presented by the Olympics.

The following are a series of innovative projects that provide different examples of the type of work in schools that could be facilitated by the 'Olympic moment' during the Cultural Programme.

The Margate Exodus

The Olympic Games is an event with unparalleled global recognition. It has become a magnet for commercial sponsors, politicians and extremists. This interest is a considerable lever at Creative Partnerships' disposal for the creation of different kinds of projects in Creative Partnerships schools.

The Margate Exodus is a contemporary re-telling of the Book of Exodus, created by the filmmaker Penny Woolcock.¹⁶ The film, *Exodus*, will be shown on Channel 4 in Autumn 2007. Much of the film has required the active participation of people throughout the town. Some of the biggest scenes were shot on Exodus Day over the last Saturday in September 2006, creating a Spanish fiesta-style occasion in the town. The Exodus theme, combined with the active involvement of so many people, has provided a way for young people to explore their own identities in a town where

most families do not stretch back more than two generations. The project has been a catalyst for a series of projects in Creative Partnerships schools, such as Wendy Ewald's 'Towards a Promised Land'. This project has documented the lives of 22 newcomers, namely children and young people, to Margate across a series of billboards across the town. The Margate Exodus has also led to the creation of an associated soundtrack by musicians ranging from ambient producer, Brian Eno, to UK hip-hop artist, Klashnekoff. The project has been commissioned and produced by Artangel in association with Creative Partnerships Kent, Arts Council England and Channel 4 Television.

In a town whose history is wrapped up in waves of immigration The Margate Exodus project has placed potentially inflammatory issues in a public arena, in an original and exciting way. The creation of the film and the events that are arising around it have partly made the project the property of the town. In doing so it has created a 'safe' way for people to relate to issues of immigration, migration and asylum, going beyond the immediate experience of newspapers and the breakfast news.

The making of the film as a way into discussing deep-seated cultural issues in Margate is comparable to the lever that the Olympics will provide to discussing similar issues in east and south London and other communities around the UK.

theoneminutesJr

theoneminutesJr is an ongoing film project that has been run for several years by the European Cultural Foundation.¹⁷ It is centred on the creation of one-minute films made by young people in collaboration with professionals.

The project is coordinated through a central website where anybody can submit their film under three themes (Personal, Thematic, Open) relating to young people's lives and the world around them. Some of the films are submitted through the website, while others are created in workshops with groups of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds and film artists in different European countries. At the end of each year there is an award ceremony for the best films, held in Amsterdam. The website provides an ongoing archive of young people's lives across Europe and provides a simple way for young people to discover one another in international exchanges.

The model developed by theoneminutesJr predates the YouTube¹⁸ phenomenon, but connects with people on similar terms. It combines the familiarity of how young people engage with one another on the internet, but adds the discipline and value of working with creative and cultural professionals.

Glasgow 2020

Part campaign, part research project, part creative exercise, Glasgow 2020 is a project to imagine the future of Glasgow. For a year a team of researchers from Demos, in collaboration with facilitators and artists in Glasgow, have run a series of public events, competitions and campaigns. The aim of the project has been to use the culture of storytelling in Glasgow to enable people to investigate the future for themselves. This exercise in ‘mass-imagination’ has aimed to achieve this through a series of events, competitions, campaigns, a website and a final publication. It aims to connect this imagination exercise to how leaders and policy-makers think about the future.

The project has focused on ‘the possible’ and ‘the desirable’. In the name of the former the project has run several story-writing competitions and in the name of the latter it has run a campaign to collect wishes for 2020 from across the city. These have been brought together in workshops with over 25 different groups of people across the city, ranging from single parents to hairdressers and public housing tenants. These discussions have led to the creation of stories, which have in turn been developed into polished stories by published authors.¹⁹

The outputs of the project are being condensed into a series of ‘unofficial’ stories of the future, which can be used by the city council to think about how it plans for the future.

Glasgow 2020 is an example of a project using people’s creativity and channelling it towards a collective project. In this case it happens to be imagining the future of Glasgow but the same principles could be applied to a project about imagining the future in areas affected by the Olympics.

The projects outlined above are not about the Olympics, but they all outline a scale of working that would become a real possibility with the catalyst of the Olympics. Whether it is about using the Olympics as a lever for tackling ‘difficult issues’, as an opportunity to draw international collaborations, or as a mechanism to mount a campaign, these examples outline a new set of possibilities for schools working on Olympic projects.

4

Openings for schools

I'm going to be in it. Believe me. I'm already a black belt in Karate
Boy, aged 9, Greenwich

The Olympics is in the minds of young people across east and south London. Everybody we spoke to during this research can remember where they were when they heard that the Olympics had been secured by London 2012. Most have started to use the Olympics as a benchmark for their lives, thinking about how old they will be and what they would like to be doing in 2012.

I'm going to be the youngest journalist in the Olympics, and if I'm not a journalist I'll sell food and if I'm not selling food I'll be the janitor.
Boy, aged 10, Greenwich

But this does not always translate into affection or positive feelings towards the Games. Most young people feel an automatic connection to the ideal of the Olympics – the Olympic torch, the romance of the eyes of the world being fixed on one place, peace and harmony, and the prospect of an enormous party. But while allured by the story and mystique of the Games, young people tend to feel that it is disconnected with the realities of their everyday lives.

I was happy that it's here so I can go to it, but I'm not too bothered.
Girl, aged 14, Tower Hamlets

They have little or no understanding of how the Games will reach out to them if they aren't interested in sport. But at the same time they all recognise that the Olympics is going to alter their lives. Many believe that house prices are going to increase and that they will have to pay higher taxes to help cover the cost of the Games. Other young people we spoke to pointed to the rising price of property pricing out artists from their area and the emergence of new jobs they won't be skilled to do as other potential negative impacts of the Games.

I think it's all crap because everything is gonna go up.
Girl, aged 15, Tower Hamlets

Young people seem to be measuring their lives against the Olympics and they know that it's going to affect them, but at the same time they have little or no sense of how the Olympics relates to what they want to do. The inability of previous Olympics to connect with young people, beyond what they see on television, is in part due to a failure to create projects that are capable of bridging this gap.

The 'just add water' form of cultural work where young people are drip-fed information about the Olympics is unlikely to be enough. Young people in east and south London are likely to know about and appreciate the Olympic Games and its message, through a wide variety of sources of information.

The value in the Olympics will not be in celebrating the magic of the Games, but in using this magic as a catalyst for new kinds of work that connects with new audiences around the globe, new types of creative practitioners and new forms of learning.

There is a clear opportunity for organisations like Creative Partnerships, working among schools, communities and creative practitioners to respond to this. Organisations like this are well positioned to create the new forms of working with schools that can provide a positive legacy for the young people who take part in them and for how future Olympic host cities think about developing their cultural programmes.

Approaches and goals

As shown in the examples in chapter 3, the new Olympic environment presents several opportunities that schools could respond to. These opportunities can be expressed as three new aims or goals for Olympic projects, which will be made possible by two new approaches.

Approach 1. Coordinating projects

The success of Creative Partnerships' work around the Olympics will depend on its ability to ensure that individual projects add up to more than the sum of their own parts. While the projects will bring the Olympics close to young people's lives, the fact that the projects are related to the Olympics will make them of interest to a much broader set of audiences and schools (see approach 2). This suggests that projects should be coordinated with one another. This could be at specific 'moments' when the results of projects could be performed or exhibited, but could also lead to the creation of a web resource that children both inside and outside Creative Partnerships could feed into. Vision London is an interactive website currently in development to encourage young people from Creative Partnerships schools to communicate and share their thinking and experience of their city and their futures.²⁰ This project, led by Soda Creative Ltd, could provide the means to achieving this. This would provide a way for different projects to inform one another and to create a sense that they were contributing to a greater end.

Approach 2. New sources of demand

Coordinating projects is important as it will make it easier for projects to respond to new sources of demand. The Olympics will provoke an elevation in interest in London, the East End and young people. Accessing these new types of audiences and collaborators through Creative Partnerships projects presents another opportunity for Creative Partnerships schools to develop projects and widen the impact of their work. Further potential audiences beyond Creative Partnerships schools in east and south London might include:

- Other schools

There is considerable interest to ensure that the Olympics is not just for the benefit of Londoners, but resonates throughout the UK. The experience of the Cultureshock²¹ and Spirit of Friendship festivals that occurred around the Commonwealth Games in Manchester during 2002 showed that cultural activity around major events can happen in a haphazard way. Both Creative Partnerships schools and non-Creative Partnerships schools around the UK are likely to be interested in undertaking Olympic-related projects – a central resource (as highlighted in approach 1) would provide a way of communicating models of practice to them.

- Olympics enthusiasts

The broadband era is diversifying how people across the world access media. By 2012 people interested in the Olympics are unlikely to just be watching it on national television. The growth of streamed visual media, facilitated by the websites like YouTube, presents a series of opportunities for young people to become authors of their own Olympics. For example, young people could document people training for the Olympics in their own area in different ways, eg on film, audio, in pictures. This information could be coordinated in a central resource. During the Olympics this would be a place for people across the world to find out the background stories behind Olympians who go on to become successful.

- Visitors to London

The Olympics is likely to increase the overall number of tourists visiting London and will bring new visitors to east London. Given that the Games will be used as an opportunity to market London to new potential tourists in Brazil, China, India and Russia, it is likely that the capital will be welcoming many first-time visitors in the years after 2012. The Olympic park itself is likely to create considerable interest for Londoners themselves. Projects could involve the creation of work that informs new visitors about where they live – maybe in a similar way to ‘The Young Person’s Guide to the Royal Docks’ developed by Cascade.²²

Responding to these various interests is likely to increase the value for young people in taking part and investing their time in projects, and will increase the chances of a wider audience becoming interested in Olympic projects.

So, for example, it isn’t just that a young person would be making a film of a local athlete, but they would be making a film that might be watched by people across the world, potentially generating support, enthusiasm and interest in their activities.

The new approaches outlined above, made possible by the Olympics, suggest that Creative Partnerships has an opportunity to work towards the following goals.

Goal 1. Creative activism

The rhetoric of young people and the realisation of their aspirations and desires was central to the success of the London 2012 bid. Projects created through Creative Partnerships London East and South could provide a powerful way to ensure that the young people of east and south London are not forgotten over the next five years. The creative practitioners in Creative Partnerships London East and South's network could provide a powerful platform to create a profile for children through creative activity, especially with national media partners.

Goal 2. One-to-one international relationships

The cultural statements that accompany the Olympics, the opening ceremony and signature exhibitions in major arts institutions are marketing and public relations the old way: one point of communication to a massive audience. Many of these messages will be determined by the emergence of the London 2012 brand in spring 2007. The new communications environment in advertising and marketing, however, tends to emphasise the growth of small, participative communities of interest. Creative Partnerships projects could provide a platform for peer-to-peer communication between children and communities in other schools.

Rather than sending messages out about young people to the world, Creative Partnerships can position itself as building real relationships between young people from different countries, reflecting the way London functions as a world city. Schools making and creating work with other schools around the world would fit with London's work as an international collaborative city – its financial institutions, its creative industries and its international campaigns around the world.

Goal 3. Ownership of change

The London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games is just one in a long line of regeneration projects affecting east and south London. Stratford City, the continued expansion of Canary Wharf, redevelopment of the Greenwich peninsula and the Thames Gateway are all adding to a process of transformation in east and south London. This will add up to the biggest alteration to the area since the end of the Second World War. The transformation of neighbourhoods can be a disruptive experience as incumbent communities feel superfluous to the transitions occurring around them. Creative Partnerships projects can offer the opportunity to bring local ownership and meaning to new physical infrastructure.

5

The biggest learning opportunity on earth

Regeneration and the transformation of places occur as much in the minds of people as it does in the new public buildings, blocks of flats and public spaces that we tend to think of automatically.

Tony Wilson recently commented that ‘the single most powerful tool in British regeneration in the last 25 years has been youth culture’.²³ He was making reference to Manchester’s vibrant youth culture in the 1980s and the growth of youth culture accompanying the transformation of Sheffield at the moment.

The renewal of east and south London that will occur through the Olympics is not a project that will run alongside young people’s creative activity and personal forms of expression. The creative activity of young people will be at the heart of its renewal. It will be the young people involved in the types of projects outlined in this paper who will experience the opportunities and possibilities presented by an area transformed by the Olympics.

Communications technologies are making it harder to see the divisions between work and leisure, school and home and between recipients of culture and its creators. All the indications point to a world in the future where personal creative expression will become more important for finding a sense of place in this world and more important for finding jobs and starting new businesses, enterprises and communities.

The Olympics have created an unprecedented political commitment to young people and cultural activity. Not only this, they have opened a door to new audiences, collaborators and ways of working in schools. Furthermore and perhaps most importantly, the Olympics are arriving at a time when sophisticated consumer preferences, increasing public support for the arts, the re-emergence of cities as centres of creativity and the emergence of social software focused on personal creativity have exploded the avenues available for creative expression in the UK.

Pierre de Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympics, was an educationalist. If ever there was a time and a place for the biggest learning project on earth, it’s now and it’s in London.

Notes

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23 'Can NewcastleGateshead become the next big "music city"?', conference, Newcastle College Performance Academy, 26 May 2006

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