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**Rhetoric and realities of London 2012 Olympic education and participation 'legacies': Voices from the core and periphery**

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## **Abstract**

A legacy emphasis was one of the fundamental pillars of the London 2012 Olympic Games. The notion of an Olympic legacy was predicated on assumptions that the event's value would not purely derive from the sporting spectacle, but rather, from the 'success' of enduring effects met out in London and across the country. For physical education students and practitioners, Olympic legacy agendas translated into persistent pressure to increase inspiration, engagement, participation and performance in the subject, sport and physical activity. Responding to this context, and cogniscent of significant disciplinary scholarship, this paper reports initial data from the first phase of a longitudinal study involving Key Stage Three (students aged 11-13) cohorts in two comparable United Kingdom schools: the first an inner-city (core) London school adjacent to the Olympic Park in Stratford, East London (n=150); the second, a (peripheral) school in the Midlands (n=198). The research involved the use of themed questionnaires focusing on self-reported attitudes toward the Olympic Games, and, experiences of physical education, sport and physical activity. Students from both schools demonstrated a wide variety of attitudes toward physical education and sport; yet, minor variances emerged regarding extreme enthusiasm levels. Both cohorts also expressed considerably mixed feelings toward the impending Olympic Games. Strong and variable responses were also reported regarding inspiration levels, ticketing acquisition and engagement levels. Consequently, this investigation can be read within the broader context of legacy debates, and, aligns well with physical educationalists' on-going discomfort regarding legacy imperatives being enforced upon the discipline and its practitioners. Our work reiterates a shared disciplinary scepticism that while an Olympic Games may temporarily affect young peoples' affectations for sport (and maybe physical education and physical activity), it may not provide the best, or most appropriate, mechanism for sustained attitudinal and/or social changes *en masse*.

## **Keywords**

Physical education, Olympic legacy, youth participation, physical activity, East-London, Midlands

## Introduction

More than two years on from the London 2012 Olympic Games the Olympic park (officially known as Queen Elizabeth II Park) has reopened as a revitalised urban space. Rejuvenating a considerable swath of London, and providing a place for civic activity and recreation *en masse*, the park has become emblematic of the altruistic ambitions of Games organisers (and latterly post-Games delivery agencies) to align the Olympic Games with provision for increased sport and physical activity participation (Andranovich & Burbank, 2011; Fusco, 2007; Sampson, Harden, Tobi & Renton, 2012; Van Loon & Frank, 2011). Utility of the park notwithstanding, close by (and across the country) there have been, and still are, lingering uncertainties over the London Organising Committee for the Olympic Games' (LOCOG) legacy ambitions (Brown, Cox & Owens, 2012; Bullough, 2012; Devine, 2012; Mahtani et al., 2013; Mackintosh, Darko, Rutherford & Wilkins, 2014; Weed et al. 2012). Discontent with the economical, tourism, infrastructural, political, environmental, health and educational residue from the 2012 Olympic Games, for example, has been varied and persistent (e.g. Agha, Fairley, & Gibson, 2012; Carmichael, Grix & Palacios, 2012; Davies, 2012; Girginov & Hills, 2008; 2009; Grix & Carmichael, 2012; Thornley, 2012). These multi-faceted debates, to which this paper contributes, are largely underpinned by a critical examination of LOCOG, and, the difficulties faced by those individuals, groups, and organisations now responsible for legacy implementation, monitoring, and measurement (Bullough, 2012; Girginov & Hills, 2009; & Weed et al. 2012).

One sustained stream of scholarship has been within education, and specifically, the discipline of physical education. Participation legacies in physical education were fundamental in LOCOG's strategies for motivating youth and encouraging community engagement in the lead up to the 2012 Olympic Games (Devine, 2013; Girginov & Hills, 2008; 2009; Weed, Coren, and Fiore, 2009; Weed et al. 2012). LOCOG cleverly aligned its legacy strategy with the United Kingdom's (UK) sport and education policies to enhance all levels of sport participation. Physical education researchers have, however, taken exemption to the notion of Olympic legacies writ large, the inadequacies of legacy planning, resource and guidance provision, accountability

measures, the (m)alignment of legacy aspirations with curriculum imperatives, the politicising of physical education to meet government agendas, and, the disjuncture between legacy rhetoric and the realities for practitioners and the young people they teach (Armour & Dagkas, 2012; Chatziefstathiou, 2012; Girginov & Hillis, 2008; 2009; Griffiths & Armour, 2013). These general concerns regarding Olympic Games legacies in physical education provide the backdrop for this paper.

### **Aims and intentions**

Concurrent with critiques of Olympic legacies and also reflecting sustained interest in examining youth participation in sport and physical activity (King & Church, 2014; Rikard & Banville, 2006; Tannehill et al, 2014; Rowe, 2014), the underlying objective in this paper is to investigate participants' perceptions and experiences of the London Olympic Games and their thoughts about physical education and physical activity. Subsequently, we present the initial stages of a longitudinal study with Key Stage Three (students aged 11-13) cohorts in two UK schools: the first an inner-city London school adjacent to the Olympic Park in Stratford (n=150); the second, a comparable inner-city school in the English Midlands (n=198). The data derives from mixed qualitative and quantitative questionnaires examining attitudes toward physical education, physical activity and the Olympic Games in the months immediately preceding the London 2012 Olympic Games (effectively the latter part of the 2011/2012 academic year). Our aims here are to: present baseline levels of inspiration and engagement with the Olympic Games; establish young peoples' attitudes toward physical education, physical activity and the Olympic Games; and, evaluate some of the assumptions about 'Olympic-inspired' participation. While participation legacies may have some merits, we argue that practitioners should be mindful of young peoples' varied physical activity and physical education attitudes, behaviours, and experiences when considering the alignment of Olympic legacy initiatives to the discipline.

### **Olympic legacies, physical activity and physical education – An uneasy accord(?)**

As far as the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and its official charter (IOC, 2013) attest, the Olympic movement prides itself on utilising the regularity of the Olympic Games to propel global engagement with sport (and to less specific extent physical activity) (Carmichael, Grix &

Marques, 2012; Charlton, 2010; Girginov, 2012; Gratton & Preuss, 2008; Kidd, 2013). This imperative is particularly directed at improving both young people's lives and the broader communities they are a part of. The assumption, generally, is that the perennial and popular nature of the Olympic Games serves as a means to inculcate human virtues and, concomitantly, foster a link to sport participation. Associations with sport and default physical activity here provide crucial links for Olympic Games Host City organisers (such as LOCOG) to leverage opportunities not only in their initial bids, but also, throughout (and beyond) the staging process. Expressing a desire to promote sport also assists organisers to affirm corporate ambitions and gross government expenditures by consolidating popular (sporting and youth) sentiment and capitalise on national concerns, fears and insecurities regarding health and physical activity discourse (Devine, 2012; Kohe, 2010; Lenskyji, 2012; Pringle, 2012).

In LOCOG's case, even from initial preparatory stages, through to conception and implementation, a key thread in their plans were aims to use the elite sporting event to 'inspire a generation' (primarily in sport, but, also, across other avenues of social life) (Bloyce & Lovett, 2012; Girginov, 2012; Girginov & Hills, 2009). Though initially aligned to the Labour government's social reform agendas, eventually post-2010 LOCOG's approach enmeshed with the Conservative coalition's much-heralded 'Big Society' agendas targeted at empowering domestic communities and improving collective social ambition and cohesion (Devine, 2012). Against this context, mass sport participation was not just a lofty cause, but rather, a means to improving the nation's lot (through better health and wellbeing) (Boardley, 2012; Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), 2002; National Audit Office, 2010).

The politicisation of physical activity debates (and predominant mass participation focus) in the UK (and admittedly elsewhere) gathered pace over the last decade. Considerable attention has since been afforded to sport and physical activity within national policy developments (see Bloyce & Lovett, 2012; Green, 2009; Boardley, 2012 for cogent examination). In 2002, for example, the then Labour-led government delivered *Game Plan* (Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS), 2002) which outlined their ambitious 20-year plans for enhancing the nation's sport and physical activity landscape. Two particular imperatives were to develop UK sport and physical activity cultures, and, improve the delivery

of sport and physical activity. Although physical education was not targeted specifically, persistent mention was also made of youth participation rates, behaviours, attitudes, and engagements. In addition, participation and engagement data from select UK schools was cited to provide weight to the underlying argument that the education system must play its roles in achieving collective sport and physical activity ambitions (DCMS, 2002; Bullough, 2012). To this end, targets began to be routinely tracked through the Government's key measurement tool, Sport England's regular *Active People Survey* (Carmichael, Grix & Marques, 2012; Weed et al. 2012; <https://www.sportengland.org/research/about-our-research/active-people-survey/>).

Further changes were made by the DCMS in 2006 regarding the devolution of responsibilities for delivery bodies (e.g. Sport England and the Youth Sport Trust) (Bullough, 2012). In addition, comprehensive Sport England policy documents and reports (e.g. the 2008-2009 to 2012-2013 strategy) were published by the National Audit Office (NAO) outlining the government's commitment to increase demand for sport and physical activity (NAO, 2010). These plans essentially emphasised fostering 'grassroots' participation across the UK by improving the provision of sport facilities and coaching support services; capitalising on the country's alleged passion for sport to stimulate community engagement in physical activity projects; and, utilising the Olympic park as a central physical resource to focus legacy activities (NAO, 2010; see also, Devine, 2013; Bullough, 2012; Grix & Carmichael, 2012; Girginov, 2011; Grix & Palacios, 2012; Griffiths & Armour, 2013; Weed, Carmichael & Fiore, 2009; Weed et al. 2012).

The abovementioned policies are underpinned largely by correlations between mass participation and civic health behaviours, young peoples' Olympic experiences, and, their affectations for sport, physical education and physical activity (Bloyce and Smith, 2012; Carmichael, Grix, Marques, 2012; Charlton, 2010; Girginov, 2011; Green, 2009; Karadakis & Kaplanidou, 2012). With the exception of a few enthusiasts (e.g. Binder, 2012; Culpán & Wigmore, 2010), physical educationalists are, however, becoming increasingly sceptical of the implicit and explicit associations made between the Olympic Games, politicised participation mandates, legacy debates, and the contents of their discipline (see Carmichael, Grix & Marques,

2012; Griffiths & Armour, 2013; Lenskyji, 2012). The drive within school physical education for increased participation might, though, seem commonsensical. Physical education is a domain in which health, physical activity, wellbeing, active lifestyles, corporeal awareness, and, social development through participation is actively pursued and encouraged (Bullough, 2012; Smith, Green & Thurston, 2009). Physical education remains a space within which goals to increase mass physical activity participation, and concomitantly inspire lifestyle opportunities, appear rational, logical, well-intentioned, and meaningful. Yet, scholars emphasise that conceptual ambiguities, shifting political and curriculum targets, the complexities and stresses of physical educators' daily work, and, the absence of clear and consistent delivery guidance have compounded successfully, or realistically, achieving (sustainable) increases in physical activity (Armour & Dagkas, 2012; Chatzeifstathiou, 2012; Griffiths & Armour, 2013).

The above debates are, thus, useful in demonstrating that a) discontent over (physical) educational legacies is pervasive and provides an unstable foundation upon which then to attempt to build physical activity goals; b) that using the Olympic Games to affect increased physical activity in young people is a profound concern; c) that our position rests firmly within a collective call to challenge forces shaping physical education in schools and, d) that there is groundswell behind a fundamental shift in the ways pedagogues and the young people they teach engage, accept (or resist) the seductive promises of the Olympic movement.

### **Considerations in our approach**

Our research draws from examinations of youth perspectives and participation in physical education, and, the preceding scholarship and larger meta-data regarding Olympic legacies in education and physical activity. Regarding the former, an extensive corpus of literature provides salient critiques of associations between physical education, physical activity and behavioural adaptation, and, proclivities toward life-long participatory change (e.g. Bailey, 2006; Bocarro, Kanters, Casper & Forrester, 2008; Bullough, 2012; Carmichael, Grix & Marques, 2012; Haerens et al., 2010; King & Church, 2014; Kirk, 2005; Kjønnsen, Fjørtoft & Wold, 2009; Mahtani et al. 2013). Central to these critiques is an acknowledgement of the difficulties of guaranteeing a natural, or harmonious, symbiosis between physical activity agendas within

school physical education, opportunities to engage in physical activities outside formal schooling, and, the peculiarities of young people's motivations/de-motivations overtime (Kjønniksen, Fjørtoft & Wold, 2009; Kirk, 2005; Wright, MacDonald & Groom, 2003). With this in mind, we drew upon the works of Bailey (2006), Bocarro et al. (2008), Haerens (2010), Hohepa et al. (2006), Kirk (2005), Kjønniksen et al. (2009), Rikard & Banville (2006), Smith, Green & Thurston (2009) and Tannehill (2013); all of whom have utilised a variety of qualitative (namely, interviews, focus groups, and open-ended questionnaires) and quantitative (e.g., standardised psychometric, Likert-based, correlational questionnaires) measures, and, on occasion longitudinal studies to engage with youth voices in relation to their sport, physical activity or education experiences. The work of Wright, Macdonald & Groom (2003), Johnson et al. (2008), Cotton (2012) and Mackintosh et al. (2014) who have specifically examined young people's attitudes to physical education and physical activity in the context of the Olympic Games and legacy debates was also useful. At a time when Olympic 'legacy' debates (at least in terms of measurable mass physical activity agendas) lacked gravitas and political impetus, Wright et al.'s (2003) work not only forewarned of disjuncture between Olympic imperatives and sustainable youth physical activity ambition, but also, called for research to improve accounts of young people's lived experiences through qualitative enterprise.

Taking up this call, prior to the London 2012 Olympic Games Johnson et al. (2008) used a mixed-methods approach of mini-focus groups, pair discussions and quantitative questionnaires for a large cross-sectional study involving 36 schools in England. Using a similar focus-group approach, Cotton (2012) examined Olympic and legacy attitudes in Year Seven-Ten cohorts in two Midlands secondary schools. Extending this work, Mackintosh et al. (2014) focused on the manifestation of legacy imperatives within the family context using pre- and post-Games interviews and video diary data. Collectively, Wright et al. (2003), Johnson et al. (2008), Cotton (2012) Mackintosh et al.'s (2014) research emphasises that: 1) engendering large-scale, long-term, physical activity participation increases is considerably difficult, contextually nuanced, and, cannot be solely attributed to an Olympic project alone; 2) incongruences exist between Olympic legacy rhetoric, young people's lives, and, their physical activity/physical education experiences; 3) quantitative, meta-data, evaluation measures alone



do not adequately account for the complex realities of young people's lives; and, 4) longer term qualitative, phenomenological, studies of legacy may help provide post-Olympic narratives that might better inform physical education and physical activity policy development and implementation. This paper, thus, is significantly positioned at the nexus of this scholarship.

## **Methodology**

Our study involved examining two Year Seven cohorts in two United Kingdom schools. The first school was an inner-city (core) school (total roll approx. 1800 students, n=150) located within one of London's nine Olympic boroughs (precincts adjacent to the main Olympic park in East London). The second was an inner-city school (total roll approx. 1500 students, n=198) located 120miles from London in a mid-size (peripheral) Midlands city (approx. 300-350,000 inhabitants). The peripheral city was also selected on the basis that it was selected to host games for the Olympic football tournament. Regarding cohort demographics, of the 198 respondents at the Midlands school, 96 students (48.6%) were male, 70 students (35.5%) were female, and, 32 students (15.9%) did not specify. Of the participants in the London cohort, 74 students (49.3%) were male, 63 students (42%) were female, and, 13 students (8.7%) did not specify.

Akin to Johnson et al. (2008) and Cotton's (2012) comparative research, we also strategically selected a school outside of the Olympic host-city to provide *an* insight into how legacy engagement is negotiated both within and beyond an Olympic host-city context. The schools were also comparable in terms staff numbers, student-staff ratios, and, sport facilities. Both schools were also part of the LOCOG's official 'Get Set' school programme. The programme enabled schools to 'sign up' to access Olympic education resources, receive public recognition for their efforts to promote the Olympic Games, and, have opportunities to gain 'rewards' (e.g., vouchers and prizes from the Games' corporate sponsors, visits from Olympic athletes, resource packs, and selection as a host/training camp for visiting national Olympic delegations) (see, <http://www.getset.co.uk/home>; Chatziefstathiou, 2012).

Based on the aforementioned studies, we constructed a 14-item questionnaire containing three main sections based on the general areas of physical activity and physical education, the Olympic/Paralympic Games inspiration, and ticketing and Olympic park engagement. Although the surveys employed some quantitative questions (namely to help gather base-line data), our focus was primarily young people's perceptions about their physical activity involvement in and outside of school, and, their current understandings about, engagement with, and feelings toward the Olympic Games. The structure of the questionnaire included a combination of 5-point Likert scale questions (with ambivalent or neutral responses possible) and questions requiring open-ended responses. Examples of questions included, variously: asking how often they heard about the Olympics in physical education lessons; how enthusiastic they felt about physical education; what sports they currently played; whether people visited their schools to talk about the Olympics; and, whether they had visited the Olympic park. Each of the quantitative questions were subsequently numerically coded and analysed using the Chi-Square test to determine statistical significance (where  $p < 0.05$ ) between the schools. When statistical significance was achieved, the Cramer's value was used to ascertain the strength of the relationship between the question and geographical location (a value of 0.0 indicates no association, whilst a value of 1.0 represents a complete association between the variables).

Qualitative responses were inductively examined independently by both co-researchers. Key points from the responses were then considered and compared in relation to the prevailing literature. A pilot study was also undertaken involving small comparably-aged cohort to determine the quality of potential responses and improve conceptual and syntax clarity. In the proceeding section we focus on some of the key findings. The study was approved by the University's Institution-based ethics committee. Key findings are presented in the following section.

### **Attitudes, Engagement, Inspiration and Involvement**

In keeping with our intention to map Olympic engagement, we sought first to ascertain students' general attitudes toward physical education as a subject. General levels of

enthusiasm (accumulating 'very enthusiastic' and 'enthusiastic' response items) across both schools were relatively high (London, 76%; Midlands, 70%). However, participants in London expressed much higher levels of 'very enthusiastic' attitudes (51% versus 29% respectively). In terms of negative response items ('not enthusiastic' and 'not enthusiastic at all'), the results between the schools were comparable (London, 9%; Midlands, 10%). Overall when comparing all of the responses, there was a significant difference in general attitudes towards physical education between the two schools ( $p = 0.0002$ ) and a moderately positive association between enthusiasm levels and cohort location (Cramer's Value = 0.256). This suggests that the two schools may differ in the overall levels of enthusiasm, although this seems to be largely due to the higher number of "very enthusiastic" attitudes in London compared to the Midlands. As such, there are some encouraging signs regarding this positive attitude towards physical activity shared among the schools, yet, this component is slightly more complex when taken in consideration with sport participation responses and feelings toward the impending Olympic Games.

In terms of attitudes to sport participation within school (e.g. extra-curricular clubs and teams) there were considerable similarities between the two schools. At the top end of the spectrum a small number of participants were involved 'very often' (in excess of 5 days per week) (London, 7%; Midlands, 2%). In terms of participating 'often' (3-5 days per week) there were minor differences (London, 15%; Midlands, 9%). At least 23% of London participants and 26% of Midlands' participants were involved in school sport between 1-2 days per week. The number of students participating on an ad-hoc ('every now and then') basis was also similar (London 19%; Midlands, 21%). Most noticeable, and potentially linked to aforementioned physical education attitudes, was the difference in responses between those who reported not participating in school sport (London, 33%; Midlands, 42%). Although a significant difference in attitudes to sport participation was found between the two schools ( $p = 0.0346$ ), only a weak positive relationship (Cramer's value = 0.1736) was detected between the school location and attitudes to sport participation. This suggests that overall the differences in geographical location of the two schools had a minor effect on attitudes to sport participation within school. It bears noting at this juncture that at the time of data collection, although both schools had

comparable facilities, as a consequence of falling performance statistics the physical education department in the Midlands school had been the subject of an internal review led by the Head teacher who had been seeking to raise standards and aspirations.

To gather a broader picture of young people's sporting and/or active lives data was also collected on sporting participation external to the school environment. With regards to a high level of engagement in sport outside of school (in excess of 5 days per week), there were some differences (London, 8%; Midlands, 14%). Midlands' participants were also more involved at the 3-5 times per week levels than their London counterparts (28% versus 22% respectively). As regards involvement at least once a week, participation is fairly comparable (London, 17%; Midlands, 20%). When juxtaposed against rhetoric and policy about the Olympic Games potentially inspiring sport more generally, the statistics for external-sport at the other end of the spectrum might be considered a concern. For example, 28% of London participants and 20% of Midlands participants only participated 'every now and again' in sport outside school. Add to this, too, the 23% of London youth and 14% of Midlands youth who indicated never participating. Again, there was a significant difference across all responses between the two schools ( $p = 0.0363$ ), although only a low positive association between participation outside of school and cohort location (Cramer's value = 0.173). This suggests that like within school participation, the differences in cohort location of the two schools had a minor effect on attitudes to sport participation outside of school.

Although there were differences in attitudes to physical education and sport between the schools sampled, in terms of students' feelings toward the London 2012 Olympic Games there were striking similarities. Overall there was no significant difference in the responses across the two schools when asked about excitement level ( $p = 0.6681$ ). For instance, levels of excitement across both schools were relatively high. Nineteen percent of London youth and 18% of Midlands youth reported feeling 'very excited'. An additional 35% (London) and 32% (Midlands) of students felt 'excited'. Based on the attitudes expressed above, we were further interested in ascertaining the degree to which students felt they were inspired or otherwise by the Olympic Games. Again, there were comparable levels of inspiration between the two

cohorts. Overall when considering all responses, no significant difference was detected between the two schools for levels of inspiration ( $p = 0.2542$ ). When considering the positive responses in detail, 13% of London students and 10% of Midlands students felt 'very inspired'. A further 21% (London) and 29% (Midlands) felt 'inspired'. Add to this 30% (London) and 35% (Midlands) who felt 'quite inspired'. *"I'm very excited about the Olympics"*, one London student remarked, *"and I hope and would love to compete or be in it"*. Yet, there were a considerable number of students from both schools who were evidently either 'not inspired' (London, 21%; Midlands, 17%) or 'not inspired at all' (London, 11%; Midlands, 7%).

Further qualitative responses add some colour to these figures. *"It is quite unbelievable"*, one London student remarked, *"that some of the best stars in the world, for example Usain Bolt, is going to be a few minutes from my house"* (sic). Likewise, as one Midlands student remarked, *"...it's a very exciting because it is in our country and I enjoy sports a lot and do a lot of sports as well"* (sic). Other Midlands students added: *"I feel proud that they are in Britain"*, *"I am really eager and excited to watch the Olympics as it give me determination to do what there doing"* (sic), *"Excited because it makes me happy because it a very big thing"*, *"Very excited because I know someone in the Olympics"*, *"Its good but not that interesting"*, *"Scared and happy that its in England"* (sic). Many London students shared these sentiments too. *"I feel very happy because I am going to see the Olympics"*, *"Good to be able to see some top athletes live"*, *"good looking girls"*, *"I am very excited because I will be going to see a swimming event with my family :) :) :) :) :) :) :) :)"*, *"I feel very joyful and excited because a lot of people would see how it feels to live in East London and I support Mo Farah"*, *"The Olympics is very sick and exciting"*, *"I really fell excited as I attended a party in the Olympic stadium and it was really fun, attending in the next months would be wonderful"*, *"good looking girls coming from different countries"*.

Negative feelings about London 2012 were also fairly similar. 18% (London) and 24% (Midlands) reported feeling 'not excited'. To note, there were a high number of participants who indicated their ambivalence by having 'no opinion' (London, 28%; Midlands, 23%). Various Midlands students decried, *"I Don't think it is Great because nashons are going against*

*nashons, friens vs friens*" (sic), "It's on every advert and can be annoying, but I cant wait", "Its starting to get boring because its everywhere and adverts" (sic), "I hardly think anything of the Olympics", "I don't really get excited because I dont like sport of P.E." (sic), "I'm just not very excited...I have never been", "It bores me & arent that interested" (sic), "I think it's too much fuss", "I am not very excited at all because I will miss the Olympics because I am going to Thailand" (sic), "hatrid, despair, murderous". London students were similarly despondent: "BORING!", "Boring and dull", "I am not that excited because everything is harder and harder in life. E.g if the Olympics come there will be traffic jams, money problems", "I don't really feel that the Olympics is good, As I am part of it, so why should I care", "The country is trying to turn an urban area into a modern fantasy. New buses, new buildings. All of the money spent is quite a lot and can be used for helping people get out of difficult lives", "I won't have a chance to go and the streets will be crowded with tourists", "I am not excited because there might be a nuclear bomb", "Well, people get excited over it, so I got a hint of excitement deep down, but I HATE sports, I stink at it! But, I don't care :p".

One particular marker of engagement and inspiration were figures relating Olympic ticket acquisition. Although there were to be plentiful opportunities to watch the Olympic Games on a variety of media platforms, it may have been possible that those students who held tickets to see live events 'on-site' may have, potentially, felt more inspired and/or engaged. The majority of participants (London, 71%; Midlands, 86%), however, reported not having success in obtaining tickets. 9% of London students and 8% of Midlands students did receive tickets. The remaining students did not indicate either way. The high number of students who did not indicate whether they received tickets, or, did not know at the time whether they had tickets makes it difficult to determine the significance of the school location to ticket acquisition. What we are able to say, however, is that there the known ticket acquisition levels between the two cohorts are fairly similar. Noting how contentious Olympic ticket allocation can be (Giulianotti, Armstrong, Hales & Hobbs, 2014), these figures are fairly unsurprising. There were, interestingly, a few qualitative responses from students that indicated mixed attitudes to the games and their own personal involvement through attendance. As one London student reflected, they were "happy and excited but sad that they didn't get tickets" (sic). A Midlands

contemporary added, *"I think it is cool to have them in London but the tickets are 2 much money"* (sic). To note, given ticketing prices, difficulties in the booking and acquisition process, families' potential socio-economic constraints, and, the possibilities of parents not revealing the purchase of tickets to their children these responses give only a very general picture. The results in these two schools seem to suggest that attitudes towards the Olympics (certainly positive feelings toward and levels of inspiration) are not directly or clearly contingent (or exclusively reliant) upon 'being there' (via a ticketed event). The data on perception and involvement covered here is reflected in other similar studies (e.g. Johnson, Fraser, Ganesh and Skowron, 2008), however, more directed research into the motivational consequences of ticket application and attendance would be useful.

To note, while students were fairly generous and open with their responses, our prompts for elaboration often went unanswered, or, answers were merely repeated. Our attempts, then, to articulate key impact mechanisms of mega-events within localised contexts (at least as far as these particular cohorts are concerned) are somewhat constrained. Consequently, we acknowledge here the difficulties of ascertaining (certainly from this small array of qualitative and quantitative data) the breadth and depth of influence an event such as the London 2012 Olympic Games may have on young peoples' lives, and, specifically their attitudes and engagement with sport, physical activity and physical education. Nonetheless, we believe there is value in affording young people a space to voice their thoughts and experiences. Moreover, when contextualised against the backdrop of mega-event scholarship, Olympic legacy criticism, and politicised physical activity/participation debates, the data presented here (and certainly range of voices we have tried to represent) does, we believe, remind us that young people are not passive recipients whose voices and opinions can be marginalised, suppressed, trivialised or written out of policy development and implementation, Olympic planning, and scholarly debate.

### **Physical educators work & maintaining legacy momentum**

Efforts made to capitalise on the Olympic Games (or other such mega-events) by government policy-makers, curriculum developers, physical activity providers and physical educationalists

appear worthy. The public hype generated by these events, for example, provide a visible cause and platform around which a set of civic, educational, health, physical activity, well-being and moralistic goals might be mobilised and implemented (Dickson, Benson, & Blackman, 2011; Carmichael, Grix & Palacios, 2012; Griffiths & Armour, 2013). With regards to the London 2012 Olympic Games, LOCOG's mission was to 'Inspire a generation' and propel enduring increases in (primarily youth-based) physical activity and sport participation. Against the broader context of 'Big society' political projects (Devine, 2013), promulgating the importance of physical activity and sport legacies was, thusly, instrumental, and furthermore, provided a mechanism through which the Government and LOCOG could legitimise the considerable economic, political and ideological investments made in the London 2012 Olympic/Paralympic Games. While it might seem logical to use the Olympic Games to provide positive physical activity and sporting experiences that might better the long-term vigour of the UK's youth, we contend here that this process cannot always be universally guaranteed or uniformly implemented. Rather, legacy engagement, pre-Olympic experiences, and physical activity and sport increases should better account for the nuances of young people's attitudes, beliefs, and complexities of their lived experiences (certainly those beyond the immediate Host City environment), and, be better mapped against the local context.

Across two cohorts (which invariably may share similarities and congruence with other UK school groups), we have illustrated what a body of young people made of their London 2012 Olympic experiences and their physical activity and sporting involvement. Unsurprisingly, irrespective of location there appears to be a range of attitudes toward physical education/sport/physical activity in the school setting. Aligning with the work of Bloyce & Lovett (2012), Bullough (2012), Charlton, (2010), Hohepa, Schofield and Kolt (2006) and others, this malaise also seemingly translates into variable sport participation beyond the classroom. That young people do not collectively all hold positive attitudes to physical education, sport and physical activity might, we suggest, make it difficult to implement legacy agendas, and/or, for physical educators to work on inspiring participation and attitudinal change.



However, there is some evidence that in these two schools young people were involved in, or at least aware of, informal and formal 'Olympic'-related activities in their school and local area. Moreover, and irrespective of sport and physical education, students appeared mindful of the positive consequences of the impending Olympic Games and the transformative significance of the event at an individual, local and national level. Although an Olympic Games may inspire young people, it remains hard to discern if and when this may correlate into increased participation, attitudinal shift or long-term social change. Akin to Cotton's (2012) research, although young people exhibit general excitement toward the Olympic Games this appears to be tempered with a degree of non-engagement and/or reservation.

Enthusiasm for the London Olympic Games, at least in our study, did not appear to be contingent on geographical locale. Both schools, for instance, demonstrated comparable levels of excitement for and inspiration toward the event and engagement with the general public's Olympic hype. It is useful to recall, too, Fusco's (2007) remarks about the important relationship between urban green space and youth play and physical activity to understand how the Olympic park symbolically operates as a physical and metaphorical space in which to enact legacy realities and aspirations (see also Charlton, 2010; Sampson, Harden, Tobi & Renton, 2012; Van Loon & Frank, 2011). Although the inner-city London school had the benefit of being within close proximity to the Olympic-park and associated urban regenerations development of the City's Eastern boroughs, this appeared not to influence their propensities toward physical activity and sport, or, enthusiasm for the Olympic Games to a greater degree than their West-Midlands counterparts.

### **Future considerations**

We acknowledge the constraints of our approach. Our choice of schools, for example, was particular and guided by our desire to have participatory schools that were comparable in size, staff-student ratios, facilities, and demographical composition. A broader array of schools, we understand, would have added further comparative data possibilities. Nonetheless, synthesis of our findings with current research literature suggests the results and experiences put forth in this study are concomitant with the aforementioned similar studies on physical education and

participation, youth attitudes to physical activity and sport, and, emergent legacy engagement. We also respect the limitations of having students self-report their physical activity and sporting involvement. Coupled to this, too, are the inevitable difficulties in students conceptualising these terms in comparable ways. Furthermore while efforts were made to adequately brief teachers who were facilitating the questionnaires, it is also possible that the potential guidance offered, or not offered, may have influenced the responses.

One area of development is in furthering the socio-economic breakdown of the data; in particular, with regards to gender. While data on gender was gathered, this variable was, for us, not an initial focal point of the longitudinal study. However, given the attention afforded to gender in perennial participatory debates in sport and physical education (see, for example, Velija & Kumar, 2009; Hills, 2007), a further investigation relating to legacy engagement certainly seems warranted. Notwithstanding these limitations, we believe our study presents a small, selective, yet valuable, initial foray into some of the ways young people have/have not responded to the Olympic Games and its associated hype in the led up to the London 2012 event. The work represented in this study also contributes to debates that seek to better situate and account for legacy imperatives and young people's experiences against the broader physical education, physical activity and sport participation context.

As our participants testify, and reflecting Homma and Masumoto's (2013) recent assertions, the Olympic Games *may* provide opportunities to promote participation in sport and physical activity. Mindful of the potential pedagogical utility of Olympics, we are not suggesting here that efforts within physical education to inspire physical activity and sport participation should be abandoned or diminished (these are, we believe, integral to the disciplinary fabric). What we argue is that ascertaining and guaranteeing a long-term relationship between a momentary Olympic Games and sustained increases in participation is problematic; namely, in the first instance, in that it may place a burden on physical educationalists (and also other providers) that are charged with fulfilling idealistic and ambitious (and oft unobtainable) legacy mandates. Fostering behavioural and attitudinal shifts regarding sport and physical activity among young people within physical education, we recognize, *does* matter. Yet, assuming that

a periodic elite sport event such as an Olympic Games will afford a highly appropriate or effective useful leveraging opportunity does not, in our opinion, adequately account for the myriad affections and proclivities young people have for physical activity, sport, and/or physical education. In addition to negotiating students' individual needs and concerns, and the idiosyncrasies of their local terrain, practitioners already have a considerable task meeting, implementing and monitoring ever-changing curricula and government guidelines and directives. Essentially, physical education and its teachers *may* provide opportunities to increase participation and foster long-term social change, and, young people *may* also engage with and be inspired by the Olympics. Yet as aforementioned scholars have forewarned, and as even our preliminary data indicate, to suggest the latter has a definitive impression on the former remains contestable.

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