

London 2012 & New Legacies of Learning: Citizen Media as Public Pedagogy

Emma Rich

One aspect of the Olympic and Paralympic legacies may be their capacity to provide a context through which young people can engage with the intersections between culture, media and social activism as a form of learning. However, has the London 2012 Cultural Olympiad been a context through which young people have been engaged as learners?

The London Organizing Committee for the Olympic Games (LOCOG) cultural narrative for 2012 focuses specifically on the connections between the Cultural Olympiad and learning; on the 'power of the Olympic and Paralympic Games to inspire children and young people across the UK and around the world ... to spark their imagination and enthusiasm for learning' (London 2012).

This sentiment coheres with the Olympic Charter, which discusses the fusion of culture and education and, more broadly,

embodies Pierre de Coubertin's vision for the Olympic movement. Indeed, the use of the Olympic and Paralympic Games as vehicles for learning through popular culture and everyday life may distinguish them as mega-events and reflects a broader recognition of the potential for learning outside of formal institutions such as school. One may even argue that there is a new form of knowledge economy that is driven through the hype and interest surrounding mega-events.

Much interest has been expressed in exploring the opportunities presented by the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games to re-vitalize curricular to enhance student learning opportunities.¹ Open Educational Resources 'learning legacies' have been developed to 'harness the rapidly growing interest in the Olympics and Paralympics, and their scope for engaging students and teachers alike'.

Yet, there is another trajectory that is shaping these learning aspirations that has a particular relevance for young people, that is, the social media revolution. Miah's (2011) 'media blueprint for

the London 2012 Games' proposes the creation of an international citizen journalism community that travels from one Games to the next, instantiated during 2012 as #media2012. The blueprint argues that "Olympic & Paralympic media centres must shift from being spaces of information and mediation, to become factories for creativity, collaboration, and engagement." (p.X)

The prospect of a significant population of self-designated citizen reporters who want to share and organize their Olympic and Paralympic content alludes to the spirit of the emergent field of studies now recognized as 'public pedagogy', which is

a concept focusing on various forms, processes, and sites of education and learning occurring beyond formal schooling and is distinct from hidden and explicit curricula operating within and through school sites. (Sandlin et al, 2011: 338-9)

Collectively, this work has focused on processes and sites of learning beyond formal education and schools (Giroux 2004a/b, Kellner 1995, Ellsworth 2005, Sandlin, Schultz and Burdick 2010). However, despite evidence of the transformative potential of these public pedagogies, Sandlin et al. (2011) report that very little empirical work has explored this from the

learners' perspective. The Olympic and Paralympic Games may provide a context where such learning can be evidenced and through which young people can actively engage with culture as public pedagogy, as reflected in the principles, values and aims of the #media2012 community see (The #media2012 Charter, 2012).

The current interest in the media legacy of the London 2012 Games provides a rich opportunity through which to examine the pedagogies of mega events; particularly the learning that takes place at the intersection between 'culture, media, informal sites of learning, democratic education, and social activism' (Sandlin et al, 2011: 339).

This position coheres with Public pedagogy scholars, such as Ellsworth (2005), who have argued that learning occurs not just in formal institutions but across a range of different sites and via modalities that might not be recognised as official 'pedagogy'. Indeed, following Giroux (1998), we can conceptualise the Olympic and Paralympic Games as a product and process which enacts particular forms of pedagogy and 'pedagogic address' (Ellsworth, 2005: 108).

Elsewhere, scholars have alluded to the pedagogical potential of sports mega events in the construction of nationalism, particular forms of citizenship and neoliberal ideologies (see

Silk, in press; Falcous & Silk, 2006). Such studies have been clearly influenced by work of public pedagogy scholars such as Giroux (1998; 2000) and his interrogation of hegemonic dimensions of the media.

However, we know relatively little about how and what the public *learn* through the pedagogies constituted through these events. Moreover, given the promulgation of the potential for young people's engagement with learning through the Games, it seems incumbent that we develop a better understanding of how *young people* are drawn into 'pedagogical address' (Ellsworth, 2005: 108).

In focusing on mega events as pedagogy, it is incumbent, as Savage (2010: 107) suggests, that we distinguish how such processes of learning 'differ from traditional accounts of socialisation'. Approaching discourses of the Games as 'pedagogical texts' rather than simply sports or media events might present avenues of 'inquiry into how citizenship, identity, and cultural performances are taught and learned via public transmission' (Sandlin et al, 2011: 352). In the context of Olympic and Paralympic legacies, such an approach can elucidate what and how young people learn through mega events and the complex processes of negotiation and resistance of publicly transmitted discourses. In this sense, if we are to understand how the Olympics and Paralympics operate as

public pedagogy, then I would concur with Savage (2010: 108) that we need to frame this in relation to 'far more nameable subcategories and *specific forms of pedagogy*, or in a pluralized sense, *pedagogies*'.

Focusing on the pedagogical potential of emerging media environments is timely, given that scholars have identified their importance as a 'resource for kids to develop their own cultural identities and sense of social agency' (Giroux, 2001d, p. 23). Indeed, a growing body of research in public pedagogy alludes to the resistant possibilities within digital cultural spaces, such as facebook (Freishtat and Sandlin, 2010), YouTube (Kellner and Kim, 2009) and more broadly cyberspace (Miah and Rich, 2008). In particular, this will provide a focal point for understanding the role of social media as public pedagogy from the *learner's perspective*:

within a wide variety of social institutions and formats including sports and entertainment media, cable television networks, churches [. . .] profound transformations have taken place in the public space, producing new sites of pedagogy marked by a distinctive confluence of new digital and media technologies (Giroux, 2004b: 497)

Young People and Citizen Media Projects

Over the past year, with research partners and institutions, I have been involved with a series of research activities on young people and citizen media as part of the South West #media2012 community, exploring what and how young people learn as they engage with citizen journalism around the Cultural Olympiad.

The first was undertaken with Liz Milner and Relays at Watershed² (Bristol) and research partners in Weymouth³, a venue for Olympic and Paralympic 2012 sailing competitions. A group of young people resident in Weymouth underwent training with sports writer David Goldblatt to learn how to be a 'citizen journalist' and produced a social media blog reporting on an Olympic Open Weekend which took place in Weymouth 23rd-24th July 2011 (<http://weymouth2012.posterous.com/>).

The second project (<http://disability-sport.posterous.com/>), involved the citizen journalism training of young people from city of Bristol College as part of research collaboration between University of Bath⁴, City of Bristol College and Relays at Watershed on 'Young People, Citizen Media and the Paralympics 2012'.⁵ This has involved young people interviewing, photographing, videoing and blogging about the

build up to the London 2012 Paralympic Games.

In addition to this, with the help of their course tutor Sacha Butterworth, the young people are producing a short film on disability sport due to be publicly screened in 2012. In both projects, smart phones and other mobile technology, such as iPads, were issued to participants to enable them to interview, blog and report on various aspects of the Olympic and Paralympic Games. Semi-structured interviews with these young people have explored their motivations for and experiences of being citizen journalists, focusing on the pedagogical flows and experiences from the learners' perspectives.

These projects provide a rich insight into the pedagogical features of new media infrastructure given that the London 2012 Games coincides with scheduled targets set by the Digital Britain report and Race Online 2012, suggesting a new phase in media engagement within Britain. Projects like those described above examine how social media spaces can provide opportunities to challenge traditional Olympic narratives and function as critical forms of public pedagogy.

In doing so, citizen media may provide a context for a more critical engagement with traditional discourses about the Olympic and Paralympic Games

and their beholden truths regarding the potential to create social and economic legacies; for example those which claim to tackle antisocial behaviour/ disaffection, improve educational attainment, increase participation in physical activity, or lead to healthier nations (eg focus on reduction in obesity) (See Shipway, 2007). Public pedagogical spaces, such as #media2012, contribute to critical intervention in relation to dominant discourses constructed to mobilize popular public support for the Games.

Miah's (2011) 'Blueprint' supports the need for legacies for the #media2012 network to be founded on principles of 'open media' to facilitate community legacies and build stories about London, the Nations and the Regions that reach an international audience. It will focus on reporting all non-sporting legacy stories, locating culture and art at the heart of its practice. These alternative legacy stories are providing the means through which young people learn a critical media engagement and may co-construct alternative perhaps even transgressive and resistant narratives, as alluded to in the comments from some of the young citizen journalists in our research projects:

there's quite a debate in Weymouth about the Games, people have been putting up with the roadworks for over a year

now and sometimes you get the idea of the Olympic Games no one is as in to it as they once may have been.. and if with all these events going on, the dome etc it really pinpoints what the event can bring to the town really

the art of it .. it's another element to the Olympics

(Comments from young people participating in young people, citizen media and the Olympic and Paralympic 2012 Games media2012)

Such media structures may provide critical transformative moments in young people's understandings of dominant values, such as those around ability and physical activity and representations of otherness. For example, the young people involved in our *young people, citizen media and the Paralympics 2012* project began to interpret 'disability' in alternative ways as they engaged more affectively with these issues through their interpretation and reporting at a Paralympic training site:

We also interviewed Ben Rushgrove who in the Beijing 2008 paralympics became a silver medalist holder. He came across as an extremely happy fella and if i had achieved as much as him i would also be extremely happy as its hard for any human to become/stay motivated and to there for overcome the

downsides to having a disability from sheer determination and being highly motivated is very inspiring (Young citizen journalist: <http://disability-sport.posterous.com/>)

Understanding these learning processes may help elucidate the 'relationships among pedagogy, democracy and social action – regardless of where those relationships occur' (Sandlin, Schultz and Burdick, 2010: 4). Additionally, the use of emerging technologies - which are now part of the everyday landscape of youth culture - allows an exploration of the educational force of everyday practices (Luke, 1996; Sandlin et al, 2011) such as social media exchange, to engage more critically with narratives of citizenship and subjectivity propagated through the Games.

To conclude, participatory media communities such as #media2012 can provide new 'conditions of possibility for young people's pedagogic engagements' (Savage, 2010: 105) which have 'democratic implications' facilitated through citizen journalism (Goode, 2009). Over the next year, with research partners, I will be further examining the cultural engagement and pedagogical processes experienced by these young people as they continue to engage with Olympic and Paralympic narratives through broader community media. This work will consider how young people learn through public

pedagogies of the Games in relation to the local spaces that mediate the ways knowledge is experienced, valued and reported.

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The #media2012 Charter (2012) see <http://www.media2012.org.uk>

Dr Emma Rich is Senior Lecturer in Education at University of Bath. E.Rich@bath.ac.uk www.emmarich.co.n

¹ In 2010 the hospitality, leisure, Sport and Tourism annual conference was focused on "Going for Gold" – Enriching Student Learning Through the 2012 Games, 9th November 2010, St. Hugh's College, Oxford.

² RELAYS at Watershed is Watershed's contribution to the region wide RELAYS project. RELAYS is an ambitious, innovative and flexible programme of linked cultural and sporting opportunities across the South West which marks one of the regions contributions to the forthcoming 2012 Olympiad in London. Watershed is one of three venues contributing cultural activity to the RELAYS celebrations. Thanks to Liz Milner for her work on this project.

³ Support at the event was also provided by Mathew Swindells, UWE and artist Kerri O'Connell. Many thanks also to Tim Abberley from Weymouth College, Alan Rogers, Arts Development Officer, Weymouth and Portland and Richard Crowe, London 2012 creative programmer south west.

⁴ The project is part of a wider research study at the University of Bath being undertaken by Dr Emma Rich, Dr Jill Porter and Dr Mike Silk . Their initial work has produced a number of narratives based on the experiences of young people with disabilities that speak to some of the contemporary issues regarding disability and participation in sport and activity. confidence and so on.

⁵ Support at the event was also provided by Mathew Swindells, UWE and Relays. With special thanks to: Rob Elchuk, Kate Grey, Simone Lewis, Ben Rushgrove, Greg Sharp, Mark Skimming, who generously gave their time to help with this project.