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## **The Inspire>Aspire Values Poster Award and the Spirit of London 2012**

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### Abstract

Inspire>Aspire – Exploring Olympic and Paralympic Values – has been running in schools over the last 2 years leading up to London 2012, and is currently running a legacy year to find out who inspired young people at London 2012. This paper will report on the transformative process of translating inspiration into aspiration via the structured values poster format developed over a number of years. The London Games highlighted exceptional human achievement and provided a unique learning opportunity for young people to understand what it takes to develop their characters and capacities and to achieve outstanding success in any field. Students reflected on how to embody the Olympic values of excellence, friendship and respect, and the Paralympic values of courage, determination, equality and inspiration into their lives. The paper will also explain the principles of the values poster and how it is being translated into a new format for the Commonwealth Games to be held in Glasgow in 2014.

*“Acts form habits, habits form character.”*

*Aristotle*

### Introduction and Background

The idea of the values poster award came originally from Sir John Templeton’s Laws of Life Essay Contest, launched in 1987. In the mid-1990s, Sir John published his book *Worldwide Laws of Life*, which I reviewed for *Network Review*. A new edition of the book was published as *Wisdom from World Religions*. The format is 200 sections to be studied over 40 weeks with 5 sections per week. Each section begins with a quotation or maxim followed by some commentary interspersed with stories and quotations. At the end of each week there are questions for reflection. My initial thought was to replicate the Laws of Life Essay Contest in the UK, but it proved hard to engage schools. I therefore conceived the idea of an online course based on Sir John's book. In order to implement this, I indexed his book and came up with forty themes and qualities divided into four sections:

- **Personal development**
  - Positive outlook
  - Gratitude
  - Love
  - Enthusiasm
  - Happiness/joy
  - Perseverance
  - Generosity
  - Honesty/integrity
  - Humility/modesty
  - Wisdom

- **Principles for successful living**
  - Creative thinking
  - Learning
  - Focus
  - Hard work
  - Ideals/vision
  - Purpose/goals
  - Courage
  - Friendship
  - Confidence
  - Self-discipline
- **Resilience (turning things around)**
  - Problems > Solutions
  - Potential > Actual
  - Loss > Gain
  - Pessimism > Optimism
  - Worry > Moving on
  - Mistakes > Learning
  - Anger > Calm
  - Put it off > Do it now
  - Fear > Fearlessness
  - Stress > Stillness
- **Personal relationships**
  - Co-operation
  - Responsibility
  - Empathy
  - Trust
  - Kindness
  - Forgiveness
  - Respect
  - Loyalty
  - Listening
  - Openness

With the help of DC Thomson, I designed a learning process in the form of a large and colourful A2 poster with different sections. In the first sections students had to identify the three qualities from each main section above that they thought most important and write a short commentary on their top choice. Then there were boxes to list their favourite quotations and describe their favourite story. The next task was to select an inspirational figure who embodied some of the qualities chosen by the student. Finally, there was a large section for personal reflection—this was effectively the essay- and a small section introduced later on, personal plan. The whole piece of work was transcribed onto this large poster, and

could therefore be displayed. Schools liked the poster format, and the idea soon caught on with 20 schools and 2,700 participants in the first year. This has since grown to more than 25,000 a year.

At the same time, each theme or quality has its own page on our website, so that students could click on the quality and go through to the page. Each page has a maxim or quotation at the top and bottom, then some text from Sir John as well as some of the stories and quotations he selected. We also introduced a number of Aesop's Fables, and The Hare and the Tortoise as well as The Bear and the Travellers proved very popular. A feature of the site was that many stories and quotations were in boxes that the students had to click in order to open, thus encouraging active participation. In addition, quotations were accompanied by biographies so that students could learn something about the life of the person whose words they had just read – for instance Ralph Waldo Emerson, Seneca, William James, Eleanor Roosevelt and many others. In some cases this could have a powerful effect: on the Confidence page we had a famous quote from Helen Keller – ‘life is either a daring adventure or nothing.’ Students were intrigued to find out who had said this and therefore clicked on her biography and were astonished to read her story. This helped them reflect on their own situation in relation to Helen and to count their blessings. Indeed, gratitude is a quality especially emphasised by Sir John.

In 2007, we produced our first book, launched at the Scottish Parliament in the spring of 2008, and of which the subtitle was ‘from inspiration to aspiration.’ By this time, we had discovered that the poster process reflected this transformation. In that year, we redesigned the poster format so that it became three A4 pages folding into one A4 - making it much easier to handle. We also developed a route map for students on the web site to take them through the process.

As an indication of the qualities most important to students, positive outlook was the most important in the first section, while girls rated love more highly than boys. In the second section, it was not surprising that confidence was the first choice for both girls and boys, but it is interesting that courage came next—especially moral courage. Mistakes > Learning was most highly rated in the third section, with students reflecting that it was liberating to feel that they could make mistakes on a journey to improvement. This was perhaps encouraged by some quotations on site, for instance Joseph Conrad -‘if you don't make mistakes, you won't make anything’, or from Einstein ‘he who has never made a mistake has never tried anything new.’ By far the most popular quality overall was trust, with students observing how important this is in their relationships.

For the last two years, we have been focusing on the Inspire>Aspire Programme - exploring Olympic and Paralympic Values. For this, we designed a new poster format using the same principles, but this time applied specifically to the three Olympic values of excellence, respect and friendship and the four Paralympic values of courage, determination, equality and inspiration. So the main object of the exercise became, for the student, how to apply these Olympic and Paralympic values to their lives.

This time, we structured adjectives under the values as follows:

**Excellence**

- Focused
- Enterprising
- Ambitious
- Purposeful
- Creative
- Organised
- Wise

**Respect**

- Patient
- Tolerant
- Open-minded
- Reliable
- Considerate
- Good at listening

**Friendship**

- Cheerful
- Trustworthy
- Forgiving
- Generous
- Caring/kind
- Loyal
- Appreciative

**Courage**

- Honest
- Confident
- Resilient
- Positive
- Resource full
- Fearless
- Optimistic

**Determination**

- Persistent
- Decisive
- Self-disciplined
- Enthusiastic
- Hard-working
- Committed

- Calm

### Equality

- Selfless
- Flexible
- Cooperative
- Approachable
- Modest
- Fair

This time we made a slight modification. Rather than asking students simply to rate the importance of a quality, we ask them to assess what they were best at and what they needed to work on in two separate boxes. We believe that this has enhanced the effectiveness of this part of the intervention by directly relating these qualities to the students themselves rather than making a more abstract judgement. Hence we will be carrying this format forward into the Commonwealth Games poster template.

We have done a fairly detailed analysis of qualities chosen by students over the last 2 years.

### Chart Analysis

		2012	2011
Girls/Boys	N 2011 = 517	31/69	35/65
	N 2012 = 1,092		
	Primary	24%	3%
	Year 8	19%	25%
	Year 9	37%	59%

### Excellence

Strength	Creative	32%	32%
	Organised	21%	24%
	Focused	20%	15%
	Ambitious	18%	22%

Weakness	Organised	36%	29%
	Focused	30%	10%
	Creative	11%	33%

### Respect

Strength	Understanding	25%	31%
	Reliable	24%	20%

Weakness	Patient	51%	10%
	Tolerant	11%	47%
	Reliable	4%	14%
	Good at listening	12%	3%

<b>Friendship</b>			
Strength	Cheerful	30%	27%
	Trustworthy	25%	25%
Weakness	Forgiving	30%	28%
	Appreciative	25%	22%
<b>Courage</b>			
Strength	Honest	33%	34%
	Confident	22%	17%
	Positive	17%	20%
Weakness	Confident	35%	39%
	Fearless	22%	21%
<b>Determination</b>			
Strength	Hard-working	35%	32%
	Committed	18%	17%
	Enthusiastic	18%	17%
Weakness	Calm	32%	31%
	Decisive	23%	23%
<b>Equality</b>			
Strength	Co-operative	32%	28%
	Approachable	22%	17%
Weakness	Flexible	31%	26%
	Co-operative	21%	21%

There is little space here for a detailed analysis of the above findings, but a few general remarks are in order. The sample size within 2012 was twice as large as 2011, and contained a much higher percentage of primary pupils (24% rather than 3%). The percentage of boys and girls is broadly similar. Differences between the years may well be accounted for by the inclusion of more primary pupils, but this will require further analysis to determine. It was striking to find under Excellence that the numbers in 2012 describing focused as a weakness increased from 10% to 30%, while those describing creative as a weakness fell from 33% in 2011 to 11% in 2012. Does this say something about the transition from primary to secondary school?

Another difference emerged under Respect, where the main weakness in 2012 was identified as impatience (51%) while in 2011 it was tolerance at 47%. This may have something to do with vocabulary, and it is interesting that if one adds together impatience and tolerance in both years, the total in 2012 is 62% and for 2011 57%. Most of the other results showed striking consistency and ranking order between the years.

## **Methodology and Poster Format**

The fundamental purpose of the poster award is the translation of inspiration into enduring aspiration. We have found from experience that the poster format encourages young people to reflect on their life experience - as with the Laws of Life Essay Contest - and to express their own thoughts and feelings by writing from the heart. They gain increased self-awareness and self-knowledge, and are encouraged to relate their reflections to their plans for the future. The values poster concept now has a track record in drawing out young people's capacity to develop specific values and personal qualities that will stand them in good stead throughout their personal and professional lives.

More specifically, students begin by reflecting on their personal qualities. In the first version of the poster, as already indicated, this meant choosing the three most important qualities in each box, and writing a short comment on their first choice. In the second version, they applied these qualities directly to themselves. Making these choices can be quite hard, and students soon realised that all are the qualities listed are important, whether or not they have selected them. This is an important insight in itself. It also begins to help them realise that what really matters is who they are who they become as people. This process enhances their self-awareness and self-knowledge: students themselves tell us that they would never have discovered some new things about themselves if they had not done the exercise. I believe that life is ultimately lived from the inside out, rather than the outside in. As William James put this: 'The greatest discovery of my generation is that human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives.'

In the first version of the poster, we asked students to describe their favourite story. Some of these came from the website, but others were chosen by the students themselves, reflecting their current reading. In the Olympic poster, we did not have room for this feature, but we are reinstating it in the Commonwealth Games version.

The next component invites students to choose inspiring quotations and comment on them. This use of maxims is powerful and was a particular passion of Sir John. At a time when students read less extensively, the wisdom encapsulated in short quotations can provide some guidelines for life. Many quotations are listed on the website, but equally, students were able to find interesting ones for themselves. Here is a representative sample from last year:

*"Stand up for what is right even if you are the only one standing"* Martin Luther King

*"It is impossible to live without failing at something, unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all, in which case you fail by default"* J K Rowling

*"Champions aren't made in gyms. Champions are made from something they have deep inside them – a desire, a dream, a vision. They have to have the skill and the will. But the will must be stronger than the skill"* Muhammad Ali



*“Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you strength, the patience and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world”* Harriet Tubman

*“The great pleasure in life is doing what people say you cannot do”* Walter Bagehot

The next section is central to the whole process: the students select an inspirational figure to research and write about. In the first version of the poster, this could be anyone, and we found that mothers were the top choice, partly because around three quarters of the prize entries came from girls. In the Olympic version, students have to choose an Olympian or Paralympian (last year 67% chose Olympians and 17% Paralympians), and this year they have to write about who inspired them at London 2012. Reflection on inspirational figures is a significant component of the translation of aspiration into inspiration, especially when students discover how many obstacles and challenges their inspirational figures have had to overcome. This enables them to realise the importance of courage and persistence.

In the final section, students were asked to write about what was important to them in life. In the Olympic version we made this more specific by asking them a series of key questions:

- 1) What kind of person do you want to be?
- 2) What do you want to be good at?
- 3) What do you want to achieve in your life?
- 4) What do you want to contribute to others?
- 5) How are you going to achieve your goals? (this corresponds to the personal plan in the earlier version)

### **Transformational Results**

We receive similar positive feedback every year from all age groups. As a detailed example, here is what the 2012 London Gold medal winner said: *I have learned many things with this project. It has given me the chance to make a thorough analysis of my character, my strengths and weaknesses. This is important so that I have a wider picture on the aspects of my personality that I would like/need to improve. Researching the life of an inspirational athlete has also been extremely useful for me as it highlights all the qualities a person should have in order to achieve great things. I have also been able to reflect on my future, the goals I want to achieve and how I'm going to achieve them. They have always been at the back of my mind but this is the first time I have actually written them down, which makes them seem more achievable. Overall, with this project I have been able to get to know myself in more depth, something that is extremely important.*

**Giulia Battaglia-Trovato**, Putney High School (Year 9)

Other elements mentioned include:

- Learning more about yourself and the skills and qualities you need to succeed in life as well as identifying your personal values

- Learning about your strengths and weaknesses - what kind of person you want to be when you are older
- Never to give up and always to believe in yourself
- Learning how to achieve your goals
- The importance of working hard and trying your best
- The importance of strength of character when things go wrong
- No matter what, you should always follow your dreams
- That your actions can inspire others
- Realising that life is not just about yourself, but about those less fortunate than you

Here is another individual comment:

*It is unbelievable how much I learned in such a short time. I have realised that if I love something I should go for it and never give up on the way. The project has given me the strength and ability to believe in myself and have confidence to do things that I would never have dreamed of doing before. I think I've also learned not to take anything for granted and to appreciate everything I have.*

**Jodie Stevenson**, Banff Academy

The comments show that the values poster process can have a powerful impact on young people for the reasons analysed above. I am therefore confident that a poster with a similar structure and process can have an equally potent effect -we will be able to test this again with the new Commonwealth format.

### **The Spirit of London 2012**

*Inspire a Generation* - I believe that the spirit of London 2012 is captured in the Inspire-Aspire values poster. The whole country witnessed extraordinary feats from such people as Mo Farah, Jessica Ennis, Katherine Grainger, Ben Ainslie, Sir Chris Hoy, David Weir and Eleanor Simmonds. Those lucky enough to be in the stadium, in the velodrome or at the rowing lake said that it was one of the greatest experiences of their lives. The atmosphere was buzzing as people celebrated a new sense of community and potential, transforming customary cynicism and apathy into empowerment and inspiration. This demonstrates the key importance of attitude in transforming inspiration into aspiration. As Henry Ford famously said, 'Whether you think you can or whether you think you can't, either way you're right.' Nowhere was this more apparent than in the Paralympic spirit, and I can't wait to read more about who inspired our young people at London 2012.

[www.inspire-aspire.org.uk](http://www.inspire-aspire.org.uk)