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# **Developing outdoor and adventurous activities for co-existence and reconciliation in Israel: an Anglo-German approach**

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Conflict resolution between different social groups is an issue that has continued to gain high profile news coverage both nationally and in a global context. In this respect, it has been shown that carefully designed and managed physical activity programmes can make a small but nonetheless invaluable contribution to reconciliation and co-existence within deeply-divided communities and socially fractured societies. Where this has been successful it is possible that projects such as these can be designed to be tangible products that not only facilitate co-existence work but can also be part of a more sustainable product that local coaches, teachers and community leaders can continue to promote through the teaching of core values and principles. This paper highlights how outdoor and adventurous activities (OAAs) can be used as a means to address co-existence and reconciliation within a deeply-divided society and outlines the work that is currently being undertaken in northern Israel by an English and German project team.

## **Introduction**

Since 2001 the University of Brighton and the German Sport University, Cologne, have been involved in a sport-related peace project in the Galilee region of northern Israel. Led by university lecturers and volunteer student coaches from English and German Universities, the 'Football for Peace Project' (F4P) features the setting up and running of coaching camps for 10- to 14-year-old boys and girls from Jewish and Arab communities in northern Israel. The primary aim of the project is to provide an opportunity, through football and outdoor education, for children from Arab and Jewish communities to meet and participate together in teams and groups so that cultural bridges can be built between neighbouring communities that are socially

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segregated. In the process it is hoped that a small contribution to community relations in this divided society could be achieved. Football was the medium through which the project team pursued a community relations agenda because it is a popular team game with young people throughout the country, irrespective of ethnicity, national identity or religious affiliation. Likewise, having children from different communities engaged in aspects of outdoor education could develop trust, respect, personal development, friendship and an appreciation of each other's cultures.

Part of the work that takes place in Israel involves children participating in a range of outdoor and adventurous activities (OAAs) in order to promote co-operation between Arab and Jewish communities. Based on the assumption that sport in general (and football in particular) has potential for aggressive behaviour and is thus a big challenge for children to work together in the right way, it was considered that using elements of OAA could facilitate and accelerate the team-building process and therefore help to achieve the aims of the project such as to develop mutual respect and understanding for each other, take responsibility for themselves, and to trust each other. In this respect, a key emphasis of the overall curriculum is the teaching and practical application of five core values (neutrality; equity and inclusion; respect; trust; and responsibility) that are designed to help to resolve conflict and promote community reconciliation among young people. This project has increasingly involved co-operation between the University of Brighton, the German Sports University, the British Council and the British Embassy in Israel as well as the English Football Association who are key partners in organization and fundraising.

There are a range of projects that have addressed the outcomes of a 'sport for peace' curriculum (Ennis, Solmon, Satina, Loftus, Mensch, & McCauley, 1999) and have focused on interdisciplinary teaching through outdoor education, as well as teaching personal responsibility through sport education and physical activity (Bunting, 2005; Hastie & Buchanan, 2000; Hellison, 1995). There are, however, few projects that are underpinned by a curriculum that develops technical and practical skills while at the same time articulates, exemplifies and imparts the qualities and values upon which mutual understanding and reconciliation are built. In this respect, both conceptually and through application, the OAA and football-related curricula are built upon a carefully designed curriculum that includes both a football coaching manual (Lambert, Stidder, & Sugden, 2004) as well as an 'outdoor education' manual (Stidder & Haasner, 2006).

The broad aims of the project overall are that by providing the opportunity for young people to learn, play and work together, distrust might be overcome and mutual understanding and respect across cultural boundaries promoted. Specifically, the aims are to:

- provide opportunities for social contact across community boundaries;
- promote mutual understanding;
- engender in participants a commitment to peaceful coexistence; and
- enhance community relations.

## **Background**

Beginning in 2001 with one project for 60 children, the project has grown significantly and has virtually doubled every year. Unfortunately, the 2006 project had to be abandoned at the eleventh hour due to the outbreak of war in the northern part of Israel but the UK management team have not been deterred. The team flew out to Israel in December 2006 to run a small-scale residential project for 200 children near to the Lebanese border. In March 2007 some 34 sports leaders from Israel were involved in a UK-based training programme working alongside UK and German volunteer coaches over 4 days. The training event took place at the University of Brighton's Chelsea School in Eastbourne. During the summer of 2007 the management team organized their most ambitious project to date. Based in the Galilee region of northern Israel there were 12 projects including one exclusively for girls, serving 24 Arab and Jewish communities, involving more than 100 local volunteer coaches and community leaders who, alongside 50 University volunteer coaches, catered for the needs of almost 1200 children.

## **An Anglo-German approach to teaching OAA in Israel**

After 2003 the University of Brighton has been able to recruit students from other institutions outside the UK. Through the EU-sponsored Erasmus exchange programme it was hoped that an existing partnership with the German Sports University in Cologne could help the management team to view the community relations and co-existence work from a non-UK perspective. Based on discussions and previous evaluations with the German Sports University the inclusion of outdoor and adventurous activities was considered to be a valuable addition to the existing framework whereby the five core values could be integrated into a series of problem-solving and decision-making tasks. In this respect, it was recognized that OAA could provide opportunities for personal and social development through physical challenges in the outdoors where a sense of teamwork could be achieved amongst the Arab and Jewish children who ordinarily would not interact with one another despite the fact that their respective communities bordered on each other.

While the main focus of the project centred on football-related activities it was felt that larger and more sustained outdoor experiences could enhance the overall programme. With this in mind both the English and German institutions have worked closely to develop carefully structured learning activities linked to outdoor education, which are related to the overall aims and objectives. From a UK perspective there is considerable evidence to show that experiences of OAA can add value to the lives of young people providing that they are properly conceived, well planned, efficiently taught and effectively followed up. For example, these types of experiences are often memorable for the individuals concerned and can lead to personal growth and enhanced social skills (OFSTED, 2004; Rickinson et al. 2004). Research has also shown that children, in general, have a strong natural desire for adventure and a natural curiosity to explore and in this respect, OAA can fulfil this

natural desire to meet challenging situations and can stimulate self-discipline, judgement, responsibility, relationships, and personal awareness (Barrett & Greenaway, 1995; Cooper, 2005; Gair, 1997; Hopkins & Putnam, 1993).

The over-riding rationale for the inclusion of OAA within the programme was based upon the notion that all children can enhance their personal, physical and social education through a range of experiences that encourage them to work collaboratively in an outdoor environment. In the context of the political and social structure of Israel, collaborative work between the University of Brighton and the German Sports University focused on an outdoor education programme which was considered to have a positive impact on young people's self-perceptions, attitudes and beliefs and could lead to increased inter-personal and social skills such as group cohesion and teamwork.

### *Core values and principles*

Within the outdoor education programme the core themes and principles mentioned earlier are emphasized by motivating groups of children through enthusiastic verbal and physical actions such as high fives, team or individualized handshakes, team cheers, group huddles, warm-up type activities, buddy systems, team talks, and learning someone else's physical greeting. The following section outlines the principles of the project based upon a set of common values.

- **Neutrality** – F4P is a politics-free zone. Those who participate in F4P leave their political views and ideological positions outside including participants, coaches and parents.
- **Equity and inclusion** – Within F4P all participants are treated equally and the commitment to equality is recognized in the way that activities are organized and run. Those who want to participate can take part regardless of ethnicity, race, religion, gender and ability.
- **Trust** – The appreciation of one's own individuality and the value of others in a context of social diversity.
- **Respect** – Respect for oneself, respect for team members and opponents, respect for coaches and parents.
- **Responsibility** – Working with and for others, requiring mutual aid and self-sacrifice.

### *The development of the outdoor education programme in Israel*

For the purposes of this project outdoor education is a generic term which is considered to be synonymous with forms of physical activity and used to embrace different types of outdoor and adventurous activities such as trust games, team-building activities, problem-solving, decision-making scenarios and aspects of orienteering. Initially it proved difficult to engage some children in what was termed the 'outdoor education programme' as they viewed this as a distraction from the football-related

activities. In contrast, the children who began with the outdoor and adventurous activities demonstrated considerably better behaviour during the football coaching sessions that followed.

Based on these observations which were consistent at all of the project sites, it was decided to incorporate a series of trust games and problem-solving activities prior to starting each football coaching session. This proved to be very effective in breaking down initial barriers and anxieties amongst the Jewish and Arab children and enabled the leaders to integrate the children more effectively into co-operative football practices (Stidder, 2007). It is acknowledged, however, that the subsequent improvements in behaviour may have equally been attributed to the fact that simply playing in teams may have enabled this to happen. None the less, after a series of evaluation sessions with local Israeli coaches the project team introduced a programme of OAA within the coach education curriculum and the subsequent training weeks that took place in England in order to promote team building, trust and understanding before the introduction of the football-related activities.

#### *The development of the outdoor education manual*

While getting children to enjoy learning and playing together in non-threatening settings is one of the guiding principles of F4P, simply playing is not sufficient to promote the kind of interaction that can allow longer-term relationships and cross-community understanding to flourish.

A major innovation, therefore, has been the development of the Football for Peace outdoor education manual (Stidder & Haasner, 2006), the idea behind which is to underpin the technical sport-specific coaching programme with the values and principles which in practice help to promote mutual understanding and inclusive citizenship. Using selected OAA, each of the activity sessions have been very carefully designed so that each of the five principles of fair play (Neutrality, Equity and Inclusion, Respect, Trust and Responsibility) are exemplified through the nature of the activities being undertaken. All of the activities provide leaders with ideas of how to introduce OAA within safe and manageable environments without the need for specialist equipment or particular expertise. In this context all activities within the outdoor education manual are supported by the promotion of citizenship with the intention of addressing issues of co-existence and reconciliation.

#### *The UK-based training week*

Since 2004 sports leaders from the various Arab and Jewish communities in Israel have attended a UK-based training week which has focused on the teaching of the five core values. The outdoor education programme has consisted of a range of activities that could be transferred within the Israeli setting and has included activities that encourage collaborative group work such as route planning, expedition, orienteering, raft building, trust games, team building, problem-solving and

joint decision-making tasks. In this respect the Israeli sports leaders have been encouraged to promote the development of the core values by allowing children to improve their own learning and performance and work with others from different social backgrounds to solve problems collaboratively using verbal and non-verbal communication skills. In this context, the coach education programme emphasizes activities that encourage children to plan their own adventure activities and assess the types of problems they may encounter using numerical skills, map reading techniques and navigational skills. There are now plans to develop the training of the Israeli leaders at the German Sports University of Cologne in March 2008.

### **Using the outdoor education manual: a process-based approach to teaching OAA**

Within the outdoor education manual a child-centred teaching approach through the processes of planning, performing and evaluating is used to develop practical knowledge and understanding. This process-based approach focuses on team work through learning from doing, ownership of learning and collaborative learning.

In many ways the outdoor education manual has encompassed many of the government aims for citizenship and social inclusion in PE and sport in which children develop mutual respect and understanding for each other and learn to become informed and responsible citizens (Department for Education and Employment [DfEE] and Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [QCA], 1999). In this respect it has been shown that learning through outdoor and adventurous activities can have a major part to play in developing citizenship amongst young people and help potential leaders to think carefully about their teaching strategies within the context of deep social division (OFSTED, 2004).

Based upon the specific curriculum written for the project several intended learning outcomes were considered with respect to the broader aims of the project. These intended learning outcomes are based on the national curriculum for citizenship in England (DfEE and QCA, 1999) and include the following.

#### *Promotion of communication skills (verbal and non-verbal)*

- Enhance interaction.
- Breakdown inhibitions.
- Build trust, co-operation and sharing.
- Increase working relationships.
- Develop leadership skills.
- Enhance teamwork.
- Allow joint decision-making and problem-solving.
- Encourage children to work outside 'safe' friendship boundaries.
- Develop positive personal, social and moral qualities.

Through a carefully selected range of OAA tasks it has been possible to address these outcomes. For example, the children have to rely at times on using non-verbal instructions as the programme is tri-lingual, which encourages them to think about ways of interacting with each other and reaching a collaborative decision in respect of solving a particular task. Community sports leaders ensure that children work with as many different groups as possible by rotating the pairings or groups as often as possible.

In this respect, DfEE and QCA (1999, p. 7) have identified opportunities for young people to develop citizenship in the following ways which have informed the development of the Outdoor education manual and has particular relevance for children from divided societies.

- Spiritual development, through fostering childrens' awareness and understanding of meaning and purpose in life and of differing values in human society.
- Moral development, through helping children to develop a critical appreciation of issues of right and wrong, justice, fairness, rights and obligations in society.
- Social development, through helping children to acquire the understanding and skills needed to become responsible and effective members of society.
- Cultural development, through helping children to understand the nature and role of the different groups to which they belong, and promoting respect for diversity and difference.

### *The outdoor education programme*

The overall programme is designed to run over a 5-day period where the emphasis of each day is on one of the five principles and core values that underpin the curriculum. Children arrive at each project site divided into two mixed age groups and take part in a 2-hour football-related programme and a 2-hour programme of outdoor and adventurous activities. The outdoor education manual includes advice, guidance and practical ideas for community leaders to use during the 2-hour sessions.

Within the manual there is a focus on personal and social development using a number of trust games that can promote feelings of co-operation and respect, enhance children's ability to work together and develop a sense of responsibility. These include activities that aim to involve children in a series of 'ice-breaking' games (catching a partner, back to back sits, blindfolded walk in pairs, re-ordering in groups, and rope running, for example). Children also have the opportunity to engage in a series of problem-solving activities ('radioactive rods, blindfold square, stepping stones, human knot, floating stick and 20-m crossing for example). Depending on facilities, many of the Israeli community leaders have been trained to teach aspects of orienteering, which have been integrated into the outdoor education programme at some of the project sites involved. Feedback from various project leaders in 2005 suggested that orienteering in particular had proved to be very successful and extremely popular amongst the children (Stidder, 2007). At one project

site, for example, children took part in a highly organized orienteering event through each other's communities and worked collaboratively in groups to solve particular navigational problems that were designed to be adventurous in nature.

### *The application of outdoor education for co-existence*

In providing OAA it was acknowledged that the community leaders in Israel and student volunteers faced a number of constraints within their planning and the provision of OAA was not necessarily going to be a straightforward task. Shortage of equipment, lack of expertise and facilities were just a few of the difficulties that impinged upon a leader's decision-making. However, the application of the outdoor education programme has been designed so that many of these issues can be overcome through the use of the immediate surroundings and local environment without the need for specialized equipment, expertise or wild terrain.

In the context of the facilities available the educational benefits highlighted earlier can be developed through an integrated approach to learning, decision-making and problem-solving. This has been organized at some project sites through paired and group orienteering over long and short courses. Children plan how to complete an orienteering course, hand in a copy to the leader prior to departure, record the order in which they visit each control and record the time it has taken. Opportunities for evaluation and self-reflection have then been the focal point for team or group discussion between the Arab and Jewish children. This has already been shown to be extremely successful both in promoting the core values and principles within the four UK-based training weeks and various projects in Israel that have taken place from 2004 to 2007.

### **Future research**

While at the time of writing there is little empirical evidence to report, the project team does have anecdotal evidence to show that many of the children have gained both personally but also educationally from such experiences. In this respect, the children have had an enormous amount of fun, made new friends, were given opportunities to visit each other's communities and started to view 'the other' in different ways (Sugden & Wallis, 2007).

There is certainly a strongly held belief amongst the management team that it has a positive impact upon the lives of the children and parents within this area of northern Israel testimony to which has been the increasing numbers of participants over the past 6 years. However, this needs to be tested against systematically gathered objective empirical evidence in terms of the extent to which this project is achieving its aims. It is the intention, therefore, to enter a period of consolidation rather than expansion and focus on a multi-method and multi-layered approach to gathering such evidence. The strategy is to develop a 3-year longitudinal research project through case studies of selected project sites using a series of research instruments such as journals, questionnaires, project reports, in-depth sampling of particular project sites and post-project plenary evaluations to gather such evidence.

If this particular project is seen to be successful it is hoped that it may be possible to seek other sources of funding from national funding agencies in order to establish an exit route and take the project elsewhere. In this respect, it is hoped that future projects might help to facilitate programmes whereby community/sport leaders can begin to develop sustainable cross-community links and networks through sport and outdoor and adventurous activities.

## **Conclusion**

The Israeli model has provided excellent training and preparation for volunteer coaches based in Israel and from a University perspective is a very good advertisement for English and German excellence in education and training. In this context the model is adaptable to any social context where there is community disharmony and dovetails with existing sports-based enterprises both nationally and internationally. Moreover, the team with whom the children have worked have developed a reservoir of knowledge, expertise, logistical know-how and experienced leadership and there is now access to a pool of highly trained and well qualified volunteer coaches and teachers who can make a contribution to the project's position on anti-racism and increase the profile in the local community. Ultimately this can develop positive behaviours and attitudes that transfer beyond the project and encourage team bonding and respect amongst young people who may share experiences and empathy for one another and enable youngsters to become responsible citizens of their own communities.

Overall, the F4P programme has provided Arab and Jewish children with an experience that they could share with their respective friends and families within their own communities and an insight into the positive effects that well-managed programmes such as this could have on their overall perspectives of each other. In a small, but nonetheless significant way, the cascading effect of these experiences upon the extended families of these children may have contributed towards an understanding of the significance of these types of activities from their own and other cultures, and subsequently help to recognize how activities and public performance give a sense of cultural identity, and consider how outdoor education can transcend cultural boundaries. The management team now plan to build upon the experiences of Israel and intend to make grass-roots interventions into the cultures of Northern Ireland, Cyprus and South Africa while at the same time making a contribution to political debates and policy development around outdoor education and sport in those countries.

## **Biographical notes**

Gary Stidder is the PGCE route leader for PE initial teacher training and co-ordinator of all outdoor education modules at the University of Brighton, Chelsea School. He is also an integral member of the University's Mentor Liaison Group that oversees the training of PE mentors in schools. Gary is a former secondary school PE teacher and was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship to the USA during

1990–1991. Gary is a founder member of the Football for Peace Project in Israel and is the coeditor of *Equity and Inclusion in Physical Education in Sport* (2003) published by Routledge. His main academic interests include gender issues in PE, pedagogy of teaching and learning and mentoring and has written extensively on these issues.

Adrian Haasner is a lecturer in outdoor education at the German Sports University in Cologne, Germany. He spent a year at the University of Brighton, Chelsea School as part of the Erasmus Exchange Programme during 2002–2003. Since then Adrian has been involved in the Football for Peace project in Israel and has now taken a leading role within the management committee. Adrian's main academic interests relate to the teaching of outdoor education.

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