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David Geldart – Improving health and education in South Africa and the UK through educational exchange



Over the past 14 years, David Geldart (M.Ed Physical Education 1989) has helped to change the lives of students in South Africa and the UK; he has established the Bambisanani Partnership, an educational exchange which uses sport to promote education, health, global citizenship and leadership.

The work of the Bambisanani Partnership covers a broad range of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, from Goal 1: No Poverty, through to Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals. However, David's work has direct links to Goal 3: to ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages, and Goal 4: to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning. He told us more about the work his charity is involved in, and how it is making a difference to the lives of those who take part.



How did you get involved in the work you're doing now?

In 2006 I founded the Bambisanani Partnership, which came about following an invitation from the South African government to develop a school-based sports project in the eighteen most deprived areas of South Africa. I began by establishing a link between my own school, St. Mary's High School in Leeds, and Mnyakanya High School, which serves one of KwaZulu-Natal's most deprived rural communities. We brought students together from the UK and South Africa in a collaboration that went on to inspire young people across many areas of the curriculum – not just sport – becoming embedded in the lives of both schools.

'Bambisanani' is a Zulu word meaning 'working hand in hand' and aptly describes the work and vision of this inspirational partnership that uses sport as a catalyst to promote education, health, global citizenship and leadership. One of our fundamental aims has been to create genuine 'two way' learning between students of both the UK and South Africa, with a key focus on 'working together and learning together'.

Fourteen years on, and this pioneering partnership has gained international acclaim for its work – we are now a multi-award winning charity. The project has not only been sustained, it has grown and expanded to involve other schools and indeed universities. Significantly, The University of Leeds and Leeds Trinity University are now both heavily involved in the partnership, and like St. Mary's School, students regularly visit South Africa in order to extend and develop the partnership's various programmes, such as 'Developing Leadership through Sport', 'Cycling for Success', and the use of sport to enhance other areas of the curriculum. .

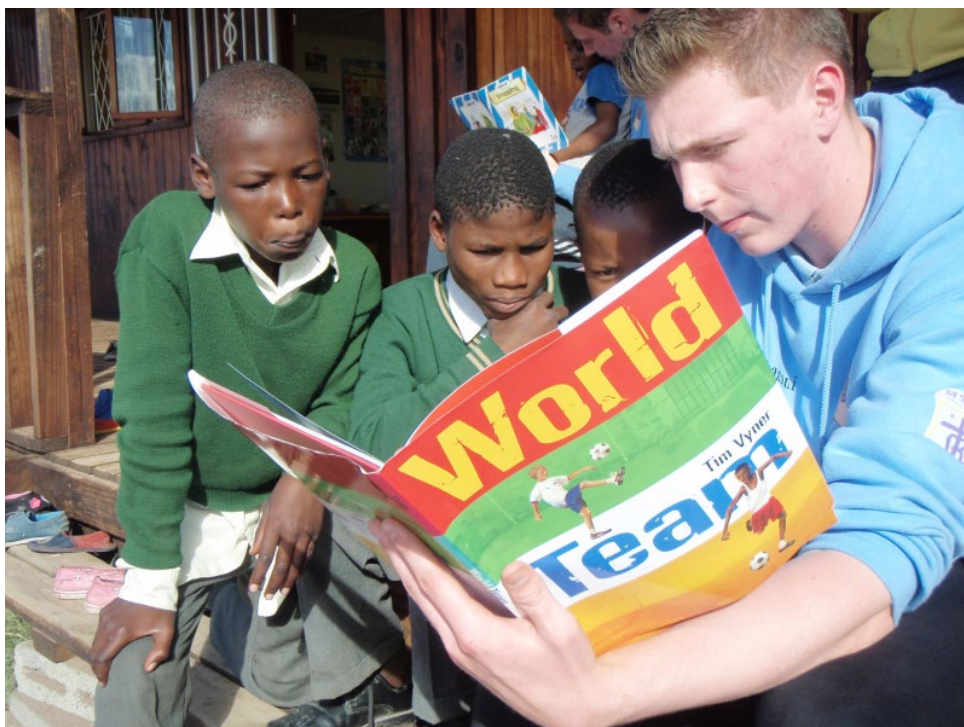
Since its inception all those years ago, over 10,000 UK and South African students have now participated in Bambisanani activities. Over 280 students from the UK have travelled to South Africa as volunteers to deliver the various Bambisanani programmes, over 775 South African students have gained the Bambisanani Leadership Award and over 2,750 South African students have taken part in Bambisanani Sports Festivals.

"The Bambisanani story is testimony of the power of sport to change lives and has served as a reminder to many just why they became a teacher".



How did Leeds help you to get where you are today?

The University of Leeds was absolutely instrumental in giving me the academic basis, confidence and inspiration that fed my passion for education, sport and a better world. Alongside my work in schools, Leeds provided me with a range of opportunities at national and international level. Working with the brilliant Dr Jim Parry in both Physical Education and Philosophy was transformational. Jim challenged me in a way that I had not been challenged before – he made me think and taught me lessons that have continued to serve me and my work well for over thirty years. One thing tends to lead to another in life, and my current work with the Bambisanani Partnership can be traced back to my time at Leeds. I am therefore absolutely delighted that in recent years my alma mater has become a key member of the partnership, with students and staff regularly volunteering on our programmes in South Africa.



How is your role linked to sustainability?

I lead the Bambisanani Partnership Charity, which operates in one of South Africa's most deprived rural communities. It is committed to using sport to promote education, health, global citizenship and leadership – all key factors in creating a more sustainable world. Significantly, we bring young people together from both South Africa and the UK in a way that opens their eyes to a wider world and mutual learning possibilities. Challenged and inspired by the experience, young people from both countries begin to take a wider view of the world. They start to question the way the world is, and consider how it could, and indeed should, be in the future. Full of vision, hope and future intentions, these young people are better positioned to take their place in the world. This is real education.



“Every day presents us with a myriad of opportunities to make a real difference and a chance to live more authentic and meaningful lives – let's get going!”

*David Geldart, (M.Ed Physical Education 1989)
Founder and Chair, Bambisanani Partnership charity*

What does sustainability mean to you?

For me sustainability is about taking care of the planet and its people; creating a more equitable, compassionate and harmonious world that is increasingly interdependent. It is about addressing human behaviour that is capable of destroying our world and each other; it is about inspiring and motivating behaviour that can do the reverse.

My holistic view encompasses and interrelates the social, environmental, economic and governance pillars of sustainability. I wholeheartedly support the UN Sustainable Development Goals, but view them as inextricably linked rather than in isolation. Indeed, while my work with the Bambisanani Partnership most obviously contributes to goals 3 and 4, I also believe that we make contributions to 1,2,5,8,10,16 and 17 in our own small and hopefully interconnected way.

Sustainability is about the kind of world I want to see, and what I am prepared to do to help achieve it through my own personal actions, advocacy and the opportunities I create for others to be motivated into action.

“What we doing to the forest of the world is a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and to one another” - Mahatma Gandhi



Why is it important?

Sustainability is important because time is running out. We all have a responsibility for the future of our planet and for humanity. There is clearly a mismatch between the kind of world that we would like to see and the one we have now. Sustainability in all its facets cannot afford to be ‘everyone’s concern but someone else’s responsibility’. Change needs to happen; our leaders need to lead, but I believe that the most powerful and significant changes will have to come from individuals believing that their actions will make a difference.

“Only when the last tree has been cut down, the last fish caught and the last stream poisoned will we realise that we cannot eat money” - Native American proverb

What sort of actions do you think individuals need to take in the next five years to create a sustainable future?

Paradigm shifts in attitudes and behaviour will be required, but relatively small changes made by all of us would make the difference. If you want to see a kinder, more thoughtful and compassionate world, then be a kinder, more thoughtful and compassionate person. In all things we need to be empowered to be the change that we want to see in the world.

It is both ironic and perverse to think that there may be 'positives' that come from the Coronavirus pandemic, but I have been heartened and inspired by the outpouring of humanity during such a devastating and difficult time. Our lives suddenly became very different to what they had been, and I believe that because of this there is the very real potential for people around the world to 'press the reset button' in terms of purpose, values and what is really important in the world and in our lives. For many of us, I believe our priorities in the future will be different.

Every day we make choices about how we live our lives; what we consume and how we treat others. Every day presents us with a myriad of opportunities to make a real difference and a chance to live more authentic and meaningful lives – let's get going!

"Do your little bit of good where you are; it's those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world" - Archbishop Desmond Tutu



In 2019, UN updates outlined that major progress had been made in improving the health of millions of people around the world, as well as improving access to education. However, significant work in both areas still remains to be done. David's work with the Bambisanani Partnership is playing a vital role in helping towards this, improving health and education for thousands involved in his program.