

Bambisanani Partnership



Working Hand in Hand with the Power of Sport

David Geldart

For the past eight years, St Mary's Catholic High School, a sports college in Leeds, and Mnyakanya High School, situated in one of the poorest rural areas of South Africa, have worked together using sport to inspire young people in both countries. What started as a British Council/Youth Sport Trust 'Dreams and Teams' initiative has been developed into a unique collaboration between the two schools which is known as the Bambisanani Partnership. The partnership has gone on to gain international acclaim.

Mnyakanya High School is situated in the rural and remote Nkandla region of Kwa Zulu Natal, South Africa. The school, in the heart of traditional Zululand, was opened by Nelson Mandela in 2004 and is located in one of the most deprived areas of South Africa with one in three adults infected by HIV/AIDS, 90 per cent unemployment and an adult illiteracy rate greater than 60 per cent. The school serves a vast area and many students walk two hours to and from school each day. The area has many AIDS orphans. Class sizes are in excess of 60 and the school has very limited resources.

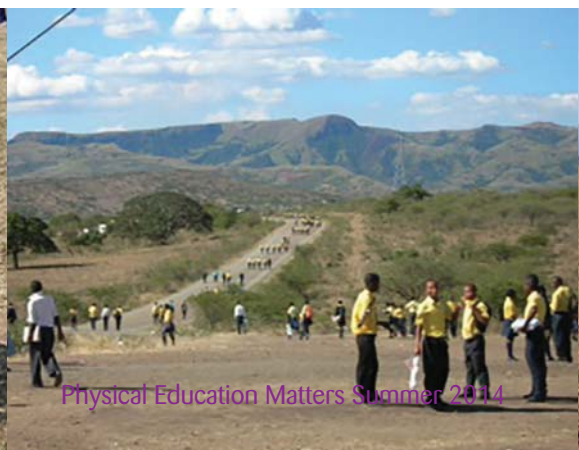
Beyond the Dreams and Teams initiative our challenge was to develop an authentic, sustainable and effective partnership that allowed our two schools to work and learn together for the mutual benefit of both schools and their wider communities. In order to achieve this I sat down and listened to the local Zulu chief and other community and school leaders. There is a long history of Europeans going to Africa and telling indigenous populations what they need; history indicates

that this approach is fundamentally flawed. If we were to go forward it would need to be a genuine partnership: equitable and with shared responsibility. I spent a considerable amount of time in the community learning about Zulu culture and the day-to-day issues of rural Zulu life. This time proved invaluable in developing understanding, friendship and trust. From our discussions, common areas of interest emerged: education, health, global citizenship and leadership. We concluded that both our communities had much to gain from working together and we made a commitment to do so. The Bambisanani Partnership emerged as the name for our unique collaboration. 'Bambisanani' is a Zulu word meaning 'working hand in hand' and aptly describes the collaboration between the two schools.

My way into this community was through sport and we were increasingly drawn to two quotes from Nelson Mandela, quotes that have continued to inspire and sustain our work:

Sport has the power to unite people in a way that little else can. Sport can create hope where there was once only despair. It breaks down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all kinds of discrimination. Sport speaks to people in a language they can understand.

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.





Sport and physical education have driven the Bambisanani Partnership since that time; in turn, the partnership has been the catalyst for whole school developments at both St Mary's and Mnyakanya. Over the course of the past eight years the Bambisanani Partnership has become part of each school's identity. Teacher and student exchanges, joint learning projects involving almost all areas of the curriculum, and significant impact on whole school policies such as global citizenship, social justice, enterprise and leadership have enriched learning at both schools and empowered the partnership. A fundamental factor in this success has been whole school involvement: the engagement and support of governors, senior leaders, teachers, parents, students and the wider community, including supporters and sponsors.

The visits to and from each country have the potential to change the way those involved see the world. Students from St Mary's who visit South Africa prepare for more than 18 months in advance. In addition to the necessary fund raising and advanced leadership training, students are involved in a learning programme that covers topics such as Apartheid, South African history and politics, Zulu culture and traditions, HIV/AIDS awareness and Zulu language. When in South Africa the students (normally lower sixth formers) mentor 20 Mnyakanya students through the 'Bambisanani Leadership' programme taught through sports activities. At the end of the programme, which lasts a week, the students from both schools have the responsibility of jointly planning and delivering a community sports festival and a community reading festival for over 150 primary school children from the Nkandla region. Significantly, even the reading festival uses sport to great effect. Beyond the leadership mentoring, St Mary's students also coach a range of specific sports and teach academic subjects at Mnyakanya, and sports and reading at Ntlowane Primary School and Zulufadder Orphanage.

The annual visits to South Africa have also included primary and secondary colleagues in order to encourage this kind of development in other schools. We also take business sponsors as team members in order to give them first-hand experience of the project and to give us a different perspective on our work.

The process of the young people working together using sport for sport's sake and sport for the greater good never fails to remind us of the awesome power of sport. The impact on all those involved is truly inspirational.

Quotes from St Mary's students

My world has just got bigger. I realise it is my duty to be a global citizen.

What used to be important to me is no longer important. I now have a new set of priorities in life.

Much of our life in the UK has become obsessed with materialism and 'celebrity'. We have lost touch with things that really matter. My visit to South Africa has given me a much more meaningful perspective on life.

The people I met have changed my life forever. I have met amazing people who have taught me so much.

How can my life ever be the same again? I have been given the most wonderful opportunity and I have a responsibility now to continue to make a difference in my life.

We have so much to learn from the attitude and dedication of Mnyakanya students. They have so little materially but have so much more than us in terms of determination and desire to learn. We have no excuse at St Mary's for not achieving our goals.

What I have experienced on this visit is the greatest achievement in my life.

On this visit I learned that we have not got all the answers to life's problems in the UK.

This experience has proved to me how working together can achieve incredible results.

Wouldn't it be fantastic if we could take the best of life in Leeds and the best of life in Nkandla in a new kind of world for the future?

I didn't realise how much pride I would feel when witnessing the students I mentored achieve more than they ever thought they could. I have gained more from their success than from my own.

I have encountered a wave of experiences which have genuinely refined my global perspective. Some of the people I have worked with have inspired me to open my mind and be courageous to achieve something extraordinary. I have had an education in life which is priceless; it will be pivotal for the rest of my life.





Quotes from Mnyakanya students

We have worked together... people of different colours, countries, religions and cultures... we have proved it can be done.

I have learned to help other people and I have learned that respect is everything. Through sport we have worked hand in hand – we have different colour skin but it does not matter. I am a leader now and I want to help my community.

The Bambisanani Leadership course taught me that I am a leader.

Never did I believe that anyone from the UK would visit Nkandla... I did not think you knew we existed.

The Bambisanani Partnership has given me the opportunity to continue my education. I have no parents and live alone. I want to be a doctor to help my community. I will work hard.

Before I came to the UK I did not really believe that there were so many different cultures in the world.

We have all learned so much from working together. We have learned to be leaders and to work in the wider community. We have made friends and now have greater confidence in the world.

It is important for South Africans to have connection with people from other countries – this is why the Bambisanani Partnership is so important. I have learned that we are all the same even though we have different skin colours. It is important to develop young leaders because older people in the community need help.

The partnership is bringing two different countries together to share their strengths in order to learn. I have learned not to judge people but to encourage, share ideas and work together. This partnership is an example to other countries and it must continue. Bambisanani is needed all over the world.

We are different but we are the same.

At St Mary's School I learned that it is good to ask questions.

My view of the world has changed. I can now see what a difference it makes when you love and respect different people.

I am the first young person from my part of South Africa ever to visit the UK. Bambisanani is a miracle from God. Every day I learned so many things. Above all I have learned to believe that everything is possible if we can work together.

Beyond annual visits the majority of faculty areas at St Mary's have used the partnership as a stimulus for learning. Exceptional work in English, religious education, languages, humanities, technology, drama, art and music has further embedded the collaboration. Last year, joint learning projects in art and creative writing based on the theme of 'The Power of Sport' inspired over 650 students from both schools to voluntarily enter our age-related competitions. The work has since been exhibited in both countries and prints sold internationally.

'Bambisanani Enterprises' is a student-led business that exists in both schools with the purpose of teaching enterprise skills and raising funds for the partnership. Business sponsors in both countries have given their time to mentor the students involved. Through a range of ventures



including importing/exporting Zulu crafts, developing an exclusive range of gift cards and art prints, organising a variety of music events and concerts, Bambisanani Enterprises is a highly effective operation which has made over £10,000 'profit' in the past four years. Again the student perspectives are most illuminating:

I am proud to be a member of Bambisanani Enterprises, South African branch. I have learned so many things that will help me be a businessman one day.

Bambisanani Enterprises is an exciting venture. I have learned so much about different aspects of business and about working in a team. It is really good working with students from different year groups.

I am proud to be a board member of Bambisanani Enterprises; I know that I am helping to make a difference.

Bambisanani Enterprises is in the real world, we are in business – it is not easy. Lots of big companies in the UK made a loss last year but we made a profit in a difficult economic climate.

The board members, significantly from different year groups, have been mentored by a number of Bambisanani business supporters including Andrew Smithurst, Managing Director of Cardinal Maritime, who said:

The board members of Bambisanani Enterprises and other volunteers are gaining real life experiences of the business world. They are involved in key aspects of business and are clearly learning important transferable skills in the process. They are serious about what they do and have real purpose. They are very impressive young people who are making a difference.

Following considerable discussion with students and teachers at St Mary's and Mnyakanya the *Bambisanani Award* is currently being developed. The award will ultimately be available to all students in both schools at three levels: Bronze/Ithusi, Silver/Isiliva and Gold/Igolde. To gain the awards students have to successfully complete independent learning projects on leadership, social justice, global citizenship, enterprise, volunteering and community engagement.

Students have been very positive about the award and, indeed, have played a significant role in developing it.

It was a great experience and privilege to be involved in the development of the Bambisanani Award. Some of my ideas have been taken on board including the Zulu names for Bronze, Silver and Gold and using a wide variety of ways to assess the learning of individual students.

I have really enjoyed working towards the Bambisanani Award. It has motivated me to learn different things in different ways. I have learned so much about the culture of South Africa. It is great that the award is open to everyone.

The Bambisanani Partnership has gained a number of awards in recent years. The Diana Award has recognised the "exceptional work of St Mary's and Mnyakanya students who are prepared to make a difference in the world". It is significant that Mnyakanya became the first South African school to receive the Diana International Award last year. Ten students who had previously gained the Bambisanani Leadership Award went on to develop their own AIDS/HIV Awareness programme in the community. This year no fewer than 27 Mnyakanya students gained the prestigious International Diana Award for their pioneering peer education and counselling with abuse victims in the wider community.

It is truly wonderful to see students use their generic leadership skills to such good effect. As we always say, gaining the Bambisanani Leadership Award is a starting point not a finishing point. These are simply outcomes that we could not have predicted; with leadership education we clearly scatter seeds that are capable of flourishing in a variety of ways. Prince William recently met with St Mary's Diana Award winners who had volunteered in South Africa and was particularly interested in the use of sport to develop young leaders.

St Mary's and Mnyakanya both now work with other schools to encourage them to develop international partnerships. This involves working with schools individually and speaking at conferences on the Bambisanani Partnership. There is no shortage of schools in South Africa wishing to develop a partnership with UK schools.

William Vilakazi, Principal of Mnyakanya School, is in no doubt about the importance of the partnership:

The Bambisanani Partnership continues to be an inspiration to our school and community. It is difficult to put into words the impact of the partnership. Some of the impact is physical and very practical; some of the impact is psychological, influencing attitudes, confidence, motivation and aspiration. We all learn from working together and the focus on developing young leaders is changing people's lives. We are working in an equal partnership where there is mutual respect. There is a saying in Zulu culture: 'Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' – meaning, 'we are what we are because of others', we are genuinely working hand in hand and I believe that both school communities are enhanced as a result. What this partnership teaches cannot be learned from books.

This work is not easy, indeed it is fraught with difficulties and frustration, yet the prize is great if you have a team that is determined to succeed. The Bambisanani Partnership is now part of what we are as a school. It reflects our values and constantly reminds us of the true purpose of education. It has a life and energy that has the potential to make us think and act differently. This is not about charity; it is more than that: it is about two schools from different parts of the world working together and learning together. The Bambisanani Partnership will not change the world but it has changed the world for some people. It is testimony to the unique power of sport when it is harnessed as a force for good and, indeed, to what can be achieved by working hand in hand in a genuine partnership.

David Geldart (afPE member) is Assistant Headteacher at St Mary's Menston Catholic Voluntary Academy and founder of the Bambisanani Partnership.

Three remarkable books chart the development of this inspirational partnership:

Bambisanani: The First Five Years, David Geldart and Duncan Baines ISBN 978-0-9927124-1-9

Bambisanani: 2012 Faster, Higher, Stronger, David Geldart and Duncan Baines ISBN 978-0-9927124-2-6

Bambisanani: The Power of Sport, David Geldart and Duncan Baines ISBN 978-0-9927124-0-2

Available from Blurb.com in hard back and electronic versions.

For further information on the Bambisanani Partnership also see www.bambisananipartnership.com