

Exchange for Peace/Caspea - Jordan School Support Project
Irbid January 2009
Monitoring and Evaluation Report

This report follows a two-day visit to the Project (25-26 January), which was nearing its conclusion. Two full days were monitored, featuring lectures/breakout groups in the morning and practical sport sessions in the afternoon. I spoke on several occasions and at length with members of the Caspea team. I also spoke with officials and volunteers from Al-Hayat (the local NGO offering support to Caspea), and with many of the 39 participating delegates. On the second day, I held a private focus group meeting with four delegates (two male, two female; two from Jordanian and two from Palestinian schools) to discuss their experiences and views of the project.

In general terms, given the context, the facilities (a University gymnasium, with sport equipment) were adequate; and, the translators/translation facilities and hotel were very good. I understand that there were early difficulties in ensuring that agreements regarding some of these facilities were adhered to, so I commend the Caspean officials for working hard in making sure that these infrastructural aspects were in place for the school to begin.

There has been a serious need in Jordan for a project such as this focused on sport's role in promoting peace, development and positive social relations. Many of the delegates reported that they encountered very difficult circumstances – for example:

- They come from schools with very poor sport or play facilities for their children.
- Their children face a lot of other problems, associated with poverty, refugee status, major gender inequalities, etc.
- The children are growing up in specific and broader contexts associated with regional conflicts (e.g. many are refugees, violence is an issue in the schools, pro-terrorist ideologies are also in the background).
- The schools give children only 40-50 minutes per week of physical education, and as the grades for PE do not count towards their overall mark, the children and parents are not strongly motivated towards taking sport-related activities seriously.
- The teaching schedules can be intense, while salaries are very low.

On the other hand, most delegates are strongly motivated, and take sport seriously. Many reported that they organized and supervised sporting activities outside of school hours (e.g. for one hour, from 7am, before school started at 8am). This project helped to confirm to the delegates the importance of sport, and offered strong support for their motivation to teach sport to children. This project was tailored extremely well to meeting the needs of these teachers, in terms of being centred on capacity-building.

In terms of the daily sessions which I observed, each session started with ice-breakers that were, where possible, taken by the delegates. These are fun ways of getting students into sessions, and were effective.

The morning lectures, taken by Claude Ribaux, went extremely well. The subject matter and goals of each session were clearly identified. Claude ‘practiced what he preached’, in terms of ensuring that there was strong dialogue with the delegates, that he gained their agreement for how the session should proceed, and he invited questions at regular intervals. Claude also did not use an instructive or judgemental method for teaching; instead, he insisted that delegates were in the best position to decide what was required in their particular schools, and therefore they should think carefully and plan the kinds of project that they want to develop. In broad terms, this mode of teaching was very new to the delegates, it was an education to them in itself; in effect, Claude offered them an illustration of ‘best practice’ in consultative, dialogical teaching, which we would hope they then transfer into the classroom or the sports playing-fields.

During one session, Claude set the delegates particular tasks, and then separated them into breakout groups, in order to get the delegates to reflect and to respond to the task (e.g. setting out their aims for the projects that they might want to implement). The breakout groups generated some fruitful discussions, and led the delegates to then present their findings and arguments to both Caspea officials and their peers. Several of the plans were rather vague and reflected the limited personal skills of the delegates in planning and organizational development.

During another session, Claude explained clearly to the delegates how the project stood in relation to receiving and distributing funding for projects; he then used delegates in a kind of role-play to demonstrate the large number of actors associated with the Caspea project and how complex the relationships were. This was highly effective in explaining to the delegates the range of actors they would have to think about, and also reflected the transparency of Caspea in terms of releasing information.

The afternoon sessions focused on sport practical sessions and also went very well. Mark is a very effective communicator. These sessions connected very well with the morning lectures, as sport was used as a powerful teaching device for exploring key themes. At times, Mark had to insist that delegates listen more attentively, and avoid becoming involved in distracting conversations and horse-play. Mark also highlighted the issue of non-participation among some delegates, and got the delegates to think about how these non-participants might become more involved. This would be something that delegates would also encounter in schools, hence Mark demonstrated how this problem should be resolved in a reflective rather than authoritarian fashion. Mark’s strategies on these issues worked very well, and met with appropriate responses from the delegates. The games chosen by Mark during these sessions included a skipping game that helped to develop themes on teamwork and group organization, and a competitive game called Kin-ball which helped to include all types of delegate. Overall, these games were highly popular, and met the delegates’ strong wish to receive practical knowledge. The delegates are very keen to receive a manual in Arabic, setting out these games, which they may then implement in their schools.

One further session by Mark – on sponsored sports events – was very useful. It demonstrated how the delegates should seek to generate resources from the local community through sponsored sports.

It is clear that the project has had a number of major impacts with delegates, and some of these may be summarized as follows:

- Capacity-building in terms of delegate educational development: it is clear that many of these delegates, despite their teaching status and responsibilities, lack a lot of basic training, notably in terms of physical education knowledge (e.g. the importance of warm-ups before engaging in sports, to prevent injuries), teaching skills (e.g. communication, listening and pupil engagement) and organizational skills (e.g. planning their teaching). This project has clearly had a remarkable impact upon many participants, in terms of greatly improving these basic skills and demonstrating excellent teaching practice in these areas. Overall, the transferable skills generated and exchanged through this project should not be underestimated.
- Lectures: different delegates have reported gaining very strong benefits from a wide range of lectures, depending upon their particular circumstances. The lecture material on conflict resolution and mediation has been especially beneficial, and reportedly has enabled delegates to acquire stronger understandings of how conflicts escalate, how they may be de-escalated, and how mediation should promote facilitation (rather than judicial imposition of settlements) between rival parties. Other lecture material that was very well received included coverage of leadership, decision-making and organizational issues. Delegates in the focus group reported that the project would certainly lead them to change their teaching practices, and to focus much more on communication and listening, both in their teaching practice and as important skills that should be taught.
- Sport practical sessions: these were clearly popular, and satisfied the delegates' desire to receive practical instruction and assistance. Delegates were particularly impressed both by the accessibility of the games (as simple activities, with low levels of cost, which are fun to engage in), and by the effectiveness of these games in helping to communicate key themes and values (for example, on leadership, teamwork, fairness, etc). One delegate, for example, reported that the games would help to reduce the amount of aggressive and violent 'play' that takes place in his school. Another delegate reported that these games would help to engage more girls in sport activities. Delegates also particularly enjoyed learning entirely new games, such as Kin-ball which was an enormous success.
- Reaffirming the value of sport: in line with the point made earlier, this project has helped to give support to the delegates, in confirming the importance of sport as part of the education of children. The project has, in a broader sense, helped to emphasize the role of sport to the Ministry of Education and to UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East), at a time when these organizations appear out of step with national and international bodies in regard to the importance of physical education and general play.

Finally, I do commend Caspea for the way in which the officials dealt with the very sensitive issue of allocating funding to different delegates. Inevitably, some delegates were not successful in gaining funds. Caspea dealt with this situation very sensitively, fairly and openly. I do also agree with Caspea approach to the next stage, whereby Caspea will seek to retain maximum control over how school projects are resourced and monitored.

Areas for reflection and possible development:

- Selection of delegates: this has clearly been a significant issue, and Caspea has obviously encountered some problems in this regard. Both the Ministry of Education and UNRWA have not been particularly helpful in identifying schools for support or in delivering suitable delegates to this project. Several delegates (all male, from the UNRWA schools) that were selected by sources in Jordan showed low levels of engagement with the class, notably paying little attention during lectures and not participating in practical sessions (due to reported injuries and ill health, such as sore heads). These delegates were also a frequent distraction and hindrance to their peers. Places taken by these types of 'participant' would be better filled by other delegates. Caspea officials report that they would prefer to have a much more direct involvement in the selection of delegates, and I am highly sympathetic to this view.
- Volunteers: several volunteers from the local NGO have not been particularly effective in helping Caspea during this project. In broad terms, I understand that volunteers are not well trained, nor is there a surrounding culture in which the volunteer role is clearly defined. In effect, by taking on these local NGO volunteers, Caspea have provided some strong capacity-building – the form of in-service training – for these individuals. It might be helpful, in future work, if Caspea were to make it clear to local NGOs that problems with volunteers have been encountered in the past, and that certain levels of training are to be expected from the local NGO before the programme is implemented.
- Finance: delegates have been made aware that there is funding for sport projects in schools after this project, and they have also received some daily expenses to cover their attendance. This information and assistance regarding finance has had advantages and disadvantages to the project overall. In favour, this has helped to ensure strong levels of daily attendance (which can be a problem in these types of project), and to motivate the delegates to think in terms of the possible application of the project's findings to their situations. On the negative side, there have been concerns that some delegates have been overly motivated by money, and that their discussion of plans for sport projects in their settings has centred too much on funding and not enough on the real pedagogical and sporting objectives of their planned projects. There is no easy solution to the dilemmas raised by financial issues; on balance, Caspea's approach to the release of relevant information, in my view, seems to have been the correct one, though Caspea officials may reflect that further adjustments on this point might be made.
- Manual: the delegates have been very keen to receive a manual (as noted above), and this was in the process of being completed during my last day at the project. It seems that many delegates would be very keen to receive additional information

- on other games that might be played with children in a pedagogical way; hence, Caspea might also consider adding further games (perhaps including those used by other NGOs) for distribution to delegates.
- Caspea might consider using more than one restaurant for meals – all participants were becoming a little tired of the fare offered by the caterers.

Overall, I found that Caspea have done an excellent job within the school support project, especially given the challenging circumstances that were initially encountered. This is very important and highly commendable work, and I congratulate the Caspea team on their achievements thus far. The next stage is a highly important one, in terms of facilitating a smooth transition of knowledge-transfer and capacity-building from the teachers in the workshop to the children in the classrooms and sports fields.

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