

Students' and Teachers' Visit to Israel & Palestine 2010

Visit Report by Donal Rooney

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I initially became aware of 'Schools Across Borders' as a teacher in St. Kilian's School in Clonskeagh. As a teacher of CSPE and Religion this particular subject is very relevant and topical in the classroom. Further enthusiasm was also generated with the presence of 'Schools Across Borders' during the Transition Year programme. The opportunity was presented to me to visit Israel/Palestine which I accepted with open arms. For me this was an opportunity that couldn't be missed.

From the very first day my perspective on the conflict had completely changed, it was no longer a set of historical facts or events but a place where I experienced real people, traditions, places and social realities. The trip was very different to a typical tourist trip which I found very refreshing. We weren't given the usual tourist 'gloss' but rather an insight into the fabric and challenges of the society. The 'Schools Across Borders', leadership were very generous in imparting knowledge and their dedication motivated myself and the other teacher within the group. There was an overall purpose to the trip which was based on principles of bridge building and conflict resolution.

It was the personal experiences in Israel/Palestine that affected me most on the trip. It was the small events that were most potent and attitude changing. It was also the sense of humanity I felt during the trip. As a teacher one gets to know the mentality of teenagers very well. It came as a great surprise to me how similar the Irish pupils were to the pupils in Israel and how similar the Israeli pupils were to the Palestinian pupils. Behind the colours and banners and allegiances there was a common thread of humanity. One of the most striking aspects of this was how we could compare a similar personality on the Israeli side to a similar personality on the Palestinian side. Like in every classroom there is always the joker, or the most vocal or the creative type, the sporty type and the brightest. This became more emphasised when the Irish pupils on the trip vocalised the same observation. However the difference between Israeli and Palestinian students and Irish students was the presence of fear. It is the fear that each side has of one another that prolongs the conflict. It is on this emotional level that I feel 'Schools Across Borders' is most affective, in that by emphasising the similarities both sides have for one another, they emphasise their common humanity. The various schools on both sides are used as bridges between the two borders.

I hope, over the years to be involved with this topic both in the classroom and on a personal level. I feel more motivated than ever before to use education for the purpose of conflict resolution. The lessons learned can also be brought closer to home in Northern Ireland and even within Dublin itself.

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