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## OASIS – A SHORT GUIDE

Teachers/Management Teams

Changing my neighbourhood in order to change  
the world

These materials form a short guide to Oasis Methodology



With the support of:



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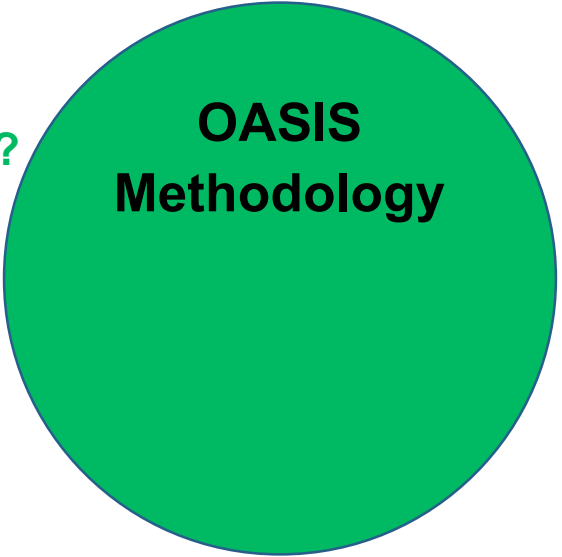


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**General Guide for Teachers/Management Teams**





## OASIS Methodology

### What if we can change the world starting with my neighbourhood?

#### The “Oasis Game” as an educational methodology for social change

Achieving a **collective dream**, inspiring a movement to achieve the world we all dream of. That’s what lies at the heart of the Oasis Game, a cooperative tool for mobilising community involvement that activates local resources and talents. We invite a group of people to work with a community or neighbourhood to build a collective dream that will be expressed through specific projects involving a physical change to the urban landscape (or school).

The Oasis methodology **draws on the resources and talents** found in all communities and territories. It starts from the basic belief that there is an abundance of resources – both tangible and intangible – but that often our eyes are not trained to see them. Oasis invites us to see opportunities where we are used to seeing problems; to see resources rather than rubbish; to ask ourselves what talents and skills we have that can make a contribution to a new world.

At a time when we are facing multiple crises, we often see our territories as “deserts” devoid of resources or full of problems. Through the metaphor of the oasis, the aim is to regain the idea that there are also good places, full of optimism, joy and beauty, that reflect our desires and aspirations. Despite the vast “deserts” that extend across regions and communities throughout the planet, **there are “oases”, spaces of trust where collective action can be re-established.**



The aim of the Oasis methodology is therefore to create and expand these spaces. It starts with a physical intervention in the neighbourhood (or school) to encourage cooperation and participation, and then seeks to extend these spaces into new environments and territories, spreading the idea that change is possible at both an individual and a collective level. It's a flexible process that enables people to be involved in building the type of community and society they want to live in.

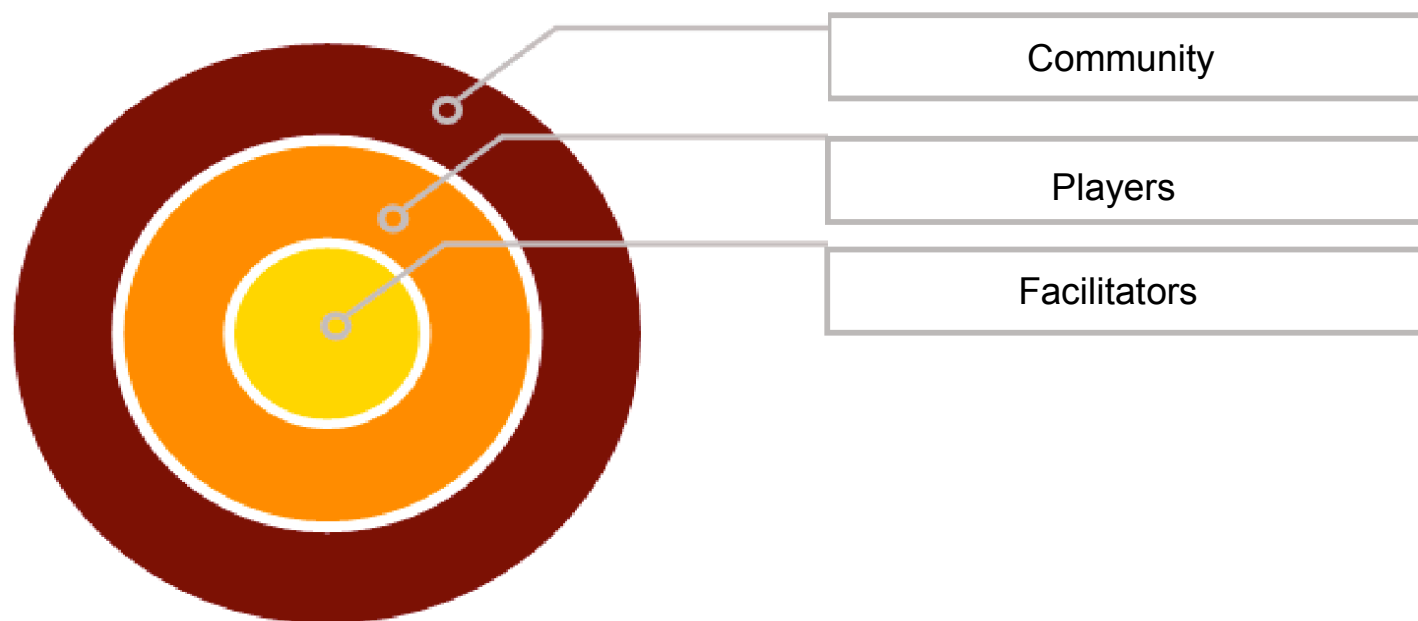
Oasis is based on *Appreciative Inquiry*, a set of principles concerning the operation of human systems and organisations that involves *“the cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves **systematic discovery of what gives a system life** when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms”* (Cooperrider and Whitney, 1999).

Participants **develop their abilities** to involve groups and communities in collaborative initiatives, whether this is a project in a physical space, an organisational strategy or a new community (or school) project. Each participant is invited to connect with their greatest potential and their highest aspirations (dreams), to develop competencies that nurture the creation of creative teams, to visualise what starts to emerge (opportunities) and to innovate collectively to achieve rapid, high-impact solutions. Designed to be carried out entirely cooperatively so that all of us, working together, design and achieve something in partnership, the Oasis rules make for a win/win situation. In this scenario, the success of each individual relies on the success of other people.

The Oasis Game comprises **three different circles of people** with different roles in the process: a group of players, who will form the team that drives the experience forward; process facilitators or coordinators; and an entire community (in the broad sense of the term, to include a range of participants such as local residents, NGOs and associations, schools, local government, commerce, leaders, businesses, etc.).

In our case the community could be the neighbourhood where the school is located, or it could be the school itself, including everyone involved in the school community, such as pupils' mothers and fathers.

These different roles are described below:





- **Facilitators:** These are the people who coordinate the process. Their main role is to initiate the activities and provide support in carrying them out. They will help the players to complete the different challenges and actions to be undertaken. They will nurture relationships with the community and be responsible for the overall preparation and organisation of the Oasis launch. In our case the facilitators will usually be teachers, supported by the school's management team.
- **Players:** This is the group that takes the initiative forward, the people who throughout the entire Oasis process will be performing the various activities proposed by the facilitators. Their main role is to mobilise the community where the action is taking place, in order to capture their dreams and design a collective project to be undertaken in a short period of time. In our case this group will be young people, together with some teachers and/or parents, for example.
- **Community:** This is the widest circle and it is the end group of people that the project will be seeking to mobilise, to get involved in devising and implementing the dream/collective project. They are usually local residents or workers, or people who are in some way linked to the territory where the Oasis experience is being taken forward. They will become involved over the various stages of the Oasis project and will be invited en masse to a range of meetings. In our case this group will be the neighbourhood and/or the school community in general.





These are some videos about Oasis experiences in different contexts:

- **OASIS METHODOLOGY** and **ELOS PHILOSOPHY**:
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1KJQoFZu-U> [in Portuguese and Spanish only]
  - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BTs63bgWkYY> [with English subtitles]
- **OASIS** in the **EL RUEDO** community in the Moratalaz neighbourhood of Madrid: <https://vimeo.com/36474529> [in Spanish only]
- **OASIS** in a neighbourhood in **AMSTERDAM**: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l7CEz80vZwQ> [film clip without words]
- **OASIS SANTA CATARINA**, across an entire state in Brazil. Various Oases were undertaken simultaneously after a hurricane: <https://vimeo.com/17337520> [in Portuguese with English subtitles]

**OASIS represents the capacity for social transformation – inherent in every community – to achieve good places, full of optimism, joy and beauty, that reflect our collective desires and aspirations.** By using an appreciative eye and seeking out opportunities, talents and knowledge, it fosters a spirit of cooperative social entrepreneurship. At the same time it strengthens emotional connections between those involved, generating an environment that helps to achieve the collective empowerment and optimism needed to spark autonomous social transformation processes.

The final outcome of the experience is an intervention – physical or otherwise – in the urban space or school, which is achieved through the collective participation of the residents/school community and which provides a real example of how different people can come together to fulfil their highest aspirations. The completed projects are an essential part of the methodology. They are a chance for the participants and members of the community to work together to bring about a tangible and visible improvement. The experience of, literally, transforming a physical space in a short period of time leaves an indelible mark. For the community, that space functions as a physical reminder that they have the power and the ability to create a better future for themselves.





Below, we set out the principal stages of Oasis.

**1 THE APPRECIATIVE EYE:** In this first stage, we are seeking to change the way we look at our surroundings, to create a scenario of abundance within which to make our intervention. Groups and communities are full of resources and strengths, but sometimes they are hard to see because of the way we have been trained to look at things. To enable us to recognise them we need to change the way we look at things. In this stage of the Oasis methodology we are seeking to involve the members of the group, to discover what potential there is within the system in which we are intervening, and to see what works well so that we can expand on it. Working with the Oasis players, we identify and systematise local resources (in the neighbourhood, school, etc.). We also look for the beautiful things that exist there, the spaces on which time and care have been lavished, the places that we find beautiful.

This offers us a different starting point from which to intervene, and a different way of connecting with the territory and the people who live there.

*For example, in the community of El Ruedo in the Moratalaz neighbourhood of Madrid, the participants in the Oasis Game identified that the atmosphere created in the streets by the presence of older women sitting chatting on benches was something beautiful. One participant also found a small cactus garden tended by someone next to a doorway. What beautiful things might one find in a school? Perhaps a corner filled with plants, colourful murals, a group of children of different ages working together ... We're sure that pupils will be able to find lots more!*

**2 EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS:** In this second stage we seek to build meaningful relationships with people in the area. Building relationships that start from meaningful and appreciative places is one of the keys to gaining people's commitment and participation. Having created a space of abundance in the first stage, we now look for the people behind those beautiful things. We establish "meaningful conversations" with them and seek to discover their talents and the beautiful life stories they have lived there. The systematic gathering of these accounts and life stories and the systematisation of the knowledge and talents possessed by the inhabitants (or members of the school community) help to build emotional connections that strengthen collective endeavour. This enables us to get closer to the community. The aim is to look at it systematically, focusing not only on the people who live in/share those surroundings, but also on the quality of the relationships that we can build with them.

This creates a climate that fosters social innovation. It strengthens ties between the people who live in the area, producing a more robust framework in which to bring about transformation. We record the talents of the people we interview, because these will be needed in the fourth and fifth stages in order to build the project/collective dream.

*An example from the "Campanal" community in the Brazilian city of Santos. Oasis participants brought together the different talents demonstrated by women, who used recycled materials to design curtains, bags and a whole range of accessories such as necklaces, rings and bracelets. They showed off this huge array of talent in a talent show put on with the community. The group of women also told participants about their relationship with this type of handicraft, and shared stories of their lives in the community. Beautiful stories of when they were girls and used to have fun playing in the streets, the different games they played and the songs they sang.*



**3 THE DREAM:** Like other methodologies, Oasis values dreams as a major driver for change. Often, working with dreams isn't easy. That's why it comes in the third stage, because we need gradually to create the right climate and to prepare ourselves to receive the dreams of the communities or groups we're working with. It's often difficult to dream because we're not used to giving ourselves that space, or because we're afraid that what we want or long for won't come true.

When we work with people's dreams we need to be aware that this is something important and meaningful to them, and it's important to treat these spaces with care. In seeking out dreams we focus on collective dreams, the dreams with the greatest potential to mobilise people, that are best able to bring people together and that will stir the largest number of people to action. We will ask people about their dreams for the community, the dreams that also care about the environment.

We will gather dreams from the different groups in the community. For example:

- For a school: pupils, teachers, mothers and fathers, admin staff, cleaning staff, canteen staff, etc.
- For a neighbourhood: boys and girls, young people, the elderly, mothers and fathers, people who play sport, people who work in local businesses, associations, etc.

*An example of the dream stage can be found in the Puglia region of southern Italy – specifically in a neighbourhood of the city of Ceglie Messapica. Using the Oasis methodology, the players carried out a series of activities to discover the neighbourhood's dreams. The most common dreams were about improving community relations within the area itself. People dreamed of a more united neighbourhood, where local residents knew each other better. They dreamed of things such as holding parties and communal meals in the neighbourhood, having games in the street for children and adults, and regaining meeting places.*



**4 CARING:** What we are looking for in this fourth stage is the shared dream, which cares about people and the environment: the dream capable of mobilising the largest number of people within the school community or neighbourhood; one that we will be able to put into practice in two days of action. During this stage, the aim is to develop the strategies that will make that shared dream a reality. To achieve this, we turn the collective dreams into physical form, by making models of them. Producing a prototype will help us to plan the actions to be taken and to ask ourselves what talents and resources we will need. This stage is about being very specific about how to implement the dreams we are going to build during the days of action: what we need, where to get hold of it, who will take part etc. We seek out the talents and resources we uncovered during the first Oasis stages, so that they can be involved in and support the building of the dream.

We build the models with the neighbourhood or school community. These models will capture what we are going to implement during the days of action (the next stage). We hold a big meeting with the community and divide people into working groups. Each working group is given the same materials with which to build a model of its dreams. Finally, we build a single model by selecting the best bits from all the groups' models. A jury, comprising a representative from each population group (e.g. pupils from different years, teachers from different subjects, the management team, fathers and mothers, support staff, local residents, grandparents etc.) can be appointed to prepare the final model.

Once the project/shared dream has been designed, the next stage is to mobilise resources. Using their various networks, the internet, local contacts etc., the members of the group responsible for driving the Oasis forward begin to mobilise the resources and the people needed to make the dream a reality.

**Another example** comes from the Brazilian city of Santos: one of the actions we undertook during the caring stage was to invite everyone in the community (favela) where the Oasis was taking place to a big meeting. We invited the local residents to attend a meeting at a school in the community. Around one hundred and fifty people came. We created different working groups to reflect the dreams we had gathered, which we had divided into dreams about spaces for children, environmental dreams, and dreams around economic issues. People took part in the group they were most interested in exploring. For example, the environmental dreams group designed a garden for a piece of wasteland at the entrance to the favela, identified all the materials needed to construct it, and built a model to illustrate it. At the end of the meeting the groups pooled their ideas by displaying their models, and a collective model was produced. (The collective model illustrates the shared project that is going to be implemented.) For the group charged with exploring dreams around economic issues the dynamic was somewhat different. A group of women came together who wanted to establish a small self-employment project. They worked on the design of their idea, which involved a small cooperative of craftswomen who would design and make bags, necklaces and other accessories.



**5 ACTION:** The outcome needs to be impressive. The days of action will be set in the context of a role-play, where it will be “shoulders to the wheel” for the entire community/group in order to put into practice the dreams that were brought together and expressed in the final model. We will only have a short time – one or two days – to implement the shared dream/project that was developed in the previous stage. The dreams can be reflected in physical changes to the school or neighbourhood (e.g. gardens, communal vegetable plots, murals, play or leisure spaces) or they can be other kinds of dream that are capable of being implemented in one or two days (e.g. awareness campaigns, swap shops). For very popular dreams that can’t be achieved within this timescale, we can work with pupils to draw up an action plan setting out the first steps, which can be implemented later.

This stage takes the form of a little game in which each working group has a series of important roles to play in taking forward the activity: for example, one group might be responsible for finding more people, another for looking after the materials, and another for explaining what’s going on. During this stage, collective action is encouraged, getting the best out of each person in order to achieve spectacular results which use the community’s resources and talents. This is a collaborative project that takes place in a changed context: a context of abundance with the emphasis on knowledge, resources and human relationships.

*An example from Zarzalejo (a town in the mountains outside Madrid): The days of action involved two days of intense activity in which all members of the community shared their talents and all the resources at their disposal. Even the heavy rain was not enough to dampen the enthusiastic support that had been generated for the construction of Oasis Square in Zarzalejo. Boys and girls, young and old, people of Moroccan origin, locals, and new arrivals from the city worked together to build a playground with coloured wheels and logs, an amphitheatre built from pallets, a stone table around which people could meet to chat or have a picnic, a garden, a vegetable plot and even a community oven! You can see pictures of the action at the Zarzalejo Oasis at: <https://unoasisenzarzalejo.wordpress.com/2015/05/09/video-del-juego-del-oasis-en-zarzalejo/> [Text in Spanish only]*

**6 CELEBRATION:** Sharing the collective achievement, and recognising each person's contribution to the group success, makes the Oasis experience even more meaningful. We don't just work together to make an impact: we make space to celebrate the achievements and outcomes. This stage is about more than having a party: we create a space in which to recognise what each of us has achieved.

***An example:** In the Italian city of Ceglie Messapica, on the day that the action (the previous stage) came to an end, local residents were invited to the celebration, which took place close to the public space that had been restored with the community's dreams. People brought home-made cakes, and each group involved in implementing the actions showed the others what they had achieved: a community oven, herb gardens, a performance area, children's play areas, meeting places for adults, with tables and chairs made from recycled materials, a big mural ... We revisited all the actions and congratulated the people who had helped to achieve them. We ended by dancing traditional regional dances to the sound of a local group of musicians. It was an opportunity for local residents to thank each other for what they had done.*



**7 RE-EVOLUTION:** This is the final stage, when we invite the Oasis players and participants from the community to design a new dream cycle. Based on our experience of turning dreams and shared projects into reality, we think about what we will be able to achieve together over a longer timescale. We ask ourselves what the new dreams are, or what dreams were put on hold, and how we can put them into practice. In essence, we produce an action plan for the new activities that will continue to transform our surroundings, our neighbourhood, our community, and bring us closer to the world of our dreams.

We pose these questions within the group of players and also with members of the community (the neighbourhood or school community). The following questions can be used to inspire participants:

- What talents, beautiful things and resources are there around me?
- What dreams have been awakened in me?
- What is the next step I can take towards my dreams, using my network of talents, resources and beautiful things?

*An example of re-evolution from the Prosperitat neighbourhood of Barcelona: At the end of the Oasis, we held another meeting with local residents and the Oasis players. At the meeting we set up various discussion groups in a square. Those discussions enabled us to design the next steps, which included personal changes for participants, creating a group to take forward the vegetable plot and the garden that had been planted during the days of action, new ideas for the residents association, new ideas for the youth centre, and a local swap shop.*



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To find out more about the project go to [www.tidegloballearning.net](http://www.tidegloballearning.net)

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