Who cares?

Creating Empathetic leaders and citizens of the future

Victoria Gardner
HOD Social Sciences | Palmerston North Boys’ High School
About me

Teacher at boys’ schools in NZ for 23 years.

Lindisfarne College (State Integrated, Roll 520)
PNBHS (State Secondary, Roll 1780)
OVERALL THEME:
Shattering Stereotypes; helping boys cultivate healthy masculinity

SEMINAR TITLE:
**Who Cares?**
Helping boys overcome apathy and develop empathy

Formulated an idea with the Action Research cohort 2022/2023
How could I start to change the way boys treated each other and to become more empathetic and inclusive citizens?

Can we expect them to lead if they don’t fit within a ‘Man’ stereotype?
What/Who are we wanting our young men to be?

**MOTTO:**
‘Nihil Boni Sine Labore’ – ‘Nothing Achieved Without Hard Work’

**VISION:**
To develop educated men of outstanding character
Hai Whakapakari i Ngā Tamatāne
Kia Purapura Tuawhiti

*For me as an educator* – the idea of ‘Outstanding character’, must relate to the ideas of being able to communicate effectively as well as show empathy and kindness.
In 2019, the implementation of a new curriculum began in New Zealand.

This is taking part in stages and is redeveloping both the New Zealand curriculum document (NZC) and the new assessment standards-NCEA at Senior levels of school.
Te whai ahunga, te manaaki i ētahi atu me te manawaroa

‘Having a purpose and being empathetic and resilient’

The Year 10 Social Studies progression outcome...

The MoE is realizing the need to develop more empathy and resilience in our classrooms.
How to develop feelings of empathy in Year 9 Social Studies?

While completing my action research in 2022/2023, I chose a class of top stream year 9 Social Studies students that I taught, to see if this could be cultivated...

RESEARCH QUESTION:
How can student presentations help to develop boys’ empathy in a Year Nine Social Studies class?
Use the case studies of others!

With an understanding of the abuse of Human Rights (historical and contemporary), could I start to introduce and cultivate empathy?

Boys were to study these as a class and then create a multimodal presentation on one that interested them the most.
Explicitly teaching empathy

There are many versions of empathy scales, but this one, developed by Caruso and Mayer (1998), used a scale and gave valuable data to begin the research and to reflect at the end.
What we discovered
“In my book, Permission To Feel, I describe the Mood Meter, a tool to build greater emotional awareness that was built based on decades of research on the circumplex model of emotion. My colleague David Caruso first used the tool to help people recognize emotions. In the early 2000s, David and I reworked the Mood Meter which became the signature tool of RULER, the evidence-based approach to social and emotional learning…”

Excerpt from Mood Meter App designed to help you build your emotional intelligence (marcbrackett.com)
The key terms used by the boys in response to others’ struggles

Sadness
Overwhelmed
Cruel
Helpless
Some personal responses to the movies

“I found seeing the human rights abuses from the victim’s perspective affected me a lot more than just reading books about the same topics. It has changed my perspective a lot when it comes to human rights and before I did not quite realise just how helpless the situation was for those groups of people when they faced it.”

“This is just cruel to all the Jews and other people who were sent to the concentration camps. They had no chance at a new life and were treated like rubbish. They were fed literally a piece of bread about the size of an ant, a little dribble of potato water soup. With this hostile environment they had to live in they were destined to die there.”
“What the Germans did to the Jews in the concentration camps such as Sobibor was horrifically cruel and all of it happened just because of their religion.”
This boy was, at times, very emotional about the Holocaust as this was something he had never really been exposed to.

“I now realise how lucky I am to live in this safe country called New Zealand with a loving family and awesome friends. I am very grateful that I have enough food and water to keep me healthy and live a sustainable life. I also realise how hard it would be to live in those concentration camps with my whole life taken away from me, not knowing where my family was or even if they were still alive.”
2024: Extending the ideas of empathy to every classroom

1. How can I foster and develop empathy within my classroom on a regular basis?

2. How can the practice of relational teaching help both myself, and the students in front of me?

3. How can I be an authoritative rather than authoritarian leader in the classroom, while still maintaining tradition and control?
How can I foster and develop empathy in my classroom?

Use of a new scale in teaching Human Rights

- While we can change our approach as teachers, there are also ways to continue the work I started last year, by implementing ways that the boys can reflect and develop empathy.

- I adapted the Caruso and Meyer scale from earlier and have continued to use this in a Social Studies context.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Empathy scale for teaching and learning - Using case studies. (adapted from Caruso and Meyer) (Gardner 2024)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Seeing other people suffer harm makes me uncomfortable</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I sometimes cry when watching other people’s suffering</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I struggle to contain my emotions</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>It hurts me to see another person in pain</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Other people’s experiences influence me</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I enjoy learning about other’s experiences</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>I feel sad watching others being treated unfairly</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>People in bad situations don’t deserve to be treated differently</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>People’s bad experiences should be treated with sympathy by me</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>I feel guilty watching others suffering</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I try to make up for others past wrongs</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I like to learn about Human Rights, so the same mistakes are not repeated</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>I sometimes laugh in awkward situations, even when I know it isn’t appropriate</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>I don’t like watching anyone suffer</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>I can relate more to children’s experiences than adults</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results from a 2024 class

These were very similar to the experiences of my Action Research-empathy can be taught and cultivated in class, both through the use of case studies and relational teaching practice.
Starting points from the adapted survey:

Prior to this the answers to these questions were primarily in the ‘2’s’ and ‘3’s’.

There was a little apathy to the experiences of others.

“It happened ages ago”

“People realised they were wrong already”
At the end of this unit, many of these answers had slid… from 2 and 3, to 3, 4 and 5.

More empathy and more awareness. A better perspective!

“Others have had horrible experiences”

“School isn’t that bad”

“Why would they do that”

“You couldn’t do that now!”
How can the practice of relational teaching help both myself, and the students in front of me?
Boys learn teachers and not subjects according to Steve Biddulph. This is, indeed, true and boys tend to work for teachers they believe like them and respect them as an individual. Teacher professional development must concentrate on giving teachers the skills to relate to boys in an effective way so that the connection between them is maximized at all times.

Biddulph 2003 – Steve Biddulph – notes on ‘making school a better place for boys’ (positiveschools.com.au)

Now what that means is that the boy’s ability to access the content you’re teaching is 100 percent dependent on your relationship with him.

How to Educate Boys Pt. 1 – Building Positive Relationship – Calmer Classrooms
Extending Empathy from the Human Rights context to my classroom

In short, let’s call this my RTL (Relational Teaching and learning scale). Developed for me to better understand the boys in front of me.

Developing on from the outcome of boys being able to be empathetic to others’ situations, to the idea of fostering this through my continuous actions in the classroom.

I needed to understand what it was that made the boys ‘tick’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Empathy scale for teaching and learning - Relationships (Gardner 2024)</th>
<th>Strong Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I appreciate praise from my teacher for my work</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 It makes a difference to how I learn if the teacher knows me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I don’t like it when a teacher calls me the wrong name</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Watching other students getting told off makes me uncomfortable</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 When a teacher yells at me I lose all respect for them</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 The most important thing in the classroom is the subject I am being taught</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 I don’t mind being told off if I have done something wrong</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 The most important thing to help me in the classroom is the attitude of the teacher</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 I like a teacher using humour in a class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 I don’t like it when a teacher has no strict rules</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 I want teachers to know a bit about me and what I am interested in inside of the classroom</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Respect for a teacher has to be earned</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 I don’t understand why I have to earn a teacher’s respect</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 I like it when a teacher addresses me by my first name</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 A detention means I will never misbehave again</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 A restorative chat with a teacher never works to correct my behaviour</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 A teacher’s attitude to me changes how I act in class</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 I am always good in class—it doesn’t matter who the teacher is</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Who the teacher is will determine whether I like the subject or not</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 How long it takes a teacher to mark and return my work is important to me</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How did I do this?

- Asking a few of our more ‘challenging’ (not my choice of term!) students, what it is that makes them feel valued in a class and become focused, motivated and engaged learners.

- Could we get these boys to engage with their learning in a positive way, simply by changing OUR approach as teachers?
CASE STUDY 1:

**Student A**

**DAY 1:**
**ME:** Sit where you like.
**ME:** You have continuously talked, please move up here.
**HIM:** Mumble mumble, this class sucks.
**ME:** Tactfully ignores.

**DAY 2:**
**ME:** Remember A, you are up at the front with me today.
**HIM:** Mumble, Geography sucks, I thought this class would be fun.

**DAY 3:**
Attitude change…
**HIM:** I love this class. Miss, can I keep sitting up the front please?
CASE STUDY 2:

**Student G**

- One of the schools longest pastoral records.
- A boarder
- A clear idea of where he wants to be after he completes his schooling
- The student that everyone knows – even in a school of 1800!
- The one that others ‘didn’t want’.
- And I was the lucky one that ended up teaching him and engaging in a way that has changed both of our viewpoints of each other into very positive ones.
Have a go and reflect on your practice
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Empathy scale for teaching - Relationships from teachers (Gardner 2024)</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I make a habit of learning all my students' names within the first week of class</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I don't believe that a seating plan is important</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I always call students by their first names</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>I don't believe that raising my voice is the only way to control a class</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>I make a point of knowing something about my students outside of the classroom</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
And? Let’s reflect on your scores

0–5
There are fundamental changes that should/could be made to your approach in the classroom.

6–10
While there are some encouraging signs, further investigation into your approach will be useful.

11–19
Many of these practices have been implemented in your classroom, but there is fine tuning needed in some areas.

20–25
Your relational approach in the classroom is imbedded and will be contributing to a positive culture in your classroom.

We can never ‘rest on our laurels’ as educators, we all need to be continuously assessing ourselves to achieve best practice.
Why these statements? Why are they important to the boys?

**Discussion**

- I make a habit of learning all my students names within the first week of class.
- I don’t believe that a seating plan is important.
- I always call students by their first names.
- I don’t believe that raising my voice is the only way to control a class.
- I make a point of knowing something about my students outside of the classroom.
More from the boys – *Using the RTL scale to determine their viewpoints*

**Year 10 Social Studies Class**

I make a habit of learning all my students names within the first week of class. *Over 80% liked this*

I don’t believe that a seating plan is important. *95% of students agreed this didn’t help their learning or behaviour*

I always call students by their first names. *Boys are not as concerned as you may imagine – 60% in agreeance here*

I don’t believe that raising my voice is the only way to control a class. *90% agreed that yelling leads to a lack of respect from the boys (4’s and 5’s)*

I make a point of knowing something about my students outside of the classroom. *80% answered in the 4 and 5 here. There were NO 1’s*
How can I be an authoritative rather than authoritarian leader in the classroom, while still maintaining tradition and control?
23 years of teaching to get here

- As Steve Biddulph has said, Boys learn teachers, not subjects, has become a real catch phrase for me.
- My initial teaching was formulated around the idea that the boys must learn my knowledge and didn’t need to understand me, nor did I need to understand them.
- But, 23 years of teaching our young men, and embarking on research and reading, has only made me realise that our relationships come before any knowledge.
Some books and articles that I found interesting in this journey of empathy and relational teaching

Permission to Feel
Marc Brackett

Better Boys, Better Men
Andrew Reiner

Raising Boys
Steve Biddulph

For Whom the Boy Toils
Michael Reichert and Richard Hawley
Questions? Comments? Time to chat?

gardnerv@pnbhs.school.nz

Download takeaways for future reference here

Victoria Gardner
HOD Social Sciences | Palmerston North Boys’ High School