TEACHING ADAPTABILITY: WORKING WITH DIGITAL TOOLS TO FOSTER CONFIDENCE AND RISK-TAKING IN GRADE 8 BOYS

Robert Faltermeier & Damien Pitman,
Jeppe High School for Boys

Introduction

One of the main functions of our school is to provide a nurturing environment so that our boys become better men. Entering a new high school with a strict hierarchy can be intimidating for Grade 8 boys and can delay or stifle confidence levels. Students might have the will to adapt; however, being judged by their peers can be obstacles to their adaptability. They are often hesitant to take calculated risks. Considering these challenges, we aimed to conduct research on methods that might encourage Grade 8 boys to feel confident and take risks.

The Research Question

How might working with a variety of digital tools help foster confidence and encourage risk-taking in Grade 8 boys?

Research Context and Participants

Jeppe High School for Boys is a government all-boys school situated in the heart of Johannesburg, South Africa. Jeppe welcomes boys from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and is home away from home for over two-hundred and fifty boarding boys; the remaining seven-hundred boys are day boys. The school has a proud 127 years of history behind its name. Our motto, *Forti Nihil Difficilius*, is Latin for "Nothing is too Difficult for the Brave." At Jeppe, we aim to produce the "all-round Jeppe boy." The participants in our action research project were a group of 13 to 14-year-old Grade 8 boys who were all in the same English class.

Jeppe High School for Boys in 1909
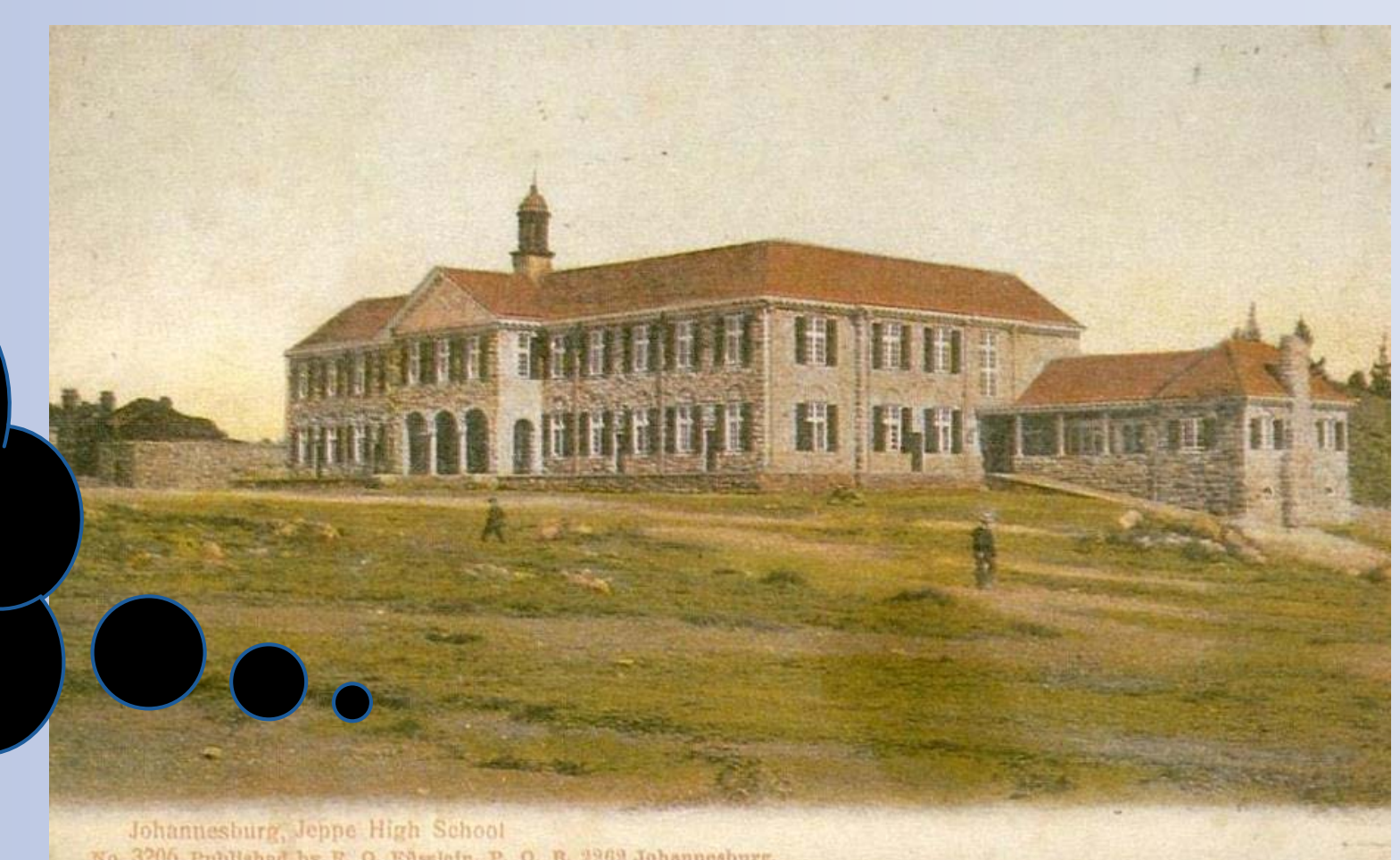
The Research Action

We hoped to encourage adaptability in our boys by fostering confidence and providing risk-taking opportunities. After gathering permissions, our action involved:

- Collecting preliminary data from the students on the topics of confidence, risk-taking and adaptability.

- Training the boys to use various digital tools, including Google Docs, Google Forms, and News Booth.

- Allowing boys, over a five-week period, to explore these technological tools by working on assigned activities and projects related to our study of Roald Dahl's short story *Lamb to Slaughter*.

Scan the QR codes to hear boys' comments about this project.

"The use of digital tools helps develop adaptability."

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection in all phases of the research was both qualitative and quantitative in nature, with qualitative being the primary form of data collected. We used three phases of data collection; each phase involved teacher observations, interviews with students, and Google Form surveys.

- **Phase 1:** A Google Form quiz provided baseline data regarding boys' first experience with technology.
- **Phase 2:** Teacher field notes and audio-recordings of class sessions as boys worked with digital tools, including Google Docs and various video recording and news broadcasting apps.
- **Phase 3:** Student interviews required boys to reflect on their recent digital activities in order to consider whether working with various forms of technology affected their confidence.

Key Findings and Discussion

After categorizing and coding our data, we recognized several recurring themes. These themes related to the boys' use of digital tools, their confidence levels, and their ability to take meaningful risks in class. An unforeseen fourth theme was identified involving their confidence and risk-taking behaviours outside the classroom environment.

1-Through the course of our action, the boys began to embrace digital tools as a part of our classroom instruction. One boy said, **"This is so cool. I can see you typing on my phone, but you're using your phone."**

2-During the first few lessons the boys slowly started to engage more vocally with the task and even started to confidently ask questions. Some boys began to offer advice if they noticed classmates were having issues with logging in. One boys asked, **"Sir, can I help him log on?"**

3 The boys were more vocal about asking for help in an attempt to get the best possible outcome for the task at hand. We noticed students who typically asked irrelevant questions only to get a laugh from the class were now comfortable asking questions related to the task, unfazed with how peers might judge. One boy said **" I have the confidence to try new things and risk sharing his ideas more openly."**

4 One of our colleagues mentioned, "The boys participating in your action research project want to do what you are doing in my class as well." One boy asked, **"Can you please show Mr. X how to use Google Docs?"**

Conclusions

After reviewing our data, it was clear that digital tools did have an effect on encouraging positive risk-taking and confidence in Grade 8 learners at Jeppe, not only in the confines of the action, but in the greater school environment as well. However, we discovered the incorporation of digital tools must be introduced in stages, allowing the boys to be anonymous at first so as to share thoughts and feelings without the fear of being ridiculed. It is essential for the teacher to be cognisant of setting the stage at the outset. In short the use of digital tools helps develop the skill of adaptability."

Scan the QR code to see a boy's final project - a simulated news report about the murder mystery.

Key Readings

- Doyle-Jones, C. S. (2015). *Importance of working collaboratively and risk-taking with digital technologies when teaching literacy*. Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations Publishing. (AAT 3715838)
- Martin, A. (2013). *Coping with change: teaching adaptability will help kids grow*. Retrieved from http://theconversation.com/coping-with-change-teaching-adaptability-will-help-kids-grow-19726
- Reeves, M., & Deimler, M. (2011). Adaptability: The new competitive advantage. *Harvard Business Review, 89*(7/8), 134-141.

International Boys' Schools Coalition Action Research Program 2017 - 2018
Adaptability in a Changing World

international boys' schools coalition