



ST ANDREW'S COLLEGE

Introduction

"I don't have a place yet – I come across as just some dumb kid who is looking for attention because of doing impulsive things."

Teaching the "born free" generation (born post 1994) in South Africa has become particularly complex. Teenage boys are struggling with their identity with regards to race, ideals and values, as well as what it means to be a "man."

Grade 9 boys at our school find themselves in a particular identity crisis, caught in some no-man's-land between being "new boys" and the demanding senior phase. If not one of the academically gifted or a real struggler on the other end, they sometimes fall through the cracks altogether.

Research Context and Participants

"When in trouble (which is a lot) I start to get nervous, anxious and shy, because I'm out of my comfort zone."

St Andrew's College is an independent, Anglican, predominantly boarding school for boys from Grade 8 to 12. The school is situated in Grahamstown in the rural Eastern Cape province of South Africa.

We aimed our research at a Grade 9 English class of mixed academic ability, representing a broad spectrum of boys.

The Research Question

How might participation in the Critical Thinking Skills section of the Adapt Program deepen Grade 9 boys' ability to integrate more effectively into their school environment?



Key Readings

Marin, L. M., & Halpern, D. F. (2010). Pedagogy for developing critical thinking in adolescents: Explicit instruction produces greatest gains. *Elsevier*, 6(2011), 1-13.

Sax, L. (2007). *Boys adrift*. Perseus.

Swartz, R. (2003). Infusing critical and creative thinking into instruction in high school classrooms. In D. Fasko (Ed.), *Critical thinking and reasoning*. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

Critical thinking is not exclusive to "smart people."

Critically Speaking: The Impact of Teaching Critical Thinking Skills

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"Yes! It helped me in exams - I felt more confident, like I knew more!"

The Research Action

Of all the animals, the boy is the most unmanageable – Plato

We presented an academic course where boys learnt the language and concepts of critical thinking through evocative and current practical examples, puzzles, exercises as well as traditional teaching methods. Lessons consisted of stimuli of short video clips, newspaper articles or visual texts. Short skills-teaching sessions then led into activities: small group discussions, debates, role-plays or writing tasks.

Data Collection and Analysis

"The railway puzzle was the most enjoyable - it showed our sheep mentality."

We used a mixed methods approach, but found that the richest information came from the qualitative data derived through:

- Online surveys and an online blog
- A written reflection on their perceptions around critical thinking
- Creating logical and sound arguments around emotional issues
- Teacher observations and reflections
- In-depth individual video interviews

The online surveys showed a tangible positive shift in some areas. Written reflections and arguments were analysed for general trends and perceptions. The video interviews were transcribed and analysed to ascertain the impact of the programme individually on boys. Since most of our data were question-specific, assigning these to categories was relatively easy. We developed common themes, and interesting excerpts were highlighted, which elucidated our key findings.

Key Findings and Discussion

"I debate differently to other people now because of what we did."

We found that most boys thought that:

- Although they don't "love" writing, critical thinking in self-reflective writing is valuable in **positioning yourself in the world**.
- Being able to think critically is **useful when organising your thoughts**, especially when confronted with emotional topics, or when faced with stressful conditions such as tests and examinations.
- **They learn best while doing**: concepts become irrelevant if they can't relate them directly to their own environment.
- Developing critical thinking skills has a **positive impact on their writing skills**, particularly with regard to structure, paragraphing and providing valid and sound evidence.
- Critical thinking skills are **useful in social situations** and **supports better decision making**.
- The **metalanguage** of critical thinking becomes useful when **talking about your own learning**.

Conclusions

"I think I'm better at assessing the consequences of my actions and decisions."

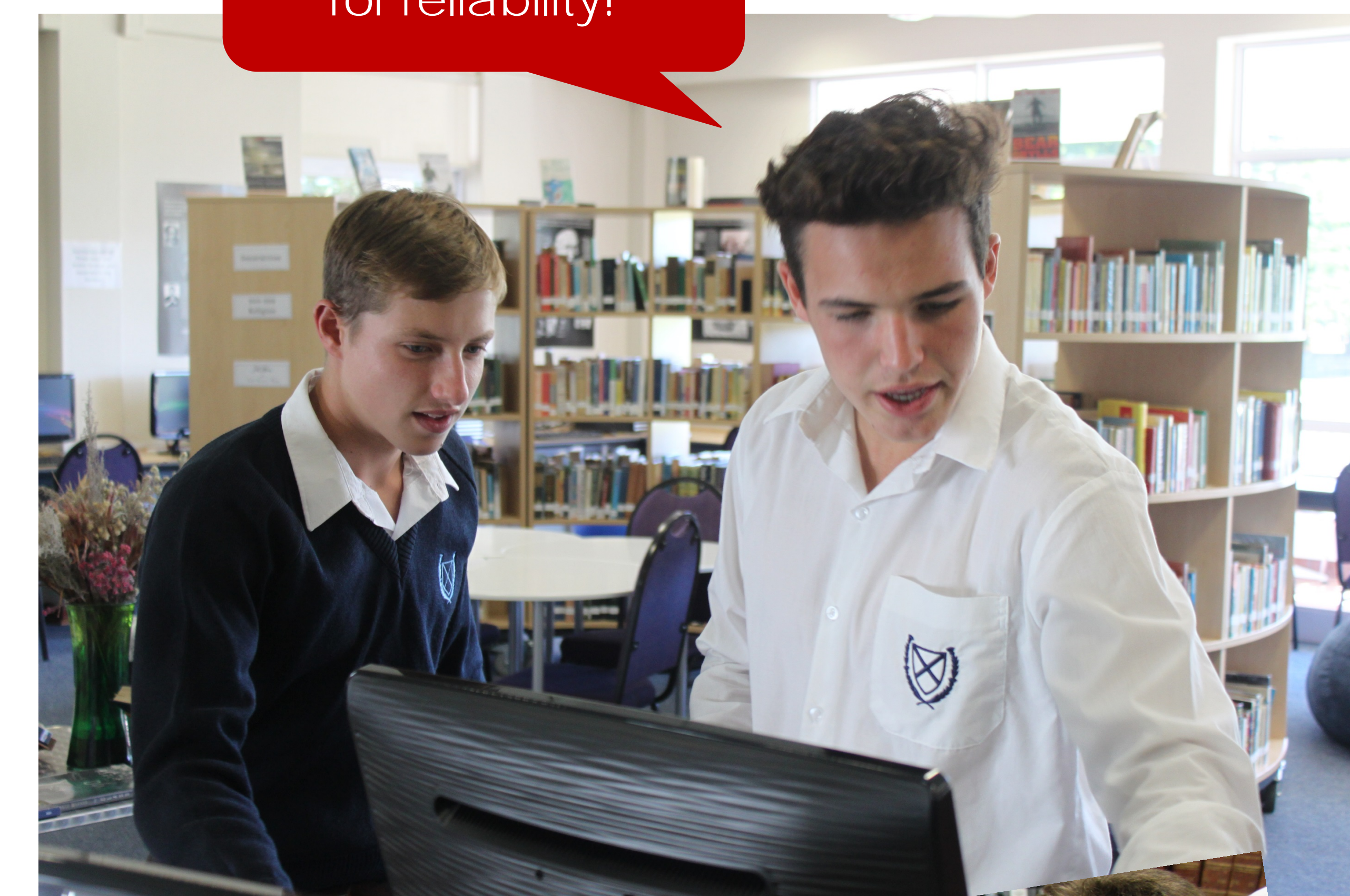
We did not anticipate how appreciative some boys would be when they were enabled to express their thoughts and feelings. The knowledge that your opinion matters might be one of the most empowering ways in which you can exercise self-actualisation.

According to our pre- and post-surveys, there was a significant shift in how well the boys thought that they communicated with peers, supporting our hypothesis that critical thinking skills empowers boys at both academic *and* social levels.

This study created a space for boys to reflect on their place in the world; strengthening their voice within their complex negotiation of finding an authentic sense of self – a vital ingredient of being adaptable in a changing world.



"You have to check for reliability!"



"I just learn better by doing."

Further Information

This poster and further information is available at <http://www.theibsc.org/>

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