



FROM REFLECTION TO AWARENESS: HOW LIFE STORIES SHAPE A GRADE 7 BOY'S IDENTITY

Patricia Alviano
Crescent School, Toronto

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

Researcher's Email:
palviano@crescentschool.org

Introduction

At Crescent School, educators endeavour to guide students in the increasingly complicated task of understanding their authentic "self." Now, more than ever before, we must challenge the influence of identity formation via social media by mentoring our students to create a personal identity using the richest source of data available—their personal story.

Crescent School's *Portrait of a Crescent Graduate* identifies three questions: "Who am I?", "How do I Lead?", and "What is my Legacy?". This work, along with the ideas embedded in the 2018/2019 IBSC topic *Boys and Stories: Pathways to Learning* inspired me to commit to providing students with an intentional framework for identity construction. This action research project focuses primarily on the development of narrative coherence, a reflective tool used to make meaningful connections between life events and one's sense of self.

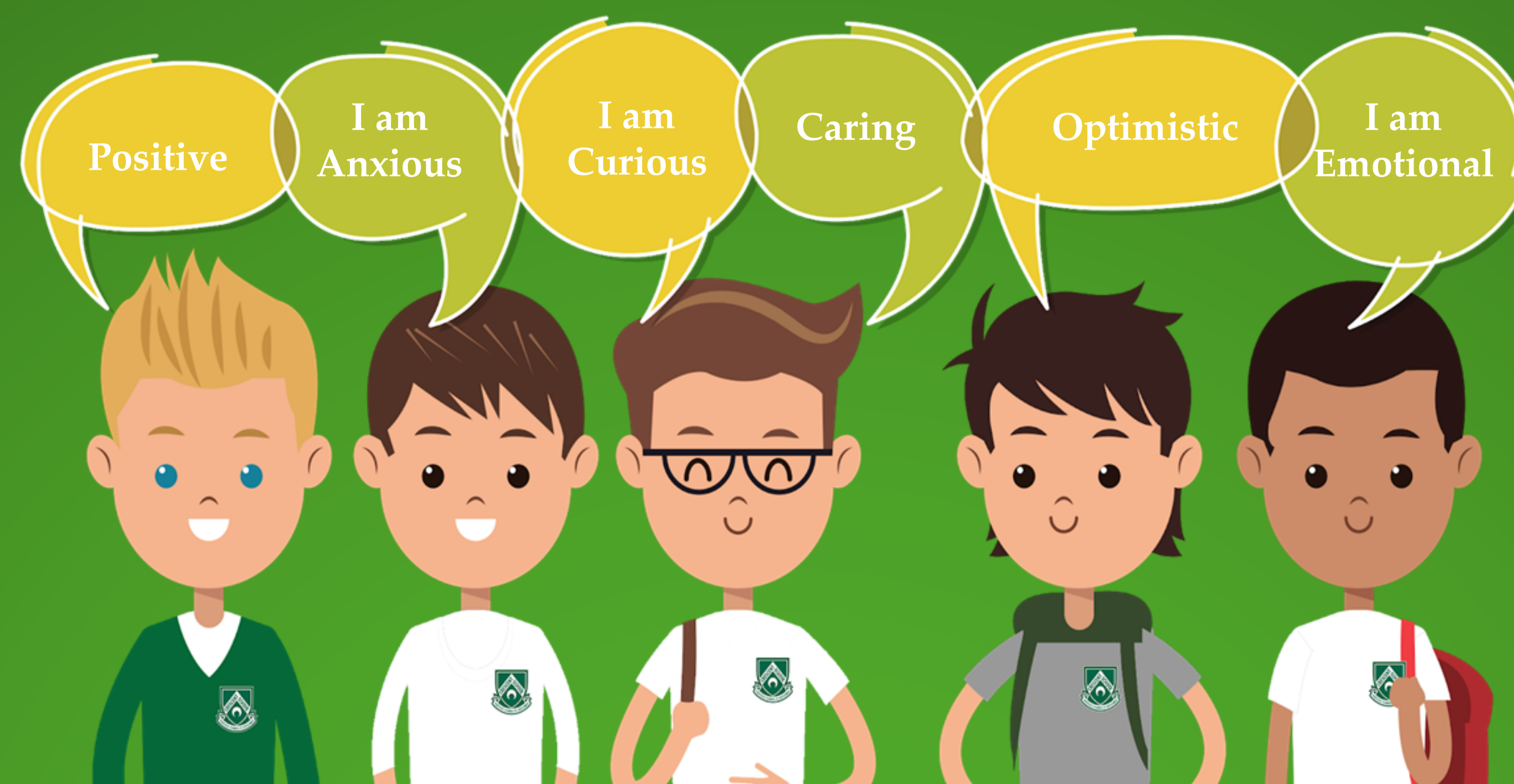
The Research Question

How might analysing life story events develop Grade 7 boys' narrative coherence?

Research Context and Participants

Crescent School is a Grade 3 to 12 independent, university preparatory, non-denominational, school for boys in Toronto, Canada. The school seeks to live its mission *Men of Character From Boys of Promise*, which recognizes that boys with curious minds and humble hearts have the potential to discover their unique passions and purpose in life. The core values of respect, responsibility, honesty, and compassion are demonstrated daily in our words and actions. Crescent School is passionately engaged in ensuring that each and every student is known and loved.

Eleven Grade 7 boys participated in this action research. These boys were part of my mentor group; mentor groups included a random sample of the overall 84 boys in grade 7.



The Research Action

Each student answered the question "Who am I?" as a baseline assessment. Following this pre-activity data collection, each participant created a personal narrative portfolio including accounts of critical life story events. Students chose to build their personal narratives as a reflective journal, a timeline using programs such as Prezi or Google Slides, or a social media display using Instagram or Facebook. Over the course of eight weeks, portfolios were populated with personal reflections of six critical life story events. The memories reflected two high-point, two low-point, and two turning-point life story memories. Following each submission, one-on-one discussions with each participant followed to promote the development of narrative coherence.

Key Findings and Discussion



Data Collection

Pre- and Post-Action Reflections

The boys began and ended the process by answering the question "Who am I?"

Written Reflections

The boys were asked to write a reflection for two high-point, two low-point, and two turning-point life story memories. Prompts allowed them to think critically about how these events connected to their understanding of self.

Interviews

One-on-one interviews allowed the boys to use autobiographical reasoning to make connections between their life story memory and identity.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data, including anecdotal notes, observations, and exit tickets were analyzed, looking for any recurring commentary. The priority was to include the boys' authentic voices in reporting my findings to highlight shifts in their self-awareness. The various data collection methods allowed the boys to continuously reflect on their personal experiences and the analysis captured recurring themes and patterns.

Conclusions

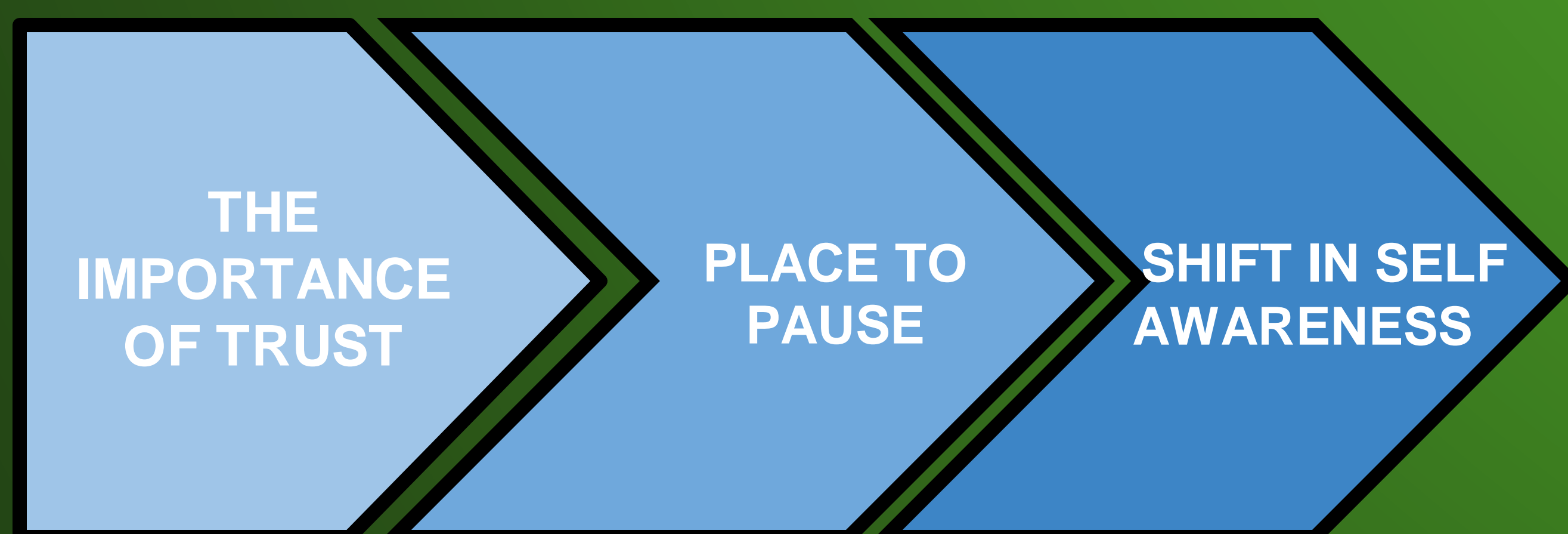
Findings from this action research reflect a positive correlation between the development of narrative coherence and identity formation. Through the analysis of critical life story events it was remarkable to see each Grade 7 participant experience a shift in their understanding of "self" as they answered the question, "Who am I?", more fully. This action research confirmed the need for offering Crescent students with an intentional process to develop narrative coherence as a tool to answer the three guiding questions in the *Portrait of a Graduate*. Framing the question "Who am I?" in a predictable context allowed the boys to stop and think about themselves.

Key Readings

Habermas, T., & Bluck, S. (2000). Getting and life: The emergence of the life story in adolescence. *Psychological Bulletin*. 126 (5), 748-769.

Habermas, T., & Haiboglu, N. (2014). Contextualizing the self: The emergence of a biographical understanding in adolescence. *New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development*, 145, 29-41.

McLean, K. C., Breen, A. V., & Fournier, M. A. (2010). Constructing the self in early, middle, and late adolescent boys: Narrative identity, individuation, and well-being. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 20(1), 166-187.



International Boys' Schools Coalition Action Research Program 2018 - 2019
Boys and Stories: Pathways to Learning

