



WHAT SHAPES HIM, SHAPES THEM

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Further Information
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Introduction

This action research project investigated whether Year 10 students coming together on a regular basis and sharing personal stories with one another had an effect on their level of connectedness with one another.

Adolescence is a time when students look to redefine their identity and purpose, and throughout our teaching career we have noticed that Year 10 students can appear more disengaged, particularly emotionally and intellectually.

Fostering connectedness amongst young men is an important area of our work as teachers in order to enhance their psychological well-being (Schulze, 2014).

The Research Question

How does the sharing of "personal stories" affect connectedness in Year 10 boys?

Research Context and Participants

The Scots College is an Australian independent boys' school in Sydney's Eastern Suburbs. The school has a reformed Presbyterian heritage and draws on its Christian values to shape and inform its practice. The College has nine campuses and approximately 2000 students. This project was conducted with students from the Senior School Campus in Bellevue Hill.

- Pilot program of writing and sharing a personal narrative into the Year 10 Tutor groups.
- It follows on from self-discovery activities during Year 9 whilst the students are at our outdoor education campus at Glengarry.
- The focus group consisted of thirty Year 10 students aged between 15 and 16 years. There was a mix of day-boy and boarder students in Year 10 that offered a mixture of socio-economic and cultural difference amongst the group

How does the sharing of personal stories affect connectedness in Year 10 boys?



*The value relates to the % of boys who indicated a positive change in connectedness.

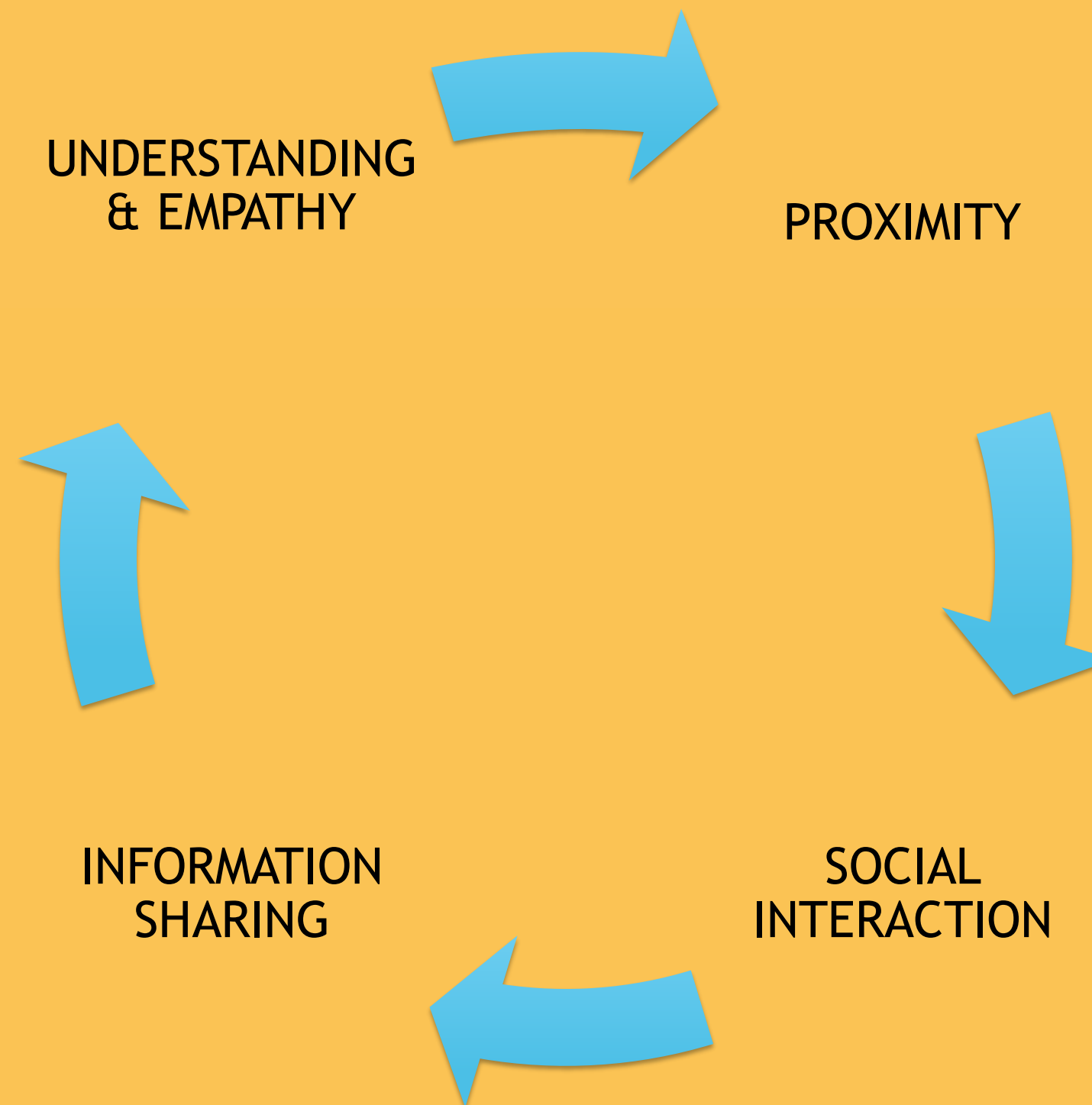
The Research Action



The action comprised a series of weekly 25-minute sessions spanning a seven-week time period. Students engaged in a variety of story sharing initiatives, ranging from providing random facts about themselves to the final action of sharing a deeper and more complex side of themselves or family life through a speech.



Social interaction



First impressions & stereotypes

Data Collection and Analysis

- Interviews with participants (individual and/or focus groups)
- Researcher observations
- Questionnaires/descriptive surveys
- Researcher field notes
- Student self-assessments
- Photos and videos

Key Findings and Discussion

- Connectedness is influenced by **proximity**, however, this is limited without interaction.
- **Social Interaction** for the boys was based on verbal and non-verbal behaviour, where the level of engagement is usually low.
- **Information sharing** activities over time led to improved relationships. Students noted that this developed greater respect, trust, and understanding between each other, which allowed them to feel comfortable to share their meaningful stories.
- The sharing of information and ultimately the sharing of their story took place as an evolutionary process through the growth of connection and resulted in students **understanding and gaining empathy** for one another.

Conclusions

- Students explaining the meaning behind their story and why it was important for them to share it was a significant finding in our project and led to an increase in connectedness.
- There is a difference between knowing things about someone and knowing someone. Whilst the project didn't necessarily form better friendships, it did appear to form greater connections and understanding between group members.
- Moments of vulnerability shared willingly and heard respectively by Year 10 boys enabled a deep experience of being known and understood, essentially facilitating connection through empathy.

Key Readings

Karcher, J. (2011). *The Hemingway: Measure of Adolescent Connectedness. Hemingway Manual.*

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Schulze, S and Naidu, N (2014). *Exploring Differences in Connectedness of South African Adolescents. Journal of Social Science, 40(2).*

Seppala, E., Rossomando, T., and Doty, J. (2013). *Social Connection and Compassion: Important Predictors of Health and Well-Being. Social Research Vol. 80.*

