

"Who am I, really?": Year 12 Boys Defining Identity Through Their Immigration Stories

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

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Introduction

Media reports of youth gangs involved in suburban inter-racial conflict came to mind as I read of successful personal storytelling projects that had delivered positive outcomes for immigrant graduates at University of New Mexico (Vitali, 2016).

This action research project was an opportunity for 18-year-old boys to engage with families about their immigration experiences. I believed that through personal storytelling at this critical time in their lives, they would gain an increased understanding of themselves and each other as a diverse cultural mix with shared experiences.

The Research Question

How might an exploration of the stories of Year 12 boys' own cultural heritage encourage a deeper sense of identity?

Research Context and Participants

Mazenod College is a Catholic school with an enrolment of 1415 boys in Years 7-12. It is a highly diverse multicultural community located in south-east suburban Melbourne.

The 12 participants in this action research project were Year 12 Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning (VCAL) vocational pathway students. See them at work on garden landscaping in the inset photo.



The Research Action

By supporting the boys to produce a video of their family's personal immigration story, the application of an action learning method guided my process through the project. The research design was informed by an inquiry-based method of learning incorporating scaffolded activities.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collected were both qualitative and quantitative. Methods used to collect data included:

- Interviews with the boys and pre-project survey to establish existing knowledge.
- Researcher observations and classroom conversations.
- Exit survey provided feedback on the boys' attitudes and feelings towards participation.
- Evaluation of dialogue of final videos.

Once data were organized and categorised, interpretation involved identifying data that answered the research question. Additionally, evidence of the value of this project to Year 12 VCAL boys, and the method of teaching it, was of particular interest.

Key Findings and Discussion

Three themes emerged from the coding and categorisation of the action research data.

A boy's identity is influenced by the experiences of his family unit.

Boy H was comfortable with his Mauritian culture "Members of the family speak Creole when we have parties and celebrations".

[Listening to family stories made me] "see the importance of maintaining the link between the two cultures". Boy J

The project provided boys with the opportunity for conversations.

Boy E speaking to his grandmother says "it helps getting closer". It was "a long time" since they'd had such a conversation.

"it was difficult to approach my mum about the topic since I never talked to her much about it". Boy I

The boys developed an appreciation of their family's sacrifice.

"I learnt my family history and why it is special". "Life was difficult". Boy E

"It was a risk to move to a country they knew nothing about". Boy C

Conclusions

The very act of creating the story video at this stage of their lives put the boys back in touch with their family stories. It provided the opportunity to look closely at their roots in Australia through adult eyes and to ask questions in the context of their growing maturity.

Our stories make us who we are. By re-engaging with the reality of their family's immigration experience and life prior to emigrating, these boys know their story better and have a deeper insight into their own identities.

Key Readings

- Cooper, P. J., & Collins, R. (1992). *Look what happened to frog: Storytelling in education*. Scottsdale, AZ: Gorsuch Scarisbrick.
- Vitali, F. (2016). Teaching with Stories as the Content and Context for Learning. *Global Education Review*, 3(1), 27-44.
- Zehr, M. A. (2017). Celebrating the voices of immigrant students. *American Educator*, (Winter 2017-2018), 13-15.



[The templates] "gave me an idea of the questions to ask my family."

[By interviewing grandmother] "I learnt it helps getting closer."

[By doing the project I learnt] "about why they came to Australia."

