

Walk and Talk: Developing Boys' Well-being Through Peer Conversations

Further Information

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

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Introduction

Sax (2017) argues that '*boys seem to think that they can make a problem disappear by refusing to acknowledge it.*' What he calls '*Magical Thinking*' should be discouraged but regrettably, today, boys' demanding timetables and busy lives in boarding schools leave very little time for their emotional voice to be exercised.

This project aimed to give boys the time, space, the tool of **coaching**, and the benefits of **walking** to empower their voices and sense of agency during pastoral sessions.

The Research Question

How do peer-to-peer outdoor exchanges in pastoral sessions enhance the emotional well-being of boys in Years 10 and 11?

Research Context and Participants

Eton College, an independent boarding school outside of London in South East England, educates boys aged 13-18. The participants of this research were my two tutor groups: one of five boys aged 14 to 15, and a second of four boys aged 15 to 16. I met each group once a week throughout a term.

Data Collection and Analysis

For this research, I relied on a mixed methods design. Data were collected throughout the project via questionnaires from participants, interviews and focus groups, the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being scale and student journals.

I created a system of categorization to analyse these data. Dependability meant that I was particularly careful to give as much detail as possible on any changes or particular circumstances in my observation notes.

Key Findings and Discussion

The boys' definition of well-being matched that of the Oxford English Dictionary (2014): a 'state of being happy, or prosperous, physical, psychological, or moral welfare'. '*Thinking clearly*' and the importance of healthy relationships with peers and adults were all mentioned at the beginning of the research.

Key findings.

- Older boys showed greater support for the project than the younger boys who felt that the 'Walk and Talk' sessions resembled therapy.
- The darkness provided by sessions taking place in the late afternoons of a winter term allowed more privacy and created an environment more conducive to self-disclosure.
- Most boys were able to open-up to their peers and felt relaxed after the sessions, sometimes even more productive afterward as they had a 'clearer mind.'
- Some boys surprised themselves when realising they could be helpful to their peer using the coaching tool.
- Boys recognised that walking whilst talking lessened the pressure of having to look at one another and enabled them to have deeper conversations about themselves.

"I MANAGED TO TALK ABOUT THINGS THAT WERE WORRYING."

BOY C

"I FELT HELPFUL BEING A COACH." BOY A

"COACHING IS A SKILL EVERYONE SHOULD HAVE AND LEARN." BOY D

Conclusions

It is clear that the sessions helped boys express their emotions freely and think clearly. They also provided a safer forum for boys to express themselves and reinforced healthy social interactions.

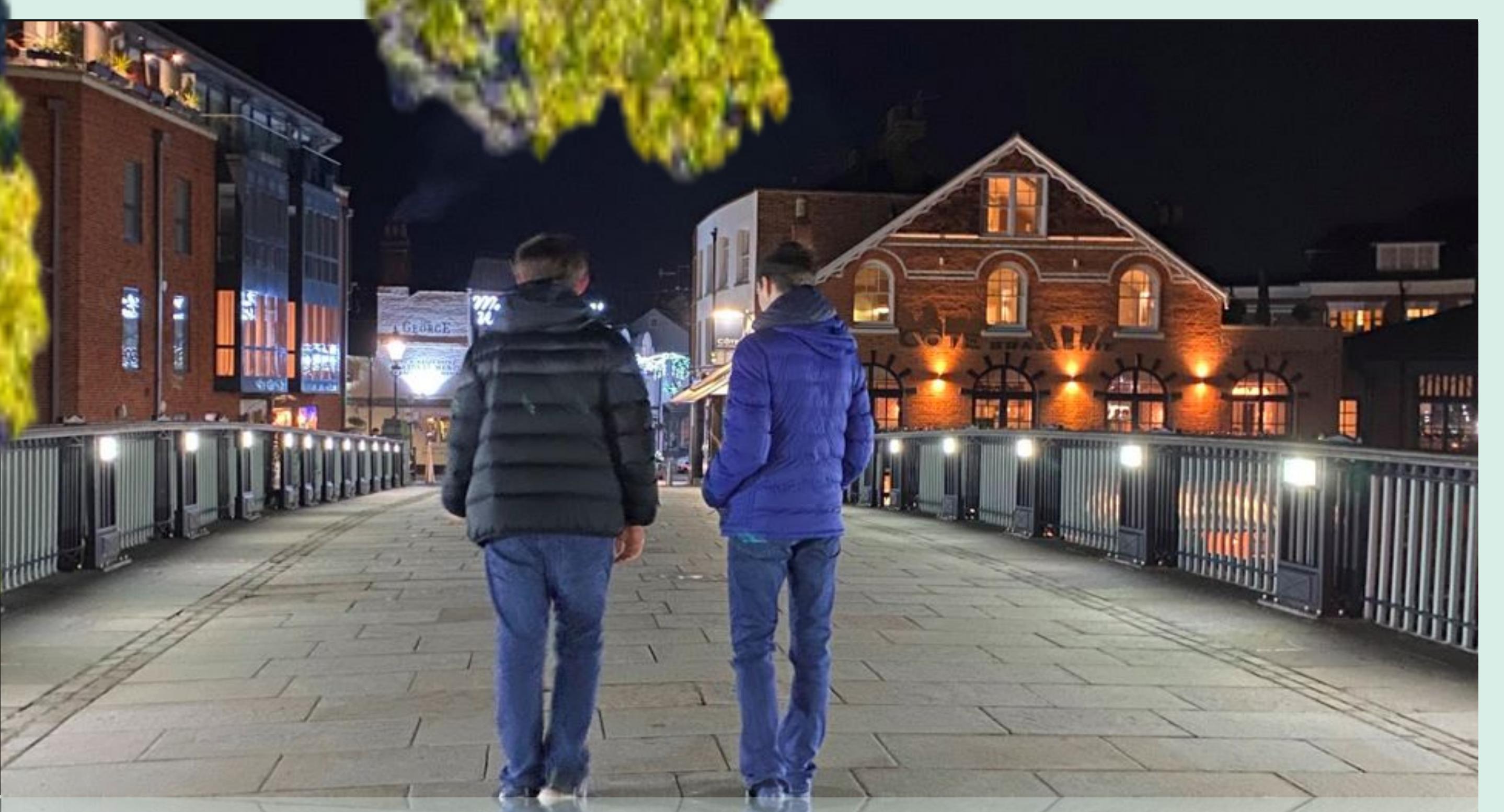
All of these advantages were aspects identified in the boys' definitions of well-being. We can, therefore, say that peer-to-peer outdoor exchanges in pastoral sessions enhanced the emotional well-being of boys in years 10 and 11, especially in Year 11 and increase their sense of agency.

Key Readings

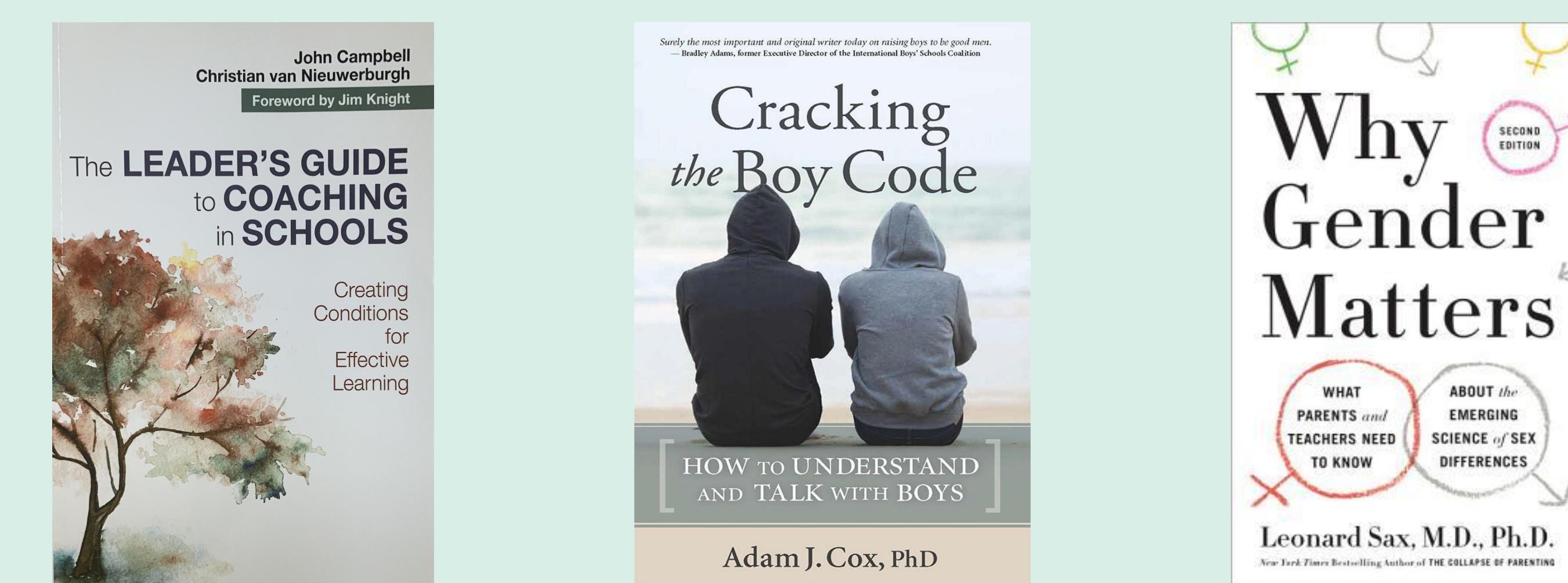
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The Research Action



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