

NIACE Research and Development



Key Findings



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Catching Confidence

The nature and role of confidence-ways of developing and recording changes in the learning context

Abstract

Catching Confidence arose from Adult and Community Learning Fund (ACLF) projects. The projects worked with a range of different learners, many of whom had undertaken no learning for many years. One of the key learning outcomes reported by ACLF projects was a growth in confidence among learners, and such gains appeared to be highly significant to learners. The outcomes were usually based on anecdotal evidence. It was important to learn more about the nature of confidence, particularly the role of confidence in learning and to explore ways in which any changes in confidence could be captured.

The initial research began in 2003 and involved investigating the nature of confidence, designing a visual and interactive tool to capture changes in confidence and piloting the tool with the help of tutors and learners. In 2005, a guidance pack was designed which built on the research and recent experience of tutors using the catching confidence tool in different learning environments. It contains advice and guidance on how to capture changes in learners' confidence. The pack was developed in response to what teachers felt could be a helpful process in catching confidence.

Research methodology:

This was an action research project involving practitioner researchers and learners in piloting and adapting the catching confidence tool. In-depth one to one interviews and focus groups with learners and tutors were also carried out. Initially, 9 projects involving 93 learners piloted the tool for research purposes. In the second part of the project, eight organisations took part, with 41 groups involving 350 learners, to try the tool and embed it into learning courses.

Key Findings

The main conclusions of the project are:

Confidence and learning

- ❖ Participation in learning did increase most learners' confidence. Confidence gains developed at different rates and were not constant but rose and fell.
- ❖ Changes in confidence related to learners' feelings of self-worth, self-assurance, happiness and increased well-being.
- ❖ A noticeable change was learners' enhanced ability to 'speak out' in many different ways and circumstances.

- ❖ Increased confidence, often combined with new knowledge and skills, brought about changes in learners' lives, which included new dreams and aspirations.
- ❖ Successful learning increased confidence, which in turn supported further successes in learning.
- ❖ Changes in confidence had an impact on relationships with family and friends, increased levels of community involvement and changes in work aspirations as well as relationships and achievements at work, as individuals became more assertive and independent.

Helping confidence to grow

Both learners and tutors were able to identify what helps confidence to grow. Their evidence related to three areas: the tutor, teaching and learning approaches and support for learning.

- ❖ The role of the tutor emerged as vital in developing confidence. Many teaching approaches and activities were identified as helping learners' confidence: having time to answer questions, repeating things in case they were not understood, sharing ideas and doing things together.
- ❖ Tutors had strategies to help learners' confidence, such as accentuating achievements and encouraging a positive outlook.
- ❖ The most significant support seemed to come from the learning group itself. Sharing difficulties, solutions and offering friendship were valued by both learners and tutors.

This research provided powerful evidence that there is a strong connection between learning and confidence. Catching changes in confidence means first defining what is being caught and then recording its growth or loss as evidence. Confidence was an outcome of learning which had wide ranging benefits; an important one was that it enhanced ability to learn and inclination to take up further learning opportunities.

Recommendations

- ❖ The methods of integrating and building confidence in the adult learning environment identified in this research should be built into adult learning programmes.
- ❖ Work should be carried out to develop best practice in framing confidence growth as a learning outcome.
- ❖ Growth in confidence should be recognised by funding bodies as a valid and desirable outcome.
- ❖ Development of other tools for recording confidence should also be considered.

Output

- ❖ Eldred, J., Dutton, Y., Snowdon, K. and Ward, J. (2005), *Catching Confidence: The nature and role of confidence – ways of developing and recording changes in the learning context*. NIACE: Leicester. Available to download from <http://www.niace.org.uk/funds/ACLF/Catching-Confidence-Final-Report.pdf>
- ❖ Eldred, J., Dutton, Y., Snowdon, K. and Ward, J. (2004), *Catching Confidence summary report*. NIACE: Leicester. Available to download from <http://www.niace.org.uk/funds/ACLF/Catching-Confidence-Summary.pdf>
- ❖ For updates on current training opportunities see www.niace.org.uk

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Project Manager: Yanina Dutton

Email: nina.dutton@niace.org.uk

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niace
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21 De Montfort Street
Leicester LE1 7GE

Tel: +44 (0)116 204 4200/1
Fax: +44 (0)116 285 4514
Website: www.niace.org.uk

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