Catching confidence

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

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Guidance for tutors

Acknowledgements

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Welcome to Catching Confidence!

This guidance is designed to help adult learning providers and tutors to develop, identify and record changes in confidence during learning. This is important because many practitioners and learners have reported that gains in confidence are a significant part of learning. The pack is based on research conducted with 17 different providers with access to over 450 learners. The guidance is designed to link with existing teaching and learning infrastructures, enhance the learning experience and offer evidence of development. It places learners at the heart of the process and fits well with Recognising And Recording Progress and Achievement (RARPA) as well as Planning Learning and Recording Progress and Achievement (PLRA) frameworks[1].

Identifying learning gains and achievements are vital parts of the learning process. The challenge is to clearly capture individual and group achievements in order to demonstrate to learners, tutors and funders what has been gained. If gains in confidence are as significant as many learners and tutors appear to suggest, ways of evidencing them seem to be important.

We hope you find it useful and welcome comments and feedback on its application and development.

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[1] Department for Education and Skills (2003), *Planning Learning and Recording Progress and Achievement: A Guide for Practitioners*, DfES, Nottingham

Background

Gains in confidence have featured highly in discussions about what adult learners achieve as a result of involvement in learning activities. Reports that we received from projects participating in the Adult and Community Learning Fund and two previous studies (Eldred, 2002; Ward and Edwards, 2002)[1,2] highlighted the significance of changes in confidence among learners. Our first study, published in 2004, indicated the nature of confidence in relation to learning and its impact on individuals as well as ways of capturing changes in confidence during a learning experience (Dutton *et al*)[3]. A summary of that research is enclosed in this pack and the full research report is available on the NIACE website (www.niace.org.uk).

One issue that arose from the study, which was conducted with practitioner-researchers, was that the research tool and the process of gathering insights and data could be adapted for use in a teaching and learning situation. The practitioner-researchers began using the tool with their learners. The members of the NIACE team who had undertaken the study were reluctant to share the tool and process it more widely before it had been further developed and tested in different situations and with different groups of learners. We felt that we could not assume that a tool designed for research would necessarily be directly transferable for recording developments in a teaching and learning situation. Funding was therefore sought and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) agreed to support the next stage of development.

Following publication of the research report, several adult learning providers expressed further interest in applying the research and data to their contexts. They felt that the report resonated with their own experiences and were keen to try out the tool with their learners. A request for organisations who might be interested in further developments to respond resulted in a further eight sites around England taking part in awareness training about the nature of the research study, the opportunities presented and the processes which might be undertaken. Following these training and development sessions, eight organisations working with 41 groups and involving approximately 350 learners, participated in the development of the Catching Confidence process.

The new participating sites were encouraged to change and adapt the Catching Confidence tool to reflect the requirements of the learners they were working with. They were urged to consider the potential of the tool to enhance teaching and learning and to assess its usefulness with 'their' learners in 'their' situations. They were also encouraged to consider carefully how to obtain feedback from learners, their learning peers and teaching and support staff. It was clear from the beginning of this process that pairs and groups of staff worked together to agree how to progress, placing their learners at the centre of their concerns. Practitioners and their learner groups agreed to feedback to the NIACE team after six to eight weeks and again at the end of the pilot.

The NIACE team then collated the data and feedback in order to produce this guidance for others to use. What appears in this pack is a result of the efforts, imagination, flexibility and responsiveness of the learning providers who volunteered to be involved with us. We hope that it inspires others to consider using Catching Confidence: involving learners in the process, using creative teaching and learning strategies that consciously develop confidence, and recording the outcomes.

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[1]Eldred, J. (2002), *Moving on with Confidence: Perceptions of Success in Teaching and Learning in Adult Literacy*, NIACE, Leicester
[2]Ward, J. and Edwards, J. (2002). *Learning Journeys: Learners' Voices; Learners' News on Progress in Achievement in Literacy and Numeracy*, LSDA, London
[3]Dutton *et al*. (2004), *Catching Confidence*, NIACE, Leicester

Before you start

This section outlines the practical steps, common themes and questions that managers, tutors, and those who will be involved should address when preparing to introduce the Catching Confidence process into provision. We have drawn this advice from the experiences and feedback given to us by all the individuals who piloted it.

Definitions

We have used the following terms in the text to describe the different aspects of Catching Confidence.

The **Catching Confidence process** is the descriptor for an overall process that includes defining levels of confidence, reflecting on and discussing confidence and changes in confidence and capturing the content and/or conclusions.

The **Catching Confidence tool** is the mechanism used for capturing reflections on levels of confidence. It originally took the form of a grid and has since been adapted into a variety of designs including grids, workbooks, mind maps and electronic versions.

The **statements** highlight different general or specific activities that people do. For instance, 'I am confident I can speak in a group'.

The **situations** in people's lives can include 'the learning centre', 'at home' and other places/people they regularly interact with.

The **symbols** relate to different levels of confidence. For example, the rectangle to represent the 'confident' level. These symbols can be in the form of stickers, cards, hand drawings, computer generated shapes or number lines.

The **boxes** are where learners place the symbols in response to the statements.

Preparing tutors

The Catching Confidence process will only be effective if tutors have an opportunity to take part in a supported development and planning process.

Working with colleagues

The practitioners and providers involved in the development of the Catching Confidence process found that getting together with colleagues helped them to prepare for working with learners. They exchanged information, ideas and imagination; we recommend to any tutors interested in using Catching Confidence that they should meet with their colleagues to address all the topics that are covered in detail in the following sections. Through that preparation, tutors and learners will be better equipped to develop and catch changes in confidence that will further inform their teaching and learning.

Understanding confidence

Tutors should have insight into the study of confidence, the research evidence on which this guidance is based. This will equip them with knowledge of why confidence matters, the characteristics of confidence, the relationship of confidence to learning, including strategies that can be used to support the growth of confidence through the learning process. A copy is enclosed with this pack.

The benefits for learners

It is important that tutors understand how learners can benefit from Catching Confidence, as this secures their commitment to the process and supports them to present it to learners as a positive aspect of their programme. The process and tools are designed to ensure that learners gain a sense of ownership of the process and their interests should be paramount. We have identified the following benefits:

- The process itself can support learners in gaining confidence.
- It can help learners to identify and track their changes in confidence and articulate factors supporting these developments.
- It can help learners to identify learning goals.
- Reflecting on their experience and progress helps learners to heighten their skills and think about their own learning and the processes of learning in a more critical and analytical way.
- Sharing and comparing experiences helps to develop constructive and supportive group dynamics.

Defining confidence levels

Definitions of confidence are not absolute and in order for tutors to be familiar with the key level descriptors and their meaning we recommend that they complete the same activity as learners. This will help them to decide which approach to agreeing definitions would best suit their learners. (See page 12)

"Remember, the purpose is not to come to one definition but to help learners to focus in their own minds that there are differences in how confident they feel. This is not a test or vocabulary exercise – it is the start of the process. It is preparing learners for the next stage."

(Tutor, Leicester College EETAC)

Integrating Catching Confidence

Catching Confidence is designed to complement and fit within existing teaching and learning programmes and quality practices. Teams and tutors will need to identify the most appropriate ways to integrate the use of the process into their programmes.

Selecting programmes

Tutors should agree whether the learners, the setting and the course content are conducive to using the process. They need to believe that the process will enhance the learning experience and help the learners to gain as much as possible from participation. The process is designed to be flexible and responsive, and not restrictive for either tutors or learners.

The practitioners researching the Catching Confidence process found that it could be used in most curriculum areas. However, some programmes lend themselves to using Catching Confidence more than others. Some research sites indicated that learning opportunities or courses such as garment making or flower arranging were not suitable, whereas others did find the process enhanced the experience of learners participating in these or similar programmes. This seems to suggest that if tutors are convinced by the process it can be applied to most curriculum areas. Colleagues from one organisation suggested that courses of one session per week for fewer than six weeks were too short

as the time involved in using the process proved to be disproportionate in relation to the teaching and learning time.

The process can be of particular benefit to learners who are:

- returning to learning;
- lacking in confidence because of past learning experiences;
- attending courses where personal development outcomes are recorded in addition to the main subject;
- attending learning programmes where the curriculum includes personal development outcomes, for instance assertiveness and confidence building;
- developing their literacy, language and/or numeracy skills.

> *"My advice is that the most important thing is that you feel comfortable using the tools. I would go as far as saying that if you don't feel reasonably comfortable, don't do it."*
>
> *(Tutor, Leicester College EETAC)*

Language, literacy and numeracy

Our research indicates that developing confidence appears to have a positive impact on the successful development of literacy, language and numeracy skills. Tutors can use the Catching Confidence process to support the development of specific speaking, listening, reading and writing skills in both discrete and embedded provision. We have mapped the Catching Confidence grid tool to the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum at Entry 3 and Level 1 (see page 7) to indicate where it might be the most applicable. The process also complements the Planning Learning and Recording progress and Achievement (PLRA) framework.

Although the link with literacy and language development is most obvious, the Catching Confidence process can also provide a valuable mechanism for enhancing numeracy, as a lack of confidence is one of the significant barriers to progress in this area.

Fit with quality practices

> *"Look for ways of integrating Catching Confidence into what you are already doing e.g. tutorial time, self-assessment activities, introduction to the programme or learning activity."*
>
> *(Tutor, Chorlton Workshop)*

The Catching Confidence process is complementary and fits well with other tools such as self-assessment, Individual Learning Plans and different forms of assessment. Practitioners and tutors will need to consider how to integrate the process into existing approaches and practice, including using Recognising And Recording Progress and Achievement in non-accredited learning (RARPA) or Planning Learning and Recording progress and Achievement (PLRA), tutorials and self-assessment. The following indicates how it links to RARPA.

RARPA is a quality process related to the progress and achievement of learners in non-accredited provision. The Catching Confidence process mirrors the central tenets of the RARPA approach, that it must be learner centred, fit for purpose, flexible and non-bureaucratic. The RARPA approach consists of the application of a staged process, and the fit between Catching Confidence and the five elements of this process is indicated in the table on page 8.

Example of Mapping the Catching Confidence tool to the Adult Literacy Core Curriculum

Statements	Core Curriculum referenced to Entry 3 and Level 1
1. I am confident when meeting new people	SLlr/E3.4,4,5,6; L1.3,4,5,6
2. I am confident I can learn new things	Rt/E3.2,4,5,8; L1.2,3,4 Rw/E3.3,5; L1.1,3 Rs/E3.2; L1.1,2
3. I am confident that I can learn from this course	SL1r/E3.1,2,3,4,5,6 SL1r/L1.1,2,3,4,5,6
4. I am confident that I can use what I learn in daily life	SLc/E3.1,2; L1.1,2 SLr/E3.5; L1.4,5
5. I am confident to speak in a group	SLc/E3.1,2,3;L1.1,3,4 SL/E3.2; L1.3 SLr/E3.6; L1.6
6. I am confident to speak to one other, unfamiliar person	SLc/E3.4; L1.2 SLr/E3.4,5,6; L1.3,4,5,6
7. I am confident when writing things down	Wt/E3.1,2,3,4; L1.1,2,3,4,5,6 Ws/E3.1,2,3; L1.1,2,3 Ww/E3.1,2,3; L1.1,2
8. I am confident that I have valuable skills to offer	SLc/E3.1,3; L1.1,2,3
9. I am confident about my reading skills	Rt/E3.1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9 Rt/L1.1,2,3,4,5
10. I am confident I can read and understand a newspaper	Wt/E3.1,2,3,4 Wt/L1.1,2,3,4,5,6

RARPA staged process	Fit with Catching Confidence
Aims appropriate to an individual learner or group of learners	Enhancing confidence might be included in the overall learning aims
Initial assessment to establish starting points	The first Catching Confidence activity will help to capture starting levels of confidence
Identification of suitable challenging learning objectives, initial, renegotiated and revisited	The discussions in the first activity can help to identify learning objectives in relation to confidence and other aspects of the learning programme
Recognition of progress and achievement during the programme, including learner reflection and tutor feedback	The record of the first activity can be referred to in order to inform this process
End of programme assessment that includes learner self-assessment, tutor assessment and review of overall progress and achievement	The second activity and recording tool can be used to evidence progress and achievement in relation to confidence. Valuable reflections on wider learning might also emerge to inform this review.

Selecting and adapting your Catching Confidence tool

Tutors should be very familiar with the tool they use. The beginning of the preparation process should be to examine the enclosed grids, mind map and booklet. Each team or tutor should then decide which tool(s) they wish to use. They will then need to adapt the model(s) they have selected to suit the particular learners and situations they are working with. You should consider:

- *the format* – is a grid, mind map, picture-based computer-generated tool or something different most appropriate?
- *the language* – do you need to change any of the language to ensure that it is accessible and appropriate for your learners? Take literacy levels into account when you do this
- *the situations* – do you need to adapt them to reflect the learners' lives? For instance, is the work category appropriate for learners who don't work?
- *the statements* – do you want to change them or reduce the number?
- *the symbols* – do you want to change them and will you use cards and/or stickers or a different method, such as a drop down computer menu?

NB. Do not change the options to an odd number of confidence levels as research has indicated that learners tend to select the more neutral middle category and do not always make a fully considered judgement.

When to use the tool

The tool works best when used close to the start of the learning programme/activity to capture starting levels of confidence. Deciding when and how to re-visit the process is important. For most, this will be at the end of a learning activity in order to identify the 'distance travelled'. This enables learners to see changes clearly and reflect on the reasons for this, as well as the impact on their learning and wider areas of their lives.

"Learners reflected on how they felt at the beginning of the course and identified lots of growth."

(Tutor, Chorlton Workshop)

When it is not possible to carry out the activity at the beginning, you could use it once at the end of the programme, inviting learners to think retrospectively about how they felt at the beginning of their course. The drawback of this option is the possibility that learners will not remember their feelings accurately, particularly if a long period has elapsed since the start of their learning.

Time required for the process

The time taken to introduce the topic of confidence and carry out the activity ranges from 40 minutes to two hours. Strategies you can use to manage this include the following:

- include the activities in the main course programme;
- split the activity up over more than one week; for instance, discuss the nature of confidence and look at the tool one week, then carry out the activity the following week;
- introduce it into tutorial and assessment activities;
- add an additional session to the course.

Approaches for using Catching Confidence

Tutors will need to decide the most appropriate method for carrying out the activity. It can be carried out:

- as a group activity;
- in pairs;
- one-to-one between the learner and tutor.

Doing the activity **in pairs or a group** provides the learners with a chance to discuss and reflect on their levels of confidence. Talking to peers may help them think about their own levels of confidence. The positive observations of peers in the group process can also boost learners' confidence and help the group to bond for the rest of their learning sessions.

However, confidence is a personal subject that some people might find difficult and not wish to discuss with peers. For instance, a young adults project involving young men felt the men would not be as honest with themselves in a group as they would be individually.

A **one-to-one discussion** between the tutor and learner allows exploration of personal subjects, which might not be possible in a group situation. This has worked well where people feel vulnerable and are unlikely to discuss their level of confidence in a group. Using the tool this way, however, can be time consuming and intense, but both tutors and learners can benefit from the discussion. Learners using a computer could complete the activity on their own, followed by discussion with their tutor. One-to-one discussion can also be more suitable when learners are at different stages of their learning course, which can sometimes make group discussions difficult when it comes to changes experienced over time.

Introducing learners to the tool

Learners should be involved in the process as early in their learning programme as possible. Tutors must consider when this should be and how they can involve learners in the adaptation of the tool and process to best match their learning. Assurances of confidentiality and that there are no right or wrong answers are essential. Tutors have also found it helpful to prepare examples to support their explanations of the different statements and situations.

> *"The Catching Confidence booklet is a way of [recording] your self-confidence and how you change and develop during this family learning course. The booklet will be confidential between you and your tutor. If information is shared with others your name will be removed."*
>
> *(Tutor guidance, Camden Education and City Lit.)*

It is vital that tutors work with learners in ways that develop their sense of ownership of the tool. Where this was not done in our pilots they tended to perceive it as extra paperwork and were understandably reluctant to take part. Catching Confidence was most successful when presented in a positive way, focusing on the enjoyable aspects of using an activity-based approach.

Capturing what learners say

The feelings, experiences, stories and insights, which learners reveal during the process of Catching Confidence, are vital aspects of the process. They help learners and tutors to reflect on learning experiences, attitudes to learning, skills, knowledge and abilities, and they determine the next steps. They also help in identifying progress and development. Decisions must be made about how these are recorded for future use by learners, tutors, funders and inspectors.

> *"Evidence of confidence is often lost in discussion and activities…I am keen to use it to 'officially' record personal growth."*
>
> *(Tutor, Blackburn with Darwen)*

Using the Catching Confidence process with learners

This section draws on the experience of the pilots to provide guidance on using the process with learners. It includes suggestions on introducing the activity to learners, ways of working with learners to define confidence, working with the tool and teaching and learning approaches that build confidence.

Introduce the activity to learners

Explain why it is important, how they might benefit, that it is not a test and there are no right or wrong answers, that they should enjoy it.

- **Complete an introductory activity to agree the levels of confidence**
  It is difficult to tie the concept of confidence and different levels of confidence to a precise definition. For this reason it is important to work with learners to develop a shared understanding of what confidence means.

  Where possible use a group activity as this helps to start discussions about confidence and encourage people to think about different levels of confidence. At the end of this activity the learners and tutor should be clear about what each level of confidence means to them.

Here are some tried and recommended activities that tutors have developed to suit the learners they work with. You can select one of these or develop your own to suit your learners.

Example 1: Post-it note activity

This activity works well with learners who are confident to write and illustrate concepts and as a training activity with tutors before they begin to use the Catching Confidence tool with their learners.

- You need Post-it notes, four sheets of paper (flip chart size) on a wall and pens.
- Write one of the levels of confidence at the top of each sheet of paper: highly confident, confident, not confident and very low confidence.
- Explain that the aim of this activity is to think about what confidence means and to agree what the different categories mean.
- Ask learners to write or illustrate/draw on the Post-it notes what each level means to them.

It is important to point out that there are no right or wrong answers – what the word means is important for the next stage of the activity.

- Ask the learners to stick the Post-it notes on the flip chart sheets under the four different headings.
- Ask the learners to look at the results.
- Summarise the main points and discuss with the group.

This may take some time and if learners are anxious about their understanding of the terms they may need some support and guidance. An example of responses given by other learners is given over the page.

- Agree with the learners what the categories mean.

Post-it note activity: examples

Highly confident	Confident
Feelings – happy, comfortable, at ease, assertive, capable Sense of independent achievement Statements – it's no problem I can do it, I enjoy I believe I can do this I am not afraid of anything	Feelings – comfortable Statements – I will have a go at it I am able to speak I have never done this before but will give it a go I probably can
Not confident Feelings – shy, anxious, frustrated, negative Statements – I probably can't do it I would rather not do it I'm unsure about the situation I do not think I will be any good but will try it	**Very low confidence** Feelings – nervous, afraid, anxious, frightened, no self-worth, no interest Statements – I can't breathe I can't do this and don't want to There is 'no way' I can do this I'll avoid being in certain situations

Example 2: Sticker activity

Groups have found this activity suits young adult learners and those who have difficulty with the Post-it note activity because it provides learners with the language and vocabulary to begin to express what they feel and think.

- You need stickers (labels are a good size) and four sheets of paper (flip chart size) on a wall.
- Write one of the levels of confidence at the top of each sheet of paper: highly confident, confident, not confident and very low confidence.
- Print out or write labels with different statements and feelings related to the different levels of confidence on the wall. Drawings symbolising the levels of confidence can also be used. Examples of these stickers are shown on the next page.

Sticker activity: example of stickers that could be used

I'm worthless	Unable to communicate	In control	Sleepless nights
Isolated	(sun and cloud image)	Worried	Able to grow as a person
Energised	Anxious	Rock on!	(smiley face image)
Afraid	Successful	Underachieving	Mental health issues
Fear of the unknown	(sun image)	Comfortable	Always holding back
(sad face image)	Assurance	I can't do it	I don't push myself forward
I really can't do this	No problem	Proud	Optimistic
What's the problem?	Shall I ask for help?	(rain cloud with sun image)	Prepared to take on challenges
I can do this today	Achieving	Getting better	I'm held back by fear
Relaxed	Getting there	I can go further	Everyone hates me

- Explain that the aim of this activity is to think about what confidence means and to agree what the different categories mean.
- Ask learners to place the stickers on to the most appropriate level of confidence on the flip chart sheets.
- Ask the learners to look at the results.
- Summarise the main points and discuss with the group.
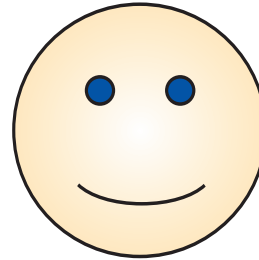- Agree with the learners what the categories mean.

Example 3: Faces activity

This alternative activity is particularly suitable where learners are not comfortable with reading and writing in group situations.
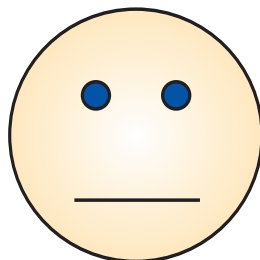
Place these four symbols on a white board/wall

Highly confident

Confident

Not confident

Very low confidence

- Ask the learners to shout out a word(s) that illustrate that degree of confidence.
- Write a few up on the board.
- Discuss each level.
- Agree with the learners what the categories mean.

Explain the tool to the learners

Discuss the statements and situations used, providing examples to illustrate where needed. Make sure they are understandable and appropriate. Do any of the learners want to change anything?

- **Decide with the learners whether all the statements need answering in relation to all of the situations**

  Some groups asked the learners to fill out the boxes related to being at the learning centre (often renamed to the place where learning took place). Some learners placed stickers in all of the other boxes, whereas others only filled in those that they felt were important and applied to them.

- **Provide the learners with material that you will be using, such as the tool, stickers and cards**

  We found when using a grid format it worked best when it was enlarged to A3 size.

  If you are using a grid, cards the size of the grid boxes with symbols for the levels of confidence may be used.

  Using cards before placing a sticker in the boxes allows for reflection and discussion about the choice being made therefore allowing people to change their minds before making a final choice.

  Some learners have found the cards useful, especially when doing the activity in groups, while others preferred to use the stickers straight away.

- **Ask learners to discuss then choose their level of confidence that best fits each statement and situation**

  If working in a group or pairs encourage them to discuss choices with others. Encourage the learners to move the cards around and discuss their choices with peers if working in pairs or a group or tutor if working one-to-one. This allows for in-depth reflection on their confidence in different situations.

  Most learners felt it was easiest to complete one or two statements at a time, then discuss it and make a decision on their level of confidence before moving onto the other statements.

● **Ask learners to record their choice in the relevant box**

Different methods for this include placing stickers on the boxes, computer drop-down menus and drag and drop, and mind maps.

Use the left section of the box the first time the activity takes place, and then the right the second time. This supports the learner to observe and reflect on any changes over time and the differences between different aspects of their lives.

● **Record the essence of what is said during the discussion**

Learner quotes capturing changes in confidence can be useful evidence. Some organisations have used a MP3 recorder to record learners' conversations while others have made notes or used learners' quotes. The process of completing the tool is as important as recording changes in confidence levels.

● **Take a photocopy of the grid to allow both the learner and tutor to keep a copy for reference**

● **Repeat the activity near the end of the programme**

Encourage learners to identify any changes in levels of confidence (positive or negative) and reflect on the reasons for these changes and the impact of the changes on their learning and wider lives.

Reflecting on starting points during the final activity is a powerful tool for supporting learners to identify distance travelled.

However, if you think the level of confidence they chose the first time will influence their second choices you could consider asking them to complete the second activity before seeing their choices from the first activity. This might be useful where learners feel they should record gains in confidence even if this is not the case.
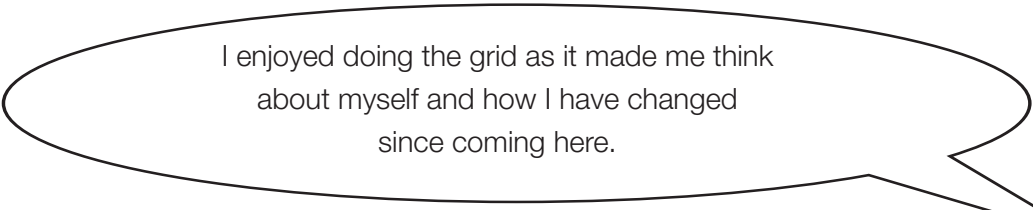
Teaching and learning strategies

We have distilled the aspects of teaching and learning which the practitioners who took part in our research suggested are essential to help to build confidence. They could be used as a checklist when planning and delivering adult learning activities.

- Try to bring people together into learning groups who have some shared background or experiences. This might be through working with referral and sign-posting organisations such as schools, housing associations, neighbourhood or community organisations. Learners who feel that they have shared backgrounds or experiences appear to develop effective support and mutually-helpful strategies in the learning situation. This helps to build confidence.

- Plan learning and communicate the plans so that learners are informed and can predict patterns of activity and attendance. The research revealed that tutors believed that including learners in the planning helps them to cope with the new situation.

- Include activities such as discussions that reflect on shared experiences, build the group and develop trust; these seem to lead to increases in confidence.

- Acknowledge that learners may bring negative experiences of learning from their past. This will help learners to understand any anxieties about returning to learning and assist tutors in addressing attitudinal barriers.

- Individualise programmes wherever possible to demonstrate that learners are working towards their own aims and aspirations. This also helps them to work at their own pace. Learners suggest that working at their own pace towards their own goals, in non-competitive situations, helps them to feel more confident.

- Provide as many opportunities as possible to develop skills in discussion, speaking up and making presentations. Learners revealed that talking helps to build their confidence and speaking up offers evidence that confidence is growing.

- Use practical activities as often as possible – doing new and interesting things seems to build confidence as well as evidence its growth.

- Monitor social groupings and friendships within the group and build on these; try to ensure no one is isolated.

- Ensure everyone feels included and involved. This can be through group and paired working, building on new or existing relationships and friendships as well as tutorials. The study revealed that relationships and friendships were important ways of building confidence in the learning situation.

- Reflect regularly with the group and with individuals on activities, learning and behaviours. Include not only classroom but also other life and work activities. Highlight the positives and the 'can do'; gradually work on the negatives and challenges. Tutors felt that reflection offers opportunities to build confidence by identifying the positive aspects and changes in learning that may, otherwise, remain hidden. Learners revealed that some of the evidence of what they are now able to do is evidenced outside the classroom.

- Offer regular feedback orally or in writing, both confidentially and in front of the group. Offer praise and encouragement; ensure this is genuine to avoid appearing patronising. Involve the group in offering feedback and praise. Learners indicated that such feedback and encouragement helped them to feel good about their learning and built their confidence in their ability to learn new things. They also indicated that listening to and relying on each other supported their learning.

- Be non-judgemental and actively develop equal opportunities practices. Learners revealed that their low levels of confidence were because they felt failures, isolated, different or excluded. Not being judged seemed to help them to build confidence in their identity as learners.

- Make sure learning is fun and includes laughter!
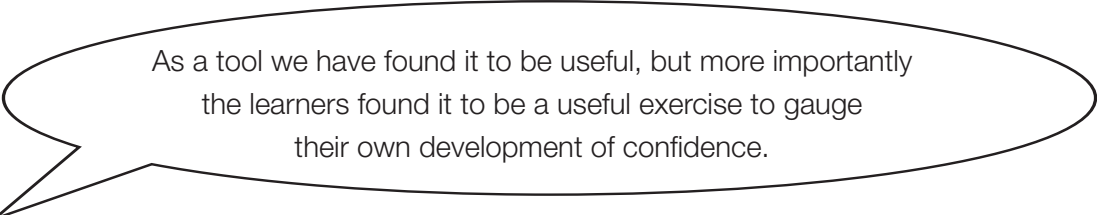
Learner and tutor comments

About the activity
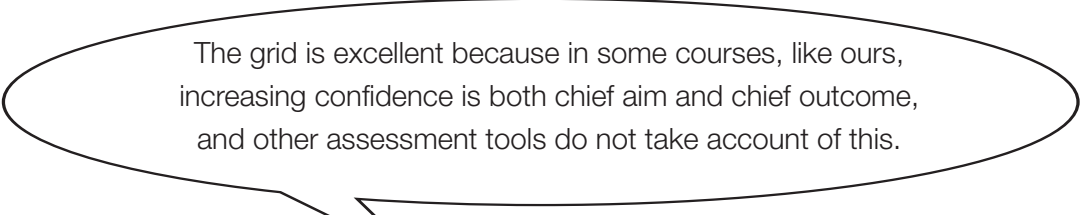
I enjoyed doing the grid as it made me think about myself and how I have changed since coming here.

Learner

As a tool we have found it to be useful, but more importantly the learners found it to be a useful exercise to gauge their own development of confidence.

Tutor

The grid is excellent because in some courses, like ours, increasing confidence is both chief aim and chief outcome, and other assessment tools do not take account of this.

Tutor

About confidence and learning

When I first came here my confidence was really low. When I walked in my instinct was, '*You won't be able to do it because that's what you've been told in life*'. The people that I've met and the people that I've worked with have made my confidence in coming here really good.

Learner

Knowledge of the subject is a big thing because if you know about the subject you can talk about it, you can can't you?

Learner 1

… But that is a limitation that is. You are saying in order to be confident I must know all about it… that's because you are confident in that area, you know about it. But… I would say anyway, you have to be confident that you can overcome anything in front of you, no matter what is placed there. You are successful – you got through to where you are, you were faced with a new situation and you have overcome this, you have applied what you do know to help with this.

Learner 2

I hadn't really used a computer. I've been amazed at what you can do. I've felt quite chuffed sometimes when I have done stuff, '*I can do that*'. I never thought I would be able to do it, so yes, I have gained a lot by coming to class. I have boosted my confidence definitely, yes.

Learner

But I think people treat you, as you get over 60 with grey hair, people see you as senile. You begin to think yourself, '*well I can manage everyday life but I couldn't learn something new*'. And I think once you start on computers the more you do and the more you realise how much you have learnt you do begin to realise that your brain is still working and that gives you confidence that you can still learn…

Learner

We're pretty much encouraged to help each other here. Since coming here my confidence in helping other people, education wise, has got better. Whereas before I wouldn't even have tried to help anybody, even if I thought I knew. I wouldn't have said anything because my confidence wasn't that high because I couldn't write it down.

Learner

Case studies

The following case studies illustrate how organisations developed the Catching Confidence process. The eight organisations reflected different geographical areas, learner profiles, and types of provision.

Blackburn with Darwen Lifelong Learning involved adult community learning from a variety of curricula. Seven tutors tried the activity with nine groups. A total of 53 learners completed the tool; they were men and women from different age groups and at different life stages from parenthood to retirement.

The tool was tried in three different grid formats using eight of the original ten statements. Some learners used it in paper form, similar to the original grid with stickers being used. The others used electronic versions of the grid; one enabled learners to drag and click their level of confidence to the box, and the other enabled learners to select their levels of confidence from drop down boxes. The discussion and views about the levels of confidence were captured in one group by learner comment boxes to record their feelings. A mini MP3 player was used to capture learners' feedback and reflections once they had completed the grid for the second time. The grids were done during the first or second session and again at the last session of the course.

The tutors were successful in achieving seamless integration of the electronic grid into ICT classes. Tutors were able to make the process suitable for their own learners.

Leicester College EETAC outreach centre has tutors working within a wide range of learning areas. Four tutors trialled the activity with 30 learners. The learners included women who use English as their second language and adults with physical difficulties. Courses included flower arranging and garment construction and pattern cutting, accredited at levels 1 and 2.

The tool was kept similar to the original grid with ten statements, although the wording was changed. In one group a tutor had a colleague take notes and quotes under headings while learners did the activity. Tutors captured some of what learners said on a separate sheet. The tool was used in the second or third week of a ten-week programme and again at the end.

Doing an activity that introduced discussion about confidence was important. It was challenging to carry out the activity close to when learners started their course. "Our experience is that learners enjoy the activity and value the process and outcome".

Camden Family Learning (Local Authority) involved parents and carers, in particular women from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Three tutors tried the activity in three groups with a total of 30 learners. The courses included non-accredited family learning, City and Guilds Level 3 Adult Teaching Certificate and Helping in Schools accredited at Level 1.

The statements on the tool were rephrased and reformatted to include comment boxes and produced in booklet form with one statement per page. Tutors received guidance notes to help them adapt the tool to suit their learners. The activity was done with the learners in the second/third week

of the course and then again five weeks later. The learners or tutor wrote down comments made during the discussion in the comments box. Some learners categorised themselves as highly confident at the first stage, but in retrospect felt that they had gained in confidence so they invented an extended category, such as 'highly confident plus'.

It was a good discussion point for the learners and made them reflect on their own levels of confidence. The activity was well received by the learners, although some said they were confident because the person next to them had said they were. This made it difficult to gain a true record of the learners' initial confidence levels. In future they would consider carrying out the tool on an individual basis.

North Devon College in Barnstaple involved tutors from a variety of curriculum areas. Six tutors tried the tool with 14 groups consisting of 122 learners. The learners were from a mix of backgrounds including students with mental health issues and other disabilities, some with confidence issues and young people with challenging behaviour. The learning included literacy, language and numeracy skills at Entry levels 1 to 3, accredited and non-accredited personal development, level 1–2 art courses and a foundation programme that included both Key Skills and GCSEs.

Tutors adapted and created different versions of the tool to suit the learners. Tutors agreed that the number of columns needed to be reduced from four to three and removed the column 'At Work/Out & About'. Tutors also changed the language and reduced the number of statements. Additionally, the art tutor changed both the statements and the appearance of the grid.

The tool was successful at initiating group discussions and resulted in some good conversations about confidence. It successfully demonstrated to learners how their confidence in many areas had improved and generally the 'distance they had travelled' by the end of their course.

Tutors felt that the tool would have worked better if they had been able to use it at the very start of their course rather than first using it at the beginning of the second term. Some learners did comment that they did not see the relevance of the activity, as they were doing an art course. Some younger learners did not feel self-assured enough to put down their levels of confidence in a group situation where they felt peer pressure.

Chorlton Workshop offers basic skills learning in a community education centre. Two tutors trialled the tool on a one-to-one basis with six learners who had different literacy, language or numeracy needs. They delivered it as part of a six hour tutorial programme. Each interview took approximately two hours.

The tool was used in two different ways; both involved the use of bright colours and shortening the number of statements used. The first version involved a grid on the Excel computer package. The grid had seven statements with everything else similar to the original. Learners could drag the symbol representing their level of confidence to the appropriate place on the grid.

The second version was a visual mind map that used seven statements. This was created for the high number of dyslexic learners in the centre's literacy, language and numeracy provision. Both tools were used with people who had been learning for a while. The learners completed the activity retrospectively, where they considered what their level of confidence was when they began learning and then for their current level of confidence. The mind map allowed the activity to be less linear. The boxes could be filled out in any order, which enabled it to fit with the flow of the conversation. The conversations were taped in order to record useful points and learner quotes. Prior to the activity the tutors had discussions with the learners about what the different levels of confidence meant to them.

Overall the activity was a useful exercise and a good starting point to help learners take stock of their achievements and the distance they had travelled. It was also interesting for the tutors to see changes in the learners that normally they do not look for. The challenges were in arranging the practical aspects of the tool: having the equipment to record the discussion, having space to meet and having the time available.

Gateshead Council Adult Learning involves community learning from a range of curriculum areas and includes family learning and young adults. Five tutors used the tool with a total of 53 learners, of whom 40 were women of different ages. The tool was kept in the original grid format and trialled with learners involved in adventure education, family learning and confidence courses.

The grid was customised to meet the needs of the learners. The grid was in a familiar format to the learners, through previously completing different learning plans. Tutors did feel that the exercise helped to create an opportunity for learners to explore the effect confidence had on their willingness to try new activities. The project would be interested in trying the tool with more academically orientated students.

Cumbria Adult Education '*Skills for Life* Team.' The tool was trialled on a literacy course and a BBC storytelling course called 'My life, a personal story'. All learners were new learners with a particular focus on rural isolation and had literacy skills below GCSE Grade A-C. There was a mix of both male and female learners and a wide age range. There were 30 learners in total.

They used the original grid format, which was adapted to make it more 'literacy friendly', and also mapped to the adult literacy core curriculum. This was to enable tutors to establish the aspects of the curriculum that learners were meeting by completing the tool. It also helped to inform planning. The tool was given to the learners in week one or two. The BBC course lasted six weeks (30 hours) and learners were given the tool again in week six.

The levels of confidence were expressed through numbers 1–5 instead of using symbols. Tutors took notes of the discussions that took place while completing the tool. The general feedback was that learners felt the tool was an excellent means of recording confidence gained, but some felt that the tool might benefit from being simplified. The overwhelming feeling from tutors was that the tool could be an invaluable if some of the statements were redefined to suit the audience in question.

The project has established a working group to re-look at the tool and make it more appropriate for the learners at the project. The tutors intend to use the tool throughout the *Skills for Life* provision, as it is excellent for formally recording confidence progression.

Rochdale Work-Based Community Learning Service offers a range of learning courses from entry and foundation to more advanced levels, giving adults the opportunity to update and extend their qualifications.

Three tutors used the tool with a total of 24 learners from two literacy groups and two groups of learners with mental health issues who attend confidence-building sessions. The learners were of mixed ages, gender (although predominately female), race and ability.

Both tutors reduced the number of statements on the tool from ten to between six and eight. They kept the questions they felt most appropriate for the learners. The literacy tutor introduced the activity as a group exercise. Although initially apprehensive, once the tutor had introduced the concept of the tool to the group they were interested and eager to participate. The activity promoted discussion within the group and the learners engaged in the activity. The confidence-building tutors introduced the tool as a group activity then learners completed them on a one-to-one basis with their tutor. Some of the learners liked using the stickers, while others preferred a number line to see the changes in confidence.

Using the tool as a group exercise was challenging as learners worked at different paces and wanted to discuss the situations that were on the tool. They found completing the tool worked best on a one-to-one basis.

The tool was used to 'add value' to documentation already being used in this important area, and has become part of the learners' portfolios. The discussions generated by the grid activity have been recorded on learners Individual Learning Plans, class notes, evaluations and also in learner's personal diaries (confidence building). The learners found it a useful exercise to gauge their own development of confidence. The tutors wish to continue using it as part of their work towards recognising progression in this area.

Hints and tips

Here are some suggestions from organisations that participated in trialling the Catching Confidence process.

We thought the Catching Confidence tool was a superb concept, but one that needed adapting to meet the specific needs of our learners.

Consider and plan for different learning styles and abilities.

Try to weave this tool into your current provision so that it doesn't become another piece of extra paperwork for tutors.

Integrate your project with initiatives such as RARPA, e-learning and blended learning.

Make sure the tutors are on-board and involve them in customising the material to increase ownership and enthusiasm for the process.

It is important that the group reach a shared understanding of what the categories of confidence mean and how to complete the activity.

Offer choices to learners of ways of recording confidence levels, which are activity based, and contain an element of fun.

Avoid too many questions or a complex grid.

Consider learners' levels of literacy and English and adapt the activities accordingly.

Allow time for group discussion but encourage learners to complete the tool alone.

Explain to learners that there are no right or wrong answers and any comments they wish to make will be valuable.

For shorter courses it may be possible to do the activity once at the end by reflecting back on how learners felt at the beginning and noting changes.

Catching Confidence Checklist

1. Are you clear about the reasons for doing this activity and what benefit it will have for learners and yourself?

2. Have you put mechanisms in place to prepare staff to develop the Catching Confidence process for their programmes?

3. Have you planned how you will integrate the tool into the learning programme?

4. Have you adapted the tool to suit the learners' needs?

5. Have you checked that learners:
   - understand what the activity is;
   - know what they might gain from taking part;
   - want to participate;
   - have given their consent.

6. Do you have all the materials you need such as stickers and an adapted tool?

7. Have you planned an activity that:
   - introduces the topic of confidence;
   - gives everyone an opportunity to think about it;
   - supports the learners to agree what the categories mean.

8. Have you planned how you will introduce the activity to learners and thought of examples you might use to illustrate the different situations or statements?

9. Have you agreed a way of recording the process of the activity, such as the discussion learners have around their levels of confidence and how it changes over time and in different situations?

10. Have you allocated enough time for the learners to complete the activity?

11. Have you planned a date and time for the follow-up sessions to reflect on learning at a later stage?