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Successful young adults are asked –

'In your experience, what builds confidence?'

A thesis presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Social Work

at Massey University

Palmerston North, New Zealand.

Karen Fagan

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Successful young adults are asked -
'In your experience, what builds confidence?'

Abstract

This study used an ethnographic approach to explore the perceptions, interpretations and meanings young adults gave to the concepts of ‘confidence’ and ‘building confidence’. Giving young adults viewpoints a central positioning reflected the researcher’s perception of adolescents as active contributors not only to their own wellbeing, but also to the development of healthier communities and societies as a whole.

The research participants were Year 13 students in their last week of attendance at a co-educational state high school within a provincial New Zealand community. In support of the literature this study found that ‘confidence’ per se was not a concept explored often, but rather it was an assumed component of broader concepts like self-esteem. The young adults involved in this study shared the belief that confidence existed, involved emotion, was an enabler, and was generally attributed as being a desirable thing to have. As an outcome of their reflections an emergent definition of confidence was proposed, namely that ‘confidence is knowing who you are, having pride in who you are (inside and out), and being able to portray who you are to others’.

The young adults in this research project revealed a multitude of interconnected strategies for building self-confidence, and for supporting the building of confidence in others. As the researcher I was privileged to hear these insights first hand and recognized the potential value in this for schools. This has led to a recommendation that high schools routinely undertake exit interviews with their Year 13 students.
Dedication

This research study is dedicated to my family, Mike, Ben and Sarah. You have shared this entire journey from beginning to end, with love, patience, and whole hearted support. Thank you.
Acknowledgements

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I would like to acknowledge and thank the schools involved in this study, the liaison staff, the cultural advisors, and particularly the young adults themselves who participated in this research project. Your insights, considerations, and contributions were most valuable, and made this research journey a most purposeful endeavour.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank Massey University for providing this wonderful mechanism in which I have been able to engage in academic learning, namely extramural studies. I have completed most of my academic studies on a part time basis while juggling work and family commitments. I am cognisant of my grandmothers, Ivy Jensen and Matrona Shevchuk who due to war, the depression, children, domestic chores, and the low to non-existent value placed on educating women in those days, both completed their formal education at around 12 years of age. The Massey University extramural programme has provided me a vehicle through which I have been able to continue my studies. Without this opportunity my educational studies would have highly likely ended many years ago.

Lastly, my heartfelt thanks goes to my research supervisors, Dr Mary Nash and Helen Simmons, both of whom embraced my research journey while providing wise and patient guidance. Thank you.
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