

Young women and positive risk taking

Positive risk taking is essential for growth and learning. To be pushed outside your comfort zone and explore a new skill or talent is how we hone in on our passions and develop our identities. However, young women don't always have the opportunity to try something new or may not be motivated to pursue new activities independently, outside of their friend group. For this reason, it is crucial that environments are created in which young women feel safe and supported in trying new things.

In the fall of 2015, a group of female high school friends approached us about trying something new and through conversations with them we discovered that they had several overlapping interests with film (writing, cinematography, costuming, special effects make-up, etc.). They met one evening a week through-out the school year working on creating a short film together with the guidance of a film mentor and other experts. One student took on the role of script writer, three students acted in the film, one directed and the other two operated the camera and sound. They also got two of their friends to fill in for acting roles and had many family and friends help during the long 10 day filming process.

We were excited to give a group of friends the opportunity to try something new in a safe environment where they were being encouraged by friends. We hoped to see if the young women would be more comfortable taking risks in such an environment. We also hoped to see that they would be feeling more confident and more likely to try new things in the future as a result of having this experience.

The students learned a lot about film-making and group dynamics throughout this project. They were calling the shots during filming, and at first it was difficult to overcome the learning curve of doing something completely new while also learning how to keep each other on task and on schedule. The end result, however, was that the young women were proud of their hard work and what they accomplished. One young woman said, "Filming [was the most challenging]; our project was super challenging and filming on our own was crazy, but gratifying". The group has plans to explore film festivals or competitions with youth categories in which they can enter their film.

Some of the girls expressed how energizing it was to be able to work on something that they were really interested in and had the freedom to choose and have creative control over. This quote sums it up well while comparing this experience to a recent school project: "The other [group project] was much more frustrating because it wasn't something I was interested in and I was with friends this time so I could laugh at my mistakes". Several of the girls also expressed that it was a helpful experience to give them a better idea of whether or not they wanted to pursue film further. Most remarkable was that 5 of the 6 young women reflected that participation in this group project has made them more likely to try new things in the future.

Working in a familiar group of friends can be a successful way for young women to try new endeavors. The support of a friend-group appears to be a key factor when building their confidence and ultimately encouraging them to pursue new areas of interest in the future. Working in a new area seems to also create a greater sense of pride and accomplishment in the final product due to overcoming many challenges and obstacles associated with learning something new. It was exciting as an observer to see some of the young women transition from "I don't think we can do this," to "Look what we did!"