**Key features of a learning environment**

Although we often focus on the physical environment first; making sure our classroom or outdoor area is set up in a way that we are happy with, the overarching key features of any effective learning environment are actually those relating to the emotional dimension, rather than the physical. Granted, the physical elements do support us to enable and facilitate learning; giving us a place in which to learn and access the resources needed to develop, but any space can be used as an effective learning environment if the essential emotional features are present. These include;

**Valuing the Teacher**

We live in a technology-filled world where children could learn all of their content online. There’s now access to literature, [mathematical formulas](https://youtu.be/2OpuD67v8QY), and research that were once difficult to bring into a classroom. However, the teacher plays a valuable and necessary role in the learning of each child in the classroom.

Teachers build relationships with their children.  These relationships build trust.  A child is much more likely to learn new content [from an adult](https://www.britishcouncil.org/voices-magazine/why-we-still-need-face-face-teaching-digital-age) they trust than they are from a device.  When a teacher creates a climate that shows they care about each child, it pays off!  Children feel cared for and are more willing to work hard for that teacher.

## Allowing choice

Many researchers cite [choice](https://www.edutopia.org/blog/five-strategies-more-voice-choice-students-rebecca-alber) as a top way to increase the effectiveness of your learning environment. Child-choice can be as simple as being allowed to choose where they sit or as complicated as allowing them to investigate topics of personal interest.

While most teachers must stick to the curriculum assigned by the school system, there is always flexibility in how to approach the content.  Teachers can offer children a choice of how to research the content, how to represent their new understandings, and how to present their learning to their peers. When children have the ability to make some decisions, they take greater ownership of their learning which increases motivation and perseverance.

## Providing beneficial feedback

Every teacher assesses their class, but far fewer effectively give feedback. “Good job” or “Try harder next time” are not examples of feedback that make a difference with children.  When a teacher [gives very specific feedback](https://www.edutopia.org/blog/tips-providing-students-meaningful-feedback-marianne-stenger) that encourages growth by suggesting next steps or gives specific praise, children’s outcomes change.

The following example is an effective form of feedback: “Nice job on your narrative. Your characters were developed well by describing what they say and do.  Each character went through some sort of change throughout the story. Next time, consider introducing some character traits through dialogue between the characters.  Well cover this technique in a small group during next the next lesson.”

## Encouraging goal setting and growth mindset

Another great way to increase effectiveness in your learning environment is with [goal setting](http://w1.msszst.net/prod/c7714ee5-2887-4e41-af22-fddebb7aef21/bc5e13e3-5c7d-45ea-8a22-b58ad10c6c6d).  When children set their own learning goals, they are more motivated to work towards them.  Older children could even create [action plans](https://www.edweek.org/tm/articles/2015/01/20/10-tips-for-setting-successful-goals-with.html) outlining the steps they need to take to reach their long-term goals.

This entire process creates a [growth mindset](https://www.prodigygame.com/blog/growth-mindset-in-students/). Children and teachers see that everyone is capable of moving forward and making progress. When barriers are overcome new goals are set – creating a ‘can do’ ethos.

## Promoting self-belief

When a child believes in their [ability to succeed](http://psychlearningcurve.org/self-efficacy-in-the-classroom/), or a teacher believes in their ability to positively impact the learning of the children in their class, the effectiveness of the classroom skyrockets. Researcher [John Hattie](https://visible-learning.org/hattie-ranking-influences-effect-sizes-learning-achievement/) determined that teacher efficacy and student self-efficacy were the top factors contributing to learning effectiveness.

## Making children feel safe

One of the greatest factors contributing to the effectiveness of the learning environment is the perception of safety for the children. In a physical sense, children need to be aware of the factors that you have in place to keep them safe. These range from class rules to risk assessment and from the resources you offer to the activities the children can take part in.

Likewise, children must perceive that they are safe emotionally and mentally.  We must create an environment or culture within our classrooms that allow them to make mistakes, take risks, and understand that failure is simply another step along the learning journey.