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Creating an effective learning environment

If children are to feel ready and able to learn, then the learning environment matters – both in your school and your classroom. But how? In this Best Practice Focus, ***Matt Bromley*** offers practical advice and ideas as he examines ways to create the physical, social and emotional conditions to support our children's learning

ALL IMAGES ADOBE STOCK

The physical, social and emotional conditions to learn

I infuriate family and friends whenever we eat out because I insist on sitting in the corner of the restaurant where I can see the exit. This often involves a mirthless game of musical chairs.

I am not sure why – I do not recall a related childhood trauma and I have never had to make a quick escape from the clutches of an enemy. All I know is that I feel uneasy whenever I have my back to the door.

At home, I am always fighting over the thermostat to ensure my ambient temperature is maintained (some like it hot, but not me). I do not like the "big light" on because I favour gloom to the full glare of an interrogation room. I do not like too much noise and work best when there is complete silence, whereas some people prefer the constant companion of background music or the television in the corner.

I know what I am describing is akin to diva-esque behaviour (I am quite easy-going really, I promise), but I also know that I am not alone. In fact, I am sure each of us has a set of personal preferences with regards our immediate environments. We are each of us comforted by certain conditions and discomforted by others – whether it is light, heat and noise, or more tangible features (some of us like order and organisation, perhaps to the point of sparsity; others like clutter and chaos and only feel safe when surrounded by their hordes).

And this is only the physical environment, of course; there are also the social and emotional environments to consider. Some people like company, others solitude. Some people like hustle and bustle, others library-like quietude.

Why the learning environment matters

What applies to the home also applies to school, of course. So, what of the primary school environment? What physical, social and emotional conditions are most conducive to our children's learning? And what may distract children from their studies?

The answer, unhelpfully, is that it depends: it depends on the child and it depends on the context. You will find no easy answers here.

However, what we do know with some degree of certainty is that the quality of the learning environment really does matter.

Pupils need to feel comfortable if they are to accept the challenge of hard work, and their basic needs must be met – think Maslow (1943) – if they are to attend to teacher instruction (for more, see Jeffrey, 2020).

How we use our corridor and classroom spaces, and the rules and routines and expectations we establish in our schools, are therefore crucial considerations to make. So in this *Best Practice Focus*, I would like to examine ways of creating the physical, social, and emotional conditions that support our children's study.

Before we begin, however, I'd like to briefly revisit an article I wrote as part of a *SecEd* series on "the learning process" (Bromley, 2017). In a piece entitled "Comfortable with discomfort", I outlined the main features of a positive learning environment and I think that advice holds here and acts as a useful introduction. I argued that a positive learning environment is one in which all pupils:

- Feel welcomed.
- Feel valued.
- Are enthusiastic about learning.
- Are engaged in their learning.
- Are eager to experiment.
- Feel rewarded for their hard work.

I could, of course, have expanded on this, and I am sure you too could add some important characteristics of your own. But behind all these characteristics – and any more we care to add – is a simple, albeit oxymoronic, aim: to ensure children are comfortable with discomfort.

In other words, we want our pupils to know that the work they will be asked to do in our classrooms will be tough, that they will be challenged and made to think. We want our children to know that there will be no hiding place in our classrooms; they must ask and answer questions and attempt everything. However, in so doing, we want them to feel safe and protected, we want them to eagerly accept challenge, and to willingly attempt new things because they know we have strung a safety net beneath them: they might falter but we will catch them if they fall.

We also want them to know that taking risks and making mistakes is not just accepted in our classrooms, but is positively and proactively welcomed as an essential part of the learning process. After all, if pupils do not make mistakes, they cannot receive feedback; if they do not receive feedback, they will not know how to improve; and if they do not know how to improve, they are unlikely to do so.

There are many ways of achieving a positive learning environment like this: some are common sense; some are counter-intuitive. Let's deal with each of the hallmarks I list above in turn and explore tangible ways of achieving them.

My six hallmarks

Children feel welcomed: The best – and simplest – way of achieving this is to physically welcome pupils over threshold into our classrooms. Establish a habit of greeting pupils at the classroom door at the start of every lesson, and then do so with a smile and by greeting at least some pupils by name.

Children feel valued: Make sure you are on time and have a lesson planned and ready to go. Create a culture whereby everybody's contributions are welcomed and given the time and attention they deserve.

Children are enthusiastic about learning: This is, in part, achieved by developing pupils' sense of intrinsic motivation but this isn't always possible and is rarely easy. Model enthusiasm by constantly articulating – through your words and actions – your joy at teaching your pupils and at teaching your subject.

Children are engaged in their learning: Not only in the sense of enjoying what they are doing, but also actively paying attention to the right things and thinking hard. Ensure each lesson or sequence of lessons has a clear end-point and is planned and sequenced to allow pupils to make demonstrable progress.

Children are eager to experiment: Instil in pupils the importance of practice, of redrafting and redrafting work until it is the best it can be. If it isn't excellent, it isn't finished.

Children feel rewarded for their hard work: Rewarding hard work and effort not only creates a level playing field on which every pupil has equal chance of scoring a goal (because everyone can try hard, after all), it also makes explicit the progress each pupil is making from their individual starting points. Not every pupil can achieve a Grade 9 but every pupil can improve and beat their previous score. And remember: don't compare one pupil with another; compare each pupil with their earlier self, show where they were then, where they are now, how far they have come, and where to go next.

The physical environment

When I talk about the physical learning environment, I refer of course to those concrete aspects of our surroundings that stimulate or offend our senses – the quality of the school buildings, the attractiveness and usefulness of classroom walls, the quality of light and room temperature, and how the physical space is utilised.

Professor Peter Barrett, an honorary research fellow at Oxford University's Department of Education, has long studied the connection between the physical design of schools and pupils' academic progress and has been involved in publishing a wealth of research (see further information).

Among his findings, is the suggestion that pupils' emotional and physiological stability can have a direct impact on their understanding of the school curriculum and, therefore, affect the pace of their progress.

Creating a physical environment that allows pupils to feel comfortable, content and focused, the research argues, can help pupils to become more attentive to their teacher and more attuned to the content of the curriculum they are studying.

In other words, pupils' conscious and subconscious attentions, and the development of their knowledge, skills and understandings, are more effectively piqued when they study in a positive physical space.

So, what exactly is a "positive physical space"?

Prof Barrett's work has suggested that a wide range of environmental factors can contribute towards the emotional and physiological effects of a classroom. For example, environmental factors including temperature, light, noise, classroom layout, and even air quality have been shown to improve pupils' achievement.

Let's take a closer look at three physical attributes: temperature, light and noise. All references in this section can be found in a report entitled *The effects of school facility on teacher retention in urban school districts* (Buckley, Schneider & Shang, 2004).

Temperature

Earlier I referenced in passing Abraham Maslow (1943) whose hierarchy of needs is widely known, and we cannot ignore the importance of catering for our pupils' more basic needs because if they are uncomfortable they are less likely to concentrate in lessons.

Lowe (1990) found that the best teachers in the US (winners of State Teacher of the Year awards) emphasised their ability to control classroom temperature as central to the performance of both teachers and pupils.

Lackney (1999), meanwhile, found that teachers believed thermal comfort affects both teaching quality and pupil achievement. Another study (Corcoran et al, 1988) focused on how the physical condition of school facilities, including thermal factors, affected teacher morale and effectiveness (see also Heschong Mahone Group, 2002).

Light

Classroom lighting also plays a critical role in both pupil performance and staff wellbeing (see, for example, Phillips 1997). Jago and Tanner (1999) cite results of 17 studies. The consensus is that appropriate lighting improves test scores, reduces off-task behaviour, and plays a significant role in the achievement of pupils.

The study by the Heschong Mahone Group, covering more than 2,000 classrooms, is perhaps the most cited evidence about the effects of daylight. It indicates that pupils with the most classroom daylight progressed 20 per cent faster in one year on maths tests and 26 per cent faster on reading tests than those pupils who learned in environments that received the least amount of natural light (Heschong Mahone Group 1999; see also Plympton et al, 2000).

Noise

The research linking acoustics to learning is consistent and convincing according to Buckley, Schneider and Shang's review: good acoustics are fundamental to good academic performance.

Earthman and Lemasters (1997) offer three key findings: that higher pupil achievement is associated with schools that have less external noise, that outside noise causes increased pupil dissatisfaction with their classrooms, and that excessive noise causes stress in students (see also Crandell et al, 1995; Evans & Maxwell, 1999).

Teachers also attach

> "We want them to know that taking risks and making mistakes is not just accepted in our class-rooms, but is positively and proactively welcomed"

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importance to noise levels in classrooms and schools. Lackney (1999) found that teachers believe that noise impairs academic performance. Indeed, so say Buckley, Schneider and Shang, it appears that external noise causes more discomfort and lowered efficiency for teachers than for pupils (Lucas, 1981).

Layout

Another physical factor to consider is classroom layout. An intelligently designed physical environment with, for example, distinct and clear lines of communication, can help promote dialogue between pupils and teachers. This, in turn, can help pupils to feel better integrated in the learning process which, in turn, helps promote wellbeing within the classroom.

There is often a lively debate on social media about whether or not an "intelligently designed classroom" equates to seating in rows or less traditional arrangements, but my advice is: what works is what works.

Sometimes it is best for pupils to be seated in rows facing the teacher and the board; other times, if it is logistically possible and not time-consuming, it may be best to deviate from this layout to facilitate discussion and debate or to allow safe movement around the classroom.

Seating in rows is indeed "traditional", but it has survived through the years for a reason – it focuses pupils on the teacher and whiteboard and therefore minimises distractions and low-level disruption. What's more, it enables the teacher to see every pupil at all times.

If and when you want to vary the layout, moving from rows to a horseshoe, or grouped tables for different activities, then I would suggest you make sure you explicitly teach pupils how to do it safely and quickly and with minimum disruption – practice the routines to ensure smooth and speedy transitions.

Displays

When deciding how to organise wall displays, meanwhile, I think there is a balance to be struck. On the one hand, we do not want bare walls because such a stark environment is uninspiring and can be demotivating. But likewise, we do not want the walls to be so engaging as to distract pupils from the lesson or offend their eyes with a kaleidoscope of colour and shape. If we do have displays, we want them to be useful and useable, not mere wallpaper, and we want them to be up-to-date and relevant not formed of peeling and yellowed posters from yesteryear.

We should think carefully, therefore, about what would prove most useful to the majority of pupils who study in the room, what would provide cues for their learning and act as schema or stimulants to thought. For example, we may want to display key words or concepts, perhaps threshold curriculum content or ideas from knowledge organisers.

The social environment

An effective social environment, at least in part, means a whole school culture which is conducive to good behaviour and helps develop positive attitudes to learning, as well as tackling poor behaviour including low-level disruption, and protecting all staff and pupils from harassment and harm. So, what might this look like in practice?

Social norms

One way to build such a social environment is to create a set of social norms that define good conduct. In *Promoting the conditions for positive behaviour* (2011), Philip Garner says that "It remains clear that ... the promotion of good behaviour and learning can be firmly linked to effective leadership."

The senior leadership team therefore has a crucial role to play in terms of consulting on, agreeing and articulating the features of their social environment and then ensuring that this is established and enforced by every adult working in the school.

I think the right social environment is best created in four stages:

- Creating the social environment.
- Communicating the social environment.
- Making the social environment concrete.
- Making the social environment continuous.

1, Creating the social environment

A key role of the senior leadership team is to design a detailed vision of what the social environment should look like for their school, focusing on pupil conduct. Expectations must be as high as possible, for all. Designing the social environment is about agreeing the social norms that you would want to see reproduced throughout the school community. Here, I would suggest, school leaders should ask: "What would I like all pupils to do, routinely?" "What do I want them to believe about themselves, their achievements, each other, the school?" Once these questions have been answered, senior leaders can then translate these aspirations into expectations.

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2, Communicating the social environment

Social norms are found most clearly in the daily routines of the school. Any aspect of school behaviour that can be standardised because it is expected from all pupils at all times should be, for example walking on the left or right of the corridor, entering the class, entering assembly, clearing tables at lunch. These routines should be communicated to, and practised by, staff and pupils until they become automatic. This then frees up time, mental effort and energy towards more useful areas, such as study.

3, Making the social environment concrete

Next, school leaders need to make the social environment concrete with as much detail and clarity as possible. Staff and pupils need to know how to achieve this, and what the social environment looks like in practice from behaviour on buses, to corridor and canteen conduct. This means demonstrating it, communicating it thoroughly, and ensuring that every aspect of school life feeds into and reinforces that culture.

One way to make the social environment concrete is to design routines that pupils and staff should follow. The school must have well-established and universally known and understood systems of behaviour, for example, pupil removal, consequences, and sanctions, corridor and classroom expectations, behaviour on trips, arrival, transition and departure behaviour and so on.

4, Making the social environment continuous

Once built, school systems require regular maintenance – school leaders must not assume that, once it has been created, communicated and made concrete, their social environment will flourish if left along. Rather, school leaders need to continuously cultivate that social environment. In short, it requires their constant attention. Although it is reasonably straightforward to identify what a good social environment might look like, much like a diet, the difficulty lies in embedding and maintaining it. This includes staff training, effective use of consequences, data monitoring, staff and pupil surveys and maintaining standards.

In order to make the social environment continuous, school leaders need to establish the right conditions within which such a culture can flourish and – among other means – this can be done through the use of assemblies, displays, expectations around punctuality and appearance, and what happens if pupils do not come to class with the right equipment.

Pupil behaviour

In the 2014 report, *Below the Radar*, Ofsted found that only a third of the teachers felt their school's behaviour policies were being applied consistently. Teachers said this inconsistency, and a lack of support from senior leaders, undermined their efforts to effectively manage behaviour.

Five years later, Ofsted decided to update what they know about managing challenging behaviour in schools, looking not just at low-level disruption as they did in 2014, but at more challenging forms of misbehaviour too. They did so because pupils' behaviour and attitudes are a major concern for teachers.

The NASUWT's annual big question surveys, the OECD TALIS studies and Ofsted's study on teacher wellbeing have all showed that teachers feel misbehaviour is common and is a major source of stress. The Ofsted wellbeing study (2019) found many teachers felt senior leaders provided insufficient support.

Two years ago, Ofsted's chief inspector Amanda Spielman (2019) looked at what had changed since *Below the Radar*. Her aim was to identify the strategies that schools use to pre-empt and manage challenging behaviour and persistent absence and promote good behaviour and attitudes.

Compared with *Below the Radar*, Ofsted's latest research found some positive developments. For instance, they found that teachers and leaders better understood the importance of consistency in the implementation of behaviour policies. Most schools in the study favoured whole-school behaviour management approaches in which a set of consistent routines are put into practice and rigorously and consistently applied.

Staff, particularly in secondary schools, emphasised the value of teaching desired behaviours and making them routine. This is especially the case for those behaviours that are repeated regularly throughout the school day and that ensure the safe movement of pupils around the school, the smooth running of lessons and the minimum loss of learning time to low-level disruption.

Ofsted concluded that, when pupils and staff have a shared understanding of the expectations for these common behaviours and both staff and pupils follow established routines, overall consistency is easier to achieve.

A whole-school approach to behaviour is, Ofsted says, much more than a set of policies or documents; it is about what everyone in the school does, how they behave, and what expectations are set and taught. It is also about the values and ethos of the school. Strong values underpin good behaviour.

In the best schools, the values underpinning the behaviour management policy are clear and explicit. Staff and pupils across the school know what the values are. In these schools, pupils know that good behaviour and attendance prepares them well for their future lives. Indeed, one way to improve attendance in particular is to make an explicit link between attendance and educational outcomes, and between educational outcomes and later success in life and work. Such a strategy can encourage pupils and their parents to appreciate the longer-term impact of absenteeism on their life chances and potential earnings.

In the best schools, leaders and teachers appreciate the need to build and maintain positive relationships with all pupils to ensure on-going good behaviour. Through good relationships, staff are more able to spot potential concerns or behaviours that are out of character and may lead to low level disruption or absences and so can take preventative action.

Zero tolerance?

Before we move on, let's drag the elephant into the centre of the room...

There is a lot of debate via social media about whether or not zero tolerance approaches to behaviour management are appropriate. But one of the issues, I think, is that policies described as "zero tolerance" mean different things in different contexts.

Rather than talking about zero tolerance, the teachers and leaders in Ofsted's research spoke about the different types of behaviours they wanted to see in their pupils. Foundational behaviours, such as attending and being punctual to school and to lessons, are the baseline pupils need to meet to allow effective teaching and learning to happen.

As well as these foundations, pupils also need to show positive attitudes to learning, such as making a strong effort, a positive contribution in class, engaging in their learning and completing homework to a high standard.

Social behaviours, the ways in which pupils interact with each other and with adults, formed the third component.

These three types of behaviours are reflected in Ofsted's Education Inspection Framework (EIF) under "behaviour and attitudes". In the framework, Ofsted states that – among other things – in order to be judged good the following standard needs to be reached: "Pupils have high attendance, come to school on time and are punctual to lessons. When this is not the case, the school takes appropriate, swift and effective action."

Of course, the opposite of zero tolerance is a potentially harmful leniency. For example, some schools, in seeking to re-engage with a persistent absentee, may agree a staggered return to school and/or a part-time timetable. But such strategies need to be carefully thought through because they can send a signal that attending school is optional and that missing some days and lessons is permitted.

The role of parents

Creating an effective social environment in order to ensure good behaviour and attitudes is not solely the responsibility of school leaders and teachers, of course. Parents also need to work positively with their child's school in order to support its policies and ensure compliance and conduct.

Parents reinforcing school policies makes it easier for staff to apply those policies and for pupils to accept the consequences.

Parental engagement is an important element of effective whole-school behaviour management. It gives parents a sense of involvement, provides ›

a consistent message and helps their understanding of procedures and rules. Families are most likely to support a school's behaviour policies if they understand the reasons for a particular approach. To allow parents to do so, they need to be properly informed of the school's practices.

Parental engagement can be achieved in a number of ways. For example, some schools focus on improving behaviour and attendance at parents' evenings. Others find positive ways to re-engage with parents when their child has misbehaved and/or been absent. In the Ofsted report, many teachers mentioned the power of regular positive communication.

Conversely, in extreme cases where parents refuse to engage with the school in support of efforts to improve a child's behaviour and/or attendance, schools have legal powers to use parenting contracts, parenting orders and penalty notices to address poor attendance and behaviour in school.

Managing transitions

The features of an effective social environment – what good behaviour and attitudes look like in practice – need to be explicitly taught and reinforced as early as possible and expectations raised as pupils get older. Times of transition, from primary school to secondary, or from one school to another, are therefore important here.

Leaders interviewed as part of the *Below the Radar* study talked about the value of managing transitions to make them as smooth as possible. For some pupils, going from a relatively small primary community, where you are known by everyone and where you have a close relationship with a small number of teachers, to a much larger secondary school with several teachers will be particularly challenging and can lead to instances of low-level disruption and/or absenteeism.

The schools in the Ofsted study felt that it was important to identify pupils who were particularly at risk of challenging behaviours and absenteeism *before* they started secondary school so that they could provide appropriate support and prepare them for "big school". Specific plans could then be put in place to minimise the risk of these children displaying challenging behaviours, being absent or late to school and lessons after transition.

There was agreement among the schools in the study that early identification should not result in secondary schools discouraging admission under the guise that the child "would not fit in here".

In the schools that had successfully improved transition arrangements, individual support plans or an extended period of transition were two of the solutions. Some secondary schools said they had also had success when starting work with pupils in year 5 or had run summer schools or literacy and numeracy catch-up sessions in year 7 for pupils who were struggling at the end of primary school. Leaders explained that this was to prevent pupils falling further behind, which leads to absenteeism and displays of challenging behaviour as pupils struggle to access the curriculum.

In the schools that had improved transition, there was also effective training for all staff which included training for school leaders and those with pastoral responsibilities. These schools achieved consistency through regular training, mentoring and induction of new teachers. Many teachers also valued informal discussions with school leaders alongside clear monitoring systems and policies.

> "Moving from novice to expert in any field requires practice. We should, therefore, provide our pupils with plenty of opportunities to practise and perfect their knowledge and skills"

The emotional environment

As well as building a comfortable and engaging physical space and developing appropriate behaviour and attitudes – and indeed routines – towards learning, we want our children to feel safe and secure in school so that they willingly take risks and make mistakes from which they can learn.

The first few days spent in a new learning environment are the most pivotal in determining a pupil's academic progress. We need only look at the effects of a pupil's transition from primary to secondary school, whereby almost 40 per cent of children fail to make expected progress (Galton, Gray & Ruddock, 1999), to see this. If a pupil does not feel emotionally safe and intellectually comfortable, it can prove difficult for them to make progress.

So here follows five practical strategies to help instil this willingness to take risks – what we might refer to as a "growth mindset" – in our classrooms. For each, I have added a practical tip...

1, Use frequent formative assessment

The first strategy to help develop the sort of emotional environment that encourages risk-taking is to provide pupils with frequent formative feedback. Professor Carol Dweck, in her 2013 book *Mindset*, argues that people with a fixed mindset "greatly mis-estimated their performance and their ability (while) people with the growth mindset were amazingly accurate". Why should this be? Because, as Dr Dweck says: "If, like those with the growth mindset, you believe you can develop yourself, then you're open to accurate information about your current abilities, even if it's unflattering. What's more, if you're oriented towards learning, as they are, you need accurate information about your current abilities in order to learn effectively."

***Tip:** We should, therefore, ensure that our pupils are acutely aware of their strengths and areas for development. We should frequently assess our pupils and give them formative feedback so that they know what they do well and what they can do better. We should dedicate quality time in our lessons for our pupils to act on this feedback, to redraft work in order to improve upon it.*

2, High levels of challenge for every student

Everyone can improve with practice. Therefore, we must challenge our pupils to be the best they can be, we must have high expectations of all our pupils and must encourage them to take a leap of faith, even if that means falling over a few times. Appropriate challenge – and high expectations – are not just advisable, they are essential to the process of learning. If pupils are not given hard work to do which makes them think, they won't learn anything. Likewise, we know from the work of Rosenthal and Jacobson (see *SecEd*, 2014) that having high expectations of pupils demonstrably improves their outcomes. Conversely, if we set the bar low, pupils are likely to underperform.

***Tip:** It is important, therefore, that our emotional environment is built on high expectations and the provision of stretch and challenge for all pupils.*

3, Explicitly welcome mistakes

Another way of developing an emotional environment that encourages risk-taking is to actively encourage pupils to make mistakes, and to do this we must foster a safe and secure environment in which falling over is not only accepted without criticism or humiliation, but in which it is actively encouraged as evidence of effective learning and of getting better at something.

Every teacher knows that some pupils do not raise their hands in class to answer a question because they fear they will be criticised or made to feel embarrassed for being wrong. And yet the opposite should be true: pupils should be eager to raise their hands because to get an answer wrong is to learn from their mistakes; to get an answer wrong is to learn the correct answer. Equally, raising a hand to say, "I don't understand this ... can you help?" is not a sign of weakness or low intelligence, it is a means of increasing one's intelligence/ability.

Of course, making a mistake – even if you have a positive mindset – can be a painful experience. But a mistake should not define you; it is a problem to be faced and learnt from. We teach this by modelling it, by publicly making mistakes and by making explicit our own implicit learning.

***Tip:** An effective emotional environment is one in which mistakes are welcomed and learned from. This means we have to model this in our words and actions, being honest when we too make mistakes and reassuring pupils that their mistakes are helpful to us and the learning journey.*

4, Engaging in deliberate practice

People with a belief in the growth mindset and an eagerness to take risks and learn from mistakes, rather than valuing natural, effortless accomplishments, believe even geniuses have to work hard for their achievements and that there nothing heroic about having a gift.

Moving from novice to expert in any field requires practice. We should, therefore, provide our pupils with plenty of opportunities to practise and perfect their knowledge and skills. Professor Daniel Willingham in his 2010 book *Why Don't Students Like School?* says that deliberate practice "reinforces (the) basic skills required for more advanced skills, it protects against forgetting, and improves transfer". Professor Siegfried Engelmann says that students need "five times more practice than many teachers expect". There are two kinds of practice proven to be the most effective: first, distributed practice which is "a schedule of practice that spreads out study activities over time", and second, interleaved practice which is "a schedule of practice that mixes different kinds of problems, or a schedule of study that mixes different kinds of material, within a single study session" (Dunlosky et al, 2013).

***Tip:** An effective emotional environment, therefore, is one which provides pupils with plentiful opportunities to engage in deliberate practice, both to activate prior learning and keep it accessible, and to ensure that they continue to improve.*

5, Reward effort not attainment

Returning to Prof Dweck for a moment, she conducted research into the effects of rewards and concluded that praising pupils' abilities actually lowers their IQs whereas praising effort raises them. She also found that praising pupils' intelligence can harm their motivation because, although pupils love to be praised, especially for their talents, as soon as they hit a snag their confidence goes out of the window and their motivation hits rock bottom. If success means they are smart, then failure means they are dumb.

This doesn't mean that we should not praise pupils, of course. But it does mean that an effective emotional environment is one in which we use praise carefully, predominantly praising pupils for the "growth-oriented process – what they accomplished through practice, study, persistence, and good strategies", while avoiding the kind of praise that judges their intelligence or talent. SecEd

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