

Critically evaluate elements of effective learning climates

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Introduction

Within today's society, there are a range of learning climates which aim to support children of all abilities within their education and personal lives to develop them through a child-centred approach. The emphasis on learning through different pedagogies, environments and curriculum styles has become increasingly popular in today's society, where different learning climates are critically evaluated in order to prove whether they are effective in aiding a child's education and their development as a whole. According to Conner and Sliwka (2014, p168), An effective learning climate can be defined as an education where it's aims are to promote "student learning, ideas and theories about learning and their application to teaching practice should be a core part of any initial teacher education programme", suggesting that an effective learning climate is able to put children at the centre of their learning, while practitioners are a vital role to aid this pedagogy to create an effective learning climate. Additionally, Conner and Sliwka (2014, p168) also state that an effective learning climate "recognises the learners as its core participants, encourages their active engagement and develops in them an understanding of their own activity as learners", in turn creating a trusting, positive environment where children can learn freely, effectively and flourish. Throughout this evaluation, learning climates such as Assessment for learning (AFL), growth mindset, visible learning, positive behaviour management, the SEAL programme and outdoor learning environments will be critically evaluated to determine whether they are beneficial to a child's development and learning experiences, and an effective learning climate.

Elements of Effective learning climates

2.A - Assessment for Learning

Assessment for Learning (AFL) can be described as a method in which teachers or educational practitioners can use to better a students understanding and learning of the pupil's own performance by allowing the pupil to receive feedback from their own school work in a motivating and child friendly way (Pearson English, 2019). AFL can be achieved through a number of strategies, however it is important to note whether it is an effective strategy in order to better a child's education and an effective learning climate. For example, formative assessments such as peer-assessment, self-assessment, teacher feedback and opportunities to question their feedback are all strategies of AFL. Assessment *for* learning compared to assessment *of* learning can be considered different as assessment of learning refers mainly to summative assessments, which ranks students achievements and typically involves standardised tests, whereas assessment for learning is embedded throughout the curriculum and "is a constant process rather than a single point in time" (Siedlecki, 2012) used to constantly adjust any strategies and aimed to improve a child's learning experience. Using AFL as oppose to assessment of learning, such as summative assessments as this avoids the notion that children will have to perform well in exams to show how well they learn throughout the school year, compared to formative assessment strategies through AFL which allows children to reflect and improve in a less formal way, allowing their learning process to be developmental throughout the whole school year while also allowing teachers to assess them throughout the year in a less formal manner, ultimately making it a comfortable learning experience for pupils.

AFL can also be described as a revolutionary strategy, compared to summative assessments where children were graded based on their knowledge at the end of year for example, compared to modern effective learning climates where AFL allows the assessment process to be "inextricably embedded within the educational process, which is maximally information-rich, and which serves to steer and foster the learning of each

individual student to the maximum of his/her ability" (Lambert, T *et al*, 2011). This suggests that this process is an effective and positive learning climate as it strives to allow children to be educated and succeed to their maximal capability.

For example, an affective strategy of AFL and an example of good practice according to Estyn (2018), states that "The De Bono 'Six Thinking Hats'" were an effective method of AFL, as children were able to view six different hats which represented different topics of reflection, "yellow (things that went well); black (things that didn't go well); red (emotion/feeling elicited); green (creativity); white (facts/information that underpinned the learning); blue (next steps)". This method in particular allows clear and in depth reflection topics which creates opportunities for children to thoroughly reflect on their work and how to better their learning experiences and develop their own work to reach their own personal targets, allowing an effective and efficient learning climate.

In addition to this, another strategy that can be considered an effective learning climate, and essentially an effective method of AFL to better a child's learning experience is one to one tutoring. According to William (2011), one-to-one tutoring as a strategy of AFL is effective as it allows the teacher or educational practitioner "to identify errors in the student's work immediately, and then to provide clarification, and further follow-up if necessary". Additionally, this can be considered beneficial as it allows pupils to identify where they need to improve from the viewpoint of the teacher and allows the child to ask questions in a comfortable environment, not in front of their peers, in turn allowing the child to receive feedback which ultimately improves their learning, which intrinsically links with the ultimate goal of AFL as a whole, in order to become a stable and effective learning climate.

Lastly, according to Estyn (2018), using AFL can be considered as a very beneficial learning climate as "Highly effective assessment for learning has been widely regarded by educationalists as fundamental in raising standards for learners", suggesting that strategies used through the form of AFL it allows learners to understand what they are doing right, how to improve, allows in-depth reflection, and ultimately provides an efficient and successful learning climate.

2.B Growth Mindset

The ideology of an individual having a fixed mindset can be considered as their intelligence being static, conforming to the norm, not attempting challenges which may enhance one's intelligence and the individual believing that intelligence is fixed and they are born with a particular level of intelligence. This may be demonstrated in a classroom where a child prefers to have easy learning goals and likes to be praised on them (Dweck, 2012), or a child believing they were born with less intelligence than their peers, possibly resulting in low self-esteem. In contrast to this perspective, children having a 'growth mindset', according to Boylan *et al* (2018), allows them to be "creative, connected and engaged learners who exhibit agency over their learning". This suggests that adopting a growth mindset rather than a fixed mindset allows the child to adopt the perspective that there is more to the term 'intelligence' than cognitive ability, and that their intelligence can grow and be increased over time as they develop. According to Dweck (2016), having a growth mindset can be simply described as "Individuals who believe their talents can be developed (through hard work, good strategies, and input from others) have a growth mindset"; this suggests that children who are willing to learn within a classroom, and be open to improving their intelligence can be considered to have a growth mindset. Children having this mindset in a classroom can be considered to be within an effective learning climate as this allows children to have the self-motivation and capability to learn to the best of their abilities, while motivating others around them to do the same, engaging with the teacher and their work and ultimately creating a positive and effective learning climate. Although it can be viewed that having a growth mindset can aid the development of a child's intelligence and cognitive development, according to , Beall (2018) A study conducted by Case Western Reserve University, stated that "there is a correlation between someone having more of a growth mindset and doing well academically. However, the correlation is small and the findings do not support claims that growth mindset interventions have profound effects on academic achievement". This result is in contrast to Dweck's theory on the notion that having a growth mindset allows children to excel academically, however it does state

that there is a small correlation which does not rule out the theory, suggesting there is a possibility that this creates an effective learning climate. It also does not relay the fact that having a growth mindset may aid a child's development not only in a classroom environment but in life in general, as the qualities of growth mindset may allow children to succeed in developing their knowledge as they grow through life; resulting in the climate in which they surround themselves in being an effective climate which provides learning opportunities due to the values and beliefs they adopt through having a growth mindset.

2.C Visible learning

'Visible Learning' a teaching method and approach influenced by John Hattie which can be described as a learning climate which works effectively, and is considered very influential throughout many nations. According to David-Lang (2012), visible learning can be defined as that "student learning visible to teachers so they can know whether they are having an impact on this learning. Further, it also refers to making teaching visible to the student as well so that students learn to become their own teachers, an important component of becoming lifelong learners". This can be broken down simply by teachers seeing the child learn through the eyes of the child, and the child seeing themselves as their own teachers, essentially this links to the learning climate of growth mindset, where children can be engaged with their own learning and willing to see themselves improve. Considering Hattie's book on Visible Learning and the entire basis around the notion was based on a meta-analysis from over "50,000 quantitative studies of variables affecting the achievement" (Snook *et al*, 2009) and attainment suggests that this learning climate can be considered as scientifically proven to benefit a child's education, in turn creating a effective learning climate. Implementing visible learning not only allows the teacher to view whether the child is learning, but also allows the child and teacher to work together with the shared aim being to improve their education, for example, through methods such as feedback and directing and visioning where the child will be when they want to achieve a goal. This creates an effective learning climate as

similarly to growth mindset notion, the child is willing to see themselves achieve through their own eyes, not being told by the teacher, in turn allowing the child to see themselves succeed; in support of this, David-Lang (2012) states that “evidence shows that the greatest effects on student learning come when not only the students become their own teacher”, which essentially implies that to apply visible learning through teaching and allowing children to also adopt this notion creates an effective learning climate as according to David-Lang (2012), this has the greatest effect on their learning in education. To second this, this learning climate is not just limited to the teachers creating a better education for pupils, this notion is effective as it also applies to the students, where according to Fisher (2016), students “should have to know what they are learning, why they are learning it, what it means to be “good” at this learning, and what it means to have learned” (Fisher *et al* 2016), and so do the teachers, ultimately creating an effective learning climate as this allows children to feel as though they have control over their capabilities, motivates them to achieve and also creates an environment which they can thrive in as a classroom. Although it can be noted that this notion of visible learning creates an effective learning climate, it is also important to see that there may be implications to this notion. Visible learning would require the pupils to be as motivated to learn as the teacher is to teach and help the children learn. This may require the children to be on the same wavelength as the pupils. However, what may seem simple and an easy form of teaching through visible learning for the teacher or practitioner, according to Larson (2019) “is not and can never be equal to the content of the complex learning processes ‘in’ and for pupils and students”; this suggests that teachers learning capacity and knowledge is more than likely far more developed than a child, therefore this notion may be difficult to adopt as the children may find it difficult to envision what their goals are, what they want to learn, and their learning capabilities when the teacher is unable to provide a clear and concise method of providing visible learning methods as the pupil and teacher “do not see the world in the same perspective, and they often also have different interests concerning” (Larson, 2019) what their learning goal may be or what achievement looks like from their perspective. Although this may seem like a negative viewpoint on visible learning being an effective learning climate, it can be considered that the scientific evidence and the notion around visible learning is an effective learning

climate as it ultimately allows practitioners to determine the level of learning from the pupil, while allowing the pupil to portray to the teacher the desired level in which they want to achieve while being productive and proactive learners.

2.D Positive behaviour management

According to Estyn (2018), “Positive approaches to behaviour management are accepted widely as effective practice” when supporting all children through their education. Positive behaviour management can be defined as an approach which promotes supporting all students, prevention, and focuses on developing children’s social and emotional aspects of themselves such as their relationships, values, ethos and achievement. Additionally, this is in contrast with school behaviour strategies such as punishments and sanction when misbehaviour has occurred to avoid the misbehaviour being repeated, rather focuses on improving a pupils behaviour in a positive, child friendly manner. An example of positive behaviour management strategies may be through the humanist theory. For example, the humanist theory refers to a child’s positive behaviour is established through relationships and responding to the emotional needs of each individual child, where this is person-centred, and the teachers and practitioners have empathy while also encouraging children to make their own choices and raise the pupils’ self-esteem. In addition to this, the humanist theory relates to educational theorist Maslow and his hierarchy of needs. According to Gawel (1996, p1) Maslow’ believed “that there is a general pattern of needs recognition and satisfaction that people follow in generally the same sequence”, this suggests that children need to have the support and ability to be satisfied within the needs lower down in the pyramid, basic needs such as food, water and safety needs, in order to progress higher up in the pyramid, which in turn allows the children to reach self-actualisation.

For example, Maslow’s theory “offers insight about the motivations behind "difficult" behaviors” (Benchmark Institute, N.D, p2) suggesting that if the children are focused on meeting needs lower down in the hierarchy, they will not focus on reaching goals and needs higher up, such as self-esteem needs like positive behaviour and reach self-actualisation where the child is able to reach their full potential. In practice,

practitioners can use this motivational humanistic theory to support children in a positive manner, such as supporting their self-esteem, using nurture groups, and supporting peer relationships, in turn ensuring all children's needs are met, suggesting that each child will reach their self-fulfillment needs at the top of the hierarchy where they portray positive behaviour within the classroom. However, although this theory is widely supported through education world-wide, this theory suggests that if the needs of the child are not met successfully, the children may not behave negatively, suggesting that there is a great deal of pressure on the practitioner to support all of the child's needs in order to manage their behaviour in the classroom. For example, in terms of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, if a practitioner is unable to support peer to peer relationships if the pupils do not get along with each other, the child may not move up in the hierarchy to reach their esteem needs where they are able to behave positively within the classroom, in turn portraying the fact that the humanistic approach of managing positive behaviour may not always be effective in all classrooms if the practitioner is unable to support all the needs of the child successfully. In contrast, if the practitioner was able to support the needs of the child effectively by supporting physiological, safety, belongingness and love, and esteem needs, the child will ultimately reach self- actualisation, allowing the child to to have a "continuous desire to fulfill potential" (Benchmark Institute, N.D, p5) and portray positive behaviour, ultimately suggesting that this method, when successfully promoted, proves to be an effective learning climate and strategy.

2.E Social and Emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme

According to the National Government, the SEAL (social and emotional aspects of learning) programme national evaluation (2010, p1) "SEAL is a comprehensive, whole-school approach to promoting the social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness and the emotional health and well-being of all who learn and work in schools". Additionally, the nation-wide SEAL programme aims to ensure "All children are provided with planned opportunities to develop and enhance social and emotional skills", while "building a school ethos that provides a climate and conditions to promote social and emotional

skills" (National Government, 2010, p1). It is evident that this programme is a unique learning climate aimed at focusing on the children as a whole, while developing all aspects of their interpersonal lives. An example of this in practice would be in a classroom based environment, pupils placed in groups and setting problem solving tasks for the groups; this allows the children to build their social and emotional skills while also working towards maintaining and forming peer relationships and interpersonal relationships, in turn allowing the opportunity to develop their education as a whole by "using [their] interactions with others as an important way of improving our learning experience" (Humphrey *et al*, 2010) suggesting that this programme is an effective learning climate as it benefits the children as a whole, not just focusing on their intellectual development, but their development as a whole. Additionally, the SEAL programme may be greatly beneficial for children for their future well-being, as according to Humphrey *et al* (2013, p248), "research indicates a rise in mental health difficulties among children and young people in the last several decades", highlighting the importance for a programme such as SEAL to be integrated in to the curriculum to reinforce the importance on their well-being, while working towards a healthy, mindful, positive learning climate. In support of this, childhood theorist Eric Erikson's theory on emotional development is believed to be a fundamental construct of a child's development. According to Batra (2013, p250) in support of Erikson's theory,

"Everyday experiences include engagement (or the lack of it) with family members and the entire matrix of social and cultural exchange, including play, reading and writing (or the lack of these), exposure to technology and media, etc. For instance, children's play is interpreted as children's initiative aimed at fulfilling a significant developmental need for social exchange and problem solving relevant to their age"

This suggests that through the SEAL programme within schools, supporting a child through this programme with their social engagement, peer relationships, feelings, empathy and emotional development in turn allowing children to engage with these vital skills in life, agreeing with Erikson's theory, to fulfilling the needs which are important to

be met to aid the development of the child as a whole and create a efficient learning climate.

Although the programme of SEAL seems to be greatly beneficial to child development and an effective learning climate within schools, a critique of the programme, Carol Craig, cited in Horton (2013, p210) states that “if children continue to experience negative emotions despite their best attempts to manage them this could inadvertently lead to an elevation of negative emotions”, suggesting that the SEAL programme implemented in schools to aid negative emotions of a child, which may not particularly remove the negative emotions, may then lead to an influx of negative emotions and may result in feeling worse due to the repeatedness of visiting the negative emotions through the programme, ultimately highlighting the fact that the programme needs to be undoubtedly effective for all children’s wellbeing in order to be consider this as an effective learning climate.

2.F Using the outdoors as effective learning environment

According to educational theorist Froebel, he believes that learning outdoors is beneficial to a child’s education, and an effective learning climate as “considered that children learn best through self-activity, rich first-hand experience, problem-solving, play and talk” (Tovey, N.D, p2), as children have the opportunity to thrive in a natural environment where there are rich sensory learning experiences and the ability to learn through play to develop their minds, for example, children in the foundation phase using different natural textures such as sand, mud and water to create imaginary potions, which according to the Froebelian theory, provides opportunities “to engage children’s imagination, curiosity and creativity and foster their health and well-being” (Tovey, N.D, p3). Secondly, this theory in practice may be an opportunity for practitioners to support and encourage a child’s imagination through adventurous play, such as encouraging them to have the confidence to explore new ideas and experiences such as exploring a forest where there are a range of learning opportunities, natural resources and plenty of possibilities for imaginative play, as adults and practitioners have the ability to shape a child’s development within this learning climate. Additionally, similarly to Froebel’s

theory, another childhood theorist, Lev Vygotsky's theories on the role and benefits of play on a child's development, and how learning outdoors and the natural environment can be an effective learning climate due to the endless possibilities of play outdoors. Using the outdoors as an area for learning, particularly by learning through play within the primary curriculum allows a range of opportunities for children to be imaginative, which Vygotsky states in Nilsson (2014, p925) that "imagination is an important component of all aspects of cultural life, essential to the artist and the scientist alike" suggesting that according to the Vygotskian theory, it is fundamental for practitioners, educators, schools and the curriculum to allow and support opportunities for outdoor learning, such as imaginative play in a natural environment due to the great benefits it has on a child's development, such as "enhanced personal and social communication skills" and children having "the ability to assert personal control and increased sensitivity to one's own well-being" (Morris, 2003). Furthermore, to support the fact that learning outdoors is a beneficial learning climate for all children, forest schools within the UK, which is a child-centred, holistic approach to schooling which "supports play, exploration and supported risk taking" (Forest School Association, N.D) in an effective outdoor learning climate. In addition, this approach to education supports the children physically, emotionally, socially, and intellectually in an environment where children are encouraged to play, take risks and socialise in a natural environment.

The approach of using the outdoors as an effective learning environment proves to be an effective learning climate due to the amount of childhood theorists views such as Froebel and Vygotsky, and the theories applied in practice through forest schools in the UK, additionally through curriculum frameworks through the Foundation Phase in Wales where outdoor learning is beneficial, and is encouraged and states that similarly to other literature, believe that learning outdoors "is the ideal environment for experiential learning, because it offers unique opportunities to be creative, to move around, to be noisy and to take risks" (Welsh Government, 2009, p.2), ultimately suggesting that this method of practice and method of education is an effective learning climate.

However, although it seems that there is a large amount of theorists, views and curriculum frameworks in support of outdoor learning, Knight (2017) states that outdoor learning "environments are often not being utilised as the pressures of the curriculum

can lead schools to focus more on academic achievement and therefore to stay inside a 'structured' classroom rather than seeing the opportunities of regular outdoor learning", suggesting that although Knight (2017) may believe that outdoor learning is beneficial, schools do not promote the strategy and make use of the learning climate to benefit a child's development; which although may seem like a criticism of the learning climate of outdoor learning, but merely states that there are possibilities for academic achievement within the outdoors, but may not be utilised appropriately within education to broaden a child's mind, in turn agreeing with the fact that using the outdoors as an effective learning environment is in fact an effective learning climate due to the endless possibilities for child development.

Conclusion

To conclude, as discussed, it is clear that there are many effective learning climates with their own particular important elements which are supported by educational and childhood theorists, curriculum frameworks, legislation and through educational practice in which all support children through their educational journey through their social, emotional, physical, spiritual and intellectual development. The learning climates discussed makes it evident that it is fundamental that each learning climate provides a range of opportunities to ensure all children, of all abilities are able to develop to their full potential and benefit from each individual learning climate in their own ways, which although there may be some criticisms, all seem to do so due to the large amount of advantages to children within the different effective learning climates.

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