

Enhancing the Conditions for Learning

– the physical, social and emotional environment

A Claim:

Getting to the satisfaction of achievement is in large part assisted by the quality of the environment in which learning takes place and part of that environment is created by the approach taken by teachers to learning.

An Illustration:

To illustrate this claim we recount a story told by a colleague teaching physically disabled students in the Czechoslovakia of Iron Curtain days. She said that the most telling lesson about learning she gained from over thirty years with such children was the importance of *patience* in teaching and the significance of *small achievements* in the eyes of learners. She went on to say that watching skill acquisition for these children was hugely rewarding for herself and her teachers. It required a learning environment where patience had to accompany repeated attempts, repeated failure and repeated frustration; where support, encouragement and persistence had to be meted out with good humour; where laughter and frowns were the constant companions of struggling youngsters; and where no-one entertained any thoughts of giving up. The smallest of gains was great cause for celebration. For example, when trying to help severely physically disabled children to feed themselves, getting a hand even close to the object spoon was to be applauded; lifting it off the table unaided was a major achievement and getting it to the mouth, even empty, a gold medal result. We see quite starkly in this story, two very important elements in the learning environment to which teachers and leaders needed undiluted commitment. Of course, support and celebration would have had to be accompanied by other conditions for learning if the talents and capacities of children with disabilities were to be harnessed in learning for life.

- (1) What do we hear in this narrative about the conditions of learning operating in this European school?**
- (2) Why do you think they do what they do?**
- (3) What do we do and why?**
- (4) What, if anything should we be doing differently about the emotional conditions for learning here?**