

# The Learning Conditions — FAQ

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Common Questions Answered

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Cultivate Safety · Honour Agency · Speak with Intention · Design Liberating Structure

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## About the Framework

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### What is The Learning Conditions?

The Learning Conditions is a diagnostic framework that identifies four observable conditions that must be present in any classroom, school, or institution before genuine learning can happen. The four conditions are: Cultivate Safety, Honour Agency, Speak with Intention, and Design Liberating Structure. A meta-layer — Practice with Intentionality — describes the sustained adult commitment required to maintain all four conditions.

It does not tell you what to teach or how to teach. It tells you what must be true in the room before any teaching method can work as intended. The conditions exist so children grow into the fullest version of themselves — rather than shrinking into the safest.

### Who created it?

Mamta Motwani, an educator with 20 years of experience across classrooms in India and Canada. The framework is built from 19 essays of practitioner reflection written between 2018 and 2026, covering writing workshop, read-aloud, logical consequences, social-emotional learning, school observation, innovation, inclusivity, and humanistic leadership.

### Is this based on research?

It is practitioner-built and research-supported. Every claim traces to a named essay from Mamta's corpus. Academic traditions — including Edmondson's psychological safety, Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory, Vygotsky's inner speech, Freire's liberatory pedagogy, and complexity theory — provide scholarly validation. But the framework speaks in the practitioner's voice, not the researcher's.

## **Is this a method?**

No. A method tells you what to do. The Learning Conditions tells you what must be true in the room before what you do can work. It is method-agnostic — compatible with inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, Montessori, the IB PYP, Responsive Classroom, UDL, CASEL SEL, or any other approach.

## **How is this different from Responsive Classroom?**

Responsive Classroom is a method — a specific set of practices (morning meeting, logical consequences, reminding language). The Learning Conditions explains why Responsive Classroom works when implemented well and fails when implemented poorly. The framework acknowledges Responsive Classroom as a direct pedagogical influence and builds on its vocabulary while offering a higher-order diagnostic lens.

## **How is this different from CASEL / SEL?**

CASEL describes five competencies students should develop. The Learning Conditions describes what must be true in the environment before any SEL curriculum can take root. A classroom implementing CASEL's competencies without safety, agency, intentional language, and liberating structure will fail — not because CASEL is wrong, but because the conditions were not met.

## **How is this different from the IB PYP?**

The IB Learner Profile describes who students should become (risk-takers, thinkers, caring). The Learning Conditions describes what must be true in the room for that becoming to happen. The framework's condition "Honour Agency" directly challenges the IB's framing — Mamta asserts that agency is inherent in children, not something developed through a programme.

## **Does this only work for primary/elementary classrooms?**

The framework is built primarily from early childhood and primary contexts. The conditions themselves — safety, agency, intentional language, liberating structure — are likely relevant at any educational level, but the examples and evidence base draw primarily from younger learners. Application to secondary, tertiary, or adult learning contexts would require adaptation.

## Does this work across cultures?

Yes. The framework was developed across Indian private schools (structured, exam-focused) and Canadian IB schools (progressive, inquiry-based). Both contexts fail in the same ways when conditions are absent and succeed when conditions are present. The condition names use universal action verbs (cultivate, honour, speak, design) and translate cleanly across languages.

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## The Four Conditions

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### What does “Cultivate Safety” mean?

Building an environment where children are emotionally and socially happy, free from judgement, and confident that being wrong, confused, or uncertain will not result in ridicule or penalty. Safety operates in four dimensions: emotional (freedom from judgement), relational (trust between adult and child), physical (spaces for regulation), and structural (clear, predictable norms).

### What does “Honour Agency” mean?

Recognising that children are already capable and inherently agentic — and removing the obstacles that prevent them from exercising their agency. This is not “giving students voice and choice.” Agency is not the teacher’s to give. It is the child’s by nature. The teacher’s role is to provide opportunities, not grant permission. The teacher’s experience is offered as accompaniment — the child becomes more fully themselves through the contact, not a copy of the teacher.

### What does “Speak with Intention” mean?

Consciously choosing the words, questions, tone, and framing used with children — understanding that language is the single most powerful tool available to an educator. The words adults use with children become the words children use with themselves. This means replacing directives with questions, using reinforcing/reminding/redirecting language, and maintaining the child’s dignity in every interaction.

## **What does “Design Liberating Structure” mean?**

Creating routines, frameworks, and expectations that make genuine freedom possible. Structure and freedom are not opposites — clear, co-created structure is what enables children to exercise real choice. Two failure modes: over-control (efficient but agency-destroying) and under-structure (permissive but aimless).

## **What is “Practice with Intentionality”?**

The meta-layer that holds all four conditions in active practice. It is not a fifth condition — it is the adult’s ongoing commitment to noticing, adjusting, and sustaining the conditions in every interaction. The gap between what a school says it believes and what happens in its classrooms is an intentionality gap.

## **Do all four conditions need to be present at once?**

The framework’s claim is that all four must be present simultaneously for genuine learning. A classroom could have safety without agency (a warm but controlling environment), or structure without intentional language (efficient routines delivered through directives). But partial presence produces partial results.

## **Where should I start?**

Start with the condition that speaks to your situation. If children are quiet and compliant, start with safety. If you are exhausted from carrying the room, start with agency. If your default mode is directives, start with intentional language. If your classroom feels either chaotic or controlled, start with liberating structure.

## **Does the teacher’s own growth matter?**

Yes — deeply. A teacher who has stopped growing cannot sustain the conditions for others. The framework assumes the adult is still learning, still examining their own practice, still willing to be changed by the work. The meta-layer, Practice with Intentionality, is not a technique to master — it is a commitment to keep growing alongside the children.

## **What if a child seems beyond reach?**

The framework treats refusing to write off any child as a practice, not a feeling. There will be children who test every condition you have built. The commitment is not to feel hopeful about every child at every moment — that is unrealistic. The commitment is to act as though every child is reachable, even when you are not sure. This is a discipline, and it requires the support of colleagues and structures around you.

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## **Practical Questions**

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### **Is there a self-assessment tool?**

The practitioner guide includes self-assessment questions for each condition — 6-7 reflective questions per condition that help you diagnose what is present and what is missing.

### **How long does it take to build these conditions?**

Safety is built in layers — through weeks and months of consistent practice. Language patterns take time to change (the teacher who has spent years saying “Hurry up” cannot switch to questions overnight). There is no quick fix. The practitioner guide includes a 90-day implementation plan as a starting point.

### **Can I use this framework alongside what I already do?**

Yes. The Learning Conditions is designed to work alongside any existing pedagogical approach. It is a diagnostic layer that explains why your current methods work in some moments and not others. You do not need to abandon anything you are already doing.

### **Does this apply at home too?**

Yes. Mamta applies the same principles at bedtime that she applies in the classroom. She uses the same language practices with her own children that she uses with her students. The conditions apply whether you are a teacher reading this for your classroom or a parent reading this for your home.

## **Where can I learn more?**

Download the free practitioner guide, which includes detailed chapters for each condition, self-assessment tools, cross-cultural examples, and a 90-day implementation plan.