

# The Learning Conditions

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## Executive Summary & Research Report

A diagnostic framework identifying four conditions  
that must be present in any classroom before  
any method, curriculum, or pedagogy can actually work

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

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## Executive Summary

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### The Learning Conditions: A Practitioner’s Diagnostic for Genuine Learning

**Author:** Mamta Motwani **Framework tagline:** What must be true before children learn.

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#### The Problem

Schools worldwide invest in evidence-based teaching practices — inquiry-based learning, project-based learning, social-emotional learning, culturally responsive pedagogy — and see inconsistent results. The same method flourishes in one classroom and falls flat in another. The difference is rarely the method. The difference is what is true in the room before the method is applied.

This is the implementation gap: the distance between adopting a practice and achieving its intended outcomes. Research consistently shows that educational innovations fail not because they are unsound, but because the environmental conditions for their success are absent.

#### The Framework

The Learning Conditions is a diagnostic framework identifying four observable conditions that must be present in any classroom, school, or institution before any method, curriculum, or pedagogy can actually work:

Condition	Core Question	Corpus Frequency
<b>Cultivate Safety</b>	Do children feel free from judgement?	14/19 essays
<b>Honour Agency</b>	Are children trusted as inherently capable?	17/19 essays

Condition	Core Question	Corpus Frequency
<b>Speak with Intention</b>	Are adults choosing their words consciously?	12/19 essays
<b>Design Liberating Structure</b>	Does structure enable freedom?	11/19 essays

A meta-layer — **Practice with Intentionality** (8/19 essays) — describes the sustained adult commitment required to maintain all four conditions. This is not a fifth condition but the stance that holds all four in active practice.

## Key Differentiators

1. **Diagnostic, not prescriptive.** The framework does not tell educators what to do. It identifies what must be true in the environment before any method can work. This makes it compatible with any existing pedagogical approach.
2. **Method-agnostic.** The Learning Conditions works alongside IB PYP, Responsive Classroom, CASEL SEL, UDL, Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and any other framework — explaining why each succeeds or fails in specific classrooms.
3. **Practitioner-built, research-supported.** Grounded in 20 years of cross-cultural classroom practice (India and Canada) and 19 essays of systematic reflection. Every claim traces to a named primary source. Academic traditions (Edmondson, Deci & Ryan, Vygotsky, Freire, complexity theory) provide scholarly validation but do not drive the framework.
4. **Cross-cultural evidence.** Developed across Indian private schools (structured, exam-focused) and Canadian IB schools (progressive, inquiry-based), observing that both contexts fail in the same ways when conditions are absent and succeed when conditions are present.
5. **Scales from classroom to institution.** Each condition applies at every level — individual classroom, teaching team, whole school, institutional leadership. The same diagnostic lens works whether you are a classroom teacher auditing your own practice or a school leader evaluating institutional conditions.

## Origins and Methodology

The framework is built from a corpus of 19 essays written between 2018 and 2026 by Mamta Motwani, covering writing workshop, read-aloud, logical consequences, social-emotional learning, school observation, innovation, inclusivity, adolescent advocacy, and humanistic leadership. The corpus spans practice in India and Canada, from homes during lockdown to schools implementing the IB Primary Years Programme.

Framework development followed a rigorous process: - **Corpus analysis:** Individual essay analysis, cross-corpus thematic synthesis, and framework alignment audit - **Framework revision:** Four conditions revised to align with corpus evidence (addressing authenticity gaps identified in the audit) - **Elicitation and validation:** First Principles Analysis, Socratic Questioning, Self-Consistency Validation, Feynman Technique, multi-agent review, adversarial review, editorial review (prose and structural) - **Naming and identity:** 210+ ideas generated across 30 brainstorming techniques, converged through Thesis Defense, Stakeholder Round Table, Red Team vs Blue Team, and Comparative Analysis Matrix

## The Core Claim

Methods fail when conditions are absent. The method may be sound — but the ground was not ready.

The Learning Conditions provides a way to check the ground. It is the pre-flight check for any classroom: verify that safety, agency, intentional language, and liberating structure are present before expecting any method to produce genuine learning.

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## Detailed Research Findings

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### Finding 1: Agency Is the Load-Bearing Pillar

Agency appears in 17 of 19 essays — more frequently than any other theme in the corpus. The framework's formulation — "we do not give agency; we only need to provide opportunities" — draws a brighter ethical line than existing frameworks. Most

educational frameworks talk about “giving students voice and choice,” positioning agency as something adults possess and children receive. Mamta’s framework asserts agency is inherent — the adult’s role is to remove obstacles, not grant permission.

This ontological claim (agency as inherent, not transferred) is the framework’s most distinctive position and its strongest differentiator from competing frameworks including the IB PYP, which treats agency as something students develop through the programme.

### **Finding 2: Language Is the Primary Lever**

No major pedagogical framework foregrounds teacher language at the level of specificity found in this corpus. Mamta provides exact phrases — “What do YOU need to be doing right now?” — and positions language not as a technique but as the primary mechanism of educational change. The claim that adult language literally shapes how children think (grounded in Vygotsky’s inner speech theory) is supported by the corpus evidence: careless words extinguish curiosity; intentional questions sustain it.

The specificity of this contribution — word-for-word replacements, the paradigm shift from directive to question — combined with the ethical claim that intentional language is a “moral duty” represents the framework’s most practically original contribution.

### **Finding 3: Structure and Freedom Are Not Opposites**

The framework resolves the apparent tension between structure and freedom by positioning them as complementary: well-designed, co-created structure is what makes genuine freedom possible. This identifies two distinct failure modes — over-control (efficient but agency-destroying) and under-structure (permissive but aimless) — and positions co-creation as the mechanism that resolves both.

This position places Mamta between traditional education (structure without freedom) and radical progressive education (freedom without structure), offering a synthesis grounded in observed classroom practice rather than ideological commitment.

### **Finding 4: The Implementation Gap Is a Moral Gap, Not a Competence Gap**

The framework’s meta-layer (Practice with Intentionality) makes a claim stronger than existing reflective practice traditions: the gap between aspirational values and daily practice is an ethical obligation, not a professional development opportunity. Schools fail

not because teachers lack skill but because they lack intentionality. This positions the framework's demands as moral rather than technical — a stance that gives it rhetorical force with mission-driven educators and school leaders.

### **Finding 5: No Direct Competitor Occupies This Position**

Market analysis of seven major competing frameworks (IB PYP, Responsive Classroom, Project Zero, UDL, Montessori, Reggio Emilia, CASEL) confirms that no existing framework offers a method-agnostic diagnostic lens. All competitors sell methods, not diagnostics. The Learning Conditions occupies a unique competitive position: it explains why existing methods work or fail, making it complementary rather than competitive.

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## **Implications for Practice**

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### **For Classroom Teachers**

The framework provides a self-assessment tool: four conditions, each with observable teacher behaviours, student indicators, and absent-state descriptions. Teachers can diagnose which conditions are present and which are missing before prescribing solutions. The practitioner guide includes a 90-day implementation plan for building conditions systematically.

### **For School Leaders**

The framework offers institutional diagnostic language. Each condition scales from classroom to school: safety cascades from leader to teacher to student; agency denied at the institutional level produces classrooms where agency cannot thrive. School leaders can audit their institutional conditions using the same lens teachers use for classrooms.

## For Professional Development Providers

The framework provides a pre-flight check layer that can be integrated into any existing PD programme. Rather than competing with existing offerings, The Learning Conditions adds a diagnostic step: before implementing any new method, verify that the conditions for its success are present.

## For Parents and Community Members

The framework provides plain-language diagnostic questions parents can use to understand what their child's classroom experience should include: safety to be wrong, ownership of learning decisions, adults who choose their words carefully, and structures that enable genuine freedom.

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## Honest Limitations

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1. **Single-practitioner corpus.** The framework is built from one educator's reflections. This gives it coherence and voice but limits the evidence base. Independent validation through broader research would strengthen the claims.
2. **Design Liberating Structure has thinner corpus support** (11/19 essays) compared to the other three conditions. The concept is present and consistent but has less variety of examples and contexts.
3. **Secondary and tertiary education gap.** The corpus draws primarily from early childhood and primary contexts. Application to secondary, tertiary, or adult learning contexts requires adaptation that the current evidence base does not directly support.
4. **No quantitative outcomes data.** The framework is built from qualitative observation and practitioner reflection. It does not include student achievement data, controlled studies, or measurable outcome metrics. The claims are grounded in observed practice, not experimental evidence.

5. **The framework does not address systemic barriers.** Poverty, under-resourcing, colonial education structures, and systemic racism create conditions that individual teachers cannot overcome through intentionality alone. The framework applies within the domain the teacher can influence — not beyond it.