



Creating a Positive Learning Environment

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ABSTRACT

A positive learning is evident when all students, educators, and employees experience a safe, healthy, caring, and nurturing atmosphere. It is a continuous process and although it is demanding it is also rewarding. This environment ought to strongly emphasize and recognize the innate worth and dignity of all by ensuring that equity is being practised which ensures that the teaching and learning process is interactive, dynamic, and progressive for all involved. When equity fosters a positive learning environment, students as well as teachers are extrinsically and intrinsically motivated and energized to maximize their potential. They are more likely to take ownership of their learning and support other students who may experience difficulties. This physical environment makes students feel comfortable, safe, and secure which ought to be free from violence and illicit substances. Moreover, classrooms should have adequate light, proper circulation of air and free from unnecessary noise. Similarly, schools must create an environment that is socially beneficial to the teaching and learning process. Students and adults ought to be familiar with the discipline matrix and its consequences. Within the school surroundings they must feel emotionally prepared to learn and express themselves. In this regard, constant and regular motivation in the classroom can foster students to become resilient, and independent learners. Thus, they should be unafraid of challenges but see them as opportunities for growth and development. When there is a positive environment, students are better able to properly express their needs, feelings, goals, ideals, and aspirations.

KEYWORDS: positive, learning, environment, diversity, equity, equality.

INTRODUCTION

Is there merit in creating a positive learning environment? What precisely is a positive learning environment? What does it really entail? Does it incorporate diversity equity and equality? Who benefits from it? It is instructive to note that published research unquestionably indicated that there is a paucity of information about this topic. With the support of professional literature, this paper underscored the significance of positive learning environments and classrooms. This non-empirical research provided a detailed review of several research papers, journal articles and books. A critical research method compared various papers that are directly related to this topic. Many educators firmly believe that it is obligatory to create positive learning spaces. Positive learning environments often enhance and foster the entire teaching and learning process. Thus, it is imperative that everyone: educators, professionals, and policy makers, pay particular attention to and consider the significance of creating a positive learning environment. Although this process is challenging and demanding, it is strongly suggested that all citizens, try their best to promote and encourage a positive learning environment.

CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS

Madan et al. (2019) posited that positive and growth-promoting learning environments are important for learning. They further added that positive emotions and positive self-talk icon critical in the learning process and accentuates the teaching and learning process. Similarly (Chen et al., 92018); Pekrun et al. (2017) affirmed that it stimulates the metacognitive self-regulation during the teaching and learning process. Thus, it is necessary to create positive learning environments. Frenzel et al. 92007) and Sandilos et. al. (2017) asserted these environments allow children to perform academically and socially at higher levels. Furthermore, children feel physically and psychologically safe and are motivated to do their best. Being physically safe is readily obvious when the environment is free of unnecessary clutter and hazards such as chemicals or broken glass or some other hazard. To be psychologically safe, children must be able to perform without fear of being belittled or harassed by their classmates or their teachers. Uzair-ul-Hassan et. al.(2017) firmly believed that they need to feel as if they belong in the classroom with their peers, and that they have social value, or relevance. Cohen and Huppert (2018) added that when children feel appreciated and



valued, they are motivated and energized to learn and hence cognition is enhanced. This gives rise to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Diversity, equity, and inclusion form an integral component of learning environments. Costley et al. (2021) postulated that as a collective diversity, equity, and inclusion is fundamentally concerned with the nonpartisan treatment and equal opportunity for all. One of its principal objectives is to annihilate prejudice in each environment. Corsino and Fuller (2021) hypothesized that diversity embraces the differences among humans. Some of them include race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability, or attributes, religious or ethical value system, national origin, and political beliefs. Costley et al. (2021) further stated that diversity recognizes and even celebrates the differences in others. So, in a diverse environment, it is important that a wide range of backgrounds and mindsets I'd validated which sanctions creativity and innovation.

The Annie E Casey Foundation (2021) defined equity as a state of being unprejudiced and unbiased. Equity is chiefly concerned with growth and development of the entire person and ensures that everyone is treated in a similar manner. Costley et al. (2021) further accentuated that individuals, or groups of individuals, ought to be treated impartiality. The Annie E Casey Foundation (2021) affirmed that inclusion genuinely incorporates all within a given structure and gives people a great sense of belonging. Corsino and Fuller (2021) also mentioned that inclusion recognizes the innate worth and dignity of people and empowers, motivates, and energises them to maximize their full potential. Costley et al. (2021) believed that inclusion means creating an apt environment where everyone feels welcome and valued. Inclusive environments can be created when people are more aware of their unconscious biases and have learned how to manage them.

Corbett et. al. (2021) strongly suggested that the inclusive environments and structure of educational institutions are significant because they ensure that all students feel welcomed and valued. Fuentes et al. (2021) believed that in some countries, inclusion is still not present. Consequently, it fosters feelings of isolation and poor academic performance among minority group students (Stein & Andreotti, 2016).

COMPONENTS OF POSITIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Zengilowski et al. (2023) indicated that it is important for educators to use inclusive pronouns such as "we" to build close and immediate connections. Fostering a keen sense of belonging underscores, the socio-constructivist perspective. Zengilowski et al. (2023) further pointed out that collaborative learning environments often support interaction and active participation whether synchronously or asynchronously (Zengilowski 2023). Alpert et al. (2018) stated that inclusive learning also involves diversity and equity and enriches the learning and learning experience. Very often diversity presents opportunities for educators and learners to bond and appreciate social and cultural

differences. The recognition of each other's culture can be done in the form of digital artifacts or presentations of religious and national festivals allowing for the sharing and respecting of culture in a virtual environment.

The Ohio State University (2023) stated that the use positive language within the course content that represents a myriad of identities promotes inclusivity. It is imperative that educators select reading and learning materials that represent diverse identities and perspectives. For example, they could choose course content that highlight the ethnic and gender identities of the learners. In this way students can identify and relate to it. Educators can often have case studies, vignettes, and videos to further elaborate diversity, equality and inclusion. This helps to develop mutual respect for all social groups and allows learners to share their conservative and radical perspectives that promote inclusive educational engagement. They can also motivate students to make online class agreements about rules and encourage them to utilize their social and emotional domains. It is important to use material from various authors of diverse backgrounds. Educators should use appropriate information from under represented and minority groups so that students feel a sense of connection and belonging.

Ratnayaka (2021) posited that there are many contributing factors responsible for this phenomenon. Some of them include the low socioeconomic status of the family and a general undervaluing of formal education for the young African male. Therefore, educators should pay particular attention to the inherent biases of the system and find ways to empower the young African males without resorting to stereotyping. Highlighting the success stories African males in various fields within the course content can certainly empower this marginalized group. The development of course elements must consider the levels of accessibility for students. The Universal Design for Learning, (Alpert et al. (2018), is an appropriate guide that helps educators and course developers plan and cater to diverse learner needs and disabilities. The three principles of UDL include representation, engagement and action and expression. It is an issue of social justice and human rights to ensure inclusive education is accessible to all learners. Therefore, inclusive learning environments consider the physical and cognitive aspects of the course delivery.

In the digital learning environment, the use of the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines provides the standards that should be incorporated into the course content and interface. According to the The Bureau of Internet Accessibility (2019) web content should be Perceivable, Operable, Understandable and Robust (POUR). In terms of Perceivable, it should provide text alternatives for any non-text material, and it should be adaptable using a simple layout of the information. Operable guidelines include making the keyboards accessible, ensuring that the design does not stimulate seizures and physical reactions and the web interface is easy to navigate.

The Understandable guidelines suggest that the interface is readable, predictable, and understandable. The component focusing on the Robust nature of the interface means that there is compatibility with assistive technologies.

The movement from monocultural education toward the development of inclusive and equitable education systems is still a work in progress. Educators tend to rely on their socio-cultural background and values consciously and unconsciously about learners' experiences to shape their teaching. Reflective practices are crucial for inclusive instruction as it gives an opportunity to critically review personal biases in their professional life (Alpert et al., 2018)

Inclusive content involves designing course material that considers broad goals and specific objectives and delivers on the overall expectations (Alpert et al., 2018). Students should be presented with a roadmap of the course that illustrates relevant content and assessments that are aligned with the mandates of the syllabus. Students should be presented with suitable rubrics and formative and summative assignments that keep them abreast. Educators ought to provide detailed feedback that helps to communicate the expectations of students. Some strategies to help students to achieve these expectations include providing examples of exemplary work, modeling expected behavior, setting community guidelines, giving reflective feedback, and using multiple non-graded assessments to build the confidence of learners (Alpert et al., 2018).

ADEQUATE LEARNING CLASSROOMS

It is imperative that educators and students and parents/significant others engage in a continuous process. Constructing and establishing positive relationships in education is significant and entails proper and meaningful communication which entails getting to know students: their various personalities and diverse idiosyncrasies. This activity can be accomplished both individually and in groups. Moreover, educators should always highlight the positive and use the negative as opportunities for further growth and development. Educators could try to foster a deep sense of belonging and encourage students to establish caring classrooms (Bergin, 2016). Educators ought to be extremely alert and listen attentively and thoughtfully to the voices and utterances of all students. The rules and regulations of the classroom must be carefully outlined. Students must comprehend them and be aware of the consequences when they are not adhered to. Thornton (2018) agreed that misbehaviour among students adversely affects the teaching and learning process and the overall school climate of the school. Thus, in carving rules for the classroom, it is strongly recommended that educators refrain from using negatives. As far as possible, educators should try to use positive language when teaching. Policies, guidelines, and expectations ought to be communicated in a friendly and constructive language. For example, instead of saying "don't disrespect other students," they can mention: "please respect all students." This positive

way of carving statements can appear to be insignificant but often makes a big difference (Rusticus et. al., 2023). Most of all it strongly conveys unconditional positive regard for all. Positive reinforcement is essential and often builds intrinsic motivation and helps promote a positive atmosphere among students. There are two great strategies that can be used here. Rusticus et. al. (2023) affirmed that it is always useful to affirm students even amid challenges. Ample time could be dedicated to celebrating learning thereby reinforcing the positive. It is important to comprehend that every class is unique because the experiences of students are varied.

INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS

UNICEF (2017) asserted that inclusive education is a combination of values, ideas, and practices that provides all students with a more effective and meaningful education. Inclusion ensures that all students have equal opportunities and learn in safe environments. UNICEF (2017) further mentioned that inclusion appreciates the unique contributions of students. When inclusive classrooms are fully functional students coexist and grow together. UNICEF (2019) affirmed that students from various backgrounds which often includes those with special needs and disabilities, females, students at risk, and members of ethnic minorities, ought to study in inclusive and safe classrooms. According to Dalton (2017) intercultural sensitivity (affective), intercultural competence (behavior), and intercultural awareness (cognitive) all support a culturally responsive pedagogy and are essential for effective teaching in a variety of educational contexts. Education strategies for inclusive education should also place a strong emphasis on the identities and cultural backgrounds of the students as well as the communities' particular contexts. Dalton (2017) also affirmed that leveraging the cultural capacity that individuals bring to the classroom is a main goal of inclusion. All students are acknowledged by teachers who use inclusive practices, and all sociocultural viewpoints are given the chance to be considered in the course activities (Dalton, 2017).

It is pivotal that educators establish an environment of diversity, equity, and inclusion in classrooms. They must eliminate stereotypes in curricular resources and incorporate literature that promotes equity. This can be done by moulding, supporting, and affirming students thereby encouraging them to do the same. This minimizes prejudice and bias and creates a positive effect on the teaching and learning process. When educators actively engage students in equity, the classroom can become a place where respect is fundamental. This is a dynamic and life-long process. It is convoluted, intricate and perplexing but rewarding. To genuinely encourage diversity, equity, and inclusion in the classroom educators ought to respectfully confront and challenge negative assumptions, ideas, and attitudes. This includes setting clear rules and guidelines pertaining to how people treat and interact with each other. They also need

to transmit deep respect and tolerance for all, especially to those who have different ideas, goals, and perspectives. In this way they nurture and foster critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity. This can incite and impel students to also spread the tenet of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their daily lives and indeed beyond the walls of the classroom.

Educators must reflect and challenge their own beliefs and assumptions. To create an environment of inclusion, they need to know their students and always address them by their name. In addition, they can acknowledge their presence, value their perspectives, and motivate them to always do their best. It is important to maintain consistent and meaningful communication and allow students the freedom to express themselves and even to disagree. In addition, educators can incorporate the tenet of diversity equity and inclusion in the lesson plans.

Above all, educators need to appreciate the experiences and voices of all students and be non-judgmental in the teaching and learning process. The voices of students heightened when students are, motivated when independent thinking is fostered. According to Julien (2021) the diverse voices and varied experiences can certainly decrease the gap that exists in diversity, equity, and inclusion. Moreover, their voices and experiences can be instrumental for the better creation of policy for inclusion in education. Timely feedback often inspires and motivates students to maximize their performance and assume responsibility for their learning. Ertmer et al. (2013) affirmed that whenever there is group work and projects, students become more involved, excited, and enthusiastic. This encourages excellence, which as a result fosters collaboration amongst comrades and often assists students to be better prepared for examinations and the world or work (Julien 2021). When students feel appreciated and barriers of diversity, equity, and inclusion are eroded, students perform better. According to Julien (2021) education takes on a completely different dimension since students become more autonomous. Ertmer et al. (2013) affirmed that students also become self-motivated, creative, constructive, self-directed, and independent learner. Fuentes et al. (2020) proposed different considerations for educators, that can be used within the technologically advanced education setting. Four of those considerations are outlined below. Engage in Reflexivity: Educators are admonished to think about how their own sociocultural positions and histories might affect how they support and address inclusivity in their curricula efforts. As such, they can publish their own social profiles and whereabouts to serve as examples of this excellent practice (Fuentes et al., 2020).

Adopt a Diversity-Centered Approach: The use of a “cultural lens” is advised as a major professional activity for educators. In other words, given the relevance and influence of culture and associated diversity factors on behavior, faculty could examine their impact and influence from the outset and

frequently consider their relevance. These initiatives support a “diversity-centred” method of developing curricula (Fuentes et al., 2020).

Highlight Diversity in the Course Description and Acknowledge Intersectionality: When creating their syllabi, professors are frequently recommended to include the course description from the course catalogue. Faculty are encouraged to look for inclusive related details in the course description. Does the course description specifically imply that topics relating to diversity will be covered in the course? If that is the case, educators can make sure that the readings, activities, and assignments for the course address diversity in a subtle, intersectional, and inclusive way (Fuentes et al., 2020). Develop Diversity-Centered Learning Objectives: Another regular component of the course syllabus is the section on learning objectives. Faculty have the chance to specify what they want students to learn from the course when creating these objectives. Once more, educators are urged to either take a culture-centered approach, which calls for inclusivity to be incorporated into every learning objective (Fuentes et al., 2020).

McMaster (2014) offered five components that enhance inclusive education. They are relationships, shared experiences, advocacy, a sense of identity, and transparency. Together they converge and cooperate to synergize the characteristics linked to inclusive education. Each component is crucial to the efforts made by students to bring about inclusive, long-lasting change (McMaster, 2014). It can be argued that forming sound relationships is probably the one that stands out the most because the core of inclusion is essentially concerned about interacting with each other. Being acutely aware of others and making them feel appreciated is important (McMaster, 2014). Advocacy is also a vital element that promotes inclusivity and accentuates learning. Lack of advocacy results in a loss of involvement and voice. Mc Master (2014) firmly believed that when there is no one to advocate for inclusion and no one has the skills to effectively speak for one self, exclusion is more likely to happen. One way for this to occur is if educators neglect to assist students who struggle with communicating. This could result in exclusion from the curriculum and from social relations. Challenges may evolve from impairments if effective communication is not provided. Where there is a strong sense of self, advocacy is more assured, and there are more chances to share experiences, and build meaningful relationships. When this is void and absent, alienation and isolation occur. Thus, Mc Master (2014) stated that it is imperative for educators and students to appreciate experiences. This can often occur during school sports days and social events. During these activities students can properly exhibit their skills and talents. Moreover, they can bond with each other in a non-threatening or judgmental setting. These various elements and activities underscore the notion of transparency and cognition is heightened and affirmed (McMaster, 2014).

IDEAL CLASSROOMS

Sandilos et al. (2017) clearly stated that positive classrooms ought to foster self-worth and positive self-worth. However, this notion of positive environment is a multifaceted construct and convoluted to accurately define. Nonetheless, Nair et al. (2018) suggested that: it denotes a sound quality of life. This includes several dimensions: the social, the political, the intellectual, the religious and the educational. On the other hand, Şükran (2020) believed that universal values are extremely significant and form an integral part in creating positive classrooms. The value system is necessary because it is not possible to build a peaceful school without love, respect, and tolerance (Şükran, 2020). Educators and students alike have some expectations and needs. The most basic need for educators is to feel valued and students appreciate classrooms that are free to highlight the positive. Prodigy (2022) believed that one of the primary goals is to create and sustain classrooms that foster success especially among students. Ariyani et al. (2021) further posited that educators ought to frequently motivate, encourage and monitor others to do their best. In this way, they continue to create classrooms where peace and tranquillity are evident. Rahmawati et al. (2020) also added that teaching and learning ought to be conducted in a peaceful classroom. It is not simple to establish positive classrooms. It is a difficult, complex, and convoluted process. To have a positive learning environment in a classroom demands much more than merely adorning the classrooms with posters. It really signifies truly appreciating, understanding, and supporting the diverse needs of students and colleagues in multiple ways. This can be accomplished by establishing rules in the classroom. These rules set the tone for a healthy learning classroom where students know what is expected of them. This structure makes students feel safe and comfortable and thus promotes positive well-being. When students feel safe in the classrooms, they are unafraid of confronting challenges. Further, they do not see them as negative but use them for further growth and development. Both students and educators are more engaged and excited to interact with one another under positive circumstances.

Students are more likely to succeed in positive learning classrooms where they feel a sense of belonging. Mention must be made that there is no singular or perfect learning classroom. Thus, it is necessary to try to create an inclusive classroom by carefully selecting diverse and representative course material that supports and fosters cognition. Fuentes et al. (2021) postulated that an inclusive syllabus encourages intercultural interactions and the sharing of diverse experiences and perspectives. These are essential ingredients for ensuring that all students, irrespective of their gender, race, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, or human abilities or experiences; feel welcomed and valued as members of the school community (Germano & Nicholls, 2020).

Mind-mapping technological tools such as Mind Meister,

Bubbl.us, and Mindomocan certainly be beneficial and assist in fostering culturally responsive instructions. They can also cultivate and develop intercultural competence. Moore et al. (2017) firmly advocated that through this dynamic process students can reflect on the cultural patterns influencing their assumptions and preconceptions, compare and contrast them with others, and adapt emphatically to new ways of thinking and doing things. In addition, this may assist educators to incorporate socio-cultural factors in inquiry-based learning, promote intercultural interactions in collaborative learning activities, and provide opportunities for students to exhibit self-efficacy and self-regulation. Furthermore, Fuentes et al. (2021) believed that these mind-mapping technological tools assist students to brainstorm complex social justice issues and to build on their prior knowledge through the sharing of perspectives and experiences. Moreover, individual differences are respected and valued as an important element of the learning process (Ladson-Billings, 2014).

Tsumua and De Gagne (2022) posited that safe classrooms foster learning. Some students can be shy, introverted, silent, and more at ease expressing their questions or opinions outside of the classroom. Others may be talkative and interact readily and freely. Learning habits might vary depending on culture. For fear of disrupting the teacher during class, some students in some Asian nations with a strong traditional priority on maintaining harmony may be more prone to express questions discreetly after class than students in Western nations. Some students are affected by poverty, others may be the first in their family to attend college, and members of racial or ethnic minority groups and these students can feel alienated at times. Tsumua and De Gagne (2022) further asserted that these students can benefit if classrooms are dynamic and incorporate all. With frequent interactions with students, it is critical to provide proper feedback that is precise, helpful, and motivating. The tone and effect must also be carefully considered.

The use of modern technology for inclusive learning provides the potential to enhance learning with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) education. The Universal Design for Learning provides an appropriate framework for exploring the use of technology in a learner-centered environment that makes accommodations regardless of their abilities or requirements (Coflan and Kaye, 2020). The cost of digital tools and learning materials has been declining, which increases the potential for the use of technology. Coflan and Kaye (2020) mentioned that modern technology can meet the requirements of the principle of representation through computer-based games and puzzles that can expose learners to words and numbers in novel ways. Electronic hand-held magnifiers can increase the ease of reading for vision-impaired students. Multimedia content using sound and visual images can provide multiple representations of concepts, which increases student engagement. presentation, etc. Coflan and Kaye (2020) suggested the use of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices that can

help learners communicate to share their learning in non-traditional ways (p.12). Additionally, alternative keyboards allow learners with SEND such as motor disabilities, and visual impairments to express information, use computer-based adaptive testing tools to allow SEND students to complete assignments and enable online chat features to encourage expression and participation (Colfan and Kaye, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A review of the professional literature indicated that few people pay great emphasis on creating positive learning environments. Although the process is convoluted and complex, it is significant. Thus, this research is crucial because it offers scholars and researchers pertinent information and comprehend how to appreciate, value, and comprehend the need to create positive learning environments. The analysis of existing literature certainly contributes to current knowledge and serves as a catalysis to motivate, energize and inspire others to engage in the process of creating positive learning environments. It also underscores elements of diversity, equity, and equality in the classroom. Because this paper enriches and enhances the research and academic scenario it can put educators and all those who are really interested in education in the right and proper direction. Moreover, it can encourage and stimulate policy makers, non-governmental organization and all those who honestly desire the best for students to be unafraid to render assistance.

METHODOLOGY

This non-empirical research gathered relevant data through critical studies, systematic review, and meta-analysis. Secondary sources were taken from central library books, journals, and the internet. A careful and thorough investigation of appropriate and relevant research techniques such as text criticism, critical examination of biographical studies, narrative analysis, creative writing as a research method, and internet-based research assisted this methodology were all employed. Pertinent and apt reading material were also gathered and thoughtfully analyzed and evaluated academically and the importance of the findings informed this study.

CONCLUSION

It is the genuine desire that this paper will stimulate the minds and hearts of the public so that they can realize that positive learning environments are essential for the growth and well-being of all. In addition, it encompasses diversity, equity, and equality in the classroom. The public ought to be fully cognizant that all children are the source of hope and could be the major factor for the development of a better society, nation, and indeed a better world.

This non-empirical research explored the complexity in trying to accurately explain the need to have positive learning environments. It must be remembered that creating positive environments is much more than a physical space. It is more

than being empathetic and demonstrating sympathy. It is more than expressing a desire to be committed. It means getting seriously and wholeheartedly involved in the lives of children. This process is not easy. It is demanding, challenging and time consuming. Moreover, the paper highlighted that creating positive environments is an integral component of education. Too often programmes and curricular are designed and little or no attention is given to the creation of a student friendly positive environment. Therefore, government institutions, non-governmental organizations and all those interested in education and the well-being of students should always engage in meaningful dialogue. In this way they can clearly ascertain and appreciate the urgent need to create positive learning environments. It is the genuine desire that this paper will stimulate the minds and hearts of the public so that they can realize that students deserve the best and must study in positive environments. Children are the source of hope and could be the major factor for the development of better society, nation, and indeed a better world.

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