Classroom Environmental Principles

1. Centers should be clearly defined. Features such as rugs or low shelves clearly convey to children where an area begins and ends.

2. Wall displays and materials should be at the eye level of the children.

3. The classroom needs both cozy and spacious areas, spaced devoted to a particular activity and others that change with the shifting interest of the child. The classroom needs at least one space for being alone.

4. The classroom should be filled with an array of resource-rich activity centers for groups of children. Ideally, each center would have areas for storage, surface areas, equipment plug-in, and a display place. Consider water sources and plugs when arranging the environment.

5. Dividers should be used to help contain the centers. Typically, a three-sided enclosure helps to define the space. The amount and location of the enclosures should be determined by the type of activity. For example, the block center needs to be the largest work area in the classroom and large enough for several different structures to exist. This area should also be protected from free-flowing traffic.

6. The tables and chairs should be integrated into the centers and spaced appropriately around the room. This avoids allowing tables and chairs to consume a large amount of the available space, and it allows for needed table space in the centers. The classroom can have a limited number of chairs, since it is not often when all of the children will be sitting at the same time. If chairs are needed, they can be pulled from various areas.

7. Large open pathways should be avoided. Traffic patterns should allow for free, convenient movement without encouraging running.

8. Place noisy areas together and separate from the quiet areas in the classroom for a more effective work/play environment.

9. The environment should be arranged to accommodate individual, small group, and large group activities. Remember that the large group area can also serve for several center opportunities.

10. When selecting and placing materials in your kindergarten classroom,
   a. Choose sturdy materials that will not self-destruct when children use them.
   b. Choose materials that reflect the diversity of your class/community.
   c. Place materials and equipment in their own place and in appropriate, labeled containers. Shelves are organized and free of clutter. This supports the children as they find and replace materials.
   d. Arrange and display materials so that they are inviting to the children and suggest multiple possibilities for use by being clearly visible and accessible.
   e. Change and combine materials to increase the levels of complexity, thus helping children become more self-directed and increasing their level of involvement.

11. Ideally, the outdoor environment is an enclosed area with immediate access from the indoor environment. This area is considered to be an extension of the indoor environment.
Environment Checklist

Use this checklist to help you evaluate your own environment for children.

☐ The classroom is warm, caring, safe, secure, and clean.
☐ The classroom is inviting and aesthetically pleasing.
☐ Provisions for coats and/or cubbies are provided and located in an accessible and logical location.
☐ Centers are clearly defined.
☐ Wall displays and materials are at the eye level of the children.
☐ Displays are mostly child-created, rather than commercial items.
☐ The classroom has both cozy and spacious areas.
☐ The classroom has at least one space for being alone.
☐ The classroom is filled with an array of resource-rich activity centers for groups of children.
☐ Water sources and plugs are considered in the arrangement of the environment.
☐ Dividers are used to help contain the centers.
☐ The block center is the largest work area in the classroom and large enough for several different structures to exist. It is also protected from free-flowing traffic.
☐ Tables and chairs are integrated into the centers and spaced appropriately around the room.
☐ Each computer has two chairs to encourage team work/cooperative learning opportunities.
☐ Large open pathways are avoided.
☐ Traffic patterns allow for free, convenient movement without encouraging running.
☐ Noisy areas are placed together and separate from the quiet areas.
☐ The environment is arranged to accommodate individual, small group and large group activities.
☐ The large group also serves for several center opportunities.
☐ Sturdy materials are chosen that will not self-destruct when children use them.
☐ Materials that reflect the diversity of your class/community are present.
☐ Materials and equipment are placed in their own place and appropriate containers.
☐ Material containers are labeled, shelves are organized, and free of clutter.
☐ Materials are clearly visible and accessible.
☐ Materials are arranged and displayed so that they are inviting and suggest multiple possibilities for use.
☐ Materials are changed and combined to increase the levels of complexity, thus helping children become more self-directed and increasing their level of involvement.
☐ The outdoor environment is an enclosed area with immediate access from the indoor environment.
☐ The outdoor environment is an extension of the indoor environment.
☐ The outdoor environment provides opportunities for climbing, swinging, throwing, crawling, balancing, riding, and jumping.