I believe that classroom environments are the most effective when they are literate and purposeful, organized and accessible, and, most of all, authentic." – Debbie Miller

The environment is inviting, flexible and facilitates learning.
The environment must be conducive to escaping with a good book, learning, reflecting, and discussing. Defined with rugs and furniture arrangements, areas of the classroom should be set aside with comfortable seating and areas configured to facilitate conversation and collaboration. An ample atelier for large group meetings should be the room’s focus; there should be spaces to accommodate partner work and small group work, and quiet areas for independent work defined in the classroom. In each case, the environment informs and engages the viewer.

Plants, natural or soft lighting, books in tubs, and student work (projects, work in progress, art and book reviews) should be situated throughout the room. Natural objects should be displayed to provoke curiosity, detailed examination, and inquiry. The walls must be calming in colour – a natural or a pale hue.

To encourage students to select a wider variety of reading materials, displays should have a wide variety of literary formats – fiction, informational texts, poetry, periodicals, audiobooks, etc. The books should be interspersed throughout the room to reflect the importance of reading. Displays of project work should be interspersed with arrays of found objects and classroom materials. Book displays, caddies with paper, sticky notes, and writing utensils should be visible and accessible. Most importantly, passion for learning must be evident by students and staff.

The environment reflects the students’ thinking, and is organized and responsive to the students’ needs.
Prominently display evidence of the journey in learning. Student learning, reading recommendations and responses should be displayed, versus commercially produced charts and bulletin boards. This affirms students’ view that their opinions and work are worthy.

The environment positively influences students’ feelings about learning, their peers and school.
The environment is a very important part of encouraging students. The students need to feel safe, comfortable, and free from criticism and threats. The environment should reflect a place to listen, discuss, and celebrate.

The environment allows choice and ownership.
Students perform best when they have a sense of ownership. The environment accommodates a variety of learning styles and provides choice of learning areas. The students feel they have ownership of the environment through involvement of the process of furniture arrangement, book displays, and wall décor.

“In order to act as an educator for the child, the environment has to be flexible: it must undergo frequent modification by the children and the teachers in order to remain up-to-date and responsive to their needs to be protagonists in constructing their knowledge.” - Lella Gandini (1998)
Environment Checklist

- **Whole Class Meeting Area**
  - Is the area flexible to be used for explicit teaching, modelling, and teacher/students demonstrations often within the context of shared reading, alouds, discussions (EEKK)?
  - Can the area be repurposed for partner work or independent work when not used for the aforesaid purpose?
  - Is it large enough so students can fit comfortably?
  - Is needed furniture available, a chair, a rug, lamps, low cabinet, an anchor chart stand or bulletin board, and books?
  - Is there a basket filled with essentials for the teacher to use, including Sharpies, sticky notes in different sizes, clipboards, dry boards, dry erase markers, pencils, and sticky tack?

- **Small Group or Partner Reading/Work Area**
  - Is the area flexible to be used for small groups to respond to a particular text, topic, theme, or problem?
  - Can the area be repurposed for teacher guided, needs-based groups or partner reading/work?
  - Is the space defined by small rugs and low shelving?

- **Writing Area**
  - Will the students come here to work, or is the space for organization and accessibility of materials?
  - Are a variety of writing materials, including alphabetic materials and word cards, organized and readily available?

- **Listening Area**
  - Is there a place for listening centers and listening centre books, including online and multimedia?
  - Are there headsets with microphones and splitters for students to use?

- **Tables or Desks**
  - Are the desks/tables configured to encourage conversation and collaboration?

- **Materials**
  - Is a place designated for students to keep their books, notebooks, and other items?
  - Are needed materials available for students in each area?

- **Classroom Library**
  - Are a variety of books such as fiction, nonfiction, periodicals, and reference material available?
  - Are the books (such as author, genre, topic, format and level) organized throughout the room to surround students with literature and eliminate congestion?
  - Is there a place for students to store their good fit books?

- **Computers**
  - Are the computers mobile to allow for flexible use?
  - Is there sufficient number of computers for student use?

- **Wall Décor**
  - Do the walls reflect evidence of student learning and ownership (student created rather than commercially produced)?
  - Are spaces designated for a PWIM chart and co-constructed anchor charts and writing continuums?
  - Are the bulletin boards covered in calming colours, such as natural or pale yellow, pink or blue?