

Reflecting on our Learning Environment

“When we institutionalise childhood, as we have certainly done, we risk doing what institutions nearly always do – diminish the poetry of everyday life. We eliminate the highs and lows and wash out individual difference; trading predictability and security for the messy idiosyncrasies of individual lives. Is that what we want for the one childhood allocated to our children?”

(Jim Greenman “Places for Childhoods” Child Care Information Exchange, 1992)

Not Yet Begun	Just Beginning or Thinking About It	On the Way	Well Established
Nature Inspires Beauty			
No natural elements or living items	One plant or natural feature – might still look a little ‘added on’	2-3 plants or natural features displayed in 2-3 different areas	Several natural features help create the feeling of connectedness to outdoors
No natural elements to interact with	The natural item is not accessible to children	One natural item is accessible to children encouraging tactile exploration	More than 2 natural items are accessible to children encouraging tactile exploration
All straight lines and primary colours	One area or display includes natural colour and/or softened lines rather than all straight	2 areas and/or displays feel softened by colour and/or line. Mostly natural colours used	Natural colours compliment each other rather than compete. Areas and displays feel softened rather than in straight lines
Texture Adds Depth and Warmth			
All plastic furniture and hard surfaces	One soft furnishing (eg: rug or cushion) or whicker feature	1-2 soft furnishings and whicker features Natural elements provide texture One display might include texture	Balance of hard and soft surfaces and different textures for children to use and for displays

Identity of Children is visible

Only commercially made charts and displays	Mostly commercially produced charts. One display reflects the children's ideas and/or images	Children's images are central One or two commercial charts remain	Charts and scaffolds reflect the thinking and learning of your unique group of learners Children's images are central
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Visual Noise and Clutter

Teacher materials dominate the space	There is one large area for teacher resources and this is disorganized	There is a small area for teacher resources that is organised and uncluttered	Teacher resources are stored away from the children's learning area unless they are being used
Materials and resources are disorganized and cluttered There feels like there is 'too much stuff' Any containers are plastic and large	Materials are organised in different coloured, sized and types of containers and many are overflowing, creating a sense of clutter ("too much stuff") Containers are mostly plastic Children may not have access to materials	Materials are organised in containers and not overflowing Like containers (colour, size, shape, type) are stored together to create as sense of order Containers may be labeled Children have access to most materials	Materials are organised in containers and not overflowing Transparent containers are used so that the materials are evident Whicker baskets are used for storage Children have access to materials to use for their learning
Furniture is mix of different colours and many may be primary colours	Furniture is the a mix of 3 or 4 colours and different busy designs on upholstered fabrics	There are no more than three furniture colours in the room and upholstered fabrics complement these colours	There is one major colour theme with 1-2 accent colours that reflect the colours of nature Furniture is mostly wood-toned
Display boards feature competing bright colours, designs and patterns It is hard for the eye to settle on one thing or to focus on the important part of the display	Display boards have common colour that is bright primary colour or patterned. It stands out from the learning displayed	Display boards have common colours that do not overwhelm the learning displayed but stay in the background	Display boards have a mix of textures and one complimentary colour that allows the eye to focus on the important feature of the display

Furnishing define and deinstitutionalize the space

The room is dominated by desks and chairs in rows All furniture is 'school issue'	All furniture is 'school issue' but it is arranged to create hubs or groups for learning collaboratively	Furniture is a mix of 'school issue' and 1-2 other pieces (such as coffee table, couch or cabinet)	Furniture is mostly 'non-school issue' and includes different levels for children to learn at
The teacher desk is central and takes up quite a large space. It is one of the first things you see as you walk in the room	The teacher desk is one of the first things you see when you walk in the room, but it is small, organised and perhaps in a corner	The teacher desk is hard to find when you first walk in the room	There is no teacher desk in the learning area

“Added Touches” enhance the environment

Supplies and materials are not stored or organised. Eg: paper may still be in the original packaging	Supplies and materials are stored in typical containers	One or two supplies and materials are displayed in unique ways (such as pencils in a log that has holes drilled in it; paper in a hanging shoe pocket)	Half of supplies and materials are displayed in unique ways (such as scissors in a brick; paint brushed in a clear bowl of river stones)
No children's artwork and learning is visible	Children's artwork and learning is haphazardly displayed with no borders and no sense of order. It is all at adult eye-level	Children's artwork and learning is displayed on paper-backed boards, carefully ordered and perhaps framed. Most is at adult eye level	Children's art work and learning is framed and some are displayed at their eye level
Children's learning displayed all looks the same - worksheet or template crafts. There is no signage that talks about learning	Most of displays are of one thing from each child, showing the same learning intention. There is one sign but it doesn't clearly explain the learning	Displays feature different learning outcomes and a sense of creative thinking for each child. There may be one label that explains the task, but not the learning (what the children DID not what they were thinking or learning)	Displays may feature only a few examples of children's learning for each experience and include short text to make the learning intentions visible to children and adults
Only permanent light sources are used in the classroom, such as fluorescent ceiling lights	There is some natural light used in the room.	There is one non-permanent source of light such as table, floor lamps, spotlight, diffused light, hanging lights, fairy lights	There is more than one non-permanent light source that is used to highlight a feature or create an ambiance