

PAYING ATTENTION TO

K-12

LITERACY

Six Foundational Principles for Improvement in Literacy, K–12

- ❖ Focus on literacy.
- ❖ Build an understanding of effective literacy instruction.
- ❖ Design a responsive literacy learning environment.
- ❖ Support student learning with fair, transparent and equitable assessment practices.
- ❖ Coordinate and strengthen literacy leadership.
- ❖ Support collaborative professional learning in literacy.

Paying Attention to Literacy

Within today's multimodal, digitally rich contexts, literacy learning and teaching is evolving with innovations that engage and respond to learners who "live in a world of 'anytime, anywhere' access to information" and who, through social media and online networks, belong not to just one but a range of global communities:

*"Today's technological environment allows [students] to draw on sources around the globe and integrate what they discover into their learning using a range of media . . . world wide access to information enables teachers to design, with students, learning opportunities that stimulate them to be independent, reflective, and collaborative learners, challenge their thinking and assumptions and engage them on many levels."*¹

How well is Ontario responding to evolving paradigms and pedagogies for literacy learning and teaching? How well is Ontario supporting educators in taking advantage of new opportunities, both local and global, and in meeting challenges of new and future generations of students? Recognizing the fundamental significance of these changes in the context of the learning and teaching of literacy, a diverse ministry of education committee met in the winter of 2013 to review the research and to create a discussion paper for provincial use. Members worked to access key learning from an extensive body of current field experiences and research-based knowledge in literacy. *Paying Attention to Literacy K–12* is the result of the committee's work.

COMPETENCIES FOR A DIGITAL AGE

*"What is clear is that education – deeper, broader and more universal – has a significant part to play in enabling humanity to succeed in the next half century. We need to ensure that students everywhere leave school ready to continue to learn and adapt, ready to take responsibility for their own future learning and careers, ready to innovate with and for others . . . We need perhaps the first truly global generation; a generation of individuals rooted in their own cultures but open to the world and confident of their ability to shape it."*²

The intent of *Paying Attention to Literacy K–12* is to provide a framework for conversations about processes and strategies that will help improve literacy learning and teaching in Ontario schools. It offers ideas under six foundational principles as a basis for dialogue and collaborative planning for future directions of literacy learning in classrooms, schools and boards. While each principle has a distinct focus, all principles draw upon research related to 21st century learning. Habits of mind or competencies such as creativity, imagination, critical thinking, metacognition, collaboration and innovation, among others, inform each principle and help frame the discussion:

*"Multiliterate, creative and innovative people are now seen as the drivers of the 21st century and the prerequisites to economic success, social progress, and personal empowerment. Organizations have identified these competencies and called for transformation of public education systems globally to meet current needs along with a shift in the way that we engage students in their own learning."*³

KEEPING THE INSTRUCTIONAL CORE IN MIND

Empowering all learners to thrive in a digital age involves understanding that each learner starts from a unique position and may be headed toward a unique destination.⁴ Developmentally appropriate and culturally responsive program planning is therefore essential in facilitating literacy learning experiences that promote each learner’s physical, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social and creative development and well-being.⁵ As such, the learning opportunities that we design need to be grounded not only in knowledge and understanding of curriculum and pedagogy, but also in intentional consideration of who our learners are and what experiences will enable them to learn, adapt and achieve literacy success.

The focus in *Paying Attention to Literacy K to 12* is on the *instructional core* – “on aligning and energizing provincial direction, district priorities and school improvement efforts in support of effective classroom instruction.”⁶ As we engage one another in learning more about literacy and literacy learning in today’s classrooms, we contribute to collaborative work in Ontario that is ongoing to make our school system the best that it can be and to support our students’ success today and in the future.

LITERACY – Kindergarten to Grade 12

Literacy is ... the ability to use language and images in rich and varied forms to read, write, listen, speak, view, represent, discuss and think critically about ideas. Literacy enables us to share information and to interact with others. Literacy is an essential tool for personal growth and active participation in a democratic society.

Literacy involves the capacity to:

- *access, manage, create and evaluate information*
- *think imaginatively and analytically*
- *communicate thoughts and ideas effectively*
- *apply metacognitive knowledge and skills*
- *develop a sense of self-efficacy and an interest in life-long learning*

The development of literacy is a complex process that involves building on prior knowledge, culture and experiences in order to instill new knowledge and deepen understanding.⁷

Focus on literacy.

“Traditional conceptions of print-based literacy do not apprehend the richness and complexity of actual literacy practices in people’s lives enabled by new technologies that both magnify and simplify access to and creation of multimodal texts.”⁸

Literacy is a shared responsibility. It involves all learning and teaching partners – including students, parents and classroom teachers, early childhood educators, school leaders, professional learning facilitators and system leaders as well as members of the broader community. While a focus on literacy goes beyond reading and writing, it builds on the fundamentals to nurture a deep knowledge and appreciation of language. As we move toward a thorough understanding of literacy, we work together to motivate students to become critical and creative communicators and responsible and respectful participants in world communities.

Focusing on literacy involves ...

- engaging all partners in the belief that all learners can develop the literacy skills essential for life-long learning
- supporting all learners in exploring and making sense of a multimodal, multimedia world, through a wide variety of texts and technologies, in order to enable them to
 - think, express and reflect
 - engage in creative and critical thinking
 - critically analyze and challenge texts with respect to issues of equity, power and social justice to inform a critical stance, response or action
 - become responsible communicators, consumers and creators of texts
 - discover innovative and creative ways to access and engage with diverse communities in a multimedia world
 - develop and refine the capacity to create and share texts of all types, putting the technology of the time and place to its best use
- provoking metacognitive thinking in students and engaging them as co-learners who take active control of the development, refinement and expression of their thinking
- providing complex learning opportunities and discussions that are meaningful, relevant and engaging to learners
- knowing our learners so that “who they are” is reflected in the learning and teaching
- fostering literacy learning communities and working collaboratively in a coordinated purposeful way to improve literacy development for all learners
- supporting professional practice and inquiry into effective literacy pedagogy for learning in a digital age

❖ Principle

Build understanding of effective literacy instruction.

“[Literacy] can be defined as an individual’s capacity to understand, use and reflect on and engage with texts, in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential and to participate in society.”⁹

Effective literacy programming begins with informed understanding of what it means to be literate in today’s world. Knowledge and understanding of curriculum, pedagogy and child and adolescent development are essential for creating comprehensive programming that sets meaningful goals and supports for student learning. Effective literacy programming provides learners with opportunities for sustained interactions with others; literacy learning is embedded in every subject area across the day to deepen students’ ability to think, express, reflect and act.

Effective literacy instruction is ...

- based on pedagogical knowledge and understanding of literacy and literacy development
- grounded in inquiry and discussion of meaningful and substantive issues, built on learners’ experiences and understanding
- built on the active participation of learners in the co-creation of their learning
- designed to provide ongoing opportunities for learners to access resources, connect with others and work within e-communities, technological platforms and social media/collaboration spaces

Effective literacy instruction requires ...

- supporting clear connections among reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and representing
- incorporating curriculum-linked learning experiences and literacy resources (at various levels and formats) to actively involve learners in learning
- responding to the diverse interests, learning preferences and readiness of learners
- creating frequent and flexible groupings of learners based on their readiness, interests and/or learning preferences
- scaffolding to enable learners to confidently and independently demonstrate the intended learning
- honouring multiple ways of thinking, meaning-making and connection-making to develop understanding of concepts
- developing a learning community with multiple opportunities for student-student/student-educator interaction and dialogue
- fostering community partnerships that support achievement in literacy
- incorporating assessment that is fair, transparent and equitable, including timely feedback based on shared learning goals and success criteria, opportunities to act on that feedback and to plan next steps for learning

Design a responsive literacy learning environment.

“Imagine the ideal learning environment for today’s learner. What would it look like? Think about how much the world has changed in the last three decades and how rapidly it will continue to change in the years to come. How do we ensure that the instruction we provide is responsive to the shifting demands of the 21st century?”¹⁰

Educators and students are co-creators of a responsive literacy learning environment in the classroom and the school. Together they engage in inquiry, reflection, dialogue and the sharing of ideas in all subject areas across the day. An effective literacy learning environment is responsive to learners’ interests, preferences and strengths and provides opportunities for learners to express their thinking in many different ways.

Literacy learning thrives in an environment that ...

- fosters positive attitudes and beliefs about learning and literacy development
- involves co-construction of a safe place for expressing opinions, questioning, taking risks and innovating and establishing agreed-upon ways of learning together so that every voice is heard
- ensures all learners see themselves – their interests, values, cultures and points of view – represented in the teaching and learning
- allows for student contributions in designing the physical space

Literacy learning thrives in a program that ...

- is developmentally appropriate, challenging and grounded in a culture of high expectations for all
- provides stimulating and engaging experiences that promote critical and creative thinking
- engages learners in learning opportunities involving real-world connections across a variety of fields, media, technologies and genres
- intentionally integrates effective assessment practices, with responsive instruction focused on student learning
- ensures learners have opportunities for ongoing reflection and collaboration that deepens understanding

Literacy learning thrives in rich contexts that ...

- provide access to a range of materials and technologies
- provide a variety of ways for learners to communicate, document and reflect upon learning, both virtually and face to face
- provide active areas for inquiry, investigation and wonder and quiet areas for thinking and exploring
- include a flexible range of learner groupings

❖ Principle

Support student learning with fair, transparent and equitable assessment practices.

- *Assessment for learning involves teachers using the information from assessment to guide their instruction and improve student learning.*
- *Assessment as learning involves students using the information from assessment to improve their own learning.*
- *Assessment of learning involves summarizing and making judgments about the quality of student learning.¹¹*

*When assessing literacy skills, assessment **for** and **as** learning practices include ...*

- planning assessment and integrating it seamlessly with literacy instruction, informed by strengths, needs and interests of the learners
- identifying, sharing and clarifying learning goals and co-constructing (with learners) what successful learning looks like (success criteria)
- using assessment to inform and differentiate instruction, guide next steps and help learners monitor their progress toward achieving their literacy learning goals
- gathering, analyzing and interpreting valid and reliable evidence about literacy learning over time, using a variety of rich tasks, assessment strategies and tools, including pedagogical documentation
- giving and receiving specific and timely descriptive feedback, based on the learning goals and success criteria
- helping learners develop skills of peer- and self-assessment
- helping learners engage in assessment **as** learning and develop their metacognition by
 - monitoring their own progress toward achieving their literacy learning goals
 - adjusting their learning approaches and applying literacy skills
 - reflecting on their own learning and setting individual goals for learning

Assessment of learning practices in literacy involves ...

- focusing on learners' achievement of the literacy skills in the overall expectations
- responding and adapting to student needs as required throughout instruction
- balance with respect to the
 - learning areas of the Full-Day Early Learning Kindergarten Program
 - four achievement chart categories for grades 1 to 12 – Knowledge and Understanding, Thinking, Communication and Application
- gathering valid and reliable evidence
 - collected over time to reflect the most consistent level of achievement while giving special consideration to more recent evidence
 - from multiple sources and tasks, using a wide variety of texts and technologies
 - that includes applying subject-specific literacy skills
 - that allows learners to demonstrate the full range of their knowledge and skills
 - to inform professional judgment about the quality of learning

Coordinate and strengthen literacy leadership.

“... literacy in our culture, interpreted by schools for the purpose of educating the young, is most commonly defined as ability to read and write and to comprehend what we read, a functional literacy at best. Is it not far more important to develop the skills and habits of mind required to proficiently communicate in the literacies of the culture in the terms of mathematics, technology, science, language and the arts?”¹²

School and system leaders set direction and develop a collaborative vision and plan of action with respect to the learning and teaching of literacy. As the conditions and resources that support the most effective learning and teaching of the “literacies of the culture” are provided, literacy learning and teaching will soar.

Literacy leaders are ...

- committed to action based on research and identified student needs and informed by all available data on each student’s learning

Effective leadership in literacy involves ...

- valuing the importance of literacy as foundational to students’ future success and participation in society
- supporting ongoing and differentiated professional learning in literacy for educators across the system
- taking part in inquiry into what effective literacy pedagogy looks like in order to reflect on practice
- participating in, supporting and monitoring the impact of collaborative practices such as co-learning, co-planning, co-teaching, co-debriefing and co-reflecting
- encouraging risk-taking and innovation by providing a safe environment for educators to talk about learning and practice with respect to literacy
- supporting parent and community understanding of the shifts in literacy learning and teaching

Literacy leadership planning requires ...

- knowledge and understanding of effective literacy pedagogy as informed by current research
- using a range of literacy evidence to inform board and school improvement planning
- aligning resources with literacy priorities to support learning
- creating the conditions for open-to-learning conversations in order to build capacity for responsive literacy pedagogy in a variety of settings and contexts

Support collaborative professional learning in literacy.

“Collaborative inquiry that challenges thinking and practice involves people working together in meaningful ways to deepen understanding and challenges what they already know and do.”¹³

When professional learning is job-embedded and inquiry-based, it contributes to a culture of ongoing learning for classroom educators and students alike and builds the capacity of the entire system for change and innovation. Professional learning occurs in a variety of contexts and settings – wherever educators share practice, examine evidence of learning, access opportunities to build instructional skills and knowledge and reflect upon the impact of their work.

Professional learning in literacy is continuous, responsive to learner needs and is ...

- focused on literacy pedagogy, how it connects to subject-specific curriculum and pedagogical content knowledge
- based on high-quality research and instruction
- engaged with student thinking and student demonstrations of understanding
- inquiry-based where educators, facilitators and researchers engage as co-learners in exploring areas of mutual interest
- differentiated in response to readiness and need and informed by evidence of learning
- flexible, coherent and responsive to all learners

Professional learning in literacy is collaborative and involves ...

- an iterative approach informed by cycles of monitoring and implementation
- asset models of learning where all participants consider themselves learners of literacy pedagogy and practice, openly explore ways of teaching literacy and supporting ongoing literacy development and engage in multi-level participation
- an integrated blend of learning, inside and outside of classrooms; classroom-embedded learning, online and remote access and electronic learning opportunities

Planning for professional learning in literacy requires ...

- an open-to-learning stance and commitment from all participants to support literacy development across the day and in all subject areas
- articulation of explicit literacy goals and strategies across schools and boards, including clear statements in Board Improvement Plans for Student Achievement (BIPSA)
- alignment of literacy goals and strategies across grades and schools
- development of literacy leadership capacity, including knowledge of pedagogical practices that support literacy development
- use of practices, such as coaching and mentoring, to strengthen literacy learning and teaching, aligned with the Ontario curriculum policies and ministry support documents

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