

# Toronto District School Board

**Policy P.003 CUR:**

**Literacy Foundation**

## Statement

*Language is the most powerful tool learners have for developing ideas and insights, for giving shape to their experiences, and for making sense of their world and their possibilities in it. All classrooms are centres of inquiry, where learners use language creatively and critically, and come to understand why language and literacy are so central to their lives.*

*The Toronto District School Board identifies the development of literacy as a priority, and is committed to providing the support necessary for all learners to attain their highest level of literacy at each stage of their education.*

The Toronto District School Board believes that:

1. Literacy\* encompasses a broad range of skills and understandings. To participate fully in society and in the workplace, learners need to use a wide variety of information, literature, media, technology, oral and visual texts.
2. All learners are capable, and require opportunities to attain a high degree of proficiency in language development and use. The Toronto District School Board holds high expectations for all learners.
3. All learners develop language ability and competence through recognizable stages\*, but differ in their pace and ways of learning. Literacy develops best when these individual styles and rates of learning are recognized and accommodated through effective classroom practice\*.
4. An emphasis on early literacy\* is essential to provide a solid foundation for all learners to succeed.
5. All learners must be provided with appropriate interventions to address their needs. Literacy support for adolescent, young adult, and adult learners ensures that all learners have opportunities to achieve a high level of literacy prior to graduation.
6. All language skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and representing) are equally important. They are interconnected and are learned best when they are integrated in all subject areas\*. Learners gain fluency and proficiency when they use language to communicate for real purposes and in real situations.

\* This word or phrase is explained in detail in the Administrative Procedure section of this policy.

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7. Effective classroom practice\* is based on sound educational research about how learners successfully acquire literacy skills, and all teachers should have specific competencies\* related to language learning and teaching. The Toronto District School Board and its teachers are jointly responsible for continuous professional dialogue and training to develop and refine these competencies.
8. A balanced approach\* to literacy provides both immersion in rich language environments and explicit teaching of skills, such as grammar, phonics, spelling, usage, and punctuation, in all classrooms.
9. It is the responsibility of all teachers in all subjects to promote literacy development as an integral part of the school curriculum. All learners need to develop skills in learning to use language, and in using language to learn.
10. Literacy, culture, and identity are closely linked. The use of resources and teaching practices which value and reflect the rich diversity\* of our communities enhances the literacy development and sense of inclusion of all learners.
11. All languages and varieties of languages are equally valid forms of thought and communication. First-language literacy is important for second-language learning\* and for achieving academic success in the second language. All learners need to develop proficiency in Canadian Standard English\* to achieve success in school and in society.
12. Assessment and evaluation\* of language learning are ongoing and purposeful. Teachers use a range of strategies to assess learners' strengths and needs, and to plan instruction for improved performance. Teachers help learners monitor their own progress and set goals for future learning.
13. Language proficiency enables learners to be effective users of technology for research, information processing, and electronic communication.
14. Language learning promotes the development of thinking. All learners must have time and opportunities to engage in critical and creative thinking\* and problem-solving\* in all subject areas, and to reflect on and control their own thinking and learning.

\* This word or phrase is explained in detail in the Administrative Procedure section of this policy.

**Note: See also Policy P.038: Achieving Excellence in Reading, Writing and Mathematics**

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## Administrative Procedure

The Toronto District School Board prepares learners for the literacy demands they will face throughout their lives, as citizens, workers, and individuals who derive personal satisfaction from full participation in society. The development of literacy skills in all subject areas enables learners to become reflective, articulate, literate individuals who use language effectively for learning, communicating, and thinking.

### 1. Literacy

Literacy includes all language and communication skills: speaking, listening, viewing, representing, reading, and writing. In all areas of endeavour, including media, technology, arts, and sciences, the meaning of our world is interpreted and communicated through literacy skills. A high level of literacy allows individuals to take control of the challenges and events in their lives.

Learners from all linguistic backgrounds need opportunities to demonstrate the literacy skills they possess. Once learned, literacy skills in one language will transfer to whatever new language the learner undertakes.

A literate person:

- *uses* information from a variety of texts (from billboards to books, from television to the Internet)
- *knows* how to critically evaluate a variety of texts and apply their content
- *is able to use* the conventions of language to solve problems and communicate to others
- *values* language and texts as sources of personal development and empowerment

### 2. Stages

Learners learn in different ways, at different ages, and at different times. Effective classroom practice addresses these developmental learning patterns by adjusting pace and style of teaching to maximize the learner's potential.. Both the curriculum and adults' interactions with learners should be responsive to individual differences and provide learning opportunities that enhance growth and development.

In addition to these developmental stages for all learners, ESL learners who are acquiring English and/or require literacy, numeracy upgrading, progress through four stages of English language acquisition and literacy development:

- Stage 1: Use of English for daily living
- Stage 2: Use of English in supported and familiar activities and contexts
- Stage 3: Independent use of English in most contexts
- Stage 4: Facility in English approaching that of standard Canadian English

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speakers

The progression through these stages is **not** time-based. Language acquisition occurs at a different rate for each learner and is governed by a number of linguistic, experiential and maturational factors. The stages indicate levels of proficiency, not grade levels.

**3. Early Literacy**

Early literacy focuses on the stages young learners go through in their literacy development. In early literacy, teachers build on the strategies learners use to read, write, and communicate orally. Teachers use appropriate resources and activities to support learners in the context of a balanced literacy program. Schools build partnerships with communities and families to promote literacy development in young children.

**4. Integrated In All Subject Areas**

The concept of integrated curriculum recognizes that all learning has an inner connectedness. When learners encounter new ideas, concepts, and skills, they connect them to existing knowledge and information as part of the thinking and learning process. Integration of knowledge and skills across subject areas enhances learning by making explicit connections and modelling the transferability of skills across disciplines. Learners are able to use skills from one discipline to another; link ideas from one subject to another in meaningful ways across the curriculum. They are able to explore connections within and across disciplines.

Literacy development is enhanced when learners use integrated language across the curriculum. In every subject area - science, mathematics, music, social studies, art - language is a tool for learning. Learners speak, listen, read, and write as they:

- Write from the point of view of real or imagined characters;
- Conduct a science experiment;
- Engage in a research project in history;
- Reflect on an art project;
- Write entries in a math journal;
- Design a computer program;
- Discuss plans for making a video.

Because the content of these subject areas is different, learners discover how various disciplines use language in specialized ways. Integrating language in all subjects helps build communicative competence and deepen understanding of how language works.

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**5. Effective Classroom Practice**

Educators regularly conduct studies to understand how language and literacy develop, and what kinds of teaching practices support learners best as they acquire literacy skills. The conclusions drawn from sound educational research are the foundation for effective classroom practice.

Current research provides important insights into how learners successfully acquire and develop literacy skills, including the following examples:

- (a) Talk (speaking and listening) is the cornerstone of language learning, and the major communication mode in everyday life. Through talk, learners refine their thinking, express their ideas, and give shape to their experience. Opportunities for talk support growth in reading and writing.
- (b) Reading is a complex process of comprehending and interpreting a text. Efficient readers use many strategies and skills simultaneously, including prior knowledge and experience, grammar and context, word knowledge, and phonics, to make meaning from text.
- (c) Phonics skills are important, and are taught within the context of reading and spelling instruction and through explicit teaching of skills. Learners use their understanding of phonics in writing when they are learning how words are spelled, and in reading to determine the sound of words they don't know.
- (d) Writing develops best when learners have opportunities to write for real purposes and varied audiences. Effective writing instruction helps learners to use the stages of the writing process (pre-writing, drafting, conferring, revising, editing, and publishing), to focus on the craft of writing, and to attend to grammar, spelling, usage, and punctuation.
- (e) Dramatic and imaginary experiences enhance the development of language. For example, when learners participate in drama and write in role, their writing is more powerful.
- (f) The use of technology, such as computers and word processors, has a significant impact on the writing process.
- (g) While it can take ESL learners only 2 - 3 years to become fluent in oral communication skills, 5 - 7 years, and possibly up to 9 years, are needed for them to reach the level of their English first-language peers in academic language skills.
- (h) ESL learners require a rich language environment and a balanced approach to literacy. Effective instruction presents language in context, which is understandable to the learner. Then attention may be directed to the teaching of skills.

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- (i) Literacy development begins in the home in the language of the family. Partnerships with communities and families to support literacy in the home contribute positively to the learner's success in school.

**6. Competencies**

All teachers should have specific competencies related to language learning and teaching, including:

- (a) An understanding of how learners of all ages learn language, both their first language and subsequent languages, including:
- stages of language acquisition
  - relationship between first and subsequent languages
  - social attitudes to language(s)
  - development of learners' awareness of their own and others' use of language
- (b) An understanding of the role played by listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing and representing in learning, including:
- recognition of different learning styles
  - connections among all aspects of language use
  - demonstrations of learning through many language activities
- (c) An understanding of the learner's need to master appropriate language styles for a variety of purposes, including:
- social and personal development
  - checking observations and opinions; clarifying understanding
  - finding and using information
  - formal presentations (speaking, writing, representing)
- (d) A knowledge of effective strategies for providing direct instruction in all subject areas through the use of language and language skills relevant to the text, task, or topic, including:
- language patterns and vocabulary specific to subject
  - effective reading of textbooks
  - note making skills
  - use of graphic organizers

**7. Balanced Approach**

Balanced literacy programs under the direction of the teacher include the following:

- (a) A rich variety of oral language activities, such as storytelling, reader's theatre, drama, small group discussion, and oral presentations
- (b) Immersion in a rich literacy environment

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- (c) Direct instruction by the teacher using a variety of instructional methods to teach skills and strategies in whole class, small group and individual settings (e.g. modelling, guiding, conferring)
- (d) Opportunities for learners to practise and apply the skills taught in whole class, small group and individual settings
- (e) Enrichment and remediation based on the learner's performance of the skills that have been taught
- (f) Focus on phonics, grammar, spelling, usage, and punctuation in the context of reading, writing and through explicit teaching.
- (g) Opportunities to experience writing as a process, including pre-writing, drafting, conferring, revising, proofreading, and publishing.
- (h) A wide variety of reading and writing texts, including fiction and non-fiction, print and non-print, technical reading and writing, prose and poetry which value diversity and allow all learners to see themselves as part of the curriculum

**8. Diversity**

Valuing and respecting diversity requires an inclusive curriculum which recognizes and affirms the life experiences of all learners, regardless of gender, place of origin, religion, ethnicity and race, cultural and linguistic background, social and economic status, sexual orientation, age, and ability/disability.

Inclusive curriculum:

- (a) Promotes understanding of a variety of cultures by ensuring that resources throughout the system represent the diversity of the communities served
- (b) Addresses and presents various points of view on contemporary and historical issues and events

Inclusive curriculum seeks to encourage both the educator and learner to see in multiple ways that they may use this knowledge to create a more just and equitable society.

**9. First-Language Literacy is Important for Second-Language Learning:**

Academic proficiency in first language is important in achieving success in other languages. The continued development of a learner's first language helps the learner hear and understand knowledge that is transferable to learning in the new language.

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**10. Canadian Standard English**

Canadian Standard English is that variety of English in which most educational texts, government and media communications are produced in Canada.

**11. Assessment and Evaluation**

Assessment is the collecting and analyzing of data and information about a learner's progress and achievement.

Evaluation is the application of judgment to the data collected and its analysis, in order to place a "value" on the learner's achievement.

The main purpose of assessment is to improve learning. It should never be an end unto itself, but rather, the means through which to inform teaching and learning. Effective assessment should direct subsequent instruction and provide the basis for modifying and adapting programs to meet the needs of learners.

Learners need to know **what** is being assessed, and **how**, and especially **why**. They need to be involved in decision-making related to assessment activities. A learner's understanding of assessment and involvement with it will enhance the commitment to learning and will encourage the development of skill in self-evaluation and personal decision-making.

Effective assessment is:

- respectful of the learner
- fair and equitable
- closely tied to instruction
- developmentally and culturally appropriate
- ongoing and systematic
- specific and provides timely feedback
- learner-centred through self-evaluation
- both informal and formal (diagnostic, formative, summative)
- concerned with both the processes and products of learning
- varied in techniques, tools and strategies to measure learning
- performance-based in authentic contexts (which may include the learner's first language)
- broad-based using varied contexts over time to build a learner profile
- based on criteria known to all--no surprises!

**12. Critical and Creative Thinking**

Critical thinking refers to the process of thinking through ideas or situations in order to make a judgment about what is sensible or reasonable to believe or do. Learners think critically in all subject areas when they read, write, speak, listen, solve problems, make decisions, analyze an issue, or make an inquiry, Bloom's Taxonomy of Cognitive Skills identifies a hierar-

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chy of critical thinking skills that include *knowledge* (learning the information); *comprehension* (understanding the information); *application* (using the information); *analysis* (breaking ideas down into their constituent parts); *synthesis* (using information to make new ideas); and *evaluation* (judging the value of information, ideas, materials, or products).

Creative thinking refers to the process of thinking about ideas or situations in inventive and unusual ways in order to understand them better and respond to them in a new and constructive manner. Learners think creatively in all subject areas when they imagine, invent, alter or improve a concept, product, or material. William's Model of Creativity identifies a non-hierarchical list of creative thinking skills that include *fluency* (the ability to generate many ideas); *flexibility* (the ability to view things from different perspectives, use different approaches and change direction of thought); *elaboration* (the ability to expand, develop and add to ideas or materials); and *originality* (the ability to produce clever and unique responses).

**13. Problem Solving**

Problem solving activities require learners to think critically, creatively and systematically, and communicate their ideas to others.

Problem solving occurs in all subject areas and generally follows the process of:

- (a) posing and defining a question
- (b) suggesting a strategy or plan for answering the question
- (c) testing the strategy or plan
- (d) analyzing results and posing further questions
- (e) communicating findings, results or answers

Learners need opportunities to engage in rich problem-solving tasks that encourage a variety of approaches and solutions.