



PrincipalConnections

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LITERACY

STEVEN KATZ

Mirrors Before Windows

JENNI DONOHOO

*Fostering Collective Teacher Efficacy to
Support Quality Implementation*

USHA JAMES & WARREN WOYTUCK

Leadership Lessons from Ecosystems

2024

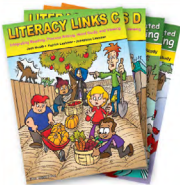

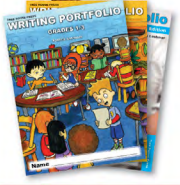


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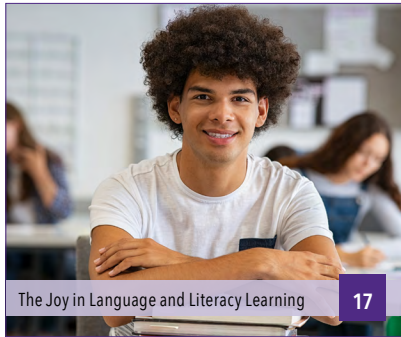
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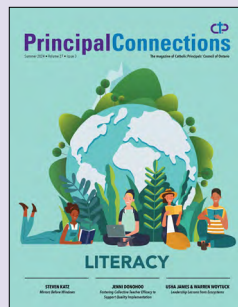
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FROM THE PRESIDENT & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Michael MacPherson, Joseph Geiser

The Framework of GROW

Throughout this past school year, our Catholic Principals and Vice-Principals have continued to focus on the needs of all our students through the work of Ontario's literacy goals. Through the framework of GROW, educators and school communities are championing the transformative power of literacy.

G is for Gratitude – A cornerstone of the educational journey. With heartfelt appreciation, we acknowledge the tireless dedication of educators who ignite the flame of learning in students' hearts each day. We thank parents and guardians who work hard to partner with our educators; from the first hesitant steps of reading to the confident strides of adolescence. Together, we form a partnership bound by a shared commitment to nurturing literate minds.

R stands for Right to Read – A fundamental principle that underscores the importance of providing every student with the confidence and skills to navigate the written word with ease. As stated in the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read Report, "... learning to read is not a privilege, but a basic and essential human right." In a world where literacy serves as the gateway to knowledge and opportunity, we must ensure that every student is given the tools to become confident in their unique literacy skills and aware of the transformative power of reading and writing.

O embodies Opportunity – The promise of a brighter future is realized through the acquisition of literacy skills. From the classroom to the boardroom, the ability to decode language, interpret print and communicate effectively opens doors for students, allowing them to experience new opportunities that lie ahead.

W represents Winning – When we strengthen our students' literacy skills and foster positive attitudes towards reading and writing, our communities win. As we focus our efforts to support students on their journey to becoming lifelong learners, we recognize that together when we partner, work and strive for all learners, our school communities shine.

*Through GROW,
we sow the seeds
of knowledge,
nurturing literate
minds that will one
day shape the world
with their wisdom
and insight.*

In the pursuit of literacy, we find not only the means, but we also help every student reach their potential. Through GROW, we sow the seeds of knowledge, nurturing literate minds that will one day shape the world with their wisdom and insight. For in the journey from Gratitude to Winning, we discover the transformative power of literacy – a gift for life.

As we enter the summer season, let us extend a heartfelt message of thanks and appreciation to all our Principals and Vice-Principals in Catholic schools across the province. Without the steadfast leadership of these dedicated individuals in these most challenging times, our school communities would not thrive. Your guidance, vision and unwavering commitment to student success inspires us all. Thank you for your tireless efforts in shaping the future leaders of tomorrow.

May the summer months afford each of you the opportunity to relax and be refreshed with your family and friends. You have given so much of yourselves – it is now time to take care of your own health and happiness. For those who are retiring, you should do so secure in the knowledge that you have made a valuable contribution to the lives of so many students and their families. CPCO is grateful for your commitment and service to Catholic education. God bless.



FROM THE EDITOR

Deirdre Kinsella Biss

Leading Literacy

The **Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8: Language** is a new curriculum designed to guide the teaching of literacy in our province. This program places emphasis on the foundations of language; values cross-curricular learning; recognizes the diverse identities and abilities of students; encourages the development of transferable skills and highlights the impact of emerging technologies on student learning. In this edition of *Principal Connections*, we explore the new curriculum and discuss the ingredients of a quality implementation process that will encourage student success.

Students first. To ignite our thinking about literacy in Ontario Catholic Schools, the EQAO Literacy Team shares insights gleaned from the voluntary student questionnaire of the EQAO test. This data reveals our students' sentiments about reading and writing. The article not only highlights students' perceptions about their own ability, but also discloses feelings about their personal level of engagement and confidence as they advance through our Ontario education system.

Quality implementation is the key. Steven Katz, in his article *Mirrors Before Windows*, refers to the role of school principal as the "sweet spot" for the realization of meaningful implementation of new programs. The planning of the work, the development of intelligent expectations and the understanding of school context all start with the principal. The necessity for school leaders to self-recognize their own biases and thought patterns is also an important part of leading a quality implementation process.

Collaboration creates momentum and synergy. In *Fostering Collective Teacher Efficacy to Support Quality Implementation*, Jenni Donohoo identifies collective teacher efficacy as the number one factor in raising student achievement. Increasing teacher motivation and the desire to collaborate can create the conditions for quality implementation of a new program, as well as foster a sense of joint responsibility for student learning.

Collaboration grows collaborative intelligence and can be the vehicle for reinventing teaching and learning.

A critical inquiry stance transforms the practice. In *Leadership Lessons from the Ecosystems*, Usha James and Warren Woytuck discuss reimagining education by encouraging educators to adopt a critical inquiry stance that empowers them to think long and hard about their own practice. Using a critical inquiry stance encourages educators to reflect both individually and together. Inquiry questions and evidence of impact provide school leaders with multiple entry points to design the actions that will enable them to meet the needs of their school communities.

Be intentional about the joy factor. Brian Weshiar's article draws our attention to the new curriculum's use of the word "joy." Building connections between literacy, joy, learning and student well-being is now part of our mandate. It is not the first time Ontario has included the word "joy" in their learning documents. As educators, we must search for ways to intentionally awaken joy in our classrooms through the teaching of this language curriculum.

This new Language curriculum, together with a quality implementation process, moves literacy in Ontario in a new direction. It guides us as we lead learning for tomorrow. It promotes high quality, evidence-based instruction. It places students at the centre of learning, in safe classroom environments that are infused with joy, curiosity and engagement.

As leaders in Catholic education, we possess a unique opportunity to shape, inspire and enhance literacy within our school communities. Foundational skills are crucial; nurturing healthy relationships is paramount. Our energy should focus on empowering students to read and navigate the world in which they live confidently and critically, instilling in them an understanding of their pivotal role in fostering a sustainable, peaceful society.



Exploring Student Perspectives on Literacy

Insights from 10 Years
of Survey Data

By The EQAO Literacy Team



Mirrors Before Windows

By Steven Katz

The expert knowledge base in education is filled with an inventory of evidence-based practices. These are curated in an ever-growing body of resources and more are being added every day. Highly successful school districts embrace these practices and use them to define what we have described as the “intelligent expectations” for the system.¹

That said, it will come as no surprise that efforts to define, communicate and support the introduction of evidence-based approaches into schools doesn’t guarantee meaningful implementation. We’ve previously suggested that “what works” might be

better described as “what’s *supposed* to work.” Indeed, a sobering finding in another important domain, healthcare, is that only 50 per cent of all evidence-based practices that have been shown to work ever make it into routine general practice; and moreover, for those that do, it takes an average of 17 years to get there!²

What we are talking about here is the elusive quest for “quality implementation.” We define quality implementation as a process through which intelligent expectations and practices get realized. This process involves a critical mass of people in any given organization doing their best to apply and experiment with what’s supposed to work, assessing impact relative to the



intended outcomes, learning about what worked, what didn't and why within *respective* contexts, and then making the necessary modifications.³

The phrase “respective contexts” is a key one because it holds the clue as to why this quest for quality implementation is just so elusive. While it's great that “what's supposed to work” has been shown to work somewhere for someone, that's not particularly helpful if that somewhere isn't where you are and that someone isn't you! In other words, context matters; and it matters a lot.

What we need then is a both/and strategy. We need an appreciation of both the centralized “intelligent

expectations” and the localized “responsive contexts” of implementation. These two sides of the improvement ledger need to work together, like a pitcher and catcher in a baseball battery. Exemplary organizations that show evidence of this synergy have been described as having solved for “stagility”— a made-up word that blends stability and agility.⁴ Organizations that have both stable and agile elements are three times more likely to be high-performing than those that are agile but lack a stable core, and four times more likely to be high performing than those that are stable but lack agile elements.⁵

Intelligent expectations help us to plan the work, but contextual realities are instrumental in helping us to *work the plan*. Research tells us that once a direction has been



Fostering Collective Teacher Efficacy to Support Quality Implementation

By Jenni Donohoo

A key factor in successfully implementing the Revised Ontario Language Arts Curriculum is teacher efficacy. As school leader, you play a crucial role in influencing teacher collaboration and strengthening their efficacy beliefs.

What research shows

Research demonstrates a significant relationship between teachers' efficacy judgements and the implementation of programs and initiatives (Cantrell & Callaway, 2008; Lyons, Thompson, & Timmons, 2016; Parks, Solmon, & Lee, 2007). In these examples, teachers' collective efficacy aided them in overcoming barriers associated with applying new strategies and teaching approaches into their everyday practice.

Wilcox and colleagues (2014) noted that in schools where teachers shared a sense of collective efficacy, teachers spoke of taking risks to innovate and meet students' learning needs. Principals in these schools also noted that teachers were receptive to new ideas as opposed to teachers in the less efficacious schools who "described feelings that they had done all they could do" (p. 9). Michael Fullan (2015) identified the role of teachers as one of the nine factors that influence policy implementation and noted that teachers' efficacy beliefs influence the extent to which they will change their existing practices and use new materials. When collective efficacy is lacking, on the other hand, it affects quality implementation in ways that stifle the spread, depth, sustainability and ownership of improvement initiatives (Donohoo & Katz, 2020).

Collective efficacy refers to teachers' beliefs in their combined ability to positively impact student results. Efficacy beliefs influence the persistence and creativity in which teachers approach their work. According to Hattie's (2023) Visible Learning synthesis, collective teacher efficacy is the number one factor in raising student achievement. It is three times more powerful and predictive of student achievement than a student's home environment. It is two times more powerful and predictive of student achievement than a student's socio-economic status.

Your role as school leader

School leaders have tremendous potential to influence teachers' efficacy beliefs and strengthen collaboration in their schools. In a large-scale empirical study, Goddard

and colleagues (2015) found that principals' instructional leadership was a significant positive predictor of collective efficacy through its influence on teachers' collaborative work. Collaboration can take on many forms. At times, it can serve to reinforce the status quo. Or it can be a vehicle in which teachers reinvent teaching and learning.

Increasing teachers' motivations and desires to collaborate, creating the conditions for joint responsibility for student learning and helping teams to intentionally observe the impact of their collaborative efforts becomes the adaptive challenge for school leaders.

Best leadership practices

There are leadership practices that will enhance teacher collaboration and tap into vicarious experiences as a source of collective efficacy. Vicarious experiences enable teachers to learn from the successes of their colleagues. They have the potential to increase their belief in their own ability to make a positive impact on student learning (Bandura, 2000). When teachers see their colleagues successfully implementing the revised curriculum, they will start to believe that they, too, can achieve similar results.

1. Provide Opportunities for Peer Observation

Principals can identify teachers who are successfully implementing the Revised Ontario Language Arts Curriculum and ask them to open their classroom doors to their colleagues. Teachers observing other teachers can be one of the most powerful forms of collaboration. By encouraging teachers to observe their colleagues' classrooms (within and across schools) and focusing their observations on the successful implementation of the revised curriculum, school leaders can create the conditions for efficacy enhancing vicarious experiences.

2. Initiate Literacy-Focused Peer Collaboration

Principals can organize literacy-focused Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). By focusing collaboration on the principles underlying the Revised Ontario Language Arts Curriculum and the four strands, principals can support deeper implementation. During PLCs, school leaders can encourage the sharing of successful strategies, collaborative lesson planning and the analysis of student artifacts. Most importantly, when school leaders help teachers realize that their joint efforts

Leadership Lessons from Ecosystems

By Usha James and Warren Woytuck

Data, evidence, continuous improvement, achievement, screeners. These words may feel cold and clinical to educators, especially those who came into the profession because of their compassion and love for young people and their hopes to see youth flourish. Words associated with data-driven approaches may also feel violent to students, families and staff who are connected to communities that have been harmed by data-driven decisions and practices.

The inherent tensions between the mechanisms of data-driven approaches and the warmth of compassionate action beg a fundamental question: how can we reconcile these seemingly opposing orientations?

One promising possibility lies in **leaders adopting a critical inquiry stance.**

Cochrane-Smith and Lytle (2009) conceptualized inquiry as a stance rather than a mere protocol or process. We propose extending their conceptualization to critical inquiry as a stance. At The Critical Thinking Consortium (TC2), we have developed a robust conceptual framework and approach (Gini-Newman and Case, 2015) for guiding and sustaining critical inquiry for all learners. We have learned through working with school systems over the last 30 years that when leaders and educators adopt a critical inquiry stance, we are able to combine curiosity and inquiry-mindedness with the inclination and the ability to think critically about our own practices. And perhaps most important, with a critical inquiry stance, we develop a reflex to reflect about how we may intentionally or inadvertently uphold systems and structures that perpetuate and cause harm.

Adopting a critical Inquiry stance requires both individual and collective vulnerability, which can often feel challenging and sometimes unsafe. How might we support ourselves and staff in taking this approach? Many leaders find it helpful to reimagine educational organizations as ecosystems, a metaphor that invites a more holistic and empathetic understanding and safety for vulnerable reflection. By embracing the ecosystem metaphor and intertwining it with a critical inquiry stance, leaders can set in motion three vital disruptions:

1. Disrupting deficit-mindedness: Instead of locating a problem within individual learners or educators, an

ecosystem metaphor invites us to inquire into and think critically about broader environmental factors and systemic practices.

- 2. Disrupting siloed thinking:** Rather than examining slices of data in isolation, engaging in critical inquiry through the lens of ecosystems challenges us to view a single data set as just one sign of how healthy our ecosystem might be and prompts us to inquire further fostering deeper insights and more nuanced responses.
- 3. Disrupting short-term solutions:** Using a critical inquiry stance along with an ecosystem metaphor can help us think beyond immediate short-term solutions, guiding us to “dig” beneath the surface of challenges and issues to uncover root causes and engage all members of the ecosystem in meaningful collaboration.

Disrupting deficit mindedness

Robin Wall Kimmerer (2015) describes how Indigenous Peoples cultivate squash, corn and beans together rather than in isolated rows or fields, recognizing the reciprocal reliance that contributes to the plants' coexistence. If a plant falters within an ecosystem, we don't blame it for poor "performance." Instead, we inquire into its relationships with other key plants and surroundings. Does it need more sunshine? Is it being crowded out? Does the soil provide the necessary nutrients?

In our school ecosystems there remain all-too-frequent examples of students being implicitly and explicitly blamed for their lack of success or engagement. How might we overcome the inclination to locate the problem within the child, their family or community? When we think about what is required for individual students to thrive, the ecosystem metaphor and a critical inquiry stance invites us to question how well the surrounding environments support the student. Adopting a critical inquiry stance towards our own practices prompts us to ask how we might be

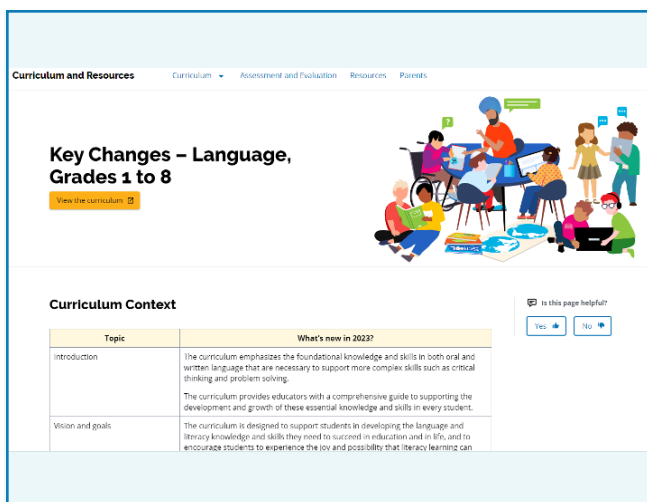
Implementing Ontario's Revised Language Curriculum

A Critical Inquiry Approach

By Teresa Paoli and Linda Ford-DeCunha

Introduction

In June of 2023, the Ministry of Education released the eagerly anticipated revision to the Ontario Language curriculum. This school year, school leaders began the challenging task of leading the implementation of the Language curriculum, which includes significant revisions as outlined in the Ministry of Education Key Changes Document. **Language (2023)** (gov.on.ca)



The screenshot shows the Ontario Ministry of Education website. The main heading is "Key Changes – Language, Grades 1 to 8" with a "View the curriculum" button. Below is a "Curriculum Context" table with two columns: "Topic" and "What's new in 2023?".

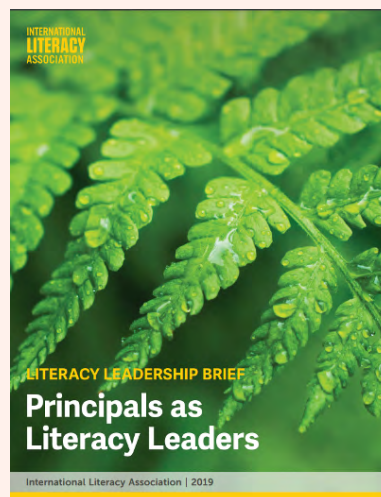
Topic	What's new in 2023?
Introduction	The curriculum emphasizes the foundational knowledge and skills in both oral and written language that are necessary to support more complex skills such as critical thinking and problem solving. The curriculum provides educators with a comprehensive guide to supporting the development and growth of these essential knowledge and skills in every student.
Vision and goals	The curriculum is designed to support students in developing the language and literacy knowledge and skills they need to succeed in education and in life, and to encourage students to experience the joy and possibility that literacy learning can



Notable changes include a strong emphasis on culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy, as described in the curriculum vision and goals. Four new strands (Strand A: Literacy Connections and Applications; Strand B: Foundations of Language; Strand C: Comprehension, Understanding and Responding to Texts; Strand D: Composition, Expressing Ideas and Creating Ideas) now detail the program in language for all students in Grades 1 to 9.

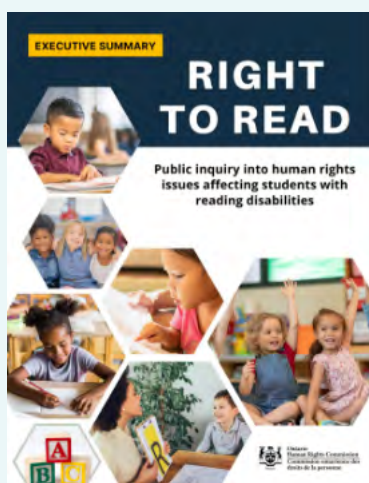
The curriculum also includes two associated continua; one that provides an elaboration associated with overall expectation B2 for Grades 1 to 4, and another that describes the progression of learning associated with overall expectation B3 from Grades 1 to 9.

Evidence-informed pedagogical approaches now include differentiated instruction, tiered levels of support and multimodal learning opportunities. Also included are explicit instructional approaches to support multilingual learners and students with special education needs/disabilities. Cross-curricular and integrated learning along with the role of the teacher-librarian and learning commons are prioritized, highlighting the responsibilities of all educators in supporting students' literacy learning. In addition, key changes to assessment and evaluation are evident, including the shift to one report mark/grade. *Principals as Literacy Leaders*. [Literacy Leadership Brief: Principals as Literacy Leaders \(literacyworldwide.org\)](https://literacyworldwide.org)



As school leaders, principals and vice-principals support student achievement in literacy through actions that foster a school culture focused on higher literacy achievement for all students. They help teachers focus on effective literacy practices, guide and approve the purchase of resources, engage in professional learning alongside teachers and, most importantly, take leadership in establishing and monitoring school improvement plans. Ensuring human rights, equity and inclusive education is central to the role of school leaders and will impact all decisions specific to leading this curriculum implementation. To remove oppressive and discriminatory practices, it will be important that staff take time to learn about students, their strengths and the experiences they bring to the classroom. With student identities and lived experiences in mind, educators must implement evidence-based practices and allocate resources effectively to address and eliminate barriers to learning. Particular attention must also be focused on supporting Indigenous students who have experienced unique and compounding oppressive and discriminatory barriers to learning.

The OHRC Right to Read recommendations clearly state the need to improve literacy outcomes and experiences for Indigenous students. [Right to Read inquiry report | Ontario Human Rights Commission \(ohrc.on.ca\)](#)



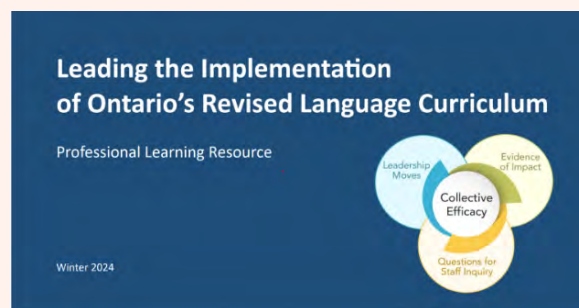
To support principals and vice-principals, Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario and Ontario Principals'

Council worked collaboratively to provide a series of webinars, podcasts and a PDF leadership support document, all developed through Ministry of Education funding. These resources can be found on the association websites (www.cpcoc.on.ca, www.principals.ca). The PDF leadership document includes leadership actions, inquiry questions and evidence of impact indicators emphasizing inquiry-focused leadership approaches and actions.

Usha James, of the Critical Thinking Consortium, describes inquiry as a comprehensive approach that understands that really deep, transformative learning is not going to happen unless educators have both an opportunity to practise and the conditions for professional learning that engage them in thinking critically about their practice. This approach to professional learning validates that it takes time, space and some structure to meaningfully engage educators. Identifying and understanding barriers to learning are key in inquiry approaches and culturally responsive and relevant leadership.

Culturally responsive and relevant leadership:

- Nurtures respect for diversity, inclusive environments and affirms identities
- Promotes collaboration and aligns with board and school learning plans
- Responds to educator and student learning needs
- Moves back and forth between inquiry questions and leadership moves in response to evidence of impact and professional reflection and educator feedback



Recognizing that schools and school districts are unique and diverse, leaders will want to reflect on which of these examples may support their school planning and school team. It is important to engage in a collaborative process with staff and families to arrive at shared solutions.



The Joy in Language and Literacy Learning

By Brian Weishar

With the old curriculum more than 15 years old, many educators anticipated some much-needed updates in the new Grades 1 to 8 Language curriculum and de-streamed Grade 9 English. But, some of the political messaging leading up to last summer's release, in particular the expected changes in response to the Ontario Human Rights Commission's *Right to Read* inquiry report and the rhetoric around the need for a "back-to-basics" approach, may leave educators wondering if the new curriculum might focus more on skills and teaching "the fundamentals," rather than a curriculum that would inspire and instill a love of learning.

However, there is much in the new curriculum that goes beyond teaching word parts and handwriting, items that dominated media reporting. In fact, it is references to joy

and enjoyment in the new curriculum that could prove to be the most transformational in terms of Language and English classrooms, particularly at the Intermediate level: *"High-quality, evidence-based instruction, coupled with a classroom environment that promotes joy, engagement and motivation, is the key to students developing proficient language skills"* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2023).

Being aware of the presence of joy in the curriculum provides principals and system leaders with a powerful opportunity to engage in conversations with educators around what teaching, learning and assessment can look like within this context.

This is not to say that joy was absent in Language and English classrooms previously, although there was no



Embracing Anishinaabemowin

By Dawn-Marie Wemigwans, Jennifer Gran, Dina Bowles and Raymond Trudeau

In today's educational landscape, there continues to be growing recognition of the importance of cultural diversity and holistic approaches to learning. As school boards strive to build inclusive and enriching environments for all learners, integrating Indigenous languages and cultural practices into mainstream education is a promising avenue for fostering cultural understanding, respect and strong holistic development.

Anishinaabemowin (Anishinaabek Language), like many Indigenous languages, holds profound cultural significance. It is a means of communication and a repository of Indigenous knowledge, worldview and identity. Over many generations, there has occurred a drastic decline of first language Anishinaabemowin speakers resulting from the legacy of colonialism, forced

assimilation policies, residential school experiences and decades of systemic racism.

It is understood in First Nation communities that in Anishinaabek society, the wealthiest people are the people who maintain their language, culture and identity, and these are the values we want to pass down to the children. Today, many school boards are looking for teachers with Western-standard qualifications AND who are proficient Anishinaabemowin speakers to teach Indigenous language classes. When school boards cannot find these rare individuals, it simultaneously minimizes Indigenous qualifications of ancient knowledge and wisdom and also lessens coming generations' opportunity to learn beyond archival material. By incorporating Anishinaabemowin into educational programs and

better recognizing non-Western qualifications, Ontario schools can achieve multiple objectives that benefit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students alike.

The new Ontario Language Curriculum ‘Vision and Goals’ represents an inclusive framework emphasizing linguistic diversity, cultural understanding and equitable education. It recognizes the significance of languages in shaping identity and promoting reconciliation while honouring Indigenous cultures. It also prioritizes the integration of language learning with other subject areas, acknowledging the interconnectedness of language, culture and learning. Through an emphasis on equity, inclusion and cultural responsiveness, the ‘Vision and Goals’ and ‘Principles Underlying the Language Curriculum’ set the stage for a more holistic and enriching educational experience for all students.

At St. David Catholic School in Sudbury, the Kindergarten teaching teams, working alongside the school’s Indigenous support worker, have introduced daily Anishinaabemowin language interaction. The teams have worked together effectively planning, preparing and implementing these hands-on language lessons for their multicultural classrooms.

Working in partnership has been the key to success when implementing this new initiative. The Kindergarten teams along with the Indigenous support worker have created a blueprint to introduce their youngest students to Anishinaabe vocabulary and culture. Using broad themes regularly explored in the Kindergarten program, the team has simply added an Indigenous language component. The overall goal of this initiative was to find a way to naturally bridge ‘curriculum and culture.’

Once they established a variety of themes that spanned a few months, the team set out to isolate words and phrases they thought would add interest to their existing program. The Indigenous support worker shared her knowledge of the language and together they set out to infuse this into their daily practice.

Recognizing students have a variety of learning styles, the team was cognizant of including lessons that covered multiple sensory experiences to help engage with as many learners as possible. The team was also aware that repetition also plays a role in establishing solid links to lasting knowledge. It allows the youngest students to feel self-confident, and thereby more willing to participate in lessons. The team very quickly witnessed the positive results of using this model. Students were independently



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Leadership Moves

By Andrea Fraser

How will the new Language curriculum impact our students with special education needs? And what can we do to support its successful implementation for ALL our students? In this article, we explore leadership strategies in four key areas:

Building Relationships

For elementary students, the environment needs to be a combination of a solid relationship with the educator and a physical space that they feel comfortable to learn in. Relationships in the classroom learning community – between educators and students, as well as relationships between students – are important for all students, but crucial for our learners with special education needs. It's essential for them to be comfortable in the environment and trust they can be vulnerable.

Students, who face challenges in accessing the Language curriculum due to their learning profile, are being asked to perform tasks every day that are really hard. We must be cognizant of the intellectual and emotional drain on students, who are asked to come to school and do the very thing that challenges them all day – decipher, interpret and interact with text! To make this seemingly impossible task manageable, there must be a strong relationship

with the educator. Students need to know they have the understanding of an approachable educator, who believes in them and is in tune with their needs, and will provide the supports, accommodations or modifications they need to reach their potential as a literacy learner.

The best opportunity for success occurs when fostering relationships between peers is also a priority. When students feel secure to take risks with their learning, they will be better positioned to acquire the necessary literacy skills.

Learning Environment

The learning environment in each classroom plays an important role in enhancing the student experience and supporting all learners. However, meeting the needs of a diverse group of learners can look different for everyone. The new curriculum highlights a universal design for learning (UDL) approach and embraces providing an environment that is welcoming and offers a variety of choices for students.

A comfortable environment that allows for student choice is key for all learners, but especially for students with special education needs. When in place, it can help maximize literacy instruction. For example, we

Digital Literacy

By Jennifer Casa-Todd

When you think of technology and social media, it's likely with a furrowed brow or a frown; after all, administrators deal with the fallout of poor decisions and digital drama almost every day.

For a decade, I've dedicated my time and energy impressing upon school leaders, teachers and parents of the need to embed media literacy, digital citizenship, information literacy and digital well-being into the context of their classes, in order to empower students to make better decisions online.

This past fall, Ontario released the new Grade 9 de-streamed English and Language Arts curriculum for the 2023/2024 school year. It makes digital literacy an explicit expectation. In a world where technology and social media exist, students need to have guidance on how to use technology and social media positively and productively, and to use skills such as creative and critical thinking, collaboration, empathy and problem solving in the context of their learning.

The overall expectation is:

Digital Media Literacy (A2): *demonstrate and apply the knowledge and skills needed to interact safely and responsibly in online environments, use digital and media tools to construct knowledge, and demonstrate learning as critical consumers and creators of media.*

The specific expectations include digital citizenship; online safety, well-being and etiquette; research and information literacy; forms conventions and techniques of digital and media texts; and an understanding of the interrelationships between media, audience and production (New Curriculum).

There is also an emphasis on transferable skills: critical thinking and problem solving; innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship; self-directed learning; collaboration;

communication; global citizenship and sustainability and digital literacy; which are a common focus in all new curriculum areas.

For many English teachers, who primarily focused on literature in their English courses, embracing this approach to literacy may feel overwhelming. Teachers may be tempted to add these elements to a singular unit and consider the expectations met, while continuing to focus on literature. As well, the new curriculum may seem like a tall order considering a de-streamed Grade 9 classroom means teachers will have students working at many different levels and with individual needs. This time in adolescence is one of extreme variance in terms of physical maturity, and cognitive and social development. Successful implementation of any curriculum needs to consider these learning needs.

How might administrators support English teachers with this new curriculum?

Expand Your Definition of Literacy

For some, the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test, or OSSLT, is a metric upon which to measure a standard of literacy. But today, literacy is about much more than success on a standardized test. As my book, *Social LEADia: Moving students from digital citizenship to digital leadership* states: Students must be able to read and write the world (Casa-Todd #); and that world is rich with technology, social media and thus information and

Social Media: Back to the Future

By Laurie McCann and Megan McGarry



Back to the future? What are we talking about here? Well, what we mean is what you post now WILL impact you in the future.

Everything you do online leaves a “digital” footprint.

Hold on, what is a digital footprint?

A digital footprint is also called a digital shadow or electronic footprint. It is the trail of data you leave behind when using the internet. This includes, website visits, text messages, social media accounts and emails.

You have an active digital footprint and a passive digital footprint. What does that mean?

Your “active digital” footprint is anything you do online. Your social media posts, the online comments you make, your photos, your emails, your searches on the web.

Your “passive digital” footprint is your online health records, SIN number, anything you are tagged in on social media, pictures of you posted online and browsing history.

Your digital footprint will follow you throughout your life. So you want to make sure your footprint is a positive one and not one that could come back to haunt you or stop you from getting into that school or get that job you always wanted.

Everything we do these days is generally online. So, what’s the issue? Well, it won’t be an issue if you’re careful about what you do online.

We are seeing youth opening up multiple accounts on different platforms and having several different social media handles. So, what’s the issue? What this creates is

a larger digital footprint that becomes harder to control as it gets bigger. A greater chance of being hacked, cloned or phished with multiple accounts. Also, a great chance of forgetting your passwords for the multiple accounts you’ve created.

The question becomes, how do we help our youth control their digital footprint?

Let’s start with some overall strategies to help keep our students’ digital footprints – and ours – smaller.

Everyone should do what we call a “social media scrub” once in a while. This is where you go through your followers and really think about why you’ve let them into your account in the first place. If you don’t know them personally, remove them, if you wouldn’t stop and talk to them in person, remove them.

If your account is public and you have many followers that means your digital footprint will be bigger because there is greater opportunity to have followers share your posts. For safety reasons and to control your digital footprint, all your accounts should be locked down and private.

Taking photos and sharing them via social media or text or emails, is also part of your digital footprint. It’s important to think before you share anything that could contribute to your digital footprint.

And among so many, here’s a really good reason why we need to help our students understand the importance of these strategies. And follow the digital media checklist. When applying to universities and colleges, applying for a job or internship, the companies will look at your social media accounts and what type of digital footprint you have left behind. If your digital footprint is large and not

Relationship-Focused Leadership and Metacognition

By Laurie Faith

I recently logged on to a ZOOM session with an Ontario elementary school principal and his team of educators. Our focus – to build the knowledge, understanding and skill needed to support executive functions and self-regulated learning in mainstream classrooms. Like many educators, this team hoped to get better at responding to the disorganization, inattentiveness and lack of motivation they see in students.

In our session, we unmuted and attempted a Stroop test – trying hard to inhibit our *reading* of a series of colour words flashing on a screen so that we could instead *say the colour* in which the word was printed. RED! BLUE! WHITE! PURPLE ... no GREEN! Everyone quickly experienced the limitations of their core response inhibition and flexibility. As the words appeared increasingly quickly, performance dropped off for many participants; some started reading more quietly or dissolved into laughter. Others persisted loudly, noticing the unusual strength in their executive functions. When things started to break down, I stopped the activity and steered the group outside of habit, routine and automaticity toward more strategic performance. I said, “What additional capacity may be available using our metacognition? How can we hack this? Sure, some of our executive functions are stronger and weaker, but can we exceed these core limitations? Let’s get strategic!” We discussed the task, shared a few strategy ideas and wound up either taking off our glasses or only looking at the last letter of each word. We all went much faster; we can do hard things.

My work with educators is based on this insight: there is a big difference between *automatic* and *strategic* cognitive capacity. Everyone, especially children in classrooms, benefits tremendously from a nudge towards a strategic approach.

Just like in the Stroop task, without intervention diversity in core executive function, or EF, capacity is estimated to account for over half of the variation in

student performance evident in typical classrooms (Visu-Petra et al., 2011). It is more consequential than indexes of language or intellectual ability (Blair & Razza, 2007; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Espy et al., 2004). Knowing this, I encourage educators to regularly pause challenging classroom tasks to activate the more evolved and fruitful cognitive state of *metacognition*. This sounds easy and self-evident. But there are complications.

In 2016, I began working with two Ontario boards, exploring a feasible approach that would allow teachers to “turn on” student metacognition in mainstream classrooms. We knew that while most teachers agree building a self-regulated approach is extremely important, most struggle to sustain environments that encourage metacognition, autonomy and strategic processing (McCaslin & Good, 1996; Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997; Wood et al., 1976; Zimmerman, 2000). Attentive support of learning regulation often seems too time-consuming to be universally designed and available in the mainstream and is often perceived to require an unattainable level of strategy expertise (Peeters et al., 2013). When overwhelmed by unexpected or disruptive student behaviour, teachers often steer classrooms in the opposite direction of self-regulation towards pedagogies that are more rote, prescribed and heavily scaffolded. This interplay of noisy student needs and subsequent teacher safeguarding depletes the autonomy, feelings of competence, sense of belonging and student-teacher relationship that support EF development (see review, Faith & Pyle, 2021).

In this context, how can a school leader expect teachers to persist with metacognitive approaches? Without extensive preparation, most people do not easily move in the direction of danger, discomfort or even mild stress (Augenblick & Rabin, 2018; e.g., West & O’Neal, 2004), and certainly not all day, every day from September to June. *The Barriers & Strategies Protocol (BSP; Faith, 2018; Faith, 2021; Faith et al., 2022; Faith & Pyle, 2021)* is the simple patch I advocate.



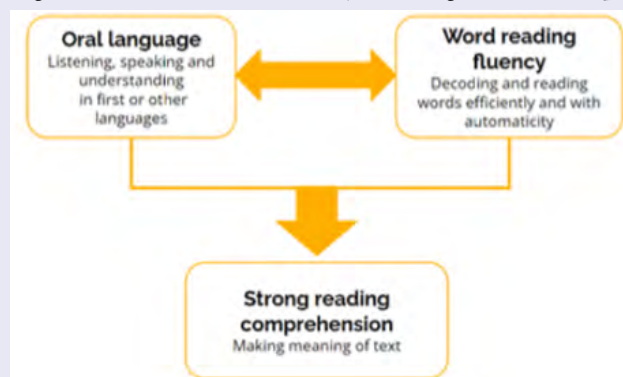
Early Reading in Ontario: Opportunities and Challenges

By Wendy Goulden

Among the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s recommendations to the Ministry of Education, there are repeated calls for “critical changes to Ontario’s approach to early reading for students” (Ontario Human Rights Commission [OHRC], 2022, p. 4). This article highlights some of the benefits of this shift, while identifying potential concerns school leaders may consider when planning and leading curriculum implementation and supporting educators in literacy learning within their schools.

The elementary Language curriculum (2023) was designed to ensure all students develop the foundational knowledge and skills necessary to achieve their full potential, including oral language, word-level fluency, vocabulary, etc. A commitment to evidence-based systematic and explicit instruction of these knowledge and skills is critical to ensuring a high degree of achievement for learners in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education [OME], p.60). Since strong reading comprehension (making meaning) is the end goal of reading, an explicit focus on these foundational early reading skills is essential.

Figure 1: OME, Effective Early Reading Instruction, p. 4



The Kindergarten Program (2016) will be updated and implemented as of the 2025-26 school year. According to Ontario’s Education Minister Stephen Lecce, the intent is “evidence-based clear and direct instruction” is combined with “hands-on and play-based learning” so children leave Kindergarten with skills that will “help set them up for long-term success.” (News Release, 2004, Ministry of Education).

Ontario’s commitment to excellence in early learning is long-standing and significant.

The 2007 publication of *Early Learning for Every Child Today (ELECT)* set out principles to guide practice in early years settings and stated that “an intentional, planned program supports learning” and “play and inquiry are learning approaches that capitalize on children’s natural curiosity and exuberance” (OME, 2007, p. 5). *ELECT* reminds us that the ability to impact children’s learning positively begins with the understanding that human development is complex and varied, but skills mostly emerge in a predictable continuum. The arc of possibilities for human development is vast and is influenced by family, community and cultural contexts. Educators know the importance of a robust program/curriculum to guide their work with young students. In Ontario, it serves to “outline the knowledge and skills students need,” each grade building on the learning in the previous one and progressing alongside students’ developmental growth.

With today’s renewed attention toward foundational knowledge and skills, early years (K-2) educators have looked closely at their practice and considered what needs to change. Phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics are addressed within the specific expectations in “Strand B2” of the elementary curriculum, *Language Foundations for Reading and Writing*. These critical skills are not new – they were also identified in the well-known and highly regarded National Reading Panel Report (2000), which examined the research and evidence-based findings on reading and reading instruction.

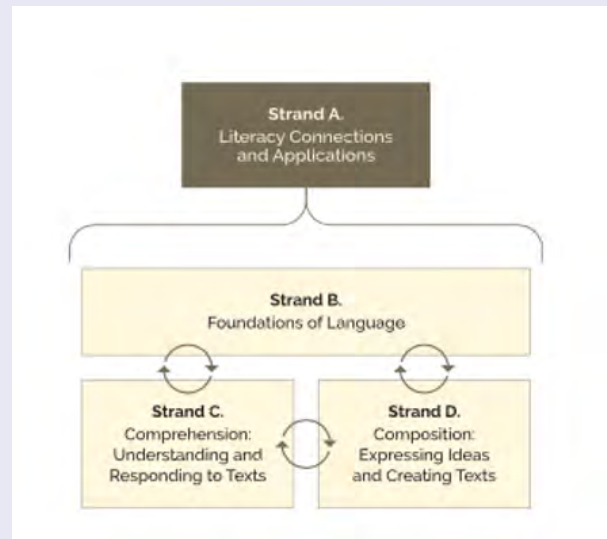
To implement this portion of the new curriculum, many educators in Kindergarten to Grade 3 classrooms have been learning more about teaching phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics. Schools and boards have accessed many resources to support explicit and systematic teaching of these skills. Publishers have responded by providing access to a plethora of support in these areas. These resources, are primarily sourced from the United States. This has exposed educators to many new strategies and ideas to use in the classroom, which has supported the needs of many young learners.

What’s the possible downside here? While important, an over-emphasis on phonological and phonemic awareness and phonics may result in a language program that is too narrow and perhaps too hurried, risking a misalignment with the developmental needs of young learners.

Phonological Awareness

Literacy learning encompasses much more than the narrow band of skills recently taking up so much time and energy (i.e., Strand B). There are four literacy strands in *Language, 2023* (see Figure 2). Still, educators and principals have identified that when most of a language block is devoted to developing foundational skills, there is limited time left to address the other strands. Figure 1 reminds us of the broader context of literacy, where word reading (e.g., phonics, decoding) is just a portion of what is required. Reading is also about making meaning from texts, building knowledge about the world and developing vocabulary.

Figure 2: The Strands in the Language Curriculum, *Language* p. 66



We all draw from a deep well of resources to read effectively. An overemphasis on phonological, phonemic awareness and phonics is too narrow and represents only a portion of the curriculum. This, may result in children lacking the other skills necessary to become readers and writers and allow them to meet all the essential expectations set out by the OME.

Developmental Needs

Ontario students typically begin to attend school when they turn four, some beginning Kindergarten as early as 3.9 years. In other jurisdictions (e.g., other provinces and countries), children begin school at different times (e.g., on their fifth birthday or the month they turn five). When Ontario classrooms rely heavily on instructional resources created for other contexts, such as American classrooms, we must be mindful when using them in



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Your Emotional Style
Motivators, Emotional Reactors and Agilities



Transforming Assessment and Evaluation

By Jackie Gauthier, Lori McCaw and Sarah Cassidy

How is assessment like making pancakes? The first misshapen, goopy pancake and the thin, burnt ones that follow guide your next steps. Until it all comes together. And you cook that perfectly round, fluffy pancake!

Assessment provides educators with formative feedback to deliberately plan for each student's success. It's our educator beliefs in the purpose of assessment and evaluation that determine what we do with feedback. If assessment is merely a method by which to rank and categorize students, then it simply becomes the means to an abrupt (and goopy or burnt!) end.

However, if educators believe ongoing assessment is the key skill with which to gauge students' trajectory towards mastery of taught content, and equitable evaluation embodies evidence over time from a triangulation of data, then every student can be a loved, inspired and successful Ontario Catholic School Graduate. Pass the maple syrup!

The shift in the Ontario elementary language curriculum from the evaluation of four separate strands to an integrated pedagogy across strands requires changes in educator thinking and practices.

Teachers are the lynchpin of the assessment-learning cycle and re-thinking pedagogy is a stressor that can cause teachers to succumb to ranking and categorizing. Time and collaborative professional learning, within intentional structures created by school leaders, decreases that stress and creates conditions for educators to regain a sense of power and purpose.

Establishing a data-based inquiry habit of mind can seem daunting, especially given the operational demands on leaders' time. Principals can fall into the trap of addressing

this adaptive challenge of changing the culture of assessment and evaluation with technical solutions – Buy the programs. Check! Audit the books. Check! Assess the students. Check! See an increase in student achievement???

While resources are essential, they alone do not equip educators to effectively implement new pedagogy. Transformation is complex, since professional practices are connected to educators' beliefs and unconscious biases.

Everything school leaders do must serve our Catholic social teachings. Co-learning with staff through a lens of culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy enables principals to articulate the rationale behind the work, while fostering a climate of collaborative inquiry that empowers staff, including the leader, to be vulnerable enough to question, refine and adapt practices.

The driving inquiry at the Algonquin and Lakeshore Catholic District School Board is, "Who needs us to change our practices the most and how do we know?" This question guides the Professional Learning Community (PLC) work as schools focus on students as individual learners when assessment data is interpreted, and timely interventions are determined within a multi-tiered system of support.

Learner profiles go beyond the September "Who Am I?" surveys, as ongoing assessment meetings more clearly define what each student needs. Building professional knowledge of crucial factors, such as self-regulation and information processing strategies so students' brains can focus on instruction, also prepare teachers to employ active learning routines. While time, money and lack of occasional teachers are ongoing obstacles to professional development, siloed workshops will not sustain lasting

A Both/And Perspective

By Joanne Reid



Ontario’s 2023 language curriculum is an ambitious blend of the “both/and” perspective (Ontario, 2023). It is both modern in its inclusion of digital literacies and 21st century competencies and it is traditional in its return to past practices such as direct instruction of phonics and the revival of cursive writing. This article encourages educators to take a “both/and” approach, as well in adapting reading programs to meet the revised language curriculum.

Apply the analogy of a pair of binoculars to language. One lens is language as a subject, a specialized discipline. This is the foundational content that is receiving so much recent attention and for which explicit direct instruction is mandated (See Strand B and Appendix A and Appendix B of the 2023 Ontario language curriculum). The other lens is language as a means, a tool by which we express and receive ideas and information. As with binoculars, the two lenses work together to amplify the world. Rather than the adage that students must first learn to read, and then read to learn, educators need to do both simultaneously. Here’s why.

Content knowledge improves reading comprehension

Decoding is not the same as comprehension. Knowing the sound of a consonant blend is a start, but readers apply their procedural/foundational skills (e.g., phonemic awareness) to some form of content. Readers synthesize components to create overall meaning – that is, comprehension. A rich and broad base of general knowledge supports this process. Studies show that expanding knowledge on diverse topics improves reading comprehension (Kim et al., 2023; Grissmer et al., 2023) Indeed, Tyner and Kabourek (2020) wrote that “Spending more time in elementary school on the ‘skill’ of reading comprehension at the expense of teaching content may sound like a good idea, but it actually works against the very outcomes we’re trying to achieve” (p. 8).

A cross-disciplinary approach increases content knowledge base

We can increase students’ knowledge base by leveraging the cross-curricular and integrated learning opportunities set out in the Ontario language curriculum.¹ Students gain



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Learning About – And With – Artificial Intelligence

By Christopher DeLuca and Michael Holden

ChatGPT 3.5's launch in November 2022 caught many educators off guard. Still reeling from the effects of COVID19, school systems have been forced to reckon with a new tool that can generate essays and homework responses in mere seconds. The platform's seemingly meteoric rise has led to more than 180 million users and some 1.5 billion webpage visits per month (Duarte, 2024). And ChatGPT isn't the only generative artificial intelligence, or genAI, tool on the market. Dozens of genAI tools are now capable of generating text, images, video, music and computer code – each with its own assessment implications.

Some institutions have banned genAI outright, forbidding students from using these tools and blocking them in their schools. Others employ AI detection software or rely on teachers' ability to suss out genAI content. While understandable, these responses are somewhat short sighted.

Banning genAI has no effect on students' ability to access these tools on their own devices, especially if educators are concerned about academic misconduct

when students complete work at home. AI detection options aren't much better. False positives – when detection tools incorrectly flag student-written text as computer generated – remain a risk in all available detection tools. Researchers at Stanford University recently tested seven AI detectors and found that “over half of the non-native English writing samples were misclassified as AI generated” (Liang et al., 2023, p. 1). Despite some educators' confidence, repeated studies have demonstrated that teachers cannot reliably identify AI-generated work (Kumar & Mindzak, 2024; Perkins et al., 2023; Waltzer et al., 2023). In Kumar and Mindzak's (2024) study, for example, educators' ability to correctly identify whether a text was created by humans or genAI ranged from 20 to 67 per cent. A coin toss can perform about as well and is equally unacceptable as a standard for rendering judgment on students' work.

While these challenges affect every curricular area, language teaching and learning is perhaps most susceptible to academic integrity concerns associated with genAI. The release of Ontario's revised language arts curriculum offers a timely opportunity for teachers



Structured Literacy

By Alicia Smith

In education, change may seem to be the only constant. But another certainty is the pivotal role of the principal in leading change. When it comes to literacy instruction, there has been considerable change to both policy and practice in Ontario recently. On the recommendations of the Ontario Human Rights Commission, the 2023 Language curriculum includes an increased focus on foundational literacy skills. Ministry guidance emphasizes that literacy should be taught through evidence-based systematic and explicit instruction, often referred to as structured literacy.

Structured literacy is a research-supported approach that is effective for all students and necessary to ensure children at risk for reading difficulties can succeed (Lyon & Goldberg, 2024). Shifting to evidence-based instruction requires orchestrated efforts from multiple stakeholders, with principals playing a key role.

As you navigate these changes in your school, consider seven key leadership moves:

1. Prioritize Your Learning

To lead the implementation of the new curriculum, principals need to, first and foremost, build their own understanding of structured literacy. Knowledge and understanding of research-based approaches to reading

instruction, intervention and assessment underpin leadership actions linked to improved student outcomes (Murphy, 2004); this knowledge is critical to effectively supporting staff.

While there are many changes in the revised curriculum, Strand B marks a significant change from the previous curriculum. Educators will need ongoing professional development and support to incorporate these changes into their practice. Digging deeply into this learning alongside your team is an actionable step to improving student outcomes.

"Principals actively participating in professional learning sessions with their staff is a key factor in driving positive changes in our schools. This leadership is crucial to ensure that the curriculum translates into impactful classroom practices. Learning together enables effective collaboration between principals and teachers, fostering a shared vision for improving student achievement. This collaborative journey strengthens a culture of lifelong learning and ensures our schools are well-equipped to provide top-notch literacy education."

Marlene Perry, K-12 Literacy Consultant,
York Catholic District School Board

Enhancing Equity and Mental Health Literacy

By Michelle Coutinho

In the constantly evolving landscape of education, the role of school administrators in Catholic schools extends beyond managing daily operations. They are entrusted with nurturing schools where equity and mental health literacy thrive.

Recognizing that the mental health and well-being of staff and students are deeply interconnected, administrators are called to prioritize cultivating supportive learning environments where every staff and student can thrive. As stewards of Catholic faith and education excellence, administrators must continuously enhance their own understanding of equity and mental health to effectively lead their school communities.

The term literacy has two definitions. The first being the ability to read and write. It is also defined as knowledge

or competence in specific areas. As school leaders, administrators are responsible for building capacity, coherence and literacy in school communities. But with so many responsibilities in a school, on what 'specific' areas should we focus? Our faith reminds us that we are in relationship with God, and that he sees us each as unique individuals deserving of dignity. For administrators to model this relationship in support of every student requires a focus on the interconnectedness of three literacies: Faith, Equity and Mental Health.

Catholic systems and schools are afforded the privilege of connecting students with the information and supports needed to engage with their faith in deep and meaningful ways. Through the religious education and family life curriculum we directly inform and instruct students regarding scripture, sacrament life and Catholic social





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Consolidating Global Competencies and Transferable Skills

By Dr. Beverley Freedman and Mirella Rossi

We are living in a period of profound change. The world has evolved from a traditional industrial base to an interconnected and globalized knowledge economy (Freedman & DiCecco, 2014). Education remains one of the critical drivers of social and economic change. Collectively, forces of changing demographics, globalization and technological developments are shaping our present and future. The revised 2023 Elementary Language Curriculum document¹ responds to these changing forces.

We all acknowledge that literacy is essential for personal and academic success. Language is how we

think, understand, communicate, interact and share knowledge, skills and information. It is foundational to life-long learning.

The 2023 Elementary Language Curriculum document emphasizes **transferable** knowledge and skills as building blocks to support complex skills such as critical and creative thinking and problem solving. These reflect an evidence-based approach, sequencing the acquisition of literacy skills through explicit, systematic instruction. This is equally true of the 2023 English Grade 9 De-streamed Curriculum (ENL1W), which extends the skills and knowledge continuum, from



Grades 1 through Grade 9. According to the Ministry of Education, research informs the curriculum and provides opportunities for students to learn and demonstrate these skills (CMEC; Ellis, Holston, Drake, Putnam, Swisher, & Peske, 2023; Gamrell, Morrow, 2014; OECD).

The revised 2023 document includes student-centred learning, inquiry, curiosity, inferencing and extending understanding in a supportive learning environment (Language 2023: 15). The expanded literacies include information and communication technologies, as well as understanding and meaning-making, creating and analyzing media literacy texts.

Digital literacy is highlighted, and this is important for a technologically literate population. Students have opportunities to demonstrate agency and voice using technology in a safe, legal and ethically *responsible manner* (Language 2020: 43). Given the increasing influence of social media, the focus on literacy connections and applications (Strand A), comprehension and understanding, and responding to texts (Strand C), and composition (Strand 4) may bring some balance.

an asset-based approach incorporates culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy so learners may see themselves reflected in the curriculum (Language 2023: 19). They can understand the cultural and societal impact of texts and connections to their real world.

Students are assessed on four components that reflect these new literacies.

- Knowledge and Understanding
- Thinking
- Communication
- Application

Additionally, the 2023 Language Curriculum document reinforces literacy development that is an intentional, evidence-based approach to language acquisition and consolidation. It incorporates oracy, reading for fluency and comprehension, vocabulary and even spelling, phonics and phonemic awareness, and cursive writing. It deals with concepts including foundations of language, comprehension and composition.

Learning Today for Tomorrow's World

What are the skills and knowledge required by today's learners for tomorrow's rapidly changing, diverse, interconnected and digital world to become global citizens? The Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation², or OECD, championed global competences, which enabled students to examine and engage with local, global and intercultural issues through a lens of sustainable development and respectful, responsive interactions.

Accessing educational partners including student voice from across the globe, the OECD explored transformative competencies. What are the curriculum and resources required to build these competencies? How can learners demonstrate learning outcomes or the mastery of these competencies in terms of what they know and are able to do as evidence? Envisioning an evolving learning framework to prepare current learners for an unknown future is briefly outlined in the OECD's Learning Compass 2030³.

The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, or CMEC⁴, endorsed six global competencies: critical thinking and problem solving; innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship; learning to learn/self-awareness and self-direction; collaboration; communication; and global citizenship and sustainability. These competencies

Literacy Leadership

By RomaLee Bumbacco Sodaro

“School leaders improve teaching and learning by promoting staff motivation, commitment and a positive school culture.”

Leithwood, Day, Sammons, Harris, Hopkins, 2006

Literacy leadership is about supporting staff in improving student achievement and the literacy needs of all students. Literacy instruction is the teaching of phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension. If there is no clear understanding of ‘what’ literacy is, then the question of ‘how’ it is taught and the reason for its ‘why’ are disconnected.

The understanding of oral language, word study, reading and writing as practical strategies for all students is critical. Building confidence and motivation of staff in understanding the components of the science of reading strengthens literacy instruction. A school culture that focuses on meeting the students where they are in their literacy development is not only being knowledgeable in its content, but also being able to effectively apply that knowledge. The goal is to build on what is known. All students are supported in meeting their literacy needs at their level.

A single strategy in helping students to read, understand texts, and/or write does not fit/work for all students.

Triangulation of data examines student products, conversations and observations of classroom teaching and learning. Feedback opportunities encompass analyzing student data to make informed decisions about next steps and reflecting on instructional practice. Evidence-based practices provide professional development opportunities where literacy instruction and data are shared. It is important to identify and acknowledge what is working along with gaps to further develop the literacy instruction. It is a collective responsibility.

Staff, who know the school priority and are on the same professional learning page, collectively grow in their professional development. Through collaborative dialogue about literacy expectations, student performance goals, shared practice and research, schools create a learning environment that promotes instructional leadership among all. It fosters a collaborative environment that consistently monitors growth over time and uses data to inform instructional next steps.

Assessment is clear in terms of what it looks like, as well as efforts to achieve the goals that result in continuous improvement. Students can provide oral summaries to help improve/strengthen their oral communication and develop their vocabulary. When asked to summarize a text, whether it’s printed or digital, they have a checklist or a model to guide them to include relevant information. Students are encouraged to visualize and make connections building on their previous knowledge to understand new texts.

Leaders work with staff as part of a team, ensuring all are clearly aware that literacy is the school priority. They visit classrooms, participate in the learning and are engaged in the teacher/student discussions and work. Literacy guidance is reflective of a school culture where language comprehension, word recognition and reading skills are integrated in all content areas in every classroom. This helps students make connections and think critically. Students are shown examples in how to apply their reading, writing and oral language skills. This does not just happen – it is modelled, coached and led as evidenced by literacy leadership. [CP](#)

RomaLee Bumbacco Sodaro

Retired Principal, Waterloo Catholic District School Board

Revitalizing Catholic Leadership Through the Christian Mysteries¹

By Ezio Delfino and Francesco Lorusso

The pandemic not only exposed serious global inequities, but it has also highlighted the intense distress of our youth. Distress that is manifested through young people's disengagement with school and social relationships, outbursts of aggression and issues with their physical and mental health.

The rapid spread of artificial intelligence (AI) offers interesting prospects for education. However, worrying forms of social withdrawal, such as Hikikomori Syndrome, are also spreading among the most fragile youth.

While the education sector has long been experimenting with interactive and engaging teaching methods, both in pedagogy with students and in leadership and management, an important question arises: Is it enough to rely solely on educational and organizational innovation processes to revitalize schools and close the gap between school and real life, between traditional knowledge and future aspirations, offering a horizon of hope and fullness of life for our young people?

The gravity of the moment is captured in the recent Message of the Holy Father for the launch of the Educational Pact². He calls for new educational paradigms and leadership in education that prioritize the dignity of the human person and educators' testimony in dialoguing with and addressing the needs of young people.

Beyond strategic planning and functional methodological frameworks, it is crucial that education

leaders embody *a commitment to believe in their mission and engage with it* if improvement is to occur.

Personal testimony of leaders and attending to those who place their trust in leaders are the keystones to an approach to education that meets the challenges of the current ever-changing era. Without these, innovative school practices and methodologies, no matter how well-conceived and structured, risk being nothing more than incidental to education.

If the moral imperative of education lies in knowing we are entrusted with the destiny of our youth and the learning community, as educational leaders, we must reflect on the purpose of educating and on the relationship between learning and real life. This highlights the importance of welcoming and supporting the individual beyond academic achievements.

It becomes crucial to operate deeply with a “nuance”³ approach, one that requires us to look at students and collaborators without prejudice and beyond differences, valuing the humanity within them. It is the capacity of an educational leader, who first takes care of and puts into play their own humanity. Educational practices are enhanced by this attitude of love and the humanity of both the adult and the student, who venture together into infinite paths of knowledge and applications, perceiving the beauty of creation and of its creatures.

This aspiration towards a genuine common good, fuelled by profound attention and care for others and oneself, finds authentic foundation in faith. In particular, the



CPCO's Principal Exchange to Italy

By Luciana Cardarelli

CPCO enjoys a longstanding relationship with DiSAL (Dirigenti Scuole Autonome e Libere) – a principals' association that includes Italian Catholic and state schools. This year, the two associations successfully offered a job shadowing program.

Over March Break, four practising CPCO Associates travelled to different regions of Italy and job shadowed a DISAL colleague. And in April, CPCO welcomed DISAL colleagues to Ontario. The experiences of our CPCO Associates can be described as transformative, as evidenced by their testimonials.

“My experience participating in the CPCO/DISAL Principal Shadowing Program provided me with an opportunity to see Italy, Italians and the Italian school system in a way I could never have accessed through a vacation or a standard work program. I enjoyed learning new ways of thinking and doing, ways that can inform my current practice. I had the opportunity to see that some challenges are universal and may not be rooted in anything that I may or may not be doing. I was reminded

that life is better with ‘aperitivo time,’ and that I need to live ‘la dolce vita’ to be at my best to support my school community and my own family. In my principal shadowing partner, I truly feel that I have made a friend for life. We are looking forward to the many adventures we will continue to have beyond the program.”

Lorraine van Zon, Principal Bishop Macdonell Catholic Elementary School, Toronto Catholic District School Board

“The trip itself was magical. My Italian counterpart was amazing, kind and generous. She and her family made me feel right at home. I do not speak Italian so I was a little worried but its amazing what a little charade and a lot of Google translate can do to support you! I saw classes from Grade 1 to 10 in my home school but also had the experience of touring schools in a nearby city to see high schools that were tailored to suit different career paths. I find that as principals we often feel alone. The burden is heavy, especially in education today and I had often speculated that this was an Ontario issue. This trip made me realize that the problems we face here are

Black Heritage & Excellence Series 2024

In Conversation with Tyrone Dowling

CPCO's Black Heritage and Excellence Series strives to inspire by featuring Black Catholic educational leaders, who will share their journeys and perspectives on current issues in education and highlight excellence of the Black community. In this article Tyrone Dowling, Director of Education, Waterloo Catholic District School Board, shares his thoughts with Christine Cosentino, a Member of CPCO's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Standing Committee.

Tyrone, what are you reading right now?

My wife and I watched a Netflix show called *Slow Horses* during the Christmas break, and now I'm reading one of the books the series is based on – *Real Tigers* by Mick Herron. I've also begun reading *Hidden Potential* by Adam Grant and previously started reading *Politics and Faith in a Polarized World: A Challenge for Catholics*. Other book recommendations include: *Lead Like Jesus* by Ken Blanchard and *Jesus CEO*, which focuses on Catholic faith and leadership.

Does that reading extend to your school board, staff and parents?

As staff members, we take the time to participate in book studies. One of the books we are focusing on is called *Street Data*. Our administrators, along with our program services staff, are discussing it during Family of School meetings. We are also working on bringing out the book

Equity and Social Justice Education: 50 Critical Questions for Improving Opportunities for Black Students for our principals to read.

What explicit things do you do to promote equity and literacy in your system?

One of the initiatives, which is not related to equity but deals with Indigenous issues and our calls to action, is that a decision has been made for the NBE 3C/3U. One of our secondary schools is currently piloting the course. Next fall will be the Grade 11 English course for all five secondary schools and summer school. This is a significant move for us. The other aspect we are discussing is how often we review our secondary school communication book lists and the process we follow.

We've also implemented our multiyear strategic plan, which is composed of three pillars with three goals in each. One goal is that every student will see themselves reflected in their learning. We're also looking to expand our library collections in the areas of family structure and 2SLGBTQIA+. We're looking into how we can add another layer to that. Staff – our teachers and literacy consultants – are actively trying to have displays of books in their classrooms and learning comments that resemble the students in our schools so students have the opportunity to select materials that look and sound like them.



A Gentleman Named Joe

By Sandra Donaghue

When you hear someone mention the name Joe Geiser, no matter where you are, people immediately share stories of how they know him or how he helped them. And they ask, does he still get up early to go to the gym before work?

When Catholic educators gather, people look around to catch a glimpse of the man who rarely requires an introduction. He will, however, introduce you to everyone he sees and talks to. This is usually a combination of former students, staff, colleagues, relatives, friends and family. In every space, Joe knows someone.

Rooted in relationships and his faith, Joe Geiser easily and confidently navigates the world. People line up to chat with him. People gather to listen to him. And people eagerly seek him out for advice, counsel, a laugh or to share a fond memory.

So, who is Joe Geiser?

Joe is an icon in Catholic education circles. His life has been centred in his faith and Catholic education since the days when those in Ontario had to pay tuition to continue in a Catholic school to OAC. For Joe, it was a natural

AGM Address to Delegates

By James McDade, *President Elect*



Serve.
Advocate.
Lead.
Together.

Thank you for granting me the opportunity to serve as CPCO's President for the upcoming school year. It is an honour to represent all Catholic Principals and Vice-Principals in the province of Ontario. I am committed to serving, advocating and leading on behalf of our organization with unwavering dedication.

The challenges we face, both in the past and on the road ahead, are substantial. Despite the turbulence, our commitment to excellence remains steadfast. We have continued to persevere through the staffing crisis and an ever-growing list of other obstacles, demonstrating daily the indispensable role of Principals and Vice-Principals in our schools. Yet, we continue to operate without sufficient recognition, resources or support. We are weary but hopeful, fuelled by our passion for Catholic education.

Rest assured, I will prioritize your needs every day and ensure your voices are heard.

Together, we will confront these challenges with courage and solidarity, guided by our faith and hope. As Catholic leaders, we must remain optimistic, knowing that through our collective efforts, we will not only strengthen our organization but also enhance the education system, always prioritizing the well-being of our students.

The road ahead may be uncertain, but we will persist in advocating for you and educating all stakeholders about our concerns and our solutions. We must begin to have meaningful resolutions to our concerns. We must continue to address issues such as workload, stress, burnout and the need for fair employment conditions that reflect the invaluable work we do daily in our schools.

Remember, you are never alone. Let us lean on each other and continue to support one another. Together, we will fulfil CPCO's mission to Serve, Advocate and Lead.

CPCO

Award Recipients

2024



PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR AWARD

Jacqueline Gauthier

Algonquin & Lakeshore CDSB

Jacqueline Gauthier began her educational career in 1991. In 2007, her experiences in both elementary and secondary schools, as well as supporting students with trauma and behaviour exceptionalities, led Jackie to a journey in administration. Jackie is an instructor for CPCO's Principals Qualification Program and has written and facilitates PQP for Queen's University. She co-designed Phase One of OISE's Education Leaders Program and is

Expert in Residence for their Professional Learning Fellowship. Having led multiple schools and now as a System Principal, Jackie is blessed to learn with her students, educators and principal colleagues. She believes we each possess unique gifts and leadership skills, which can be promoted through introspection, exploration and application. Jackie continues to learn and grow within her community of faith.



PRINCIPAL OF THE YEAR AWARD

Tim McGrenere

Toronto CDSB

Tim McGrenere was born in Toronto and started his career as an educational assistant working in an ISP classroom. There he learned to see the best in every student and built future relationships on that foundation. Tim taught 14 years at Monsignor Fraser College's Alternative Program, a formative time in which he worked with colleagues to help students, who had struggled in a regular school,

to achieve success. He became Vice-Principal, Monsignor Johnson Catholic Secondary School, in 2014, before moving to Brebeuf College. In 2019, Tim was appointed Principal, St. Patrick Catholic Secondary School. Right in time for work action and Covid lockdowns! This year, Tim is honoured to represent Secondary Principals of the Toronto Catholic District School Board as Chair of their association.

Thank You for Leading Our Catholic Schools

CPCO would like to congratulate these Associates on the occasion of their retirement. Thank you for the many years of leadership and dedicated service to our Catholic School Community. To each of you, we extend our sincere appreciation for the time you have spent serving your students, staffs, schools, boards and communities. Never forget the difference you have made, the hearts you have touched, the growth you have nurtured, the learning you have fostered and the precious relationships you have developed.

**“For everything there is a
season, and a time for every
matter under heaven”**

Ecclesiastes 3:1

Joanna Mary Besselink
Mary Leonard
Carole (Carrie) Anne Girdler
Renee Rozon
Dean Doucette
Alexis Galvao
Joni MacLean
Michael Young
Lisa Marie Stewart
Michael Goff
Rita DeLuca Malette
Louise Cronin-Nowitsky
Lorraine Boulos
Maria Pasceri
Judy Foster
Kevin MacIsaac
Lesia Konyt
Carla A. Cameron
Fred Fowlie
Suzanne Terpstra

Algonquin & Lakeshore Catholic District School Board
Brant Haldimand Norfolk Catholic District School Board
Bruce-Grey Catholic District School Board
Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario
Catholic District School Board of Eastern Ontario
Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board
Durham Catholic District School Board
Durham Catholic District School Board
Durham Catholic District School Board
Durham Catholic District School Board
Durham Catholic District School Board
Halton Catholic District School Board
Halton Catholic District School Board
Halton Catholic District School Board
Halton Catholic District School Board
Halton Catholic District School Board
Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board
Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board
London District Catholic School Board
London District Catholic School Board
London District Catholic School Board

Irene Ricci
Bruce Marietti
Lori Hurtubise
Mike Curry
Leisa Villeneuve
Sheri Stashick
Mark Kennedy
Caroline O'Connor
Deanna Tremblay
Rita Graaskamp
Deborah Langdon
Ruth McNulty
Leah Smith
Dave Soehner
Cara Soehner
Betty-Jane Roman-Mercier
Anita M Treesh
Jacqueline Fredrickson
Alma Provenzano
Anita Treesh
Beverley Lawrence
Lou Bellini
Brian Munaro
Charmain Barker
Christine Dehaas
Iolanda Faraone

Niagara Catholic District School Board
Nipissing-Parry Sound Catholic District School Board
Northeastern Catholic District School Board
Ottawa Catholic School Board
Ottawa Catholic School Board
Ottawa Catholic School Board
Ottawa Catholic School Board
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Ottawa Catholic School Board
Ottawa Catholic School Board
Ottawa Catholic School Board
Renfrew County Catholic District School Board
Simcoe Muskoka Catholic District School Board
Sudbury Catholic District School Board
Sudbury Catholic District School Board
Superior North Catholic District School Board
Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board
Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board
Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board
Thunder Bay Catholic District School Board
Toronto Catholic District School Board
Waterloo Catholic District School Board
Wellington Catholic District School Board
York Catholic District School Board
York Catholic District School Board
York Catholic District School Board



CPCO 2024 Conference and Awards Ceremony April 18-19

