

Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada

Position Statement, May 2008

Language and Literacy, Research, Educational Practice and Policy in Canada

LLRC defines “literacy” broadly, understanding that what it means to be literate is situational, and that individuals generally acquire numerous literacies as they navigate different linguistic spheres. In keeping with this notion, our members promote understanding of literacy acquisition in a range of developmental, socio-cultural, and media contexts.

The Nature of Language, Literacy, & the Literacy Learner

There is consensus within LLRC that language and literacy are:

- ▶ on-going, interrelated, and individualized processes;
- ▶ complex activities that involve the interplay of various individual and social factors;
- ▶ multi-faceted and multi-dimensional interactions incorporating at minimum six language arts: speaking, writing, representing, listening, reading, and viewing;
- ▶ used for multiple purposes in diverse contexts;
- ▶ embedded in culture, society, and ideology.

Curriculum & Teaching

that support the development of languages and literacies should:

- ▶ make language and literacy functional, purposeful, and meaningful while instilling positive attitudes and values toward language, literacy, and learning;
- ▶ engage literacy learners in diverse opportunities to speak, write, represent, listen, read, and view;
- ▶ focus on what learners know and are able to do and scaffold teaching-learning situations in order to foster success, independence, and engagement;
- ▶ expect all learners to succeed and be actively engaged within a responsive literacy learning environment;
- ▶ engage students in strategies that encourage and mediate language and literacy development, which include physical, cognitive, affective, social, and discursive characteristics;
- ▶ include opportunities for student choice;
- ▶ incorporate a full continuum of support to learners which includes opportunities for modelled, shared, interactive, guided, and independent use of the language arts;
- ▶ focus on language and literacy as processes and products for learning across and within the curriculum;
- ▶ incorporate literature that is relevant to the strengths, needs, and interests of literacy learners, and reflects the diversity of Canadian society (i.e., cultural and linguistic), as well as human relationships with the natural environment;
- ▶ include texts that reflect a variety of genres, modes, and media, new media, new technologies, and non-print media;
- ▶ focus on comprehension, sense-making, concept development, and critical inquiry;
- ▶ foster learning about the patterns, structures, and relationships in language and literacy.

Policy Makers & Practitioners should ensure that curriculum and teaching include opportunities for:

- ▶ literacy learner engagement in learning experiences that are responsive to individual funds of knowledge (including strengths, needs, and interests);
- ▶ the application of language and literacy practices and processes across the curriculum;
- ▶ modeling, demonstration, interaction, guided practice, and independent application of language and literacy strategies and skills;
- ▶ exposure to a wide variety of methods, experiences, and contexts that are grounded in research about effective instruction.

Assessment & Evaluation

practices should:

- ▶ reflect the complexity of the definition of literacy provided at the outset of this position statement;
- ▶ Reflect the interactive relationship between teaching, assessment and evaluation related to the development of language and literacies;
- ▶ consider the multiple dimensions and purposes of literacy within the classroom;
- ▶ be responsive to the strengths, needs, and interests of the student and reflective of curriculum and teaching decisions;
- ▶ be contextually, developmentally, culturally, and linguistically responsive;
- ▶ support learners in a way that enhances teaching and learning;
- ▶ offer feedback to ensure collaboration, growth, and development;
- ▶ recognize individual variation in learners and allow for differences in learning opportunities and timelines.

Literacy Evaluators & Assessors should:

- ▶ consider the diverse purposes of evaluation and assessment, no matter how well -designed, should not be used to make decisions regarding certification, access to programs or resources, screening, placement, etc.;
- ▶ capitalize on and be supportive of learners' resources;
- ▶ use assessment to purposefully gather reliable and valid information to inform improved practices;
- ▶ recognize the unique context of each student, school, and community.

Teacher Education & Professional Development

Teacher educators should:

- ▶ be trusted to use their professional discernment to make decisions about what to teach and how to teach;
- ▶ have specialized education in language and literacy pedagogy;
- ▶ develop extensive knowledge of language and literacy development and processes;
- ▶ maintain a contemporary and progressive awareness of research and effective teaching strategies;
- ▶ acquire knowledge about how language and literacy are fostered and improved;
- ▶ maintain a range of effective strategies for teaching, assessment, and evaluation;
- ▶ model and demonstrate the approaches and attitudes they expect of their students;
- ▶ engage in on-going knowledge-building in multiple and multimodal literacies;
- ▶ develop their own literacies and model life-long learning;
- ▶ develop extensive knowledge about language and literacy learners;
- ▶ develop a range of teaching practices to address the diverse needs of language and literacy learners;
- ▶ Foster collaboration between the universities, schools and professional organizations to enhance successful practices in a variety of learning contexts.

Professional Development Opportunities should:

- ▶ continue to support the teaching and research relationships that exist between teachers and teacher educators;
- ▶ provide opportunities for teacher educators to participate in professional development opportunities organized by individual boards or governing bodies, therefore positioning themselves as collective members of professional communities who should have autonomy over their professional development;
- ▶ support teacher educators' professional growth and consult them in developing ongoing professional development opportunities that foster inquiry, reflection, critical consciousness, responsiveness, innovation and thoughtful problem solving;
- ▶ provide opportunities for in-service, continuing studies, teacher networking, and venues that collaboratively involve teacher educators in furthering their professional development.

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csse.ca/CACS/LLRC





The Use of Research in Informing Practice & Policy

When determining the quality of research findings, consumers of research (teachers, teacher educators, governing bodies, parents, and students) need to:

- ▶ consider the sources in which the research is published, with an emphasis on peer-reviewed, reputable journals in the first instance, with subsequent publishing in professional education journals, and association magazines, including newsletters and magazines appropriate to a wider audience;
- ▶ have a healthy skepticism toward research produced to support commercial materials and programs and/or particular political agendas;
- ▶ consider the rigor of the research design and implementation;
- ▶ consider the careful selection of instruments or tools used to gather language and literacy data;
- ▶ consider if the research has given a full description of the research contexts and populations;
- ▶ carefully analyze the research's accuracy in reporting results and conclusions;
- ▶ consider the appropriateness of generalizability or transferability of the research;
- ▶ look for a critical and reflexive nature that foregrounds limitations and announces bias;
- ▶ question whether research supports a robust view of language and literacy and decries a deficit view of learners;
- ▶ declare conflict of interest.

LLRC emphasizes that rather than single research studies or a set of studies by one group of researchers, effective use of research to inform policy and practices considers multiple sources that seek:

- ▶ convergence of evidence from a variety of research methodologies;
- ▶ accumulated knowledge over time (historical as well as recent research);
- ▶ an open-mindedness to different research approaches and to perspectives;
- ▶ ways of integrating diverse (and sometimes conflicting) perspectives and domains.

Teachers, teacher educators, other language and literacy practitioners, and policy makers need to:

- ▶ make decisions based on the appropriate use of research findings;
- ▶ take a critical perspective towards promotional materials from publishers and "information" that promotes a single approach to language and literacy teaching.

Teachers of Language & Literacy

need to:

- ▶ understand the nature and purposes of language and literacy;
- ▶ engage in reading and writing for pleasure and for their own purposes and value the role of language and literacy in their lives;
- ▶ be lifelong learners and envision themselves as speakers, writers, representers, listeners, readers, and viewers, and continue to learn about languages and literacies after their formal education is complete;
- ▶ believe that all children can learn and engage in language and literacy practices;
- ▶ understand how theory informs practice and their understanding of the unique needs of each student;
- ▶ adopt a comprehensive approach to the teaching of language and literacy in the classroom recognizing that students need multiple opportunities for modelling, demonstration, guided practice, sharing, reflection and independent application of strategies and skills;
- ▶ understand the relationship that exists among the language arts and the interaction of curriculum, assessment, teaching, and evaluation;
- ▶ recognize that text selection should be negotiated with students and reflective of their strengths, needs, and interests; they understand the difference between censorship and selection;
- ▶ engage their students in critical and meta-cognitive thought about the processes, strategies, purposes, and consequences of language and literacy;
- ▶ be responsive to the context and knowledge and needs of learners;
- ▶ recognize that there is no consensus in the literature that supports one generalizable way to teach.

Teachers should be empowered by the knowledge and needs of their students and responsive to their specific context. This means ensuring that teachers have the professional development, resources (e.g., time and materials), and authority to make instructional decisions and carry them out.

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Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada (LLRC)

is a special interest group within the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies, a constituent association of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education.

About this Position Statement:

This position statement is intended to support the effective use of research in language and literacy education, including teaching, assessment, teacher development and policy development. It is directed to all individuals interested in language and literacy education in Canada, including parents, media, governing bodies, and the general public. In particular, it is directed towards individuals and groups who make educational decisions at various levels – teachers, administrators, curriculum and assessment developers, teacher educators, and policy makers.