

THE
Teaching Librarian
The Magazine of the Ontario School Library Association
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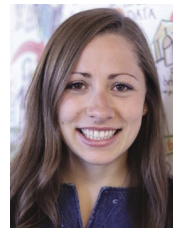
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TingL Mission

The Teaching Librarian

The Teaching Librarian (TingL) is the official magazine of the Ontario School Library Association (OSLA). It is published three times a year to support OSLA members in providing significant and effective library programs and services. *The Teaching Librarian* promotes library programs and curriculum development that furthers exemplary educational objectives. The magazine fosters effective collaboration within the school library community and provides a forum to share experience and expertise.

TingL References

The Teaching Librarian is a general magazine for OSLA members and not a scholarly journal. If your article does require citation of sources, please provide them within the text of your article or column with as much or as little bibliographic information as necessary for identification (e.g. book title, year). If you feel that the works you are citing require full identification, please provide a bibliography at the end of your piece, formatted according to the latest Chicago Manual of Style (16th edition) or APA Style.

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TingL Submission Guidelines

Please Note: Themes are subject to change.

May 2023 V. 30, Issue 3	“Reader’s Rights @ Your Library” Deadline: January 31, 2023
September 2023 V. 31, Issue 1	“Everybody @ Your Library” Deadline: May 31, 2023
January 2024 V. 31, Issue 2	“Gaming @ Your Library” Deadline: September 30, 2023

Articles of 150-250 words, 500 words, or 800-1,300 words are welcome. Articles, when approved, should be accompanied by high quality images and/or graphics whenever possible. Text must be sent electronically, preferably in a Microsoft Word (or compatible) file. Images or graphics must be sent separately in a digital format, such as .jpeg, .png, .tiff, or .ai. The minimum resolution must be 1000 px at 150 dpi. With photos that contain a recognized individual, please secure the individual’s permission in writing for the use of the photo. Photos taken at public events or crowd shots taken in a public place do not require permission from the subjects. All submissions are subject to editing for consistency, length, content, and style. Journalistic style is preferred. *The Teaching Librarian* adheres to Canadian Press Style. Articles must include the working title, name of author, and email address in the body of the text. OSLA reserves the right to use pictures in other OSLA publications unless permission is limited or denied at the time of publishing.

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The Editor's Notebook



Kasey Whalley

Happy New Year, library land! I hope each of you had a wonderful and restful holiday. As we start the new year, it is a great time to reflect on all that we have accomplished last year and put plans in motion that inspire and excite us.

This issue of *The Teaching Librarian* is a call-out to the importance of literacy in schools and school libraries. With the Right to Read Report being published in early 2022, we wanted to focus on literacy at your library. Literacy can refer to many knowledge areas, but the fundamental right to read can not be overstated.

Libraries can sometimes be reduced to “the place where books are stored” and, though we want to expand that definition, it is the place where books are kept – though, I’m much more inclined to say it’s the place where stories live. School libraries are at the intersection of academic and pleasure reading and often actively work to support all of the readers in our schools. Learning to read is a fundamental right for all children and many of us in education know that. Opening a land of possibilities though reading is something that libraries value at their core.

Being a reader was something that I often didn’t think much about as a child. I can remember hiding under covers with a flashlight to finish a book, or finagling ways to use stories and books as the basis for my presentations or independent projects. Wherever I was, so too was a book. But this was something that I often took for granted: I loved to read, I loved to feel the words come to life inside my mind, and so I read anything I could get my hands on (including old Reader’s Digest short stories at the wonderful age of 11).

It wasn’t until high school that I started to think about how I had access to the physical books I was reading, but I also had unobstructed access to the stories themselves. Reading, for school and for fun, became a topic that friends and I discussed, and I learned more about how reading blocks of text was difficult for some. I started to notice how many students are required to learn in an education system that hasn’t been built for them.

There are articles in this issue that focus on literacy in different knowledge areas and articles that focus on the Right to Read Report and language literacy support. We hope that through these articles you can reaffirm your commitment to supporting literacy in your library for all students. Learning to read is a gateway to stories, knowledge and an understanding of the world. Being able to provide support to students on their individual journeys to understanding is a key part of the library, especially those nestled in schools.

For the Editorial Board of the Teaching Librarian, 2022 has been especially difficult; the passing of former editor Caroline Freibauer hit many of us very hard. I know there have been other difficulties that many of you have faced this past year, both personal and professional. As a champion of school libraries, I think Caroline would encourage us to approach this new year with a renewed sense of drive and purpose.

With these reflections in mind, it’s my hope that 2023 brings each of you an abundance of school library joy, deeper and greater collaborations with other library professionals and a wealth of inspiration from our diverse world. This year I would encourage you to try an exciting new program in your library, make powerful connections at Super Conference, or submit an article to feature in the Teaching Librarian. Helping create resilient, literate and curious learners is a wonderful privilege, and I hope we can continue to support each other on this journey together through 2023. ■

President's Report

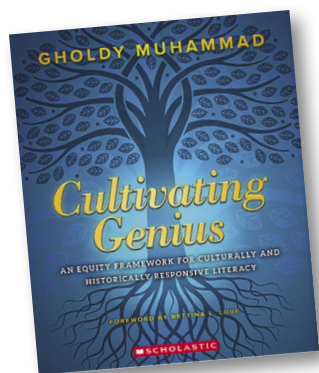


Beth Lyons

Literacy. It seems like that word is everywhere in education these days. Visual Literacy. Digital Literacy. Financial Literacy. Information Literacy. We use the word in education a lot. But do we really know what it means?

Most dictionaries offer two definitions, either “the ability to read and write” or “knowledge of a particular subject, or particular type of knowledge” (Cambridge Dictionary). As school library professionals I think we deal with both definitions equally. Library Learning Commons are uniquely poised as the hub of literacy in many Ontario schools. Staffed by qualified library professionals, collections are curated with students’ needs, wants and interests centred and at the forefront of decision-making. Texts are chosen based on their ability to provide a

diverse perspective on the world, to represent our culturally diverse society and to allow students to broaden their own opinions, ideas and wonders about their world. However, just having these texts in our library spaces is not enough. Students and educators need time to unpack, inquire, question and wonder about the texts.



In the past year the professional resource,

Cultivating Genius: An Equity Framework by

Gholdy Muhammad has been mentioned in many places and spaces where educators are discussing literacy and how school library professionals can support helping students become literate citizens. What I love about this book is that the Historically Responsive Framework presented by Muhammad is adaptable to all subject areas, all grade levels and all pursuits of literacy. As we work with students and educators around the goals of literacy, whether it’s reading and writing, numerical, scientific, media, or critical literacy, we are reminded to push beyond the rigid boundaries of the education system defined by settler-colonialism. How might we use the library learning commons as a site for connection to the natural world and outdoor education? How might we use our text collections to

call attention to the voices both under and over-represented in our society? How might we, as school library professionals, use our understanding of visual literacy and media literacy to share our library story, network with others and work to move everyone’s learning forward, to make everyone more literate?

As you read through this issue of *The Teaching Librarian*, the first to return to print since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, make a goal to reach out to another library professional and share what you love about their practice or, to ask for guidance regarding literacy programming in your space. Then make a goal to share one thing that you are doing in your space to celebrate literacy, encourage diverse literacy, and integrate literacy among subject areas. Be brave. Be bold. As a school library professional you have a wealth of skills related to literacy and the pursuit of a literate society, when you share your knowledge of this particular subject we all win. ■

References

Literacy. Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). Retrieved October 17, 2022, from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/literacy>

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Mary Doyle

Meet the Author

Thao Lam

This fall I had the privilege of speaking with author/illustrator Thao Lam. Lam's books include wordless picture books, as well as picture books with text, all with her distinct collage illustrations. In this interview, we discussed exploring illustrations as a means of building literacy and about building inclusive classrooms.



TingL: This issue is about literacy. In discussing the various types of literacies, I wondered about visual storytelling and “reading the pictures” as a form of literacy. This made me think about the role of wordless picture books. How do you see these books promoting literacy?

TL: Before they know how to read, students can visually look at the picture and describe it to you. Some people when learning how to read, look at the illustrations and they can piece them together. Wordless picture books can prompt students to write down a story, or verbally explain a story to someone. For speech therapists it is a great way to get kids to start talking; learn how to pronounce different words, or say words that they maybe aren't comfortable with. I came to Canada and I didn't know how to speak English. My gateway to reading was opening a picture book—and I didn't know any of the words at all — but I was looking at the visuals that were there. I was making up stories in my head based on the images I was seeing.

TingL: *The Paper Boat* is one of your wordless picture books. What was your thinking behind not using text?

TL: There are two of my books where I intentionally did not have text: *The Paper Boat* and *A Line in the Sand*. For *The Paper Boat*, I envisioned a refugee coming to a new country and not being able to read like I did. The visual is what they are going to rely on. I also wanted others who do know how to read, to experience what it is like to be a new person and not know how to read. So they are also forced to look at the pictures and tell the story. Also with being wordless, there is no age group. Most books come with an age rating. But with a wordless picture book, it doesn't get pigeonholed for being for one age group. The story will always be inspired by that person's experience or skill level in life. You will always get a different story with each reading. It can start a conversation with heavy subjects. You are not forcing an idea. The readers can make up their minds on the subject and have a conversation. It allows the reader to have their own perspective.

With *A Line in the Sand*, I chose not to have text, because that book is about understanding and lack of communication, and text is part of that. Text is part of communication, so when you take that out, you have this opportunity to observe and experience what it's like when there is miscommunication and a misunderstanding. That story came out of a personal experience. My daughter and I were at a park in the summer and we observed a confrontation between two kids but we didn't know what had happened to cause this fight. We didn't have the context for the situation. We could only make up the story of what happened to cause this fight. So this is what I was trying to capture when I was making this book.

TingL: *A Line in the Sand* was inspired by a real event then. Where else do you find inspiration?

TL: I'm a people watcher. So I love watching people on the bus, or at the park. A lot of the stories also come from personal experiences and situations I've encountered and experienced with my daughter. Kids are a treasure trove of ideas. I feel like I write the things I know. A lot of the time I'm trying to solve a problem. For example, in *My Cat Looks Like My Dad* I was trying to find an answer to how to explain families to my daughter. In our family, it is just me and her. So I was trying to explain the makeup of different family situations. In *The Paper Boat*, it was me trying to figure out my family history and how we got from Vietnam to Canada. Each one starts with something personal or a problem that I'm trying to solve.

For me, working on a book is very therapeutic. It usually takes about a year to make a book, so I've totally immersed myself in the subject, and have researched everything to see how other people have dealt with this subject. Then I see how I can use my point of view or make mine different.

TingL: When you are creating a book, does an image come to you first, and you build the story around it, or do you start with a story?

TL: Depends on the book. With *Skunk on a String*, it started with an image of a skunk in my head that was tied to a string and floating by. *My Cat Looks Like My Dad* came from one line that a child said to me, and it just stuck in my head, and I thought this is pretty cool, I can make a story out of this. And so each book comes to me differently, but it is usually an image or a one-liner and then I keep building on it.

TingL: In your book *Thao*, you talk about how it felt as a child to have your name mispronounced. What is the importance of names, and how do you think we can build more inclusive and diverse classrooms?

TL: Your name is your identity. It is also a personal choice. Someone may grow up and choose a different name for themselves or feel that their parents made a terrible choice. Someone may say I'm not a Tom, I feel like a Susie. You shouldn't feel pressured. You should feel like the person you are. You should never be embarrassed or scared to say your

name out loud.

After writing that book I started to think about different perspectives. When I wrote that book, it was from my perspective. In Canada, we have this great opportunity because we have lots of different people coming in from lots of different areas and experiences, and I think we have to work hard to encourage people to keep what is theirs. Not be like — oh you are in Canada now, you can only speak English. This is what my parents did when we came to Canada. They wanted us to blend in as much as possible. And so my dad didn't speak Vietnamese with me at all. He also wanted to practice his English, so he only spoke English at home.

In a way, I understand where he was coming from. So my Vietnamese is terrible, and my daughter only knows maybe five words. So I'm trying to figure out, how do we take back that which is ours. It's about learning how not to be hard on yourself, or embarrassed because you are different. Schools need to allow students to share what is theirs. It will help others understand and help that child be confident in what is theirs. For example, if I was a kid and I was in school and someone asked me to share about Lunar New Year, I would be like "yeah" because I know about Lunar New Year and my parents celebrate it at home. Then I would also learn that not every child celebrates the Lunar New Year. So this is something special to me that I can share with my friends and classmates.

TingL: Finally, what upcoming projects are you working on?

TL: I have a book that I am working on for Owlkids called *One Giant Leap*. It's about imagination, adventure and dreams. The whole thing is under the umbrella of space and astronauts. I also have a book coming out in spring 2023 called *Happy Birthday to Me*. It is a book about feelings. Nothing brings out the range of emotions like a birthday, from the excitement of a party, to maybe the disappointment of receiving a gift you don't like, to feeling exhausted when it is all over. It will be my first book published by Groundwood Books. ■



Shelf Awareness

Welcome back to Shelf Awareness, readers! We've made it through the first chunk of the year, and with luck, you are revelling in having students back in your library space. In my building, I have had the excitement of introducing Grade 7 and 8 students to the library in our 7-12 school for the first time. Spending time at recess helping students find that "just right" book, watching lanky kids sprawl in a comfy chair or perch on a climber to read, setting up a group of kids to help shelves books - these have all been unexpected joys this fall. Here are some books to think about adding to your shelves, that might be that "just right" book for one of your readers.

Love from Mecca to Medina

S.K. Ali

Simon and Schuster Canada, October 2022

I'm going to begin by hoping that the characters in this novel are not new to you or your readers. I would hope that most YA collections include the 3 novels that preceded this one (*Saints and Misfits*, *Love from A to Z* and *Misfit in Love*). These novels have become favourites of the young women in my school community who identify as Muslim, particularly those who choose to wear hijab. They are a series of novels that can truly act as mirrors for your Muslim population.

Adam and Zaynab are the adorkable (yes, that's a word) couple from the amazing *Love from A to Z*, a novel in which we get to know the two protagonists through their thinking around the idea of Marvels and Oddities. In *Love from Mecca to Medina*, they are still together as a couple, but apart geographically. She is couch-surfing in Chicago, while trying to go to university, and fighting Islamophobia in that context; he is in Qatar, working on how best to deal with his MS, creating one of his remarkable dioramas (this time of a map of the Hijra, a pilgrimage from Mecca to Medina), and keeping very quiet about the fact that he has no commissions. In other words, they are a disaster.

The couple has planned a romantic getaway to the 100 Acre Wood from Winnie the Pooh, but when Adam gets an opportunity to take the trip he is creating artistically, he feels called to take it. Zaynab, being who she is, stuffs her desires deep inside, and goes along. Throw in one of Adam's exes,

who maybe realizes that she let a good one get away, and lots of missed signals, and you have the makings of a great story. This book is once again tied together by a series of objects. In this case, it is a collection of mementoes that Adam and Zaynab's cat is nosing about on a shelf. We again get each character's perspective, which means we are far more clued in than either of the main characters is. This can sometimes be disconcerting. I often found myself wanting to whack the characters on the head and tell them to pay attention but had to remember that I knew things they didn't.

As always, what S.K. Ali does incredibly well is to make the novel a terrific story of two people trying to figure things out in a relationship. What makes it unique and important is that she does it through the lens of a Muslim reality. That means she helps the reader understand how incredibly important it is that Zaynab gets a second chance to do her pilgrimage to some of the holiest places in her faith when she's in a space to genuinely do that pilgrimage for herself, and not for anyone else. For me, the heart of this book was about choosing to do something incredibly powerful in terms of your faith, in a way that was meaningful to you — not to anyone else.

What will your students enjoy:

The return of familiar characters from other books (yes, friends, the ninja in a niqab is back!), the chance to experience a unique religious pilgrimage through a pilgrim's eyes, the tension of whether or not the main characters will figure things out.

Bonus Media:

S.K. Ali did a lovely interview about the book with Shelagh Rogers on [CBC's The Next Chapter](#).

Salt and Sugar

Inkyard Press, November 2022

Salt and Sugar opens with Lari Ramires and her single mother grieving the loss of their matriarch, Lari's grandmother, fending off the predatory corporate bakery that wants their space, and trying to figure out how to keep the vibrant food culture of their neighbourhood alive. The sweet-focused bakery across the street, run by the Molina family, is facing many of the same challenges. Will both bakeries survive? Will

someone figure out why the families can't get along? Will Lari and Pedro, the teens from each family, figure out that working together might work better than working against one another? Throw in a baking competition and you've got something pretty irresistible.

Salt and Sugar fits in beautifully with novels like Loan Le's *A Pho Love Story* (rival pho restaurants), or Uzma Jalaluddin's *Hana Khan Carries On* (rival halal restaurants). You have the standard enemies-to-friends-to-romance trajectory, the feuding families, and the dark secret that no one has quite untangled yet. The unique lens that Rebecca Carvalho brings to *Salt and Sugar* is that of location. The reader gets immersed in an urban environment in northeastern Brazil and learns about the people who live there - those who are surviving, and those who are being forced out. It brings a unique sense of community to the book, which is heightened by the teens volunteering at a local community kitchen and drop-in centre. For me, this deepened my attachment to the story. I also very much enjoyed the multi-generational aspect of the book. Many characters support the two protagonists, and they are of all ages.

This would be a great book (along with those mentioned above) to put together as a literature circle bin for an early high school class, maybe even to pair and compare with *Romeo and Juliet*. It's got a strong family story, as well as conflict around identity, and how teens may need to advocate for themselves in family structures.

What will your students enjoy?

The romance - knowing that Pedro and Lari are going to end up together doesn't lessen the fun of them figuring it out. There's a genuine sweetness here. The crew of friends who work together on a cooking project is also a lot of fun, and students will recognize people they know among them. The family dynamics will also be familiar to a lot of your students, particularly those who are first-generation Canadians.

Jasmine Zumideh Needs A Win

Wednesday Books, November 2022

I saved the best for last! This is one of my favourite reads of the year.

Jasmine is a high school senior, looking to get the heck out of her small California town. Her dream is journalism at NYU, and she needs a really strong resume to boost her early application. So...she fudges the application and says that she is president of her senior class before the election takes place. She knows that she is running against a strict rule-follower, and figures it's a done deal.

And then, the world turns upside down. It's 1979, American flags are being burned in the streets of Iran, the hostage crisis is about to blow up, and suddenly it matters that Jasmine's last name is Zumideh. Her younger brother is making a lot of noise about the fact that maybe the student activities in Iran have a point. Her parents are on the outs, again, and her mom has temporarily moved out. Jasmine's two best friends might be messing around with the same guy. And that rule-following candidate might have a chance.

This is an amazing book. The main character is snarky and smart and deals with systemic racism every day (the number of different ways her name gets mispronounced is a running theme). The crew who are working to get Jasmine elected, including a very cute guy, will have readers thinking about what people are willing to do to achieve an end. Jasmine's fantasy interviews with the rock goddesses of the period are a bonus for music fans. In a classroom, it would be a terrific one to connect with first-person sources from the late 70s, biographies of female journalists, or novels dealing with characters fighting systemic racism in a current context.

The novel allows for some thinking about the question "What do you do when you become the news story?" which will be relevant for many of your readers from diverse backgrounds.

What will your students enjoy?

The intersectionality is great — feminism, anti-racism, family dynamics — and will pull a lot of readers in. The main character is worth the price of admission here. Again, teens who are first-generation Canadians will find lots to relate to in the family situation. ■

Anita Brooks Kirkland

Future Focused School Libraries: Inspiration from TMC7

Treasure Mountain Canada (TMC) is a biennial symposium designed to bring researchers and practitioners together to discuss current Canadian research about library learning commons practice. Our seventh symposium took place on October 21 and 22, 2022 in New Westminster, BC, hosted by CSL in partnership with the British Columbia Teacher Librarians' Association and their annual fall conference.

If the purpose of TMC sounds lofty, the event itself couldn't be more grounded and dynamic. Energized by the inspiring speakers at the BCTLA conference, TMC7 participants were primed to engage in the important work of inspiring the future of LLC practice in Canada.

Keynote speaker Chris Kennedy commented on the remarkable reinvention of libraries over the past 40 years. Contrary to the popular perception of the library's demise, he believes that libraries have become more central to the work in schools and the community, and they have "defined themselves not by the books they move in and out, but by their role as a gathering place." Future-thinking librarians have defined our future, not only adapting to change but leading it.



BC teacher-librarian Nicole Wallace leads a table talk about her action research about reaching reluctant readers with audio books.

With our highest-ever registration and the most papers ever received, it was clear that this group of educators was ready to shed the burdens of the pandemic and learn from the innovations that emerged in the face of related challenges. They came prepared, having read symposium papers made available in advance and used the day to engage. "The

entire day is an interactive lesson, a classroom setup that would be amazing for a student but which is equally amazing as an educator participant. Every activity in TMC has a purpose and is designed as authentic learning." (Armstrong & Crompton, 2022)



TMC is not an academic exercise but rather a purpose-driven working event. The seven symposiums have created a large body of made-in-Canada research. The collective knowledge of these papers and events has increased professional capacity. Each symposium has inspired important projects, most notably the creation of *Leading Learning: Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada*, and most recently, the *CSL Collection Diversity Toolkit*.

Common threads from TMC7 converged on new ways of thinking about digital media literacy and its relationship to equity. Plans are underway to use what we learned at the symposium to inform an update to *Leading Learning*.

TMC is future-focused. Keeping libraries at the forefront of change is not only great practice, but it is also the best advocacy. Mourning what has been typical does not inspire support. Leading learning does. As Chris Kennedy advises,

"If I was giving advice I would tell libraries to keep looking ahead – tell the stories of the next 20 years. They should never forget their core purpose of literacy – but continually define this broadly. And they should be the gathering place for people and ideas. As so much of our world seems to have siloed, we need these common spaces to connect school and community."

TMC7 papers are available for your inspiration on the [TMC Canada Blog](#), and the papers have been added to the [CSL Research Archive](#) website. ■

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Erica Eades

Supporting All Readers Through a Structured Literacy Approach

With pandemic restrictions lifting and many schools seeing a return to normal this fall, there is one topic that has been on many educators' minds: learning loss. Months of online schooling and illness-related absences have resulted in countless children falling behind – particularly when it comes to reading. In fact, a recent U.S. study by the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) found the pandemic set reading levels for third- and fourth-graders back by almost two decades. What makes this especially tragic is that research shows if a child is not reading well by the end of third grade, they are unlikely ever to catch up.

But even before Covid-19 turned our world upside down, concerns around reading development were rising here in Ontario. This is what ultimately led to the Right to Read Inquiry, a year-long investigation launched in 2019 by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) that questioned whether Ontario public schools were failing to support students with dyslexia. The results were damning, with the OHRC finding that many schools were using outdated instruction methods, such as balanced literacy, in their classrooms. This is problematic for many reasons but is especially detrimental to students with reading disabilities.

That's because decades of research have shown that the best way to teach students with dyslexia is through an approach known as structured literacy – a term coined by the International Dyslexia Association to describe the many evidence-based instruction methods that align with the science of reading. Structured literacy programs are rooted in the knowledge that reading is not a natural process. Instead, children must be taught to read directly, explicitly, and systematically. A structured literacy approach also addresses the key foundational elements that make up a skilled reader: phonological awareness, word recognition, fluency, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

Reading specialists have been using structured literacy in intervention for many years. At Elmwood School, our 1:1 tutoring program uses a structured literacy approach known as Orton-Gillingham (OG). This program helps struggling readers by explicitly teaching the connections between letters and sounds. One of the challenges of the English language is that while it contains just 26 letters, these letters combine to create roughly 44 speech sounds — and there are over 250 ways to spell those sounds. The OG method simplifies this process by teaching students to apply rules and generalizations. This helps show that English is actually a fairly standardized language (even though it doesn't always seem that way).

A structured literacy approach like this one is essential for students with reading disabilities, but it can be beneficial for all children. That is why many schools, including mine, have also begun implementing these strategies in the classroom. At Elmwood, for instance, we have provided our Junior School staff with training in structured literacy to ensure all student learning is rooted in the science of reading. We are also developing a new language scope and sequence that conforms to current research on how children learn to read. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, we have introduced a universal screening program that sees all children from kindergarten to Grade 2 screened three times a year. The data collected from these assessments helps inform our teaching, thus preventing the need for more serious intervention down the line.

On a broader scale, the Ontario Ministry of Education recently released a document titled *Effective Early Reading Instruction: A Guide for Teachers*. In it, they recommend sweeping changes to how reading is taught to our youngest students. The document outlines the need for systematic and explicit phonics instruction, highlights the importance of phonological awareness in early reading development, and



emphasizes the need for ongoing assessment. Though the document is not without its faults, it is a solid step forward in our province's approach to early literacy instruction – and it could not have come at a better time.

As we continue to navigate our way out of this pandemic, our students are going to need our full support if they are going to thrive. By adopting a structured literacy approach, we can make a positive impact in our schools – one reader at a time.

Note: This article previously appeared in our Leadership @ Your Library issue, but has been reprinted due to its connection with this issue's theme. |

Excerpt from *Effective Early Reading Instruction: A Guide for Teachers*

What are early reading skills and how do they develop?

Reading is one of the most fundamental skills students can learn. It affects all academic achievement and is associated with social, emotional, economical, and physical health. However, learning to read does not happen naturally. The ability to read is not innate. Reading is a process involving specific skills that need to be taught and learned. As these skills develop, the brain forms new connections known as neural pathways. These neural pathways for reading are built through systematic and explicit instruction and strengthened through repeated practice.

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Understanding Dyslexia, Structured Literacy Instruction, and the Role of Decodable Books

Ontario's Situation Now

With the release in February 2022 of the Ontario Human Rights Commission's Right to Read inquiry report (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2022), students with reading challenges, including dyslexia, and educators can finally have hope. The report includes 157 recommendations aimed at all partners in Ontario's education system, including the Ministry of Education, teachers' colleges, school boards, schools, and teachers.

The [Right to Read](#) report calls for the use of *structured literacy instruction* in the classroom and intervention programs, early screening for reading problems, equitable access to psycho-educational assessments, and assistive technologies to support reading, writing, and spelling (but not to replace effective instruction).

The Right to Read report is a much-needed call to action – in 2019, 38 percent of Grade 3 students in Ontario did not meet the Grade 3 reading standards independently on the EQAO Provincial reading test (see [Lifting the Curtain on EQAO Scores](#) by IDA Ontario (2021)).

Structured literacy instruction is a research-based approach that reaches all students. The Right to Read Report has called for this approach to replace whole language/balanced literacy instruction which is based on a 'three-cueing' system that encourages 'guessing' of words based on cues such as pictures, other words in the sentence, or the first letter of the word.

This approach, and programmes based on this approach, are not supported by reading research. Recent critiques of the three-cueing system have been published by Kilpatrick (2015), Hempenstall (2017), and Seidenberg (2017). A 2019 radio

documentary by Emily Hanford of APM Reports, "[At a Loss for Words](#)", provides an excellent summary of the history of the three-cueing system and how it is not supported by the science of reading. In his review, Kilpatrick (2015) concludes the "three-cueing systems model is inconsistent with research on the nature of reading... The evidence suggests the three-cueing systems approach is not effective with weak and at-risk readers, and it may actually be counterproductive with such students (Tunmer et al., 2002)."

Structured Literacy Instruction

It is helpful to understand the *Simple View of Reading* model which explains that reading comprehension is a product of oral language comprehension and word-level recognition/decoding skills. Proficient readers require competency in both these skills.

The *Scarborough Reading Rope model* (Figure 1) expands on this and describes the foundational skills required for both oral language comprehension and decoding/word recognition.

Structured literacy instruction involves explicit, systematic, and cumulative instruction of ALL the foundational skills in the Reading Rope as well as spelling and writing skills. *Explicit teaching* means that teachers clearly explain and model key skills; they do not expect children to infer these skills only from exposure. *Systematic* means that there is a well-organized sequence of instruction, with important prerequisite skills taught before more advanced skills. For instance, children master decoding and spelling simpler consonant-vowel-consonant words (e.g., *tap*) with short vowel sounds before learning more complex short-vowel words (e.g., *stamp* or *tapped*) with consonant blends or affixes (IDA, 2018; NCEE,

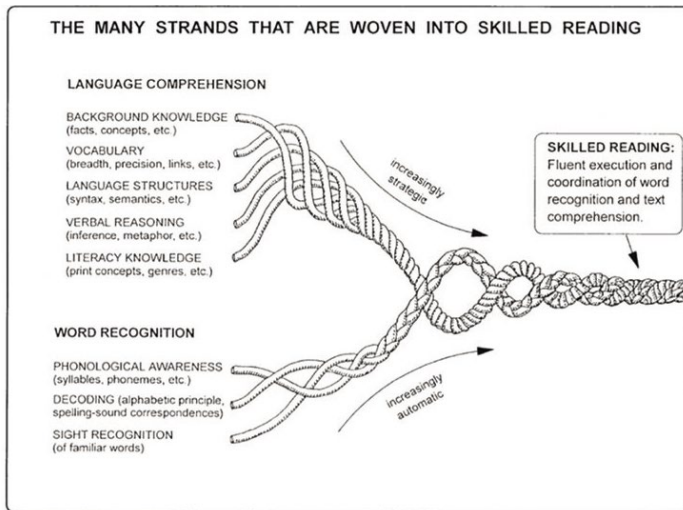


Figure 1

2016; Spear-Swerling, 2019, Moats, 2020).

Structured literacy instruction is supported by years of research (which is sometimes referred to as the “Science of Reading”) and has been found to be effective for all students. Note that structured literacy is *not* just decoding instruction (phonics), but is multifaceted, supporting the in-depth development of decoding skills, reading and language comprehension, spelling and writing skills.

Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a neurologically based condition that affects word-level reading accuracy, reading fluency, and spelling (i.e. the word recognition/decoding strand of *Scarborough’s Reading Rope*). It can be hereditary, is estimated to affect 5-20% of the population, and exists on a continuum of severity. It is often described as an unexpected difficulty in learning to read.

The formal definition of dyslexia by the International Dyslexia Association is:

“Dyslexia is a specific learning disability that is neurobiological in origin. It is characterized by difficulties with accurate and/or fluent word recognition and by poor spelling and decoding abilities. These difficulties typically result from a deficit in the phonological component of language that is often unexpected in relation to other cognitive abilities and the provision of effective classroom instruction. Secondary consequences may include problems in reading comprehension and reduced reading experience that can impede growth of vocabulary and background knowledge.”

The impact of dyslexia is very dependent on the effectiveness of reading instruction and/or remediation. Structured literacy instruction, particularly instruction focusing on the foundational skills required for decoding (i.e., phonological awareness, handwriting, phonics (letter sounds), morphology, spelling, and fluency) is essential for students with dyslexia, including adolescents. Without this appropriate instruction, more than 74% of children entering first grade who are at risk for reading failure will continue to have reading problems into

adulthood (Lyon, 2003). Early structured literacy instruction is also beneficial for English language learners (ELL) (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020).

Decodable Books – An Effective Structured Literacy Instruction Tool

The Right to Read Report recommends that [decodable text and books](#) be utilized when students are acquiring foundational skills in reading, (rather than ‘levelled readers’ currently used in most K-1 classrooms). They are an important part of a structured literacy approach to reading instruction.

Decodable books and text contain words made of letter sounds, spelling and morphological patterns (e.g. prefixes & suffixes) that students have been explicitly taught (following a pre-determined ‘scope and sequence’ of instruction). To make the text more readable, a small number of high-frequency words that have more difficult or unexpected spellings, such as ‘*the*’, ‘*my*’ and ‘*was*’ are also taught and used in the text. As a student learns new parts of the alphabetic code and morphological elements, the vocabulary used in the text expands to include the newly learned ‘graphemes’ and ‘morphemes.’

For instance, structured literacy programmes often start by teaching 5 short vowel sounds (e.g. /a/ in ‘*cat*’), the most common consonant letter sounds and the consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) syllable type (e.g. ‘*cat*’, ‘*pig*’, ‘*run*’). At this stage, decodable text provided for reading practice would only include those letter sounds and CVC patterns, such as “*The rat bit the pig. The bad rat hid in the tin can. The pig bit the cat.*” Words like ‘*any*’, or ‘*water*’ would not be included because they include other pronunciations of the letter <a> that have not been taught yet.

This is usually followed by words that include digraphs (eg. <sh>, <ch>, <th>) and consonant blends, such as ‘*trip*’, ‘*glad*’, ‘*camp*’, and some common suffixes (<s>, <es>, <ing>, <ed>). The consonant blends are often very challenging for students with dyslexia and require lots of reading practice which decodable books can offer.

It is important that the decodable text closely matches the sequence of instruction in letter sounds, morphemes, phonetically irregular words, syllable types and spelling patterns that are taught throughout a structured literacy program, especially for struggling readers.

Decodable Readers vs. Leveled Readers

Decodable text is quite different from ‘levelled readers’ which are used by many reading programs. With levelled readers, children are taught to rely on cues in the text or accompanying pictures to guess unknown words, and/or memorize a list of the most common words found in print. Often predictable and repetitive sentences are used to help students guess the correct words (e.g. “*I get my ruler. I get my*

continued on page 18

...continued from page 17

pencils. I get my shoes. I get my sweater. I go to school.”). Many words in early levelled readers require advanced decoding skills. For example, to successfully decode the word “*pencil*” a child needs to know that the letter <c> represents the /s/ sound when it comes before the letters <e>, <i> or <y>. And in the word ‘*school*’, the <ch> grapheme represents /k/.

When to Use Decodable Text or Books

Using decodable text in the earlier stages of literacy instruction ensures that a student has the skills to read without guessing. They are especially important for students with dyslexia (or any struggling reader) because they provide reading practice using the knowledge of letter sounds that are taught explicitly in a scaffolded approach. Reading decodable text helps students build fluency and gain confidence as they become proficient with word-level reading. Eventually, when most of the code has been explicitly learned, students will be able to read and understand more complex and authentic texts. Decodable books are only needed until the student has mastered the code; after that, they can read anything!

Resources

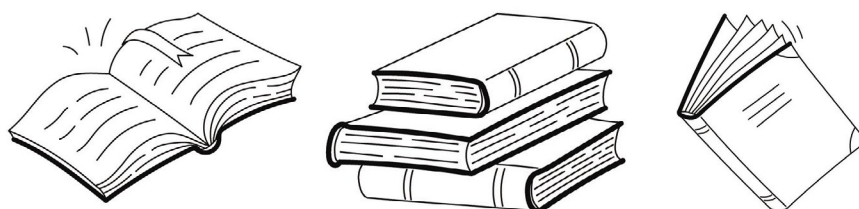
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- Three-cueing System - <https://www.idaontario.com/literacy-in-ontario-public-schools/>
- Structured Literacy Resources & Training - IDA Ontario's affordable on-demand course [Basics of Decoding and Spelling Instruction](https://www.idaontario.com/basics-of-decoding-and-spelling-instruction), which focuses on the decoding aspect of the Reading Rope
- Decodable Books - www.idaontario.com/decodable-readers-and-text **I**

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Duncan Lane

Need for Literacy Related Books: A Publisher's Perspective on Literacy Texts



All texts are literacy texts.

Over the past few decades, literacy pedagogy shifted very little. Consensus-based on anecdotal and empirical evidence continues to support comprehensive literacy as an effective framework for reading instruction. Over these decades, guided reading, one piece of comprehensive literacy seemingly rose to prominence and matching levelled books to kids became a mantra. The balance provided by rich oral language opportunities, provoked through read-alouds and shared reading, seemed to lose importance. So did other reading pedagogies, such as phonemic awareness - hear-say-pronounce, phonological awareness, word study, and phonics.

Over these past few decades, teachers across Ontario accumulated bookrooms of levelled texts, assessment boxes of levelled texts, and intervention kits of levelled texts, that focused on cueing systems and strategy instruction to keep students progressing up levels. And it worked (for many), except when it did not (for some). Ontario's Right to Read report very clearly identified students failed by 'the system' and made recommendations for change.

Some of these recommended changes include the emphasis on intentional phonics instruction in the early years, and as intervention, as necessary.

The 'science of reading', a collective body of research centred on reading instruction has challenged some guided reading enthusiasts by reemphasizing the need to re-focus comprehensive literacy with intentional balance, including explicit phonics instruction. It is widely speculated that

Ontario's new literacy curriculum due in September 2023 will follow suit, focusing on pedagogy that is centred on phonological awareness and phonics, and building the skills necessary for decoding text.

In anticipation of this, and in response to Ontario's Right to Read, Ontario districts and schools have been reviewing, approving, and purchasing sets and collections of decodable texts. Quite different than levelled texts (built to support incremental increases in text predictability, high-frequency word choices, concept load, supportive illustrations and cueing) decodables are based on applying/connecting sounds to letters combined on a page – literally decoding symbols (letters) that combine sounds to make words and meaning, typically follow a structured progression, and avoid supportive cues.

At Scholastic, our education division publishes precise instructional literacy tools; texts levelled for guided reading instruction, texts levelled for structured independent reading and decodable texts for code-based phonics instruction. The ultimate goal of literacy instruction is two-fold; develop critical reading skills that deepen comprehension and instill a lifelong love/appreciation of reading and the world of possibilities unlocked by that passion. Literacy instruction begins with oral language, including rich dynamic and engaging children's literature, brought to life by an animated and thoughtful teacher. The pedagogy surrounding this, and the literacy texts used to achieve desired outcomes rest with the educator. In the hands of great teachers, all texts are literacy texts. ■

Learning Disabilities in Your School Libraries:

Resources from LDAO

As a school librarian in Ontario, you might work with hundreds of students every day. They all have different strengths, needs and interests. They make your job engaging, but it can be difficult to know how to support so many students with different learning profiles. That's why the Learning Disabilities Association of Ontario, with the support of the Ministry of Education, created LD@school – to help educators get the information they need to support their students.

You may already know that students with learning disabilities — or LDs — comprise the largest group in special education, making up approximately 40% of students identified as exceptional by an IPRC (Ministry of Education, 2016). These students are bright and want to do well – they just learn differently. With the right support, these students can learn and can achieve great success at school and beyond.

The LD@school website is a project of the LDAO, supported by the Ontario Ministry of Education's Special Education/Success for All Branch. LD@school is dedicated to providing Ontario educators with information, resources and research related to teaching students with learning disabilities. These free resources act as necessary support for students with LDs but can be beneficial to all students. LD@school features over 300 evidence-based, evidence-informed and practice-informed resources ready for classroom use, and we're always expanding our collection.

LD@school is full of information and inspiration, available 24-7. Choose materials that work in your library or classroom, in a format that suits your needs. Whether it's a video or a webinar, a podcast or an article that you are looking for, you will find resources that align with the Ontario Ministry of Education's policies and programs. Our materials are created by educators and researchers, so you can draw on the experience of experts in the field to gain strategies for teaching and advice to help students reach their full potential.

As a librarian, you have a chance to make a difference in the lives of your students. Not only can you be an advocate for them, but you can support students with LDs as they learn to advocate for themselves and gain confidence in their strengths. Learning disabilities affect one in ten Canadians. Students with LDs can succeed in school and life when they're given the right support. Are you ready to become part of their success story?

The Right to Read Report

On February 28, 2022, the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) released the findings of the Right to Read inquiry and their recommendations for improving literacy instruction in Ontario.

The OHRC's Right to Read report has highlighted flaws in reading instruction in Ontario schools, and brought to light the need for educators in Ontario to adopt evidence-based classroom instruction methodologies and programs to teach students to read. Although the report focuses on word-level reading and associated early reading skills, the recommendations are far-reaching and have implications for supporting students at all levels of education.

In response to the OHRC's Right to Read report, LD@school has worked with educators and researchers to develop a variety of resources, including podcasts, webinars and articles, to help educators understand the importance of evidence-based literacy instruction and how to bring these methodologies into their schools. ■

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RIGHT TO READ

r e s o u r c e s



To view all of LD@school's Right to Read resources, visit: <https://www.ldatschool.ca/tag/right-to-read/>

Popular Resources:

Did You Know? The FACTS about reading
Written by Stacey Rickman

- Learning to read is NOT a natural process; reading must be taught.** Our brains are prepared for speaking and listening, but not for reading and writing. (Shaywitz 2008, Dehaene 2009). While some students will learn to read more easily than others, all students benefit from explicit, systematic, and sequential literacy instruction to "build the reading brain".
- Any student can have trouble learning to read, not just students with learning disabilities such as dyslexia.** All students learn to read at different rates because the acquisition of the foundational skills necessary for reading develops along a continuum (Harris 2020a, Scarborough 2012). Some students require significantly more instruction than others to "crack the code" (Coker 2019).
- Learning to read continues long after Grade 2.** Once students are reading with fluency in later primary grades, reading instruction focuses on an essential element of complex, multi-syllable words, morphology, spelling, building background knowledge, reading comprehension, and writing. Students are constantly learning to read and write with increasing ability well into high school, and beyond.
- We know how to teach reading so that close to 90% of children can become proficient readers.** Reading is the most studied cognitive process in humans. Reading is well understood within the fields of cognitive science, neuroscience, educational psychology, and speech language pathology. When all students are taught to read using evidence-based methods, we can expect 90% of them to experience success (Harris 2020a).

Know the Facts about Reading

Reading is a complex, and often misunderstood, cognitive process in which symbols are decoded to construct meaning.

To view the infographic, visit <https://www.ldatschool.ca/facts-reading/>



Evidence-Based Assessment in the Science of Reading

Rigorous, systematic, and explicit instruction of reading must go hand-in-hand with a comprehensive reading assessment system to allow

educators to adjust instruction to meet the specific needs of students.

To read this article, visit <https://www.ldatschool.ca/evidence-based-assessment-reading/>



Webinar Recording: Evidence-based Early Literacy Practices to Support Every Learner

This webinar discusses the essential components of Early Literacy Instruction: oral language, vocabulary,

phoneme awareness and alphabetic knowledge.

To view this webinar recording, visit <https://www.ldatschool.ca/webinar-evidence-based-early-lit1/> or the LD@school YouTube channel



The Science of Reading Part 1: The Five Pillars

In this episode of the TalkLD podcast, Stacey Rickman, SLP and Lawrence Barns, President & CEO of the LDAO, discuss the current state of literacy instruction in Ontario. Stacey introduces the five pillars of reading, the core skills

necessary to become a skilled reader, that have emerged from decades of research.

To listen to this episode of the TalkLD podcast, visit <https://www.ldatschool.ca/science-of-reading-5-pillars/>

Collaborate with us:

Do you know of a specific strategy, practice or approach that has worked well in supporting the needs of students with learning disabilities at school?

At LD@school we know that our best resources for providing supports to educators come from educators themselves! We are always looking for collaborators from Ontario school boards to write articles, participate in videos, present webinars or develop learning modules.

Email info@ldatschool.ca or visit <https://www.ldatschool.ca/ldschooll/work-with-us/> to take the first step to share your knowledge with educators across the province.

Media Literacy in an Amazing, Terrifying, Brave New World

When I first began applying to Bachelor of Education programs, I was shocked to learn that my undergraduate degree — Communication Studies — was not accepted as a teachable subject. How could this not be taught in high schools? We are saturated with media in myriad forms, all vying for influence over us, more so now than at any point in human history. Shouldn't students have the skills to navigate this brave new world?

Now, almost 15 years into my career, that initial rejection has been replaced with a rock-solid foundation of research-based lessons and advocacy from MediaSmarts. Since 1994, MediaSmarts has provided Canadian educators at the elementary and secondary levels with hundreds of lesson plans, articles, presentations, virtual workshops and interactive games related to media studies. Never has it been more critical for students to be digitally literate citizens; MediaSmarts provides everything an educator needs to get them there.

Recently I had the opportunity to preview two new MediaSmarts resources for a Grade 10 Academic English class. The first was *Consensus or Conspiracy?*, a resource package that addresses the massive misinformation campaigns surrounding both Covid-19 and the vaccines produced to mitigate it. It uses guided questions, an online game and jigsaw mats to help students understand the process of scientific consensus, the characteristics of a conspiracy and how the two apply to digital content. The package also included rubrics, a “how to” guide for teachers, additional resources and consent letters for parents.

The second was a fascinating card game called #foryou. In it, one player is “VidYou” — analogous to TikTok or another social media video hosting site. The others are consumers. VidYou uses an algorithm to make as much money as possible via advertising. The goal is for the consumers to understand the algorithm presented by VidYou. #foryou is certainly more complicated than Go Fish or Uno, but once the players understand the process, the game picks up and creates meaningful, concretized learning experiences.

My Grade 10 Academic English students not only enjoyed but appreciated these lessons. Media literacy had rarely, if ever, been addressed in their classes before this; whatever lessons

they did have certainly weren't as timely or as relevant as *Consensus or Conspiracy?* or presented in an interesting format as #foryou. This hunger to learn more is difficult to come by in a post-lockdown classroom. Media Studies is the rare subject that engages with the texts students most often see themselves in, and feel relevant to — in my opinion, that's why they care about the concept, and why it matters so much.

Our world is increasingly moderated by and understood through media relationships. Social media has gone from keeping in touch with friends to influencing international elections. Media portrayals of race, gender, religion and sexuality have sparked national reckonings and civil unrest. More and more of our personal data is being harvested and sold by telecommunications behemoths, usually without our knowledge or consent. Fewer and fewer independent, local media organizations are surviving in this climate, being bought up and vertically integrated by multi-billion dollar companies with partisan agendas. Youth spend more and more time online, creating incredible content, being subjected to ethically suspect information and disengaging from — or, perhaps, redefining — “real life”.

Our students aren't just entering this world — they've been in it since birth. The importance of media studies has moved far beyond “let's make a poster advertising the best toothpaste”. Media literacy is a critical tool in understanding how we are constantly being pushed and pulled in different directions, towards divergent goals, by forces that we do not fully understand. Media studies are about not only understanding our relationships with media but also defending ourselves from unwanted influences and actively engaging as informed digital citizens. Organizations like MediaSmarts have been arguing this point for years, and equipping educators with the resources they need to confidently address the shifting media literacy landscape. It is more pertinent in 2022 than it ever has been before; our students deserve the chance to educate themselves on the new, amazing, terrifying and brave new world they live in. ■

Tim King

Make Your LLC the Centre for Digital Literacy with the ICTC



I left a career in information technology to become a teacher back in 2003 and I've been advocating for improved digital literacy in both staff and students from day one. This fall I was seconded by [the Information and Communications Technology Council of Canada](#) as an education

coordinator. In this role, my job is to support educators in improving digital skills development in our schools.

I first became involved with ICTC when I discovered their [Canadian-focused career statistics](#). [My computer engineering program](#) ran out of our rural, composite high school, though programs like these are rare in Ontario. Having worked in the industry, I always approached our technology skills development from a pragmatic angle. ICTC is primarily a [research organization](#) and having Canadian data for students to accurately assess their career prospects was key to our approach.

In 2017 I went to the site to pull the latest monthly figures when I saw a notice for “CyberTitan”, the new Canada-wide student cyber security competition that works in partnership with the U.S. Air Force Association’s international [CyberPatriot](#) program. We got our heads around the competition and by the final round we felt pretty good about our rookie year — then we got an invite to the [national finals in Fredericton](#).

Most of my student team had never flown or left Ontario before, so this went firmly in the category of a ‘life-changing experience’. Up against top urban STEM specialist schools from across Canada, we managed a top-five finish out of the ten teams at nationals. We came away buzzing and this has since evolved into a dynasty. In 2019 we were the [first top all-female team to attend nationals](#) in Ottawa

and since then our rural high school has been a seven-time national finalist. If we can do it, anyone can. CyberTitan is an immersive, hands-on opportunity to learn real-world defensive I.T. skills. Students work through infected and damaged virtual machine images, doing digital forensics to figure out where the malware got in and repairing the damage done. It’s a collaborative, live-scoring event that keeps students coming back year after year. Teams of Grades 4 to 6 students participate in rounds that start in October and end in January. Divisions for intermediate (Grades 5 to 8) and high school (Grades 9 to 12) provide junior students with a gentler introduction and CyberPatriot itself goes out of its way to provide mentors and support to ensure you enjoy your season. The cyber-swap is first rate too! Librarians would make the perfect coaches for this competition and participation garners positive press and places your LLC squarely in the center of digital skills development in your school.

From CyberTitan we expanded into [ICTC’s Focus On I.T. program](#). FIT acknowledges student digital skills development in an education system that often goes out of its way to [ignore them](#). As a nationally recognized program, FIT certificates are accepted coast to coast to coast, and give students who have committed to improving their digital fluency much-needed acknowledgement. The FIT program also aligns tightly with [Ontario’s Specialist High Skills Major program](#). Why every ICT SHSM program in the province isn’t connecting to FIT is a strange question to have to ask.



ICTC is currently expanding the FIT program with a new middle-school focused program called [myFIT \(middle years FIT\)](#).

Engaging girls in STEAM (science, technology engineering, arts, maths) opportunities continues to be a problem in Ontario – I was lucky to keep one or two girls through my senior program in any year. When I attended a Grade 8 Skills Ontario Lego robotics competition a few years ago I was stunned to see the majority of competitors were girls. I hope

that myFIT engages these girls in STEAM possibilities before the gender norms in Ontario high schools take them away.

This year ICTC, in partnership with the [KnowledgeFlow CyberSafety Foundation](#), ran Canada's [National CyberDay](#) on Oct. 18. We were thrilled with over 2000 students and educators signing up to ask questions from professional hackers and cyber-defenders working in government and industry, along with the chance to explore vetted interactive online resources. As great as these numbers were, there are almost seven million students in Canada, so this means that the vast majority weren't participating in CyberDay, in the middle of [Cybersecurity Awareness Month](#).

We live in a time of intense online communication. Ontario has just made networked eLearning mandatory in high schools but does little to engage with critical digital media literacies around the use of these technologies. The moment we ask students to pick up network-connected technology it should be incumbent upon us to teach the cybersafety and digital hygiene needed to operate it safely and effectively.

I just returned from the Canadian Library Association's [Treasure Mountain Canada](#) in Vancouver and realized that librarians there are firmly focused on picking up the mantle of digital literacy in their library learning commons. There is a belief that coding is digital literacy, but coding is the [tip of the iceberg](#) in terms of current and emerging digital skills students will need when they graduate.

I first laid hands on a Commodore PET computer in my middle school library in Mississauga way back in 1981, and that moment launched a career. Libraries have always been the place where emerging mediums and media are first tackled in education. As information management specialists, librarians are the ones who make sense of emerging information technologies. ICTC is eager to assist library professionals with this monumental task. Reach out and we can connect you to vetted, secure, online resources and opportunities that will help both staff and students navigate our rapidly evolving digital world. You are not alone in this. ■

Links

ICTC Homepage: <https://www.ictc-ctic.ca/>

Monthly Canadian digital careers data: <https://www.ictc-ctic.ca/research/monthly-infographics/>

Our local high school's computer engineering program: <https://sites.google.com/ugcloud.ca/cwdhscomputertechnology/home>

ICTC's Research Arm: <https://www.ictc-ctic.ca/research/>

CyberTitan: Canada's student cybersecurity competition: <https://www.cybertitan.ca/>

CyberPatriot, the U.S. Air Force Association's international student cybersecurity competition: <https://www.uscyberpatriot.org/>

Our Ministry-funded action research project into virtual reality use in the classroom: <https://temkblog.blogspot.com/2017/07/replies-to-our-moe-experiential-student.html>

Reflections on our first national CyberTitan finals in Fredericton: <https://temkblog.blogspot.com/2018/05/i-just-got-back-from-canadian-national.html>

Our first national finalist all-female team. Girls in STEAM continues to be an equity issue in Ontario education: <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/fergus-terabytches-cyber-security-cybertitan-national-1.5081634>

ICTC's Digital Youth program includes FIT, Focus on Information Technology, a nationally recognized certification: <https://www.digitalyouth.ca/programs/fit/>

myFIT (middle years FIT) opens up digital pathways to middle school students: <https://www.digitalyouth.ca/programs/myfit/>

Treasure Mountain Canada, the Canadian School Library Association's research symposium, raised many challenging questions about digital skills development in our school: <https://temkblog.blogspot.com/2022/10/2022-tmc7-research-symposium-table.html>

Ontario's Specialist High Skills Major Program should be more collaborative and future-focused: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/specialist-high-skills-major>

The Knowledgeflow Cybersafety Foundation: <https://knowledgeflow.org/about/>

National CyberDay: <https://cyberday.ca/> vetted resources and a chance to ask questions of industry experts such as white hat hackers and Canadian Forces cyber-defenders.

The Canadian School Library Association's Treasure Mountain Canada research symposium: <https://tmc.canadianschoollibraries.ca/>

Supporting Food Literacy Education in Ontario Schools

Addressing global environmental and health crises

Globally, food systems (i.e., the entire food chain from production to waste) are contributing to environmental degradation and a third of greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, rates of chronic diseases that are diet-related (e.g., type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancers) are staggeringly high (e.g., unhealthy diets have been estimated to cost Canada \$13.8 billion per year). Food skills are declining with the increased availability of processed foods and fewer opportunities to learn these important skills at home. In response, analysts are calling for more awareness of food systems and behaviours for sustainable diets, and many public health officials are examining how food skills can help in improving health-related dietary outcomes. An avenue to address these large-scale issues is food literacy education. Food literacy, broadly speaking, is our knowledge and skills related to food. While many scholars discuss food literacy as a way to improve individual health, it also encompasses knowledge and skillsets for sustainable food systems outcomes through policy and sustainable diets. Thus, given the potentially broad impact of food literacy education, it is evident that this is an essential knowledge and skillset.

Food Literacy is in Ontario Education

Interest in food literacy is growing and it is rapidly becoming an action area in Ontario policy on multiple fronts. For example, in 2013, the Government of Ontario introduced the Local Food Act (2013), which aims to “improve food literacy in respect of local food” to have more resilient local food systems. More recently, a private member’s bill was introduced in October 2020 entitled Bill 216 – Food Literacy for Students Act. This bill intended to make experiential food literacy mandatory in curriculum guidelines from Grades 1 to 12. While Bill 216 did not pass before the 2022 provincial election, food literacy was included in the new 2022 Science and Technology curriculum (Grades 1 to 9). In the new curriculum, knowledge and skills related to food literacy: “wide-ranging, from students developing an understanding of where food comes from, including the importance of locally sourced food and how it is grown and prepared, to students investigating the importance of biodiversity in agriculture.” Thus, a food systems approach to food literacy is now incorporated into this curriculum. In addition to the new Science and Technology curriculum, food literacy is present in

Physical Education and Health courses, often in the format of nutrition and food guidance education, as well as in secondary school Technical Education (Hospitality and Tourism) and the Social Sciences and Humanities (Food and Nutrition, Food and Culture, Food and Healthy Living, Nutrition and Health) curricula. In brief, food literacy education in Ontario curricula and schools is broad ranging from food systems, nutrition, health and hands-on education. This wide-ranging approach to teaching and learning about food begs for resources to make these curricular goals a reality.

Supporting food literacy education in libraries

A way the school learning commons can support food literacy education is by making resources available for teachers, especially as food literacy expectations are increasingly integrated across the Ontario school curricula, as seen with the new Science and Technology curriculum. An example of food literacy being supported in a library setting was achieved by the Ottawa Public Library with its A La Carte food literacy program. This program was run with the aim “to raise awareness about how we are connected to the food we eat and grow.” They did this by increasing their collection of food-related resources, hosting events to promote food literacy, developing digital storytelling of food traditions and skills and increasing partnerships between the Ottawa Public Library and food and/or health-related organizations. Thus, opportunities in libraries to contribute to food literacy education are plentiful. Community dietitians, local chefs, farmers and other food systems experts are often thrilled to help and can offer many opportunities for hands-on learning as well.

An essential literacy to empower Ontarians now and in the future

Food provides us with many opportunities to learn about our health and well-being as well as the world around us, and it can help make learning fun and tangible. Given that skills have been degraded for generations and that the majority of citizens, especially those in urban areas, are further and further removed from food systems, the need for promoting and supporting food literacy education is more critical than ever. Food literacy has the potential to empower children and youth to become engaged, responsible and healthy citizens. We have a great opportunity to help in this empowerment. ■

Ethical Literacy

Shelagh Straughan

At the beginning of this year, two of our academic leaders led an activity in the chapel where students were asked to weigh in (thumbs up / thumbs down) on several issues related to academic integrity. It was fascinating to see 500+ students expressing confidence in some areas (“is it okay to copy work from a friend and pass it off as your own?”) and less so in others (“is it okay to skip the citation for something from the Internet that you put into your own words?”).

This activity was a lot of fun and seems to have “stuck” with the students. It also got me thinking about how much academic integrity aligns with ethical literacy. Those of us in the library all spend a great deal of time and energy helping our students search for and use information with care. From finding the right keywords to detailing citations, we promote information-seeking behaviour that is thoughtful and scholarly. It is a shame, however, for this behaviour to be isolated in any way. I think there is enormous potential for us to better connect what students learn in the library context (ethics as academic integrity) to what they do in other areas of their lives (ethics in life). For example, consider the definition of ethical literacy as offered by the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport:

“The ability to collect and evaluate information, reflect on one’s own moral values, identify the potential outcomes of various options and their impacts, make reasoned decisions about which options align with one’s values, act consistently with one’s values, explain one’s decisions, and take responsibility for one’s actions.”

This definition is all-encompassing and unexpectedly reflects not only our library practices but our school honour code and perhaps yours as well. It is also extraordinarily broad and open to interpretation, so I thought it might be fun to play with this.

Where do we see ethical literacy in action in our libraries? I looked at this through the lens of the definition above and landed on three things:

- Our instruction in search strategies & source evaluation provides opportunities for students (and staff!) to “collect and evaluate information.”
- Our guidelines regarding attribution/citation not only help budding researchers avoid plagiarism but also allow them space for “(reflection) on one’s moral values, a chance to act consistently with one’s values and the nudge to take responsibility for one’s actions.”
- Our programs, with activities such as book club and passive-like book displays, touch on the parts of the definition related to decision-making. Learning how to articulate why we read what we read is such a big step toward growth as a reader. Providing opportunities for a reader to identify the appeal factors in their reading material is a lifelong skill. One step further is recognizing where the work of Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop (mirrors/windows/doors) fits in with our selections: do we read only that which reflects our experience, or do we intentionally seek out certain genres or titles that allow us to embody another perspective?

Our libraries are natural incubators for avid readers, budding writers, keen researchers — and the ethically literate. We already know that a lot of what we do extends beyond not only the library but academia. Perhaps this is due in some small way to the fostering of ethical literacy while in our care. ■




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