What Is English Language Arts?

Relationship between English Language Arts and Literacy

In all school subjects and in all facets of life, students are engaged in literate behaviours. Current understandings of literacy suggest that learners participate in multiple literacy communities and that each community has particular ways of thinking, doing, and using and creating text. Learners need to be flexible in their literacy learning in order to be active participants in a variety of communities both in school and in other places in their life. In all disciplines or fields of study, students should be engaged in literacy learning specific to each discipline. In science, for example, students learn about the texts that are authentic to that discipline and the particular ways of thinking about those texts. Reading for historical accuracy requires different processes than reading scientific data in order to make a judgment. Similarly, ELA has particular texts and particular ways of considering language and the world. English language arts recognizes that the particular discipline of ELA has both its own way of thinking and the responsibility to support the literacy learning that transfers through and between other disciplines. Literacy practices from all fields as well as those that are particular to ELA offer multiple ways for learners to engage with, connect with, and respond to their world.

In the Kindergarten to Grade 12 ELA curriculum, the word *texts* refers to the variety of resources that we use to make meaning. These include aural/oral, visual, print, digital, physical, gestural, and spatial texts, and the various combinations of these. For example, a news video could have gestural, oral, visual, and print components simultaneously. Many different objects are imbued with meaning and used for different purposes depending on how people create or attend to them.

Language and literacies are symbolic socio-cultural systems through which human beings create and share meanings. They do so by using the conventional meaning-making and meaning-sharing practices within their socio-cultural groups, while at the same time inventing new ones.

Guiding Principles

How English language arts is represented in the Kindergarten to Grade 12 curriculum and enacted in classrooms is anchored by guiding principles. Educators are called upon to interpret and live out curriculum through these principles and reflect on implications for their planning.

Language and literacies are central to all learning.

Language and literacies are tools for making meaning across any learning context—in and out of school. An ability to work across languages and literacies opens paths to social participation and learning. Today's learners need a broad communicative repertoire in order to interact with and navigate multiple forms of text and social contexts. This repertoire provides multiple ways to participate. Language particular to academic fields (e.g., the ways we make and communicate meaning in science) and fields and experiences beyond school (e.g., ways we make and communicate meaning within social groups and communities) helps us to participate more deeply. Understanding and using the particular language, ways of thinking, and the social norms and practices within particular contexts helps us to actively participate and engage more deeply.

Reflection:

- How do I design learning experiences so that learners have meaningful opportunities to use language and literacies in all facets of learning?

- How do I model and help surface the multiple ways that we use language and literacies in learning and life?

- How do I support learners as they notice, name, and strategically make decisions about the language and literacies they use within and across contexts?

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Language and literacies are context dependent.

Language differences are important. Multiple ways of knowing and seeing the world, multiple modes for making and communicating meaning, multiple variations of languages and dialects are critical to an evolving and equitable society.

There is a lot of divergence in the social languages we use. How we use language will shift as we navigate different contexts. For example, our practices will potentially be different in the context of a community feast compared to those on social media. How language and literacies are situated in contexts makes them valid and meaningful. Navigating cultural context, purposes, and audiences is therefore critical. This requires users to be discerning and thoughtful decision makers. When language and literacies are understood as situated, it is also understood that conventions will differ as well.

Reflection:

- How do I make space in learning environments to honour and celebrate the multiple ways that learners and communities make and communicate meaning?

- How do I harness knowledge, experiences, cultures, and languages of learners and their families to support and deepen the learning of all?

- How do I recognize and help others to recognize that the ways we use language and literacies will change based on context?

- How do I support learners in becoming discerning decision makers in relation to language and literacies?

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Language and literacy learning is complex, continuous, and recursive.

Language and literacies are not something that one either has or does not have. Rather, language and literacies are multiple, dynamic, and malleable. Language and literacies are mobilized in multiple ways and in various contexts. Authentic language and literacy experiences engage learners in practice—drawing upon multiple skills, knowledge, strategies, processes, and resources all at once. Language and literacy learning is ongoing as we embrace and navigate new learning and contexts. Language and literacy learning is recursive. Through the process of returning to and reflecting back on learning, learning can then grow, deepen, and transform. Recursive learning facilitates deep, rich understanding and involves "building and rebuilding ideas in multiple contexts" (Shwartz, Sadler, Sonnert, and Tai 801). Reflection is key as it changes the way learning may be understood and opens up new learning

pathways. This process is generative, non-linear, and complex. Such learning does not always grow incrementally from simple to complex understandings, but rather can be characterized as an expanding, changing web of dynamic interactions, relationships, and experiences (Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning 57).

Reflection:

- How do my choices related to teaching, assessment, and resources reflect the idea of literacy as complex, continuous, and recursive?

- How do I provide opportunities for learners to broaden, deepen, and transform their language and literacies?

- How might planning, teaching, and assessment capture learning as expansive?

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Language and literacies develop differently for each individual.

Children and youth have unique and diverse ways of developing and expanding their language and literacies. There is not one singular model that represents learning development. Our learning environments are therefore rich in diversity, where learners and teachers share multiple ways of knowing

and diverse backgrounds and identities. Each learner, therefore, has a different way of "seeing" and processing. This adds depth, complexity, and opportunity in learning communities and requires a broad range of ways of tapping into, surfacing, expanding, and deepening learning. Educators are called upon to imagine rich, generous, and inclusive learning spaces and experiences in which all learners engage deeply and meaningfully. David Jardine offers the following analogy:

> When I go out into the garden with my young son, I don't send him off to a developmentally appropriate garden. I take him to the same garden where I am going to work. Now, once we get there and get to the work that place needs, of course, each of us will work as each of us is able. We are not identical in ability, experience, strength, patience, and so on. But both of us will be working in the same place doing some part of the real work that the garden requires. This garden[,] and the real work it requires, is itself rich and generous and multiple and varied enough to embrace our differences. This place, this topography, this topic, has room for us both. It is a place where we can gather together in our differences and work in ways that each of us has something to offer to this place that is irreplaceable. (Jardine, "Nature of Inquiry")

Reflection:

- How do I plan rich learning experiences that are inclusive, generative, and multi-faceted?

- How do I learn about and harness the different ways of learning/knowing in my classroom?

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Language and literacy learning and use are social.

Language and literacies offer us powerful tools and processes for communication and collaboration. The collaborative nature of language and literacy communities nurtures positive relationships and interactions. Even when interacting independently with texts, we are interacting with the creators of these texts. Language and literacies allow us to have, explore, share, and change our voice. Conversation and discussion in multiple forms are key to making meaning and creating vibrant learning communities.

Michele Jacobsen comments on the importance of collaboration: "Outside of formal schooling, almost all learning occurs in complex social environments . . . teachers who design for peer collaboration and individual reflection on learning cultivate stronger learning outcomes."

Ah-Young Song notes, "Networking with classmates, instructors, local partners, and wider communities through physical and digital environments can facilitate meaningful knowledge production as individuals learn to communicate with those who have shared or diverging interests, backgrounds, and experiences" (19).

Reflection:

- How do I create meaningful and ample opportunity for learners to build relationships and engage in deep talk with others?

- How do I support collaboration in my classroom?

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Language and literacy demands are evolving.

In today's world, language and literacies are defined as much more than the ability to speak a language or to read and write print text. The texts that fill the world of today's learners are multimodal, and combine print, digital, physical, aural/oral, gestural, spatial, and visual modes, along with many more. In this shifting and complex world, language and literacies are interconnected and codependent. We now have to navigate the multiple and particular uses of language and literacies in various contexts. What is deemed important (or foundational) for language and literacy has to capture the relevance, breadth, and depth of meaning for today's learners. Reading and writing print have relevance in today's language and literacies, but must exist within a more inclusive and rich understanding of language and literacies. Today's learners are expected to innovate, take risks, and negotiate diversity and uncertainty. This requires learners to have the capacity and capability to navigate multiple uses of language and literacies and a wide range of texts and contexts. This requires educators to reflect on approaches to the teaching and learning of language and literacies. As Marjorie Siegel says, "Language arts education can no longer ignore the way that our social, cultural, and economic worlds now require facility with text and practices involving the full range of representational modes" (65).

Reflection:

- How do I select, use, provide access to, and support the creation of multiple forms of text in my classroom?

- How do I harness the power of multiple modes to make meaning?

- How do I ensure that learners are able to innovate, take risks, and negotiate diversity, ambiguity, and change?

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Language and literacy experiences inform and influence our developing sense of self.

Language and literacies and identity are inextricably linked. Our language and literacy experiences both affect and are affected by how we define ourselves and how we construct personal identities. Limiting and narrow definitions of language and literacies can marginalize individuals and social groups. This curriculum framework is grounded in the belief that variety, divergence, and agency are critical factors for thriving learning communities. Each community member brings important and unique funds of knowledge, ancestries, and wisdom. Multiple modes of language become the ways that we express who we are (e.g., one's accent, vocabulary, gestures, images shared, ways we make meaning, tones). We explore, negotiate, and express personal identity through creating, using, and responding to texts and ideas. We reflect on ways that experiences do or do not reflect and shape personal, cultural, and societal beliefs and issues. Today's learners are, in fact, active users, participants, creators, and discerning consumers in their worlds. Their everyday language and literacy experiences require selectivity and flexibility. Learners decide with what, how, and when they engage. Our learners also find, join, and create affinity spaces and affinity groups where they engage with others in relation to shared passions and interests.

Reflection:

- How do I learn about and tap into the multiple identities of learners in my classroom/school?
- How do I support and build agency in learners?
- How do I support learners as thoughtful decision makers in language and literacies?
- How do I ensure meaningful engagement for learners?

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Language and literacies are enacted through inextricably connected practices.

Authentic literacy experiences draw from a range of practices all at once. Even our youngest learners use a range of language and literacy practices to make and communicate meaning. In a play scenario, for example, children make decisions about oral language conventions (e.g., role-playing gestures, tone of voice, word choice, and talk cues). They communicate meaning about their world (e.g., by creating and recreating stories). They use a range of modes and imagine different ways to create, and they may voice their values, concerns, and issues through the stories they tell. Educators notice, respond to, and plan for opportunities to support the development and deepening of learners' language and literacies. In the context of meaningful experiences, this teaching and learning is intentional and focused.

As Christine Leland and Jerome Harste say, "A good language arts program is one that expands the communication potential of all learners through the

orchestration and use of multiple ways of knowing for purposes of ongoing interpretation and inquiry into the world" (339).

Reflection:

- How do I ensure that learners have opportunity to meaningfully engage in practices?

- How do I support focused and intentional teaching within meaningful language and literacy experiences?

- How do learners draw upon multiple ways of knowing and resources to learn?

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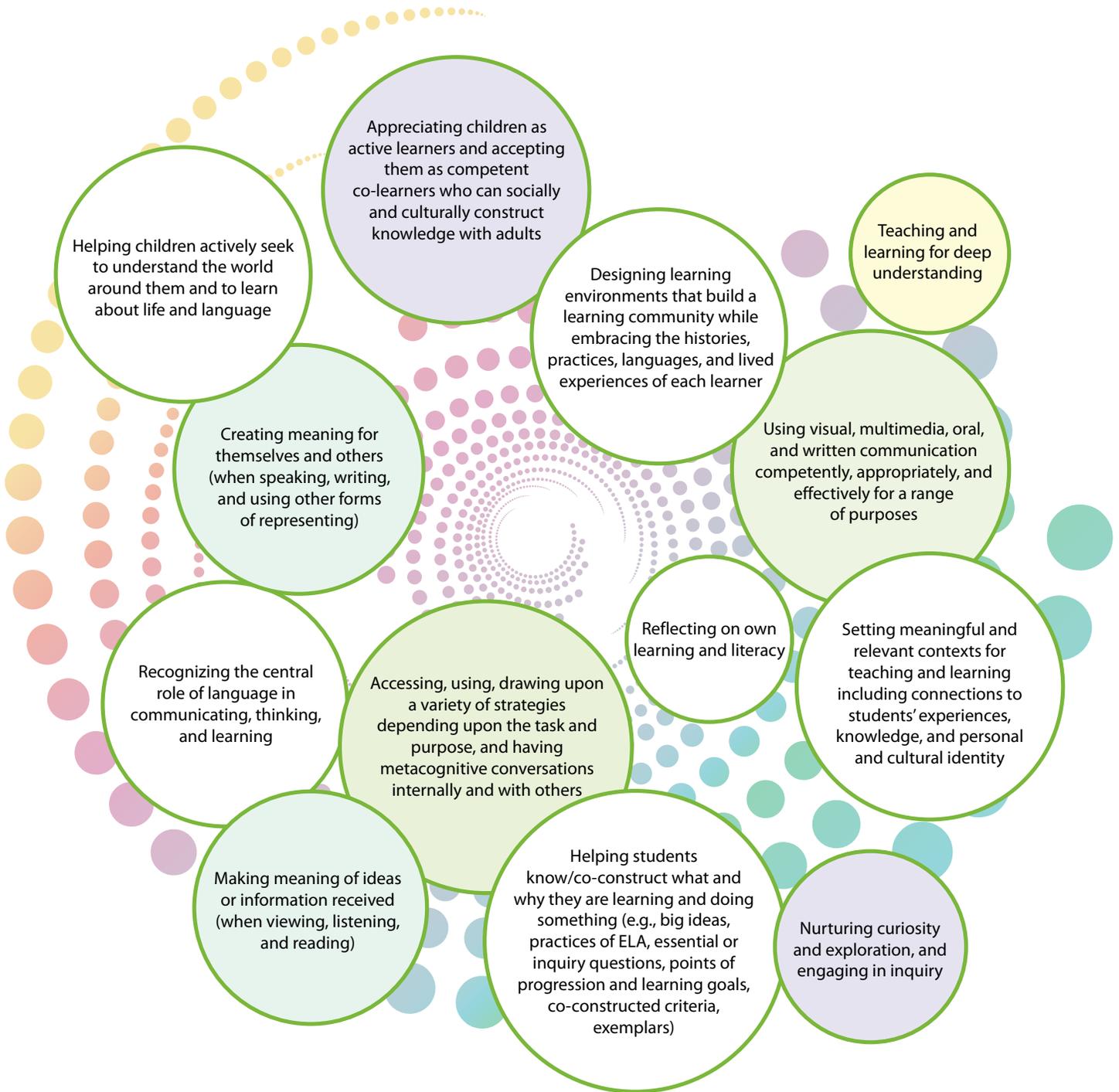
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Powerful Practice in Kindergarten to Grade 12 English Language Arts

Powerful English language arts education in Kindergarten to Grade 12 is defined by understandings and beliefs about education informed by current research, theory, and practice. As educators, we never stop learning, and are constantly evolving, expanding, and deepening our teaching practices. There may be many other characteristics of powerful practices beyond those represented on the following page. Through deep, ongoing professional learning, inquiry, and reflective practice with the Kindergarten to Grade 12 English language arts curriculum and powerful teaching, learning, and assessment practices, teachers can help all learners develop and deepen their competencies and confidence as language users. "To inquire effectively, we have to be open-minded, persistent, self-critical, reflective, and empathetic to the positions of others; we have to allow ourselves to be uncertain, to stand back and examine our practice, and then use what we find as a basis for change," note the editors of *Education Gazette* in their "refresher" on teaching as inquiry.

Powerful Practice in Kindergarten to Grade 12 English Language Arts

Appreciating children as active learners and accepting them as competent co-learners who can socially and culturally construct knowledge with adults

Helping children actively seek to understand the world around them and to learn about life and language

Designing learning environments that build a learning community while embracing the histories, practices, languages, and lived experiences of each learner

Teaching and learning for deep understanding

Creating meaning for themselves and others (when speaking, writing, and using other forms of representing)

Using visual, multimedia, oral, and written communication competently, appropriately, and effectively for a range of purposes

Reflecting on own learning and literacy

Setting meaningful and relevant contexts for teaching and learning including connections to students' experiences, knowledge, and personal and cultural identity

Recognizing the central role of language in communicating, thinking, and learning

Accessing, using, drawing upon a variety of strategies depending upon the task and purpose, and having metacognitive conversations internally and with others

Making meaning of ideas or information received (when viewing, listening, and reading)

Helping students know/co-construct what and why they are learning and doing something (e.g., big ideas, practices of ELA, essential or inquiry questions, points of progression and learning goals, co-constructed criteria, exemplars)

Nurturing curiosity and exploration, and engaging in inquiry

Adapted from Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. *English Language Arts 3*. Regina, SK: Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010. Adapted with permission.

Language is central to all learning. Through the English language arts, learners become flexible, reflective, and critical thinkers who are able to interact with complex ideas about themselves, the world, and society. The English language arts encourage creativity and imagination. English language arts is a discipline or field in itself, while also acting as a support for learning that transfers through and among the other disciplines.

English language arts enables learners to increase the complexity and sophistication in the ways that they make sense of language, understand language as a system, and use language to explore and design, while being aware of the power of language and their and others' agency. Through comprehending, communicating, and critical thinking within rich learning experiences, learners develop and deepen competency in using language to meet personal and academic goals.

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The English Language Arts Learning Landscape

In the Kindergarten to Grade 12 English language arts curriculum framework, the landscape metaphor is used to convey the understanding that learning is dynamic and always in the process of being constructed. New ways of thinking about curriculum involve a "shift in the images we use, away from knowledge pictured as fragmented pieces put together, one piece at a time, in a linear fashion on an assembly line, to an image of knowledge as a complex organic network organized into living fields, territories or 'landscapes' " (WNCP 6).

English language arts in Manitoba is conceived as a learning landscape that represents a space for pedagogical possibility. In this space, learners, in relationship with other learners, educators, Elders, and the larger community, interact and learn together in the dynamic, complex, living field of English language arts.

The English language arts landscape provides multiple ways for diverse learners to enter and engage.

English Language Arts Goals

The goals of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 English language arts curriculum are to give students opportunities to

- practise within the field of English language arts as full participants
- develop flexible and versatile ways of thinking and using language to meet personal, social, and academic needs
- build a sense of self, identity, community, and the world
- sustain a lifelong sense of curiosity, a passion for learning, and an appreciation of the power and beauty of literature, language, and multiple forms of text

What Grounds the Design of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 ELA Curriculum?

The following graphic represents a large scale view of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 ELA curriculum—its conceptual framework. It represents the relationships and the environments that support English language arts learning. Subsequent pages explain each "part of the whole."

The English Language Arts Conceptual Framework

Practices

- Language as Sense Making
- Language as System
- Language as Exploration and Design
- Language as Power and Agency

Assessment as, for, of learning

Multiple forms of text

Competency

Deep flexible thinking

Meaningful contexts

Communities

Powerful teaching and learning

Elements

- access, use, build, and refine schema
- select and use a variety of strategies
- become aware of and articulate the ways that one engages with text
- recognize, apply, and adapt rules and conventions
- identify, analyze, and apply understandings of whole-part-whole relationships
- research and study topics and ideas
- interpret and integrate information and ideas from multiple texts and sources
- manage information and ideas
- invent, take risks, and reflect to create possibilities
- recognize and analyze inequities, viewpoints, and bias in texts and ideas
- investigate complex moral and ethical issues and conflicts
- contemplate the actions that can be taken, consider alternative viewpoints, and contribute other perspectives

[Read write listen speak view represent]

[Reflective Practice]

[Read write listen speak view represent]

Teachers as co-designers and facilitators of learning

Design learning experiences around practices

Focus teaching/learning around elements and/or descriptors

Observe and gather evidence (with support of descriptors)

Learners as co-designers of learning

Use practices in meaningful contexts

Enhance practices through elements and/or descriptors

Show learning in multiple ways (descriptors)

Reflect on learning using descriptors, bodies of evidence, and dimensions of learning.

Reflect on learning using evidence and co-constructed criteria.

Communicate and report on learning.

Competency, Communities, and Meaningful Contexts

The way that we view and position the learners in our schools and classrooms has an impact on the way that we approach teaching and learning. Members of our learning communities must continuously reflect on what we understand about learners as well as what we understand about learning.

Students, teachers and other school personnel, families, and communities work together to value, promote, and develop language and literacies that are necessary to be active participants in all areas of their lives. We recognize that each member of the community has competencies for living, working, and learning in meaningful contexts and communities.

Competency

The Manitoba Kindergarten to Grade 12 English language arts curriculum is grounded in the belief that all students have and continue to develop competencies as literacy learners. Competencies are

- deep and multi-faceted ways of knowing, doing, and being
- representative of the ways in which knowledge is held, passed on, worked with, and created in the world
- owned by the learner as a transferable tool for problem solving and decision making
- changeable over time to meet the needs of particular contexts

As previously stated, this document defines language and literacies as "symbolic socio-cultural systems through which human beings create and share meanings" (5). This means learners come to school as literate beings having experienced and engaged in language learning since birth. These experiences may be similar to the ones that they will engage in at school or they may be very different. They may be in a different language or be representative of different values, beliefs, and cultures than the dominant school context. The Kindergarten to Grade 12 English language arts curriculum supports these learners in building upon and developing their competencies, and working on those competencies that are specific for success in school, academic literacies, and life experiences beyond school. Students will flexibly and dynamically draw upon their ways of knowing, including their other languages, as they make and communicate meaning in English language arts. This drawing upon multiple languages and funds of knowledge is an effective strategy often used by students.

Anne Dyson argues that

> As educators, . . . we have a particular responsibility to work toward the respectful inclusion of our children as developing learners. In order to see and hear our children's strengths and weaknesses, we must move outside the narrow image of the 'ideal' child, and we must dismantle the myth of the singular path to language arts success. (as cited in Woods, Comber, and Iyer 48)

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Living, Working, and Learning in Meaningful Contexts and Communities

Considering contexts means recognizing the circumstances in which an event occurs or an idea is formed. The context frames the way that ideas and events are fully understood and considered. For example, a student who lives in a farming community, a student who is a Canadian newcomer from a tropical climate, and a student living in an urban setting may have different understandings and vocabulary around "seasons." The relevance, importance, and value that each of these students bring to the learning about seasons also affects the motivation to learn more.

Students need opportunities to develop, build upon, and deepen competencies within meaningful contexts or rich learning experiences. The Manitoba Kindergarten to Grade 12 English language arts curriculum considers English language arts learning to be done in rich and complex contexts/experiences rather than as a series of skills, strategies, or decontextualized content.

The context or experience provides focus for learning and gives students opportunities to explore significant and complex ideas about the world while enacting the practices of ELA. For example, students do not learn about "apples," but they may consider the idea of apples within a context of an environmental lens in which they would have opportunities to explore ways in which apples are considered as a sustainable crop.

Contexts or experiences can be developed within classrooms, but it is also important for teachers to value the cultural and social contexts in which students live and to use these contexts to help students make meaning and understand how they are positioning themselves in relation to the world and their learning.

Som Naidu says:

> [L]earning is a process of developing understanding through problem solving and critical reflection, and that learning is most effective and efficient when learners are engaged in learning by doing. Pedagogical designs that embody this [constructivist] perspective make use of learning scenarios, problems, incidents, stories and cases that are authentic (i.e., that reflect real life situations), to situate and anchor all learning experiences. (4–5)

As educators and students build deeper understandings of their communities, languages, and identities, they more deeply respect and value the diversity in classrooms, schools, and other communities and the multiple ways of coming to know within learning communities.

Tapping into students' identities and communities along with co-creating meaningful and rich contexts or experiences in English language arts can provide a focus for language learning and give students opportunities to explore significant ideas that have enduring value beyond the classroom. If Manitoba students are to understand, develop, and deepen their sense of identity/self, draw upon and harness multiple ways of knowing, thinking, and doing, and live well together in an interconnected world, students need many opportunities to explore questions and concerns about themselves and the world.

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Contexts, rich learning experiences, and lenses are illustrated and explained further in "Planning Effectively for English Language Arts."

English language arts teaching and learning are effective when they are purposeful, dynamic, fulfilling, and authentic. This curriculum invites and challenges educators to think about education, schooling, and English language arts as they might be rather than the way educators might currently know them to be.

Effective English Language Arts Planning, Teaching, and Learning

Effective English language arts planning, teaching, and learning are rooted in research-based practice that includes rich, authentic, and connected experiences in which students can engage in interconnected ways with language. These experiences should include the following:

- **Powerful teaching and learning:** Effective English language arts programming helps students to make decisions to use critical and powerful learning strategies. Students need to learn and use a range of language skills and strategies while engaged in authentic language learning experiences. Effective English language arts teachers employ a range of instructional approaches to help students move from teacher-supported and guided practice to independent learning that requires varied instructional methods and strategies. Teachers also consider multiple methods and opportunities to support expanding the breadth, depth, and transformation of learning for all learners.

  Jeffrey Wilhelm notes:

  > Good teaching requires trust in our students and in their capacity to make meaning. It requires trust in our own capacity to exert "pedagogical content knowledge"—knowing how to teach kids how to make meaning. This capacity is necessary to expert teaching and depends on conversation—whether we are sharing how to do something in the form of a think-aloud, modeling a problem-solving process, or providing meaningful contexts, instructional supports, and techniques that help students to speak, to listen, and to uptake each others' ideas, and then to justify and express their own. ("CODA: Classroom Conversation" 76)

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- **Multiple forms of text:** All learners should have opportunities to work with a variety of texts and resources, including print, non-print, human, electronic, and virtual. Texts should be current, relevant, credible, and representative of many viewpoints and world views, including the ways of knowing of Indigenous Peoples. Different texts should be accessible for different purposes. Learners can engage with more complex texts with appropriate support and may need different texts when being asked to independently access and construct meaning.

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- **Opportunities for deep and flexible learning:** All Kindergarten to Grade 12 students should have opportunities to explore significant and complex ideas and questions that lead to deeper understandings. English language arts provides opportunities for learners to use interrelated practices that are specific to the discipline and that also transfer across disciplines. Questions for deeper understanding can be used and/or co-constructed to initiate and guide inquiry and learning and to give students direction for developing deep understandings about a topic or issue. Learning that arises from student interests has the potential for rich and deep learning. Supporting deep and flexible thinking can help students grasp the important disciplinary ideas that are situated at the core of a particular curricular focus or context. Exploring ideas alone or with others helps students connect what they are learning to experiences and life beyond school. Deep and flexible thinking also encourages self-reflection and goal setting.

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Approaches and structures to support effective English language arts planning, teaching, and learning are described in "Planning Effectively for English Language Arts Teaching and Learning."

Assessment As, For, and Of Learning

Planning effectively for English language arts ensures ongoing and synergistic assessment as, for, and of learning. Assessment plays a major role in how students learn, their motivation to learn, and how teachers teach. Mills and O'Keefe ("Inquiry into Assessment" 7) suggest that there are three dimensions for collaborative inquiry through assessment: teachers knowing learners, learners knowing each other, and learners knowing themselves as learners. Co-gathering information related to these dimensions allows teachers to "create curriculum with and for students."

Rethinking Classroom Assessment with Purpose in Mind: Assessment for *Learning, Assessment* as *Learning, Assessment* of *Learning* outlines three purposes for which educators and learners (and other partners) engage in assessment.

Purposes of Assessment

Assessment *for* learning: Assessment helps teachers gain insight into what students know and do in order to plan and guide instruction, and provide helpful feedback to students.

Assessment *as* learning: Students develop an awareness of how they learn and use that awareness to adjust and advance their learning, taking an increased responsibility for their learning.

Assessment *of* learning: Assessment informs students, teachers and parents, as well as the broader educational community, of growth, progress, and achievement at a certain point in time in order to celebrate success, plan next steps, and support continued progress.

The nature of English language arts as a discipline requires ongoing assessment to support students' growth in learning. In many ways, learning in English language arts is similar across the grades, with many experiences deepening in complexity and sophistication. This deepening requires educators to notice the various ways that learning grows so that they can better support learners. Rather than a linear, sequential process, learning in English language arts expands, deepens, and transforms within and across new experiences.

Language learning often looks different and progresses in different ways for learners. Assessment in English language arts must be planned to accommodate for this diversity by providing learners with multiple ways to show their learning and understanding. In fact, much of students' learning is internal—inaudible and invisible—requiring educators to seek ways to make the invisible visible.

English language arts learning cannot be assessed by collecting evidence of discrete skills, but must be observed within a range of interconnected practices that demonstrate increasing independence, and increasing breadth, depth, and transformation of learning. To assess students' increasing competency in

English language arts, educators require a variety of tools and approaches: "No single source of information can accurately summarize a student's achievement or progress. A range of approaches is necessary in order to compile a comprehensive picture of the areas of progress, areas requiring attention, and what a student's unique progress looks like" (Te Kete Ipurangi [TKI]). Educators engage in conversations with students, observe students in a variety of learning experiences, contexts, and processes, and examine student work in progress. They also provide opportunities for students to take part in peer assessment and self-assessment. When learners are invited into the assessment process, educators are better able to plan with and for them.

Planning effectively for English language arts provides students with multiple ways to demonstrate learning and achievement. Bodies of evidence that contain multiple forms of artifacts provide rich opportunities for educators and learners to notice and communicate growth in authentic ways. Mills and O'Keefe ("Inquiry into Assessment") maintain that educators must adopt an inquiry stance toward assessment tools, processes, and the data gathered from these in order to enable congruence with teaching and learning. They emphasize that "when teachers begin asking questions about teaching, learning, curriculum, and assessment opportunities in light of their children's literacy growth, they grow as strategic, professional, decision makers and as responsive teachers" (7). The information that educators and students gain from assessment informs and shapes what happens in the classroom.

Reflect further on assessment in "Grade Bands, Learning Growth, and Dimensions of Learning."

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English Language Arts Practices

The concept of discipline specific practices suggests that each discipline or field has particular ways of thinking, doing, and being. These include the types of language and texts that are used and how these languages and texts are used.

English language arts provides opportunities for learners to use interrelated practices that are specific to the discipline and that also transfer across disciplines. Identifying language learning by practice rather than skill clarifies how language can be used for a variety of interconnected purposes. These practices also help teachers make decisions about text, method, and assessment (Luke and Freebody). Pennycook explains that reframing language as practice "moves the focus from language as an autonomous system that pre-exists its use . . . towards an understanding of language as a product of the embodied social practices that bring it about" (qtd. in Hoffman, Martinez, and Danielson 21).

The four practices that the curriculum identifies as English language arts practices are interconnected and interrelated, and are used during authentic experiences. In Manitoba, we are using the term *ELA practices* to describe the "work done by literate beings in classrooms and beyond in everyday social contexts." (Luke and Freebody as cited by Vasquez, Egawa, Harste, and Thompson xiv). Like Luke and Freebody's "families of practices," each ELA practice is a necessary part of literate practice, but not sufficient on its own. "It might be best to visualize the four families as inclusive, with each being necessary but not sufficient for the achievement of others" (4). Effective literacy learners draw on their full repertoire of literacy practices to fully engage in experiences with text. Serafini ("Expanding") stresses the multi-modal nature of texts and the implications for literate practices when proposing that "readers" are navigators, interpreters, designers, and interrogators. Practices also provide a way to make explicit the links between the learning experiences in classrooms and the authentic and purposeful ways that people engage in these experiences in all areas of their lives (Barton and Hamilton).

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The practice of using language as sense making

In order to make sense of the language that they are encountering in academic and personal settings, learners need opportunities to use multiple strategies, and opportunities to assess and reflect on the effectiveness of those strategies. Such opportunities would include working with texts that require them to activate prior knowledge, make connections, ask questions, summarize, and synthesize in the ways that are effective for the text and purpose.

When learners practise using language as sense making, they bring what they know from other experiences and texts and use them to understand and compose meaningful texts. Learners would ask the following:

- How do I understand what I hear, read, and view?
- How do I communicate to others when I write, represent, and speak?

Effective sense making includes the following **Elements**:

- access, use, build, and refine schema
- select from and use a variety of strategies
- become aware of and articulate the ways that one engages with text

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The practice of using language as system

In order for students to participate fully in learning, they need opportunities to investigate, understand, and apply the ways in which language works. Such opportunities would include exploring the patterns, relationships, and conventions that are important for communication and meaning making: decoding and coding, morphology, grammar, punctuation, spelling, vocabulary, forms, genres, and structures.

When learners practise using language as a system, they use what they know about how language operates and how the codes can be used to understand and compose meaningful texts. Learners would ask the following:

- How do I use what I know about how language works to read, write, represent, listen, speak, and view?

Effective use of language as a system includes the following **Elements**:

- recognize, apply, and adapt rules and conventions (e.g., form, genre, grammar, register, punctuation, elements of design, spelling, legibility)
- identify, analyze, and apply understandings of whole-part-whole relationships (e.g., function and relationship of parts within a whole design, cueing systems, fluency, word study)

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The practice of using language as exploration and design

In order to use language to learn about the world and contribute to the world, learners need opportunities to communicate about issues or topics that they may encounter in all academic contexts. Such opportunities would involve articulating questions and designing solutions to problems by analyzing, interpreting, and communicating their learning and understanding.

When learners practise using language as exploration and design, they make choices regarding the purpose and function of meaningful texts to help them uncover new ways of thinking and doing. Language is used to deepen their current understanding of topics both of a curricular nature and from individual interests, while also seeking ways to imagine and reimagine.

Learners would ask the following:

- How do I use texts to inform me about topics, ideas, and issues?
- How do I use language to create new ideas, solve problems, extend my knowledge, and communicate ideas to others?

Effective use of language as exploration and design includes the following **Elements**:

- research and study topics and ideas
- interpret and integrate information and ideas from multiple texts and sources
- manage information and ideas
- invent, take risks, and reflect to create possibilities

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The practice of using language as power and agency

In order for students to be active citizens, they need opportunities to use language and alternative symbol systems that reflect their identities and enable them to advocate for themselves, their communities, and the environment. Such opportunities would include examining and interrogating information from multiple sources, recognizing bias, and finding inaccuracies in the information they gather.

When learners practise using language as power and agency, they understand that all texts represent a particular way of thinking and that language can privilege some voices while silencing others. This understanding encourages them to question, interrogate, and reimagine meaningful texts. Learners would ask the following:

- How does what I hear, read, and view influence what I think?
- How do I use language to influence others when I write, represent, and speak?
- How do I decide what and whose stories to tell?

Effective use of language as power and agency includes the following **Elements**:

- recognize and analyze inequities, viewpoints, and bias in texts and ideas
- investigate complex moral and ethical issues and conflicts
- contemplate the actions that can be taken, consider alternative viewpoints, and contribute other perspectives

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What is the Structure of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 ELA Curriculum?

The graphic below represents a more focused view of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 ELA curriculum—one that examines the structure and the infrastructure of curriculum. This nested system shows the interrelationship of components of curriculum while placing focus on how each has a particular function.

The Kindergarten to Grade 12 English language arts curriculum identifies the four big ideas (practices) that ground all teaching and learning in English language arts while also describing how learners might enact these practices at different points in time. The practices and the elements that characterize them are common across Kindergarten to Grade 12. Grade band descriptors support teachers in reflecting on student learning and progress by describing how students enact the four practices and their elements. Descriptors help teachers build profiles of student learning at points over time (e.g., end of grades and end of grade bands).

Each piece of the structural design must be viewed as part of a whole, where each plays a particular function when planning for, playing out, and reflecting on teaching, learning, and assessment in English language arts. Information follows to further explain each part and its function within the whole.

Structural Design of the Kindergarten to Grade 12 English Language Arts Curriculum
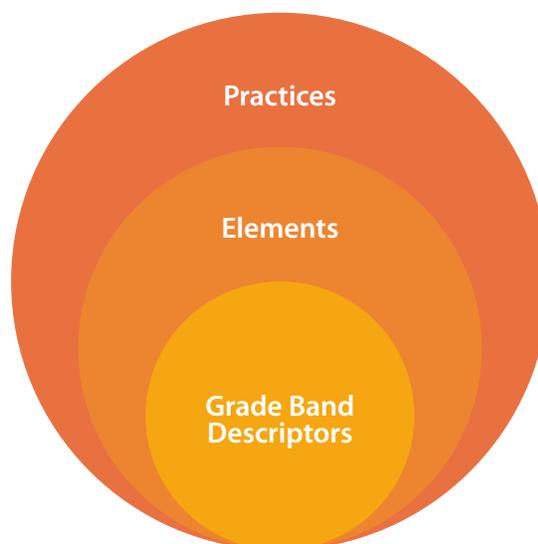
Practices: The Kindergarten to Grade 12 English language arts curriculum identifies four practices that represent the big ideas of the discipline. These practices name the valued ways of knowing, thinking, doing, and being meaningfully rich in English language arts. Although each practice presents a set of elements and grade band descriptors, the practices are not intended to be realized in isolation. The practices are to function together, in synchronized and integrated ways. Teachers would, therefore, design rich learning experiences in such a way that learners have opportunity to enact all four practices. Students use all of the language arts strands (listening, speaking, viewing, representing, reading, and writing) when engaging in practices.

Elements: Each practice is characterized by elements. These represent how the practices are generally enacted from Kindergarten to Grade 12. The elements can provide a focus for instruction, and students enhance and deepen their practice by improving their use of these elements.

Grade Band Descriptors: Sets of grade band descriptors support teachers in reflecting on student learning and progress by describing how students enact the four ELA practices and their elements. The descriptors should always be seen in the context of the practices, and their characterizing elements, as these describe the ways that learners enact the practices in rich learning experiences. The descriptors suggest that these enactments are a process that occurs over the course of the grade band. The ways that learners enact the practices should be continuously developed, elaborated, and transformed across novel and variant contexts (rich learning experiences) so that learning across grades and

grade bands becomes more sophisticated, more complex, deeper, and broader with time and new experiences and applications. Descriptors help teachers and learners describe learning and collect evidence of learning. Descriptors help teachers build profiles of practice at the end of a grade band as well as at all grade levels. Descriptors also help teachers to focus instruction and learning within rich learning contexts.

Grade bands support teacher teams, individual teachers, and multilevel teachers in taking a more longitudinal view of learning and planning for learning. The grade bands also provide support for teachers in planning for, teaching, and assessing student learning at various points along the continuum. Grade bands recognize that learning develops over time and across multiple contexts.

See "Grade Bands, Learning Growth, and Dimensions of Learning."

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