

Expanding the Notion of Literacy - The Roles of the Teacher-Librarian and School Library Learning Commons in Supporting the Transition of the New ENL1W Curriculum

By Jaclyn Cattrysse

The school library learning commons (SLLC) is a hub of school life: a place of learning for all school community members. According to *Leading learning: Standards of practice for school library learning commons in Canada* “[t]he library learning commons plays a key role in the cultivating and facilitating collaboration to provide rich experiential learning opportunities[and] a physical space to develop skills and engage learners, [and] a portal to virtual connections, both local and global” (Canadian School Libraries (CSL), 2020a). At the core of this learning and collaborating is the notion of literacy and our responsibility as teacher-librarians to ignite the love of literacy in all forms. Traditionally, teacher-librarians were thought of as the keepers of books, but more powerfully they are text curators and the agents of change about how literacy is understood, learned and embraced. “The [SLLC] has a leading role in assisting learners to hone and apply an expanded notion of literacy” (Canadian School Libraries (CSL), 2020b). Therefore, the question is: *How can teacher-librarians and the SLLC effectively support the transition of the new ENL1W curriculum while expanding the notion of literacy?*

With the introduction of the ENL1W curriculum in Ontario September 2023 (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023a), teacher-librarians have an opportunity to collaborate with our colleagues, design our spaces and demonstrate our vital roles within the school *ethos* as leaders of literacy. We need to play an intentional role in supporting the transition to new curricula, so the focus of this paper will be how teacher-librarians and the SLLC space can actively and intentionally expand the notion of literacy through supporting the transition to the new ENL1W Curriculum.

Key Highlights of New ENL1W Curriculum

First, teacher-librarians must familiarize themselves with new curricula documents. A comparison of the 2007 English curriculum and the new 2023 English document (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023b), reveals ways that teacher-librarians can support a shift in practice. These areas include, but are not limited to, adopting explicit instruction of language and literacy skills, highlighting the use of culturally and responsive pedagogy (CRRP), encouraging a more asset-based perspective for multilingual learners, decolonizing the curriculum with the inclusion of First Nations, Metis and Inuit texts and focusing on developing transferable skills.

Informed by the recommendations of the Ontario Human Rights Commission’s *Right to Read* report (Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC), 2022), the ENL1W course “emphasizes evidence-based systematic and explicit instruction that supports

students in developing and consolidating foundational knowledge and skills” (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023b). For context, the ENL1W curriculum has moved away from the strands based around traditional outputs of literacy to strands based around the fundamental knowledge and skills of multiple literacies (see figure 1).

English Curriculum for Grade 9 & 10 (2007)	English Curriculum ENL1W (2023)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Oral Communication B. Reading and Literature Studies C. Writing D. Media Studies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A. Literacy Connections and Applications B. Foundations of Language C. Comprehension D. Composition

(Figure 1: Created by J.Cattrysse (based on Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2007; Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023a)

With this key change, the new curriculum guides us towards focusing on explicit instruction of all literacies, particularly the foundational language skills. Explicit instruction is necessary because data shows many Ontario learners are reading less than optimally (Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC), 2022), and “reading outcomes depend on quality of reading instruction” ((Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC), 2022, p.10), and that instruction needs to be scientifically proven, explicit and systematic in nature (Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC), 2022). The new curriculum addresses these recommendations in multiple ways, stating that “[r]esearch shows that there is a strong connection between oral language development and reading comprehension and writing ability” (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023a).

Along with the adoption of explicit language instruction, the new curriculum highlights the necessity to use CRRP to inform practice. Knowing unique and intersectional identities of all learners provides funds of knowledge. According to ENL1W (2023) curriculum, “[t]hese funds of knowledge are historically and culturally developed skills and assets that are central to creating a richer and more meaningful learning experience for all students and promoting a socially and linguistically inclusive learning environment” (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023a). Moreover, CRRP honours student voice and identities while creating the foundation for cultural and critical literacies.

An extension of CRRP within the ENL1W curriculum is honouring the experience of multilingual language learners (MLLs). The ENL1W curriculum makes the shift towards decolonization by encouraging a more asset-based approach. According to ESL/ELD Resource Group of Ontario, “[s]chools are actively taking up the language of MLL [...] as asset-based and affirming of students’ home languages and multilingual communicative repertoires” and the ENL1W demonstrates this uptake when it states “[p]edagogical approaches are multimodal and facilitate translanguaging, whereby students use

linguistic resources from their full linguistic repertoires...The curriculum emphasizes language learners' rights to develop and use their first language and voices in the classroom to inform their learning” (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023a). Through this change in curriculum, Ontario education is beginning the process of “decentr[ing] the hierarchical norms of ‘English as the standard’” (English as a Second Language/English Literacy Development Resource Group of Ontario (ERGO, 2022).

This decentring of English and colonial legacies continues in the ENL1W curriculum with specific expectations of A3.3, C1.7 and C3.7 (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023b), emphasizing the inclusion of Indigenous authors, texts, perspectives, truths and ways of knowing. For curriculum expectation A3.3 in particular, the goal is to build cultural literacy skills by showing and understanding of diverse identities, truths and legacies of colonialism for Indigenous Peoples in Canada (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023a). These key changes related to multilingual learners and Indigenous perspectives demonstrate an evolution towards greater decolonization of the curriculum and encouragement of strengthening multiple literacies.

In line with highlighting multiple literacies, the changing of the strands shifts the focus of the ENL1W curriculum from traditional literacy outputs to more transferable 21st Century skills, including digital and media literacy. Of note, all of “Strand A. *Literary Connections and Application*” is now focused on providing learners with the tools to navigate today’s digital world (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023a).

The SLLC is an ideal space for learners to hone their literacies to navigate their in-person and digital worlds. We play an important role in supporting the new curriculum as “[t]eacher-librarians' expertise enables them to nurture and develop a love of reading for learning and for pleasure, to assist students in accessing information and in selecting appropriate texts, and to guide students in experiencing various texts and media that are relevant to their lives” (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023a). Through the physical space (e.g., multilingual book signage), instructional practices (e.g., teaching lateral thinking while researching), collections and technological tools (e.g., purchasing equitable and inclusive texts, providing professional development for software) and virtual spaces (e.g., explicitly teaching key words to access database information), teacher-librarians and the SLLC support the expansion of literacies and transition to this new ENL1W curriculum.

Expanding the Notion of Literacy

These key highlights of the ENL1W document make clear that literacy expands beyond the ideas of traditional literacy (reading, writing, speaking and listening) to include multiliteracies (e.g., digital, media, cultural, critical, transliteracy). This definition of literacy means the SLLC needs to be a place that supports and fosters all literacies (see figure 2). The new ENL1W curriculum guides us towards focusing on explicit instruction of all literacies using diverse, inclusive and multi-modal texts.

Within the ENL1W (2023) curriculum, there are numerous calls to ensure texts reflect the diversity of learners within the classroom and beyond with the integration of diverse Canadian, world and Indigenous cultures. For example, “strand C.3: *Indigenous Contexts*” (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023b), expects learners to build their critical literacy skills by exploring how historical and cultural experiences have informed #ownvoice Indigenous author’s text creation. Moreover, “[a]s they explore the concepts of identity, self, and sense of belonging and the lived experiences of a diversity of individuals within various communities, including those in Canada, they can further develop an understanding of their own unique identities” (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023a). Both examples demonstrate the need to promote meaningful learning while explicitly strengthening their cultural and critical literacy skills.

To build on and expand these notions of cultural and critical literacy, historically responsive literacy is essential for educators and teacher-librarians to embrace and encourage. Defined in *Cultivating Genius* (Muhammad, 2020), “historically responsive literacy is when teaching, learning and leadership beliefs and practices authentically respond to: students’ cultural (and other identities), the cultural (and other) identities of others and the social times (historical and current)”. Moreover, “[i]f literacy practices in classrooms [and SLLC] are multiple and diverse, then students have a greater potential to achieve both personally and academically, especially within reading development (Moje, Luke, Davies & Street, 2009). The ENL1W curriculum acknowledges that these multiple and diverse literacies also live within a digital context.

To navigate the digital context and utilize the skills of critical, cultural and traditional literacies, learners also need to hone



Figure 2: Image from *Leading Learning – Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada* (Canadian School Libraries (CSL), 2020b)

their abilities to understand, analyze and construct communication through a solid skill set of digital and media literacies. Phase *A2. Digital Media Literacy (Leading Learning – Standards of Practice for School Library Learning Commons in Canada* (Canadian School Libraries (CSL), 2020b), overall expectation sets the standard that digital citizenship, digital identity, effective research, cultural awareness and online safety are skills 21st Century learners need to be explicitly taught. These digital, media and information literacies provide essential tools for navigating the digital landscape, and – to effectively help all learners negotiate the challenges of a digital world – teacher-librarians have a role to play in the fostering of transliteracy. According to Alanna King in her work *Transliteracy and the teacher-librarian*, “transliteracy [...] becomes a skill set that utilizes metacognitive understanding of one’s own learning patterns, allowing the user/reader to adapt to changing texts and platforms” (King, 2014, p.2). With the expectation in ENL1W curriculum for multiple modalities and modes of text (e.g., books, podcasts, audiobooks, visuals etc.) and the encouragement for learners to construct their work in multiple forms (e.g., audio, video, animation etc.), the necessity for explicitly teaching and modeling transliteracy within the SLLC space is now clear. Teacher-librarians must ensure their pedagogy and practices encourage the expansion of the notion of literacy and use of multiliteracies amongst colleagues to achieve preparedness for all learners in today and tomorrow’s worlds.

Practical ENL1W Supportive Actions for Teacher-Librarian and the SLLC

Practically speaking, what can teacher-librarians do to actively and intentionally expand the notion of literacy while supporting the implementation of the new ENL1W curriculum expectations? Without a doubt many of the following suggestions might already be actively part of one’s practice and the SLLC space. Yet, reminders and intentionality of understanding about how the practices support all learners in the specific context of ENL1W curriculum is helpful as we play a powerful role in impacting our school and our profession. The ideas given below are by no means exhaustive, but simply starting points for practical actions, and potential action research.

Physical Space

Within the SLLC, teacher-librarians can post signage with annotated popular quotations or novel excerpts based on language conventions explicitly taught in ENL1W for reading and writing (e.g., prefixes and suffixes, common conjunctions, types of verbs, use of commas/colons/semi-colons/ellipses) to support expectation *B3: Language Conventions for Reading and Writing* (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023b). Additionally, we can set out board games and run language games or Kahoot contests at lunch for students to reinforce the explicit instruction of foundational language within


their classroom in a fun social setting (see figure 3). We can create displays about “How to Read Comics or Graphic Novels” based on equitable and inclusive texts within our collections to help students build their critical and cultural literacies. To reinforce the learning from strand *C3: Comprehension: Understanding and Responding to Text* (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023b), we

can profile, through posters, scavenger hunts and/or guest speakers, #ownvoices authors to build learners’ knowledge of diverse texts and enhance their learning related to text forms and genres. All these ideas to support the expansion of literacy and ENL1W implementation connect to the pedagogical framework of “Designing the learning environment. for Mathematics and Literacy, k to 8” (Ontario’s Numeracy and Literacy Secretariat, 2012), where all educators need to ponder how the environment of their spaces act as another instructor. As the learning hub of literacies, the SLLC serves as a support to concepts explicitly taught within classroom settings.

Instructional Practice & Collaboration

Within instructional practice, teacher-librarians need to ensure there is explicit teaching of multiple literacies, whether it is modeling for students sounding out a word, highlighting a prefix during a citation lesson, postulating questions about why copyright protects and honours everyone, or walking through step by step a new technological tool. We can adopt a widely used elementary strategy of ‘Read-A-Louds’ as minds-on activities in inquiries and lessons to build the connection between oral language and foundational language skills in *Strand B: Foundations of Language* (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023b). We can host story times during lunches or afterschool, utilizing texts from Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+, or world languages to reinforce the expectation *C1 Knowledge of Texts* (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023b). For all learners, especially the MLLs, developing key vocabulary

Instruction & Collaboration

- Use Read Alouds! As minds on... 
- Vocabulary Sheets with phonemes and syllables on it
 Triangular
 [TRY] + [AN] + [GYUH] + [LUH]
- Explicitly Teach Skills (e.g. Prefixes & Suffixes) when collaborating with colleagues during LLC lessons
 Tri = three ~ tricycle (3 wheels), triangle (3 angles & sides)
- Collaborate with ACLs to compile key words from curriculum so resources can be available in the library & encourage educators to breakdown & repeat multisyllabic words

"Read aloud[s] and shared reading promotes children's love of reading." (Taberski, 2000, p. 82)
[Road to Reading TDSB](#)

(Toronto District School Board (TDSB), 2019)

Figure 4: Slide Cattrysse, 2023

Physical Space

- Posting signage around the LLC space related to science of reading (e.g. phonemes, syllables etc)
- Set out board games to play & run language game events, kahoot contests

7 Syllable Types

syllables

ANOMIA

Connections to Third Teacher Learning Environment

Figure 3: Slide Cattrysse, 2023

lists with phonetic and syllabic spelling on them reinforces the expectation *B3: Language Conventions for Reading and Writing* (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023b), while taking a universal design for learning (UDL) approach to removing barriers for learners with differing learning needs; these vocabulary lists could be built in conjunction with ENL1W teachers to ensure they match learners needs.

In fact, collaboration with the English teaching team is essential to understanding their needs and to successfully supporting the transition to the new ENL1W curriculum. Together, to support multiple literacies and support *Strand D Composition: Expressing Ideas and Creating Texts* (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023b), teacher-librarians can collaborate with teachers to have students create, produce, and publish “Book Talks” and connect them with a school-wide reading contest such as Forest of Reading (Ontario Library Association, 2024), or FOLD challenge (The Fold, 2025). Additionally, to reinforce learnings from expectations *C1 Knowledge of Texts* and *C3 Critical Thinking in Literacy* (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023b), we can structure literacy activities based on Dr. Gholdy Muhammad’s Historically Responsive Literacy model: “Identity, Skills, Intellect and Criticality” (Muhammad, 2020), and share them with teachers for use within their own classroom or co-teaching within the SLLC. For example, teacher-librarian Jennifer Brown, utilized picture books from the Forest of Reading and First Nation Communities Read (Ontario Library Service/First Nations Communities, 2025), to create inquiries and ask questions through the framework of historically responsive literacy (see figure 5).

To support the “understanding, using, and creating” of media through digital, media and transliteracy skills that the ENL1W document says “are critical for individuals to become responsible and productive citizens,”, teacher-librarians can facilitate their own or student-taught media creation workshops (e.g. Book Creator, WeVideo, AdobeSpark etc). We can encourage teachers to integrate podcasts, animations, gifs, emojis, and drawings into their classes to reinforce literacy skills expected in *Strand D Composition: Expressing Ideas and Creating Texts*. For example, Diana Maliszewski (2019) for the Association for Media Literacy (AML) posted resources for emoji lessons that draw on the skills of media literacy and digital creation including “Choosing the Right Emoji Response to a Text.”

These ideas on how to include lessons and activities that support media literacy and digital creation for all learners also require explicit instruction. Therefore, as


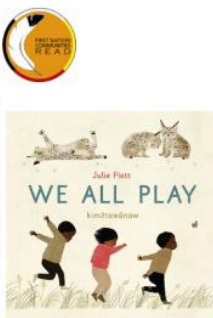
 <p>Identity: How do you pronounce your name?</p> <p>Skill: Practice spelling your first name and last name. What letter sounds are in your name? Can you think of any other words that start with the same sounds as one of your names?</p> <p>Intellect: Why is it important that we pronounce and spell other people's names correctly?</p> <p>Criticality: “If people can remember names like Beethoven and Tchaikovsky and Michelangelo, they can remember Mirha!” Mirha’s mother doesn’t let her give up on her own name. How does this help Mirha see that she has value and that her identity is important?</p> <p>Joy: What do you love most about your name and why?</p> <p><small>Framework based on the work of Dr. Gholdy Muhammad</small></p>	 <p>Identity: What are your favourite ways to play? Which games, materials, places inspire you to play?</p> <p>Skill: What words might you use to describe one or more of the animals playing throughout the book?</p> <p>Intellect: Throughout the book the children move and play like the animals around them. Pick an animal from the book and find out more about how they move in their natural habitats.</p> <p>Criticality: How does playing together help create a stronger community?</p> <p>Joy: How does moving your body (running, jumping, skipping, hopping) bring you joy?</p> <p><small>Framework based on the work of Dr. Gholdy Muhammad</small></p>
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Figure 5: Two Slides Brown, 2023

teacher-librarians, we can continue to run workshops for colleagues and students based on the lessons from CTRL F (Civix, 2025); AML (Association for Media Literacy, 2025); Media Smarts (Media Smarts, 2025); and Common Sense (Common Sense Media, 2025), to reinforce transferable skills outlined in expectation *A2: Digital Media Literacy* (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023b), and build a growing comfort with navigating technological change.

Collections & Technological Tools

- Mirrors, Windows, Sliding Doors - texts need to be relevant to students experiences & see themselves (TDSB - Road to Reading, 2019 & Price-Dennis & Muhammad, 2021)
- Computer set up in the SLLC with [pronunciation website](#) that breaks down how to say different words into sounds
*Allows students to hear and build on their oral language skills and phonemic awareness skills
- Possible harness online games/applications for contests (e.g. [Letter Tile Free Play from Really Great Reading](#))

How Do You Say?
triangular
tri-ang-u-lar
trī-ang-gū-lar

Figure 6: Slide from Cattrysse, 2023

Collections & Technological Tools

Within the SLLC collection, teacher-librarians need to continue diversifying collections to include multilingual or world languages texts, #ownvoices texts and vetted Indigenous texts. We can create more robust multilingual collections and honour the decolonized approach to literacies by coordinating with the English team to encourage the use of texts for literature circles that have been translated into multiple languages such as *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (Athitakis & Felipe, 2022); *Aya* by Marguerite Abouet (Poetry Foundation, 2023); and *Clément Oubrierie* (Drawn & Quarterly, 2024). Through continuing to develop collections by purchasing #ownvoices texts, we amplify voices and ensure culturally responsive and relevant texts in order to reinforce the expectation *A3.2 Identity and Community*, where students show their understanding of lived experiences while examining the ideas of identity and belonging. Additionally, when purchasing resources and texts, as teacher-librarians best practice recommends we consult experts and knowledge keepers (e.g., purchase from Indigenous owned and operated vendor, Good Minds) to ensure proper vetting and representation. The ENL1W curriculum “recognizes that students come from diverse families, communities, and cultural and linguistic backgrounds, bringing unique identities, abilities, and resources to their language and literacy learning” (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023a). So, teacher-librarians need to ensure the books, audiobooks and texts within the collection, act as windows, mirrors and sliding doors (Sims-Bishop, as cited in TDSB, 2019 & Price-Denis & Muhammad, 2021) and mitigate unintentional harm.

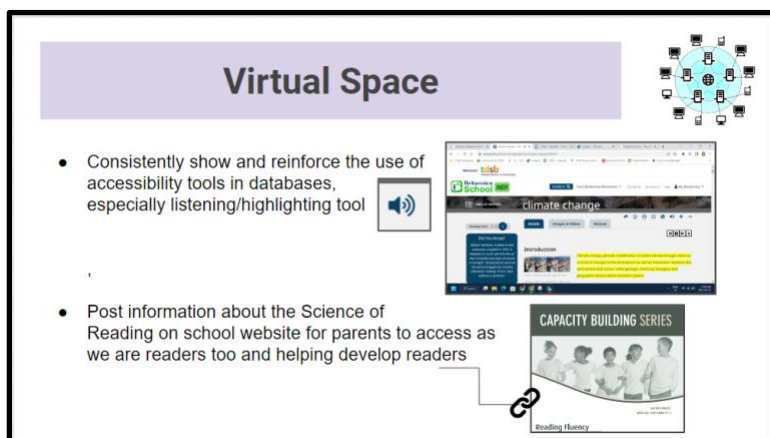
Beyond the collection, for all students in ENG1W and especially for striving readers, websites and some online games can be harnessed to build on their oral language skills and phonemic awareness skills (see figure 6). To increase the interest level, these games can also be part of contests within the SLLC to improve skills from

expectation *B3: Language Conventions for Reading and Writing*. We need to acknowledge that the use of digital devices to support student learning also requires the classroom teacher to be comfortable with the transliteracy skills of explicitly teaching the new technology. As teacher-librarian Alana King states, “students needed to be explicitly taught technology strategies [...] in order for the student to find it meaningful” (King, 2014, p.8). Similarly, teachers may need to be taught technology strategies to decide to include them meaningfully with the curriculum. To effectively support transliteracy and expectation *A1. Transferable Skills* within the SLLC, teacher-librarians need to, individually or in collaboration with experts, provide workshops on various technological software and hardware such as Google slides, iPads, podcast development, green screens, etc. for all school learners.

Virtual Space

Within the SLLC’ virtual spaces, teacher-librarians can explicitly demonstrate the use of accessibility tools within databases (e.g. highlighting and listening, or translating functionality) or Google chrome extensions (e.g. Read and Write program) in order to help with expectation *C2: Comprehension Strategies* (Ontario Government Ministry of Education, 2023b), and support language development through the connection between oral language and reading (see figure 7). Moreover, on school websites and newsletters, we can share relevant information for caregivers to access these tools online, so they can support their learners at home.

Using these practical actions and more throughout the SLLC, the key goal is to make the learning explicit and culturally relevant and responsive, so learners are conscious of the strategies and skills they need to succeed and become fully literate individuals. All learners will benefit when explicitly taught multiple literacies; this instruction empowers all learners to be life-long learners with strong literacy skills to navigate today’s and tomorrow’s world.



Concluding Thoughts

With the introduction of the new ENL1W curriculum set for September 2023, there is work to be done to support this transition and expand the notion of literacy. Part of the work is familiarizing oneself with the curriculum documents; a comparison of the 2007 and 2023 curriculums shows that utilizing explicit instruction for language and literacy skills, embracing culturally and responsive pedagogy, inspiring a more asset-based perspective for multilingual learners, decolonizing the curriculum with the

inclusion of First Nations, Metis and Inuit texts, and honing in on developing transferable skills are essential to fostering multiliteracies in students. This exploration of how teacher-librarians and the SLLC space can actively and intentionally expand the notion of literacy through supporting the transition to the new ENL1W curriculum makes clear that teacher-librarians need to ensure our practices and foci include an understanding of new curricula. As Allan Luke states,

“The challenge for today’s students [...] is that they are being asked to read not just the text, ‘but the world.’” Students need to be taught a ‘repertoire of strategies’ – “to enable them to move beyond basic comprehension skills to understanding and using texts on several levels for a range of purposes in a range of technologies” (Luke, 2012, p.7).

As teacher-librarians and SLLC incorporate the actions noted above to support specific ENL1W curriculum expectations, they simultaneously help learners read the world. The release time of the curriculum does mean this paper currently remains more theoretical postulations than proven practice. Hopefully, it serves as a reminder or spark for us as teacher-librarians to intentionally conduct action research and demonstrate our vital role within the school *ethos* to be agents for change and fosterers of literacies. All learners need the SLLC to be a hub of literacies and a source of empowerment to help them become comfortable utilizing their literacies toolkits to take on the opportunities and challenges of their futures.

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