



ERGO Position Statement on Multilingual Language Learners in Ontario Education, K - 12

English As a Second Language/English Literacy Development Resource Group of Ontario

Introduction

Across educational jurisdictions in Canada and beyond, there is growing recognition of and effort to address the legacies of colonialism, including the historical oppression and present-day experiences of Black, Indigenous, racialized communities and other marginalized groups. Ontario education has begun such work to infuse Indigenous knowledges, Black and African diasporic experiences and culturally responsive pedagogy into curriculum policy. Across the province, school districts are acknowledging and acting to address the ways in which marginalized communities have experienced patterns of underservice based on their multi-layered and intersecting social identities (i.e., social categorizations of race, class, Indigeneity, newcomer status, language/multilingual profile, ability, gender, faith, etc.).

This context provides an opportunity to critically examine and enhance the ways in which English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD) programming in Ontario supports multilingual students by addressing systemic barriers that newcomer children and youth experience in publicly-funded English schools. The ESL/ELD policy framework, anchored in Many Roots, Many Voices and the 2007 ESL/ELD Curriculum were written at a time when language education was regarded from a monolingual perspective, with instruction and assessment oriented toward native-speaker norms and language standards. This lens is evident in the labelling of students as “English language learners (ELLs)”, a deficit-oriented term that identifies students by a perceived limitation or deficiency. Since that time, Ontario education has begun to decentre hierarchical norms of “English as the standard”.

“Despite plentiful evidence that children’s home languages and language varieties provide foundational resources for learning (e.g., Accurso et al., 2021; Lau et al., 2021; Van Viegen, 2020), standardized English maintains a hegemonic status. Such standardized language practices tend to privilege White middle-class cultural and linguistic norms (e.g., Dyson, 2016; Flores & Rosa, 2015)” (Lauwo, Accuro & Rajagopal, 2022).

In response, educators are seeking to design identity-affirming learning environments that elevate students’ strengths, gifts and joy, and bring family and community intergenerational knowledges into the classroom. School districts are embracing research and scholarship that has moved toward a multilingual perspective, wherein students are recognized as emergent bilinguals or multilingual learners, acknowledging their rich cultural and linguistic resources and how these contribute to thinking, learning and communication both in school and beyond. Schools are actively taking up the language of MLL (Multilingual Language Learner) in district policies and resources that refer to students who are expanding their language practices in English. The term “MLL” is supported by national and international researchers as asset-based and affirming of students’ home languages and multilingual communicative repertoires.





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Historical and Contemporary Frameworks

Based on regional variances, community demographics, and socio-cultural contexts, there is a continuum of thought and practice across school districts in Ontario. More than 15 boards in Ontario have shifted or are in the process of shifting language from “ELL” to “MLL” to honour students’ multilingual repertoires as carriers of ancestry, identity, pride, and cultural values that enrich learning in schools. Culturally responsive teaching recognizes that all students need to have access to rigorous, standards-based curriculum while at the same time, recognizing that some multilingual language learners may need additional support to access this material and content. However, “English as the medium of instruction does not require English as the only language of learning.” ([Nordmeyer et al. 2021](#))

Drawing on current research and scholarship, as well as the collective insight and expertise of educators across the province, the table below reflects changing perspectives on language education and potential implications for language teaching and learning in the Ontario context.

Moving From...	→	Towards...
Historical Context of ESL & ELD Programming		Anti-Oppressive and Decolonizing Language and Literacy in Ontario
Historical Theoretical Framework for Language in Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monolingual theory of language underpins policy and program documents including the Ministry of Education Steps to English Proficiency STEP, Gr. 1 - 12, effectively “institutionalizing monolingualism” in our schools (Kubota & Bale, 2020; Van Viegen & Jang, 2021) • Prevalence of monolingual bias and “native speakerism”, potentially perpetuating racialized linguistic hierarchies • Colonial ideologies of “English as the standard” • Assimilative “English or French only in my classroom”, potentially excluding students’ full linguistic repertoire from teaching and learning 		Contemporary Theoretical Framework for Language in Education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shifting away from monolingualism as “the norm” toward multilingual and multimodal theories of language → validating that bilingual student’s language practices are not separated into L1/L2 or home/school language, but transcend both • Recognizing students’ communicative “repertoires of practice” (i.e., multiple languages, gestures, symbols, digital literacies, expressions, register, language of community, elders, etc.) • Decolonizing language and literacy education, recognizing language is not apolitical nor ahistorical • Recognizing and naming the effects of systemic, historic erasure of Indigenous and other





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<p>and evaluating them only in English, a language they may not be most comfortable or proficient in</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Privileging/normalizing of certain languages, identities and experiences over others. Expecting students to have certain “prior knowledge” to be included in rich educational experiences ● Erasure and invisibility of Indigenous, Black and minoritized peoples from curriculum ● Initial and ongoing assessment practices tend to be aligned with so-called Standard English without recognizing world Englishes, dialects, hybrid and creole language practices 	<p>marginalized, minoritized languages in Canada</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Counter narratives re-centre voices, excellence, histories and experiences of Indigenous, Black, racialized and minoritized cultural and linguistic communities in curriculum (curriculum understood broadly as everything about our education system - beyond subjects, texts, etc.) ● Assessment practices that recognize students move fluidly among various linguistic resources, dialects and repertoires to learn, make meaning, show what they know, and express their identities
<p>Programming Implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Perceived “neutrality” of language teacher and language instruction (i.e., language as separate and unrelated to other identity markers) ● Deficit mindsets and low expectations. Students seen solely as “learners of English”, home languages seen as a deficit or limitation ● Reductionary approach and streaming <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Simplification, remediation, diluted curriculum, marginalization, patterns of underservice ○ Systematically withdrawing MLLs (STEP 1 and STEP 2 grouped into “replacement” program scenarios) with reduced opportunity to engage and learn together with same-age peers ○ Language acquisition is seen as a separate subject or time of day ○ The Initial STEP Assessment and Ongoing STEP framework can contribute to the sorting/ranking/streaming of students (e.g., placement and access to Secondary courses, STEP continua focus solely of proficiency in English as the standard) 	<p>Programming Implications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Educator criticality and anti-oppressive reflexivity e.g., interrogating notions of “neutrality”, including one’s own power, privilege, social location, biases, in order to name oppressive ideologies ● Providing opportunities for MLLs to access grade-level curriculum at the same time as they learn English/French and their home languages (integration opportunities across subjects) ● Addressing bi/multilingualism in assessment for, as and of learning ● Open and accessible pathways responsive to all learners’ aspirations and lived experiences. ● STEP continua is used by educators to support and expand MLLs communicative competence and confidence in the language of instruction (i.e., English) for students who are adding English to their communicative repertoire ● Encouraging bilingual endeavors that enable students to move along the continuum of learning and using different languages according to standards of the community, home and school ● Building capacity for co-teaching among language and mainstream/subject area teachers rather than full withdrawal model (beyond initial





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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students at secondary level can fail/repeat ESL/ELD courses with potential for lower credit accumulation rates placing them at risk of not graduating or limiting options and access for post-secondary studies 	<p>levels of support that student may require)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teacher modeling of translanguaging practice for teaching and learning and engagement planned, purposeful and strategic use of students' and teachers' full linguistic repertoires ● Culturally and Linguistically Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy (CRRP) and Historically Responsive Literacy framework (i.e., cultural + linguistic "funds of knowledge" , high expectations, grade-appropriate curriculum, differentiated learning, valuing lived experiences as well as other ways of knowing and being, etc.)
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Defining Key Terms

Term	Description
All Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● All students (and educators/staff) have diverse multimodal communicative repertoires (i.e., multiple languages, gestures, symbols, digital literacies, expressions, registers, languages of community and elders, etc.) that they draw on to communicate, innovate, and enrich learning.
<p>MLL: Multilingual language learner</p> <p>(students)</p> <p><small>*Note: Multilingual is one word (not two words, not hyphenated)</small></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some multilingual students are also learning the language of instruction in Ontario schools, English. ● Multilingual Language Learner (MLL) is the term ERGO uses to identify a student who is in the process of learning English as an additional language while also acknowledging the student's cultural and linguistic assets. Multilingual language learner draws attention to those students who require support in expanding their communicative confidence and competence in the language of instruction (ie., English). ● The STEP continua will continue to be used by educators to guide instruction for MLLs who are adding English to their communicative repertoire.
Ministry of Education Key Terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● ESL and ELD Programming: English as a Second Language (ESL) and English Literacy Development (ELD) are described as program models (i.e., A multilingual language learner could receive support in acquiring English via ESL





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(program)	programming or ELD programming) <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Steps to English Proficiency (STEP) - continues to be a resource used provincially to help educators know their learners and inform programming● Language Grant and OnSIS Reporting are not impacted by a change in language from “ELL” to “MLL” → Technical Papers (pg. 53) - Ministry reporting is based on # of newcomers, country of birth, first language.
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