



Literacy

“Literacy” has many meanings. The World English Dictionary defines literacy as the ability to read and write, or, the ability to use language proficiently. Alberta Education notes that, “literacy is more than the ability to read and write. It involves the knowledge, skills and abilities—the competencies—that enable individuals to think critically, communicate effectively, deal with change and solve problems in a variety of contexts to achieve their personal goals, develop their knowledge and potential, and participate fully in society.” It is safe to say that literacy is the foundation of learning.

Look back on your years as a student and the ‘literacy transitions’ you made. Think back to elementary school and ‘learning to read’ - think of the types of books you were reading and the compositions you were writing. Remember your classes in middle school and the increasing significance of ‘reading to learn.’ What were you reading, both for fun and in school? Look back to high school and how important both reading and writing became. How important has literacy been after graduation—in further education, work, lifelong learning as well as for interest and pleasure. If you listed the last ten things you have most recently read, what would they be?

How did you go from reading fiction to non-fiction, from writing stories to writing essays? What did teachers do to help you make the transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn”? Think about literacy in the sense of being able to read and write, but also think about what it means to be “literate” in 2012 and beyond.

From this perspective it is clear that literacy is fundamental to student learning. It has become much more than just the ability to read the written word. Much of the recent literature related to literacy instruction suggests that an essential goal is to develop in students the ability to think deeply about what they read and to express themselves accurately and expressively in all contexts.

To support literacy as a priority in Red Deer Public Schools, our Learning Services team, using research-based best practices, has developed a professional development plan based on a “residency” model. Our District Curriculum Leaders work directly and collaboratively with classroom teachers to implement several “high yield” literacy-based strategies into the classroom. Literacy is not just a priority in elementary schools and in English Language Arts--these literacy strategies cross all core subject areas and are being integrated in elementary, middle and high schools.

Our Board of Trustees has also made a significant investment in literacy by providing reading assessment kits to all schools as well as enhancing literacy resources in all elementary schools’ with the acquisition of “Literacy Place” kits.

When you reflect on all of your experiences, think about what has worked well? What has helped you to become more “literate”? What do you remember as being very effective...even “memorable!” What did not work? Again, whether in elementary, middle, or high school, what examples that involve reading, writing, and overall literacy are memorable in a bad way? Finally, what strategies do you have for us? What can we do to help prepare our students to be literate in the future?