Guidance on Learning Resource Selection

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Introduction

Effective learning resources play a critical role in meaningful learning experiences for students. Learning resources can engage students and inspire life-long interest in a topic. They can also challenge a student's preconceived ideas and expand their thinking across the curriculum. In our digital world where resources have become increasingly accessible and the needs of students more complex, this has become an area where further considerations may be helpful.

There are several ways students interact with learning resources within a school, through materials shared by teachers, teacher-librarians, guest speakers, videos, written content on curriculum topics, or resources they choose from the school library based on personal interest.

The purpose of this document is to clarify the different ways in which learning resources are used in schools and to provide a list of considerations that educators can access to support their review, selection and use of learning resources, both in the classroom and in the school library or school library learning commons. The considerations are divided into categories to support you in the critical questions you may ask yourself when determining if a resource will fit your purpose.

The four key categories include:

1. Approved for use

2. Aligned with the curriculum and/or district learning goals

3. Age and developmentally appropriate for students and school community

4. Accurate and high-quality

Before reviewing the considerations listed, you may wish to review the context information below as it provides important background about:

- The role of educators in determining learning resources

- Requirements of the provincial Learning Resources Policy

- Specific nuances between learning resources in a school library or school library learning common resources and resources used in classrooms

- Considerations related to sensitive topics

Context

The Role of Educators

Teachers play a vital role as they are best placed to understand the learning needs of their students and to identify resources that provide an appropriate level of challenge. Teachers also have a significant responsibility to consider how their choice of resources can impact students in a variety of ways. Students develop at different rates and bring a wide range of beliefs, values and life experiences to their classroom. A resource that may be age and developmentally appropriate for most students may also have specific language or themes that individual students may not be ready for.

> **Being mindful of the unique needs that students may bring is a challenging but important part of the role of teachers.**

It is also important for teachers to approach learning topics with an awareness of their own personal beliefs, values, perspectives and biases.

> **Focused Education Resources provides educators with an [activity that explores personal bias in the selection of learning materials.](#)**

Selecting good learning resources can provide background information and different perspectives on even the most complicated issues in an age and developmentally appropriate manner. Teachers play an important role in ensuring that classrooms remain safe and inclusive places for learning for all students.

Policy Clarification

Summary

- A learning resource is anything used in a school which provides information to students as part of a student's overall educational program

- Resources in a school library used as part of an educational program offered by a board of education meet the definition of a learning resource

- While some resources (e.g., novels in a school library) may be independently selected by students, these activities are ultimately under the supervision of a teacher-librarian or other educator as part of the overall educational program provided by a board

- The selection and use of learning resources is guided by the Learning Resources Policy in conjunction with local board policies and district procedures.

- Boards of education are responsible for ensuring that there is a process for resources in their district to be regularly reviewed and approved.

- Boards of education must ensure that a challenge process is in place for their district and the process provides opportunities for reconsidering the use of resources.

- Additional support regarding the evaluation and approval of learning resources is available from the Ministry of Education and Child Care guidelines document which includes suggested criteria that schools and districts may want to use as part of their local processes

- School districts should ensure that their educators are informed of board policies, district procedures, and criteria for the selection of learning resources, the process for having resources approved, any lists of locally reviewed and approved learning resources, and referring to Focused Education Resources' K-12 Evaluated Resource Collection as a tool for resource selection

- School districts should also ensure that all educators are aware of copyright law and provide regular reminders to ensure that these guidelines are followed

School Library and School Library Learning Commons Resources

A school library learning commons serves many functions within the school. It is simultaneously a place where learning resources may be found for teacher-led, guided or independent inquiry, as well as for self-selected enjoyment, or independent learning. The selection of resources that help students learn about topics at a variety of ages and developmentally appropriate levels is important. A resource for primary students about the life cycle of salmon would look different from a middle school or secondary school resource about the same topic. It is important to consider the whole school and the range of different needs to ensure there are resources available for the learning community that considers all students' developmental level.

In addition, educators should consider how to provide a selection of independent reading materials suitable for all ages and developmental levels of students. For example, access to picture books at high school for those who need them, or books that challenge students to consider difficult topics such as the loss of a loved one.

There are many processes that schools can use to create a school library learning commons where students can access age and developmentally appropriate resources. Additional structures that can support the professional skills of a teacher-librarian can include:

- Using visual identifiers such as genre spine labels (small sticker or tag affixed to the spine of a book, typically used in libraries to identify and organize materials) or stickers to help students recognize and make informed choices about materials that may contain mature or sensitive topics and themes

- Having a section that can only be accessed at certain grade levels, with parent permission or both. For example, a K-7 school may wish to have a section for teen/young adult materials that are not accessible to primary students

- Putting notes onto a student account if there are any requests or restrictions on what a student may choose, such as "parents request only one book to come home at a time"

- Having orientations which help students/families understand how they can select reading materials that are appropriate. Depending on the context of the school and school community, this may include thinking about family or cultural values about the types of content and topics selected

With these considerations in place, it is also important to ensure that students can select reading material that matches their level of ability. If a student can read several grade levels beyond what would be expected of them, it is important to ensure that they are not unduly restricted and are still able to access reading materials that provide an appropriate level of challenge.

Sensitive Topics and Themes

The provincial curriculum includes several potentially sensitive and important topics like the history of residential schools and the Holocaust. It is also important to talk about sensitive topics in age and developmentally appropriate ways and with a trauma-informed lens.

> **Resource selection begins with considering the intended use and gives careful and thoughtful consideration to the audience.**

There are likely many ways to learn about various topics without a specific resource that is seen as particularly controversial or problematic. It is important to consider the potential educational merits of a resource, but also important to consider whether the use of a specific resource may damage relationships between students or between schools and parents, caregivers and local First Nations.

Many topics taught in schools can surface strongly held ethical, religious, or philosophical objections held by students and parents/caregivers. Using resources that are age and developmentally appropriate and that consider the needs of the school community can address these topics as sensitively and respectfully as possible to help address student or parent concerns and ensure that the focus remains on the important learning taking place in the classroom.

Detailed Considerations Guidance

Selecting learning resources for use involves considering many different and important factors. The considerations outlined below are not meant to be applied with a simplistic "pass or fail" approach. Teachers should use their professional expertise and judgement when applying these considerations when deciding whether or not to use a particular source.

The detailed considerations include four main categories of considerations:

1. Approved for use

2. Aligned with the curriculum and/or district learning goals

3. Age and developmentally appropriate for students and school community

4. Accurate and high-quality

In this section, each of the main categories have several specific considerations that teachers can use when selecting learning resources. However, not all considerations apply to every resource. Teachers can use their judgement about which of the detailed considerations apply to them and the resource they are considering using.

Before using these considerations, teachers should also ensure that they are aware of relevant learning resources policies applicable in their district, as well as any lists of learning resources reviewed and approved in their district.

> For hands-on practice with selecting learning resources, consider Focused Education Resource's [Selecting Learning Resources for the Classroom](#) online course.

Considerations and Key Questions

Approved for use

Ensuring that learning resources used in a classroom or school library are approved is an important starting point. While all school districts must have policies for approving learning resources, there are differences between districts regarding things like processes, roles, and responsibilities for learning resources. Teachers should be aware of all relevant policies and procedures in their district and check with a school or district administrator if questions occur.

1. **Approved in Alignment with Provincial and Local Policy**

-   Is this resource developed by the Ministry of Education and Child Care or part of a district inventory of approved resources?

-   If a resource is related to local First Nations, has it been discussed with and approved by those First Nations (e.g. through the Indigenous Education Council)?

-   If it is an older resource or part of an older list of approved resources, has it been reviewed in recent years?

2. **Security and Privacy**

-   Does this resource (e.g., an app or website) have any privacy or security implications related to personal information?

3. **Copyright**

-   Does a resource (e.g., showing a movie or playing music) require a specific license or permission?

-   Where appropriate, would using this resource (e.g., a photocopied excerpt from a book) in my classroom fall under fair dealing provisions of copyright law?

Aligned with the Curriculum and/or District Learning Goals

While the provincial curriculum provides significant flexibility for teachers regarding how they approach topics in their classrooms, it is also important to consider whether a potential learning resource is well suited to support student learning in a specific course or grade level. With limited instructional time and resources for acquiring resources, resource selection should prioritize resources that are most relevant to the learning standards being developed and that support a concept-based and competency-driven approach to learning.

1. Curriculum Alignment

- Does this resource align with the intended curriculum (Ministry, Board/Authority, or locally-developed) and the grade level?

- Is this resource relevant for contemporary students and will they be able to connect with it?

- Does the resource support specific modified or adapted programs such as inclusive education, English Language Learning, or learning assistance?

- Does the resource support development of the core competencies or social emotional learning?

- Does the resource support interdisciplinary learning or is it specifically targeted at one specific area of learning?

2. Teaching Approaches

- If the information is primarily factual (content-based), is it accurate?

- Are there opportunities for the development of core and curricular competencies?

- If appropriate, does the resource support multiple ways for students to engage with a topic and demonstrate their learning?

- Where appropriate, does the resource promote critical thinking and active learning?

3. B.C., Canadian and Indigenous Content

- Is the material written, illustrated, or edited by a Canadian?

- Does the resource use B.C. and/or Canadian language, spelling, terminology, and references as opposed to material from the United States or other countries.

- If it has Indigenous content, is it written, illustrated or edited by a First Nations, Inuit or Métis person?

- Does the resource acknowledge consultation with Indigenous peoples?

- If the resource includes authentic First Nations stories or cultural teachings, does it indicate that permission has been given to share the stories or teachings within the resource?

- Does the resource avoid incorporating a pan-Indigenous perspective?

4. Usage

- Will this be used by students independently, under teacher guidance, or a combination?

- Is this intended to be the sole resource used for a topic?

Age and Developmentally Appropriate for Students and School Community

Decisions about whether a resource is age or developmentally appropriate for students can often be difficult and require educators to consider many different factors. These decisions also vary depending on the needs of specific students and may need to be regularly reconsidered in light of broader societal trends and norms. Each student and classroom is different and teachers need to use significant judgement and expertise when deciding if certain content or themes are appropriate. To help with these decisions, teachers may want to discuss potential learning resource decisions with others to better understand other perspectives on age and developmental appropriateness.

1. Equity, Inclusion, and Respectful Learning Environments

- Does the resource contain explicit language or imagery that may not be appropriate for all the students in your classrooms?

- If the resource contains sensitive issues, are they addressed in educationally appropriate ways for students in a manner that respects culture, religion, and community of origin?

- Are the experiences of people of diverse backgrounds represented? If yes, how are they being represented? Does the resource include positive representations and contributions of people from diverse backgrounds?

- Are First Nations, Inuit and Métis represented, with an emphasis on local First Nations as appropriate? Were local First Nations part of the process for selecting the resource?

- Does the material depict individuals and groups in various social, economic, and political environments? If not, does this detract from the resource?

- Does the resource address topics from a variety of perspectives? If not, will it be necessary to find a counterbalancing resource?

- Does the resource perpetuate biases, prejudice, tokenism, or stereotypes that could cause trauma or harm?

- Considering the specific students in your audience, does the resource contain content that could re-traumatize or harm them based on their experiences?

- Consider how the resource portrays representations of:

· Ableism	· Ethnicity	· People with disabilities
· Age	· Family status	· Race
· Ancestry	· First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples	· Religion
· Body types		· Sex
· Class	· Gender identity	· Sexuality
· Creed	· Housing status	· Socio-economic status
· Culture	· Mental health	

- If the resource does contain tokenism, stereotyping and/ or discrimination, are these issues contextualized and presented in a manner that can be used for anti-discriminatory educational purposes?

- Is language and terminology used in polarizing or biased ways?

2. Student Interest

- Will this resource sustain the interest of students?

- Is this resource appropriate for the age, developmental level and experiences of students?

- Will your students see themselves reflected and/or will they see the experiences of others who are unlike them in the resource?

- Was it a request from students?

3. Diverse Learning Needs

- Will the resource meet the learning needs of the audience? Are there pictures or graphics where appropriate? Alternate ways of explaining a concept if it is non-fiction?

- Will the complexity of language be appropriate for the audience? Does it use unfamiliar slang or jargon that will need to be taught?

- Does the resource have built-in supports, or are there alternate formats accessible to meet the learning needs of all students including those who have disabilities or are neurodivergent? (e.g., is the font readable by the intended audience or are the graphics accessible to those with colour vision deficiency?

4. Health, Safety, and Wellness

- Does the resource model and reinforce positive behaviours and respectful relationships?

- Do people in a resource exhibit harmful behaviours towards one another, such as bullying or harassment?

- Does the resource glamourize the use of drugs or alcohol or does it accurately portray the harms of substance use?

- Does the resource include messaging that promotes safe behaviour (e.g., wearing seatbelts or using personal protective equipment)?

- Does the resource promote student health and wellness, such as destigmatizing language related to mental health and well-being?

- Does the resource encourage student resilience and growth?

Accurate and High-Quality

Teachers play a vital role in helping ensure that students are not exposed to misinformation or inaccurate information in their classrooms. With the proliferation of online resources, teachers can help model important skills for their students, like assessing the credibility of a source or analyzing potential biases in how information is presented. This is especially important with the rise of technological challenges, like the use of generative AI to generate text or images.

1. Quality and Durability

- Will the material endure repeated student use (e.g. Is the paper thick enough? Will the binding last for multiple school years?)

- Is the materials organized in a logical manner that suits the topic or point of view (e.g., as per the Design Elements Guide)?

- Are the graphics including charts, pictures, photographs or artwork of high quality?

- Is there a minimal amount of spelling or grammatical errors?

- Was any material, including pictures, computer generated?

2. Currency

- Does the resource use slang or phrases students would be familiar with?

- Is this up to date with changes in scientific knowledge, technological advances, geographic or political changes (e.g., Does a map in the textbook feature Haida Gwaii and Nunavut)?

3. Clarity

- Is the information presented clearly? Is it clear when something is fact, opinion, editorial, interpretive?

- Are complicated or contentious topics being presented in an inaccurate or misleading way?

4. Authentic and Credible

- Does the author/creator of the resource have relevant experience either lived, academic or pedagogical?

- Does the author/creator of the resource cite sources? Are these sources high quality?

- Is the identity of the author/creator of a resource clear and identifiable?

- Does the author/creator of a source have an ideological perspective, financial interest, or other source of bias that may influence the presentation of information?

Parent/Caregiver Communication

Informing parents and caregivers about the teaching of potentially sensitive topics is a good way to identify possible issues and build greater trust and communication with families. Parents and caregivers know their children best and have insights into potential areas of concern that teachers may be unaware of. Communicating with families in advance about potentially sensitive topics and learning resources helps support vulnerable students and reinforces a collaborative relationship between home and school. The intention of this communication is not to enable censorship of topics or opt-out of learning.

It is also important to enable parents and caregivers to flag areas where their child might be particularly uncomfortable. For example, a student may have experienced past trauma in their life where they would be very uncomfortable with a particular resource with themes about domestic violence. Identifying these types of concerns in advance of teaching can provide teachers with an opportunity to ensure that resources used meet the needs of all their students. In some cases, the teacher may want to find resources aligned with the overall intent of the learning, but with less potentially problematic language, imagery, or themes.

A sample letter has been included to provide an example on how to start conversations with parents when difficult topics are being discussed in school.

If a parent has an issue related to a particular topic or resource, it is best to begin with a discussion with the teacher. Sometimes, a conversation can solve the issue in a positive and productive way. In some cases, parents may have a misunderstanding about the content of a resource that can be easily clarified or explained. In other cases, parents may provide valuable perspectives, such as pointing out inaccuracies in a resource related to their cultural background or other areas of expertise. In these cases, a teacher can model this learning and growth with their students and parents and caregivers.

When an issue with a particular resource cannot be solved through conversation, parents should be made aware of their district's challenge process and how they can formally challenge the use of a resource.

If a parent's concern is related to learning about reproduction and sexuality in the Physical and Health Education K-10 curriculum, they should also be made aware that students and their parents or guardians may arrange for alternative delivery of these topics as per B.C.'s Alternative Delivery Policy.

Sample letter

Dear Parents and Caregivers,

In the coming weeks in our classroom, our class will be learning about (TOPIC NAME). I know this can a sensitive topic and my intent is to ensure that this learning happens in a safe and inclusive way. Learning about (TOPIC) is an important part of the learning standards for the curriculum in (GRADE AND SUBJECT). The full provincial curriculum can be viewed online at https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca .

Some of the specific topics covered include:

- e.g., "students will be learning about substance use and I understand some students may have experienced substance use and/or overdose within their families…"

My intention is to ensure this learning takes place in an age-appropriate and safe environment. I want to make sure that parents and caregivers are aware of this learning so they can best support their child.

Support can include:

- Checking in with the student about how they are doing after learning about the topic

- Having a conversation to help them deepen understanding

- Asking the student to teach you what they learned

- Letting me know about any potential concerns or sensitivities you wish to privately disclose related to (TOPIC)

I encourage you to get in touch with me if you have any questions or concerns about this topic.

Sincerely,

(TEACHER NAME)