2008

Inclusive
LANGUAGE
Guidelines

Halton District School Board

LEARN GROW SUCCEED

Together

Halton District School Board Mission and Values:

The Halton District School Board is committed to every student.
We will…
• Inspire learning;
• Create safe, healthy, and engaging environments;
• Provide opportunities for challenge and choice.

**The Halton District School Board values
relationships, respect, responsibility and ingenuity.**

The Halton District School Board's Accessibility Working Group has compiled the **Inclusive Language Guidelines** document. *The Guidelines* support the *HDSB Diversity Operating Policy/Procedures, HDSB Communications Protocol Handbook, Ontario Human Rights Code, and the HDSB Accessibility Handbook, 2004.*

Cultural Proficiency is about honouring the differences among cultures, seeing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully with a variety of cultural groups. As part of the Board's operational plan several goal areas have been identified. One of these areas is Safety and Well Being that addresses specific strategies for increasing levels of cultural proficiency among staff, students and parents.

It is expected that employees will refer to these guidelines for appropriate expressions and terms whenever communicating with others in their capacity as employees performing such functions as writing (letters, memoranda, notices, newsletters, reports, etc.) or speaking (meetings, workshops, announcements, presentations, etc.); when designing notices, posters, and similar visual display materials; and when fulfilling their teaching responsibilities, whether communicating with students or with parents and the community.

It is recognized that changes in language are not always easily made. Language is a powerful tool which can be used to change stereotypes and attitudes. Appropriate language choices can bring about a shift in emphasis. Language is critical in shaping and reflecting our thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and concepts.
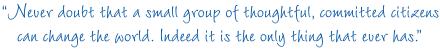
**This booklet is available in accessible formats upon request.
Please direct inquiries to Jacki Oxley at oxleyj@hdsb.ca .**

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"*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.*"

Margaret Mead

Overview and Use of this Guideline

The **Inclusive Language Guidelines** provide a standard communication procedure that recognizes respectful terminology for people from a variety of socio-cultural groups. The intent of this document is that it be used as a guide for respectful language in professional and business communications in order to recognize and avoid bias as well as discriminatory language. The **Inclusive Language Guidelines** affirm the Board's commitment to valuing the diversity of our students and staff by ensuring inclusive language is used in all written (including electronic) and spoken communication.

Language is rich in alternatives that speakers and writers, sensitive to attitudes and beliefs of audiences, can use without diminishing the effectiveness of their communication or sacrificing notions of grammatical propriety. Insensitive language usage may be an unintended form of discrimination based on a lack of awareness; however, that lack of awareness is no longer justifiable as an excuse.

Diversity means different ethnic, ethno-cultural, sexual orientation, gender identities and expressions, a broad range of socio-economic situations, physical, and emotional needs, lifestyle experiences, and changing family situations. A focus on developing our cultural proficiency assists us all in behaving in respectful ways through increased understanding of these differences (pg. 7).

Stereotypes can lead to discrimination as they take away a person's individuality and oversimplify qualities that often lack accuracy. Language is critical in shaping and reflecting our thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and concepts. Some words by their very nature degrade and diminish people. The language customarily used to denote people from different groups sometimes has been condemnatory, judgmental, or couched in medical jargon. All such inappropriate images continue to arouse feelings of embarrassment, shame, guilt, and discomfort. The power of words and images to reflect and shape community perceptions of people from diverse groups is widely acknowledged.

This molding of perceptions and attitudes through language is an ongoing and dynamic process. It represents an important responsibility and a significant challenge to all involved - particularly those who engage in public communications as a part of their professional lives.

"*We need to recognize equality is, above all, for the people who make us uncomfortable*"

Barbara Findly, Q.C.

Job and Position Titles

Forms of address and occupational descriptions should identify the positions or the role held by an individual rather than the gender of the person. Diminutive suffixes such as "ess" and "ette" are unacceptable. The use of words to patronize men or women should be avoided. Also, words that characterize "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics are not always appropriate. Some guidelines to influence stylistic choices are that people must be treated equally, no irrelevance should be introduced, no person appears to be excluded, and there should be stylistic consistency. The following is a list of preferred terms and those to avoid as examples.

Preferred Terms	Terms to Avoid
Chair or Chairperson	Chairman, Chairwoman
Supervisor	Foreman
Utility Worker	Utility man
Tradesperson	Tradesman
Nurse	Male Nurse
Firefighter	Fireman
Police Officer	Policeman, Policewoman
Postal Carrier	Mailman

Use of the Word "Man"

Preferred Terms	Terms to Avoid
human beings, humanity, humankind, people	man, mankind
artificial, manufactured, synthetic	man-made
staff hours, work hours	man hours
workforce	manpower
the average person	the common man
people in society	man in society
environmental studies	man and his environment
staffing the desk	manning the desk
best person for the job	best man for the job
team player	sportmanship

Pronouns

Replace the pronoun "his" with "his or her". Alternative approaches can be used to avoid the exclusive use of the masculine pronoun, such as recasting the pronoun from "his" into the plural "their". Another strategy is to change "his" to "the", e.g. "the principal will complete the report" rather than "the principal will complete his or her report".

Pairs of nouns and pronouns tend to become set in conversational order, including:

- husband and wife
- boys and girls
- her and his
- young and old
- black and white

In some contexts, if the order appears to give preference to a group, the order can be varied.

Gratuitous Specification of a Person's Characteristics

It is unacceptable to draw attention to a person's socio-cultural characteristics if it has no relevance in context. Words can sometimes be condescending or trivializing when unnecessary reference to a characteristic of a person highlights the irrelevant and perpetuates the concept that the person is firstly an individual with a particular characteristic and secondly, an individual of talent and skill. For example, to describe a person who performs a specific job and uses a wheelchair is gratuitous specification; only the person performing the specific job should be used.

Stereotyping

Language can contribute significantly to the creation and maintenance of stereotyping. Stereotyping assumes all people from a certain group bear the same specific quality or behaviour. To avoid this in language usage, it should not be implied that people from certain groups all have the same qualities. They should be portrayed as individuals with a variety of qualities, rather than the characteristic being the main focus of the description. For example, use the term "a person who is HIV positive" and not "AIDS sufferer" or "a victim of AIDS".

Jobs, roles, and personal characteristics should not be stereotyped by gender. Notices, telephone calls, and other contacts with students' families should be phrased in inclusive terms unless the person initiating the contact knows the individual.

Preferred Terms	Terms to Avoid
Principals…..they, he or she, their	The principal….he
Secretaries…they, he or she, he/she	The secretary…she
Is your parent/guardian home?	Is your mother home?
Conference delegates and their guests	Conference delegates and their wives
Easily distracted by classmates	Easily distracted by his classmates

Parallel Constructions and References

When women and men are grouped together in language, parallel constructions that recognize men and women equally should be used.

Preferred Terms	Terms to Avoid
spouses	man and wife
men and women	ladies and men
the women at work	the girls at work
the men at work	the men at the office

Demeaning Words

Words and expressions that demean others should be avoided. Forms of address used by all employees should reflect a professional approach that focuses on people-first language. For extensive people-first language terminology that is respectful for people with disabilities, refer to the **Accessibility Handbook**. Racial and ethnic slurs and labels set groups apart from one another and create and maintain tensions between groups. Slang terms for particular groups may also be considered offensive.

Preferred Terms	Terms to Avoid
women	girls (adult)
men	boys (adult)
use the person's name	dear, sweetie–(for co-worker)
person who uses a wheelchair	wheelchair-bound
homosexual	homo
feminist	women's libber
partner	girl/boyfriend
lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex	fag, dyke, cross-dresser, hermaphrodite
superstitious belief, idea	old wives' tale
person with a disability	handicapped
Aboriginal, First Nations, Métis, Inuit	Indian, Eskimo

Common-day expression like "That's so gay" and "That's so retarded" should be avoided and students should be told not to use them. Even if the expression is being used to mean something different, e.g. "That's so stupid", the connection is still there: gay/retarded=stupid. For a student who is gay or disabled, the connection is not lost, giving the person the message that "I'm gay, gay means stupid, therefore I'm stupid and others won't like me if I come out to them as gay". These expressions further demean and ostracize members of these groups, even if that is not the intent.

Racial, Ethno-Cultural, Language, Faith

Racial, Ethno-Cultural, Language, and Faith groups will have diverse ways of naming and referring to themselves. It is important that we respect a group's or an individual's preference about how they wish to be addressed. For example, some people in African Canadian communities prefer the term Black, while others prefer African Canadian. Similarly, some people who are South Asian may prefer to be known by their country of origin or by their language group. For example,

- Using the country name: Pakistani, Afghan, Korean, Indian, Chinese
- Using the region name: Asian, South Asian, African, American
- Using the language name: Arab speaking, Punjabi speaking, Urdu speaking
- Using the faith group name: The Muslim Community, The Jewish Community

Racial putdowns and slurs are never acceptable and it is important to realize these change as time goes by. If the listening person perceives the term to be a put down, then it is the listener's preference that takes precedence, not the speaker's preference. People-first language would indicate that it is better to refer to the "person who is Muslim" rather than "the Muslim" or "The Jewish Community" rather than "the Jews". The phrase "those people" indicates an "us versus them" attitude that further divides us and should be avoided. Generalizations about any community are inappropriate, particularly if they contribute to a negative stereotype about that community. Here are some examples of terms that are to be avoided and those that are more acceptable:

Preferred Terms	Terms to Avoid
accurate, respectful terms	any racial/cultural put down
Newcomers	Immigrants
English Language Learners, ELL	ESL students

Tone of Voice and Non-Verbal Inclusive Language

Regardless of the words we choose, our non-verbal communication and tone of voice express emotions, opinions, and attitudes. We all need to ensure that we think about how we speak to each other and that our professional tone is one of respect and curiosity, particularly when we are working within a diverse workplace. It is important to avoid patronizing, condescending, sarcastic, and other inflections that might be misunderstood as being disrespectful.

As a diverse community, we also use different non-verbal communication to express ourselves. Some people do not prefer to shake hands, particularly with people of the opposite gender, as a way of showing respect. Some people will not look someone older directly in the eye as a form of respect. In some cultures, the western hand motion for "come here" does not mean "come here" but something quite derogatory. Since we all cannot become experts on each cultural variation, good practice suggests we use the "mirror" technique. When you meet someone, try to mirror their greetings and their non-verbal communication. For example, some Korean students will always present a piece of paper with two hands. If you give it back with one hand, it is not as polite. If you return it with two hands, you are mirroring what is considered polite for that person.

As people integrate into Canadian society, mannerisms and non-verbal communication may or may not change and adapt. It is important that we do not assume that anyone from a particular cultural group will behave in any fixed way.

Don't Be Nervous, Relax

It is normal to feel a bit intimidated by the need to change to inclusive language. We learn our biases from a young age and our patterns of speech and mannerisms become habits that are sometimes difficult to change as adults. There is a good chance that in a diverse society, at some point, we will offend someone unintentionally. We should not become paralyzed or withdraw from communicating with others who are different simply by our desire to use respectful language. So relax and remember that when we do offend someone as a result of our use of language, it is important to apologize and show that you respect his or her preferred use of language, tone, or non-verbal communication in the future.

Correspondence: Internal and External

A designation of gender or marital status is not necessary in addressing or referring to individuals in internal or external letters, memoranda, or reports.

- The use of "Ms" is acceptable when the use of a title is deemed necessary for public relations and the female's preference is not known.
- For internal correspondence, use either two initials or the first initial with the surname.
- Position titles should be used where appropriate.
- When replying to external correspondence, use the form designated by the originator, unless unacceptable by these guidelines. If the information is not available do not assume a particular sex or status.
- When initiating correspondence, if sex and name of the addressee are unknown, use the form "Dear Madam/Sir" or "Dear (position) as in "Dear Superintendent" (eliminates gender identification).

Preferred Terms	Terms to Avoid
Jane Smith, Superintendent	Ms J. Smith
Salutation: Dear Jane Smith Dear Superintendent Smith	Dear Mrs. Smith
Closing Identification: John Doe Teacher	Mr. J. Doe, Teacher
Envelopes: Jane Smith J. Smith	Mrs./Ms J. Smith
Lists: Abe, Susan Abman, John	Abe, Mrs. Susan Abman, Mr. John
Reports: The following committee members were appointed: John Doe Jane Smith	Mr. J. Doe Mrs. J. Smith

Speeches

To address men and women in the audience equally, speakers should ensure their remarks do not demean, exclude, or stereotype members of either sex. Inclusive language should be used throughout the speech. Content should be balanced by references, examples, and anecdotes that include both males and females. Stories or jokes that may be perceived as sexist, racist, heterosexist, or homophobic should be avoided. Opening forms of address that include members of both sexes should be used, e.g. Good Afternoon, Everyone, Colleagues, Friends, Associates, etc. Staff have a responsibility to ensure guests who are invited to speak at our schools are aware of the need to use inclusive language. Some general guidelines for guest speakers include the following:

- Include both sexes in the opening address or identify neither and use "staff", "students", "parents" etc.
- Ensure non-sexist, non-homophobic, and non-racist language is used through out the speech
- Balance content – references and examples should include both sexes, different races, faiths, cultures, sexual orientation, and gender identities/expressions
- Avoid sexist, racist, homophobic/transphobic, and/or religious stories, jokes, etc.
- Avoid statements or labels that convey prejudice
- Avoid the use of stereotypical voices and body language
- Only mention race, ethnic origin, religious affiliation, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or gender identity, etc., if relevant

Visual Communications

Women, Aboriginal people, visible minorities, same gender-led families and people with disabilities should appear frequently and prominently in all pictorial material. Men and women of all backgrounds should be shown as successful in all fields, including non-traditional occupations, at all levels of authority, participating in all aspects of life including business, home, etc. and finally, as capable, efficient, confident persons.

Cultural Proficiency Continuum

 Cultural proficiency is defined as "the policies and practices of an organization or the values and behaviours of an individual that enable the agency or person to interact effectively in a culturally diverse environment" (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 1999).

There are six key areas on the Cultural Proficiency Continuum and the goal is to move from left to right: Cultural Destructiveness---> Cultural Incapacity--->Cultural Blindness-->Cultural Pre-competence--->Cultural Competence---> Cultural Proficiency

The word culture in this context is defined as any social group that is identified by the Human Rights Commission and will include: race, ethnicity, faith, language, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, ability, and class.

DEFINITIONS:

Cultural Destructiveness
Negating, disparaging, or purging cultures that are different from your own

Cultural Incapacity
Elevating the superiority of your own cultural values and beliefs and suppressing cultures that are different from your own

Cultural Blindness
Acting as if differences among cultures do not exist and refusing to recognize differences

Cultural Pre-Competence
Recognizing that lack of knowledge, experience, and understanding of other cultures limits your ability to effectively interact with them

Cultural Competence
Employing any policy, practice, or behaviour that uses the essential elements of cultural proficiency on behalf of the school or the district Interacting with cultural groups in ways that recognize and value their differences motivate you to assess your own skills, expand your knowledge and resources, and cause you to adapt your relational behaviour

Cultural Proficiency
Honouring the differences among cultures, seeing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully with a variety of cultural groups

Glossary

Socio-cultural groups: *includes all groups recognized by the Ontario Human Rights Commission – culture, faith, language, ethnicity, race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, differing ability, socio-economic and marital status differences. It is understood these characteristics of groups overlap and intersect as individuals have complex identities (HDSB Diversity Operating Policy/Procedure).*

Anti-discrimination and harassment: *includes bullying awareness and prevention programming.*

Bias: *used to mean a perspective from which a resource is written that may not necessarily reflect all the possible perspectives on a particular topic.*

Bisexual: *refers to an individual with the potential to be emotionally and/or sexually attracted to members of any sex.*

Equity: *refers to the right of the individual to a fair share of the goods and services in society.*

Gay: *refers to an individual who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted to a person of the same sex; often interchangeable with the term homosexual.*

Gender Identity: *refers to how we view ourselves as masculine or feminine. For many, gender identity matches their physical body. For some, the way they see themselves as masculine or feminine is different from their physical body.*

Hate Motivated Crime: *a criminal offence committed against a person or property that is motivated by hate, bias, or prejudice based on race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or other similar factors.*

Heterosexual: *refers to an individual who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted to members of a different/another sex.*

Heterosexism: *the belief in the inherent superiority and "normalcy" of heterosexuality. It is the foundation for homophobia.*

Intersex: *a medical term for someone who is biologically not clearly male or female; generally more accurate and more acceptable than hermaphrodite.*

Lesbian: *refers to a female who is emotionally and/or sexually attracted to the same sex. Lesbian is the preferred term for women.*

Sexual orientation: *encompasses the range of human sexuality from gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, to heterosexual.*

Transgender(ed): *someone who is or who has been more than one gender.*

Transsexual: *someone who was identified at birth as one sex and self-identifies as another.*

Two-Spirit: *refers to a member of the Aboriginal community who is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Individual First Nations peoples have their own words in their own languages that describe different gender identities and sexual orientations.*

Queer: *a term used in a number of different ways, i.e. as an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and other non-heterosexual identities. It is also used as a way of reclaiming and co-opting a once negative term; to remove "queer" as a term of abuse. However, not everyone finds the term empowering; some resist it because of its use among homophobic people. Queer is a term that is increasingly gaining acceptance as an academic term.*

Questioning: *refers to a person who is exploring the possibilities of, or who is in the process of figuring out their sexual orientation or gender identity.*

Sources

A Way with Words, Ontario Accessibility Directorate

Accessibility Handbook, 2004. Halton District School Board

Challenging Homophobia and Heterosexism, Elementary Teachers'
Federation of Ontario

Guidelines on Inclusive Language, National Council of Teachers
of English

Inclusive Language Guidelines, Bluewater District School Board

Inclusive Language Procedures and Guidelines, Curtin University of
Technology, Australia

Ontario Human Rights Commission, Glossary definitions (pg. 9/10)

Partnering Against Hate, Halton Regional Police Service

Racism. Stop It! Canadian Heritage Multiculturalism

Respectful Language, Halton Organization for Pride and Education

Terms for Inclusive Language and Imagery,
McMaster University, Hamilton

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The principles of inclusion involve clear recognition that society is not homogeneous and the perception of diversity as enriching rather than a problem. It requires the recognition that ideas and practices based on or modeled after norms of the dominant culture or society can result in experiences of exclusion and discrimination for a number of people. An inclusive organization not only recognizes diversity, but also embodies it. This means acknowledging the worth of every individual and their value to their community and society at large.

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