



Guidelines for  
**INCLUSIVE  
LANGUAGE**

# DURHAM DIRECTIONS

Our Plan for Student and School Success — 2009-2013

**Ensure Openness,  
Accountability and Safety**

**Implement Equitable  
Principles and Practices**



**Promote  
Student Achievement  
and Discovery**



**Success in learning to meet the challenges of the future.**

## Implement Equitable Principles and Practices

- Strive to provide equitable services, programs and facilities
- Support diversity through anti-racism and equity education
- Attract and retain a diverse staff of dedicated professionals
- Encourage cooperation, acceptance and respect in our school communities
- Provide opportunities for students to develop positive character traits
- Support quality education through system-wide professional learning for staff

The Durham District School Board's Equity and Inclusive Education Working Group has developed the *Guidelines for Inclusive Language*. These guidelines support DDSB Durham Directions, and the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy, 2009.

# Guiding Principles OF THIS DOCUMENT

**The Principle of Inclusion** acknowledges the concept that society is not homogeneous and reinforces the perception of diversity as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. It requires the recognition that ideas and practices based on the norms of the dominant culture or society can result in experiences of exclusion and discrimination for people of diverse backgrounds. An inclusive organization not only recognizes the difference, but embraces diversity. **Inclusive Language** acknowledges the value of an individual and their worth in society as a whole.

## USING THE GUIDELINES

Language reflects our experiences, thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and concepts. This powerful tool can also be used to change stereotypes and attitudes, supporting a welcoming environment for all.

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, parents, or the community. The *Guidelines for Inclusive Language* support the growth of Cultural Proficiency among staff, students and parents.

# Table of **CONTENTS**

Cultural Proficiency .....	6
Job and Position Titles .....	8
Use of the Word “Man” .....	9
Unnecessary Reference to a Person’s Characteristics .....	9
Stereotyping .....	10
Comparisons and References .....	10
Demeaning Words .....	11
Racial, Ethno-Cultural, Language, Faith Based .....	12
Correspondence: Internal and External .....	13
Speeches .....	14
Visual Communication .....	15
Glossary .....	16

***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 *Guidelines for Inclusive Language* provides a standard communication procedure which recognizes respectful terminology for people from diverse 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 *Guidelines for Inclusive Language* affirm the Board's commitment to valuing the diversity of our students, staff, and community by ensuring inclusive language is used in all written (including electronic) and spoken communication.

By making respectful choices, speakers and writers, sensitive to their audiences, can use language without diminishing the effectiveness of their communication. Insensitive language usage may be an unintentional form of discrimination. This lack of awareness can no longer be used as an excuse.

Diversity refers to the wide range of human qualities within a group, organization, or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to; ability, age, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, family dynamics, gender, gender identity, language, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. Using inclusive language leads to heightened awareness and increased Cultural Proficiency, and supports a welcoming environment for all.

Stereotypes can lead to discrimination as they take away a person's individuality and oversimplify qualities that often lack accuracy. Some words by their very nature degrade and diminish people. The language customarily used to denote people from different groups is often condemnatory, judgmental, or couched in medical jargon. These inappropriate terms continue to evoke feelings of embarrassment, shame, guilt, and discomfort. The power of words to reflect and shape community perceptions of people from specific groups is widely acknowledged.

The shaping of perceptions and attitudes through language is an ongoing and dynamic process. This is an important responsibility for all involved; particularly for those who engage in public communications as a part of their working lives.

## VALUING DIVERSITY

*“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)*

The goal of Cultural Proficiency is to move from tolerating difference to transforming for equity, while moving along the six areas of the continuum.

### Cultural Proficiency Continuum 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 the lack of knowledge, experience and understanding of other cultures limits your ability to effectively interact with them.

#### **Cultural Competence**

Employing any policy, practice, or behavior that uses 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 behavior.

#### **Cultural Proficiency**

Honoring the differences among cultures, seeing diversity as a benefit, and interacting knowledgeably and respectfully with a variety of cultural groups.

Moving from **Cultural Destructiveness to Cultural Proficiency...**

# Cultural Proficiency

# CONTINUUM



***Our lives are a continuing journey—and we must learn and grow at every bend as we make our way...***

**—Captain Gerald L. Coffee**

## **CHANGING PERCEPTIONS**

We learn our biases at a young age and our patterns of speech and mannerisms become habits that are sometimes difficult to change as adults. At times we may unintentionally offend someone with whom we are communicating; however, we should continue to communicate with people as we learn what is appropriate while using respectful language.

## **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. 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 language choices are that: people must be treated equally, no irrelevance should be introduced, no person appears to be excluded, and there should be wording consistency. The following is a list of preferred terms and those to avoid as examples.

### **PREFERRED TERMS**

Chair or Chairperson  
Supervisor  
Utility Worker  
Nurse  
Firefighter  
Police Officer  
Postal Carrier  
Custodian  
Administrative Assistant–Secretary

### **TERMS TO AVOID**

Chairman, Chairwoman  
Foreman  
Utility man  
Male Nurse  
Fireman  
Policeman, Policewoman  
Mailman  
Janitor  
Male Secretary

## USE OF THE WORD “MAN”

### PREFERRED TERMS

Human beings, humanity, humankind, people  
Artificial, manufactured, synthetic  
Staff hours  
Workforce  
The average person  
People in society  
Environmental studies  
Staffing the desk  
Best person for the job

### TERMS TO AVOID

man, mankind  
Man-made  
Man hours  
Manpower  
The common man  
Man in society  
Man and his environment  
Manning the desk  
Best man for the job

## 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” if it is grammatically correct. 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”.



***It is important to understand that  
there are many different ways of seeing  
the world and expressing wisdom...  
No one voice speaks for all voices...***



—Joseph Bruchac, Native Wisdom

## UNNECESSARY REFERENCE TO A PERSON’S CHARACTERISTICS

It is unacceptable to draw attention to a person’s physical characteristic if it has no relevance in context. It is necessary to use words that focus on the person first, while highlighting their individual achievements. Get to know the individual, but do not focus on the physical appearance and stereotypes of a person.

*“Between 2001 and 2006, disability rates increased in all provinces. Ontario reported a disability rate of 15.5%—slightly higher than the national rate.” (Statistics Canada, 2006)*

## STEREOTYPING

Language can contribute significantly to the creation and maintenance of stereotyping.

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

### PREFERRED TERMS

Is your parent/guardian home?  
Conference delegates and their guests  
Easily distracted by classmates

### TERMS TO AVOID

Is your mother home?  
Conference delegates and their wives  
Easily distracted by his classmates

## COMPARISONS AND REFERENCES

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

### PREFERRED TERMS

spouses  
men and women  
use the appropriate name of title

### TERMS TO AVOID

husband and wife  
ladies and gentlemen  
the girls at work

***...let us cherish the rich diversity  
of humankind and respect  
the inherent dignity and  
equality of every human being.***

**—Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon**

***Homophobia is like racism and anti-Semitism and other forms of bigotry in that it seeks to dehumanize a large group of people, to deny their humanity, their dignity and personhood.***

—Coretta Scott King

## 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 of people with varying physical and intellectual ability, refer to the **Accessibility Handbook** (*Accessibility Handbook 2005 DDSB*) in addition to **Tips on Serving Customers with Disabilities** (OESC). 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

women

men

use the person's name

person who uses a wheelchair

feminist

partner

lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, homosexual

superstitious belief, idea

person with a disability

Aboriginal, First Nation, Métis, Indigenous, Inuit

A student with special needs

### TERMS TO AVOID

girls (adult)

boys (adult)

dear, sweetie

wheelchair-bound

women's libber

girl/boyfriend

fag, dyke, homo

old wives' tale

handicapped

Indian, Eskimo

special ed student

## EXPRESSIONS AND IDIOMS

Expressions like “That’s so gay” and “That’s so retarded” must be avoided and students must be told not to use them. In addition, avoid using idioms such as “Indian giver” or “call a spade a spade” that historically were used to portray people of diverse age groups, cultures, ability levels, gender, gender identities, races, and socio-economic status in negative ways. These statements demean and ostracize people and must not be used.

## RACIAL, ETHNO-CULTURAL, FAITH, LANGUAGE GROUPS

Racial, Ethno-Cultural, Faith, Language 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. People from non-dominant groups may prefer to be known by their country of origin or by their language group. For example,

### RACIAL OR ETHNO-CULTURAL GROUPS

#### PREFERRED TERMS

Use the appropriate country name:

A person from Pakistan...

Use the appropriate region name:

A person from Asia...

Use the cultural name:

A person from the Wendat Nation...

#### TERMS TO AVOID

Pakistani, Afghan, Korean, Indian, Chinese

Asian, South Asian, African, American

Indian, Native, Huron Tribe

### FAITH GROUPS

*"...by 2017 at least one fifth of the population will represent diverse faith groups." (Census Canada, 2006)*

#### PREFERRED TERMS

Use the name of the faith group:

A person from the Jewish Community...

#### TERMS TO AVOID

Jewish person, Muslim person

### LANGUAGE GROUPS

*"The proportion of people reporting English or French as a mother tongue is declining." (Census Canada, 2006)*

#### PREFERRED TERMS

Use the name of the language:

A person who speaks Arabic...

#### TERMS TO AVOID

Arabic speaking, French speaking

It is important to realize that put-downs and slurs are unacceptable and may change over time. Generalizations about any community are inappropriate, particularly if they contribute to a negative stereotype about that community. The phrase “those people” indicates an “us versus them” attitude and should be avoided.

### **PREFERRED TERMS**

accurate, respectful terms

Newcomers

English language learners, ELL

### **TERMS TO AVOID**

any racial/cultural put down

Immigrants, Foreigner/foreign language

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.

## **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 “Attention (position)” as in “Attention Superintendent” to eliminate gender identification.

## PREFERRED TERMS

Jade Small, Superintendent

Salutation:

\*Use Dear or Attention

Dear J. Ali

Attention Superintendent Ali

Closing Identification:

J. Sojourner

Teacher

Envelopes:

J. Smith

Reports:

The following committee members were appointed:

J. Woods

J. Gonzales

## TERMS TO AVOID

Ms J. Small

Dear Mrs. Ali

Mr. J. Sojourner, Teacher

Mrs./Ms J. Smith

Mr. J. Woods

Mrs. J. Gonzales

## PRONUNCIATION OF NAMES

When respectfully communicating verbally with people of diverse backgrounds, learn the correct pronunciation of names, and ask for appropriate pronunciation prior to introducing individuals during meetings. Avoid derogatory comments or surprised reactions to diverse names. Do not shorten or Anglicize names.

## SPEECHES

To address men and women in the audience equally, speakers should ensure their remarks do not demean, exclude, or stereotype gender. Inclusive language should be used throughout the speech. Content should be balanced by references, examples, and anecdotes that are inclusive. Stories or jokes that may be offensive to a diverse audience must be avoided. Opening forms of address that include members of all gender should be used, e.g., Good afternoon, everyone, colleagues, friends, associates, etc.

Staff has 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:

- Opening addresses should be appropriate for the audience “staff”, “students”, “parents” etc.
- Balance content—references and examples should include all genders, gender identities/expressions different races, faith groups, cultural groups, sexual orientation, and
- Avoid sexist, racist, related jokes homophobic/transphobic, and/or religious stories, jokes, etc.
- Avoid statements or labels that convey prejudice
- Avoid the use of stereotypical voices and body language
- Mention intellectual, physical or language ability, age, culture, race, ethnic origin, religious affiliation, gender, sexual-orientation, or gender identity, etc., only if relevant

## VISUAL COMMUNICATIONS

Women, Aboriginal people, visible minorities, same gender-led families and people with intellectual, physical or language ability 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 and finally, as capable, efficient, confident persons.

***For me, inclusion is about a community where everyone is recognized for their differences and everyone is recognized as belonging—not only in our schools, but in our communities.***

—Dr. Andre M. Perry

*The earth is the mother of all people, and all people should have equal rights upon her.*

—Chief Joseph

## GLOSSARY

**Aboriginal:** A collective term which refers to all original people in North America. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people; First Nation, Métis, and Inuit.

**Accessibility:** Refers to the ease with which a person with a physical or intellectual disability can physically enter a space, participate in an activity, or use a service. Accessibility also involves the accommodations that are necessary for a person with varying physical or intellectual abilities.

**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 all genders.

**Discrimination:** Treatment or consideration of, or making a distinction in favor of or against, a person or thing based on the group, class, or category to which that person or thing belongs rather than on individual merit.

**Diversity:** Refers to the presence of human qualities within a group, organization or society. The dimensions of diversity include but are not limited to, age, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

**Ethno-Cultural:** Belonging to an ethnic group and sharing some aspects of cultural heritage particular to people of a specific nation, religious and/or language group.

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

**Faith Group:** Members of a religious group who follow and share common beliefs.

**First Nations:** This term came into common usage in the 1970's to replace the word "Indian" in describing Indigenous Peoples of Canada who are not Métis or Inuit. Among its uses, the term "First Nations peoples" refers to the Indian peoples of Canada, both status and non-status.

**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, gender, gender identity, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, 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.

**Homophobia:** Unreasonable fear or hatred toward homosexuals and homosexuality.

**Idiom:** An expression whose meaning or racial/cultural/religious/historic connotation is not predictable from the usual meanings of its elements.

**Indian:** This legal term collectively describes all the Aboriginal people in Canada who are not Métis or Inuit. Status, Non-Status and Treaty are three categories which apply to Indians in Canada. Many people find the term ‘Indian’ outdated and offensive. The term ‘First Nation’ is used instead, although there is no legal definition for it.

**Indigenous:** Original or earliest known; native; Indigenous people.

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

**Inuit:** Aboriginal people in northern Canada. The word means ‘people’ in the Inuit language of Inuktitut. The singular of Inuit is Inuk.

**Language group:** Sharing the same language and/or dialect.

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

**Métis:** “Métis” means a person who self-identifies as Métis and distinct from other Aboriginal Peoples. The Métis have a unique, mixed First Nation and European ancestry and culture.

**Person first language:** Emphasizes each person’s value, individuality, dignity and capabilities. Focusing on the person first and the human quality second, removes dehumanizing stereotypes and labels.

**Racial:** (Racial minority) A term which applies to all people who are not seen as White by the dominant group. Sometimes used instead of Visible Minority.

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

**Stereotyping:** Assumes all people from a certain group bear the same specific quality or behaviour.

**Student with special needs:** A student requiring individualized programming through accommodations and/or modifications in order to access Ontario and/or alternative curriculum expectations.

**Tolerance:** A fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward those whose opinions, practices, race, religion, nationality, etc., differ from one’s own; freedom from bigotry.

**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-Spirited Person:** A belief in the existence of three genders: the male, the female and the male-female gender. Traditionally, the Two-spirited person was one who had received a gift from the Creator to house both male and female spirits in their bodies giving them the ability to see the world from two perspectives at the same time.

**Queer:** A term used as; an umbrella term for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and other non-heterosexual identities. It is also used as a way of deconstructing or 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.

## DDSB Policy #4107—Equity and Inclusive Education

1.0 The Durham District School Board upholds equity and inclusivity as essential to ensure educational excellence. In accordance with the principles enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Constitution Act (1982) and the Ontario Human Rights Code, and as outlined in PPM No. 119, (June 24, 2009), the Board and its staff are committed to the elimination of discrimination and discriminatory barriers that may exist whether because of commission or omission. These principles include, but are not limited to, the following dimensions of diversity and their intersections: ancestry, culture, dis/ability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. These considerations are critical to ensuring equitable access and educational outcomes for all students, and equity of opportunity and access for their families, and our staff who serve them.

The principles of equity and inclusive education will be reflected in the board's policies, programs, operations and practices, and this policy will address the following areas of focus:

1. Shared and committed leadership
2. School community relationships
3. Inclusive curriculum and assessment practices
4. Religious accommodation
5. School and workplace climate and the prevention of discrimination and harassment
6. Professional learning
7. Accountability and transparency

# Reference SOURCES

*Inclusive Language Guidelines, 2008*, Halton District School Board

Aboriginal Education: <http://spiritcalling.ddsb.schools.ca/>

*Accessibility Handbook, 2005* Durham District School Board

*A Way with Words*, Ontario Accessibility Directorate

*Challenging Homophobia and Heterosexism*, Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

Durham District School Board: <http://www.ddsb.durham.edu.on.ca/DDSBmain.htm>

[Egalecanada.ca](http://Egalecanada.ca)

Equity and Inclusive Education: [//www.ddsb.durham.edu.on.ca/DDSBmain.htm](http://www.ddsb.durham.edu.on.ca/DDSBmain.htm)

First Nation, Métis and Inuit Presence in Rainbow Schools, Rainbow District School Board, 2009

*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

English Language Learners: <http://www.ddsb.durham.edu.on.ca/DDSBmain.htm>

Ontario Education Services Corporation: [www.oesc-cseo.org](http://www.oesc-cseo.org)

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

**For more information please contact DDSB's Equity, Diversity, and Race Relations office at 905-666-6933.**



# Guidelines for **INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE**



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