Literacy Policy

Preamble

The reading of books, research and study were means by which St Augustine, as a young student at Carthage as well as a Bishop, deepened his own thirst for life. After his conversion, study and learning became the venue of his on-going formation in the Christian life.

Literacy, therefore, is not only the ability to read and communicate in a particular language, but it also develops effective skills in communication, which lead a person to be able to function in education, at work and in society. Literacy is one of the College's main priorities in all classes throughout the 11 years of a student's educational journey at St Augustine College. Morevoer, *A National Literacy Strategy For All in Malta and Gozo* (2014-2019)[1], directs all schools in Malta to have their own Literacy Policy.

Principles and Objectives
1. Literacy is integral to the process of learning. It is also an important element in the social integration of learners.
2. Literacy includes all components of language: speaking, listening, reading and writing.
3. All elements of the literacy policy should be reflected across the curriculum and across all the subjects.
4. All students have their own unique potential to develop their own individual literacy skills.

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[1] Ministry for Education and Employment, July 2014

5. All educators must share responsibility for developing literacy skills and must collaborate to create an environment that motivates and supports all learners in order to raise their expectations of achievement. This means that all educators are teachers of literacy, regardless of the curriculum they teach.
6. Guardians have an essential role in the development and consolidation of their children's literacy abilities at home and during the family's leisure activities.
7. Close collaboration among all stakeholders is a must for a successful application of the literacy policy.
8. The educational journey of our students must be as seamless as possible and the transition between the Primary and the Secondary should be a natural step forward in each of the learner's literacy journey.

Literacy in the Primary

Speaking and Listening

Speaking and Listening are to be achieved through purposeful interaction with teachers. We recognise that speaking and listening are fundamental skills upon which the educational development of our students depends. Through the development of oral and aural skills, they learn about language, and this equips them to demonstrate and refine their learning. The teachers consistently model Oral Language. Speaking and Listening is planned in all areas of the curriculum, with resources and displays as support.

Our College promotes reading as it is believed to be the key to success. Students are encouraged to read equally in Maltese and in English.

Reading

In the first term of Year 1, the students will start formal teaching of reading and writing in the English language whilst being exposed to the Maltese language mainly through speaking and listening activities. In the second term, formal teaching of the Maltese language commences too. Teachers always act as role models by using both languages in different contexts according to the goals of learning.

A lot of groundwork takes place especially in year 1 to master the skill of reading. Our students are primarily introduced to phonological awareness as well as to the 'Look and Say' method. Any students who will be struggling in grasping the fundamental skills are addressed instantly and are offered extra help. In fact, our College offers complimentary sessions to those students who struggle in literacy and are in year 1, 2 and 3.

In the upper years, reading remains one of the main highlights in our students' education. Our students are exposed to different genres of readings, and they are encouraged to

vary their reading materials/topics to widen their knowledge and perceptions. Along the way, teachers help their students enrich their vocabulary through several activities.

Writing

Writing entails a more challenging process to accomplish. However, this skill is given as much of importance as reading. Writing in English and in Maltese commences from the very beginning. It starts off with writing sounds in isolation, then words in isolation, then phrases. Our students are encouraged to be creative in their writing, however writing is given a lot of structure especially in the early stages. Teachers initiate discussion with the aim of exposing the students to vocabulary which will be then highly encouraged to use it in their writing.

In the upper years, teachers expose their students to a variety of writing styles addressed to a variety of recipients. Besides the actual format each writing entails, teachers emphasise the correct use of vocabulary and tone. At this stage students' creativity is an asset in every piece of work.

Literacy in the Secondary

The aim of Secondary education from Year 7 to Year 11 is to equip learners with the required qualifications and skills to be successful according to their own potential beyond their compulsory schooling age. By the end of Year 11, a student "*is expected to read and write fluently and independently, have high levels of expressive and receptive language and use language in a correct manner*"[2].

The transition from Primary to Secondary will be as seamless as possible, with the passing of information regarding students' abilities and needs from the educators of the Primary to those of the Secondary.

The curriculum is delivered by a range of teachers with different subject specialisations that does not always include an expertise in literacy. Therefore, the College will provide continuous professional development opportunities for these educators, when the opportunity arises.

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[2] A National Literacy Strategy For All in Malta and Gozo (2014-2019), Ministry for Education and Employment, July 2014, pg. 38

In the secondary years, the College will strive to increase student motivation to literacy learning through dedicated teaching and learning, peer collaboration, media usage and technology. Educators will be supported to create resources and activities that are appealing for the teenage years.

Students will be offered opportunities to feel secure to ask for literacy support when they feel the need, and offer guidance to educators to support the students' and feel confident when stating that they are a teacher of literacy.

The role of the College Librarian

The College will have a teacher-librarian to be shared in both Campuses. The duties of the College librarian will be listed in the call for application of the post, which is an internal call for the College educators.

The role of the College Librarian vis-à-vis literacy is to:

1. Act as a support teacher to other educators who wish to carry out literacy lessons in the library
2. Organise an annual book week in both Campuses with the aim of:
   a. Inspiring learners with the love of books and reading
   b. Inspiring learners to appreciate the book-writing process
   c. Encouraging learners to expand their literary tastes
3. Participate in national initiatives related to book week
4. Ensure that the library contents are appropriate for students' reading ages
5. Establish a section of dyslexia-friendly books that are also age appropriate.

In the Primary, all classes have a weekly timetabled-slot to visit the library. All students are encouraged to borrow a book, alternating between English and Maltese. Our teachers guide their students in choosing the right book to ensure confidence in reading. We believe that it makes a whole lot of difference when the teacher takes note of the students' interests and makes sure that the book is of the right level.

In the Secondary, the library will be open every day during break and the librarian will be present to assist and support students in choose the right book or make use of the library resources during break. Educators of all subjects can also book a slot when the educators can co-teach with the librarian in a literacy session relevant to the subject and to the particular area of the curriculum.

Public Speaking

Public speaking, which involves the conveying of an idea to a group of people, is essential for the development of literacy skills[3]. Public speaking is important because it[4]:

1. Improves communication skills and social interaction
2. Improves classroom interaction and peer learning
3. Encourages critical thinking since it encourages children to apply information in order to solve a problem, rather than memories facts and figures
4. Involves planning, writing and comprehension, all of which are important elements of literacy
5. Gives self-confidence and thus encourages students to strive in their improvement of their skills
6. Leads learners to be resilient and adapt to changing situations.

In order to develop public speaking skills, one needs a lot of practice. The College is to provide as many opportunities for students to speak in public, outside of the formal activities related to the assessment of speaking. These should include amongst others:

1. Show and tell sessions for the younger learners
2. Presentations as evidence of learning in non-language subjects
3. Active participation in assemblies where students share experiences and ideas
4. Participation in clubs during break which encourage public speaking
5. Participation in public speaking engagements outside school organised by other entities, like for instance the Ekoskola Parliament, the Agenzija Zghazagh Public Debate Competition, the EY Idea Explosion.
6. Develop public speaking skills like voice projection and control during Drama lessons

Children with diverse abilities

The five stages of literacy development include emergent literacy, alphabetic fluency, words and patterns, intermediate reading, and advanced reading. While these are characteristic of particular age brackets, every individual learner will reach this stages depending on his own abilities.

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[3] https://www.leapintoliteracy.com/2019/06/27/public-speaking-important-children-learn/
[4] https://www.leapintoliteracy.com/2019/06/27/public-speaking-important-children-learn/
https://www.hmhco.com/blog/importance-of-public-speaking-oral-communication-for-students

The College will take the necessary steps to support all students in reaching their literary abilities by:

1. Involving school-based and external professionals to assess and support students with particular needs
2. Promote continuing professional development for educators in the development of literacy skills.
3. Promote multisensory teaching in the different school subject areas by making use of the multi-sensory room in the Campuses or otherwise.
4. Provide intensive literacy programmes for students with particular difficulties, within the College, or suggest programmes that are held by other institutions.
5. Ensure that learners with a statement of needs are helped to reach their literacy potential through individual educational programmes (IEPS), also through the use of technology.
6. Provide training courses for parents/guardians to enable them to support the literacy development of their children.

In the Primary, at the beginning of the scholastic year, formal talks are organised by the SLT for the students' parents in years 1, 2 and 3. Our main aim is to disclose the scholastic literacy goals and to share any tips which might be helpful for the parents. Communication between teachers and parents is crucial. In fact, teachers give constant feedback on the students' progress and provide several resources/flashcards/games/online links/detailed notes so that parents can give adequate support at home.

In the Secondary, educators will offer diverse tasks and methods of support depending on the students' abilities.

Digital Literacy

Digital literacy goes beyond computer literacy and digital know-how. It is an extension of the traditional forms literacy since we continuously use technology to harvest information, interact, and spend our leisure time in the digital world. This is done through the means of text, visuals and audio. Therefore, learners need to be able to evaluate and manipulate these multimodal means to generate meaning from their digital experience.

Moreover, technology is continuously changing the environment in which we interact with each other on a professional as well as on a social basis. Therefore, we need to keep abreast with the changes and shift our practices accordingly.

Technology also provides tools which can help in the development and enhancement of our learners' literacy skills.

In view that digital competence is the right of every citizen to function in society, the College will

1. reasonably invest in digital technologies that will enhance literacy and promote digital communication with all stakeholders
2. assess from time to time the diverse needs of all the members the learning community and provide professional development programmes for educators, where it is deemed necessary
3. carry out pilot projects involving different forms of technology, before implementing over a larger scale
4. provide learning opportunities for students within the entire curriculum that enhances the learners' digital competences within a relevant context
5. implement digital practices to reflect the practices in our society as for instance block chain certification; online payments, bookings and applications; digital communication
6. educate all stake holders in appropriate online behaviour
7. support members of our learning community who have limited access and digital literacy skills to able to function in society by asking for support to outside agencies if necessary

Bilingualism
The use of both Maltese and English in our country, allows us to have access to both Maltese and English in an equal manner. This skill is an essential one to function both nationally as well as on an international basis with other educational institutions as well as the world of work for our learners.

"An early start in language learning is essential for young children to gain appropriate levels of competence"[5]. Therefore, the College will strive to encourage bilingualism from the early stages of the primary throughout the Secondary in order to equip our students with this skills.

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[5] Johnstone R (2002*), Addressing 'the age factor': Some implications for languages policy, Council of Europe,* http:// www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/JohnstoneEN.pdf in *A National Literacy Strategy For All in Malta and Gozo (2014-2019)*, Ministry for Education and Employment, July 2014, pg. 38

One, however, must make a premise that bilingualism, is the concurrent development of two languages, without the use of one impinging on the other, and involves the correct use of vocabulary and syntax relevant to that particular language.

The College will encourage bilingualism by

1. use code switching whenever possible
2. encourage an equal use of the Maltese and English language without one language adversely affecting the other
3. identify particular occasion when a specific language is to be used. This might vary according to the competences of the learners and their need to develop their skills
4. create opportunities where students can extend their skills in their 'weaker' language whenever possible

Foreign Languages

While learning a foreign language forms part of the Secondary Curriculum in Malta, the College will make use of its resources, when possible, to expose primary students to foreign languages through language taster sessions in the Junior Years. Students will then be supported to choose one language for the Secondary that will be followed from Year 7 to Year 11.

The teaching of foreign languages in the Secondary will be based on 4 weekly lessons in Years 7 and 8, and 3 weekly lessons in Years 9, 10 and 11.

The Role of Parents and Guardians

Research shows that parental involvement in their children's learning positively affects the child's performance at College in both primary and secondary schools, leading to higher academic achievement, greater cognitive competence, greater problem-solving skills, greater school enjoyment, better school attendance and fewer behavioural problems at school[6].

Parents and guardians are therefore encouraged to:

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[6] Fan & Chen, 2001; Feinstein & Symons, 1999; Melhuish, Sylva, Sammons et al., 2001; as quoted in Clark C., 2007, Why it is important to involve parents in their children's literacy development, National Literacy Trust, https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED496346.pdf

1. provide early reading experiences to their children by introducing them to books in both languages from an early age
2. involve their children in reading activities at home
3. encourage an atmosphere of reading for pleasure at home, while promoting that reading is a worthwhile and valuable activity
4. take interest in their children's reading habits and likes even at an older age where children become independent readers
5. create opportunities where students are exposed to both languages by making it possible through various sources; be it social media, television, storytelling and sometimes even relatives who are more inclined to a particular language

6. encourage language comprehension as the very first step to familiarise oneself with a language by providing an adequate environment where practice of speaking both languages takes place whenever possible.

The College will encourage these practices through

1. the involvement of external agencies that support reading initiatives involving parents
2. the organisation of activities like Book Week
3. the support of parents who seek help in accessing reading resources for their children
4. the organisation of activities in the classroom that encourage parental involvement

Roles and Responsibilities

For a successful implementation of the Literacy Policy, all stakeholders need to be aware of their responsibilities in the implementation of the policy

Roles	Responsibility
Senior Leadership Team (SLT)	The Senior Leadership Team will take an active role in supporting the overall implementation and evaluation of the policy. It will provide training opportunities where lacunae are encountered
Subject Department	Led by a member of the SLT, every subject department will implement initiatives that implement the Literacy Policy within their own classroom and outside, while striving to implement this policy in a cross-curricular manner wherever possible. During the meetings the various forms of assessments will be used as a baseline to identify learners' needs and act upon them.
Educators	Both teachers and learning support educators will implement the initiatives discussed in the Subject Department Meetings.
Parents/Guardians	Take an active role in the development and enhancement of their children's literacy skills through active participation

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