

Final Report for the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat:

Niagara Catholic District School Board's Cross Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry Project (2013)



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Project**

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Final Report for the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat: Niagara Catholic District School Board's Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry Project

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Over the past few years, teachers at NCDSB have participated in various professional learning sessions that have literacy embedded strategies. It has become evident that although teachers understand the importance of embedding literacy through-out all subject areas, questions are consistently raised about: (1) the consistency of classroom literacy instruction across the intermediate grades, and (2) the use of learning goals and success criteria when assessing and evaluating students, and (3) the use of 'literacy units' within the intermediate grades. Further, a comprehensive approach to language and literacy instruction should include questioning, metacognitive strategies, critical literacy skills and opportunities for students to form their identity. These considerations and components were integral to the instruction that was facilitated as part of this project.

To positively impact the literacy learning of adolescent students, programs of professional learning should be collaborative, job-embedded and inquiry-based. It is important for teachers to be a part of the learning process, where educators can seek answers to questions they have rather than being told what they need to do. An effective method to undergird growth in educators is the formation of collaborative inquiry teams that engage in cycle of professional learning (Coburn & Stein, 2010). This cycle begins with planning: identifying a literacy need, selecting a learning focus, and determining professional learning to address students' literacy need. The second stage is acting: implementing evidence-based strategies and evaluating the outcomes. Then collaborators observe, building their experiential knowledge to re-apply it. Finally, there is reflecting: examining, analyzing and evaluating the results of the learning.

A complementary blend of professional learning approaches might be found in collaborative inquiry and co-teaching. Co-teaching that involves middle and high school teachers is termed, vertical team teaching (Cunningham, & Gresso, 1993; Texas Leadership Center, 1998). This is especially poignant for a successful transition from middle to high school given the typical differences in the curriculum and skills (Bertrand, Roberts, & Buchanan, 2006).

Research Design and Methodology

This case study research reports on a program of professional learning that eighth and ninth grade teachers engaged in establishing their own inquiry and collaborating to plan and teach together. Debriefing about this collaborative inquiry process was encouraged post-lesson and in teacher and student open forums. Data was collected over a 3-month period (March-June) in 3 elementary and 2 secondary schools with teachers (n=11), students, literacy coaches/facilitators, administrators and parents. Multiple forms of data were collected: fieldnotes (during meetings, lessons), surveys (teachers, parents), interviews (teachers, administrators, coaches/facilitators), artefacts (work samples, forum summaries, reflections), report card grades. Qualitative and quantitative analyses were conducted on these data.

Findings

As a function of participating in this project, teachers developed, shared, and added to their repertoire of instructional strategies, ideas, and resources that support adolescent literacy development. Many of the teachers described the critical role of co-planning to ensure a common understanding and common language of instruction across both panels. During co-planning the teachers prepared attainable learning goals for the lesson that were shared with the students to make them aware of expectations. As a part of this co-planning process, the teachers also discussed how to make the lesson and resources personally relevant to their adolescent learners. The co-taught lessons were enhanced with technology to make learning relevant to and match the preferred learning styles of the 21st century learners.

The grade 9 teachers appreciated the ability to observe the grade 8 classrooms, which allowed them to see the gaps between elementary and secondary literacy instruction. Grade 9 teachers commended the grade 8 teachers for their innate ability to embed literacy into the various subject areas. Based on these observations, the secondary teachers are now incorporating familiar components of scaffolded, skill-focused literacy instruction in their classrooms. The elementary teacher participants appreciated the ability to observe and co-teach in an applied, academic, or locally developed classroom, and they now more fully understand the dynamics of streaming/ability grouping in secondary school.

Teachers acknowledge that their adolescent students' transition to secondary school involves changes in social interactions, academic expectations and school environments which inevitably impact literacy outcomes for their students. The grade 8 students benefitted from the co-teaching by garnering an understanding of the culture and academics of secondary school. Additionally, the parents of the students involved in this project were quite positive about the preparedness of their children for secondary-level English. The practice of being actively engaged during a collaborative inquiry lesson was valued by the student participants who remarked about this during the student forum. Students were also able to apply the strategies learned during the co-taught lesson to their own summative assessment task of writing an essay. Final language arts report card grades for grade 8 students and English for grade 9 students were analyzed for gender comparisons for strand grades.

Responses for the teachers' beliefs about traditional vs. social constructivist practices were compared; interestingly, the former beliefs still dominate the latter beliefs. Participating in this cross-panel project enabled teachers to confront and challenge some of the misconceptions they held about their co-teaching partners' teaching practices in elementary or secondary school. Teachers reported a sense of validation of their current literacy instructional practices as a function of participating in this cross-panel literacy collaborative inquiry project. Participating teachers also reported that they now sought alignment and consistency in assessment and instruction across the grade levels. Based on their students' positive reactions to the co-taught lessons, several teacher participants will continue to use their co-teaching partner's instructional strategies in their future practice.

Lessons Learned

Bringing together these traditionally opposing but complementary levels of education was a catalyst for professional growth. Funding, resources, and periodic release time for observing, co-planning, and co-teaching should be continuously provided in order to build continuity and consistency across all grade levels. This type of parallel learning builds collegial professional practice among teachers and focuses on student learning. An opportunity exists for a sustained investigation into the program of literacy professional learning that has been presented herein.

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Background

OSSLT Achievement in Niagara Catholic District School Board

The literacy achievement of students in Niagara Catholic District School Board (NCDSB) has demonstrated some consistency over the past five years. **Figure 1.** shows the 5-year trend for first time fully participating NCDSB grade 10 students who were successful on the OSSLT.

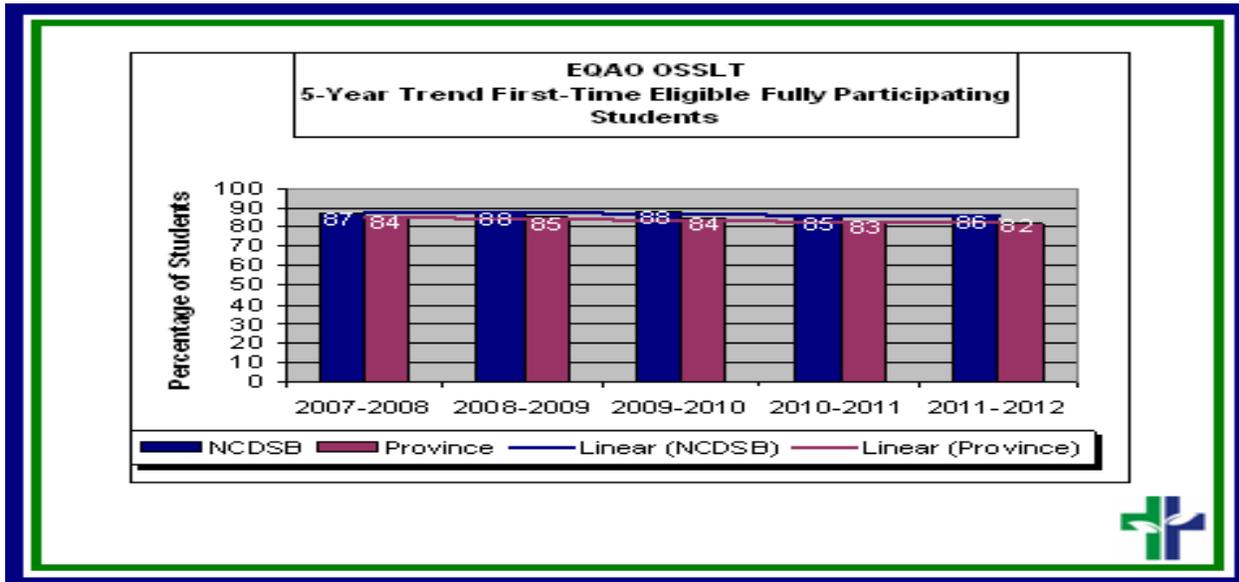


Figure 1. OSSLT Successful First-time Eligible, Fully Participating Students – NCDSB and Province

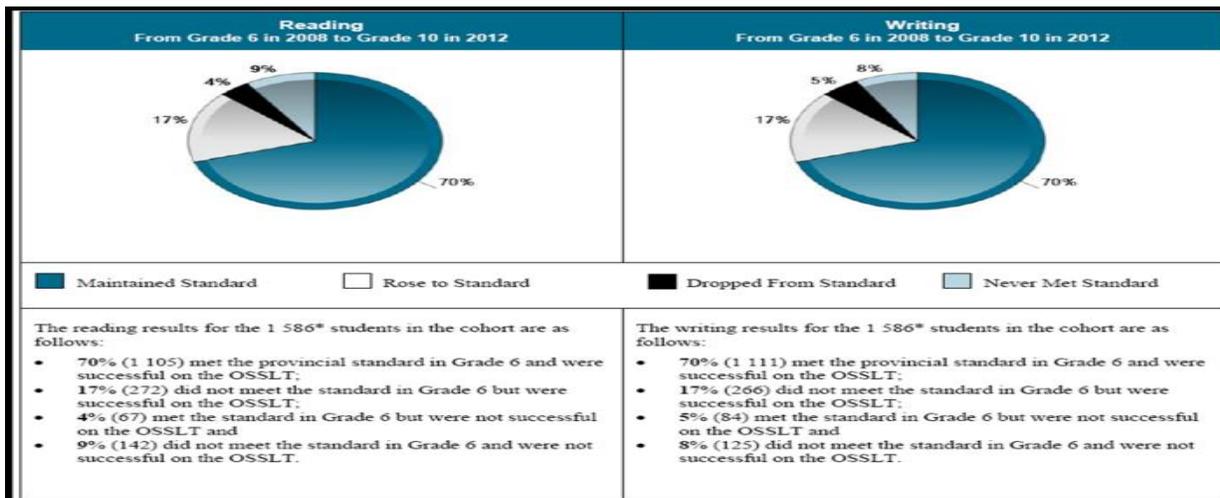


Figure 2. OSSLT Cohort Data for NCDSB

The two secondary schools (Schools 4 and 5) that participated in this project were either 3% below (see **Figure 3.**) or 4% above (see **Figure 4.**) the NCDSB proportion of students meeting the provincial standard on the OSSLT (see **Figure 2.** above).

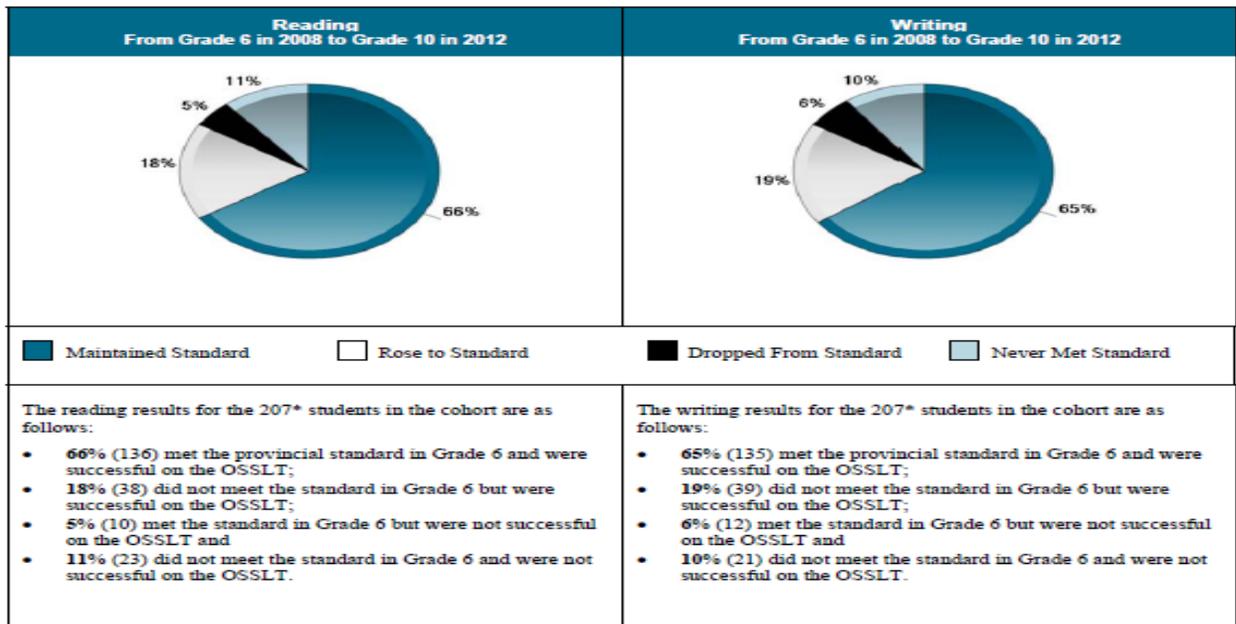


Figure 3. OSSLT Cohort Data for School 5l

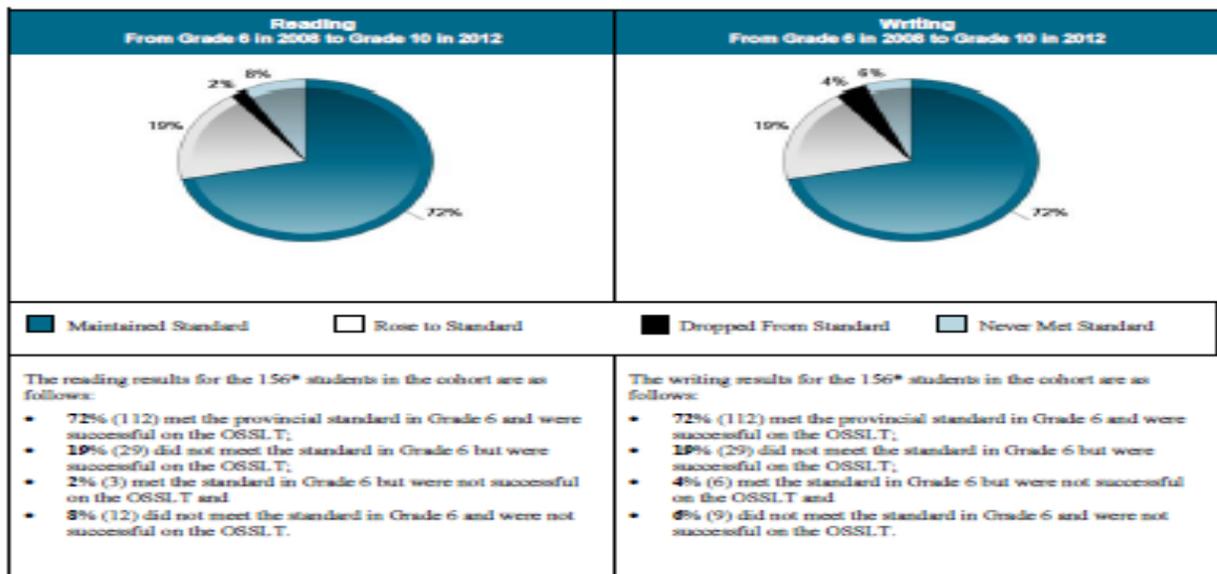


Figure 4. OSSLT Cohort Data for School 4

Identified Areas of Need

Building an Understanding of Literacy, Language Arts, and English

According to the *Adolescent Literacy Guide* (Ministry of Education, 2012), it is important for literacy to be embedded in all subject areas, and in all grades. Literacy is defined as more than just reading and writing, it is how a child understands the world around them. Since the release of the Think Literacy documents and the ongoing implementation of Ontario Curriculum documents, teachers at NCDSB have participated in various professional learning sessions that have literacy embedded strategies. However, these sessions have not lead to a deeper consistent approach to implementation of literacy based classroom instruction.

Over the past two years of implementation of the cross-panel literacy collaborative inquiry sessions, common inconsistencies have been noted in teachers' overall understanding of the similarities and differences between literacy, language arts and English. During sessions involving first year cross-panel literacy collaborative inquiry schools, it became apparent that misconceptions existed when discussing the Language/English curriculum expectations continuum. Teachers from the opposite panels displayed differing views on the definitions of language and English. The elementary Language Arts curriculum was believed to be a more literacy-based program, whereas the grades 9 and 10 English curriculum was more content specific. According to the Ontario Curriculum for Language and English, the expectations are based on a continuum with minor distinctions. The front matter of the two documents is very similar with no major differences in the definitions of language and English.

Strategic Direction for Student Achievement (NCDSB – BIPSA 2012-2013)

With Ministry of Education, Board and school teaching and learning initiatives, one of NCDSB's goals is to advance student achievement and close the achievement gap for all students on the Provincial EQAO Primary and Junior Assessments, the EQAO Secondary Mathematics Assessment, the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) and classroom assessments.

Strengthening the Impact of Professional Development

Over the past five years, the model of professional development has evolved at NCDSB. Ballroom style professional development that focused on a guest speaker addressing a large crowd is no longer standard practice. Overwhelming feedback from educators expressed the need for more practical, hands-on sessions. Teaching Learning Critical Pathways (TLCP) sessions were well received by educators at NCDSB. These sessions were very helpful in that they allowed teachers to focus on the student with the initiation of moderated marking, and gave teachers the venue needed to engage in professional dialogue. The problem with the TLCP model was that it was too structured and educators requested more flexibility to answer the questions they had concerning student achievement. This facilitated the need for the movement towards collaborative inquiry for professional development. According to the *Capacity Building Series Monograph on Collaborative Teacher Inquiry* (Literacy & Numeracy Secretariat, 2010), it is important for teachers to be a part of the learning process, where educators can seek answers to questions they have rather than being told what they need to do.

Using Assessment to Drive Instruction

With the release of *Growing Success Assessment, Evaluation & Reporting (Ministry of Education, 2010)*, it has been NCDSB's vision to find ways to integrate effective assessment strategies into collaborative inquiry networks. It has become evident that although teachers understand the importance of embedding literacy through-out all subject areas, questions are consistently raised about: (1) the consistency of classroom literacy instruction across the intermediate grades, and (2) the use of learning goals and success criteria when assessing and evaluating students, and (3) the use of 'literacy units' within the intermediate grades.

NCDSB is currently entering year three on the roll-out of the Ontario Comprehension Assessment (OCA), an assessment for learning resource that helps teachers identify student comprehension strengths and weaknesses. Feedback during professional learning networks within grades 9 and 10 has indicated the importance of recognizing the reading abilities of their students and how their comprehension skills directly affect classroom instruction and resources. Based on these sessions, it was concluded that if teachers know what the student comprehension needs are in the classroom, then they can better embed literacy strategies within their classroom practices to increase student understanding.

Theoretical and Practical Foundations

Academic Research

The middle school years are a period of development that is marked by significant physical, emotional and cognitive change in students. While adolescents thrive on social interaction, they also have the need for autonomy. Their learning needs are changing and teachers must be aware and responsive to these needs, especially during the transition from elementary to secondary school. In particular, language and literacy teachers recognize the responsibilities of supporting the maturation of their adolescent students' reading, writing, language and communication skills. It is a reality that, "...by the time adolescents enter the middle grades, they have learned a great deal about literacy. However, they need to learn more. Literacy continues to evolve as the world changes, its demands shifting and becoming more complex" (Ministry of Education, 2012).

Bearing in mind that adolescent literacy development is ongoing, there are some key points that should be rendered as noteworthy considerations in language and literacy programs (Ministry of Education, 2012):

- literacy is developed through thinking, expressing and reflecting
- literacy is fostered in active and responsive learning environments
- literacy learning is a shared learning responsibility
- adolescent literacy practices are deepened through research, collaboration and professional learning

Further, a comprehensive approach to language and literacy instruction should include questioning, metacognitive strategies, critical literacy skills and opportunities for students to form their identity. The above considerations and components were integral to the instruction that was facilitated as part of this project.

Adolescents crave to communicate with each other and sharing ideas boosts their confidence. The *Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry Project* sought to promote adolescent learning through abundant classroom talk. Such talk begins with teachers

providing students with instruction on taking the perspective of others, asking clarifying questions, validating the points that peers make, and disagreeing respectfully (Michaels, O'Connor, Williams Hall, & Resnick, 2010). Then teachers need to focus on a learning goal while holding students accountable for what and how they are talking with their peers – talk should be purposeful and provocative.

To positively impact the literacy learning of adolescent students, programs of professional learning should be collaborative, job-embedded and inquiry-based. This approach builds capacity, informs instructional practice and contributes to a culture of learning (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2012). Such programs can be facilitated on-site more easily than when teachers from different school sites strive to collaborate and nurture professional working relationships. Skilled facilitators should be available to support and sustain collaboration and administrators should engage as participants in the professional learning groups (Institute for Educational Leadership, 2012).

An effective method to undergird growth in educators is the formation of collaborative inquiry teams that engage in cycle of professional learning (Coburn & Stein, 2010). Collaborative inquiry was first proposed by John Heron in 1971 and later expanded by Peter Reason (2006) and it includes “research ‘with’ rather than ‘on’ people.” It emphasizes that all active participants are fully involved in research decisions as co-researchers. The research process includes a four stage iterative cycle with deepening experience and knowledge as a function of every cycle. This cycle begins with planning: identifying a literacy need, selecting a learning focus, and determining professional learning to address students’ literacy need. The second stage is acting: implementing evidence-based strategies and evaluating the outcomes. Then collaborators observe, building their experiential knowledge to re-apply it. Finally, there is reflecting: examining, analyzing and evaluating the results of the learning.

The cycle of collaborative inquiry is only as effective as the degree of teacher participation. There are seven common characteristics of collaborative teacher inquiry that contribute to enhanced professional learning: relevant, collaborative, reflective, iterative, reasoned, adaptive, reciprocal (Literacy & Numeracy Secretariat, 2010). Relevant teacher inquiry is steered by students’ learning. Then teachers may engage in a collaborative and reflective process of improving their practices. Ideally, this process is iterative and teachers continuously act, analyze, reflect and adjust practices. The analyses should be evidence driven and reasoned. Finally, teachers’ practice adapts and informs subsequent professional practice and theory.

A complementary blend of professional learning approaches might be found in collaborative inquiry and co-teaching. Co-teaching is also known as team teaching and has existed as an instructional model since the 1960s (Alexander, 1995). Co-teaching involves a dyad or triad of teachers who work collaborative to plan lessons and provide students with an enhanced learning environment. Co-teaching has the potential to create bonding opportunities for students and to engage teachers in collaborative, interdisciplinary planning (Coffey, 2013). Typically, co-teaching requires that teachers spend dedicated time developing curriculum and instructional methods before they facilitate a shared lesson.

Co-teaching that involves middle and high school teachers is termed, vertical team teaching (Cunningham, & Gresso, 1993; Texas Leadership Center, 1998). A vertical co-teaching team is comprised of teachers from different grade levels of education who come together to provide instruction that will ease the transition from grade to grade for students. This is especially poignant for a successful transition from middle to high school given the typical differences in the curriculum and skills (Bertrand, Roberts, & Buchanan, 2006). These

theoretical and practical considerations were integrated into the integral to the *Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry Project* that has been evaluated herein.

Ministry of Education and Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat Resources

The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 1-8 Language (2006) & English, Grades 9 and 10 English (2007)

The Ontario curriculum documents were the key components used in the Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry. Teachers used the documents throughout the collaborative inquiry as a starting point for open discussions, curriculum mapping, co-planning and co-teaching. They were used extensively as a reference to understanding the similarities and differences between language, English and how literacy impacts both the elementary and secondary classroom practices.

K-12 School Effectiveness Framework (Ministry of Education, 2010)

Key components of NCDSB's *Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry Project* are the effective practices of *Assessment for, as, and of Learning*, *School and Classroom Leadership* and *Student Voice*. The following indicators from the *K-12 School Effectiveness Framework (2010)* were instrumental factors within this project:

Assessment for, as and of Learning

Indicator 1.4:

Assessment tasks are aligned with the curriculum, collaboratively developed by teachers and the resulting demonstrations of student learning analyzed to ensure consistency with success criteria.

Specifically:

Collaborative planning processes were used to craft meaningful assessment tasks that aligned understanding of performance levels across grades, and courses (curriculum mapping, co-planning, co-teaching). Common assessments of learning were developed collaboratively by cross-panel grade teams.

School and Classroom Leadership

Indicator 2.1:

Collaborative instructional leadership builds capacity to strengthen and enhance teaching and learning.

Specifically:

Effective teaching practices, modeled in the PLC were used within classrooms during co-teaching.

Collaborative learning, co-planning and/or co-teaching was implemented inform instructional practices to meet the needs of students.

Indicator 2.4:

Job-embedded and inquiry-based professional learning builds capacity, informs instructional practice and contributes to a culture of learning.

Specifically:

Administrators regularly visited all classrooms to participate in the ongoing inquiry into effective instructional practices and how to increase their impact on student learning.

Knowledge and effective instructional practices were shared (e.g., through co-planning, co-

teaching, mentoring and coaching). Risk taking was demonstrated by trying new instructional practices and strategies. Consistent language and practices were modeled across classrooms.

Student Voice

Indicator 3.3:

Students are partners in conversations about school improvement

Specifically:

Articulated their role relative to the priorities of the school and contributed ideas, identify needs and celebrated strengths. Articulated what would help to strengthen the learning environment.

Growing Success: Assessment, Evaluation and Reporting (Ministry of Education, 2010)

The *Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry* focused on creating a more consistent approach to teaching language arts/English within the intermediate grades, and therefore a more consistent approach to assessment and evaluation practices. The *Growing Success* document was referenced in discussions when co-planning and incorporating learning goals and success criteria into their co-teaching lessons. Also the *Growing Success* document supported grade 7 and 8 teachers as they strived to better understand how to incorporate the four categories of knowledge and skills into their own assessment and evaluation practices.

Adolescent Literacy Guide: A Professional Learning Resource for Literacy, Grades 7-12 (Ministry of Education, 2012)

The *Adolescent Literacy Guide* provided participating teachers and administrators strong supports while developing their understanding of adolescent literacy and how it impacts student understanding. According to the *Literacy Guide*, it is very important to take into consideration all aspects of the adolescent student including the physical, cognitive, emotional and social development as well as the importance of the learning environment. Educators were encouraged to use the guide as a tool when co-planning their co-teaching lessons.

Research Questions

Based on the ongoing, *Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry* project that NCDSB began in 2011-2012, research questions have been identified that relate to teachers' practices and beliefs, and impact on students' achievement. The following research questions guided the evaluation of the Spring, 2013 initiative:

Teachers' Practices

1. How has collaborative inquiry contributed to teachers' (Grades 8 and 9) change in literacy instructional practices?
 - a. What are the instructional practices that are supporting students' literacy development?
 - b. What resources support teachers' collaborative inquiry professional growth?

Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions

2. Has the *Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry* project:
 - a. ...increased teachers' self-efficacy in literacy instruction?
 - b. ...made teachers aware of literacy instruction in another panel?
 - c. ...made an impact on teachers' intentions for their future practice?
3. Do teachers perceive growth in their knowledge of literacy instructional practices?

Students' Achievement

4. What are the students' (Grade 8) perceptions of their literacy development and preparedness for secondary-level English?
5. Is there an impact on students' literacy achievement as a function of their teachers' participation in the *Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry* project?

Research Design

Intervention Design

This research reports on a program of professional learning that eighth and ninth grade teachers engaged in together. Teachers were provided with professional learning and support in the use of the instructional methods of collaborative inquiry. This was accomplished through professional learning sessions that sought to encourage teachers to establish their own inquiry and collaborate as they plan and teach together. As partners, these cross-panel teachers focused on a collaborative inquiry that involved co-planning and co-teaching in each other's classrooms and debriefing about the process. It was also the intention of this initiative to increase teachers' awareness of instruction in another panel (i.e., elementary or secondary) and address potential apprehensions that students might hold with respect to high school English.

Operationally, the intervention design included the following key components:

- **Introductory Plenary Session** (full day)
- **Co-planning Sessions** (half day at each school site)
- **Co-teaching Lessons** (each dyad/partner taught at each site) and **Debriefing** after the co-taught lessons
- **Teacher Forums** (half day and then one full day)
- **Student Forum** (half day)

Introductory Plenary Session

The Introductory Plenary Session was facilitated by Jessica (Intermediate Consultant) with support from three other NCDSB Coaches (see **Table 1.**). All participating teachers in the project from February 2013 – June 2013 attended this session to re-establish their roles, review their involvement in co-planning and co-teaching and discuss data collection. The grade 8

teachers from School 1 partnered with grade 9 teachers from School 5; the grade 8 teachers at Schools 2 and 3 paired with the grade 9 teachers at School 4. The year previous, many of these teachers had participated in a pilot project focused on establishing collaborative relationships between the grade 8 and 9 teachers. For this current iteration, the facilitator sought to guide the teachers as they self-determined their statement of inquiry and details related to collaboration.

Co-Planning Sessions

Each of the participating teachers was granted a half day to engage in collegial co-planning for their upcoming lesson. Co-planning was done at one of the school sites with the dyads/partners coming together at a mutually agreed upon time. Teachers booked these half days in advance and were given release time. During the co-planning the teachers decided on the lesson goals, strategies, activities and resources that would be needed to co-teach in each other's classrooms.

Co-Teaching and Debriefing Lessons

In each of the five school sites, co-taught lessons occurred once in each of the classrooms. The foci of the lessons varied. Some lessons focused on oral discussion defending an opinion (using a 4 corners strategy); reading strategically to identify facts vs. opinions; writing a persuasive paragraph; explicit instruction of learning goals and success criteria. Other lessons focused on identifying author's message in a poem; identifying poetic devices; critical analysis with a Gallery Walk; explicit instruction of learning goals and success criteria. For Schools 1 (elementary) and School 5 (secondary), the teachers took on each other's roles and did all the teaching in the host classrooms. For Schools 2 and 3 (elementary) and School 4 (secondary) the groups shared equally the teaching in the host classroom.

The Facilitator and support staff were also available during the co-teaching lessons to provide the teachers with on-going assistance and make observations. After the co-teaching lessons, there was time devoted to debriefing of these sessions. Teacher participants shared their experiences and perceptions with their colleagues.

Teacher Forums

Teachers (n=12) and principals (n=3) involved in the *Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry Project* met for a half day focus group discussion. They reviewed the work of their students from the previous Student Forum (see below). Then they met in their family of schools and discussed the following questions: How has the collaborative inquiry made you aware of literacy instruction in another panel? Impacted your ability to support your students' literacy development? How the co-planning and co-teaching impacted your students' learning? What instructional practices helped to facilitate this learning? What resources and/or activities did you find most helpful to you professionally? Why? Has your participation in this collaborative inquiry influence your teaching? Where should the Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry go from here?

A second Teacher Forum was held for all teachers (n=46) involved in both the literacy and numeracy cross panel projects. The teachers chose to participate in three different small group discussions that prompted teachers on topics such as the benefits of rotary classes;

cooperative learning; academic streaming; scope and sequence of skills; bridging the panels; and moderated assessment.

Student Forum

A cross-section of students (n=39) from all participating schools attended a half day, guided focus group. This was facilitated by Jessica with 9 other consultants assisting during the small group discussions and data collection. There were five student discussion activities:

1. In your same grade class group, discuss what happened when another teacher taught in your classroom
2. With students from the same grade (but another school), complete the Venn diagram comparing the similarities and differences between the lessons
3. In same school and same grade discussion groups, discuss how you prefer to learn in Language Arts/English class (groups, partners, independent)
4. In same school groups, discuss your thoughts on moving to Grade 9 or grade 10 and write them down in chart form
5. Blending grade 8 (from feeder schools) and grade 9 students, discuss your responses to the previous activity question. Grade 9 students, can you offer advice?

Methodology

Case study is an exploration of a bounded system or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context (Creswell, 2012). More specifically, a collective, multi-site case study design (Merriam, 1998) was employed. This study was bounded by time and place. Data was collected over a 3-month period (March-June) with administrators, literacy coaches/facilitators, teachers, parents, and students from NCDSB in southern Ontario. The purpose of this collective case study is to understand and document the effects of collaborative inquiry on grade 7-12 educators who have engaged in the process in an effort to address a student learning need related to literacy. This research employed mixed methods of data collection, combining quantitative and qualitative data to examine the phenomenon being studied. Ethical clearance to conduct data collection was granted by both Brock University Research Ethics Board and Niagara Catholic District School Board's research ethics boards. All participants (teacher participants, facilitators, administrators, parents/guardians of students) signed informed consent forms.

School Sites, Teachers and Students

Three elementary schools and two secondary schools were invited to participate in this program. There were 11 teachers (grades 7-10) that fully participated in the program and their students indirectly participated as recipients of the teachers' professional learning. In total, there were 249 students in 10 classrooms. All of the teachers participated in the whole-group sessions (teacher open forums). James, the Grade 9 English Department Head at one of the participating secondary schools, did not participate in the observation, co-planning, and co-teaching sessions. Tracy was a grade 10 English teacher who did not participate in the co-

teaching sessions. Tracy participated in Year 1 of the cross-panel project, and was asked to serve as a mentor for the other teacher participants. There will be 20 targeted grade 8 students that will be tracked into Year 2 of this project. The following **Table 1**. offers a profile of each of these school sites, the teachers, classes, the facilitators, and administrators. It is important to note that Schools 1- 3 are elementary schools, and Schools 4 and 5 are secondary schools.

School	Teacher	Grade	Class Size	Facilitator(s)	Principal
1	Evan	8	31	***Jessica (Intermediate Consultant)	David
	Melissa	7/8	25		
	Lily	7/8**	N/A		
2	Jaclyn	8	22	Jillian (K-12 Literacy Coach)	Deanna
3	Ted	8	29		Dale
	Tammy	8	29	Tabitha (K-12 Literacy Coach)	Jeremy
4	Robin	9	28		
	Philip	9	14		
	Iris	9	32		
5	James	9*	N/A	Chloe (Grade 7 and 8 Student Success Teacher & Literacy and Numeracy Coach)	Kris
	Tracy	10*	N/A		
	Tristan	9	7		
	Larry	9	32		

Table 1. Summary of Sample: Schools, Teachers, Grades, Classes, Facilitators, and Administrators

NOTE: *= teacher only participated in the co-planning; **= teacher (not students) only participated in the co-teaching; ***lead facilitator

Data Collection

Qualitative and quantitative data were collected from five sets of participants: teachers, facilitators, administrators, parents, and students. The researchers triangulated the data collected through the use of multiple sources of evidence within each participant set.

Teacher Data

1. Surveys

An online pre-intervention survey (March, 2013) hosted on SurveyMonkey™ was posted by the facilitator. The online survey captured teachers' current practices and beliefs related to literacy instruction. The surveys were coded for each of the teacher participants. The survey consisted of 24 questions on a 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Undecided, Agree, Strongly Agree). The survey questions were intended to help teacher participants reflect on their current conceptions of reading and writing. The surveys were adapted from

previously administered instruments (Kucer, 2005; Graham, Harris, Fink, & MacArthur, 2001). As part of the analyses, the questions were clustered into categories: Writing Instruction (Traditional); Writing Instruction (Social); Literacy Instruction (Traditional); Literacy Instruction (Social); Spelling.

2. Anecdotal Notes during Professional Learning Meetings and Teacher Forums

There were 2.5 full-day plenary sessions (March, May, and June, 2013) and four (half-day) teacher-released professional learning meetings. For each of these sessions, the researchers took anecdotal notes of the professional dialogue and evidence in teachers' beliefs and practices related to literacy instruction.

3. Interviews

At each of the schools, the teachers were given release time to be individually interviewed (n=13) in June, 2013. The purpose of the interview was to garner an elaboration on the teachers' practices and beliefs with examples and illustrations from the classroom. Teachers were asked 11 questions about their Language Arts/English programs, their personal definitions of literacy, frequently used literacy resources. They were asked about their perceptions of students' literacy achievement. Finally, they were asked about their own professional learning growth and self-efficacy in literacy instruction as a function of participating in this collaborative inquiry. The 30 minute interviews were transcribed by the researchers.

Facilitator Data

1. Anecdotal Notes during Professional Learning Meetings

As abovementioned, there were two full-day plenary sessions (March and June, 2013) and four (half-day) teacher-released professional learning meetings. For each of these sessions, the researchers took anecdotal notes of the professional dialogue and evidence of the facilitator's practices.

2. Interview

Each of the facilitators were interviewed in June, 2013. The purpose of the interview was to garner an elaboration on their evaluation of the project and changes in teachers' practices and beliefs. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed by the researchers.

Administrator Data

1. Interviews

The administrators at the host schools were interviewed in June, 2013 to capture their perceptions of their teachers' professional growth as a function of the NCDSB *Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry Project*. Administrators were also asked about the supports and resources that they have offered their teachers. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed by the researchers.

Student Data

1. Term 1 and Term 2 Report Card Grades

Statistical analyses were run (t-tests) for all grade 8 student participants' Language Arts (Oral Communication; Reading; Writing; Media Literacy) report card grades (Term 2: June) and Grade 9 students' English grades. Gender comparisons by strand and for each class were made. For confidentiality, students were coded by: school/teacher/grade/student code/gender/targeted.

2. Anecdotal Notes of Student Forum

A Student Forum was held in May, 2013 to collect student feedback about their involvement in the cross-panel literacy collaborative inquiry project. Specifically, the forum was an opportunity for students to express their thoughts about the co-teaching lessons, their attitudes toward literacy learning, their preferred learning styles, and their perceptions of their preparedness to transition into grade 9 or 10 English. The researchers took anecdotal notes of the dialogue and evidence in students' beliefs and concerns about literacy and literacy instruction.

3. Artefacts

Evidence of students' performance was gathered from their classroom work samples. In particular, the researchers collected student work samples from the Student Forum and each of the teacher participants' co-taught lessons to determine whether the students achieved the lesson's learning goals.

4. Exit Cards

Students were asked to complete exit cards after the Student Forum. The purpose of these cards was to assess the students' own self-efficacy in literacy, their preferred learning styles, what they learned as a function of participating in this project, and what they enjoyed most about the co-teaching lesson.

Parent Data

1. Surveys

The parents of the students were invited to complete a survey in June, 2013 to capture their perceptions of their child's preparedness to transition into secondary level English and their child's attitude toward literacy learning. The survey was adapted from the *Family-School & Community Partnerships Bureau* (2011) and the *Michigan Study of Adolescent and Adult Life Transitions* (2000). A total of 249 surveys were distributed and 6 parents completed the survey, for a very low, overall response rate of 2.4%.

Data Analysis

The interviews (teachers, administrators, and facilitators) were transcribed by the researchers and qualitative data analysis included coding and collapsing data into themes. These subsequent themes were derived in response to the research questions. The researchers' anecdotal notes, student artefacts, work samples, and exit cards were similarly coded using the same themes that evolved from the interview data. Interpretations of the themes were made and illustrative quotes were selected from all of the participants. These qualitative findings are mapped back to the five research questions in the following section.

The quantitative data (i.e., teachers' surveys and students' report card data) were entered and analyzed using SPSS 19.0 (SPSS Software, 2011). The teacher survey data and the

students' report card data were analyzed using Paired Sample t-Tests. For the teacher survey data clustered categories were compared: Writing Instruction (Traditional) AND Writing Instruction (Social); Literacy Instruction (Traditional) AND Literacy Instruction (Social). For the students' report card data, since there were no pre-project data to make comparisons, so analyses consisted of gender comparisons for strand grades for Term 2/Final.

Findings

The following section is a presentation of the findings based on the data analyses. These findings respond to the clusters of research questions related to: "Teachers' Practices," "Teachers' Beliefs," and "Students' Achievement." Specifically, the findings will describe how the teachers' practices to: engage in synergistic co-teaching, develop a common language; share instructional strategies and resources; consider integrated instruction; use learning goals, success criteria and assessment tools; make instruction relevant; supplement instruction with technology. Teachers' awareness of literacy instruction in another panel, beliefs about growth in their knowledge, self-efficacy and intentions for future practice are summarized. Finally, the results of the analyses of students' perceptions of their own literacy skills and achievement are offered.

Teachers' Practices

How has collaborative inquiry contributed to teachers' (Grades 8 and 9) change in literacy instructional practices?

Synergistic Co-teaching to support Students' Success

The co-teaching partners displayed a synergistic relationship which maintained the pace and flow of the lesson keeping the students engaged. The teachers complemented each other and exemplified a competent and powerful instructional approach:

After Jaclyn reads the passage she asks class for comments. There were no comments - silence in room. Philip jumps in and asks "What do we know about what this person looks like physically does he say anything in the poem that gives away what he looks like?" (Anecdotal notes).

As Robin has difficulty with the SMART board, Tammy picks up the discussion for him... Tammy has been writing down these points as success criteria on a chart paper and she reviews them with the class (Anecdotal notes).

With two teachers facilitating the lesson, students received constant support and clarification: To have two teachers in one classroom doing one lesson is fantastic. You have someone giving it instructionally, but then you have someone going around the classroom fine tuning or keeping someone engaged, and people who need that constant extra support (Iris, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

The co-teaching was really great because you have the other teachers in the class and you can move around and see what is going on especially if you have a big class- I have 32 students in mine- so it's hard for me to reach all of them every time. But with other teachers in the class you

can have the time to go and check and see the steps and see how things are progressing, so it was really helpful (Larry, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

Robin asks for next steps for the response. A female student provides a response and Robin doesn't understand it so he asks her to restate it. She offers a good point and Tammy gets what she has said and helps her to paraphrase her point (Anecdotal notes).

Common Language and High Expectations

Teachers reported a lack of consistent use of common language in literacy instruction and assessment, and stressed the need for continuity across grade levels:

I would like to see a consistent approach from Gr. 7 to 10 for independent reading (Grade 9 Teacher, Teacher Open Forum).

There is inconsistency within our own departments in secondary school. We should all see an example of how essays are written (Grade 9 Teacher, Teacher Open Forum)

Grade 8 teachers don't call it 'essay' anymore. We need to speak a common language (Grade 9 Teacher, Teacher Open Forum).

Many of the teachers described the importance and critical role of co-planning to ensure a common understanding and common language of instruction across both elementary and secondary panels:

We need to continue on this course of co-planning so that there are some similarities and this idea that we are speaking the same language in grades 7 through 10. A lot of times the teachers are bringing up the idea that we have to be talking the same talk- the vocabulary -not single words- but just the way we are exposing them to inferencing, for instance, so everyone is doing inferencing. That common language is only developed when those teachers from both panels have time to sit down and discuss what inferencing looks like and how they are doing it in their respective classes. A common language of instruction will lead to changes in student work and achievement (Chloe, Literacy & Numeracy Coach, Interview).

All of the teachers developed a common language of assessment. For instance, grade 8 teachers have already begun speaking the same language and use the same terminology (specifically, the four categories of the achievement chart: Knowledge/Understanding, Thinking, Communication and Application) as grade 9 teachers in their assessment practices:

Some of the difficulty in transitioning from grade 8 to grade 9 is how the students are assessed. Parents get used to the 4 strands in elementary school and then in high school they are graded on "Thinking and Communication", "Application" etc. This is confusing for them and difficult for teachers to explain. I am now beginning to break down questions and structuring my tests according to the 4 categories of achievement and get students thinking about them such as, "This is Communication," and "This is Thinking" (Melissa, Co-Planning Session).

It would be useful for professional development if all the other teachers compared their expectations and saw what was important and useful. For instance, the achievement chart categories are often not in their rubrics when a piece of writing is required in the content area essays (Tristan, Co-Planning Session).

Together the teachers hold similarly high expectations for the students regardless of whether the students are in grade 8 or 9. In response to this, students demonstrated a higher level of performance:

Iris gives them two minutes to read and comment. Ted points out that they need to be more specific with their comments, such as, "If the response is good, what is good about it" (Anecdotal notes).

The grade 8 teacher says that she saw groups stating their opinion and then they were looking at the poem for support but only a few groups were looking at the poetic devices sheet and this is a goal for the future (Anecdotal notes).

Robin states that we remember events because of our emotional association to an event. With respect to the poem, there is an event that lingers and cannot be forgotten. A student comments on how this is expressed in free verse in this poem. Robin confirms that there is a psychological connection between an item and an emotion...Robin asks about the larger implications of this poem. He says that bullying is still occurring so what does the poem offer us? Students reply saying that it is a reminder. Robin affirms that it is a call to action. These words ring in your head. What is the call to action? (Anecdotal notes).

Evan asks students, "Once you pick a location, what do you think teachers expect?" A student responds and says that you need to back up with reason. Evan says, "Think about why chose corner and why didn't choose other corners." Think about how would you defend this? (Anecdotal notes).

Toolkit of Literacy Instructional Strategies, Supports, and Resources: An Evolving Resource

As a function of participating in this project, the cross-panel teachers developed, shared, and added a repertoire of new instructional strategies, ideas, and resources to their evolving teacher toolkit to support adolescent literacy development:

Since being a part of this project, I see now having looked at how a grade 8 teacher will approach my class, I look at how then I can approach literacy in different ways. Things that I haven't even thought of that would work for an applied level, after working with Evan (Tristan, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

I believe that from talking to my teachers, that they understand what's happening in terms of at the elementary level and how some of the practices that the elementary teachers are using or extremely valuable in getting the kids to move forward in literacy. So I can see certainly our people starting- they use a lot of the same strategies but maybe not to the same degree- but just looking at those and saying "ok we can incorporate some of these other practices." (Kris, High School Principal, Interview).

I felt that it was really great to get another teacher's feedback on language arts in English and a fresh perspective on what we do. It's great for us to collaborate and say, 'Well, you know this is what they should know really well, and this is what you should work on.' What are some trends they are seeing in grade 8 that they assume are polished in grade 9. I realized how much you could do in a short amount of time because in elementary they only have 40 minutes for a Language Arts lesson, so that really helped me see that there are a lot of things you can do quickly with them that you don't need to labour over. There are a lot of different approaches that she did with her classroom that I'd never thought of using different resources, such as whiteboards or the smart board that I found really helpful (Philip, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

I really got a chance to see and work together and what they were looking for skills coming into high school and how I could help my students out. Last year I rarely focused on short stories and the real development of characters and plot. But having the cross panel and talking with them, I did a little bit more. Instead of doing one short story, I actually did three or four short stories with them, delved a little deeper, so that hopefully when they hit high school they have a better understanding of characters, setting, and plot development, and analyzing what happens in a story will help them when they get to high school. So that has influenced my resource choices now (Ted, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

Teacher participants from both panels discussed the powerful effects of using similar instructional strategies on students' literacy learning and understanding:

A common thread is that the incoming grade 9 students are very well prepared, they have the language, they use anchor charts, and they know reading and literacy strategies. So when we're doing our novel studies, for example, the students already know what an inferencing skill is, they already know how to read for meaning, and they do a very good job with those particular skills (James, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

I started looking at grades 8 and 9 as a continuum as opposed to two very different separate entities which I never thought of it that way before. There is this idea that when they come into grade 9 there's a lot we have to teach them new concepts right from the ground up. I find with cross-panel that's not necessarily true- a lot of what we already do they've already done. I realized that you can do things like you can work things like inferencing because it is not a new thing for them, they've been doing it for so long...it's something they already know most of them but something I don't have to build from the ground up (Tristan, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

The grade 9 teachers also discussed how their physical classroom environments are now supplemented with visual supports for literacy learning:

These teachers discuss how in grade 9 classrooms wall space is being used differently and a stationary grade 9 classroom mirrors the elementary experience and helps students with the transition. A grade 9 teacher stated that they learned how to use wall space with anchor charts and they designated a particular room as a grade 9 English classroom that had all materials and resources present and posted (Tracy, Co-Planning Session).

The grade 9 teachers appreciated the ability to observe the grade 8 classrooms, which allowed them to see the gaps between elementary and secondary literacy instruction. Based on these observations, the secondary teachers are now incorporating familiar components of scaffolded, skill-focused literacy instruction in their classrooms:

A grade 9 teacher states that he has a visual or a schema for a grade 8 classroom and understands that they read small segments independently and not full novels. He appreciates that they will need gradual support to read a novel as he knows where they are coming from and begins the semester with some guided reading activities first (Anecdotal notes).

Another grade 9 teacher says that he used to assign a lot of independent reading at home but doesn't know as it takes practice to get through a full text. They don't like the independent reading and now they scaffold this with a text, *The Hunger Games*, that is fairly readable but they want to build the skills necessary for getting through a novel (Anecdotal notes).

Continuity through Interdisciplinary & Integrated Instruction

Grade 9 teachers commended the grade 8 teachers for their innate ability to embed literacy into the various subject areas. The secondary teachers wanted to emulate this cross-curricular, integrated approach to literacy learning in their own classrooms.

The grade 9 teacher clarifies that he sees that at grade 8 they are integrating other subject areas into their literacy time each day. They do this with such ease. This needs to happen at the secondary level and done with all the subject areas. This requires high school teachers to step out of their comfort zone (Anecdotal notes).

A grade 9 teacher discussed a more integrated strand approach instead of discreet units in poetry, Shakespeare, media, etc. This is now more interdisciplinary within English and more skill-based instead of just genre-based (Anecdotal notes).

A grade 8 teacher states that now he is doing less of the discrete literacy skills and taking a chance to incorporate these into a novel study (Anecdotal notes).

What are the instructional practices that are supporting students' literacy development?

Explicit Learning Goals and Success Criteria to support Students' Success

During co-planning the teachers prepared attainable learning goals for the lesson that were shared with the students to make them aware of expectations:

The next slide includes a "Learning Goal: I will use evidence from the text to explain the author's message" (Anecdotal notes).

During the co-teaching, the teachers draw out the success criteria for a response based on an exemplar. Students are required to link the success criteria to their own work and evaluate their own performance:

The teacher asks the groups which of the four success criteria they had and polls them one at a time. Then the teacher projects on the SMART board an exemplar of what the author's message is. The teacher dissects the exemplar using the highlighter feature of where the introduction is, the explanation, and the quotation (Anecdotal notes).

The grade 8 teacher takes up the lesson with the whole class. She asks what is a criterion for a good response. While this discussion is going on, the grade 9 teacher is writing on the tablet for the SMART board the points that are being made (Anecdotal notes).

Iris pulls up another slide on "Success Criteria" for a highly effective response. They give the students a few moments to talk in their groups about this. They circulate among the groups looking for criteria and prompting more detailed responses (Anecdotal notes).

Students validated this practice. At the Student Forum, in their same grade class groups, they discussed what happened when another teacher taught in their classroom:

I thought that really helped because we then knew for next time what we needed to work on for improvement (Mary Ward student).

Students also reflected on what they had learned during the co-taught lesson on their exit cards. Open-ended comments attest to the impression that goals, exemplars and success criteria make on students:

We made a success criteria and I knew step-by-step how to do it (St. Gabriel student).

The teacher walks around and gives us visual examples of what were required to write, while explaining the learning goals and success criteria (St. Paul, Academic student).

I learned how to give a good answer based on the criterion that was posted in class (St. Gabriel student).

I learned was exactly what I needed to know to set up a level 4 answer for these types of questions (Mary Ward student).

Before this project, my answer would have been a level 2 answer, but after this project and learning the steps, my answer will be closer to level 4 (St. Paul, Academic student).

I learn best when the teacher gives us a rubric and a rough outline to follow (St. James student).

Familiar Instructional Methods to support Students' Success

Teachers posed questions to activate students' prior knowledge and this was helpful for students to frame their thinking. Question prompts were relevant to students and illustrated what was pertinent to students:

Philip centres on the double meaning of 'hurt' and asks for predictions about what the poem might be about. A student replies with a viable answer (Anecdotal notes).

Larry opens with a provoking question about why we don't engage in thinking in persuasive ways as much anymore. A few students offer responses such as the media gives us the answers we need (Anecdotal notes).

When co-teaching the two teachers offer probing questions to scaffold the connections between opinion and evidence. This pushes the students to thinking critically:

The two teachers continue to circulate among the students. The teacher crouches down to work with a group and asks them to find evidence in the poem. What is the character actually saying about emotions in the poem? He moves on to another group and asks them clarifying questions about what they see as evidence for how the character is feeling (Anecdotal notes).

The grade 8 teacher then asks what the second sentence addresses in their success criteria and a girl responds, "the evidence." The grade 9 teacher asks why this is important. He reads the last sentence in purple and states that this is helpful with the context of the paragraph as well as the clarity and flow of the paragraph. He asks what this sentence also does and a student replies that it explains the quote. The grade 8 teacher then asks how this adds to the paragraph and a student states that this helps to make the connection even more clear (Anecdotal notes).

The teachers called on students' experience making connections to reinforce their comprehension skills and move the students to the next level of critical thinking:

Evan asks a girl to elaborate on the prompt with an example and then a second girl adds to this explanation. Evan asks a male student to comment and he is praised for stating his opinion and providing a personal example. Evan reviews that this is a text-to-self connection (Anecdotal notes).

Evan asks the student to refer back to his prediction and how it has been confirmed in this second paragraph reading (Anecdotal notes).

During the Student Forum, students expressed the helpfulness of making connections to

enhance their understanding. In their same grade class groups, they discussed what happened when another teacher taught in their classroom:

This activity helped us to improve our work because we got feedback from other classmates... We had to find out the meaning and support from the text. We also needed to try and connect to the poem (Mary Ward students).

We had to be VERY SPECIFIC about our comments (like how words helped and connections were made, etc.) (St. Paul students).

With two teachers, they could help out more and we got the point of the poem and a better understanding (St. Paul student).

The teachers used familiar instructional methods that the students responded to favourably, including group work and the Gallery Walk:

The students are used to getting up, walking around and working in groups, and showing their work. So, I don't think that was a surprise to them. To be honest, they're fairly adaptable. They didn't really seem to bother them that another teacher was in there...it's just another day. Same with the Grade 8s; I was in there, but they didn't change their behaviour at all, neither did mine (Robin, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

The students – we do a lot of cooperative work in elementary. So when the high school teacher came and we started doing the activities for our classes, it really wasn't a big deal. The way they acted, the way they were on task, and performing, as far as what we expected them to work within their groups, wasn't very different than what it would be on a regular day when I was teaching (Ted, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

They like the gallery walk; they liked seeing each other's work. They liked the idea of looking around and seeing what everybody else did (Philip, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

In this grade 9 class, the grade 8 teacher states that just like in grade 8 they will do a Gallery Walk and read their peers' responses on the chart papers. They need to note what they did well, whether they found evidence, and if they have a question or need clarification (Anecdotal notes).

A group of students critique a response saying that it is not organized and the punctuation is missing. The grade 8 teacher comes to them and asks, what is it that is missing? He pulls out of them that the introduction is weak (Anecdotal notes).

In each group we went around and gave constructive criticism to help the other groups (Mary Ward student).

At the Student Forum, students were grouped with students from their same grade (but at another school) and they completed a Venn diagram comparing the similarities and differences between the lessons. This group validated the use of using feedback gleaned from the Gallery Walk:

We used quotes from the text to support our answer...we both used feedback to help other groups improve (St. Gabriel & Mary Ward students).

The teachers made use of anchor charts for students to refer to and self-regulate their learning:

Evan holds up an anchor chart defining “Fact vs. Opinion” they are defined in 2 columns (Anecdotal notes).

After reading the article, Larry points their attention to a chart he has on the front board...

Fact: anything known to be true or have really happened; something that has or had actual existence

Opinion: what one thinks; a view or belief based on judgement rather than knowledge;-must be supported (Anecdotal notes).

He asks for students to refer back to the article and the anchor charts to review what is fact vs.opinion. A student cites key words like, “some people say...” And this is an indicator that it is probably an opinion. Another student talks about surveys and expressions of people's preference. Larry states that when there is a set of numbers there might be a fact. A student states that if there is research there might be a fact if it is based on some study (Anecdotal notes).

Making Instruction Relevant to Students

During co-planning the teachers discussed how to make the lesson and resources personally relevant to their adolescent learners. This meant choosing topically relevant reading material:

Melissa introduces the article about banning best friends at school as one they chose because they anticipated that the students would find it relevant (Anecdotal notes).

The grade 8 students especially noticed this and commented on their exit cards about personally relevant topics:

I enjoyed how they picked topics like cellphones, and best friends, that we could relate to and enjoy as well. It was something we know a lot about (St. James student).

Freedom to choose my topic for the final opinion place because it gave me a chance write about something I was passionate about (St. James student).

I learn best when the teacher makes connections to our work, to help us better comprehend what we`re learning (St. James student).

The teachers made the instruction relevant to the students' experience with other types of classical literature. Making this explicit for students is important for them to see the relevant connections:

Iris parallels this activity to Shakespeare's sonnets that they have been covering (Anecdotal notes).

The grade 9 teacher states that supporting your response is very important and supporting your interpretation of a poem is an important skill that was not done in the recent sonnet assignment they did (Anecdotal notes).

Lily asks the student to review their paragraph before handing it in to Larry. She recaps the lesson and says that finding the author's message is an important skill to practice when they are writing for topics related to their novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Anecdotal notes).

The use of visual literacy strategies to enhance verbal learning is important (Flattley, 1998). Because visual literacy precedes verbal literacy in human development, it is the basic literacy in the thought processes that are the foundations for reading and writing (Sinatra,

1986). The co-taught lessons were enhanced with technology to make learning relevant to and match the preferred learning styles of the 21st century learner:

When they were doing some of the visual instructional strategies, they were talking about something with a piece of text and it was on a document camera, and then the students in return were highlighting their own work or making their own notes. They were reviewing but it was a visual connection. I think so many more students are visual learners and because of that in the 21st century, we need to add visual instructional strategies to support that so they can see it, they can do it, they can learn from it. That is going to improve student achievement. (Jillian, Literacy Coach, Interview).

Students appreciated the use of visual literacy teaching aids and expressed this during the Student Forum and in their exit cards. Students from the same school and grade (different levels: Applied and Academic), completed a Venn diagram comparing the similarities and differences between the lessons and noted the use of visual strategies:

We read between the lines to find the meaning behind the words actually written...the video helped display more emotion as opposed to reading it from paper alone (St. Paul students).

It is helpful when teachers talk to us and also write stuff down on the board or uses a power point (St. James student).

A power point; I find it helps me learn better (St. James student).

Explains thoroughly the topic, showing pictures, having an engaged conversation with the class. There for visual and auditory learners, all in one (St. Paul Academic student).

What supports (including professional learning resources) did the team find helpful? Why?

Supplementing Literacy Instruction with Technology

Howe and Strauss (2003) note that millennial generation students expect to use technology and to have the tools necessary to streamline their educational experience. For students of this generation, using technology has become, and always has been, a part of their everyday experience. According to Evan, one of the grade 8 teacher participants, this level of familiarity with technology breeds a level of expectation for teachers to integrate technology into their daily literacy instruction:

I tend to use technology a lot. If I am doing a mini-lesson on how to format a newspaper article, for example, there is always some type of visual for them to use that will be either a PowerPoint or a Prezi presentation. Those resources really help. The students have developed an expectation and that's what they're expecting of me. So if I go up to the board and talk to them, it isn't going to work because they will ask where the PowerPoint is. So those technological resources are almost a must in our language program now. We've almost conditioned them to use those technology resources and they almost expect them now (Evan, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

During the co-teaching, some of the teachers successfully integrated technology (and more specifically, different modes of expression- visual and aural) into their poetry lesson. The teachers used another outlet (YouTube) to help their students better understand and interpret the figurative, symbolic and literal components of this poem:

Jaclyn went to a You Tube video of the poem and introduced this as a group of animators' effort to interpret the poem. The students immediately sit up and take notice. One student is

particularly interested in the fact that the animation would also include other parts of the poem that they had not yet read. The students are absolutely motionless viewing the video. The video (poem) has a very significant message about beauty, superficial judgement, lack of self-esteem, and depression (Anecdotal notes).

During one of their co-planning sessions, the grade 8 teachers discussed using an online reading source for their lesson as a vehicle for teaching students how to differentiate between fact and opinion. This website contains news articles on topics that are timely and relevant to students' lives, at reading levels appropriate for grades 2-8, and meet the expectations in the Media Literacy strand of the Language curriculum.

Melissa suggests using an online source called "Teaching Kids News"; she finds an article on cell phone use which is always discussed by students (Anecdotal notes).

Assessment Tools that Inform Literacy Instruction

The cross-panel teachers made reference to two formal diagnostic and summative assessment tools- the Ontario Comprehension Assessment (OCA) and the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT) respectively. These tests provided the teachers with accurate and comprehensive information on student progress in reading and writing:

In terms of reading specifically, we always use the Ontario Comprehension Assessment as just a way of measuring where the students are at the beginning of Grade 9 and where do we need to go from there. We always have them write a news report, so we give them examples early on what they'll have to do (Evan, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

A grade 9 teacher talks about how useful it is that both Gr. 8 and 9 teachers are now using a comprehension multiple choice test, called the OCA and this makes it easy to talk the same language when it comes to understanding a student's needs in comprehension; The OCA tests supports a cross-curricular focus in grade 9 (like in grade 8) other subjects like the arts and technology are now incorporating literacy into their courses (Iris, Grade 9 Teacher, Co-Planning Session).

The OCA is huge for your starting point, where you want to go with the kids. We do personal inventories at the beginning of the year to gauge how they think they learn and build on that as independent students (Lily, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

With our elementary and secondary teachers from grades 7 to 10, we've been rolling out the OCA as a diagnostic assessment. Teachers didn't understand the power of a diagnostic assessment which is focused on proficient reader skills- that's what the OCA is looking at. So using a diagnostic as a resource to develop a starting point in the class profile saying this is where we're going next and really structure teaching around the weakness for a student or group of students or whole class so that you can develop those skills in guided practice and whole class and the reading you do (Chloe, Literacy & Numeracy Coach, Interview).

The elementary teacher has a huge advantage in terms of knowing the kids so well that they can really understand where the student is at in terms of their literacy skills in any subject that they're working on. At the secondary level, we have to have a way of having that information available and incorporated so that the teachers can really draw on that. One of the things that we're doing at the high school is the OCA with all of our grade 9 students. We test them in the first semester and in the second semester they are tested again to see where they're at. It's very helpful for a teacher to be able to use a type of diagnostic assessment that will give them a good

idea early on in the semester where a child is at in terms of their literacy skills or comprehension skills. (Kris, High School Principal, Interview).

We try to teach to parts of the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test within our English course. Our department head likes us to do the same types of multiple choice reading questions, news report, and opinion piece that they will see in the literacy test, and we try to incorporate these within our units. For example, we will do a newspaper report within our Romeo and Juliet unit on a particular scene. It's more integrated now (Tracy, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

Whatever they do is based on or similar to the activities that they do on the literacy test. So once they get there- no surprises. I let them see what is similar in the test and what skills they need to be able to pass that test. When they come to grade 9, they're scared and ask 'What is this literacy test about, what do we have to do?' I tell them that it's something that they already know and will be ready for. So once something similar comes up -for example- a newspaper article, I point out that they will be doing something like this on the OSSLT. Once they do it once or twice, they are confident and comfortable to do it again (Larry, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

Focusing on the issues generated from administration of the OCA and OSSLT invited teachers to engage in rich cross-panel discussions about assessment and instructional planning that would help both grade 8 and 9 students learn and access information more effectively, as well as help them reach the provincial standard.

Professional Learning Resources for Literacy

The teacher participants identified and recommended the following additional resources to support literacy development at the elementary and secondary levels:

The *Adolescent Literacy Guide* focuses on literacy skills- it is a great resource that helps you understand and build those skills. It also helps with numeracy, for students struggling with comprehending math word problems. We need to focus on developing students' critical literacy skills (Jessica, Literacy Coach, Teacher Open Forum).

I really like the *Think Literacy* documents because of that focus that we have on trying to incorporate different subject areas, so it's very easy to use those *Think Literacy* documents because they make the connection between different subject areas and Language (Evan, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

The *Ontario Educational Resource Bank (OERB)* is one of those great, untapped resources that people do not know about. It's a little bit of searching to find what you need, but there are interactive things on there that just blows my mind. When you have access to computers like I do and in an applied class, it's great because they're right in if they can go on the computer (Philip, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

The *Literacy in Action* produced by Pearson is the strongest instructional support that could be purchased. In terms of its multimedia, it's a rich and engaging text that was always having an appeal to kids. As I was looking through the lenses of a non-reader, it had enough text support in it, had enough guides, but wasn't over stimulating because some texts have too many of the post it notes, strategies, or too much of the embedded strategies that are far too sophisticated for a struggling reader. *Literacy in Action* has a very crafty way of providing leveled texts for guided moving kids into independent practice. It follows the gradual release of responsibility so that kids would move from shared story part into them being engaged in that text and then moving into

texts that they could potentially read independently (David, Elementary School Principal, Interview).

I definitely recommend Pearson's *Literacy in Action* for grades 7 and 8, because there are a lot of entry points for students, no matter where they're at as a reader. They offer some shorter pieces for those students who are challenged in reading longer pieces. A lot of collaborative work is also suggested by those pieces (Chloe, Literacy & Numeracy Coach, Interview).

Teachers' Beliefs and Perceptions

Has the *Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry* project increased teachers' self-efficacy in literacy instruction?

Survey of Teachers' Beliefs

The one-time administration survey captured teachers' beliefs about literacy instruction. The 24 questions were clustered into categories: Writing Instruction (Traditional); Writing Instruction (Social); Literacy Instruction (Traditional); Literacy Instruction (Social); Spelling. Responses for the teachers' beliefs about traditional vs. social constructivist practices were compared. **Table 2.** is a summary of the significant findings. Interestingly, the teachers' expressed traditional beliefs on this survey instrument are not aligned with the social constructivist instructional methods that were the focus of this project.

Comparisons	Results	Significant Results Explained
Traditional Writing Instruction Methods vs. Social Constructivist Writing Instruction Methods	$t(12)=18.04, p<.001$	There is a significant difference in grade 8 and 9 teacher's views about traditional writing instruction methods ($M=26.23, SD=2.28$) as opposed to social constructivist writing instruction methods ($M=11.38, SD=1.19$). Teachers' beliefs align with traditional writing instruction methods.
Traditional Literacy Instruction Methods vs. Social Constructivist Literacy Instruction Methods	$t(12)=4.41, p=.001$	There is a significant difference in grade 8 and 9 teacher's views about traditional literacy instruction methods ($M=21.78, SD=3.35$) as opposed to social constructivist literacy instruction methods ($M=17.69, SD=1.80$). Teachers' beliefs align with traditional literacy instruction methods.

Table 2. Summary of the Teacher Beliefs Survey Comparisons, Results, and Significance

Self-Efficacy and Confidence

Teachers reported a sense of validation and affirmation of their current literacy instructional practices as a function of participating in this Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry Project:

It has confirmed a lot of what we're doing, in terms of specific strategies, and that there are similar things that they are going to be working on in high school. I tell them that they won't lose those strategies; they're just applying them in different ways, like in Shakespeare. They're still using those same strategies, only in different ways through different formats of language (Lily, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

I believe that they've been validated. They've been strongly validated that they're on to something powerful and purposeful. I think they're much more motivated knowing that now in the next panel there might be a driving force that continues. I believe that they've been much more validated than instructional practice being improved because they were at that point, they had a full understanding of problem solving, inquiry, for establishing a gradual release of responsibility, for creating multiple ways for kids to answer problems, to effectively use manipulatives and technology for kids to either have vicarious or real experience to problem solve (David, Elementary School Principal, Interview).

One of the concepts that we talked about with cross-panel was where high school was teaching English literature where we teach a lot of mini-skills that will help when they get into and analyze and breaking down literature. We're looking at visualization, making connections, asking questions, inferencing, so were doing a lot of those mini-lessons to help for when they get to high school (Ted, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

Since participating in this project in Year 1, several second-year teacher participants now felt more comfortable and confident in their professional practice. The second-year teachers reported that they were more prepared this year because they were familiar with and understood the topics better from their previous experience with this project in Year 1:

I think after my first experience, I didn't realize as much as I did after the second time going through. I think you just need more exposure to it, you need to go through it twice. I think with anything, to really get to know a course, you need to teach it once and sort of...then you can kind of step back and start playing with it (Robin, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

Has the *Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry* made teachers aware of literacy instruction in another panel?

Collaborative Culture of the Elementary Classroom vs. Secondary Classroom

Teacher participants discussed possible negative social and academic aspects of transition which elicits a range of concerns and confronting issues for students, most of which result from the dramatic changes that occur as students move from elementary to secondary school. According to the teacher participants, elementary schools provide students with systematically different social and academic experiences by virtue of size and structure. The students' transition to secondary school is a period that involves changes in social interactions, academic expectations and school environments, all of which concurrently occur and inevitably impact literacy outcomes for these students:

I think that it really gave a lot of insight into how students change from Grade 8 to Grade 9. There's an attitude shift, there's personality shift, social dynamics change. I think the method of

teaching changes slightly. I think it's different in the sense that there's a certain level of comfort that is achieved by the end of Grade 8...that sort of needs to start all over again in Grade 9, and never really happens again during their entire career. And, that's just a matter of being with the same students, the same teacher in sort of a close environment. I think that affected students' ability to take risks, and that's one clear thing I noticed this time, that see the Grade 9s were a little less willing to take risks. They didn't want to make mistakes for whatever reason, you know what I mean? They still don't want to make mistakes and the reasons for that- they don't want to be regarded as unintelligent by their peers or maybe their teacher or maybe they just don't want to show their creative side (Ted, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

In most of the co-teaching lessons, the secondary students had to talk it through, there were some questions of what was and what wasn't, and they were starting to hone in on that. In the elementary panel, it just seemed like it was a natural thing that they do all the time anyway in terms of their groupings and I think it's something that we're trying to get to (Kris, High School Principal, Interview).

In the literacy, I asked the grade 9 teacher if the depth of discussion in Tammy's class was greater and he agreed that it was in grade 8 – why? They discussed that it was a culture in grade 8 that they have been together for so long. I forgot how much the environment comes to play on the whole lesson. We talked about why students in grade 9 might hold back in answering – it is their comfort level to engage in discussion - how do we get the depth of discussion in the grade 9 academic class? This was an eye opener for me (Jessica, Literacy Coach, Interview).

I felt that in high school, the environment is different. They are used to a different learning structure where group work and collaborative learning probably doesn't happen as much as it does in elementary. I think high school is different in the way that the material gets delivered to the students. With apathetic kids and kids that don't really know each other as well, in grade 8 a lot of our children have been together, they are comfortable with speaking in a group in a small and large group. Now you have a lot of kids that are coming from different schools, so their comfort level might not be the same, they might not want to share answers as much, it might be more difficult for the teachers to try and get them to collaborate as much as they do. My oldest is in grade 8 and I get it, I understand that it is really tough enough for kids that you know- but looking outside your comfort level with kids that you don't know they are very self-conscious. Am I going to be attacked, ridiculed, laughed at. Am I saying the right things? (Ted, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

Differentiated Instruction in Elementary School vs. Secondary School

The grade 8 teachers provided the necessary pre-requisites to success and then differentiated instruction to support student achievement:

A grade 8 teacher says that students need the procedural steps, processes, exemplars, time to work in groups, with partners and by themselves in order to produce quality pieces of work.

When they were working today they showed me that they are not ready and I still need to go around and give them support and more practice (Anecdotal notes).

When the teachers and their principal reflected on co-taught lesson, the grade 9 teachers expressed that they ensure that the skills and needs of students in Applied English are considered. Teachers consider how to give students opportunities to be successful in the oral communication domain when they are challenged by reading and writing forms of communication:

The students need more white space in the text and this might be less intimidating to them. Some of the students might not have a clear definition of what reality t.v. is. This group might be a bit different in what they prefer to watch (Anecdotal notes).

Tracy stated that the Applied students are much better orally, and Lily says that this is the case with her grade 8's too especially the ones that have been brought forward to team. The principal concurs that in the Applied class that he sat in on, the oral discourse was a testament to their confidence in this modality. This is the reason for differentiating instruction. Tracy concurs that she sees this even with her grade 12 students who are in applied and their talents in oracy and it is a challenge to support their reading and writing skills (Anecdotal notes).

Students are much stronger orally in reading (Grade 9) but struggle with writing their ideas down on paper (more confident in sharing opinion and talk things through but paralyzed by text- writing skills versus oral literacy). There is a need for these to be developed together (Anecdotal notes).

Teacher participants noted the main difference between elementary and secondary literacy is in the complexity of instruction provided for students. Specifically, the secondary teacher participants commended their elementary counterparts for their ability to differentiate instruction within their mixed-ability classrooms and to create an inclusive learning environment:

When I plan, I plan for the whole class and differentiate but when they plan for academic classes, it is just academic. This is different and the high school teachers didn't plan for the various levels in grade 9 and they only planned for the general levels (Melissa, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

I learned that in grade 8, you have such a mixture of students. When I plan for my applied class, I think of a certain way to approach the lesson because I know what I'm getting. With grade 8, you have to remember that there are all levels. That's the way I had to approach the grade 8 lesson, 'how can I do an activity that's not going to leave anyone out or be stumbling for some kids and that other kids won't find too easy?' When you plan for an applied class, your shining stars will be fine with the work but you have to remember that there are students who I know will put up their hands and I don't want them to feel left out because I don't want them to shut down. So I try to include everybody and that was one thing I found eye opening about planning with Evan...It was valuable to see how a grade 8 teacher deals with different levels all in one room which we don't have to worry about in high school. Even in my applied class, I have higher applied students than I have low. So I saw how you could blend your instruction to make sure everyone is getting touched, that was a key thing (Tristan, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

The cross-panel teachers discuss the practice of grouping students together so that they support each other's growth as a form of differentiating instruction. This type of cooperative instruction in the intermediate classroom supports learning for all as students benefit from heterogeneous groupings. This is an insight for the secondary teachers who are accustomed to streaming:

Tracy stated that she could not tell the difference between the grade 8 students who would be streamed into applied or academic. She is still baffled by how this decision that is made for students. She wonders if some of them lean on their peers and benefit from this? Lily replies that this might be the case but it is also the case that students benefit from sharing dialogue and learning from each other (Anecdotal notes).

Evan notes that he assigns students to groups with a purpose in mind so that there is a student within each group that might be streamed as applied and with the others at the group they are

supported...He carefully selects students for groups such that at least one is a high level student who will mentor other students in the group (Anecdotal notes).

Awareness of Streaming and Misconceptions about Elementary and Secondary School

The elementary teacher participants appreciated the ability to observe and co-teach in an applied, academic, or locally developed classroom, as they more fully understood the dynamics of streaming/ability grouping in secondary school:

I really appreciated observing a locally developed class. My grade 8 students' parents asked about it, and now I can tell them what it looks like in action, the dynamics of the classroom. It was not at all what I thought it would be (Tammy, Teacher Open Forum)

The observation was really good. I thought that was a really good experience because it was the first time going in. Especially when we have to recommend, as Grade 8 teachers, what stream they should be going in. I had no idea what a locally-developed English class would really be like. I guessed academic and applied, but the locally-developed was really good, so now when I recommend kids for that, I know they're actually doing work, they're doing a novel in there (Jaclyn, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

I don't know if I necessarily fully understood the way in which an applied class of 8 students worked until I actually saw it. I noticed that some of the things they respond to, for example getting up and walking around the classroom or being able to share their thoughts and opinions and discussion, I didn't know how well that would work in a class of 8 because I've been in an intermediate class of 30 plus. So it's very easy to stimulate discussion when you have so many students in my class and of varying levels, and I wasn't sure how it would work with such a small class and when they're deemed applied and how that understanding those levels work in applied (Evan, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

Participating in this cross-panel project enabled teachers to confront and challenge some of the misconceptions they held about their co-teaching partners' teaching practices in elementary or secondary school:

It really opened my eyes to how much, in terms of language arts and the skills that they already know, coming into Grade 9 that I assume I'd have to teach them. The entire higher order concepts like symbolism or indirect characterization, I assumed maybe, wasn't broached until grade 9 but upon going into Jaclyn's classroom, I saw evidence of it all over the walls. So, it really gave me an idea of what I don't need to cover, and also some things that I would need to strengthen. There's certain skill sets that they already have that I assumed I would have to teach them from scratch that I don't really necessarily have to. That's one thing that I was really pleased with is, again, and that's all about closing that gap (Philip, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

The observing portion is critical for teachers to get a sense of the respective worlds. There may have been a bias of what happens in high school or elementary, so I think to remove that right away if there was a bias for them to witness first hand and observe. Co-planning goes hand in hand in terms of allowing each teacher to see what the expectation is in grade 8 for example and what the expectation in grade 9, because sometimes there might be a misconception with regards to what abilities a student should already have coming into grade 9. So I think it is more an awareness that you are kind of seeing and then moving to the next step by co-planning and having that discourse with the teacher (Tabitha, Literacy Coach, Interview).

One of the things I noticed is that the students in the grade 9 applied class really responded to some of the strategies I use every day in my grade 8 class. They responded very well to the four corners activity. When I am in a high school classroom it's not necessarily the idea I had in the past that the teacher stands up there in front of the students, that's the way I thought a lot of teachers taught in high school, but just from the co-teaching I realized it's nothing like that which I guess is great for me to understand as a grade 8 teacher because I know that the strategies I am using in my class are being used in grades 9 and 10 (Evan, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

Has the Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry made an impact on teachers' intentions for their future practice?

Importance of Teacher Voice: Self-Directed Professional Development

As a group, adult learners are self-directed, ready to learn, experienced, task-centered, and intrinsically motivated (Lieberman & Pointer, 2008). They typically prefer open-ended learning opportunities and a voice in the direction and pace of their learning. This was confirmed by the teacher participants who believed that effective professional development should integrate teacher input regarding what and how they will learn as well as teacher choice regarding learning pace and direction:

Professional development should be what we choose to talk about or learn (Teacher Open Forum).

We should have self-directed PD and decide which is more important to us. For example, if we are given three days of release time, I could choose where to go and what to do with it. If I feel the need to do observation, planning, or moderated marking, I should be able to choose how to use those days (Teacher Open Forum).

Instead of PD being one day in November, we should be allowed to sign up for opportunities like the teacher open forum and take it to whatever level (Teacher Open Forum).

Teachers Observing Teachers: A Professional Development Tool

Engaging in reflective practice allowed some teacher participants to become aware of their "default" teaching styles and traditional teaching methods, which may not necessarily work and have adverse effects on students' literacy learning. Based on their students' positive reactions to the co-taught lessons, several teacher participants will continue to use their co-teaching partner's instructional strategies in their future practice:

The grade 8 teachers now know that they need to be more complex in their teaching. The grade 9 teachers now know that they need to be more collaborative in their practices and get their students talking (Jessica, Literacy Coach, Interview).

I think it was watching the way that my students responded to Evan, watching how the way he approached them was a lot more discussion based which I didn't know would work with my Applied students because a lot of times some of them are very reserved and don't like to offer a lot. But I found that when you find common ground with them, they will open up, and they're learning even when they don't realize they're learning. They're actually acquiring something new and don't even realize that they're doing something new. That's something I really liked about Evan's lesson that way with the four corners and cell phone. They were actually expressing and supporting an opinion and they were doing it in such a way that was so easy to them and you realize that that's exactly what you're actually going to be learning. That was a real light on for

me because wow they are learning and they don't even realize they are learning. And for me maybe I should talk less and maybe they should talk more. Because in high school there is that idea that we have to be the shepherds, the Socratic teachers. And I thought, no I should take a step back and let them figure it out for themselves (Tristan, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

Prior to participating in this project, Tristan focused exclusively on building students' content knowledge. However, after observing a grade 8 classroom, Tristan came to the realization that he must move his students beyond literal interpretation and regurgitation of facts, and use strategies for deeper understanding, one of which includes helping students hone their skills at making inferences (Co-Planning Session, Observational Notes).

In grade 9 they have a lot of content. In the grade 8 class I saw today, they were learning strategies like inferencing. This is what is helpful to me to go to another person's class and see how it is done. I learn how to teach better by doing this. In grade 9 we don't focus as much on the inferencing – we tell them a lot directly and we need to be careful not to cram them with the information. We encourage them to regurgitate information (Larry, Co-Planning Session, Observational Notes).

I liked how the grade 8s are willing to use words, even though they weren't using it properly, they were experimenting with language, and I think that's so important. It becomes so analytical in high school, we really want to focus on this essay-model at the beginning of grade 9, make sure they have that perfected because they're going to be doing that their whole life, their whole academic career, and they need to be able to do it well. But at the same time, it starts to shape the way you think. And in terms of how you can use language in such dynamic ways, it becomes very restricting. This formal writing style becomes a rote process that they go through without giving them the chance to be creative. So, within the English classes themselves, maybe I'll try to do more to bring that creativity out of them again, experimenting with language, getting a little bit messy, instead of focusing so much on strict form (Robin, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

It is the belief of many teacher participants that the increased connectedness and maintained collaborative partnerships between the elementary and secondary schools will provide for a seamless transition and reinforce a continuum of skills and strategies that will ensure each student's successful literacy development. Teachers described the benefits of pooling their talents, sharing their effective practices and resources to meet student needs:

When I speak with my grade 9 counterparts at my feeder school, I listen more to what they have to say and now I get more ideas of what they're doing, what I should be doing more of, what should I step back from and let them take the reins on. An example of that is using essay writing. I would always focus so much on essay writing, whereas because of this cross panel, I've been able to deal with the grade 9 teacher at School 4 and he tells me they'll take the reins on essay writing, why don't you focus more on developing better paragraphs. So it almost relieves me and helps me understand that now I can focus specifically on this skill and next year they'll take over and they'll worry about essay writing and some of the other skills that I don't necessarily need to focus on. So I guess my pedagogy has changed in that way (Evan, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

I am going to take the best practices that we talked about collectively and collaboratively with our peers in high school, and even the individual lessons and learning goals that we focused on. I am certainly going to build on that for next year. I am also going to use those same resources again (Ted, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

Marking and Moderation of Assessments

According to the cross-panel teachers, moderated marking is a valuable exercise because the process allows the cross-panel teachers to engage in meaningful dialogue about students' work. Consequently, there is greater alignment and consistency in assessment and instruction across the grade levels:

We should bridge assessment tasks. If we do the same or similar tasks, we should also perform moderated marking (Grade 9 Teacher, Teacher Open Forum).

I would like to do more moderated marking to see how secondary school teachers mark. For instance, do they assign a certain percentage to reading and writing, how is it weighted? (Grade 8 Teacher, Teacher Open Forum).

We could teach a Shakespeare lesson in grade 8, then assess it together, and decide what a Level 3 or 4 looks like (Grade 9 Teacher, Teacher Open Forum).

It would be nice if grade 8 teachers taught *The Outsiders*, and the grade 9 teachers went in during this time, assessed their work, and created a sequel to build their prior knowledge (Grade 8 Teacher, Teacher Open Forum).

Sharing Resources between the Elementary and Secondary Panels

Teacher participants discussed engaging in data-based decision making, where they would analyze student results on the OSSLT from the previous year to help improve the students' literacy development. Teachers also suggested the creation of a resource document for both panels that contains sample OSSLT assessments, instructional resources, and reading lists:

We should give grade 8 and 9 teachers exposure to the style of OSSLT so we can support students with the OSSLT test and provide the tools to set students up for success (Grade 9 Teacher, Teacher Open Forum).

Grade 8 teachers could get a report from secondary schools as this might help develop next steps (Grade 8 Teacher, Teacher Open Forum).

What is the data telling us? We need to look at the data to focus on student literacy needs in grades 8 and 9, and then adjust our teaching (Grade 8 Teacher, Teacher Open Forum).

We need to know each others' reading lists and instructional resources from grades 7 to 10 so we are not repeating lessons or content (Tammy, Grade 9 Teacher, Teacher Open Forum).

Sustainability

Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts to long-lasting teacher professional growth and improvement in student achievement. Professional learning should no longer be viewed as an isolated event. According to the teacher and principal participants, the two key factors are the provision of time and funding for both individual reflection and collaboration:

The piece to sustain growth to really affect student achievement is ensuring that the cross panel observation, co-planning, co-teaching are not just isolated events. It needs to be longer and greater. It needs to be where we hear in both scenarios that they're saying, "From that co-teaching lesson, I have followed up and continued." We need to set it up so that the lesson wouldn't be finished in a day, hoping that it would be carried on, finding the time to then come

back again and think where are we? Where did that one lesson take you? The cross-panel teachers were not looking at making it an event or interruption to learning but making it a long-term plan. The conversation was there; the intention behind the instruction and goals of the lesson was so that both could carry on. In my belief, to really look at improvements in student achievement, we have to give it time, we have to see, and it needs to not be single events (David, Elementary School Principal, Interview).

I would like to do more than one lesson. I want to immerse myself in the culture of that secondary classroom (Grade 8 Teacher, Teacher Open Forum).

We should meet with our grade 9 partners once a month (Grade 8 Teacher, Teacher Open Forum).

There needs to be continued allocation of funds from our school board for release time for observation, co-planning, and co-teaching (Grade 9 Teacher, Teacher Open Forum).

There is so much value in discussion. We should have professional development for half a day and the other half having real conversations between grade 7 to 10 teachers (Grade 8 Teacher, Teacher Open Forum).

Do teachers perceive growth in their knowledge of literacy instructional practices?

According to the teachers, participating in this project allowed them to obtain a clearer understanding of and the differences between English, literacy and language:

I think my definition of literacy changed because I think that I am started to think more cross curricular as we've all been discussing. A couple of years ago, we were teaching it as a unit and something that we had to do to fulfil those criteria of the literacy test. I used to think of it within the realm of English and I don't think of literacy under the umbrella of English anymore after talking about this (Tracy, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

In the beginning when we first met I know that when Jessica was asking us to define English, literacy and language. I found it to be overwhelming to break them all down. I now know that literacy is all encompassing. If you want to teach Shakespeare, that's the English aspect of it, but the literacy part of it is all those strategies and how you can apply them and use them in different areas of language and English. So I think I've become clearer on each of these definitions (Lily, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

My definition of literacy has changed in that we understand that there is more of a continuum than we ever realized before. We look at the expectations between grade 8 and grade 9, and the documents are almost identical. So we have to look at literacy as more of a continuum, and I think that's what has changed. Literacy exists now along a spectrum as opposed to in the confines of your classroom from September to June in one year (Evan, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

Students' Achievement

What are the students' (Grade 8) perceptions of their literacy development and preparedness for secondary-level English?

Perceptions of Students' Literacy Development

Capturing the students' voice and their perceptions of their own learning was a goal of the Student Forum. In same school and same grade discussion groups, students discussed how they preferred to learn in Language Arts/English class. They provided examples of when it is helpful/not helpful to work in groups, partners and independently:

Group work is helpful for different thoughts and ideas; partners can generate more ideas when you are with another person; by yourself you can focus on your own ideas rather than the opinions of others (Mary Ward students).

Group work is helpful when learning a new task to get new ideas and ways of looking at things but not helpful when students don't participate or take it seriously; partners make working comfortable but if you don't get along with the partner or they slack off, all the work is on your shoulders; working independently is helpful to focus and get the work done the way you want it however not helpful if you don't have feedback from a peer and if you can't get the work done (Mary Ward students).

Group discussions are helpful when everyone is putting in ideas on a topic; partner work is helpful when you are answering knowledge and understanding questions, but not helpful if your thoughts and ideas are in conflict with your partner; independent work is helpful for writing essays and responses to application questions but not helpful with communication questions and expanding your ideas (St. Francis students).

Group work is helpful when the project is big but not helpful when there are a lot of distractions and people talking over people; partners are helpful if they have more knowledge on the project but not helpful if they don't cooperate or if it is your friend that distracts you; individual work is done quickly without noise, but if you need more information or more ideas then you have no one to ask (St. Francis students).

To acquire another perspective on students' perceived literacy learning and development, parents were surveyed. The majority of parent respondents (67%) believed that their child was "good" in Language Arts. Four parent respondents believed that their child needs to demonstrate "a bit" of effort in order to be successful in Language Arts. Two parent respondents expressed concerns over their child's writing skills:

We hope Amanda has realized now how important it is to pay attention to detail when writing (Anonymous Parent).

Our child's writing could use some help with punctuation and neatness (Anonymous Parent).

Parent survey responses regarding their perceptions of their child's attitude toward Language Arts were evenly divided. Three parent respondents believed that their child finds Language Arts "interesting" and the remaining three respondents believed that their child finds Language Arts "neither interesting nor boring." According to most parents, their child has a positive attitude toward reading, writing, and oral communication:

Amanda has always loved reading. It is in hope that she continues to take that love of books and express herself with writing (Anonymous Parent).

Our child enjoys reading and reads frequently. I am satisfied with our son's oral communication (Anonymous Parent).

Christopher has maintained a positive attitude toward reading, writing, and oral communication. I think that is in part to the great teachers that make it exciting and interesting and provide encouragement to Christopher (Anonymous Parent).

Expectations and Perceptions of Preparedness for Secondary-Level English

The students recognized the instructional methods that the teachers used and familiarity built confidence in their own ability to respond to English teaching.

I thought that in high school the teaching ways were much harder, but I now know after the project that the teaching ways are very similar (St. Gabriel student).

It isn't as hard as I thought it'd be. When the teacher came in and we did our explanations, it was like we were doing it with our own teacher (St. Gabriel student).

The teaching methods were the same. It wasn't a lot harder or more independent as I had thought it would be (St. Gabriel student).

I enjoyed that was that the grade 9s also did the same thing and it helps me get to know how grade 9 teachers teach (Mary Ward student).

I've learned that even though your teacher may not have you as a student all day, they will treat you the same and that makes me more confident about participating during class (Mary Ward student).

Grade 8 students benefitted from the co-teaching by garnering an understanding of the culture and academics of secondary school. This contributed to their schema of becoming a successful high school student:

A boy in my class asked the grade 9 teacher whether or not his lesson was an applied or academic lesson. I thought that was interesting because I thought the students really learned that there is no such thing as an applied or academic lesson. So what they saw is that he came down into grade 8 and he used strategies that they are familiar with. So they were interested to see are these strategies going to be used next year because what if I am going into an academic class, are they going to be different? Now the students are making the connection to high school and making the connection to where they are going. The grade 9 teacher did a great job explaining that there is no such thing as an applied or academic lesson. We look at all of you as learners and we all learn differently and have different intelligences, and that is what we focus on as teachers (Evan, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

Evan asks his students why they are revisiting a type of writing that they did in the Fall and they inferred that it was important because the high school teacher was here to do this lesson so it was something that they perceived as important (Anecdotal notes).

It was a look into our new future and what we are going to become...This was the first time we learned about English...Made us get an idea of what high school is like (St. James students).

The co-teaching lessons prompted and instigated further questions by the grade 8 students. Students expressed concerns over the expectations of secondary school, specifically the instructional content, strategies and skills required to succeed in secondary level English:

They really started to make more of a connection with high school. They started to think and ask me a lot of questions about how this will help them next year or where they will see this next year. They wanted to know how what they're doing here will be useful in high school and where it will

be useful, whether it's with Shakespeare or what media literacy looks like or will you have to read newspaper articles in a grade 9 class. I think the whole purpose of this cross panel is to bridge the gap, to help students recognize that there is a pivotal moment between grade 8 and grade 9 and that by bridging the gap, they're at least starting off grade 9 on a positive note. That is really where I can see my class benefiting from (Evan, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

The experience of participating in a lesson that was co-taught by a grade 9 English teacher helped assuage the grade 8 students' fears of high school English:

The classes won't be as scary as I thought (Mary Ward student).

Grade 9 English isn't as hard as I expected (St. James student).

Grade 9 work for English really isn't as scary as I thought it would have been (Mary Ward student).

The parents of the students involved in this project were quite positive about the preparedness of their children for secondary-level English. The parents of three student participants gave favourable evaluations of their child's preparedness for secondary-level English (1- very prepared; 2-prepared). Four parent respondents were "satisfied" with the transition process in preparing their child's transition into high school (1-neither satisfied or satisfied; 1-very satisfied). According to their survey responses, all of the parent respondents believed that the Academic English stream would be most appropriate for their child to take in grade 9. The majority of parents (83%) believed that their child will do "well" in English next year.

Ability Streaming: An Overriding Concern for Students

During the student open forum, one of the grade 8 students was worried about the effects of ability streaming on students' self-image of academic performance- more specifically, channelling into the Applied Stream- and the negative connotations associated with it:

I overheard a grade 9 student who had chosen an Applied stream in English, and she said to the grade 8 student, 'It doesn't matter if you're Applied. You have to do what's right for you. Don't worry about what everyone else is saying.' Of course it is ok to be in an Applied class if that is where you learn best. Knowing that that was one of her concerns- she was upset about having to choose the Applied stream. I think we are not well read enough- administrators, guidance counselors, principals, VPs, teachers, parents. They are not valuing all pathways equally and they don't understand them. What I am getting from kids is that the Applied class is the behaviour kids who just couldn't hack it in Academic and that is the wrong message if the kids think about themselves. So we have to add value to each pathway read and think about the program we are delivering to those students (Chloe, Literacy & Numeracy Coach, Interview).

Another grade 8 student reflected on the experience of having a grade 9 teacher explain how their lesson was taught in both Academic and Applied classes. This put at comfort the uneasiness that was perceived:

That there is almost no difference in how Academic and Applied are taught (St. James student).

Is there an impact on students' literacy achievement as a function of their teachers' participation in the Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry project?

Students' Ability to Engage in Collaborative Inquiry

The Gallery Walk strategy is established practice and students demonstrated respect when critically analyzing the work of their peers:

The students are posting their chart papers and the grade 8 teacher passes them a stickie note and they have to rotate clockwise. A group of boys view a page and state that they see the opinion and support for it. They see evidence of why it was effective and a conclusion (Anecdotal notes).

Robin turns to his left to read another response on chart paper and reads it verbatim. He asks for strengths of the response. A boy says that there was ample evidence; another says that the evidence was clear; another boy says that they used their prior knowledge and Tammy chimes in to say that this is true if this has happened to someone here. Robin states that they can relate to the poem when it is something that we have experienced – this is the schema part (Anecdotal notes).

Artefacts were garnered from Ted`s grade 8 class after they had completed the Gallery Walk strategy. Students read a poem and on chart paper in small groups responded to the question, “What is the author`s message?” There were three rounds of peer feedback that were affixed to each group`s response. All of the peer comments were constructive and respectful. Some of the comments noted that the responses offered good support from the text as well as specifically cited evidence. Some of the suggestions offered in the peer comments were that a response was a bit simplistic and had a literal interpretation. Another constructive comment was that there was a lack of clarity in the response. Most significant were two groups` responses that lacked support for their statement of opinion and a lack of connection to the cited quotes. Overall, the depth of peer feedback offered during this exercise in Ted`s grade 8 class was quite substantive.

Students have a mature understanding of the value of expression and taking perspective. In their exit cards, students stated their appreciation for the collaborative aspect of the lesson:

Evan asks students why it is important to accept different opinions? A boy replies that this is good because you can hear about different things. A girl adds that this gives you a different perspective and you might accept another opinion (Anecdotal notes).

When you are in a group and when you combine everyone`s answer you get a great answer in the end because everyone has something to add and contribute (Mary Ward student).

I really enjoyed how the classroom became a huge discussion circle where everyone was encouraged to give their opinion and feedback on the poem and video (St. Paul Academic student).

Going into groups and collaborating with other peers that is what helps me learn more (St. Francis Academic student).

I like to hear their opinions and how they are thinking (St. Francis Applied student).

I like voicing my opinion in front of the class and defending it, hearing other peoples` opinions and agreeing with them (St. James student).

This practice of being actively engaged during a collaborative in inquiry lesson was valued by the student participants who remarked about this during the Student Forum: I liked being able to talk about our lesson and being more involved...it was a different learning experience sharing our opinions (St. James student).

The teaching style was more advanced... our thoughts on the topic were more detailed and we had to do more thinking (St. James student).

I think that the teachers should do this more. I like how they went step by step and not just doing it on our own (St. Paul student).

Student's Oral Communication Performance

During an introductory portion of the lesson on fact and opinion, students demonstrate their ability to take a stance and orally defend it. They are respectful at listening to the opinions of their peers and responding thoughtfully:

Larry calls on the one student that is at corner number 1 and asks her for her reasons why she chose this stance. She offers three good reasons including cheating and the availability of the phone in the main office. Larry calls on the members of group 2 and one boy speaks out about the temptation of using a cell phone for cheating and the fact that the prompt that was originally presented did not include any educational reasons for having a cell phone. Moving to corner number 3, a boy speaks to the fact that during some emergencies the phone lines might get blocked and it would be helpful to have individual phones. The phones could be all gathered during a test to deter cheating. Larry challenges their thinking and they honestly respond saying that they love their phones and would respect the rules so that they don't lose them. A boy in corner number 2 then challenges the girls in corner number 3. The one girl in corner number 1 also chimes in with a justification that there are some privacy issues related to what goes on at school and students should not have the opportunity to take pictures with a cell phone. There is another set of comments about the usefulness of the phones to teach responsibility. This group of grade 8 students enjoys debating and respectably listens to each other's comments (Anecdotal notes).

They love to debate and are so strong and this especially strong orally. This group is not afraid to speak out and they respect each other (Melissa, Grade 8 Teacher, Interview).

According to one of the grade 9 teacher participants, the co-taught lesson helped increase his students' comfort levels and improve their oral communication skills, as they more willingly initiated more whole-group and small-group discussions:

I saw that my grade 9 Applied students were very happy with the co-taught lesson we facilitated, and so we do more of that now, such as the Four Corners or we talk in general. For example, before we read a chapter together, my students now like to talk about things or bring up discussion questions based on a chapter (Tristan, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview).

Students' Reading Performance

Students are using metacognitive strategies, their prior knowledge and making connections to other texts. This is a bridging of the strategies and skills that were taught in the elementary grades and now being applied in the secondary grades:

As the researcher walked around the room, she noticed that some (high-level) students used their prior knowledge and made text to text connections to support their answer (e.g., *Outsiders* novel study unit) (Anecdotal notes).

Evan noted that when he used text-to-self connections that he was happy that they recalled this from elementary school and this helps to bridge their reality of moving from grade 8 to 9 (Anecdotal notes).

Tammy makes notes on a chart paper on the side board. A student says that they were searching for relevant evidence; another says that they were using their schema to make a connection between past experiences and the text. A boy says that he looked to see the evidence was valid. Another boy said that the answer needs to flow and Robin confirms the coherence. A girl explains how the evidence supports the point being made (Anecdotal notes).

Students are comprehending, analyzing and drawing inferences from text. They are competently picking out the figurative, symbolic and literal components of this poem:

Iris pulls together the group and asks the students to share their thoughts. The dichotomy of emotions is pointed out by a student. Another student points out the misunderstandings. Some students draw inferences about the character's eating habits. Another points out the point of view with use of pronoun, "I." The T asks why this is an advantage to be reading the poem from the perspective of the author poet (Anecdotal notes).

A group of four students races to fill their chart paper and begins to refer to the poetic devices page. They shout out "imagery." They write a response stating how a connection was made and the emotions that were evoked – sympathy. The girl in the group writes quickly and fills the whole chart paper with several paragraphs and a conclusion (Anecdotal notes).

The teachers circulate the room while the students are working. The grade 8 teacher reminds a girl to highlight only something that contributes to the key message that the author is trying to deliver. They move to the lined paper to paraphrase the author's message. Working in a group of 3, they all talk about the message, "that words stay with you forever but bones can heal" (Anecdotal notes).

Students quickly attack the question. One group of boys doesn't even sit and they begin talking about the victims of bullying and cite a few sentences from the poem. A boy asks his group mates, "What are we going to write down?" Another group is quick to move right to the chart paper and begin with, "The author's message is..." one student writes while the others are stating things to him. Another group writes on the chart paper what their task is and then they begin to write, "We believe that the message the author is trying to communicate is..." They talk about how much they like the poem as everyone goes through this...They add to their statement after discussion that "bad things that happen to you will stick with you." Another group starts, "In our opinion, the author's message is that emotional/verbal bullying can be worse than physical pain or injuries..." Another group uses the poet's name in the introduction to the response...These students are very focused and on task immediately and without hesitation writing their ideas down. Scribes are quickly chosen and fed ideas (Anecdotal notes).

The students themselves positively evaluated their own reading skills citing specific strategies that they use within the following comments on their exit cards:

I read well by understanding what I am reading and visualizing it (St. Francis, Academic student).

What I do well is while I'm reading I try to picture what's really happening in my mind, I do this so I get a visual in my mind so I can understand better (St. Paul Academic student).

I do well in reading because I am able to make inferences and make predictions (St. James student).

Students' Writing Performance

Students can identify components of a complete persuasive paragraph citing evidence and explaining its significance. This was apparent during the lesson and stated in their reflections on the exit cards:

He then asks why the last portion of the last sentence is underlined and why it is significant than the rest of the explanation. A girl says that it shows how far bullying can go. He asks what it refers to. A boy says that it refers to the topic sentence. Another says that it is a reference back to the quote. The teacher says that this is not always easy to do (to refer back to the quote) and you only need to do this for a certain portion of the quote to get the message across – focus on a few key words (Anecdotal notes).

I learned how to write a proper answer with good supporting evidence and relate it to why I think what I think (Mary Ward student).

This prepared me for next year's English was supporting my answer using a quote from the text and making my points clear (Mary Ward student).

I learned that for every opinion there must be a fact to back it up. If you don't have evidence, your writing won't be strong enough (St. James student).

Students were able to apply the strategies learned during the co-taught lesson and apply it to their own summative assessment task of writing an essay. This enhanced the structure and content of their writing:

I would say that they wrote very successful and effective essays at the end as a result. That was one of my goals- to be able to write an essay. So the activity that we did together was finalized for that. After marking them, I saw that many of them actually used the same strategies that we covered in this activity we did together. (Larry, Grade 9 Teacher, Interview)

In the lesson, we learned about the steps about including the topic sentence, examples and explanations then relating it to the text and making connections (St. Paul Academic student).

How to properly structure a supportive opinion, and follow through to expand ideas (St. Paul Academic student).

Students were highly motivated to write and (unprompted) began the subsequent steps of the writing process. They expressed confidence in their own writing skills:

Larry interrupts them and praises all the brainstorming that is being done. He also sees some rough drafts coming out. He did not ask for students to do this however he states that this is a good next step in the writing process...Students are engaged and not distracted during this lengthy activity. Then Larry interrupts and complements them on what he is seeing. He sees good titles, "Don't touch my BFF"... interestingly, this was not a prompt from him (Anecdotal notes).

My strength in language arts is writing because I love to write and express my opinion and thoughts (St. James student).

Student writing samples completed several weeks after the co-taught lessons were evaluated by the researchers. The purpose of the writing samples was aligned with the goals of the co-taught lessons. Students in both Tammy and Jaclyn`s grade 8 classes were required to write to the prompt, "Use evidence to explain the author`s message" in response to a poem that they had read. Students in Melissa`s grade 8 class wrote to the prompt, "State your opinion about banning best friends" after reading an article about schools that restricted peer contact. A rating scale (Level 1= weak; Level 2 = developing; Level 3=good; Level 4=excellent) was used to evaluate three criteria. **Table 3.** is a summary of the means for each of the writing criteria for each of these teachers.

Teacher`s Class	Clear topic sentence that identifies author`s message	Quotation from text that clearly relates to topic sentence	Clear explanation of how the quotation shows author`s message
Tammy	3.3	2.9	2.7
Jaclyn	3.3	3.0	2.5
	Clearly stated what they thought or believed	Based the view or belief on judgment	Provided logical support for their opinion
Melissa	3.8	3.3	3.1

Table 3. Means for Writing Criteria for Grade 8 Teachers' Classes

Students' Confidence

The students were confident orally communicating and sharing their opinions. They critically analyzed text and articulated this analysis to their teachers with justifiable reasons. They were also confident challenging responses:

The students in this grade 9 Applied English class were not phased by the filming – they were getting the lesson too. The elementary principal noted that they were comfortable sharing their opinions than the Academic class (Anecdotal notes).

A female student questions why a phrase has been classified as a fact when it should be an opinion. Robin asks a girl to defend why she believes this and she points out a sentence in the fourth paragraph as the justification for this. So then he refers back to the underlined sentence and says that should be an opinion (Anecdotal notes).

There is some confusion with categorizing a statement as fact or opinion. Tristan gets clarification of which one. It is one sentence that was labeled "O" and the second clause is a fact as it is truly what the person was encouraged to do. Tristan agrees with the student and praises her. Another girl adds that this sentence could be looked at differently, she thinks that the "O" part could be a fact. Tristan asks her if this portion could be challenged and she comes to agree that it could so that it remains an opinion. He thanks her for challenging the response and says that it proves that she is thinking (Anecdotal notes).

When asked as part of their exit slip reflections, students expressed their self-confidence in their literacy skills:

I think that I'm good with writing and discussing because I'm a leader. I like talking with groups of people and writing because I have great ideas for independent writing (St. Francis Academic student) (Anecdotal notes).

I read and write the best. I know this because my vocabulary is exquisite and I can understand most words in their respective arrangements. This also doubles as the reason for why I think I am good at writing (St. Paul Academic student).

I do well in reading, comprehension listening, and discussion. I usually get good grades in these areas (Mary Ward student).

Student Report Card Data

Final report card grades for grade 8 students (4 strands: Reading, Writing, Oral Communication; Media Literacy) and grade 9 students (English final grade) were analyzed for gender comparisons for strand grades. **Table 4.** is a summary of the significant findings for each of the three elementary schools and the two secondary schools combined.

School and Strand	Results	Significant Results Explained
School 1 Reading	School 1 Overall: $t(41)=-2.44$, $p=.019$ Evan`s Class: $t(29)=-2.75$, $p=.010$	There is a significant difference in grades between grade 8 males ($M=74.88$, $SD=6.08$) and females ($M=79.57$, $SD=6.83$) at School 1, $t(41)=-2.44$, $p=.019$. Female grades are higher. There is a significant difference in reading grades between grade 8 males ($M=74.30$, $SD=6.48$) and females ($M=81.09$, $SD=6.76$) for Evan`s class, $t(29)=-2.75$, $p=.010$. Female grades are higher.
School 1 Writing	Evan`s Class: $t(29)=-2.26$, $p=.032$	There is a significant difference in writing grades between grade 8 males ($M=74.20$, $SD=6.19$) and females ($M=79.63$, $SD=6.82$) for Evan`s class, $t(29)=-2.26$, $p=.032$. Female grades are higher.
School 1 Oral Communication	Evan`s Class: $t(29)=-2.03$, $p=.052$	There is a significant difference in oral communication grades between grade 8 males ($M=76.40$, $SD=5.04$) and females ($M=80.55$, $SD=6.12$) for Evan`s class, $t(29)=-2.03$, $p=.052$. Female grades are higher.
School 1 Media Literacy	Evan`s Class: $t(29)=-2.09$, $p=.045$	There is a significant difference in media literacy grades between grade 8 males ($M=78.30$, $SD=6.76$) and females ($M=83.18$, $SD=5.00$) for Evan`s class, $t(29)=-2.09$, $p=.045$. Female grades are higher.
School 3 Reading	School 3 Overall: $t(56)=-2.04$, $p=.046$	There is a significant difference in grades between grade 8 males ($M=78.12$, $SD=7.35$) and females ($M=82.03$, $SD=7.03$) at School 3, $t(56)=-2.04$, $p=.046$. Female grades are higher.

	Ted`s Class: $t(27)=-3.18, p=.003$	There is a significant difference in reading grades between grade 8 males ($M=76.19, SD=5.86$) and females ($M=82.23, SD=3.92$) in Ted`s class, $t(27)=-3.18, p=.003$. Female grades are higher.
School 3 <i>Writing</i>	Ted`s Class: $t(27)= 2.50, p=.019$	There is a significant difference in writing grades between grade 8 males ($M=77.19, SD=6.32$) and females ($M=82.54, SD=4.89$) in Ted`s class, $t(23)= 2.17, p=.041$. Female grades are higher.
School 3 <i>Media Literacy</i>	Ted`s Class: $t(27)=-2.07, p=.047$	There is a significant difference in media literacy grades between grade 8 males ($M=78.31, SD=3.91$) and females ($M=81.54, SD=4.45$) in Ted`s class, $t(27)=-2.07, p=.047$. Female grades are higher.
School 2 <i>Writing</i>	Jaclyn`s Class: $t(20)=-1.35, p=.192$	There is a significant difference in writing grades between grade 8 males ($M=73.00, SD=6.86$) and females ($M=84.46, SD=8.08$) in Jaclyn`s class, $t(20)=-3.47, p=.002$. Female grades are higher.
School 2 <i>Media Literacy</i>	Jaclyn`s Class: $t(19)=-3.11, p=.006$	There is a significant difference in media literacy grades between grade 8 males ($M=78.00, SD=2.65$) and females ($M=83.23, SD=5.17$) in Jaclyn`s class, $t(19)=-3.11, p=.006$. Female grades are higher.
Schools 4 & 5 English grades for all grade 9 classes	All: $t(133)=-1.08, p=.281$ Applied: $t(122)=.432, p=.666$ Academic: $t(14)=-1.87, p=.083$	No significant gender differences on final English grades for either of Applied or Academic classes.

Table 4. Summary of Report Card Grades for Schools, Strands, Statistics and Significant Results

Limitations

As with any body of educational research, the study examined here exhibits some limitations that merit noting. One of the most common concerns with all self-report measures remains the truthfulness of the participants' responses (Creswell, 2012). The Likert-scale surveys such as the one used to capture teachers' beliefs about literacy instruction is susceptible to biased reporting. Response bias of social desirability may have also occurred when the teachers, facilitators, and administrators were interviewed (Creswell, 2012). In other words, the interviewees might have filtered their responses in a conscious effort to create a favourable impression of participating in this project. There is an even stronger tendency for participants to modify their responses when they are not anonymous (Creswell, 2012).

Third, because the researchers were present during the observation, co-planning, and co-teaching sessions, the Hawthorne effect (i.e., participants may change their typical behaviour merely because of the presence of the researchers) may have limited results (Creswell, 2012).

This research also included a small number of teacher participants from a medium-sized school board which results in a low level of generalizability. There was also no random assignment of teachers to a control or intervention condition. This research could thus be

enhanced using a quasi-experimental design with the inclusion of a teacher (non-intervention) control group.

Next Steps

Lessons Learned: Implications for Practice

The research summarized here offers a unique perspective as it is founded on two years of implementation of the *Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry* project. This timeframe afforded stakeholders to use the data already collected as a means to help inform future decision making and improve professional practice. This pattern should now be repeated with subsequent iterations of this project.

As the teacher participants came to realize that there were more similarities than differences between the language arts and English curriculum expectations, a bridge between the two panels was created. This work needs to continue; professional learning might focus on curriculum mapping and collapsing expectations into groupings that could be meaningfully taught concurrently and across grade levels. Clustering expectations across the four elementary strands and making connections to the secondary curriculum expectations would be a next step in implementing this program of professional learning.

Teachers of students in the intermediate grades should continue to explicitly build student awareness of how to apply learning strategies when responding to OSSLT assessment question items. In other words, OSSLT preparation should be ongoing throughout the intermediate grades and inherently a part of language and literacy instruction. Teachers should not be regarding OSSLT preparation as a distinct educational entity, reserved for grade 10. Moreover, they should be communicating to their students that literacy skills that are exercised during the intermediate grades will be used in this assessment and it is an opportunity for students to transfer their knowledge and skills.

Based on the teacher survey finding that the participants held somewhat traditional instructional beliefs about teaching reading and writing, future professional learning programs should offer teachers a safe forum to express their beliefs about literacy instruction. Facilitators need to begin this discussion with a debriefing about prior experiences and effective and ineffective practices need to be deconstructed and connected to current, research-based instructional methods. The teacher's role as a director of knowledge versus a facilitator of student-directed learning should be explicitly addressed as part of teachers' beliefs and attitudes. This is an ongoing pursuit as teachers' own practices begin to change, their beliefs will be challenged and cognitive dissonance will ensue. Facilitators need to be acutely aware of the discomfort associated with cognitive dissonance, perceived loss of control, and resistance to change that some teachers exhibit.

As a function of participating in this project, the cross-panel teachers developed, shared, and added a repertoire of new instructional strategies, ideas, and resources to their evolving teacher toolkit to support adolescent literacy development. They began to use common language in their literacy instruction and assessment, and thus, their students experienced consistency in literacy pedagogy. This implies that funding, resources, and periodic release time for observing, co-planning, and co-teaching should be continuously provided in order to build continuity and consistency across all grade levels. Teachers also believed that effective professional development integrates teacher input regarding what and how they will learn as well as teacher choice regarding learning pace and direction. Teachers preferred engaging

in professional development activities that they deemed necessary and personally relevant. These expressed preferences should be taken seriously by professional learning facilitators.

Teachers stated that the time that they were allocated to co-plan with their teaching partners was the most invaluable to share their knowledge and plan to move forward. They regarded this piece as having an impact on both their practice and their students' learning. The teachers also suggested that future cross-panel dialogue should analyze OSSLT data, engage in moderated marking, curriculum mapping, sharing and refining literacy instructional and assessment practices to improve student learning, and promote a seamless transition from elementary to secondary school. Teachers suggested the creation of a resource document that can be shared among both panels, which contains sample OSSLT assessments, instructional strategies, and reading lists for them to draw on to support collaborative inquiry and communication among their students. These practice-oriented recommendations should be considered as operational objectives as this Cross-Panel Literacy Collaborative Inquiry matures and moves forward.

Without question, an essential component of this professional learning project was the release time that teachers received to co-plan and co-teach with their teaching partners. They regarded this piece as having an impact on both their practice and their students' learning. The time devoted to co-planning was used in a variety of ways and in some cases included teacher moderation of student work. The self-determination that teachers were granted to determine the path of their own professional learning was one of the key contributors to the perceived effect of this component of the project. Circuitously, this mirrors the key elements articulated in the purpose of this collaborative inquiry project.

Implications for Future Research

A longitudinal, quasi-experimental research design can be used to monitor whether extraneous factors, such as the Hawthorne Effect, may explain any changes (i.e., teachers' practice, students' literacy achievement) in the intervention group. The paucity of longitudinal research tracking the effects of teacher professional learning on both educators' practice and students' literacy achievement means that little is yet known about the potential for establishing enduringly effective professional learning communities. An opportunity exists for a sustained investigation into the program of literacy professional learning that has been presented herein. Future research should also strive to include larger samples of participants. The teachers that have served as participants for this portion of the project are also well-positioned to further enhance their literacy instruction and be tracked into the following academic year. This poses interesting prospects as some teachers entering their first, second or third year of the project. The achievement of their former and present students could also be studied. The research design could be extended to include additional teachers who might be mentored by the experienced ones. This type of parallel professional learning builds collegial professional practice among teachers and has a particularly high focus on student learning, which consequently makes a significant contribution to the research literature.

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Authors' Note:

Dr. Tiffany L. Gallagher and Katia Ciampa, Ph.D. (c) are both educational researchers and instructors in the Department of Teacher Education at Brock University. Tiffany`s research expertise is in mixed methods research designs that investigate assessment and teaching strategies and students with exceptional learning needs. Katia also engages in mixed methods research designs specializing in the use of technology in literacy education to motivate students. A request was made by NCDSB`s Research Officer for researchers to investigate the *Cross-Panel Collaborative Inquiry Project* and Tiffany and Katia elected to assume this role. Throughout the second term of the 2013 school year, both Tiffany and Katia were at arms-length to the design and facilitation of this project. The research of this project was vetted through the Research Ethics Board at Brock University and NCDSB. All data were independently and confidentially collected and analyzed and subsequently presented in this report. Neither Tiffany or Katia have been employed by Niagara Catholic District School Board and were not remunerated for the research or writing of this report; consequently they have remained an objective evaluators throughout this process.