

Literacy@School: Enhancing Professional Learning through Demonstration Classrooms in Canada

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What is Literacy@School?

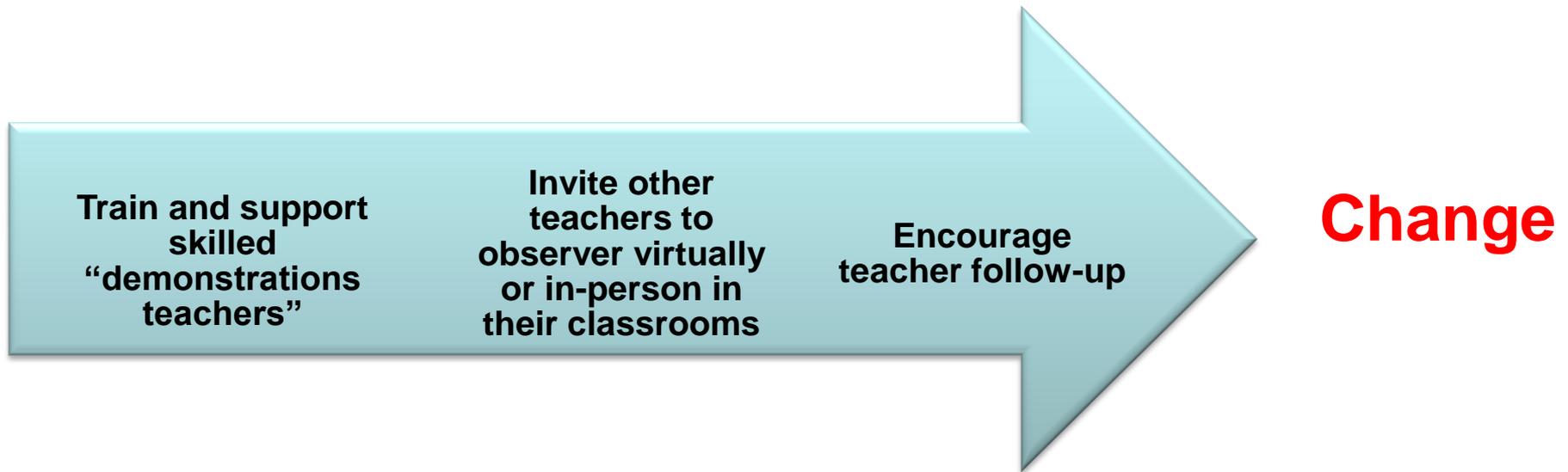
- Multi-school initiative of the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) in Ontario, Canada
- Central aim to enhancing literacy instruction by using powerful digital tools in demonstration classrooms throughout the district
- A “classroom without walls”



Canadian context

- Education is solely a provincial responsibility
- Ontario Ministry of Education established target of having 75% of Grade 6 students reach the provincial standard on reading and writing assessments
- Literacy and numeracy secretariat created
- L@S in one of several initiatives aimed at helping YRDSB students reach the objective

Theory of action...



Teacher professional development

- Teachers selected for best practice literacy teaching skills
- Ability to articulate their practice
- Technology not a prerequisite
- 3 daylong sessions/yr and release time



Virtual visits



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Outcomes at end of 3rd year: Program

- Realization that professional practice does not change by one-off visits to demonstration classrooms
- L@S integrated into other professional development programs across the school board
- Expanded to more teachers, higher grades, numeracy skills

Outcomes at end of 3rd year: Teachers

- Classrooms became more constructivist, learner-centered, greater use of technology than previously
- Shift in teacher conversations away from the technology tools per se to focus on the tools' role in learning and instruction
- Literacy instruction: guided reading and shared reading, questioning for inference development, the use of technology to support multi-modal learning and multimedia artifact creation, relating instruction to students' lived experiences, and the critical study of media representations.

Examples of student projects

- A body project, in which students worked in teams researching and writing about a chosen body system (e.g. the circulatory system) and then worked with other teams to show how the systems were interrelated.
- A graphic novel project, involving the team creation of storyboards followed by the use of graphic novel creation software to develop the project.
- Reading and responding to stories in Moodle



Other student projects

- A French language project in which students created a short play.
- A music video project, in which students created a music video as part of the music and literacy curriculum, developing storyboards, choreographing dance moves, and editing the digital video.
- Various science projects researched on the web, and presented to the class using PowerPoint.



Conclusions

Nearly all of the demonstration teachers' growth can be attributed to three factors:

- the quality of the professional development sessions held for the demonstration teachers several times a year
- the state of “reflective mindfulness” around practice engendered by their assuming the responsibility to demonstrate and discuss best teaching practices to visitors
- their collective participation in a strong, albeit informal, professional learning community.