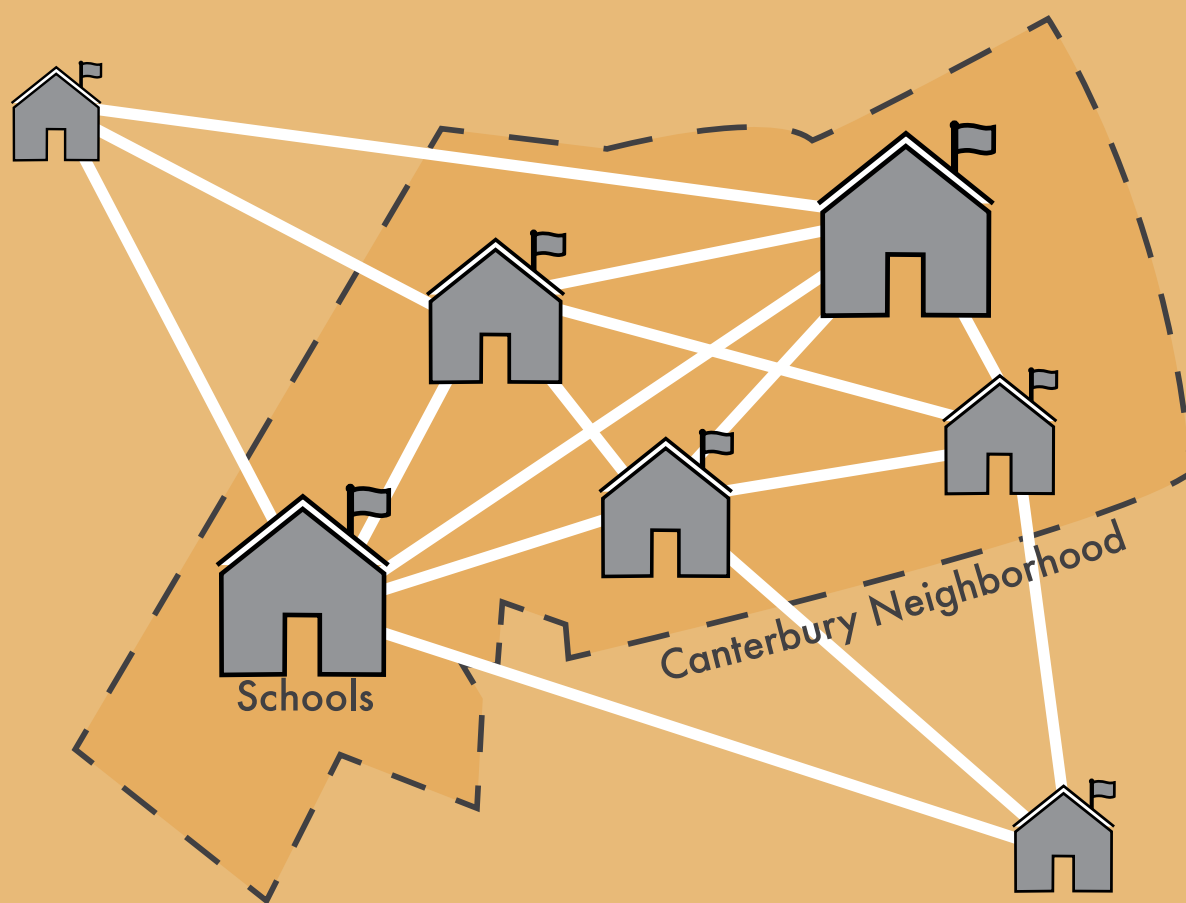


Lessons for Developing School and District Capacity to Transform Literacy Instruction:

A Retrospective Study of the Canterbury Learning Collaborative

By Ann Jaquith





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Introduction

This retrospective study chronicles the progression of the Canterbury Learning Collaborative (CLC). The CLC consisted of a small group of educators, mostly principals and teachers, from a cluster of schools located in the Canterbury neighborhood of the Woodgrove Unified School District (WUSD).

The WUSD is a medium-sized, urban school district with approximately 50,000 students. Within the WUSD, Canterbury is a poor, working-class neighborhood with large numbers of immigrant families, and where students typically perform below the district average. With sustained support from an outside funder, the Goodwork Foundation, schools in the Canterbury neighborhood came together regularly over a period of 10 years (2006–16) to learn with and from one another about how to strengthen their school leadership and teaching practices in order to improve student literacy in their schools. This network of schools became known as the CLC.

During the period from 2006 to 2009, CLC schools focused first on developing systems of performance assessment. In 2010, the focus of the CLC shifted to developing an alternative approach to literacy instruction, and some of the schools participating in the Collaborative changed. Over time, in CLC schools, the culture and teaching practices changed considerably. The district saw the effects of these changes and eventually central office administrators became interested in learning from the CLC schools. As a result, in the period from 2013 to 2016, practices used by CLC schools were absorbed into centrally administered approaches for developing principals as instructional leaders and for supporting a new district-wide approach to literacy instruction. Thus, the CLC, which first existed as an independent network of schools, later became a district-led structure. The discussion that follows shows how practices were incubated within five CLC schools over a four-year period and, then, how these practices were spread to the district's 75 elementary schools.

This article describes a case study where school educators have ongoing opportunities to learn in a network of schools that share the same learning goals and hold each other accountable to make progress toward those goals, resulting in transformational change. This article further shows that under the right conditions, central office staff can learn from innovative schools and figure out how to leverage this learning to benefit other schools in the district. This article begins with a description of the district context, which changed considerably during the decade from 2006 to 2016, and describes the key actors in this story. Then, it chronicles the development of the CLC by considering four phases of its progression. The article concludes with a series of lessons about how schools and districts can develop the capacity needed to achieve district-wide instructional change.

¹ See Appendix A for a description of the study's data sources and methods.

² With the exception of technical assistance providers, such as Columbia University's Teachers College Reading & Writing Project (TCRWP) and the New Teacher Center, all organizations referred to in this report have been anonymized. Interview subjects are not named and locations are given pseudonyms in order to preserve the privacy of the participants and their organizations.

District and Central Office Culture

In order to make sense of the magnitude of the changes that occurred in the culture of the WUSD, it is useful to know the context in which these changes took place.

The Relationship Between the Central Office and Schools

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) resulted in schools throughout the United States operating under stringent centralized requirements. Schools—especially those whose students performed poorly on state tests—were held accountable to district mandates. For instance, this meant CLC schools were expected to use a mandated reading curriculum and adhere to a regime of mandated tests.

In 2006, schools within the WUSD operated in relative isolation from one another. Some schools had access to more resources than others; opportunities for educators in different schools to get to know each other or to work together were relatively rare. As one principal recalled, prior to the CLC, “There wasn’t really a way for neighborhood schools to be networked.”

In 2008, when the state governor declared a “fiscal emergency” in the wake of the national financial crisis, the WUSD, like other districts in the state, faced severe budget cuts. During this period of limited resources and high levels of accountability, public schools in the state continued to be under intense pressure to follow prescribed curricula and increase students’ test scores—without having adequate resources to do so.

Conditions in the district’s schools were stressful for teachers and staff; anxiety was high. Interviews with CLC principals, teachers, and coaches indicated that teachers often felt blamed for inadequate levels of student learning; similarly, principals felt their jobs were in jeopardy if students’ test scores did not increase at an adequate rate. According to CLC principals, the lack of trust between schools and the central office was “pretty deep,” and the isolation principals felt was profound as they looked around for the people who were their “allies as leaders.”

As a general rule, staffing in the WUSD central office shrank—and expanded—in accordance with the state education budget. By 2008, the total personnel in the central office’s school supervisory department was reduced by half. The Curriculum and Instruction (C&I) department was allocated only one 1.5–full-time equivalent position to support the district’s three thousand elementary language arts teachers. During this time, from 2008 to 2012, the central office struggled to carry out basic functions. As a C&I administrator recalled, “During those lean years, when

we weren't supported as a department to do the work that we were commissioned to do, there were a lot of schools that took it upon themselves to look elsewhere" for C&I support. For example, some schools, such as the CLC schools, were able to raise funds through private grants. Consequently, these schools had resources to support teaching and learning in their schools that the district could not supply. In this climate of scarce district resources, other schools' interest in what the CLC schools were doing grew considerably.

When the district budget was restored in 2012, more resources became available to support schools. The central office supplied additional resources to schools, especially those where students were performing the least well. These resources came in the form of personnel, particularly instructional coaches and other staff, as well as professional development opportunities and additional time for teachers to collaborate with each other. Additional central office staff were hired to the school supervisory and C&I departments. This time period also coincided with a significant change to the CLC grant; rather than issuing the grant directly to the CLC schools, the foundation decided to issue the grant to the school supervisory department within the central office.

Leadership Turnover in the Central Office

In addition to fluctuating levels of resources in the WUSD's central office, senior leadership turnover was frequent. From 2006 to 2016, the superintendent changed four times; twice, an "interim" superintendent was temporarily placed at the helm. Practically speaking, these changes meant that six different people led the district during this decade. Four people served as chief academic officer. In the administrative department that oversaw schools, which was subdivided into groups by school level, the elementary school supervisory personnel completely turned over during the period from 2010 to 2014.

Continuous leadership churn in the central office meant that schools did not receive sustained and coherent administrative support. The combination of extreme budget cuts and leadership changes at the top also meant that central office positions were in jeopardy. Felt vulnerability and a lack of consistent leadership, coupled with a rigid, departmentalized central office structure, incentivized departments to amass their own resources, to prioritize their own needs, and to operate in isolation from others. Consequently, the needs of individual schools did not tend to drive central office decision-making, and central office departments were not structured to promote interdependent or collaborative action. Many challenges existed for scaling instructional change within and across district schools.

Multiple Simultaneous Theories of Change

Three key groups of actors are important to this story: the principals who formed the CLC during the period from 2006 to 2012, the foundation that supported the principals to do so, and the central office administrators who oversaw the schools, curriculum, and instruction. Each group had its own perspective on the work of the CLC. Understanding what motivated the actions of these different groups helps explain the prevailing opportunities and challenges within this district for scaling the practices that the CLC developed and used.

A *theory of change* describes the beliefs, which are often tacit and hidden from view, that motivate actions taken by an individual or group of people in order to achieve a desired result. “Theories represent the stories that people tell about how problems arise and how they can be solved” (Weiss, 1995, p. 72). Each of the key groups—the principals, the foundation, and the central office administrators—had its own theories about what prevented students from achieving success in reading and writing, how these problems arose, and how to solve them. Their thinking and assumptions, some of which were explicit and others implicit, influenced the actions that they took. Below is a description of the particular theories of change held by each group and how their theories of change evolved over a decade.

The CLC Principals’ Theory of Change

The five CLC principals had a passionate commitment to improve students’ opportunities for learning and for success in life. They were a “progressive” group of educators who wanted autonomy from the central office’s increased control over curriculum, instruction, and assessment in their schools. In 2006, the district’s then-outgoing superintendent was both a strong supporter of federally mandated standardized testing under No Child Left Behind and a proponent of Reading First, which was a federally funded program that focused on putting proven methods of reading instruction into use in classrooms where students were low-performing. (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). (See *Reading First*, p. 5) The principals viewed this superintendent as an autocratic leader who made top-down decisions and mandated instructional approaches without involving teachers or parents in important decisions that affected them.

Believing that Reading First wasn’t sufficient for students, these CLC principals wanted to find additional ways to develop students as readers and writers. Self-described as young and ambitious, these principals wanted to learn. One principal said they were “newish principals” who were “super eager . . . to shift everything.” This principal, who now works in the central office, recalled: “We had this sense that we knew more than the district did, because in our small, tiny bubble of our school, we were much more aware of everything that needed to happen than the

READING FIRST

THE READING FIRST PROGRAM (2002–08) was a federally funded initiative introduced as part of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), which brought sweeping reform to school districts and redefined the federal role in K–12 education. The purpose of the Reading First program, according to its official government website, was “to ensure that all children learn to read well by the end of third grade” (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The Reading First program focused on putting proven methods of reading instruction into classrooms, particularly in low-performing and low-socioeconomic classrooms. It provided grants to states (ultimately all 50 states received grants) to establish reading programs “that show the most promise for raising student achievement and for successful implementation of reading instruction. . . . Only programs that are founded on scientifically based reading research are eligible through Reading First” (U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

States were awarded grants to provide to school districts to use Reading First instructional programs in schools with eligible students—those from low-income families. Although districts were allowed to select the particular “research-based” curricula to use, all programs had to meet the Reading First criteria, which were limited and limiting. The criteria included five elements:

- The ability to hear and manipulate the individual sounds, known as *phonemes*, that make up words—referred to as “phonemic awareness” (e.g., the word “cat” has three phonemes);
- *Phonics*, the relationship of phonemes to the letters that represent them in written language;
- *Fluency*, the ability to read text accurately and quickly;
- Vocabulary development; and
- Comprehension strategies (Barbash, 2008).

In addition, a condition of funding was that Reading First schools had to administer regular classroom assessments and adjust instruction accordingly for each child based upon the results.

Researchers reported evidence of improved student reading performance and a reduction in the percentage of students identified as learning disabled in grades K–3 in designated Reading First schools. For instance, in one study of a cohort of 318 schools in Florida that implemented Reading First for three years, a researcher found that referrals to special education at the end of kindergarten were reduced as much as 81% from Year 1 to Year 3 of implementation (Torgesen, 2009). This researcher offered two plausible explanations: first, that the instructional model significantly reduced students’ reading difficulties, and second, that “fewer students are being identified [as learning disabled] because teachers and schools are more confident in their ability to meet the needs of students without referring them for special education” (Torgesen, 2009, p. 39). This researcher also cautioned that factors other than improved student performance may cause changes in the rate at which students are referred and identified as learning disabled.

Not all educators valued the Reading First Program. The prescriptive nature of the program made it controversial. Barbash (2008) summarized the controversy:

Simply put, it requires states and districts to follow the dictates of reason and science when spending taxpayers’ money on education and holds them accountable if they fail to do so. Navigating among conservatives who oppose intrusive government, liberals who oppose President Bush, educators who guard their independence, and commercial interests who guard their market share, the law’s framers and program leadership sought to leverage the power of the federal government to attack a complex pedagogical problem that the federal government was never designed to solve. . . .

For myriad reasons, Reading First and its implementation were liked by some educators and disliked by others. The program did help to illuminate the complex knowledge that is needed, along with a web of supports that extend beyond the capacity of any single teacher, if schools are to ensure that *all* students learn to read.

district.” Another principal recalled that they were action-oriented and impatient. Their theory of change was twofold: to identify an alternative to the district’s Reading First approach to literacy instruction and to find the means to both inspire and support teachers in their schools to implement this new approach.

The Funder’s Theory of Change

The Goodwork Foundation practiced a type of grant-making that invested in neighborhoods; it funded the work of the CLC with 12 grants totaling \$2.5 million from 2006 to 2016. Its self-described approach was “developmental,” with the ultimate aim to support people and families farthest from opportunity. The Foundation’s concern was “how can we help kids.” In 2006, the Foundation had already identified Canterbury as a community in which it wanted to invest, and as part of its grant-making approach, it held “a number of activities to try and get acquainted with the community.” For instance, the Foundation asked local people to “take us on a tour” of the neighborhood so the Foundation staff could “see where people lived and worked and where the kids went to school.” The Foundation also asked local leaders to organize “town hall–style meetings” in the community with people who were engaged in different types of family support and educational initiatives. At these initial meetings, the Foundation program officer met two Canterbury school principals. They talked about “what we could do together” to help the neighborhood children. As the program officer recalled, the two principals’ engagement “persisted,” and the Goodwork Foundation made an initial grant to them to support their schools to collaborate on the development of a school-based performance assessment system. At this time, when the Reading First curriculum was mandated in low-performing schools and showing adequate yearly progress on state standardized tests was expected, a performance approach to assessment was counter-cultural, especially in the Canterbury neighborhood schools.

The Foundation’s theory of change (carried out by the program officer) was to get to know grantees and observe firsthand their activities. The Foundation believed it could make wiser and more consequential investments if it knew the people and the work its grants supported. By 2012, with a restored district budget, many changes had occurred within the district and within the central office, in particular. The program officer noticed that “a fairly complex, sort of multilayered collaboration” had developed among CLC schools and district educators. This led him to think, “Okay, there’s an opportunity here for these schools to try to influence the conditions around them and . . . [get] their work more supported from within the system . . . not only from the outside by people like us.” The Foundation’s theory of change evolved to include another grant-making strategy: to find a champion within the central office to support the work of the CLC.

The Central Office Administrators' Theory of Change

During the period from 2006 to 2016, the state and national educational context shifted considerably. Policies in the state moved away from high-stakes, test-driven accountability practices as the guide to instruction and moved toward a focus on developing and assessing students' core disciplinary knowledge and higher-order thinking, reasoning, and relating skills. With the emergence of the Common Core State Standards (2009), such skills and knowledge became widely acknowledged as necessary for success in post-secondary institutions and in careers.³ This movement toward developing students' disciplinary thinking skills focused attention on what the implementation of the Common Core State Standards required of educators and emphasized the value of performance assessments that supported various forms of active construction of knowledge and demonstrations of learning, such as making analytic arguments supported by evidence, rather than identifying the correct answer among a set of possible correct answers on a multiple choice test. The WUSD central office policies and practices that regulated and supported schools consequently shifted considerably during this time and in ways that mirrored the broader changes occurring in the state. As the district environment changed and relationships between individuals and between schools and the central office evolved, the role of the CLC within the context of the district also changed, which in turn affected the operation of the CLC. As described, the central office did not really have a prevailing theory of change during this time. Rather, the district's theory of change was heavily influenced by a combination of the current state policy environment and the particular priorities of the superintendent at the helm.

³ For example, see Darling-Hammond & Weingarten, 2014; Pecheone, Kahl, Hamma, & Jaquith, 2010.

The Progression of the CLC

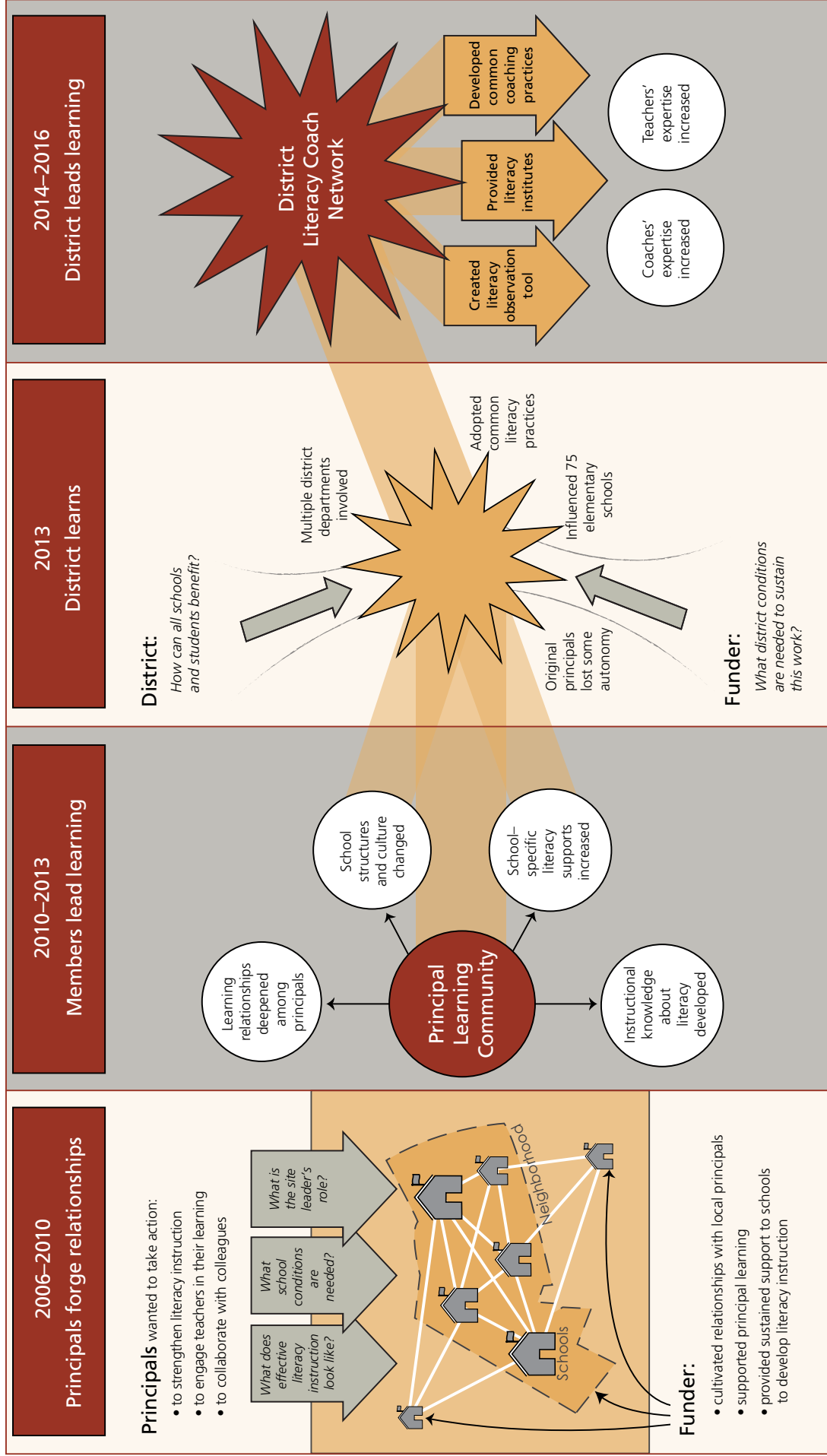
The 10-year progression of the Canterbury Learning Collaborative is described in four phases: (1) Principals forge relationships, (2) Members lead learning, (3) District learns from the CLC, and (4) District leads learning. (See Figure 1, page 8) The first phase of the CLC’s evolution, which began in 2006 and lasted until 2009, involved the development and cultivation of learning relationships among the five Canterbury neighborhood schools and between the schools and the Goodwork Foundation. The primary focus of this phase was the development of school-based systems of performance assessment and schools learning how to learn together. The second phase began in 2010 when principals from some of the Canterbury schools, along with principals from several nearby elementary schools in the district, banded together to pursue learning about student-centered approaches to teaching literacy that diverged from the district’s adopted literacy practices. This narrative describes this second phase in detail because this is the period when the principals and teachers learned how to change their school cultures and transform their approach to literacy instruction. The commencement of the third phase of the CLC marked an important turning point in the progression of the Collaborative. It occurred in 2013 when the central office became involved in leading and overseeing the CLC. In the fourth phase of the CLC, which began in 2014, an existing district structure—the Literacy Coach Network—was restructured to generate instructional capacity for improved literacy instruction by strengthening literacy coaching in the district and developing a more coherent system of literacy professional learning supports.

Through an analysis of data collected from individuals, many of whom occupied different roles at different periods of time in the lifespan of the CLC, we learn lessons about how to develop capacity for instructional reform within a district.⁴ What is most remarkable about this story is the breadth of learning that occurred—by teachers, principals, literacy coaches, and central office administrators—and the extent to which this learning changed the practices of people occupying these different roles in ways that often resulted in more meaningful opportunities for students and adults to learn.

⁴ See Appendix A for a description of the study data and analytic methods.

Figure 1

The Progression of the Canterbury Learning Collaborative



PHASE 1: Principals Forge Relationships

In the first phase of the CLC, which began in 2006, relationships were forged among educators in different schools, primarily within the Canterbury neighborhood and between the schools and the Goodwork program officer. A mutual interest in learning from one another shaped the relationships the participants formed.

Interest in Learning Together about Performance Assessment

A chief function of the initial, three-year grant to Canterbury neighborhood schools from the Goodwork Foundation was to support peer-to-peer learning among educators. The purpose of this grant was to help these schools develop and refine school-based systems of portfolio assessment. Counter to the prevailing national and district approach of standardized testing, these educators wanted to create a different sort of learning culture in their schools. They were eager to pursue alternative forms of assessment, and they believed they could do a better job if they learned together and from each other. The relationships that these educators formed with each other, and the structures and practices that they developed together, led them to want to continue learning together. In 2009, when the performance assessment structures were largely institutionalized in their schools, the focus of the Canterbury Learning Collaborative shifted to literacy instruction.

Commitment to Equitable and Meaningful Opportunities for Learning

One K–8 school leader remembered, “We were doing amazing . . . project-based learning [with] high buy-in and engagement from our kids [at our school].” Yet, she also recalled a nagging worry. Her school had no good way of knowing if students were adequately prepared to succeed in high school. Illustrating her concern, she recounted this story:

On the first day of school, a parent came to my classroom door . . . with her daughter, an African American child, [who] had just graduated from sixth grade [in the district]. She stood there and said to me, “When my child was on the graduation stage . . . I hung my head in shame because I know she doesn’t know what she’s supposed to [know]. . . . Teachers kept passing her along because they didn’t know what to do with her. They didn’t know how to teach her. My daughter stood up there with her dress on and the music playing, and I hung my head in shame.”

This uncomfortable realization inspired a powerful vision: “a performance assessment system . . . that [would enable] a student in Canterbury to go to school K–12 . . . with benchmarks at grades 5, 8, 10, and 12 that would help families know [if their children] had mastered what they needed . . . to be prepared for the next level of schooling.”

This educator recalled that the girl’s mother implored, “Do not give my child a grade that she does not deserve. I want to be sure that you’re going to teach her what she needs to know to be able to be successful.” Almost a decade later, this educator still remembered the “urgent demand” that was made of her as a teacher to educate each student more effectively and to provide honest, accurate, and informative feedback to students about their academic progress. This educator said, “I remember feeling there must be better ways that we can make sure kids receive what they need in order to succeed. I realized what a disservice we do to young people to give them the idea that they are skilled and prepared when they are not.” This vision to educate every student well was shared among principals and teacher leaders in the Canterbury schools, as was their fierce determination to succeed in this endeavor.

Teachers and Leaders Developed School Capacity for Change

Teachers and principals in several Canterbury schools—one high school, one elementary, and one K–8—worked together to develop and refine systems of portfolio assessments in their schools. Grant funds supported these early efforts to collaborate and learn from one another. From 2006 to 2009, teachers developed “tasks” that were “deep and rich and broad [so that] kids could demonstrate their mastery.” They developed and refined the use of rubrics for assessing student learning. Student tasks, such as contrasting linear, quadratic, and cubic functions, for example, focused on applying conceptual thinking in mathematics. Other tasks focused on critical thinking skills through writing persuasive essays, responses to literature, and research reports. Students also gave public presentations of their learning to parents, community members, and teachers. A teacher recalled, “In the beginning, we trained a lot of parents to . . . sit on the panels [and] score kids.” She described the work as “powerful” where “a lot of community people would show up for the [student] panels.” Another described these events as demonstrations of learning that were “a culmination of what students had learned and why they were ready to move onto middle school.”

CLC participants also recalled ways in which the neighborhood schools supported one another to carry out their portfolio work by hosting observation visits, sharing sample rubrics and examples of student portfolios, and serving as panelists for each others’ student exhibitions. Through collaborative work, these educators learned how to refine their practice. These early practices became integral to the CLC later on.

Teachers Paid More Attention to Students' Specific Needs

An educator at one school recalled realizing that teachers needed to pay more attention to the instructional supports they provided to English Language learners (ELs) and to some African American students who did not possess strong academic language skills. She said, “One of the things that really became clear to us . . . was that many of our kids—particularly our kids who struggled and particularly our African American and Latino kids and those second language learners—didn’t . . . have as much academic language as we wanted them to have.” A leader at another school saw a need to focus more specific attention on how teachers provided literacy instruction to students. Many educators realized a “way to develop academic language was through having a very strong literacy program [and paying attention to] what the literacy expertise of the teachers [was] so that they could really support kids to develop their academic vocabulary in multiple ways.” Paying attention to teachers’ literacy expertise became central work. As teachers’ literacy expertise increased, teachers and principals paid more attention to the relationship between teachers’ expertise and the particular needs of students.

Collaborative Relationships and a Spirit of Innovation

With a shared purpose and resources for collaborative work, educators in these schools began to know one another more. They began to think of themselves as a “team” of educators serving neighborhood students. One founding member recalled his excitement about the grant because it paid for collaboration time and because he “needed a way to engage [his] fifth graders in [being prepared] for moving on.” Another teacher member described the collaboration among the schools as “very organic” in the beginning. Educators said they valued the opportunity to collaborate with one another and, when the grant concluded in 2009, “there was clearly the intent to stay connected.” One principal proposed that they continue to work together with an explicit focus on literacy. He took advantage of what the funder described as their “kitchen-table kind of relationship” and sought out additional funds from the Goodwork Foundation to support a cross-school collaboration focused on improving literacy instruction. With this shift in focus onto literacy instruction, a new iteration of the CLC occurred and a few different elementary schools, also located in the vicinity of the Canterbury neighborhood, joined the Collaborative.

PHASE 2: Members Lead Learning

The second phase of the CLC’s evolution occurred when principals from the CLC schools, along with one principal from a school in another part of the district, banded together to learn about student-centered approaches to teaching literacy. These principals met together regularly. With external support, they established routines and practices that helped them figure out how to introduce and implement these unfamiliar—and at the time unconventional in the district—literacy instructional practices in their schools. Over the four years from 2009 to 2013, seven principals (representing six schools and 170 teachers) became closely involved in the CLC.⁵

Three conditions enabled the CLC to form, endure, and become a generative source for strengthening literacy instruction in their schools:

- The agency of school leaders who took action to seek out alternative approaches to teaching literacy in their schools. The principals’ sense of agency to take purposeful action to improve opportunities for learning—for themselves as leaders, for teachers, and ultimately for students—was a hallmark of the CLC.
- The depth and durability of the learning relationships that its members formed with one another. These relationships were formed and sustained by members’ willingness and routine practice of looking together at the work they were doing. As one member said, “We would always come to the table with goals, like what we do at our school, and we’d be prepared to share that.”
- The Goodwork Foundation’s steady support and strategic grant making. The Foundation’s particular approach to grant-making and the personal interest the program officer took in the schools contributed in important ways to the CLC’s evolving form.

Agency and Actions of the Principals

A great strength of the CLC was that the principals themselves organized and imagined it; it was not something imposed upon them by central office administrators or an external organization. As one of the CLC principals said, “One of the powerful things about the [Collaborative] that we started was that *we wanted to do it*. It was started by us, and run by us, and no one had an external agenda.”

⁵ The entire WUSD school district employed 3,300 teachers.

Principals Identified Their Own Learning Needs. The literacy focus was spearheaded by the principals. They were concerned about the current state of literacy instruction in their schools and the high proportions of students who lacked the necessary language skills to succeed in school. The principals wanted to take immediate action. As one principal recalled:

We had struggled as a school. We'd gotten the [performance assessment] portfolio going, and we were really excited about it. . . . What I saw was a change in staff perceptions about what they could do. . . . [School Name] was a different school at the time where I had to do a lot of rebuilding of staff there; staff had been there for many years and had not been inspired, . . . not motivated, . . . had not gotten good professional development for years.

In this principal's words, "The school was all textbooks, and there [was] no teaching going on. [The teachers] wanted something that would be inspiring." A literacy coach who worked with this school said, "The teachers were really at ground zero in terms of thinking about how to actually teach reading and writing." This school, like many of the high-needs schools in the district, had become a Reading First school, which according to the principal meant the overriding focus was on students' fluency. He recalled his school used "fluency passages [as] the measure . . . for how to make progress for students [and that] people talked about [the extent to which] . . . a child's fluency had been increased" as an indicator of students' reading level. He said, "We knew that . . . [fluency] is not going to show you the true progress" of a student's literacy development. Measures of reading fluency, while important, are a narrow and incomplete indicator of reading proficiency. This principal wanted other ways to assess students' reading levels that were more nuanced and more comprehensive.

All the principals involved in the CLC wanted to strengthen the quality of literacy instruction and learning in their schools. The principal of one school recalled that his interest in forming the CLC was to deepen the literacy work that he was trying to lead at his site. When he had been an elementary teacher, he had been "trained in balanced literacy"⁶ and believed that this was the best approach to teaching literacy. He recalled not wanting "to be a part of Reading First [because he] didn't think that was the right direction for kids." However, there were no formal supports in the district to help him. Another colleague said, "We were looking for models to actually strengthen our work, and I wanted to make sure that [teachers] actually had professional development." This principal, therefore, recalled wanting financial resources to afford "contracting with Teachers College" (TC) at Columbia University to

⁶ "Balanced literacy" is an approach to reading instruction that attempts to balance two different views of reading instruction: a focus on phonics instruction, such as the Reading First program, and a Whole Language approach that focuses on exposing students to authentic texts. A single "balanced literacy" approach does not exist.

work with the Reading & Writing Project (TCRWP). Founded and directed by Lucy Calkins, TCRWP “functions as a think tank and a community of practice” devoted to helping “young people become avid and skilled readers, writers, and inquirers” and promotes a model of instruction that involves students in authentic reading and writing tasks (TCRWP; 2014).

All CLC principals said their focus was: “How do you get readers and writers workshop [i.e., TCRWP] up and running in your school? What does it look like? What’s the role of the site leader? What kinds of things do you need to put into place?”

Principals Learned About Alternative Literacy Models. Several principals recalled that a turning point in their collective efforts was a visit they made to Acorn Elementary School, a school on the other side of the district that served a more affluent student population that was using materials from TCRWP. They remembered that Acorn’s principal “was really excited about the results that she was seeing with students.” One principal recalled the visit led to the group’s decision “to start doing site visits and form an informal professional learning community because there was nothing at the district level at that point that we thought was really important to the work that we had been doing.” Similarly, another principal recalled that in the district-led principal meetings, “We didn’t feel like we were doing deep enough learning around our roles as leaders in implementing readers and writers workshop.” Several principals said that their visit to Acorn Elementary inspired them to figure out how to bring that approach to literacy instruction to their own schools, which served larger populations of students who qualified for free and reduced lunch and who were English language learners. In the words of a literacy coach, what was appealing about the TCRWP model at the time was that it did not focus exclusively on “discrete skills”; rather the approach was “situated in a larger idea about what literacy means and how we support kids to develop their habits and dispositions, as well as their skills and knowledge, to be effective communicators and consumers and producers of literacy.”

Principals Gave Teachers Permission to Teach Differently. One principal took a team, including a teacher leader, from his school to visit Acorn Elementary to see how the TCRWP model was being implemented. This principal said, “What I saw [was] the engagement of staff. I knew, ‘Oh, *this* is what engagement can look like. This is what staff that are really engaged and learning look like.’” A teacher who became a leader at this school and then later a literacy coach in the district, remembered that her own background in teaching in schools with large numbers of low-income and minority students was with a scripted curriculum; she “had only taught Open Court.”⁷ Her professional experience was typical of teachers working

⁷ The Open Court curriculum (McGraw-Hill Education, 2017), is a tightly scripted program that was used in many low-performing school districts.

in high-needs schools. The opportunity for professional learning in the school that her principal envisioned captured her interest: “Finally, I [could] learn to teach reading. . . . Getting permission [to teach differently] was exciting. Kids were suffering in a one-size-fits-all approach. There was no room for differentiation, but I didn’t know how to do that either.”

Principals Identified a Need for Site-based Literacy Expertise. The principal who took his team to tour Acorn Elementary did not have a literacy coach. He knew his school needed more expertise on hand to support teachers’ learning: “I knew that we needed to have someone with content-rich knowledge of literacy that could really help staff understand the process” of teaching readers and writers workshop. This principal also thought, “If we’re going to engage our kids in balanced literacy, a process where they’re reading what they choose, we have to have a really rigorous process for assessment.” He recalled trying to seek out alternative literacy assessments from the district’s C&I department but found that the department, at that time, “had nothing.” The principal remembered wondering,

How are we supposed to assess [students’ reading]? All we had is the Reading First materials. It was just very frustrating. We wanted to do [more]. We knew we needed to do more. We weren’t given the support. . . . We didn’t have the tools.

Central office administrators referred to that period of time as “those lean years” when there was no district budget to support schools. That was when “a lot of schools took it upon themselves to look elsewhere [for support] because they had [grant funding], and we didn’t.”

Principals Identified Resources to Support the New Literacy. The district lacked needed literacy resources. Principals were aware that teachers in their schools felt disenfranchised and uninspired. In addition, principals believed that teaching reading required more than the Reading First program. All these reasons contributed to the urgency they felt to go “beyond the district walls” in order to develop instructional capacity at their schools for teaching literacy differently. As one CLC principal commented,

We all kind of did [research] on our own, which made all of us in the Collaborative very unique and really dynamic to work with because we didn’t just sit around waiting for things. We would research stuff and that would open up other questions. Then we would try and do that research and figure things out.

Ultimately, these principals sought out expertise from the TCRWP. Much of the grant funding they sought and received was used to fund access to TC expert resources.

Principals Sought Like-Minded Colleagues. These principals sought out each other. In one another, they found colleagues who shared their concern about the current state of literacy instruction and who similarly believed the Reading First program was too limiting. One remembered finding several like-minded colleagues who were also in the early stages of developing alternative approaches to teaching literacy. This principal recalled discovering they were using different approaches—e.g., one was using materials from Fountas & Pinnell (Heinemann, n.d.), which is an approach to literacy instruction that uses small-group instruction and texts matched to students’ reading levels, and another was using the TC model. (At that time, these approaches were not widely used in the district although now they are prevalent.) This principal thought these were “valid literacy” instructional approaches and recalled, “We all really believed in balanced literacy and readers and writers workshop as a methodology.” He said they held a shared belief that “the differentiation about that work was the right thing to do. . . . We all realized that we were trying to do something similar.”

Many also recalled that “the schools were all in very different places” in relation to their literacy work. Yet, with some shared beliefs and common goals, they quickly developed a mutual interest in one another’s leadership. They were all trying to work toward a similar goal in their schools: to change the school culture into a culture of learning for adults and students so that all students would learn to read and write competently and so that learning was joyful.

Principals Sought Funding and Shared Resources. The principals sought out grants from various foundations. One principal who was described by a colleague as “a mover and shaker in terms of getting grants” reported, “There was a lot of money coming in” in addition to the Goodwork Foundation grants, and “we were kind of putting them all together a little bit.” This principal recalled, “We just really wanted to be part of Teachers College. None of us had that money in our budgets so we just started fundraising for it. We found one funder who connected us to many funders and . . . I think [in one year] we raised over \$500,000.” The principals “used a lot of the money . . . to fund groups of teachers to go to Teachers College, to fund leaders and coaches to go to the coaches’ training for Teachers College, and then to really fund the implementation, augmenting books in the classrooms and things like that.” Principals actively sought out the funds and multiple foundations contributed money to their literacy efforts over several years.⁸

The principals also shared tools and materials with one another, and a few principals even shared personnel across their schools. In this way, the principals were entrepreneurial in their approach to getting the resources that they needed. For example,

⁸ It was beyond the scope of the study to determine exactly how much money principals raised and exactly how the funds were spent.

one year, two principals pooled their money to co-fund a literacy coach. They said, “We found somebody that we knew could do the work. We got funding. . . . We hired our first literacy coach.” Principals also pooled resources to fund professional learning visits by TC literacy experts who would come to their schools in the WUSD to provide professional development. (This arrangement was more economical than sending educators to New York City to attend TC workshops.) Sometimes principals shared the cost of bringing a TC expert to the WUSD and hosted what they called a “homegrown” professional learning institute for their staff. Another recounted organizing a similar arrangement at her school. As space permitted, they made the “homegrown” learning opportunities available to district teachers beyond the CLC, who gladly filled the remaining spots. Interest accumulated to such an extent that one central office administrator recalled the CLC schools had created a “black market” for literacy professional development in the district. Principals also supported each other with their homegrown institutes: “Whenever any of us in our schools would have a new teacher, we would look around, ‘Okay, who’s got a homegrown? Who can have someone do a boot camp?’ We would do this for each other.”

At the time (2010–12), district resources for this work were minimal. Securing funds to support these professional development efforts that were “flying under the district radar” became one focus of the principals’ joint work. The principals recalled meeting regularly for the purpose of figuring out a “strategy for money.” They remembered asking themselves: “How do we strategically organize our budgets to make this happen?”

Principal Innovation was (Unintentionally) Encouraged by the District

Context. During this time of limited district resources, conditions in the district were ripe for stimulating a high level of principal agency, mutual dependence, collaboration, and social exchange that occurred among the members of the CLC.⁹ These principals and their schools stood to benefit a great deal by pooling their funds and individual experiences in their efforts to gain more knowledge and other instructional resources to develop their capacity for literacy improvement.

Principals Invested in Literacy Expertise. The principals felt a strong need to provide expert and engaging professional development experiences for teachers. Therefore, one instructional resource that they sought out was expert advice in teaching reading and writing to children. After visiting Acorn Elementary, the principals gravitated toward the TC model. As described earlier, this is how they spent most of their grant funds. All of the principals, teachers, and coaches interviewed for this study described how instrumental TC support was to their literacy learning.

⁹ See Molm, Takahashi, & Peterson, 2000, for more information about the structural conditions that form the basis for mutual dependence and social exchange among system actors. Molm is an analyst who studies social exchange theory.

One principal said, “It was everything. . . . It moved my teachers. It just allowed everyone to do it [teach literacy] really well.” This principal described the sorts of structural changes the school made to support teachers to learn about TCRWP and create a culture of adult learning: “We created specific time for people to meet together . . . we changed our schedule; we leveled our libraries. . . . Everybody was part of a mission.” When trying to understand why the TCRWP approach was so successful at a particular school, a different principal said, “There was a group of teachers that kind of wanted it. They were stuck in their teaching, wanted something different, and tried something different.” A principal of a third school described a similar phenomenon in which teachers had gotten a taste of engaging students differently in their learning through the use of performance assessment.

Principals Made Literacy Expertise Readily Available to Teachers. Teachers in CLC schools described the rich professional learning opportunities that they were given. Some teachers, as well as literacy coaches and principals, had the opportunity to attend TC (Reading and Writing) Institutes in New York City where they learned, for example, about the TC units of study, how to provide comprehension strategy instruction, and how to develop classroom structures that support inquiry and collaboration. Teachers in these schools also received coaching from TC experts who would visit their schools several times during the year. When the TC experts visited the school, each grade-level team received coaching as a way to involve all teachers. One teacher, who never attended a TC institute, described the value of the on-site learning that was afforded through the CLC: “It’s been eminently valuable to me as a classroom teacher having the resources available to learn from Teachers College, to learn from trainers that came and visited our school, to be able to procure resources, such as the spiral-bound curriculum planning guides, as well as any of the mentorship that was available through the grant. . . .” Others also expressed a high value for the TC expertise. Teachers, in particular, commented on the deep expertise of the TC coaches as well as the individualized support that they received.

When TC trainers would visit the school, they would typically work with teachers from an entire grade-level “on a particular focus we wanted to develop.” In this way, the design of the professional development tried to strike a balance between required participation and teachers’ individual agency. One teacher, who participated in a TC training visit focused on furthering small-group instruction in both reading and writing, described two ways of working with the TC trainer—either by going into one teacher’s classroom or by pulling out their own students and working with them in the library:

The day of a visit, a session would start with us in a conference room meeting with the trainer discussing our current practice, looking at some resources, occasionally, although not always, looking at a video of teaching prior to pulling our kids or going into a classroom. . . . We would go into a classroom, and we’d either shadow the teacher who

was doing the [teaching] and try to push in, ourselves, [and] give tips. Or, in some cases, we would collaborate, then plan a lesson we wanted to deliver on what we were learning. In that case, we would take turns delivering parts of the lesson [to students], and our peers and the trainer . . . would take notes so we could debrief afterwards.

The teachers appreciated that they were able to direct the focus of the TC support, commenting, “One of the great things about this experience [is] it’s not formulaic.” A 15-year veteran teacher described the “dramatic impact” that the expert coaching from TC had on his teaching practice: “What we had going into this work was basal readers. . . . In that type of teaching, it’s very much, here is the . . . teacher’s guide”; the instruction is a one-size-fits-all, scripted approach. The TC approach was different: it was “working with readers at their particular level.” The TC approach to teachers’ professional learning was analogous—the adult learning experiences were not one-size-fits-all either but rather were custom-fitted to the teachers’ self-identified learning interests and needs.

This teacher described the impact on literacy instruction across his school: “We’re united around an approach involving the mini-lessons, the small-group work, the conferring, and the read-aloud. . . .” This teacher elaborated on the benefits of having a “grade level speaking the same language and working on our best practices” together. He said each grade level met as a team “once a week specifically to work on literacy and reading and writing.” In this way, the school provided organizational structures to support the ongoing learning that teachers were expected to do. What this teacher saw as the greatest difference in using the TC approach with his colleagues, rather than the district-adopted text, was that the focus became the particular needs of the individual students. He explained, “Prior to TC, we weren’t having any of those conversations. We were still teaching reading, but we weren’t really thinking about the text and [its] complexity, and what to anticipate a reader would need for support. . . .” From the teachers’ descriptions of the sustained and custom-fitted professional learning supports that they received from TC experts who visited their schools—as well as from the professional learning structures that the principals had established in their schools—it seems clear that CLC teachers’ knowledge and know-how regarding literacy increased. The nature of literacy instruction as well as the culture of professional learning changed in significant ways in these schools.

Depth and Durability of Learning Relationships

Within the Canterbury Learning Collaborative, the principals engaged in a social process of learning to help them lead change in their schools. A social process of learning occurs when individuals learn through participation and by pursuing specific competencies; for example, how to create school structures to support teachers' collaborative learning or how to accurately assess students' independent reading levels.¹⁰ As socio-cultural theorists Lave and Wenger (1991) have described, a community of practice exists when a group of individuals come together regularly for a particular purpose. In the CLC, the principals had a shared purpose for meeting together because they were struggling with similar problems related to leading instructional change in their schools: "We were all struggling with . . . getting buy-in from staff, getting enough money to make [classroom] libraries, making our learning meaningful." Their common problems of leading instructional change in their schools is in large part what tied the principals to one another and defined the content of their conversations and joint activities.

Principals Engaged in Learning Relationships. Relationships that are oriented toward learning are an important aspect of building capacity for instructional improvement and are an essential feature of an educational community of practice. However, school and district cultures are often not conducive to developing learning relationships among colleagues.

Learning relationships are hard to come by, perhaps because they "require an investment of time, care, and trust as well as a shared commitment to learn something in particular" (Jaquith, 2017, p. 163). According to one principal, "One of the things that made the CLC really critical is that we created a bond amongst administrators where we were all learning together." Interviews with all of the principals in the CLC indicated that they highly valued each other's knowledge, trusted one another, and had deep respect for each other as leaders. For example, a principal said, "Part of the magic . . . is that we all really enjoyed each other. . . . We thought we were great principals together. . . . We enjoyed meeting together." Another principal described his CLC principal colleagues as "long-term colleagues that I really trust." The depth of trust that these principals had with one another seemed to have enabled a rare level of open and honest discourse. For example, this same principal further described his depth of trust for one of his CLC colleagues:

I really trust that she's about the work. It's not about her and making herself look good. I don't see that [quality] from a lot of others. [In

¹⁰ See Wenger (1998) for an explanation of the theory of communities of practice; see Jaquith (2017, pp. 160–2) for a discussion of groups of educators becoming communities of practice.

other settings] I feel like there's a lot of jockeying and maneuvering to make oneself look better. [People show] a lack of vulnerability; [they don't] say, "Wow, we're really struggling with this."

This group of CLC principals had become one another's learning allies in the difficult and typically lonely (often as the only administrator in a building) job of leading schools. Because they trusted one another, they were able to learn from each other—and as they learned together, their trust and respect for one another grew.

Principals Learned to Be Vulnerable With Each Other. All of the principals talked about the CLC as a safe environment where they could be “vulnerable with each other” and expose what they didn't know. For instance, another principal who was relatively new to the principal role and reentering the elementary division after a stint as a middle school teacher said he “was pretty out of the loop in terms of what was happening in elementary schools regarding curriculum and pedagogy.” He said his challenge was “How do I in good conscience evaluate 15 classroom teachers who are actually more expert than I am in delivering content and instruction at the elementary level?” He recalled that he received “a lot of respect” from his CLC principal colleagues for his level of honesty. They told him, “You are the instructional leader,” to which he had responded, “I just in good conscience cannot call myself that.” He went on to say: “I've definitely learned over time with my [principal] colleagues that there's a lot of—I don't want to call it fear, necessarily—but there is a hierarchy and a sense that you're in your role and you shouldn't deviate from it.” Related to this idea seemed to be the notion that it was not necessarily safe for a principal to admit he lacked knowledge or expertise. Every CLC principal described the lack of trust that existed at the time between district administrators and principals. This principal's willingness to say that the teachers at his school possessed more instructional knowledge than he did challenged the idea that the principal is, or even could be, the instructional leader.

Principals Learned Through Shared Experience. Belonging to a community of “super-tight-knit” colleagues, as the CLC described themselves, could be a real asset for principals, who are often physically isolated from their peers. One principal explained how developing trust through the CLC helped him to realize the importance of developing trust at his own school—between himself and teachers and among teachers in order to create a culture of learning: “The pitfalls that often happen for principals, we get so busy, we just manage stuff, and we're not acting as leaders, and we're not focusing on real clear structures to build trust.” Through his participation in the CLC, this principal came to distinguish the difference between managing (attending to operational needs) and leading (developing a shared vision and supporting people to achieve it). Principals can lose focus on the importance of supporting teachers to learn, which is their capacity to continuously improve. This loss of focus can be a particular hazard in school systems where principals are not supported to continuously learn themselves. Ultimately, the learning relationships

that these principals formed with each other, with the CLC facilitator, with their literacy coaches, and with teachers in their schools through their experiences with the CLC enabled all who were involved to generate ideas for how to lead instructional improvement in their setting.

Principals Cultivated Learning Practices. Another principal echoed the view that their principal meetings were a safe place to learn and explained how their level of trust influenced the sort of work that they were able to do: “We would talk about what was happening in our schools . . . we shared [our] bad practices and reflected on what we were doing. . . . We would take time together to strategically think about what we were going to do next. . . . We were constantly in some way building what we were doing in our sites . . . together.” Another principal said, “We would go into each other’s schools. We did our own Instructional Rounds essentially.” This principal described the CLC’s particular process of Instructional Rounds,¹¹ a practice that involves a network of educators in classroom observations, in a way that demonstrates a purposefulness and genuine respect for teachers:

When we would go to classes [and when] we would go to each other’s schools, we would talk about it. We would talk about it [the visits] with our teachers. We’d make sure that . . . the other teachers in those other schools knew what schools we were at, and they also knew the work we were doing too. There was a larger camaraderie—this whole larger sense that we are working in different ways to increase literacy practices at all our schools. We, as leaders, are always finding ways to provide access for you, the teachers, to be involved.

The partnership that developed in these schools between the principals and teachers was both important and somewhat unusual. The principals also ensured that the teachers had agency in pursuing their own learning.

Thus, it is not surprising that this same principal said, “We were seeing our schools shift drastically—the learning culture of the schools.” Part of the reason that instructional practice may have shifted in their schools was because, in the words of another principal, “. . . one thing that all of us had in common . . . is that we had a deep desire to not just implement something, but to learn about why it was working.” Their passion for learning is palpable. As this principal elaborated,

That was true of every single member of the group. We wanted to be good at it too, so that if I had to step into a second grade class, I would know how to do it, and if I were observing in a second grade class, that my feedback would be valuable and be well received by the

¹¹ See City (2011) for a description of the Instructional Rounds process.

teacher, because they would know that I was also understanding where they were coming from. I think that that was something that we really valued as a group.

Given that the principals were committed to deeply understanding this approach to literacy instruction and to figuring out how to embed these practices in their schools, it is not surprising that yet another principal described how their work together deepened over time and how their trust and respect for one another was strengthened through the work they did together. He recalled,

We read a number of books together that grounded our work, and we created observation protocols [and] different agreements that we wanted to see in our learning community. So, each year we got a little deeper . . . went a little deeper with observation tools, et cetera. And one year, we actually had parallel processes where we had our instructional coaches meeting month to month and doing the same work we were doing. Then, we would get together once or twice a year to share our findings as leaders and coaches.

According to this principal, each of the principals “built the same kind of trusting, collegial bonds” with the coaches that worked at their schools—bonds that were “rooted in these deep conversations about our own practice and our school’s practice.”

Principals Structured Their Meetings to Better Enable Learning. One principal recalled that the CLC structured its meetings in two ways: “We usually had one site visit at someone’s site . . . every month. Then, we usually had one learning session. Sometimes they were together. Whoever was hosting was the person who ran the agenda. . . . Initially it was just the principals when we first started. Then we realized that the reason it wasn’t getting off the ground is that we weren’t thinking strategically enough, and so we started inviting our . . . literacy coaches.” The principals also identified a person outside of their group “to facilitate our meetings to make them more meaningful.”

Principals Hired an External Facilitator. The facilitator “acted as lead coach to the principals.” The principals identified a person who possessed a unique and important set of skills. This person had previously worked in the district as a teacher and coach; she had taught in the Canterbury neighborhood for long enough to have participated in the portfolio work that some of the CLC schools had engaged in. One principal, not from Canterbury, said, “It was incredible to have [her]. . . . She knew each of us; she knew our schools.” Part of the facilitator’s strength seemed to be the relationship that she had with the principals and her intimate knowledge of their schools. The principals said the facilitator served an important role as an organizer. She helped them create the agendas for their meetings, which were “based

on what [their] needs were.” She also organized the site visits, managed the grant reporting requirements, and kept them focused. Principals had found it “very difficult” to do these tasks given the demands of their jobs.

The facilitator also helped them to create the conditions for deeper learning among themselves. For instance, one principal said, “We were not pushing ourselves the way we felt an outside observer could. . . .” Everyone remarked on the “strong facilitation in these meetings” and the important role the facilitator played in the group’s learning. For instance, the facilitator introduced and facilitated the use of “dilemma protocols,” which are structured conversations that focus on a particular dilemma that the presenter selects. One principal particularly appreciated the opportunities she had to “share problems that I was having . . . around literacy instruction and looking at ELs, especially looking at academic language.” Each principal had identified a problem of practice to focus on that was related to the implementation of readers and writers workshop, and CLC provided support to address it.

The facilitator guided the principals through conversations with each other that were grounded in the difficult, uncertain, and sometimes emotionally fraught aspects of leading a school. A principal said, “Those were really good meetings because we were kind of all on the same level, so to speak. We weren’t being facilitated or managed by a supervisor, so it allowed us to, essentially, be more open and honest in our discussions.” Most commented on the absence of an evaluator as a critical condition for enabling the principals to be vulnerable. Their conversations required courage, self-awareness, a willingness to examine their own actions with a critical eye, and openness to learning. The quality of the facilitation, in part, enabled those conversations to take place in the way that they did.

The facilitator was intentional about supporting the principals’ interest to focus their meetings on both equity and literacy. She explained,

We were trying to have a space where principals could come together and say, “I don’t know how to do this, or I need help with this, or, you know, this is what’s not working well in my school. I want feedback so that there could be real growth.” . . . There wasn’t sort of a dog and pony [show]. . . . I’m going to take you to my two best classrooms for no reason. . . . [Instead] there was a lot of space for giving each other support and being able to talk really honestly about how they were balancing the demands from the district, from families, from teachers; how they were trying to do that sort of relationship-building, so that the teachers would [genuinely] buy into the program; so that there would be teacher leaders; . . . [so principals could] try to understand [what] people’s resistance was and the ways in which they were feeding the resistance. . . .

She believed that “doing work focused on equity” also required the principals themselves “doing some inside-out work [and establishing] the relational trust that needs to exist” to engage in meaningful equity and improvement work.

The principals also recognized how important the trust was that they developed with one another and that this trust enabled the depth of the work that they did. In the words of one principal, “There has to be the trust. There have to be the structures to promote the trust. The facilitation has to include our ability to talk about what we’ve learned and our hopes. Our PLC [professional learning community] depends on somebody who’s very objective, who’s pushing us to think beyond, and where there’s no sense of what the district might think is good or bad about this work.” Another principal contrasted the CLC conversations, which supported this type of talk among leaders, to typical administrator conversations: “That’s one thing that we as administrators don’t have right now. When we meet, we never are asked, ‘Okay, so let’s talk about what your goals were at the beginning of the year and what progress you’ve seen.’ We don’t ever do that.” The CLC principals wanted to become more effective leaders, and they described their CLC meetings in ways that corroborated the facilitator’s perception that the meetings became “a place where they could really get support to be the kind of leader and literacy leader that they wanted to be.” Having a designated facilitator, who could and did attend specifically to the principals’ learning needs and established structures that promoted trust among them, played a critical role in the group’s capacity to learn from each other and from their own work. Other researchers have also “found that the learning capability inherent in social groups such as communities of practice greatly depends on internal leadership” (Wenger-Trayner, E. & Wenger-Trayner, B., 2012, p. 3).

Principals Established Norms and Agreements that Built Trust. The external facilitator said the CLC intentionally established norms and agreements to build trust.¹² One of these norms was maintaining the confidentiality of the conversations that took place in their meetings. One principal said, “We were very open with each other. We were giving each other tough feedback, too. It felt like a kind of a collaborative space and accountable space.” Principals were able to bring leadership problems that they were experiencing as a struggle to the group. For example, one principal discussed the difficulty of agreeing upon a vision for school leadership with an assistant principal. Another discussed the problem of “a number of teachers who were really rebelling against the amount of work that balanced literacy [took].” This principal didn’t want teachers to leave the school and yet he thought that developing teachers’ capacity to provide a different type of literacy instruction was essential for students’ learning. The principals helped each other deal with these sorts of challenges that do not have simple, straightforward answers.

¹² The group drew upon the norms from Singleton’s (2014) work on having “courageous conversations.” They talked about “really speaking truth” and about “experiencing discomfort.”

Principals Shared Knowledge to Create School Conditions for Learning.

One of the aspects of leading teachers to develop their skills in teaching a “balanced approach” to literacy involved figuring out how to create conditions in their schools to support the ongoing learning of teachers. The principals were intentional in asking: “What does it mean to be a balanced literacy leader?” They said they spent a lot of time discussing, “What are you seeing that’s showing your [literacy instruction is] working [and] where are the opportunities to deepen this practice?” One principal said, “We were constantly talking about what we were going to do to move our whole building” forward in its literacy work.

Principals Invited External Expertise. The principals all believed “bringing in someone from the outside was really powerful” for the teachers. By participating in trainings with teachers, one principal described how this participation deepened her relationship with the teachers and to the work that they were jointly undertaking. This principal said:

I did the teaching with them. . . . I [believed], “We’re all learning. Let’s all be vulnerable, and mess it up!” . . . That’s not really part of the CLC, but for [School Name], it was the piece that I think moved practice a lot. . . . Going back to the Collaborative, [although] I don’t know that everybody taught, every principal was committed to attending those trainings with their teachers. Nobody sat in the back and did email. Nobody came in and out. We were there.

The way in which principals utilized the expert support also helped to sustain the school’s focus on these instructional approaches. This principal explained,

If they [TC] told us to read the prework ahead of time, we [the principals] read the prework. If they asked us to do a novel in an hour, which was one of the activities we did that year, then we were in a group, and we also participated in doing the novel in an hour, and acting it out in front of all of our staff. . . . We were learners with them. The same thing, when we went to TC in the summer: we were just participants there with them. I think that . . . really spoke a lot to them around our willingness to be engaged and learn alongside of them. Instead of saying, “You need to learn this, but I don’t need to learn this.” I think it helped us, as principals, become instructional leaders . . . because we were really deepening our understanding. [The teachers] knew more than us. That was cool.

Like the principals, the teachers also appreciated the expert support the TC coaches provided. One teacher said, “When the [TC] trainer came, it was time to narrow our focus on a specific [pedagogy such as] . . . small-group work [or] working one-on-one with students.” Teachers found this infusion of expertise invaluable. Ultimately,

because of their steady commitment to and ongoing investments in developing teachers' capacity to use a balanced approach to literacy instruction, these schools became known in the district as "TC-trained schools."

Principals Created Site-based Opportunities for Ongoing Learning. In addition to providing teachers with doses of expert guidance from TC specialists at regular intervals during the year (e.g., sending teachers to TC or hosting TC specialists to visit their schools and offering "homegrown" institutes), the principals also worked together to figure out how to provide steady and frequent opportunities for teachers to develop as literacy teachers. Another principal said, "The ultimate goal was to be able to work together, use each others' schools, [and] give each other feedback about what we saw." Each principal described learning from one another through their visits to each other's schools and through the conversations they had together. For example, one principal said,

I really saw some of the structures that my colleagues had put into place from teacher planning, different observation devices that they were using for peer observations, how they rolled out professional development to their teachers, how they would do walkthroughs that were aligned to their principal's expectations. There are a whole host of things that . . . helped to systemize the work that the whole school started to move forward with. Very common understandings of what we expected from a readers and writers workshop. . . . We identified together what some of the things were that we wanted to have in common in year one, year two, year three of our work together, so we could articulate that to our staff: "Listen, we're doing this work with other schools; here's where we're all at. These are some things that we think are best practices in year one that we want to work on."

This principal's statement indicates specific strategies learned, such as the design and use of particular organizational structures and routines to support the literacy work. The comments also suggest that this principal felt supported, less isolated, and perhaps even emboldened by knowing that his colleagues were pursuing similar changes in their schools.

A second principal described the sorts of questions that they were asking of themselves and each other during their meetings:

What do we need to know about our school? What are the strengths that our schools have? Where are the opportunities for growth? Are they [the opportunities] the same across schools or are they different? If they're different, how can we learn from one another around how you began implementation, and what can I learn from that? Is the context similar enough that I can put that into place in my own school?

This principal also recalled how she strategically selected and adapted the strategies that her principal colleagues used in their schools. She recalled asking herself, “When I was thinking about where my school was, could I use one of those strategies as my strategy, or did I need a different approach? . . . I didn’t have quite as much money as either of those schools. I didn’t have quite as many people. . . . We started with mini-lesson, because it felt more strategic to me than interactive read-aloud.”¹³ This principal explained that she used one colleague’s strategy “of building up libraries” in the classrooms and also a colleague’s strategy to build up momentum and interest among her teachers by responding to those who were interested. She said, “We just said, ‘If you’re interested, we’ll help you.’ I sent anyone that wanted to go to Teachers College. I found money to send them that summer. I was like, ‘If you’re interested, I’m interested.’” This strategy differed from another principal’s strategy for “building up grade levels” one at a time. A third principal recalled that they shared information and ideas about how to use their literacy coaches effectively. Together, they considered questions like: “How do we utilize our coaches to help move newer teachers along but also support more experienced teachers? How do we differentiate that coaching? How do we build teacher leadership so that the coaches don’t have to facilitate every grade-level meeting?” The principals found these conversations helpful because they were responsive to the particular needs and concerns that they were confronting at that moment.

¹³ TCRWP mini-lessons are short, structured lessons on a reading or writing strategy, often involving a demonstration of a strategy before students are given the opportunity to practice using that strategy. An instructional, interactive “read-aloud” is when the teacher reads from a text as a way to engage students in conversation about the text and as a way to model strategies that proficient readers use while reading to make sense of a text.

Sustained Foundation Support

Principals relied on the money that was available to them from the Goodwork Foundation and others to pay for TC expert coaching and professional development to support teachers' and coaches' learning. They also relied on the funding and the reporting requirements of the grant to deepen their own learning to lead this new approach to literacy in their schools. Sustained support came not only in the form of funding from the grants but also from the various structures that were created to provide ongoing support to teachers, coaches, and principals.

The Foundation Provided Dependable and Discretionary Resources.

Individual principals were able to use the “funding in a different way” and according to their discretion to support the balanced literacy efforts underway at their schools. In this way, the terms of the Goodwork Foundation grant enabled principals' authority and ability to make independent decisions. One district administrator viewed the sustained support and the authority that principals had as a real asset: “I always felt like these schools had this wonderful benefactor in place so that they could do higher-quality, deeper [work]; it allowed for some differentiation but allowed them to go more deeply. The district is cumbersome.” Change from the central office occurred slowly. Thus, this district administrator saw the advantage these school had because “they did not need to wait” for the district to catch up with them. This administrator highlights a tension that often emerges—whether or not to allow for individual agency as well as how to do so—when a system is trying to scale a particular practice or approach. Some degree of agency is necessary in order to deepen a new practice or approach and to root this practice in a particular context.

The Relationship between Funder and Principals Strengthened the Work. The relationship between the CLC principals and the Goodwork program officer helped sustain and strengthen the work. Their relationship developed over many years and was connected to their mutual interest in trying to improve opportunities for Canterbury students. The program officer stayed closely connected to the ongoing work. He spent time visiting classrooms in the CLC schools and attending some of the CLC meetings. As he became increasingly familiar with the work, his relationship with principals, coaches and teachers evolved. He recounted,

What is most helpful to me is, I see what I see, and then to debrief with the school leaders to understand, “Well, what do you see?” If you were meeting with this teacher to debrief the visit, what might you say? What evidence do you see that the kinds of shifts your efforts are intended to produce are actually taking root here?

The enduring commitment of the funder’s program officer, coupled with the sorts of thoughtful questions he asked of educators, added other opportunities for learning.

Through these sorts of visits and debriefs, the program officer and the principals got to know one another quite well. Their mutual interests and different perspectives also benefited the work that they did and gave them a grounded opportunity to discuss “what adjustments should we be making [to the grant].” A district administrator also noticed the importance of the program officer’s personal engagement in the work. “The funder is very supportive of the principals, and I know [the program officer] had this relationship with each person. . . . His work . . . was very instrumental.”

The principals also reported several ways in which their relationship to the program officer positively shaped and enhanced their work. For example, they recalled helpful suggestions “to get other people involved” in the work, which they did. Several principals also talked about how the process of actually writing grant proposals and reports contributed to the principals’ learning and helped improve the work that they were leading. One said writing the grants required thought “about . . . goals and also how . . . to measure them.” He said one result was, “We got really good at really thinking through our work. . . . I think it sharpened our skill and our thinking a lot.” Awarding the grant to the principals, thus, provided them with a different opportunity to learn.

PHASE 3: District Learns from the CLC

The third phase of the CLC, which began in 2013, marked an important turning point in the progression of the Collaborative. Recognizing that a few central office administrators “saw a lot of what they [the CLC schools] were doing . . . as strategies that deserved to be sponsored and supported and lifted up” by the district, the Goodwork Foundation awarded its next grant to the district as a whole to support the CLC work. In the life of the Collaborative, awarding the grant to the district was a momentous decision. This decision placed central office administrators, who were in charge of overseeing elementary schools, directly in charge of principals’ professional learning, which up until now had been entirely initiated, led, and funded by the principals. The award of the grant to elementary school supervisors (ESS), rather than to another department within the central office, also mattered. Recall that the CLC principals believed conducting their learning out of view of their supervisors had actually increased their ability to be vulnerable with each other, and therefore to learn. Furthermore, up until this point, these principals had determined the content, processes, purpose, and facilitation of their CLC meetings. One principal recalled, “There was a lot of consternation about it when the district took the grant over from the schools themselves.” In addition to a loss of authority and power, the consternation likely stemmed from the historical tensions that existed between the principals and the central office.

The principals’ concerns, however, in retrospect appear premature. ESS actively tried to learn from the work that the CLC principals had done, to strengthen it, and to spread it to other schools in the district. In district-led school reform efforts, it can be unusual for central office administrators to actively try to learn from work that schools initiate or to seek out ways to emulate that work within the system.

As ESS sought out opportunities to learn from the CLC, tensions and challenges emerged. For instance, the original CLC principals felt that the CLC “wasn’t ours anymore.” This is a basic tension inherent in trying to bring practices to scale. Balancing the need for local agency with a need for centralized direction is a challenge. Open and continuous communication about the purpose and participants’ needs (which will vary) can help.

The CLC principals—whose worldview remained fairly confined to their own schools’ needs—had difficulty appreciating how the changed CLC leadership structure created stronger learning opportunities for other schools in the district. As ESS developed initiatives to extend CLC practices to other schools, it also found itself promoting a particular form of literacy practices in schools. Literacy curriculum and instruction, however, was the purview of the C&I’s Humanities team. The Humanities team was simultaneously supporting its own, new form of literacy instruction in the district focused on the needs of teachers while ESS, on the other

hand, focused specifically on principals and what they needed to learn in order to lead a new approach to literacy instruction in their schools. Early on, ESS seemed to view the district’s approach to literacy instruction and the CLC approach as interchangeable; later on, differences between the two approaches revealed degrees of incoherence and discord between the two central office departments. Little communication at this time occurred between ESS and the Humanities team.

Thus, challenges and tensions were exacerbated by a lack of centralized leadership within the central office and by a departmentalized culture where supports to schools were not provided in an interdependent and coherent manner. Furthermore, the significant shift to instructional practice (as well as the recent dearth of district resources and supports) meant everyone felt taxed by new responsibilities. Leaders in schools and the central office were overwhelmed by the enormous amount of work that needed to be done and the learning challenges that they confronted. This section, which discusses how the district learned from the CLC, illuminates some of these tensions that emerged in the central office and in schools; it also considers whether or not these tensions were used as opportunities for additional learning.

A Comprehensive Approach to Literacy: A New District Direction

At this juncture in 2013, the WUSD intentionally began to use the term “comprehensive approach” to literacy instruction to describe the district’s approach. The term referred to an approach that encompassed strategies—such as the TCRWP approach used by the CLC schools, which was growing in popularity in the district—but, importantly, also included other literacy strategies, such as “Word Study” and “Guided Reading”¹⁴ that were not a part of TCRWP. The reason the WUSD espoused a “comprehensive approach” to literacy instruction stemmed from a belief that effective literacy instruction involves a collection of pedagogical approaches and depends upon a variety of curricular materials in order to meet the full range of learners and their particular needs. Given the different views about the use of literacy resources, tensions emerged between schools, such as those in the CLC, that chose to adopt the TCRWP approach wholesale and the Humanities department, which advocated for schools to pursue a “comprehensive approach” to literacy instruction and, thus, use TC materials judiciously as well as other literacy resources.

The Judicious Use of TC Materials. The district’s stance of providing “comprehensive” literacy instruction communicated an expectation that schools attend to the particular needs of their individual students. The Humanities department said they

¹⁴ Word Study is a type of spelling instruction that is based on learning word patterns. Fountas & Pinnell (Heinemann, n.d.), widely used in the WUSD, has an approach to guided reading that matches books to readers and provides differentiated instruction through working in small groups.

viewed TCRWP as “a wonderful resource,” but an incomplete one. The Humanities department staff members also strongly held the view that all resources for teaching, no matter how high in quality or how comprehensive, needed to be fitted to the particular needs of the learner and were not “something that you just follow” like a script. They and some other administrators and literacy coaches expressed concern that the TC units of study—which were rich with instructional materials, anchor texts, rubrics, and model lessons—were being followed in schools and grade-levels like a “script.” The critique went like this: “Where is the learning? . . . It [TCRWP lesson plan] doesn’t give you an analysis of your kids. [The teacher] is the *only one* who can do that. . . .” The Humanities department believed excellent teaching resulted from knowledgeable teachers, not from particular materials, as indicated by one department member’s comment:

[Teaching well] takes a level of learning, of understanding, . . . [that] when we talk about reading—teaching reading—it’s not about having [students] do x, y, z. It’s about, once you observe what [students] are reading, how do you cue them? How do you prompt them to go the right way? You need to have knowledge. . . . What’s important is that the teacher understands the learning process. That is not easy, but it can be learned.

Given the Humanities department’s view, it directed the bulk of its efforts toward providing a wide range of literacy learning supports to the district’s 3,300 teachers. It focused on increasing teachers’ content and pedagogical content knowledge and on developing teachers as literacy instructional leaders.

A Teacher-Generated Core Literacy Curriculum. As part of the Humanities department’s efforts, it consulted with teachers to develop “a teacher-generated” core curriculum. Involving teachers in the process of developing curriculum was “very important” to the department and rooted in its belief that “people have to have ownership of the work.” According to the Humanities department, this approach “was a departure from the way that we were doing things. It had a lot more to do with the sense of teachers wanting to take more ownership of their instruction than it did about the Common Core Standards coming in.” The Humanities department approached this work by connecting standards to learning outcomes for students that were organized around curriculum spirals¹⁵ in which students were expected to produce writing in four genres: “narrative, informative/explanatory text, opinion/argument, and then a piece of research.” The Humanities department recognized that it was “difficult for the teachers to understand” how to develop the curriculum spirals. Multiple steps were entailed: understanding each particular literary genre, creating a grade-level appropriate curriculum map for that

¹⁵ [Brief description of curriculum spirals here.]

genre, and then designing appropriate units and lessons. The aim was ambitious, and the process was slow and time-consuming.

The Humanities department observed that teachers were not accustomed to doing this sort of extensive curriculum planning work and it explained the difficulty this way:

If you were told coming in that you had a whole curriculum as a text and you're going from page one, to page two, to page three every other day, . . . then, being asked to actually think about the students that are in front of you . . . [and] what's going to make sense [for them] and [the expectation that you're] working with your colleagues, that's a whole different mindset.

Challenges arose for teachers who found developing curriculum spirals overwhelming, and principals who did not understand the rationale for this particular approach were frustrated when they could not support teachers in this work. One principal explained that schools found the district's approach "cumbersome to bring actually to life at the school site, especially at sites that . . . didn't have the help that they needed." The Humanities department may have underestimated how difficult learning new instructional practices can be and how essential it is for teachers to be supported to learn in their daily workplace. Therefore, in retrospect it was critical to have engaged principals in learning how to support teachers in this learning and how to create site-based conditions to enact this new approach to instruction. In essence, this was the process that the CLC schools had developed.

Elementary School Supervisors and the CLC

Meanwhile, in another part of the central office, ESS was embarking on new ways to support principals' learning. A central office administrator, a member of ESS, recalled being approached by the Goodwork Foundation and asked to get involved in the Canterbury Learning Collaborative. This administrator recalled that the Foundation was thinking about "scalability" and "longevity for the project" and "the way the work needed to find a home inside the district." The funder's concern and interest made sense to this administrator, who was "vaguely" aware of the work going on in the CLC. Up until this time, people in the central office "hadn't been involved much." Getting involved, for this administrator, meant getting to know and understand the work in which the Collaborative was engaged. This administrator recalled "sitting down with the principals at the time to think through what would the next version of a proposal to the Foundation look like" and "to think about how the district could take on and effectively lead" this work. This administrator recognized challenges inherent in the central office assuming this role, but expressed a deep commitment to the potential of supporting cross-school, collaborative learning:

What I was concerned about had to do with nurturing the idea of school collaboration and network learning communities as something that we should foster at the district level and then stitching together the department support inside of this network. . . . It also felt really important to me to be responsive to the principals' needs. It was important to me that the district tried to meet those needs, not with its own version of what's important but to actually respond in close to real time to what principals say is necessary.

This intent to understand the principals' needs was genuine. Efforts were made not to privilege the "district's own version of what's important." Yet, ESS administrators were responsible for supporting and overseeing 75 elementary schools. ESS needed to make sure that all schools (and their principals, many of whom were new to their schools and often new to the job) were receiving adequate central office support to strengthen the quality of literacy instruction in their schools. Therefore, ESS was interested in learning from the CLC and intentionally spreading some of its practices to other principals.

From the perspective of ESS, the schools participating in the CLC were advanced. They had already had the good fortune of having received a steady stream of resources and supports when many schools in the district had not. The school supervisors noticed that CLC schools had leaders who had a "goal and vision among themselves" for supporting teacher learning. In order for ESS to "take on and effectively lead" the work of the CLC, they wanted to understand what the CLC's work looked like in practice, especially since these principals were viewed as doing the work that supervisors planned to do to support other schools.

Expanding and Replicating the CLC

Central office administrators learned from the practices of the CLC. They observed their meetings and retained the external facilitator for the first year. ESS formed two other learning collaboratives in the image of the CLC. Twelve additional schools—also high needs and low performing—comprised these two groups. Administrators joined ESS who had familiarity with Instructional Rounds protocols and their own knowledge of how to lead school instructional visits. Practices and knowledge were combined, and, copying the structure of the CLC, time was set aside each month for principals (and sometimes others) to visit classrooms in one another's schools and to look closely at literacy instruction.

This was the first time these principals had opened up their schools to their colleagues or had the opportunity to visit classrooms in each other's schools. Their joint experience of observing literacy instruction and paying attention to what students were doing and saying, allowed for a different type of conversation to occur among the principals—conversation focused specifically on the instructional practices of

interactive read-aloud, mini-lessons, and small-group instruction; on particular teaching moves; and on in-the-moment indicators of effective teaching. Principals appreciated these visits and opportunities to learn from each other. They discussed the sorts of supports that teachers needed in order to become capable of teaching reading and writing well to all students. It is worth noting that members from the Humanities team did not participate in these site visits or instructional conversations about literacy. A member of ESS facilitated the principals' discussions that followed these classroom visits. Within a year of launching these two additional collaborative structures, ESS spread this collaborative way of working among all 75 elementary principals in the district.

New Principals Joined the CLC. As the original CLC principals moved into other leadership positions in the district (e.g., led other schools or moved into central office roles), new principals joined the CLC group. The original CLC principals shared their knowledge and experiences with their new principal colleagues who joined the district-led CLC meetings. A newcomer principal found these structured meetings and conversations to be informative and “high leverage” even though the original CLC principals felt that the learning experiences were diminished from the days when they led the CLC themselves. One newcomer principal said the visits to colleagues' schools “really helped moved my thinking forward” because specific implementation problems that principals were wrestling to resolve were discussed. On school visits, she saw “planning structures” in action and “what [other schools'] professional development looked like.” Observing the work-in-action to support literacy instruction was helpful to her because these schools were further along in transforming their literacy instruction. For instance, this principal said, “Going and participating in the collaborative with other schools that had literacy coaches really helped me see the importance of allocating money in my school budget for a literacy coach position.” This principal subsequently created a literacy coach position at her school. Furthermore, she described how her own understanding of how to support teacher learning evolved: “We can't just say to teachers, ‘Here's the curriculum, now go do it.’ We have to partner with them and show them and teach them how to do it and give them support so that they become better teachers.” Her learning is reminiscent of the leadership insights that the original CLC principals described gaining.

ESS Develops Literacy Labs in Schools. Meanwhile, ESS was simultaneously developing other ways to support changes to literacy instruction in elementary schools—especially in those schools that were “high need, low scores, and no money.” For instance, 12 schools with this profile were selected to have Literacy Labs established in their schools. Also led by members of ESS, the Literacy Lab was a three-year project that consisted of professional development for teachers, literacy coaching, and release time for grade-level teams “to plan units and lessons for each of those spirals” in the district's core English Language Arts [ELA] curriculum. Schools were “given a lot of money to buy the [TC] units of study . . . [and] all the environmental things you need for readers and writers workshop in the

classroom, like the leveled libraries, the tables, the book bins, the easels.” According to a district administrator, the aim was at the end of three years “these schools could be *model schools* for others to come and visit.” The Literacy Lab initiative was “working toward the same goals” as the CLC; it was a district-led effort to develop instructional capacity in a group of schools where there was “no buy-in” to this way of teaching and where “principals lacked knowledge.” In the first year, ESS supported a few teachers in each school to take up this work. There were similarities between the literacy work of the lab schools and the CLC schools.

Although ESS did not intentionally set out to use expertise developed within the CLC to support the Literacy Lab program, the district learned from the Collaborative. The Literacy Lab was conceived of as a parallel initiative to the CLC—for example, each program had its own set of literacy coaches. However, once the Literacy Lab program got underway and ESS brought the two groups of literacy coaches together, they discovered that the CLC literacy coaches “were much farther along in their experience with their professional development and especially with the [TC] units of study.” Consequently, the CLC coaches began to “provide guidance” to support the Learning Lab coaches. Sharing expertise among literacy coaches hired to serve different schools through different, although related, literacy initiatives became a way for the district to begin to connect its various streams of literacy work. This is one way the district learned from the CLC. When the literacy coaches who were supervised by ESS were redistributed to the Humanities department several years later, the capacity of the central office to support schools’ literacy instruction in a strategic and coherent way increased because the literacy coaches began to connect their literacy coaching to the district’s core literacy curriculum.

Multilevel and Interdependent Instructional Change

Central office administrators, principals, and coaches each had an important role in structuring opportunities for learning in and from the literacy work that was being undertaken. In particular, two important elements contributed to (or detracted from) the overall capacity of the central office to effectively support schools: first, the extent to which central office department leaders viewed the work of supporting schools as interdependent and mutual work, and second how much knowledge the department leaders possessed about the work they were supposed to actually lead and supervise. In the CLC schools, the success of transforming literacy practices was largely attributed to school principals’ beliefs that teachers, coaches, and principals all needed to learn about the new form of literacy instruction and participate in its implementation.

As described earlier, in 2013, several departments in the central office supported schools, but they did not approach their work interdependently. Consequently, the departments engaged in separate activities and provided different and sometimes disconnected literacy support to schools. The Literacy Lab schools, for example,

accumulated TCRWP knowledge and materials. Although they were provided with time “to plan units” for the curriculum spirals, their literacy coaches were not working in collaboration with the Humanities department, which was providing other supports to teachers for the development and use of curriculum spirals. The duplicative and separate work, with its different emphases, was confusing to teachers and principals.

This disconnected and overlapping support to schools, according to a veteran central office administrator, was “not uncommon” in the WUSD. It was an example of the problem of “siloes” departments in the central office. A different administrator commented, “A lot of different initiatives that come through this district (and that are intended to impact our movement around literacy) . . . have not been shared with folks who are in charge of moving literacy forward. . . . Folks take it upon themselves to move in whatever direction they feel is correct. It doesn’t mean that they’re going to follow the direction . . . that would establish a coherent view or philosophy for the district.” In short, the lack of “leadership at the helm” created a situation that this central office administrator described as “crazy-making.” This administrator said, “It was very disconcerting to see how we could be working at cross-purposes and not have a coherent [approach]” to strengthen literacy instruction. A third central office administrator also described the “disadvantage” of separate streams of work. This administrator explained:

There is a force of habit. . . . Administrators, particularly at the central office level, most of us have come of age in a system that was heavily siloes, and it’s difficult to maintain a lens of the effect of those siloes. When you come up in a system and get comfortable in that system, you learn your job that way.

In addition, all central office administrators reported that historically there had not been an expectation within the central office to think about “the way divisions work together and that continues to be the case.” The WUSD historically lacked leaders who perceived the value in coordinating the work of these multiple departments or who could figure out how to change the culture, norms, and expectations for central office practices.

The separation between departments in the central office led to other missed opportunities for learning. For example, expertise that could have been leveraged to strengthen literacy instruction was overlooked or unrecognized. For example, the literacy coaches that ESS oversaw initially “weren’t networked into Humanities.” Neither ESS nor Humanities administrators were closely connected to the department responsible for establishing several district-wide coaching networks even though both employed coaches. And, similarly, a department that focused specifically on the needs of English language learners worked in relative isolation from the Humanities department and from ESS.

In the absence of a central office expectation and accompanying practices to provide integrated support to schools that drew upon various expertise in central office departments, the type of assistance that got provided to schools was well-intentioned, but piecemeal. For example, a school supervisor recalled leading “challenging debriefings” with principals following a classroom observation in which they examined how well the literacy instruction was meeting the specific needs of English language learners.

We were paying specific attention to the EL students in the room, trying to think through together to what degree does our balanced literacy support the engagement of the ELs and can we take it as an article of faith that shared reading is by definition supportive of ELs, or do we need to be thinking that that itself has to be modified so that ELs are supported with that instructional strategy?

The debrief focused on “what we knew about the [reading] strategy, and then what would have to be modified about the strategy so that ELs were more productive participants in the strategy.” The administrator recalled that the conversations were challenging because “this group of principals had [not] really wrestled down the idea that a *shared reading* isn’t necessarily supportive of ELs and that it really depends on the way ELs are actually engaging in the activity.” Even though the debrief focused specifically on the needs of ELs, the central office administrators with specific expertise in teaching ELs were not invited into the conversation or consulted. Typically, members of one department at the central office did not collaborate with members of another.

Not reaching out to colleagues in other departments who had relevant expertise indicates the compartmentalized nature of the work in the central office. Colleagues responsible for ELs in the district at the time were also participating in a different, multiyear initiative to strengthen instructional practices for EL students. Through the use of an observation protocol and professional development with an outside expert, they had begun to develop a repertoire of instructional practices for teaching English language learners. However, this EL-focused work was not integrated into the literacy work because it was conceived of separately and because it was largely enacted with middle schools that ESS “hardly had any contact with.” Furthermore, “the leadership structures [that oversaw the two strands of work] were developed entirely separate from one another.” Thus, another central office administrator said, the long-term EL work that happened in the district “was really happening independently” of the literacy work.

When the two strands of work did merge in 2014 at the suggestion of the Goodwork Foundation, the integration was superficial. An administrator responsible for the long-term EL work said the EL focus “got folded into the balanced literacy work, [and] it just didn’t operate in the same, deep way” that it had previously. Although the initial vision was “definitely” for district administrators from the two departments to “partner and work [together] with each of the sites” to strengthen literacy instruction for EL students, “it just never happened.” This situation serves as a reminder that meaningful, interdependent work requires strong and thoughtful leadership that values different funds of knowledge and establishes routines for collective sense-making. It also requires steady work over time.

PHASE 4: District Leads Learning

In the last stage of the CLC, a reorganized district structure—a Literacy Coach Network—generated instructional capacity for improved literacy instruction, coaching, and leadership. With roots in previous district literacy initiatives, the Literacy Coach Network became an important mechanism for building instructional capacity and instructional coherence within the central office, between the central office and schools, and among elementary schools. The way in which the network was reorganized was important. It connected coaches with close ties to elementary school principals and ESS administrators to the Humanities department; it also linked the work of the CLC and schools’ use of TCRWP materials to the Humanities departments’ curriculum spirals.

This final section examines how the Literacy Coach Network functioned as a hub for developing common and effective coaching and teaching strategies for literacy instruction within and across elementary schools in the WUSD. It also describes the important brokering role that the coaching network assumed by linking ESS to the Humanities department and by connecting the various literacy initiatives underway in elementary schools to the Humanities department’s curriculum spiral initiative and comprehensive approach to literacy.

A Restructured Literacy Coach Network

In 2015, WUSD literacy coaches who resided in several central office departments were consolidated and relocated to the Humanities department. Two experienced literacy coaches with deep roots in CLC schools were placed at the helm of the reconfigured Literacy Coach Network. Both of these lead literacy coaches had benefited from extensive and ongoing professional development with TC experts over the years. Consequently, they brought significant literacy and coaching knowledge to their new role as leaders of the Literacy Coach Network. Each had significant content and pedagogical content knowledge of literacy and experience designing and facilitating professional development for teachers through the auspices of the Humanities department. Importantly, these lead literacy coaches also had first-hand knowledge of and experience with how teachers and schools were attempting to change their literacy teaching and the struggles they faced trying to do so. Originally hired by ESS with CLC project funds to support the literacy coaches in CLC schools and in other low-performing schools in the district, they had developed strong relationships with ESS administrators. They also had strong relationships with many teachers and principals and were highly regarded by the Humanities department staff. Their close ties to these different departments in the WUSD and the high regard that individuals had for these two lead literacy coaches meant that they were uniquely positioned to carry instructional knowledge back and forth between schools and the central office and support the use of literacy resources in schools.

Obstacles to a New Approach to Literacy Instruction

When the lead literacy coaches assumed responsibility for leading the Literacy Coach Network in 2015, they were aware of three obstacles preventing schools from strengthening their literacy instruction and connecting their school literacy practices to the district’s comprehensive approach to literacy. These obstacles were: a lack of teacher knowledge about the district’s core curriculum, especially in some schools; a misfit between the various learning needs of the schools and the literacy resources that were available in the district; and insufficient professional learning opportunities to support coaches in their daily work.

Teachers Lacked Literacy Knowledge. In many schools, a large gap existed between the district’s vision of literacy instruction and the reality in classrooms. Through the work that the lead literacy coaches had done, they saw that “a lot of the schools had been doing their own thing—in [Canterbury schools] too.” One of the lead literacy coaches reported,

I realized a lot of that work [developing curriculum spiral units] wasn’t happening because schools either didn’t understand how to do it, or had not really been through the professional development [offered by the Humanities department]. . . .

For example, citing her own experience in her former CLC school, this coach said, “The core curriculum was not a focus at our site; it was not the central conversation we were having about literacy practice.” Furthermore, not all schools sent teachers to the literacy professional development days offered by the Humanities department. This coach said teachers at her school “didn’t feel like that [Humanities-led professional development] was needed because we had all these resources because of our affiliation with Teachers College. . . . Many of the schools in Canterbury had the same things.” For this and other reasons, not all schools sent teachers to the district’s literacy professional development. Therefore, “not everyone [got] the same opportunities and access to professional development.” Inevitably, this led to a situation in which some schools had limited knowledge of the district’s core literacy curriculum.

In addition, the literacy coaches saw that many teachers needed support in two important areas of teaching literacy: knowledge of the multiple components of literacy instruction and knowledge of how to plan units and lessons.

What I see over and over again is a lot of both pieces are missing, and a lot of teachers are showing up in the field with the best of intentions, but they’re not always arriving to buildings from a pre-service experience with knowledge of balanced literacy methods. They haven’t been set up to succeed. They are hired by principals who expect them to

know how to do some of this stuff, and they don't. Then, where's the support? . . .

When trying to scale an instructional change, learning supports that are differentiated to fit particular needs in each school are essential while also maintaining a set of common, core principles and practices. The literacy coaches decided to focus their teacher support on “the how and the what” of literacy instruction and to do so in a way that met the particular needs of individual schools.

Schools' Learning Needs Varied. When the lead coaches began to look across schools to learn how literacy instruction was being implemented, they found that “every school kind of had a different need.” Not surprisingly, they also discovered, “The coaches did their own things that didn't connect to the district core curriculum.” In order to determine how best to respond to the varied needs of the schools, the lead coaches developed “an inventory assessment” to use with schools to determine “what they needed most to move work forward.” Then they “crafted a plan for each school,” which they worked on with the principals and the site-based coaches to implement. Through this process, they recognized various ways in which literacy coaches needed ongoing support. Although all newly hired coaches in the district received instruction in foundational coaching methods from the New Teacher Center (n.d.), a non-profit organization that develops teacher induction and instructional coaching programs, coaches still needed ongoing support and opportunities to practice using these coaching methods and receive feedback on their coaching moves. Like all professionals, coaches needed structured ways to learn and receive feedback in order to improve.

Coaches Needed Ongoing Support. As the lead literacy coaches worked with site-based coaches, they realized that “coaches needed a bit of professional development.” Although many schools by this time had literacy coaches, not all coaches were equally effective. They did not all possess the same literacy knowledge. Some coaches and principals struggled to communicate effectively with each other. In some schools, coaches had to negotiate access to teachers' classrooms and received little help from principals in their efforts to work with teachers. In other schools, principals expected coaches to work only with the teachers who were most resistant to the new literacy practices. Site-based leadership also varied from school to school, and in some schools the existing structures were not conducive to principal and coach collaboration. Many principals had never had a coach before and did not know how to structure their joint literacy work. Furthermore, coaches and principals were each pulled in many directions, which meant that sometimes they did not make time to develop a shared understanding of the current state of literacy practices in the school. In addition, high rates of teacher turnover meant there was a steady stream of teachers arriving into the district who were unfamiliar with the district's approach to literacy instruction and who urgently needed additional support. Coaches needed help to address these problems.

How the Literacy Coach Network Developed Capacity for Literacy Improvement

The new leaders of the Literacy Coach Network designed a rich array of professional learning supports for coaches that were well matched to the various types of learning that teachers and coaches needed to do. They designed professional learning to deepen coaches' knowledge of literacy and the district core curriculum, to teach them effective coaching techniques, and to provide ways they could practice and refine their coaching. They also supported coaches to work with principals. In so doing, the lead literacy coaches refined some structures and introduced others to this multifaceted coach support network. One coach described the restructured network as “pretty exquisite.” Participating literacy coaches experienced four intertwined strands of learning in the network, focused on:

- Developing literacy content knowledge
- Practicing teaching and coaching in schools with actual students
- Getting help developing customized school coaching plans
- Receiving regular feedback from an expert coach

The available learning opportunities were closely matched to coaches' individual needs. A comprehensive survey of coach needs created and administered by the Literacy Coach Network leaders helped identify particular coaching methods and literacy content to focus on in order to support coaches' expressed learning needs. The network learning opportunities were, by design, open and flexible. The learning activities were intended to help coaches deliver more effective coaching to teachers, so that teachers could offer instruction that would help students learn to read and write well, analyze texts, and express their own ideas.

Coach Learning

Coaches developed a common understanding of the WUSD's vision of literacy instruction and learned effective coaching techniques. They participated in coaching clinics. Modeled in part on the TC coaching institutes, these clinics provided literacy coaches with opportunities to practice teaching and coaching with actual kids. One coach explained, “We could practice different coaching methods [and] . . . different teaching methods that we could then bring back to our school sites.” When professional learning experiences simultaneously meet the specific needs of the learner and are designed with a clear purpose, learning experiences become generative and the capacity for instructional improvement increases (Jaquith, 2017).

A coach described how participation in the network increased her capacity to provide more effective coaching to teachers: “In the literacy network . . . everything is differentiated. I think that makes a big difference. You get the support you need.” Although this coach was hired for her content knowledge and had previously coached elsewhere in the district, she said, “I’ve really improved my own understanding of literacy instruction; I’ve also . . . learn[ed] the new role of coach and how that connects to literacy intervention.” Another coach appreciated “the way that the content was delivered to us was . . . based on our needs” and with the intention that we bring our learning “back to our sites in order to support teachers.”

Coaches valued the content and design of the Literacy Coach Network. They learned specific coaching techniques, such as *freeze frame* and *whisper in*.¹⁶ These coaching methods were focused on in-the-moment coaching moves and were different from the more formal observation and feedback cycles that coaches had learned through professional development on mentoring and instructional coaching practices offered by the New Teacher Center.

Coaching that Supported Teachers’ Learning

A literacy coach recounted how these in-the-moment coaching techniques worked to support teacher learning. When using the *freeze frame* and *whisper in* technique,

[t]he teacher teaching the lesson has permission to say, “Hang on. Time out. Sorry kids. . . . I lost track of the lesson. . . .” Then the coach working with the [the teacher] could say, “Oh, I think you need to give the kids a chance to turn and talk, or something like that.”

As described, this technique emphasizes real-time teacher learning so that instruction can continuously improve. The coaches found using these techniques helped teachers develop instructional knowledge more quickly and in a deeper way. Not surprisingly, teachers reported appreciating these learning opportunities as well. A 15-year veteran commented on how the coaching changed the way grade-level teachers at his school talk to each other. “The conversation has shift[ed from] how would you deliver this lesson to . . . What supports are you able to provide for x student?” In this way, teaching and coaching became much more learner-centric.

Focusing on teachers and coaches as learners led to conditions in which students could develop the important literacy and sense-making skills that they needed to be able to think independently and draw their own conclusions. The provision of carefully constructed learning experiences for coaches enabled them to provide

¹⁶ [Brief description here of “freeze frame” and “whisper in” techniques.]

pertinent, individualized learning experiences for teachers, who in turn were supported to provide better and more powerful learning experiences for students.

Functions of the Restructured Literacy Coach Network

As the central office developed a more unified theory of change, it began to coordinate the work of various departments that were trying to support school-level instructional change. When the instructional improvement work became more coordinated and managed as an interdependent effort—as it was in 2015 through the restructured Literacy Coach Network—teachers, coaches, and principals experienced more success in strengthening literacy instruction in schools. The reorganization of the Literacy Coach Network within the WUSD positioned the network to serve a boundary-spanning function within the district. Like boundary-spanning units in other organizations (Briggs, 2003), the Literacy Coach Network served to mediate change between two parties—the central office and the schools. Given who the new leaders of the Literacy Coach Network were, this network was also able to broker relationships between central office departments and to some extent teach coaches how to mediate change between teachers and principals.

Coach Participation in the Network

Originally, the reconfigured Literacy Coach Network was intended to provide professional development only to the 20 district-hired literacy coaches, whose participation in the Literacy Coach Network was an expectation of their job. When word traveled of the valuable learning experiences provided by the Literacy Coach Network to the literacy coaches that had been hired by individual school sites—which tended to be those schools with more resources—those coaches also began to voluntarily participate in the network’s ongoing professional development. The leaders of the Literacy Coach Network willingly opened up their network to these school-funded coaches and, in so doing, further strengthened the district’s capacity to influence its coaching practice and forge a more consistent approach to literacy instruction in many more district schools. Thus, the Literacy Coach Network became an important mechanism for intra-organizational communication and learning in the district. In essence, the professional learning structure provided by the network became an infrastructure that developed coherence in coaching and instructional practices across schools—those that were low performing and had fewer resources as well as higher-performing schools with significantly more resources. The restructured network was able to generate capacity to improve literacy instruction in the following ways:

- By establishing an *organizational structure* that connected literacy coaching in the schools to the district’s core curriculum

- By strengthening coaches’ *content and pedagogical content knowledge* of literacy, by developing their knowledge of the district’s “comprehensive literacy” approach, and by teaching coaches “how to take a standard or a student learning outcome and then craft instruction around that”
- By developing a *common repertoire* of coaching knowledge that included specific facilitation moves and routines for practicing new instructional techniques
- By developing *tools and materials* that were used to assess the quality of enacted literacy instruction in schools and develop school professional learning plans that provided targeted support
- By creating conditions for *learning relationships* to develop among literacy coaches, between literacy coaches and teachers, between literacy coaches and principals, and between literacy coaches and district administrators

The literacy coaches functioned as boundary spanners who were able to broker ideas and practices across levels of the district system. Because the Literacy Coach Network was intentional about connecting the work of the Humanities department to the interests and needs of schools and vice versa, this network fulfilled a critical brokering function within the district that made greater literacy instructional coherence possible.¹⁷ Furthermore, through the Literacy Coach Network—with its clear aim to strengthen the quality of literacy coaching in the district—the central office strengthened its ability to transform literacy instruction in the district’s elementary schools.

¹⁷ For a discussion of the conditions that enable boundary spanners to carry instructional resources from one context to another and to support the use of these resources, see Jaquith, 2017, pp. 43–46.

Lessons Learned

Changing instructional practice district-wide is complicated and challenging work. It is a multidimensional undertaking that requires paying attention to the depth of the desired change, not merely increasing the number of schools or teachers involved. Coburn (2003, p. 4) defines such depth as “change that goes beyond surface structures or procedures . . . to alter teachers’ beliefs, norms of social interaction, and pedagogical principles as enacted in the curriculum.” Changing instruction in deep and consequential ways requires learning—at all levels of the system—as well as unlearning default ways of thinking or acting. Leading instructional change, as the CLC has shown, involves coordination, a shared vision, and a willingness to work together across multiple levels of the educational system. It requires providing purposeful learning experiences to all adults in the district system—in ways that are equitable and inclusive as well as engaging and demanding. Designing, leading, and fully participating in such professional learning is challenging and steady work that requires openness to learning and, possibly, courage.

The Canterbury Learning Collaborative offers some lessons about leading the process of instructional change. For example, the CLC reminds us to do the following:

- Establish a district-wide shared vision for the desired change;
- Focus individuals’ attention and efforts on a single, specific change;
- Develop the capacity of individuals who are expected to carry out the change to actually be able to enact it; allow time for this capacity to develop;
- Establish a culture of learning where people feel safe, are expected to ask for help, and are able to give and receive feedback;
- Recognize that achieving instructional change at scale will necessarily involve people who have various roles in the district system working together or, at least, coordinating their work;
- Realize that setting performance goals (e.g., every teacher will try out one of the TCRWP instructional strategies this month) rather than setting outcome goals (e.g., 80% of students will read at grade level by the end of the year) for individuals involved in the change process is appropriate when individuals are still learning how to enact a particular change.

In addition, the CLC offers important lessons about particular organizational levers and supports for actors located in different parts of the educational ecosystem that can help develop a district’s capacity for transforming literacy instruction. These lessons, organized by audience, follow.

Lessons for District Administrators

- In order to bring coherent supports to school instructional improvement efforts, the central office needs to coordinate its departmental supports with schools and should also consider the interdependent nature of these supports.
- In order to work together effectively, central office administrators can benefit from leaders who develop organizational structures and routines that coordinate (or integrate) work across departments and who establish an expectation for providing coherent supports to schools. “Siloed” departments in the central office create “craziness” at the school level and undermine each department’s improvement efforts.
- Instructional change efforts involve both technical as well as cultural changes; therefore, teachers and principals each have important roles to play in bringing about such changes. Consequently, the central office needs to recognize that teachers and principals are integral to bringing about instructional change and plan accordingly.
- Instructional change requires learners’ ongoing access to expert knowledge and opportunities to practice using that knowledge with informed feedback as well as with some degree of agency.
- Establishing structures (e.g., the Literacy Coach Network) and routines in the central office (and between central office administrators and schools) that foreground learning and facilitate communication can foster relationships of trust and help prevent organizational boundaries from isolating individuals and fossilizing practices.

Lessons for Principals

- Principals need structures and routines for their own ongoing learning (and they need some agency in defining their own learning needs) in order to strengthen their capacity to create site-based conditions for continuous improvement.
- Principals need to establish school conditions (i.e., structures, routines, coaches, and opportunities for expert professional learning sessions) to

support ongoing learning for teachers and coaches, particularly to develop their pedagogical content knowledge and content expertise.

- Principals need to develop their staff’s capacity (especially of coaches and teacher leaders) to lead, coach, and provide expertise to colleagues, so that adult learning in schools is continuous.
- Principals need to communicate their school’s strengths, interests, and needs to central office administrators and consider the ways in which the central office can both leverage their expertise (e.g., hosting structured school visits) and provide support for their school needs (e.g., expertise, time, or other resources).

Lessons for Literary Coaches

- Coaches need structures and ongoing opportunities to support their individual and collective learning—particularly of coaching skills and practices.
- Coaches need to develop, use, and/or refine a common repertoire of coaching practices as well as develop their knowledge of teacher, school-site, and district strengths, interests, and needs in order to help districts develop organizational capacity for coherent instructional improvement.
- As members of a district-wide coaching team, coaches should recognize their intermediary (or in-between) role and be alert for opportunities to serve as intra-organizational communicators and sense-makers linking schools and the central office.

Lessons for Funders

- Funders can aid instructional change efforts by making steady and sustained investments over a long period of time—as opposed to larger, one-time investments—since instructional change is slow and typically requires changing organizational norms, social interactions, and practices.
- Funders can act as a critical friend and partner to grantees in their work if they develop a “learning relationship” with grantees and are knowledgeable about the grantees’ work.
- Funders might want to create opportunities for school and district leaders to articulate their theories of change for achieving a particular goal, ask them to identify indicators of progress, and convene leaders from different levels of the system to discuss their theories of change, actions, and results.

- In the grant-making process, funders can be alert to opportunities to promote communication and coordination across system boundaries (e.g., schools and central office; departments within the central office; principals and teachers) and/or require cross-role communications.

Taken together, these lessons show how an educational system can approach developing capacity for continuous instructional improvement and how actors located outside, as well as at various levels within the system, can participate in this endeavor.

Appendix A: Data and Methods

The primary data sources for this study were 28 interviews conducted with people involved in the CLC during its 10-year history (see Table 1) and a review of relevant documents. Table I shows the number of interviews conducted by role. Many individuals changed roles and/or changed schools after the inception of the Canterbury Learning Collaborative. Therefore, the total interview count below is greater than 28; some individuals interviewed were able to represent perspectives from multiple roles or schools.

**TABLE 1:
INTERVIEWEE DATA SOURCES**

ROLE*	NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS
District Administrator	10
Principal	24
District Coach	5
Teacher	4
Outside professional development provider	3

**TABLE 2:
DATA DESCRIPTORS**

GROUPS OF DATA SOURCES	NUMBER
Schools Represented	8
Central Office departments represented	5
Individuals interviewed who had left the district	3

* Many individuals changed roles and/or changed schools after the inception of the Canterbury Learning Collaborative. Some individuals who were interviewed represented perspectives from multiple roles or schools.

Table 2 provides additional information about the number of school sites, district departments and people interviewed who were no longer working in the WUSD at the time of this data collection.

Interviews were conducted with district administrators, principals, district coaches, teachers, and external professional development providers, as well as with two foundation program officers. Working from an initial list of 10 people that included the principals of the Canterbury Learning Collaborative schools as well as several central office administrators who were closely involved in the last two phases of the CLC, snowball sampling was used to identify other key people whose work was connected to the CLC in a significant way.¹⁸ A total of 28 interviews were conducted

¹⁸ All interviewees who spent time in the CLC schools reported significant, school-wide instructional and cultural changes. Calculating the CLC's impact on students' literacy performance, however, was beyond the scope of this study.

during a three-month period using a semi-structured interview protocol. Documents related to the CLC were collected and reviewed. Examples of such documents include: grant proposals and summative reports, CLC meeting agendas, site-based coaching plans, coaching materials, classroom observation rubrics, and professional development materials.

All data were analyzed using a combination of descriptive and analytic codes. Descriptive codes were used to describe information in the data such as *role*, *level of the system* that was referenced, *outside expertise*, and *staff turnover*. Analytic codes were drawn from research in three areas:

- The theory of learning in a community of practice, which directs attention to the socially situated nature of learning and the importance of the ways in which boundaries are drawn around communities of practice (Wenger, 1998)
- Organizational studies of learning behaviors in teams, which direct attention to individual actions, group norms, and members' status and power (Edmondson, 1999; Edmondson, Bohmer, & Pisano, 2001)
- The theory of instructional capacity building, which directs attention to how particular types of resources are used (or not) within a specific context (Jaquith, 2017)

The constant comparative method was used to identify themes as they emerged during data analysis. Findings were identified in relation to these themes and in relation to the time period of either pre- or post-central office involvement in the Canterbury Learning Collaborative. Examples of two themes that emerged during analysis were: (1) the relationship between individual agency and a willingness to change and (2) the relationship between exhibiting “learning behaviors” (e.g., asking for help, experimenting, discussing shortcomings, and seeking feedback) and changes to practice.¹⁹ (Edmondson, Dillon, & Roloff, 2007).

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