

Mastering Implementation: A Case Study of Literacy Curriculum Implementation at Charles Carroll Barrister Elementary



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Introduction

Charles Carroll Barrister Elementary School is located in southwest Baltimore, Maryland, as part of the Baltimore City Public School System. The school serves approximately 310 students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. It is in a neighborhood that locals call “Pigtown” as a nod to the many butcher shops and meatpacking facilities that the area housed in the late 19th century. In the eyes of city leaders, the neighborhood has consistently been regarded as a thriving community, primarily due to its advantageous location near the University of Maryland Medical Center, numerous notable historical sites, expansive green areas, recreational parks, and major sports arenas, in addition to its proximity to the I-95 corridor. The neighborhood is home to a diverse population of graduate students, recent immigrants, and long-standing families and community members.

The racial identities of the student population mirror the diversity of the Pigtown neighborhood and are diverse compared to most schools in Baltimore City Public Schools: 15% of students identify as white, 42% as Hispanic/Latino, 38% as African American, and 5% as Asian/Pacific Islander. The school enrolls one of the largest populations of English language learners in the district, as about half of all students receive support for learning English as a second language. Additionally, the school population generally lives below the poverty line, with upward of 90% of students qualifying for free and reduced meals, a common indicator of financial insecurity or economic hardship.



Charles Carroll Barrister (CCB) employs 25 full-time teachers, and the majority (90%) have been teaching for over three years. David Wunder serves as the principal of the school, leading CCB for over 10 years and earning a distinguished designation from the school district as a transformational and model leader within the city's school system. The school has won awards, including grants from local foundations and the Baltimore Ravens organization, recognizing their culturally responsive and safe environment as well as strong student and staff retention rates. However, while the school's overall climate and learning environment may be award-winning, the school struggles to see most students read and write proficiently. This phenomenon can be seen through the observations of teachers and leaders at CCB as well as on classroom assessment data. Additionally, students struggle to perform at high levels on state assessment measures; recent data shows that just 17% of students scored proficiently in mathematics, and 26% of students scored proficiently in reading on Maryland's basic skills assessment.

	Math % Proficient	ELA % Proficient
All students	17.1%	26%
Black/African American	5%	17.6%
Hispanic/Latino	19%	21.6%
White	31.3%	41.2%
English Language Learners	13.6%	19%

FIGURE 1: STATE ASSESSMENT PROFICIENCY (MSDE, 2022)

Problem of Practice

One of the primary challenges that CCB faces as an organization is understanding how to best serve the needs of their diverse population by using a new literacy curriculum that the school adopted in 2018. The school participated in this effort as part of a district-wide adoption in Baltimore City Schools aimed at providing all students with high-quality teaching and learning experiences grounded in externally vetted, common ELA curricular materials. Principal Wunder and his team hoped that the adoption of these materials, called *Wit and Wisdom* and published by Great Minds, could help improve access to strong, rigorous literacy instruction and, in turn, improve student literacy outcomes. The school's leadership team was especially hopeful that the program would support improving outcomes for their large population of English language learners, who struggle the most in reading achievement. However, according to the leadership team at CCB, when the curriculum was initially adopted, teachers said that it was difficult for them to implement in meaningful, engaging ways.

As teachers at CCB were becoming more comfortable with the curriculum in the second year of implementation during the 2019–2020 school year, the COVID-19 pandemic led to persistent in-person schooling interruptions throughout the 2019–2020, 2020–2021, and 2021–2022 school years. At various times during these periods, several months of instruction moved to virtual classrooms, where attendance among students was largely inconsistent. Because of this, Principal Wunder shared that CCB's teachers often shifted away from using *Wit and Wisdom* as they reported the materials were especially difficult to translate into the virtual environment. The leadership team understood that the virtual learning setting posed many

challenges as a delivery mode of instruction, and as such, did not require the teachers to use the materials in the virtual setting. At the start of the 2022–2023 school year, which promised to be a less disrupted year with revised and more relaxed COVID-19 protocols due to the waning pandemic, Principal Wunder and his leadership team wanted to put a renewed focus on using the adopted materials effectively in hopes of realizing their goal of improving literacy outcomes for students.

In their conversations with leadership team members at the start of the 2022-2023 school year, teachers maintained that using the curriculum still felt challenging. They described the curriculum as difficult to implement in the time allotted, laborious in terms of preparing lessons, and confusing in terms of the overall design. As Principal Wunder and his team observed teachers frequently making significant modifications to the curriculum to accelerate student completion, their concerns grew. They also detected a widespread trend of tasks being simplified, and of students receiving significant teacher assistance throughout the task completion process. These observations raised concerns among the leadership team regarding the insufficient level of rigor experienced by students at their respective grade levels.

Principal Wunder and his team aim to enhance their understanding of the reasons behind these trends and to explore potential strategies to address the challenges faced by teachers in implementing *Wit and Wisdom*. In exploring the challenge that CCB faces with their literacy curriculum, I wanted to better understand the design of the curriculum to ensure that it is sound in terms of current best practices grounded in cognitive research and the body of evidence known as the Science of Reading. I also wanted to verify what external reviewers say about this curriculum regarding its overall usability

and design. Additionally, I was interested in understanding how teachers received initial training around the curriculum, the messages they received and continue to receive about the curriculum, and what coaching and professional learning experiences they currently have access to, especially those focused on preparing and implementing the *Wit and Wisdom* materials. Finally, I hoped to better understand their beliefs and motivation as these relate to teaching and using the curriculum. As part of this effort, I also wanted to understand what the literature has to say about change leadership as it relates to motivation. I saw these as key factors when researching practical solutions to the challenges CCB is experiencing in effectively implementing the curriculum and, in turn, seeing students read and write proficiently.



Challenges and Desired State

One of the challenges in motion during this improvement project was educator bias. This is because of the often-held unconscious belief that because students live in poverty or speak English as a second language, most students will struggle with reading, and therefore, this rigorous curriculum may not be appropriate for instruction. One strength present at Charles Carroll Barrister is the veteran status of most of the staff; teachers are committed to their profession, and most teachers in the school have more than ten years of experience. This also can equally be seen as a challenge. This is because the cognitive dissonance experienced during a change exploration process is often more intense given many years of experience. Those years of experience can make challenging the previously held status quo a more intense experience.

In considering the desired state at Charles Carroll Barrister, the leadership team would like to see teachers fully embracing the literacy curriculum and ensuring that students have strong teaching and learning experiences in literacy classrooms across the school. The leadership team believes that by accomplishing this, the strong teaching practices will, in turn, lead to their goal of improving literacy outcomes for students. I hope that because of our partnership, the school leadership team better understands factors contributing to the challenges teachers report in implementing the curriculum. I also hope that my findings and recommendations are framed in a relevant way, such that CCB is well-positioned to implement research-aligned recommendations.

Literature Review

To support CCB in improving their difficulties with curriculum implementation, I turned to the literature to better understand how research could inform the challenges they face. I asked the following questions of research literature to inform the design of our partnership improvement work:

- A. What does research tell us about strong literacy curriculum, both written and taught, for diverse learners in elementary school?
- B. What does research tell us about teacher knowledge and skill as well as associated high-impact professional learning experiences to build educator knowledge and skills?
- C. What does research tell us about the impact of teacher motivation and beliefs and the ways in which we can lead change efforts to align with that motivation?

While seeking answers to these questions, my goal was to gain a better understanding of the challenges CCB faces regarding the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum, and to subsequently provide guidance to the school regarding the extent to which their written curriculum aligns with best practices in literacy instruction, particularly considering the diverse student population served by the school. Additionally, I hoped to better understand how beliefs and motivation might impact instructional experiences for students and what strong professional learning experiences for educators might look like in pursuing impact and improvement, especially as it relates to using *Wit and Wisdom*.

Literacy Curriculum

In investigating what research says about literacy curriculum, three key trends emerged, each of which are outlined in more detail in the description that follows:

1. Teachers should explicitly teach reading foundational skills, such as word recognition and decoding, and writers should design the curriculum to systematically develop students' sound-spelling knowledge and decoding skills throughout the early grades.
2. Students' reading comprehension success greatly relies on their knowledge of the topic they are reading about, and the vocabulary associated with it. Therefore, the curriculum should actively strive to cultivate broad and diverse academic knowledge as well as the corresponding vocabulary throughout grade levels, aiming for a gradual and consistent progression.

Educators should employ writing instruction to enhance proficiency in reading foundational skills and to facilitate the acquisition of student knowledge and vocabulary. The curriculum should incorporate explicit teaching of writing into daily literacy instruction, ensuring integration of reading and writing (Carroll et al., 2022).

Evidence from cognitive research shows that while a small percentage of students can learn how to read with minimal explicit phonics instruction, most students need explicit instruction of the written sound-spelling code of English to become proficient readers (Panero, 2016). Despite the English written language consisting of only 26 letters, it encompasses 44 distinct sounds, referred to as phonemes, which can be categorized into over 100

sound-spelling combinations. As a result, achieving proficiency typically requires most students, particularly multilingual learners, to receive explicit instruction and engage in deliberate practice within and outside of texts, requiring multiple exposures. Although cognitive researchers have understood this evidence for several decades, teaching methods that align with approaches lacking substantial evidence in teaching reading foundational skills have maintained popularity in the past 20 years (Castles et al., 2018).

While some students may show early reading success with less explicit approaches to reading instruction, for most students to move to advanced reading stages efficiently, students should receive instruction in a systematic, uniform way across the early grades of kindergarten, first grade, and second grade (Ehri, 2014). Educators should intentionally design the literacy curriculum to systematically develop students' sound-spelling knowledge and decoding skills throughout the early grades. The reading foundational skills curriculum that *Wit and Wisdom* pairs with is called *Foundations* published by Wilson Reading. External curriculum reviewers have adequately rated *Foundations* in this domain and teachers consistently use these materials at CCB (EdReports, 2016).

Because of the critical role that knowledge and its associated vocabulary play in a reader's understanding of a given topic, instructional approaches that build knowledge and associated academic vocabulary over students' formative years in school promote stronger attainment and equity in student reading achievement (Carroll et al., 2022). This may be because many students facing financial insecurity or hardship depend on school to build academic knowledge (Cabell & Hwang, 2020), whereas their more affluent peers may attain worldly academic knowledge through greater resources in their lives at

home and in their communities, such as enriching experiences like travel and text-rich surroundings (Kaefer et al., 2014). In service of both proficiency in reading foundational skills and building content knowledge and its associated academic vocabulary, explicit writing instruction can be wielded to further student gains (Panero, 2016). This means that curriculum should embed these writing experiences into daily practice because by writing about the topics that they read about, students can more efficiently encode knowledge and its associated vocabulary to long-term memory. Routinely writing in this way can lead to stronger reading comprehension in a variety of texts spanning a variety of topics, including those that are more complex in later grades (Carroll et al., 2022). Curriculum that prioritizes both building knowledge through reading and writing is what expert reviewers prize in their analysis of curricular programs (EdReports, 2018).

Written Curriculum Analysis

The Great Minds *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum adopted by the school received high marks from external curricular reviewers in terms of the curriculum's alignment with evidence-based practices aligned with cognitive research (EdReports, 2018; see Figure 2). The curriculum scored high marks in incorporating rich, sophisticated, and complex literary and nonfiction texts as the center of instruction. These texts, grouped by topics of study, allow students to build funds of academic knowledge and associated vocabulary, and the curriculum incorporates tasks that demand students write about the content they are learning, solidifying both stronger writing skills and the acquisition of knowledge and associated academic vocabulary. For these and other reasons, *Wit and Wisdom* received the highest possible rating available from EdReports when the materials were studied in 2018.

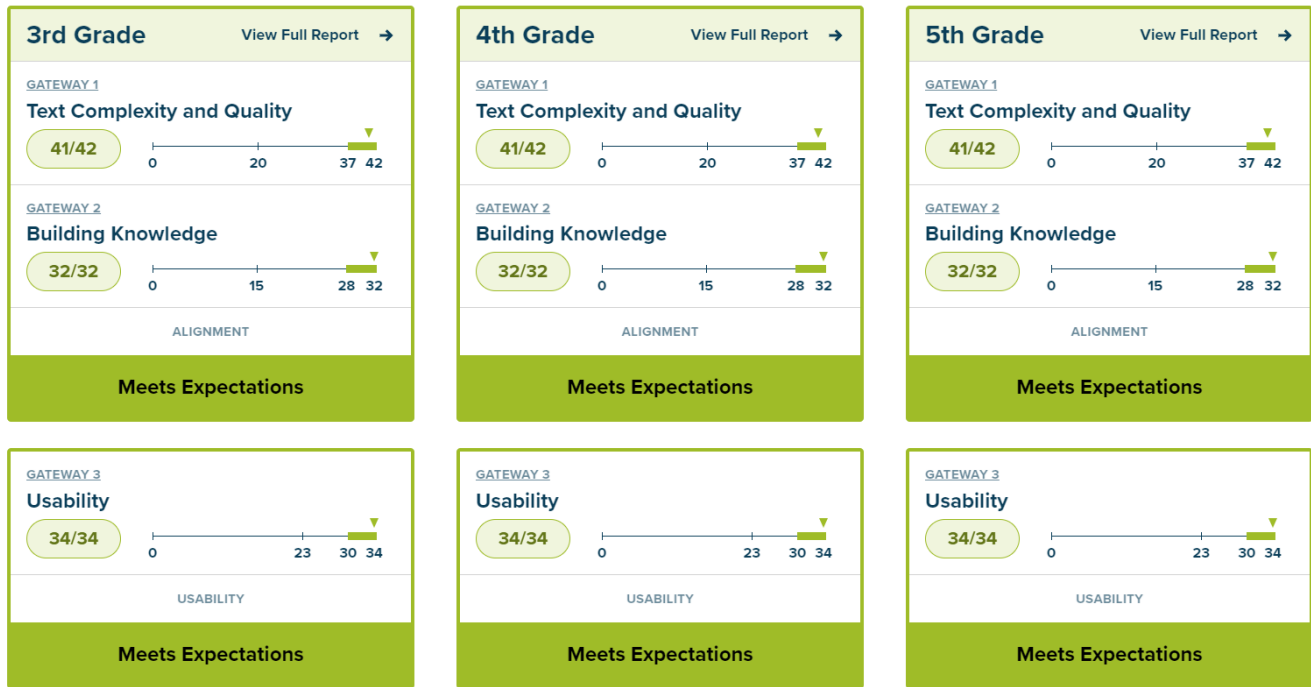


FIGURE 2: EdReports WIT AND WISDOM REVIEW (2018)

In exploring the intentional design of *Wit and Wisdom*, it is clear that the materials incorporate high-quality texts and tasks grouped in a meaningful way, as well as an overall pedagogical approach grounded in evidence-based best practices. Given this, it seems likely that the curriculum itself is not the source of the difficulties teachers face with implementation. This is because the curriculum *also* received high marks on measures of usability for teachers. The publishers do address in guidance documents that programmatic training and ongoing coaching is suggested for teachers to best understand the rationale and design for the materials, and that this type of training is critical in ensuring that teachers find the materials to be as user-friendly as intended.

When I reflected on these findings, it seemed likely that other factors are contributing to the challenges that CCB teachers are experiencing in implementing the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum. These factors may be

associated with communication around the materials, professional learning experiences provided, or other necessary components to enact and sustain the change desired in using the curriculum effectively. Given that, I chose to focus on associated experiences and factors needed to support curricular adoption and implementation throughout my exploration during this improvement project.

Professional Learning Experiences

Researchers have a clear understanding of the relationship between teacher pedagogical skill and instructional effectiveness (Davidson et al., 2022). This same body of research shows that teachers can grow and develop their capacity through meaningful professional learning experiences. For professional learning experiences to be both meaningful to teachers and impactful on their practice in terms of student outcomes, the experiences should not be grounded solely in theory but also in teachers' day-to-day work and directly applicable to their classroom practice (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Further research shows that a promising path toward improving student outcomes is for schools and school systems to not only fund professional development efforts for teachers, but also adopt curricular materials grounded in evidence-based pedagogy (Short & Hirsch, 2020). When teachers possess both high-quality curricular materials and allocated time for professional learning, they can effectively engage in collaborative intellectual preparation and various forms of lesson study grounded in day-to-day practices, and in doing so utilize their time meaningfully (Takahashi & McDougal, 2016).

These concepts also align to research focused on professional job coaching, which suggests that the best return on investment that organizations can

make in training is to ensure a mixture of general domain training, as well as context-specific application of skills experiences within organizational roles (Lazear & Gibbs, 2017). In this context, general domain training would equate to pedagogical training, and context-specific application would equate to curriculum-based professional learning. Literature (Short & Hirsch, 2020) suggests that the best way for teachers to engage in curriculum-based professional learning time is by:

- A) Engaging in protocols that allow teachers to collaboratively internalize and rehearse lesson plans.
- B) Engaging in protocols to unpack and understand lengthier units and modules to best serve student learning over time—exploring both the *why* and the *how* of the materials.
- C) Engaging in protocols to analyze student work and writing samples to learn and explore collaborative ways to provide strong feedback and subsequent follow-up instruction for students.

While there are promising outcomes for both teachers' motivation and student success in utilizing this approach (Vescio et al., 2008), many schools and systems continue to approach curriculum and professional development as separate entities without connecting the two, using a coherent approach (Chenoweth, 2007). Literature suggests that these efforts should happen in a regular, predictable cadence that allows teachers to consistently collaborate and learn together rather than just a few times per year (Kennedy, 2019). This means that schools may be able to improve through pairing the two approaches (pedagogical skill learning and curriculum-based professional learning) in a steady, frequent cycle rather than treating professional

learning and intellectual preparation of curricular materials as separate entities.

In thinking about teachers' implementation challenges, it is possible that while they have access to strong ELA materials via the *Wit and Wisdom* program, they have not had consistent access to meaningful professional learning, either from the outset of the adoption, in a regular cadence, or both. Moreover, it is possible that leadership at CCB erroneously believed that successful initiation and maintenance of the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum would require minimal professional learning for teachers. However, the literature has dispelled the myth that veteran instructors in the teaching staff would require minimal professional learning to launch and sustain the implementation of the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum. Studies have shown that professional learning experiences and ongoing curriculum-based training support the development of teachers at all levels of experience: novice, mid-career, and late career (Short & Hirsch, 2020).

Teacher Beliefs, Motivation, and Change Management

One factor to consider in thinking about CCB's challenge with curriculum implementation is the concept of teachers' motivation and agency in the process of embracing and implementing the adopted materials. In reviewing the literature, various key ideas about teacher motivation arise in a recurring way. The first of these ideas is that teachers feel a stronger sense of motivation to embrace change when they have a sense of a compelling goal or overall vision that they can accomplish (Datnow, 2012). Teachers feel more motivated when they can see the value in tasks and work related to that goal or vision (Fullan, 1991). The second is that teachers feel more motivated when they have agency over decisions in the change process and can take

ownership of influence and control in some areas of their tasks and daily efforts (Datnow, 2012). Finally, teachers feel more motivated when the change and associated tasks, work, and learning related to the change efforts are social, ensuring that teachers feel connected to colleagues working toward the same goal(s) and that they have psychological safety to take reasonable risks in pursuit of achieving the goal or vision (Han & Yin, 2016).

These findings align with more general research on change management and a number of models for change management designed from this evidence base. Each of these models promotes actively sharing reasons for the change with key stakeholders, providing actionable information on goals that stakeholders can set and achieve, offering a level of agency, and creating social capital as integral components of change efforts (Datnow, 2012).

Attending to these factors within implementation and change efforts can lead to a greater degree of sustained success in education initiatives across diverse settings.

When it comes to teacher beliefs about students and student capacity, one important theme in the literature is the idea that because of social attitudes and community prejudices, teachers sometimes unintentionally underestimate the academic capacity of racial minority and economically disadvantaged students (Papageorge et al., 2020). This may contribute to lower achievement of students that identify as part of these groups. A meta-analysis of experiments conducted over the course of sixty years shows that teachers' expectations of students' capacity can influence student achievement and educational attainment (De Boer et al., 2018). This phenomenon is not limited to the United States, as studies replicated across countries show comparable results for students in historically marginalized identity groups.

Researchers also conclude that there can be a reinforcing cycle of teacher expectations on student outcomes. This cycle begins with teacher beliefs about students, which, in turn, impact their actions and instruction with different student identity groups. Those actions impact students' academic growth (or lack thereof), which reinforces the teacher's beliefs and expectations for students (Hammond & Jackson, 2015). This cycle also impacts student beliefs about their own capacity as individuals and, in turn, can reinforce their positive or negative self-concept, especially as it relates to academic performance.

Studies also suggest that deliberate interventions can lead to improvement in teachers' beliefs about historically marginalized students. The literature presents three core ways in which educators' beliefs can be positively influenced (Boykin & Noguera, 2011):

- A. Making teachers aware of their belief system cycle and how it could positively or negatively impact students.
- B. Ensuring school leaders have strong beliefs in all students and that they communicate these beliefs with their staff.
- C. Engaging in practices that improve teaching pedagogy, such as providing high-quality curricular materials and time for internalizing and preparing to teach materials collaboratively.

These approaches are not a comprehensive solution for solving the attainment gap between low-income, marginalized student groups and their more affluent peers, but there is promising evidence for each of these methods in terms of impact on teacher beliefs and in turn, student achievement (Chenoweth, 2007). Given that these interventions are relatively

easy to implement and are also fairly cost effective, each are worth consideration in recommendations that stem from our improvement partnership. These intentional structures and practices could improve both teacher motivation and teaching pedagogy, easing some of the difficulties teachers face with the implementation of the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum.

Conceptual Framework

After exploring the literature, it was logical to conclude that the written *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum adopted by the school is sound in terms of its design and alignment to cognitive research. It is also well-suited to CCB's student population in terms of its design in attending to the needs of diverse learners, overall usability, and alignment to evidence-based instructional practices. Because of this, my further exploration of the literature focused largely on other potential factors at play in CCB's implementation of the curriculum.

Neglecting essential supporting factors for curricular change can affect what is taught to students and how teachers deliver the materials, even if the written materials are well-designed. These factors include professional learning experiences that build pedagogical skill to navigate the curriculum, and motivating factors like teacher agency and belief in student capacity (Davidson et al., 2022). For this reason, I turned back to the literature to understand what conceptual frameworks exist that inform an exploration of change management and implementation of programming in schools, since change leadership appears to be at the heart of the problem that CCB leaders wish to solve.

In evaluating literature focused on change management in education systems, I found that several scholars have created conceptual frameworks

focused on the change process, grounded in evaluations of both successful and unsuccessful school improvement efforts. Hord et al. (1987) researched assumptions about change within school reform efforts from the 1950s through the 1980s and concluded that a transformational, sustaining change process takes time and that most successful education initiatives only occur reliably at scale after several years. If not given adequate time for change, these initiatives were merely transactional and did not achieve their ultimate goals in a meaningful or sustaining way. Another conclusion from their research is that the change process should focus on individuals within school systems—their beliefs and actions—instead of focusing on program, materials, technology, or equipment. This is because by focusing on individuals and players within systems, change can be transformational, whereas program changes often result in only transactional and surface-level changes, not meaningful improvements.

Fullan (1991) further refined these concepts by codifying the change process in education improvement movements as defined by three phases: initiating, implementing, and institutionalizing. These stages built upon previous findings that showed that the change process should focus on individuals that choose to be stewards of a larger, shared vision. Knoster (1993) further refined this work when he collected data on special education reform initiatives focused on inclusive

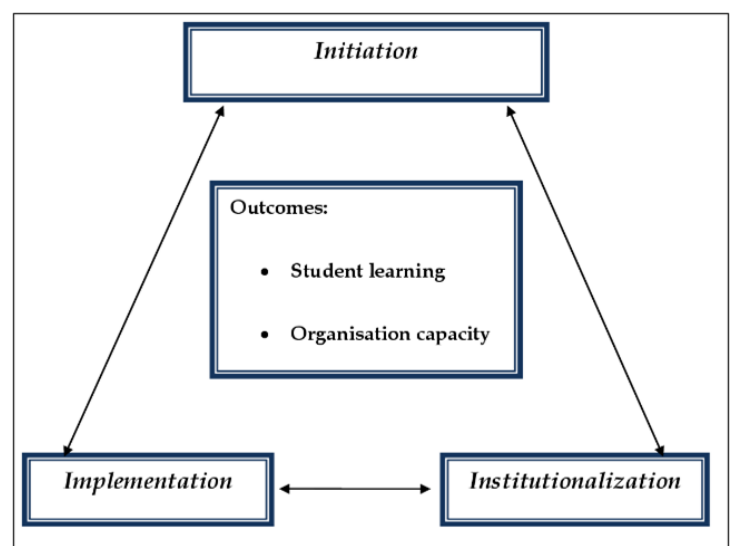


FIGURE 2: FULLAN'S STAGES OF CHANGE (1991)

education settings for students with special needs and learning differences. After analyzing this data and previous literature from education scholars, Knoster conceptualized the successful change process in school systems as having five core components: vision, skills, incentives, research, and action planning.



FIGURE 4: KNOSTER'S MODEL FOR MANAGING COMPLEX CHANGE (1993)

Knoster (1993) used Fullan's stages of implementation, to inform his own conceptual framework and built upon these concepts by adding the necessary components for successful change within each stage. These components were grounded in his analysis of what happens when these factors are missing in a change initiative. Knoster (1993) stated, "It is important to realize that while the initiation, implementation, and institutionalization phases of change have been presented in a linear manner...a high degree of interrelationship

exists among all phases in this mode. Understanding the difficulties inherent in managing change is important for the leadership in any school” (p. 12).

Knoster (1993) also expanded upon Fullan's stages of change by refining the phases to include an assessment of operational excellence. This refinement involved examining essential component activities and considering the implications of individuals' and group experiences of change in situations where these components are absent. The resulting framework serves a dual purpose: It facilitates the strategic planning of complex change initiatives and aids in identifying deficient components that could hinder or lead to incomplete, stalled, or unsuccessful implementation.

Knoster's (1993) “Managing Complex Change” model held significant relevance when examining the challenges faced by the leadership team at CCB in their implementation of the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum. This model surpasses Fullan’s four stages and incorporates the conceptualization of operational components necessary from school and district leaders to realize success. By employing this model to inform improvement project exploration and design, it became possible to diagnose the presence of historically absent or currently lacking components that teachers involved in the curriculum implementation at CCB may have encountered or currently encounter. Consequently, the model enables the development of grounded recommendations based on a comprehensive understanding of the situation faced by teacher and leaders at CCB when it comes to implementing the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum.

In Knoster’s model, the intended recommendation for the *vision* component is for organizational leaders to prioritize members' comprehension of the reasons for the changes and the desired outcomes they aim to achieve. This is

because articulation (via the collaborative process) of intended outcomes can serve as a pivotal and accelerating force in the change process (Depree, 1992). While the process of visioning can serve as a change agent, without a clear vision for what success will look like, confusion ensues. Additionally, if the changes and practices an organization is pursuing are to be sustainable, the initiative will take many leaders within the organization to act as stewards of a shared vision rather than a single charismatic leader (Fullan, 1985). These ideas are also aligned to concepts from the literature reviewed on teacher motivation and agency, specifically that teachers are more motivated when they have a clear sense of a goal or vision that they can accomplish by participating in and implementing the change at hand. This also means that if an organization hears individuals experiencing confusion, it may be wise for leaders to investigate whether the vision is shared, compelling, and clearly communicated (Knoster, 1993).

The *skills* category of the model refers to the need for organizations to ensure that players have opportunities, both initially and ongoing, to build the skills necessary to enact the change, as without it, anxiety can ensue (Senge, 1990). These ideas align with fundamental concepts regarding professional learning as discussed in the literature, particularly emphasizing the importance of providing teachers with training that addresses both the underlying principles and theories (the “why”) and practical strategies (the “how”) of their core responsibilities (Davidson et al., 2022). Such comprehensive training is essential for fostering continuous improvement among teachers over an extended period of implementation. This phenomenon continues to present itself in current education program research. For example, according to a Brown University study conducted in 2019, “Programs saw stronger outcomes when they helped teachers learn to use curriculum materials;

focused on improving teachers' content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge and/or understanding of how students learn...and included teacher meetings to troubleshoot and discuss classroom implementation” (Lynch et al., 2019, p.1). These ideas also imply that when an organization observes behaviors and expressions related to anxiety among its employees, it becomes critical to investigate the extent to which key individuals within the organization, such as teachers in the case of CCB, have undergone the requisite learning experiences to develop the competencies and skills necessary for implementing and maintaining the changes aligned with the organizational vision (Knoster, 1993).

These ideas also relate to the *incentives* factor of the model, which does not necessarily refer to financial rewards, but instead to motivation in a broader sense. Knoster (1993) also stated, “It is more likely that staff will continue to invest high levels of energy in meeting all students’ needs when they perceive themselves as active participants in decision making. This fact has been born out repeatedly in motivational theory literature across a variety of settings” (p. 13). This means that in the context of implementation, the presence of a social and community element within the change process, accompanied by a sense of psychological safety for experimenting with innovative ideas, increases the likelihood of successful outcomes. Conversely, in the absence of this psychological safety or a social or community element, change initiatives often encounter resistance (Fullan & Miles, 1992). This also implies that instead of labeling employees as unwilling participants or critics when faced with resistance, organizational leaders can benefit from evaluating the extent to which they have addressed necessary incentives, as these incentives play a crucial role in facilitating the implementation of changes required for employees to enact and sustain the shared vision.

The *resources* element of the model pertains to the essential tools required by organizational members to effectively implement the envisioned changes. These resources can take various forms, such as financial resources (e.g., funding for training), material resources (e.g., curriculum, assessment tools), and, notably, the most significant resources, which are often human resources (e.g., time, staffing). These resources are critical to the success of any initiative, and without them, individuals in schools often experience frustration (Knoster, 1993). Scholars in the current literature support this assertion, highlighting the significance of both curriculum reform and professional learning support structures as foundational pillars for initiating changes in curricular programming (Kane, 2019). Specifically, access to a well-designed curriculum has the potential to not only enrich but also revolutionize the teaching experience. However, it is equally essential for teachers to have adequate time to internalize and study their materials in a collaborative community for that transformation to reliably occur (Steiner, 2018). In situations where these resources are deficient, it is not uncommon for frustration to arise. Therefore, it is valuable for organizational leaders to investigate the specific resources that may be lacking when they observe signs of frustration among members within their organization (Knoster, 1993).

The *action plan* element of the model pertains to the concept that a clearly communicated strategic plan outlining the necessary steps for an organization to achieve its vision is essential for successful change implementation. Without a well-defined action plan, individuals within organizations may experience a sense of stagnation—feeling as if they are exerting effort but not making tangible progress toward the desired outcome, akin to running on a treadmill (Depre, 1992). The codification of an action

plan, paired with ways to assess progress, is paramount in ensuring that the implementation of a given initiative becomes institutionalized and sustainable (Fullan & Miles, 1992). This type of strategic action plan can also serve as a motivating factor for organizational members. This is because a well-designed plan can include leading indicators and ways to measure and celebrate early victories in the implementation process throughout various implementation phases. This progress made inspires team members to keep working toward the overall vision for implementation grounded in meaningful improvements. This also means that when organizational leaders detect signs of stagnation among individuals within the organization, it becomes essential to evaluate the quality, communication, or presence of a robust and realistic action plan that outlines the necessary steps for achieving the shared vision and desired organizational destination (Knoster, 1993).

Considering the sound quality of the *Wit and Wisdom* instructional materials in terms of written content, it became important to investigate the extent to which the school has addressed the crucial elements required for effective change as conceptualized by Knoster (1993): vision, skills, incentives, and action plans. The lack of one or a combination of these components may impact both the taught curriculum and the investment that teachers experience related to the curricular materials. These foundational factors guided the development of my research questions and the design of data collection and analysis methods in this improvement project. In these efforts, I aimed to offer appropriate and research-aligned recommendations to the school leadership team regarding strategies for improved implementation and sustainability of the curriculum.

Research Questions

This research project focused on collecting evidence to determine how well CCB implemented critical elements of change leadership from Knoster's model (1993) when adopting and implementing *Wit and Wisdom* both at the outset and throughout subsequent school years. The new curriculum was viewed as resource in this project, with attention to the other components from Knoster's model necessary for sustaining change. The following research questions sought to gather information about the degree to which change components were considered and attended to throughout the *Wit and Wisdom* adoption and implementation process:

1. What sources of information do teachers have to guide their understanding of *Wit and Wisdom*'s evidence-based design and structure and implementation? (*vision, resources, and action plan*)
2. In what ways are teachers' beliefs and motivations impacting their implementation of the literacy curriculum? (*incentives*)
3. What professional learning and coaching do teachers experience that is designed to help them implement the curriculum skillfully? (*skills*)

Project Design

For this improvement project, I used a qualitative, phenomenological approach to gather relevant information to better understand the experiences, opinions, and concepts impacting the teachers at CCB and later used these findings for an in-depth analysis aimed at gaining new insights.

This data collection and subsequent analysis allowed me to later make research-aligned recommendations to the CCB leadership team that were grounded in evidence, specific to CCB’s context, and aimed at alleviating the challenges teachers continue to face in implementing the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum.

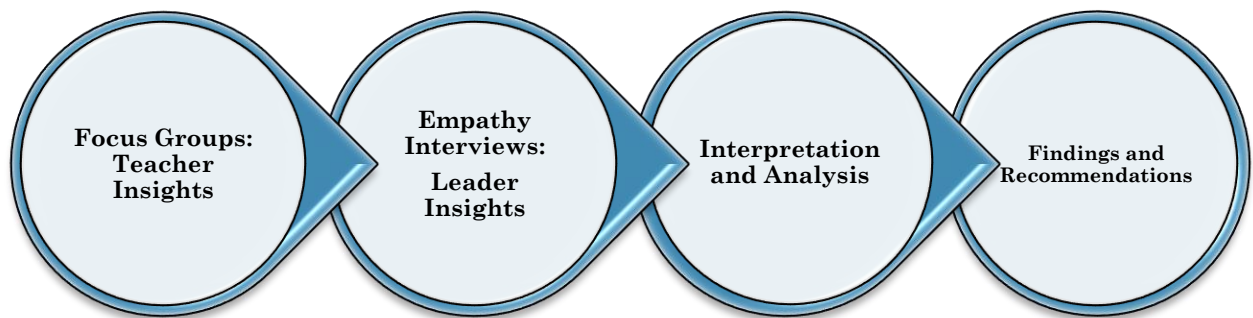


FIGURE 5: PROJECT DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROCESS

First, I wanted to gather data on the experiences and opinions of classroom teachers. I used focus groups to gather discourse and themes that informed a better understanding of the problem CCB faces, and the specific difficulties teachers experience in their implementation of the *Wit and Wisdom* materials. Second, I wanted to better understand the experiences and insights of leaders at CCB, so I used empathy interviews with key leaders to dive deeper into the themes and dialogue trending in focus groups. After engaging in content, thematic, and discourse analysis, I interpreted themes and patterns in the data to inform findings and subsequent recommendations to the leadership team at CCB.

Data Collection

The selection of data collection methods for this project was guided by the research questions and aimed at providing valuable insights for the final recommendations to the leadership team at CCB. The table presented below illustrates the interconnection among the research questions, the required data for addressing each of these questions, and the specific data collection methods employed to ensure comprehensive data gathering throughout the data collection and analysis process:

Research Question	Data Needed	Collection Method
What sources of information do teachers have to guide their understanding of <i>Wit and Wisdom</i> 's evidence-based design and structure as well as how to use the materials well?	Explanation of the vision for the materials and the actions that are being taken to support implementation efforts	Teacher Focus Groups Empathy Interviews
In what ways are teachers' beliefs and motivations impacting their implementation of the literacy curriculum?	Explanation about what teachers believe about their instruction, their students, and their sense of purpose in implementing the <i>Wit and Wisdom</i> materials	Teacher Focus Groups
What professional learning and coaching do teachers experience designed to help them implement the curriculum skillfully?	Explanation of how teachers experience coaching and professional learning experiences and the degree to which development experiences are aligned with the goals and vision for <i>Wit and Wisdom</i> materials implementation	Teacher Focus Groups Empathy Interviews

FIGURE 6: DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Participants

Eleven teachers at CCB who exclusively teach science and mathematics were not included in the sample. The focus group participants consisted of teachers who were expected to utilize the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum during their ELA instruction. Given that this is a relatively small population—fourteen teachers in total—this purposive sampling strategy lent itself well to focus groups where all teachers in the population could participate. To conduct empathy interviews, I invited key leaders of the school to provide in-depth insights based on emerging trends from the focus groups. The interviews involved the participation of the principal, lead teacher, and English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instructional coach.

Focus Groups

I conducted single-facilitator, online focus groups through a video conference platform, enabling me to record the sessions for subsequent coding and analysis. I conducted a total of four focus group sessions. I scheduled two of these sessions to align with the teachers' planning sessions during the school day, and I held the remaining two sessions after school hours. The goal of each focus group was to have three or four teachers present so that the size of the group was small enough to stay targeted within the discussion. This was the case as each focus group had either three or four teachers present.

I assumed the role of a facilitator, conducting semi-structured interviews that employed targeted focus questions. The aim of these interviews was to encourage discussion on a range of factors influencing their impressions and implementation of the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum. During the conversations, there was flexibility for the discussion to evolve organically in

response to teachers sharing previously unexplored perspectives. However, the primary objective of the conversations remained anchored in the specific areas of interest derived from the research questions. This dynamic was evident in the focus group sessions, where some organic conversation took place and led to the emergence of new insights. However, most of the information exchanged remained closely tied to the focus questions.

The focus groups were scheduled and conducted for a duration of 45 minutes. Following these sessions, the dialogue from the focus groups was transcribed in its entirety using the otter.ai software. To analyze the data, I developed a deductive, thematic coding scheme aimed at identifying significant patterns and overarching themes based on the insights and concepts shared by the participating teachers. I used Delve, a qualitative coding software, to assist in the organization of my codes during this process. The emerging trends derived from this coding process helped shape some of the questions utilized in the empathy interviews with leaders that followed these sessions. For detailed information regarding the coding scheme and protocol employed for the focus groups, please refer to Appendix A.

Empathy Interviews

Empathy interviews focused on a deeper analysis of trends from the focus groups as well as leadership perspectives. I conducted these interviews in person, providing a comfortable space for each participant based on the participants' preferences. The participants collaborated with me, the facilitator, to determine mutually convenient times and locations for the interviews. In two cases, the interview took place at the school, and in the third case, the interview was held offsite at a local coffee shop. The interviews were recorded on a hand-held device to ensure face-to-face contact

and active listening during the sessions. I conducted the discussions using a semi-structured format, utilizing carefully crafted questions to explore themes and experiences related to the research questions. While following the predetermined structure, there was also room for spontaneous and organic conversation when it added value to the exploration and fostered new insights. I specifically designed the prompts used during the interviews to elicit emotional insights and motivations related to the experiences and concepts relevant to the curriculum challenges faced by CCB. At the conclusion of the interviews, I used the otter.ai software to transcribe the responses from the recording to engage in qualitative thematic analysis derived from key insights, concepts, and trends in the data. I used Delve, a qualitative coding software, to assist in the organization of my codes during this process. For detailed information regarding the protocol employed for the empathy interviews, please refer to Appendix B.

Data Analysis

Focus Groups

After reviewing the recording and reading the accompanying transcripts from the focus groups, I analyzed patterns to create a codebook for qualitative analysis grounded in the trends from the dialogue and necessary components for sustainable change identified in the literature and Knoster’s (1993) conceptual framework. After the initial

CODEBOOK	
MESSAGING	26
MOTIVATION	25
COLLABORATION	24
VISION	20
SCAFFOLD	17
TIME	16
FRUSTRATION	14
FIDELITY	14
COACHING	12
HELP	10
CONFUSION	8

FIGURE 7: FOCUS GROUPS CODEBOOK

analysis, I read the transcripts again, applying additional codes. After conducting these reviews, I identified a total of eleven codes from the teacher focus groups. Figure 7 presents these codes and indicates the number of times each code was identified as part of the discussion by teachers during the sessions.

Empathy Interviews

After reviewing the audio recordings and corresponding transcripts of the empathy interviews, I conducted an analysis to identify patterns, which served as the foundation for developing a codebook for qualitative analysis for these interviews. This codebook was rooted in the essential components for sustainable change as identified in the existing literature and conceptual framework (Knoster, 1993) and built upon the codes derived from the trends in the focus groups. Figure 8 presents the nine identified codes along with the frequency of their occurrence during the discussions held in the empathy interviews with CCB school leaders.

Following the coding and analysis process for both the empathy interviews and teacher focus groups, I consolidated the codes and their respective supporting data from both the focus groups and empathy interviews. This process involved organizing relevant quotes extracted from the collected dialogue.

CODEBOOK	
VISION	14
COACHING	8
MESSAGING	8
TRAINING	6
COLLABORATION	6
HELP	6
FRUSTRATION	4
FIDELITY	4
CONFUSION	2

FIGURE 8: EMPATHY INTERVIEWS CODEBOOK

Next, I engaged in thematic discourse analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). This involved drawing from the emerging patterns and trends, which were informed by the literature and conceptual framework for change (Knoster, 1993), to identify overarching themes. Following the generation of these themes, I collated each theme's associated evidence from the data collected. To ensure significance, I critically evaluated the evidence associated with each theme, assessing the dialogue and patterns from the data. The identified themes and the accompanying evidence served as the foundation for the findings, as I generated all findings from the analysis and evidence contained within these themes. For thematic analysis details, please refer to Appendix C.

Findings

Finding 1: Teachers are motivated and energized by their students, driven by their achievements, and committed to their success.

During focus group sessions, teachers consistently expressed their profound passion for teaching and their aspiration to excel in their profession. Many teachers revealed that their desire to become educators began at an early age, and their dedication and affection for students provides them with the motivation to persevere even during challenging times. Teachers said:

“There is a reward in having the responsibility in teaching a child to read. It is one of the best things I think this job has ever given. My students are the hardest working kids.”

“I really enjoy coming to work every day. I love seeing my kids. I love seeing their smiles. When they learn, it is very exciting. I enjoy being with them. They give me energy, and I need it at this job!”

“I have wanted to be a teacher since I was a kid in school. I am also the first person in my family to go to college. The idea of going to college and getting a career in this was a little, I do not say unattainable, but it was very outside of my whole family's realm of knowledge. But I knew I wanted to be a teacher, and I worked really hard to make that goal happen. I love my students and watching them grow and learn.”

As teachers are highly motivated by their commitment to teaching and their students' success, they become concerned when students encounter difficulties with the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum. This concern lies at the core of teachers' apprehension regarding the program. The perceived resistance from teachers may actually stem from a lack of incentives to help the students thrive as teachers experience a conflict between their desire for students to succeed and the struggles students encounter in engaging in the curriculum's rigorous tasks. These ideas are supported by the literature reviewed focused on teacher's motivation. This literature tells us that teachers feel a stronger sense of motivation to embrace change when they have a sense of a compelling goal or overall vision that they can accomplish by doing so (Datnow, 2012) and that teachers feel more motivated when they can see inherent value in tasks and efforts related to that goal or overall vision (Fullan, 1991). This could mean that if teachers understood that some of the challenges that students encounter with tasks in the curriculum may actually benefit students overall, teachers may find greater incentivization in persisting through challenges presented by the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum.

Finding 2: There is a lack of alignment between teachers and school leaders regarding the vision for why the curriculum was selected and how it should be taught.

When asked about the reasons for adopting the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum, the majority of teachers and leaders expressed that the materials are designed to build students' knowledge of the world, which leads to the development of stronger academic vocabulary and, consequently, improves reading comprehension. However, teachers perceive that leadership emphasizes fidelity in curriculum implementation, treating the program as a rigid script that must be strictly followed. They believe that their abilities as decision-makers and educators are not fully trusted, leading to an emphasis on strict adherence to the curriculum. Teachers said:


“We are professionals, most of us with master’s degrees. You would never treat a professional in a business building who has a master’s with this lack of respect. There is no trust—they think that we cannot look through a curriculum and know what is supposed to be added or taken out or scaffolded appropriately.”

“At first, we got a message of integrity—which is having faith in the curriculum and modifying it according to your needs. Then, it felt like the messaging switched to telling us to teach it with fidelity, to stick to the script, as in you need to say everything that is written in the curriculum. That is probably the biggest problem because it feels like they do not have faith in their teachers.”

*“It is a one-size-fits-all message. And it is not in the best interests of our students. Honestly, if every teacher in this building taught *Wit and Wisdom* to fidelity, as laid out in the curriculum, I do not think our students would learn as much because we bring our experience and our toolbox.”*

The leadership team shared that their message of fidelity was because they believe that the students need to build a ladder of knowledge across the grade levels and become familiar with instructional routines that are consistent across the grades. However, the teachers' perception of this message is that of a lack of trust and belief in their capacity to make strategic adjustments to maximize learning. This is a key consideration in identifying sources of challenge within the implementation of *Wit and Wisdom*, as literature reviewed shows that that teachers feel more motivated when they have agency over decisions in the change process and can take ownership of control in some areas of their tasks and daily efforts (Datnow, 2012). This means that teachers should feel some agency in their decision making within implementation efforts, otherwise, they may draw the conclusion that they are not trusted or valued as professionals.

Research also concludes that teachers feel more motivated when the change and associated tasks, work, and learning related to the change efforts are social and collaborative. Creating a sense of community effort around change can ensure that teachers feel connected to colleagues working toward the same goal(s) and that they have psychological safety to take reasonable risks in pursuit of achieving the goal or vision (Han & Yin, 2016). This means that leaders should consider the impact of fidelity messages and consider whether they help or hinder fostering psychological safety. At CCB, it is clear from the data collected and subsequent analysis that teachers' assumptions about why they have been asked to teach the curriculum with fidelity are quite different than the rationale provided by the leaders at the school. The confusion ensuing from the true meaning behind the fidelity message is one source of tension that impacts the overall investment from teachers in implementing the *Wit and Wisdom* materials.



Finding 3: Teachers want more time to collaborate with colleagues to prepare lessons and higher-quality professional learning experiences grounded in their day-to-day challenges.

Just as teachers reported feeling motivated and energized by their relationship with students, they also reported feeling inspired by opportunities to collaborate with and learn from colleagues. Additionally, they were unsatisfied with the battery of professional development trainings offered by the district focused on curriculum implementation. Teachers said:

“I went to all the different professional development sessions offered by the district; some of them were better than others. But after those initial trainings in the first year, we have pretty much been on our own. I thought maybe after those trainings we could start learning from each other at school, but we have not had that many of those opportunities.”

“I think one of the best things to have would be to have a lot of planning support. Like, looking at the unit arcs and then saying, like, well, where do we need to go and how can we get there?”

“The first trainings, it was ‘Here’s the manual.’ The PD was about a notice and wonder routine, which I think is like the most self-explanatory lesson out of all of them. So, it was very stressful the first year trying to unpack it all and then know how to properly scaffold and accommodate for our students. Beyond the manual trainings, we just haven’t had access to much to help us learn”

“Sometimes we will go to a Wit and Wisdom training thinking we are going to learn something new, and it’s the exact same training we went to the last time.”

While teachers are unsatisfied with the trainings they have experienced, they are interested in more opportunities to collaborate with one another that are focused on unpacking lessons and preparing for the day-to-day work they do with students. Teachers said:

“I feel like everyone here is very good at co-planning, and we want to work together to prepare lessons. It is just finding time to do it.”

“I met another teacher at a school nearby. She is so amazing at planning the lessons and everything. So, I just kind of piggyback off of her whenever I get the chance to connect with her.”

“I want to learn from others who are figuring this out, and we adopted this as a whole district so we should be able to do that—but right now, there’s no connection across the city.”

“After those initial trainings in the first year, we have pretty much been on our own. I thought maybe after those trainings we could start learning from each other at school, but we have not had that many of those opportunities.”

Teachers noted that there are organic opportunities to connect and prepare lessons together occasionally, but there is not a consistent structure or cadence by which they can collaborate and tackle the challenges many of them face when it comes to implementing the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum.

This relates to the literature reviewed on professional learning experiences, which tells us that teachers can grow and develop their capacity through meaningful professional learning structures grounded in teachers' day-to-day work (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). Additionally, CCB's teachers show a desire for consistent access to these types of experiences, which could enhance their understanding of the curriculum and its evidence-based design (Short & Hirsch, 2020). The challenges with implementation that teachers experience with the *Wit and Wisdom* materials appear to be grounded, at least in-part, to a lack of time and training allocated for professional learning, and space to engage in what the literature refers to as intellectual preparation and lesson study (Takahashi & McDougal, 2016)

Finding 4: Teachers appreciate the texts and topics in the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum but struggle to ensure that all students, particularly English language learners, can succeed with embedded writing tasks.

Teachers reported that they find the content of the *Wit and Wisdom* modules engaging for students but, in particular, find the writing tasks to be challenging to implement with their students. They consistently mentioned a lack of scaffolds, which is a term used to describe supports and strategies used to help students acquire new skills. These supports are gradually reduced and removed over time as students reach proficiency. Teachers said:

“I like that it is giving the kids exposures to different versions of a story. And in turn, we kind of dive in a little bit to the different cultures around them. Giving them extended exposure to we might

know this Cinderella, but there is this version of Cinderella from Canada. There is this version of Cinderella from Mexico and the Caribbean. It builds their knowledge of the world and understanding of other perspectives.”

“It’s been amazing to see the complex vocabulary that not only they remember but they’re using it correctly.”

“I love the content because they get so excited about it. But there is still a lot lacking in the actual scaffolding for students who are striving readers and writers because of the demand for what they are asked to do independently.”

“We really like the text. But we have to scaffold things for students who need extra support to get started. And we have to create those scaffolds by doing things like trimming the opener or adding some activities for, students who have unfinished learning for one reason or another.”

Teachers called out writing tasks as a particular challenge. They said:

“When we put a newcomer (a student who is just learning English) in front of a four-paragraph essay, what is going to happen, like, it’s going to be a complete shutdown.”

“We actually have to teach our kids how to write. And Wit and Wisdom does not really show us how to do that. So, we feel really confused about how to get started, especially with students who are still learning how to write sentences.”

Teachers are clear that while they see students benefiting from some aspects of the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum, such as their engagement in building cultural and academic knowledge, they are concerned about how to help students succeed in what they perceive as very rigorous writing tasks without enough supports and entry points for their student population. This finding is emphasized by conclusions from the literature review, which showed that teachers need resources to help guide their understanding of meeting the needs of diverse learners. This is also tied to the previous finding which shows the need for stronger and more regular professional learning experiences. These experiences can lead to improvements in both educator skill in implementation, and also in improving educators' beliefs about the capacities of historically marginalized students (Boykin & Noguera, 2011) who they may be underestimating when it comes to capacity to engage in rigor. This means that attending to professional learning experiences grounded in how to effectively scaffold grade-level ELA instruction using the *Wit and Wisdom* materials could alleviate the concerns teachers have about students' encounters with rigorous tasks embedded within the materials.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Create a shared vision for strong literacy instruction and clarify how Wit and Wisdom will help CCB realize this vision in classrooms.

One of the core problems revealed in the data is a misalignment between teachers and leaders regarding the expectations for curriculum material use and the reasons behind the selection of the materials. Teachers understand the message around the curriculum to be that of fidelity and believe that leaders expect fidelity due to a lack of trust in their capacity. However, leaders shared that they feel hopeful about the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum because of the strategic, evidence-based design of the materials, devised to build knowledge and writing skills cumulatively across grade levels. They reported their belief that implementing the materials with fidelity would result in students experiencing the cumulative, consistent impact of building knowledge and associated vocabulary throughout their time in elementary school. They also cited consistent routines across grade levels as beneficial to students, and a reason behind their fidelity message. This lack of a shared, clear vision for the materials and what the school hopes to accomplish through their use has led to confusion among staff and has contributed to misunderstandings that foster resentment and hurt on the part of teachers. This tension may contribute to the challenges CCB is experiencing with curriculum implementation (Knoster, 1993).

To help mitigate this pain point, the leadership team at CCB should bring teaching staff and leadership together to define strong literacy instruction and ground the collective group in research on reading and writing acquisition as well as evidence-based instructional practices substantiated by this research. From there, it is vital for the leadership team and teaching staff to engage in collective discussions regarding how the implementation of *Wit and Wisdom* will enable their school to actualize the vision for literacy instruction. All should understand that the goal of this curriculum is to equip teachers with the necessary resources to cultivate knowledge, academic

vocabulary, student engagement, and proficient writing skills, aligning with the original aspirations of the school leadership upon adopting the curriculum. During the “vision retreat,” school leaders should formulate a detailed implementation plan outlining the strategies and steps required to effectively realize this vision, ensuring that all educators possess clear benchmarks to gauge progress throughout the process (Knoster, 1993). As part of this action planning effort, teachers and leaders should answer the following questions together to clarify expectations for curriculum use:

A) In what ways should teachers attend closely to the structure and craft of *Wit and Wisdom* written lessons and modules?

B) In which ways are teachers permitted to make intentional modifications to the curriculum as they deem beneficial?

In other words, CCB leaders and teachers should be on the same page about which aspects of the curriculum are non-negotiable and why those elements are non-negotiable. This idea is grounded in evidence from the literature, which tells us that teachers feel more motivated when they have some level of autonomy within change efforts, an understanding of their own agency, and a grasp of how the change or initiative will benefit their overall efforts (Datnow, 2012).

Providing time for discussion of what elements of the program are flexible and which should be attended to precisely, with a rationale for why, could both clear up misconceptions and be motivating for teachers. For example, the texts and topics are integral to the design and goals of the curriculum and should be maintained. However, there may be elements of the curriculum that are more stylistic and not paramount to the overall strategic design.

One example of stylistic elements are the warm-ups incorporated into lessons, which are often ten to fifteen minutes long and could be easily swapped for different engagement or scaffolding activities that the teachers prefer based on the needs of their students. Because they are just a fraction of the overall lesson's allotted time, making changes to the warm-ups is unlikely to reduce the attainment of the goals of each lesson and the overall module, but this level of agency and autonomy for one aspect of the planning process could go a long way in terms of teacher confidence and enthusiasm in the materials (Datnow, 2012). The leadership team and teaching staff should reach a consensus on which modifications are permissible and define the ways in which these modifications still align with the vision for strong literacy instruction and act in concert with the overall goals of the curriculum's strategic design. Emphasizing the message in this way could increase overall agency and investment in materials use.

The utilization of this approach has the potential to enhance teachers' understanding of the significance of the materials and rebuild their confidence in administrators as it communicates a strong belief in their professional capabilities (Datnow, 2012). Analysis of teacher dialogue showed that teachers have a strong belief in their students and are motivated to help them succeed. Therefore, reframing the materials as a tool to help achieve that goal, rather than a mandate to fidelity because of a lack of trust, could increase rapport among staff regarding the *Wit and Wisdom* materials. Additionally, this approach may foster an increased sense of motivation among teachers as they are inspired by a captivating vision that they can actively contribute to and achieve (Han & Yin, 2016).

The leadership team at CCB may misinterpret certain teacher behaviors as resistance when, in fact, they might be due to a lack of appropriate

incentives. Knoster’s model (1993) proposes that this resistance is rooted in the absence of motivating factors. As teachers have expressed that their primary motivation for exerting effort lies in students’ success, addressing how the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum will contribute to achieving this goal could potentially positively impact or even ultimately alleviate this investment challenge.

Recommendation 2: Make structured, collaborative planning sessions and curriculum-based professional learning a priority.

Teachers reported that they are unsatisfied with the amount and quality of professional learning experiences related to their implementation of the *Wit and Wisdom* materials, and additionally, they showed a powerful desire to collaborate with others within their school and district community. These valuable resources—time and learning—appear to be lacking in the implementation strategy employed, leading to teacher frustration (Knoster, 1993). Ensuring that teachers have a regular, predictable cadence of collaborative planning time with other teachers, dedicated to internalizing and preparing to teach lessons, is supported by the literature (Short & Hirsch, 2020).

This curriculum-based professional learning could help build the teachers’ skills necessary to alleviate their anxiety about the curriculum (Knoster, 1993) and foster stronger implementation of the materials as they are

intended. These sessions yield the best results when they are facilitated by a skillful teacher leader, administrator, or instructional coach (Takahashi & McDougal, 2016), so the leadership team at CCB should discuss how to enact these sessions and plan for how to ensure that these sessions are led by a capable facilitator. This may also mean that the leadership team considers investing in further training for a few core members of the staff at CCB to build their capacity as facilitators of these curriculum-based professional learning sessions. Doing so could lead to an increase in teachers' sense of community, which is a key factor in incentivizing the implementation of materials. This is because building a sense of community also increases the sense of psychological safety, a condition that is necessary to sustain the enacted changes (Han & Yin, 2016).

Teachers reported that they want protected time to do this work, free of time spent on other less related topics. To address this, the leadership team at CCB could consider hosting monthly PLCs dedicated solely to the preparation and planning of materials for *Wit and Wisdom* lessons and units. Because CCB employs just one ELA teacher per grade level, it would be worthwhile for the leadership team to connect with other schools nearby that may also have teachers that wish to participate. Because the entire district adopted these materials, this type of collaboration is possible and could be the innovation that sparks stronger enthusiasm for the use of the materials as well as stronger implementation overall. The literature would suggest that teachers spend their time in curriculum-based professional learning sessions in the following ways:

- A. Engaging in protocols that allow teachers to collaboratively internalize and rehearse lesson plans.

- B. Engaging in protocols to unpack and understand lengthier units and modules to best serve student learning over time, exploring both the *why* and the *how* of the materials.
- C. Engaging in protocols to analyze student work and writing samples to learn and explore collaborative ways to provide strong feedback and subsequent follow-up instruction for students.

By consistently prioritizing these structures, the leadership team at CCB has the potential to facilitate a transformative learning experience for teachers, enabling them to glean valuable insights from the most skillful educators in their community of teachers and leaders. Consequently, this could contribute to a more effective implementation of the curriculum on a broader scale (Kennedy, 2019). Employing protocols such as the ones mentioned earlier would empower the leadership team to gather tangible outputs for analysis, allowing for further refinement of their curriculum-based learning structures as the school improves implementation over time. Employing such protocols would also mirror the scaffolds teachers enact for students. Just as teachers want to provide scaffolds for students that can be removed over time, the teachers need their own professional learning scaffolds to be reduced or removed later as they build their proficiency in implementation with the *Wit and Wisdom* materials.

Recommendation 3: Enhance teachers' knowledge and skills in identifying and implementing appropriate scaffolds for diverse learners.

Much of the discourse shared by teachers surrounding the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum centered on their anxiety that students, particularly those who are just learning to speak English, are overly challenged by the curriculum materials. According to the literature, an effective approach for addressing the needs of students with incomplete mastery of concepts involves implementing instructional scaffolds that enable them to engage with grade-level content through targeted supports, such as sentence frames and tiered questions (Davidson et al., 2022). These scaffolds should be gradually phased out over time, facilitating accelerated learning and bringing students closer to achieving grade-level proficiency (Chenoweth, 2007).

However, teachers have expressed concerns because they do not see adequate scaffolds written into the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum, and administrators report that many teachers struggle to build the types of scaffolds that do not overly decrease the rigor of lessons. Knoster's (1993) model suggests that this anxiety stems from a lack of the skills needed to build appropriate scaffolds. Consequently, it is important for the leadership team at CCB to prioritize professional learning initiatives aimed at honing the skill of integrating

Suggested Readings

Davidson, B., Petrelli, M., & Carroll, K. (2022). *Follow the science to school: Evidence-based practices for elementary education*. John Catt Educational Ltd.

Frey, N., Fisher, D., & Almarode, J. (2023b). *How scaffolding works: A playbook for supporting and releasing responsibility to students*. Corwin.

Lemov, D., Driggs, C., & Woolway, E. (2016). *Reading reconsidered a practical guide to rigorous literacy instruction*. Jossey-Bass.

Lupo, S. M., Strong, J. Z., & Smith, K. C. (2019). Struggle is not a bad word: Misconceptions and recommendations about readers struggling with difficult texts. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 62(5), 551–560.

Murphy, J. (2019). *The researched guide to literacy: An evidence-informed guide for teachers*. John Catt Educational Ltd.

Hochman, J., & Wexler, N. (2023). *Writing revolution: A guide to advancing thinking through writing in all subjects and grades*. Jossey-Bass.

appropriate instructional scaffolds into lessons from the curriculum. It is also worth noting, that in reviewing the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum, instructional scaffolds are present in the written materials. However, it seems as though because teachers lack the time to adequately internalize materials with appropriate professional learning supports and coaching, they have difficulty identifying and understanding how these scaffolds can be utilized to effectively help their students. Ensuring professional learning devoted to building this skill in teachers at CCB could reduce their anxiety when it comes to ensuring that the materials work well for their diverse population.

This type of professional development should occur collectively so that teachers and leaders share a collective understanding of what types of scaffolds are appropriate for students to supplement the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum. This professional learning could be built into curriculum-based professional learning, as described in Recommendation 2, as part of the lesson internalization and rehearsal process. Additional training may be needed, however, to inform a common understanding of scaffolds. This could come in the form of a commitment to monthly professional reading as a staff, with literature specifically focused on this topic. While not exhaustive, the sidebar on page 47 includes a list of suggested books and professional readings that may be included in a monthly book club to help the staff collectively learn and norm on appropriate scaffolds for diverse learners. These books could be explored by the leadership team, the facilitators of professional learning sessions, grade-level teams, or school-wide, to guide understanding of evidence-based design for scaffolding learning especially for English language learners and diverse student groups.

Recommendation 4: Create and implement progress monitoring tools for continuous improvement of literacy instruction.

One final recommendation for the leadership team at CCB to consider is to set up regular structures for monitoring the progress of their efforts with implementation. Leaders at the school should identify and enact strategies, perhaps from these recommendations, to address the need for stronger supports in implementing the *Wit and Wisdom* materials. If the school accepts Recommendation 1, the vision and action plan could drive the way that school leaders design supports. After doing so, leaders could design ways to assess progress using leading indicators such as staff surveys and empathy interviews. Further, the leadership team could commit to step-back, reflective staff meetings on a quarterly basis to identify implementation patterns and tailor their supports and coaching based on the reflections from staff. By actively listening to teachers and integrating their feedback into the revision and adjustment of the overall action plan, leaders enhance the prospects of sustaining success over time by addressing all elements of sustainable and effective change (Knoster, 1993).

To fully address the challenges associated with *Wit and Wisdom* implementation, it will be important for leaders at CCB to regularly collect data and monitor the progress of their initiatives if they hope to realize success (Chenoweth, 2007). An attention to how implementation efforts are going using both formal and informal data could help the school realize their ultimate goal of literacy improvement through the use of the *Wit and Wisdom*

materials. Conversely, without regular data collection and reflection on strategy, it will be difficult for CCB leaders to meaningfully address the components necessary for sustained success (Chenoweth, 2007). These components include a compelling and evidence-based vision, an implementation strategy that fosters professional skill development, delivery of necessary resources for teachers' success, and teacher agency, which serves as an incentive to sustain efforts toward the successful implementation of the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum.

Conclusion

In undertaking this project at Charles Carroll Barrister Elementary School, my aim was to discern the root causes of challenges encountered by teachers during the implementation of the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum.

Acknowledging the complexities and demanding nature of leadership and teaching roles at CCB, this improvement project sought to provide intentional and in-depth insights into the identified issues and sources of tension. By delving into the problem methodically, I gained a valuable understanding of the challenges teachers faced, and this allowed me to make research-informed recommendations tailored to their specific context. My sincere hope is that the school seriously considers implementing these recommendations and in doing so, experiences tangible improvements in addressing the challenges faced. Moreover, I hope that this report makes a meaningful contribution not only to the school community at CCB, but also to others encountering similar curriculum implementation hurdles in educational settings.

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Appendix A

Focus Group Protocol

Each focus group participant received an introductory email informing teachers of the purpose and confidential nature of the information shared and gathered. The email stated that the focus groups would be recorded for coding trends, deleted within 6 weeks of being held, and that no identifiable information would be reported in the findings. Following each focus group, the recordings for each session were uploaded to the otter.ai software to generate transcripts. I later uploaded and used the Delve qualitative software analysis tool to assist in coding and analysis.

During the focus groups, in the opening minutes I acted as the facilitator and confirmed with participants that they felt comfortable participating and moved into asking the following questions.

Opening Questions:

1. What is your first name, and what grade do you teach?
2. How long have you been teaching? How long have you been teaching at this school?
3. What made you want to be a teacher? Why do you stay a teacher?

Discussion Questions:

- Tell us about how you were first introduced to the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum.

- How did you experience training when the school first adopted *Wit and Wisdom*?
- What do you find challenging about implementing this curriculum?
- What can you do if you are struggling with planning or implementing this curriculum?
- How often are you able to meet with other teachers to plan or discuss the curriculum?
- Do you feel like you have enough time to prepare and respond to your lessons from the curriculum? Why or why not? How do you spend collaborative planning time?
- What do you like about the curriculum? Is there anything about it that you find compelling? If so, what?
- What messages have you gotten from leaders in your school and district about the curriculum?
- How do you feel about the messages you have received about the curriculum? Why do you feel this way?
- If you could ask for something helpful in your implementation of the materials, what would it be?
- As you are probably aware, literacy scores have not increased as the district hoped they would since the curriculum was adopted. Why do you think that is?

Appendix B

Empathy Interview Protocol

Empathy interview participants were emailed to set up a time and location for a deeper discussion of initial trends from the focus group findings.

Participants were informed of the confidential nature of the discussion and that no identifying information would be shared in the findings. Following each empathy interview, the recordings for each session were uploaded to the otter.ai software to generate transcripts. I later uploaded and used the Delve qualitative software analysis tool to assist in coding and analysis.

During the interviews, in the opening minutes, I acted as the facilitator and confirmed that participants felt comfortable participating, and the following questions were discussed:

Discussion Questions:

1. What were your hopes for instruction when the district and school adopted the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum?
2. What is your impression of the information that teachers have received from district professional development sessions?
3. What do most teachers do if they find that they struggle with understanding how to implement the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum? Where can they turn for support?
4. In what ways has the leadership team at the school attempted to support teachers with implementation of the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum?

5. Have you seen any successes from implementation of the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum? Could you describe the success and what you think may have contributed to it?
6. What messages have you shared with teachers when it comes to implementation of the *Wit and Wisdom* curriculum? What do you hope they know and understand?
7. As you are probably aware, literacy scores have not increased as the district hoped they would since the curriculum was adopted. Why do you think that is?

Appendix C

Thematic Analysis

Included in the appendix below are a summary of the themes derived from qualitative thematic analysis with supporting quotes extracted from the dialogue during focus groups and empathy interviews.

Theme One: Teachers at CCB are not satisfied with the amount and quality of related professional learning, coaching, and training experiences.

- *It is a good curriculum; it just can be mismatched if you do not have the resources or training to implement it.*
- *The amount of training and coaching—that is where we are definitely lacking.*
- *I would really love actual observations that are specifically guided toward fully understanding what a lesson looks like. I think it would be helpful for us, even our leadership, to understand what that looks like in your specific school.*
- *When I did go to training, it was very...here is the manual. And the problem with that was I have never taught it before. So, it turned into me just kind of figuring it out.*
- *I went to all the different professional development sessions offered by the district; some of them were better than others. But after those initial trainings in the first year, we have pretty much been on our own. I thought maybe after those trainings we could start learning from each other at school, but we have not had that many of those opportunities.*

- *And the only great training I really got from it was from my teammate. She really walked me through how to look at a lesson, what to keep, what's going to be a time eater, and really essentially, like, how to look at a lesson or even to look at the entire scope and sequence and to know and plan accordingly based on, like, what is the focusing question task going to be? What is the end of module task going to be? What is it exactly that we are trying to get the kids to do? And from there, look at the lessons to see how they correlate. So that is really still the only real training I have had with Wit and Wisdom. I kind of just use that and move forward. I have to some of the district PDs provided by the vendor, Wit and Wisdom, you know, but they are not particularly helpful. The most in-depth thing was from just working with my teammate to give me the 101 on how to use the materials realistically.*
- *When we do have professional learning or collaborative planning, a lot of this time is devoted to other initiatives when it could be really protected and devoted to instruction.*
- *I think one of the best things to have would be to have a lot of planning support. Like, looking at the arcs and then saying, like, well, where do we need to get and how can we get there?*
- *I was pretty much just given the curriculum and told, "Here you go!" I have been figuring it out, but the first few months or so, especially in the beginning of the schoolyear, were a little rough for me because I did not really know what I was doing.*
- *I think part of the problem of the rollout as a district was, you just got this quick, you know, like, one day training of it, and it was like, "Go." Wit and Wisdom are something you really have to internally digest first,*

to understand where you want to go as a teacher, and then trust the actual curriculum itself instead of getting into the mindset of what kids can and cannot do.

- *Overall, it just feels like there is a lack of training.*
- *The first trainings, it was, here is the manual. The PD was, like, over a notice and wonder routine, which I think is like the most self-explanatory lesson out of all of them. So, it was very stressful the first year trying to unpack it all and then know how to properly scaffold and accommodate for our IEP students and our students learning English.*
- *The very first training when this all started was a nightmare. And it was the first time the particular person was facilitating a training. And we almost caused her to quit, it was so bad. And at that time, she had not taught the curriculum. She was a coach, and she had not taught anything. So, all the questions that the teachers were asking, she had no answers for.*
- *Sometimes we will go to a Wit and Wisdom training thinking we are going to learn something new, and it is the exact same training we went to the last time.*
- *I remember that first year, the end of the schoolyear they told us we were going to adopt Wit and Wisdom, and that is all that they said. And I really knew the old curriculum well, so I was sort of panicking. So, over the summer, [I was] reading the 200-page implementation guide and was taking notes to try to somehow understand what we are rolling into.*

Theme Two: Teachers at CCB believe that they are expected to use the curriculum with fidelity and see this as a reflection of leadership's belief in their capacity as professionals.

- *We are professionals, most of us with master's degrees. And you would never treat a professional in a business building who has a master's or more with this lack of respect. I mean there is no trust—they think that we cannot look through a curriculum and know what is supposed to be added or taken out or even scaffolded appropriately.*
- *We are trained professionals who have gone through countless hours of coursework to get to where we are. And it sometimes feels like they do not trust our judgment.*
- *Fidelity was the initial message we got, and it is still the same message.*
- *I wish we were given permission to change some elements of the lesson, like the opening activities and warmups, to make time and space for needed scaffolds.*
- *The first time I taught the curriculum, I did not change anything at first, you know, because it was so new. You just had to do that; you just had to do it one time through exactly how it is written. And then later, I was more confident and made adjustments based on the students, but the message that we continued to get was, do it as it is written, with fidelity.*
- *One of the messages I have gotten, like, an aura surrounding Wit and Wisdom was, like, the curriculum knows, the curriculum writers know. Do not go and try to manipulate or make it your own. Because if you*

follow it to a tee, you will get your students where they need to be or what that vision of where the students need to be is.

- *At first, we got a message around integrity—which is basically having faith in the curriculum and modifying it according to your needs. And then it felt like the messaging switched to telling us to teach it with fidelity and to stick to the script, as in you need to say everything that is written in the curriculum. And that is probably the biggest problem because it feels like they do not have faith in their teachers.*
- *We are kind of pushing our kids to write this into the script so that we do not get in trouble. Whereas we are really not pushing our kids then to become more independent writers and have some knowledge in our brains that then we can, you know, let come out of our pencils. So, I feel like the fidelity almost holds us back from being the best teachers that we can be.*
- *It is a one-size-fits-all message, and it is not in the best interests of our students. Honestly, if every teacher in this building taught Wit and Wisdom to fidelity, as laid out in the curriculum, I do not think our students would learn as much. Because we bring our experience and our toolbox and our scaffolds and our modifications to the curriculum that it becomes accessible, not just for our ELS but for, you know, 99% of our students in Baltimore City who are in need of and lack the background knowledge and exposure to kind of come into Wit and Wisdom where it seems to expect students to enter.*
- *It is about one, how you implement it. But to me, even more critically is who is implementing it, right? If you do not believe in the curriculum*

and you do not think that it is worthwhile, you are not going to teach it very well.

- *I feel like, you know, you have been in Baltimore City Schools long enough when you see, like, three new curriculums come through. With each one they say teach it with fidelity. They want to just know, like, if they purchased this curriculum, in order for us to say if it worked for our students or not, it does need to have some element of you teaching it the way it is scripted. That is why I assume they are saying fidelity, fidelity, fidelity stuff.*
- *The message I got has been: You just have to do it. That is why I have been told, you know, this is what you have to do. This is your ELA stuff, and you have to do it.*
- *Fidelity has been the message, and yes, it kind of feels like, you know, maybe not exactly the right message from my perspective.*

Theme Three: Teachers at CCB are motivated by their students and want to see their students succeed academically.

- *There is a reward in having the responsibility in teaching a child to read. I have the opportunity to teach a child how to read. It is one of the best things I think this job has ever given me. My students are the hardest working kids.*
- *I have always wanted to be a teacher. I love teaching and learning, and I love children.*
- *I have always wanted to be a teacher. I cannot think of, like, anything else that I ever wanted to be in life. I was that kid playing teacher*

growing up. I used to line up my stuffed animals and pretend to be their teacher in my bedroom at night.

- *After college, I started teaching in kindergarten, and I fell in love with it.*
- *I really enjoy coming to work every day. I love seeing my kids. I love seeing the smiles on their faces. And when they learn, it is very exciting. I just enjoy being with them. They give me energy, and I need it at this job!*
- *I have wanted to be a teacher since I was a kid in school. Because I knew I wanted to be a teacher, I would keep all of my workbooks and any textbooks, anything from school, and I would use them to play school. I would not let my mom get rid of them. I would say, "I need them for my classroom someday." This was motivating for me in school, and I am also the first person in my family to go to college. So, the idea of going to college and getting a career in this was a little, I do not say unattainable, but it was very, like, out of my whole family's realm of knowledge. But here we are because I knew I wanted to be a teacher, and I worked really hard to make that goal happen.*
- *The main reason that I teach is because I absolutely enjoy learning. I want to pass on that joy to my students. I love reading. I love how reading can come alive in your mind. As a teacher, I have learned from my kids as well as them learning from me. And they just keep me young and happy. And I feed off of the energy that they bring every day!*

- *I have always wanted to be a teacher. My mom was a teacher; my grandpa was an administrator. My aunt was a teacher. So, it kind of just was in the family, and I wanted to teach too.*
- *I love the kids. That is why I show up every day—and my really great coworkers.*
- *I come every day for my colleagues and the kids. Both groups of people here are awesome.*
- *I kind of always wanted to be a teacher, as long as I can remember.*

Theme Four: Teachers at CCB want to collaborate and learn from one another and feel that it is helpful when they have this opportunity.

- *I feel like everyone here is very good at co-planning, and we want to work together to prepare lessons. It is just finding time to do it.*
- *I met another teacher at a school nearby in the city; she is so amazing at planning the lessons and everything. So, I just kind of piggyback off of her whenever I get the chance to connect with her.*
- *One of the other teachers, when we got a chance to talk for a few minutes one day, had a good recommendation with question sets. I was so excited to try that, and it gave me the energy to keep going.*
- *We already know that Wit and Wisdom are good—but not perfect—but we have a lot of people who can make it better by adding the supports needed for students with unfinished learning to lesson plans. I want to learn from others who are figuring this out, and we adopted this as a whole district so we should be able to do that—but right now, there is no connection across the city.*

- *We do not formally have time to digest the curriculum and prepare together; I wish we did. But, like, I mean, we are on the same schedule, so we do bounce a lot of things off of each other, but also at the district level, it would be nice to also have that with other teachers at other schools, where we could be, like, hey, this has worked really well in my classroom or this scaffold works really well for my ELL students. Just hearing ideas from other teachers would be really helpful.*
- *After those initial trainings in the first year, we have pretty much been on our own. I thought maybe after those trainings we could start learning from each other at school, but we have not had that many of those opportunities.*
- *And the only great training I really got from it was from my teammate. She really walked me through how to look at a lesson, what to keep, what's going to be a time eater, and really essentially, like, how to look at a lesson or even to look at the entire scope and sequence and to know and plan accordingly based on, like, what is the focusing question task going to be? What is the end-of-module task going to be? What is it exactly that we are trying to get the kids to do? And from there, look at the lessons to see how they correlate. So that is really still the only real training I have had with Wit and Wisdom. I kind of just use that and move forward. I have to some of the district PDs provided by the vendor, Wit and Wisdom, you know, but they are not particularly helpful. The most in-depth thing was from just working with my teammate to give me the 101 on how to use the materials realistically.*
- *We need to put in some, like, really protected time for, like, instructional, collaborative planning.*

- *When we do get to collaborate to plan, which does not happen that often because it is mostly just organic, it is just this combination of different minds coming from different angles and trying to, like, piece things together that will work best for students, and it is very helpful and energizing.*
- *I think because we only have [one] Wit and Wisdom teacher per grade level, who is, you know, unpacking the lessons with you? It makes it very challenging.*
- *We have talented people just within our network here in the district that can show us what this curriculum should look like in practice.*

Theme Five: Teachers at CCB feel frustrated by the lack of “scaffolds” for students who need support to engage with the writing component of the curriculum.

- *I love the content because they get so excited about it, but there is still a lot lacking in the actual scaffolding for students who are striving readers and writers because of the demand for what they are asked to do independently.*
- *We really liked the text, but, like, we have to scaffold things for students who need extra support to get started. And we have to be available for those scaffolds by doing things like trimming the opener or adding some activities for, you know, students who have unfinished learning for one reason or another.*
- *Fidelity was the initial message we got, and it is still the same message. I started to let that go in and out of my ears because I felt like I had enough experience to push back and do what I thought was best. I*

thought if someone is going to give me a tough time when observing me, like an administrator, I would be like, well, here is the rigor. It is the same rigor. Even if we change the lesson intro, it is still rigorous. And here is why. And that comes from experience and also just not caring if someone really gives us a hard time about it and sort of just letting it roll off.

- *I wish we were given permission to change some elements of the lesson, like the opening activities and warmups, to make time and space for needed scaffolds.*
- *When we look at how we spend our time teaching students, we often run out of it to do proper scaffolds. There is just not enough of us to be in all of those places at the same time. So, somebody always gets the short end of the stick unfortunately.*
- *The writing is complex, and we are just trying to build, you know, a subject and a verb.*
- *If I were explaining it to someone, I would say, like, “I am basically teaching first graders how to write college-level essays are just our essays, one paragraph. But it does not teach them how to write, and they do not know how to write a paragraph yet, so I have to figure that out on my own.*
- *If every teacher in this building taught Wit and Wisdom to fidelity, as laid out in the curriculum, I do not think our students would learn as much. Because we bring our experience and our toolbox and our scaffolds and our modifications to the curriculum, it becomes accessible, not just for our ELS but for, you know, 99% of our students in Baltimore*

City who are in need of and lack the background knowledge and exposure to kind of come into Wit and Wisdom where it seems to expect students to enter.

- *When we put a newcomer in front of a four-paragraph essay, what is going to happen, like, it is going to be a complete shutdown.*
- *We actually have to teach our kids how to write. And Wit and Wisdom doesn't really show us how to do that.*
- *Wit and Wisdom is academic writing. But what do we do when the kids are still learning how to write? The writing demands are at such a high level. So, it is frustrating to try to figure out how to get the kids to a place where they can do that.*

Theme Six: Teachers struggle to find enough time in their instructional block to fully execute the lessons in the Wit and Wisdom curriculum with fidelity.

- *We have to scaffold things for students who need extra support to get started. And we have to be available for those scaffolds by doing things like trimming the opener or adding some activities for, you know, students who have unfinished learning for one reason or another.*
- *I wish we were given permission to change some elements of the lesson, like the opening activities and warmups, to make time and space for needed scaffolds.*
- *And the only great training I really got from it was from my teammate. She really walked me through how to look at a lesson, what to what to keep, what's going to be a time eater, and really essentially like how to*

look at a lesson or even to look at the entire scope and sequence and to know and plan accordingly based on, like, what is the focusing question task going to be? What is the end-of-module task going to be? What is it exactly that we are trying to get the kids to do? And from there, look at the lessons to see how they correlate.

- *I do not feel like I had time in terms of, like, looking at their writing assignments and being able to give them instruction and feedback. I think some of the kids need more scaffolds, more feedback, and there just is not enough time to do that and get through the lesson, but then it feels like the kids are not getting as much out of it.*
- *If you do not have a lot of experience, scaffolding materials, differentiating lessons, it can feel impossible for teachers, and it seems like there is no way there would be enough time in a lesson to meet the kids' needs and get through the written lesson.*
- *I think just with the Wit and Wisdom questions, it was a lot for me to digest. So, I know why it is a lot for these children to digest and why it takes them longer in lessons to do the tasks in the allotted time in the written lesson.*

Theme Seven: Teachers feel positively about the texts and tasks in the curriculum as well as consistent instructional routines.

- *I like that it is giving the kids exposures to different versions of a story. And in turn, we kind of dive in a little bit to the different cultures around them, giving them extended exposure to we might know this Cinderella, but there's this version of Cinderella from Canada. There is*

this version of Cinderella from Mexico and the Caribbean. It builds their knowledge of the world and understanding of other perspectives.

- *It has been amazing to see the complex vocabulary that not only they remember but they are using it correctly. I like how it gives them exposure to, like, learning about real-life things in a kid-friendly way.*
- *I do like the consistency. You go through the same thing to each book you read, like the notice and wonder instructional routine.*
- *I absolutely love the content the kids are learning space science, the ocean. We talked about immigration, which is so relevant to specifically the kids in our school, who are from all over.*
- *I love seeing my students make connections to previous units, whether you are not just, you know, fourth grade because they were just in fourth grade, but like, oh, we just did African American History Month projects for social studies, and they are making connections to their second-grade civil rights unit. And they are using this academic vocabulary that they would not have known. As we have implemented and we have seen this progression of students coming through as a fifth-grade teacher, I am noticing that these things are sticking and building their knowledge.*
- *The texts are good, and a lot of the activities are engaging for students. I think a lot of them find it interesting and find it easy to engage with. It is a good curriculum; it just can be mismatched if you do not have the resources on training to implement it.*

Theme Eight: Teachers are concerned they are not meeting the needs of newcomer students with very limited English proficiency.

- *When you get to fifth grade and fourth grade and you have newcomers, it is a completely different ballgame. And we scratch our heads. Why are we doing this? Why are we all banging our heads against the wall to force Wit and Wisdom down the throat of a student who really needs to learn a whole different vocabulary so that they can access English as a language?*
- *One thing I do not like is all the writing as well. It is very difficult. I have a lot of level one ELLS, meaning they are just starting to learn to speak and read English, and it is difficult. It is such a struggle for me to figure out how to support those students best using the Wit and Wisdom materials.*
- *This might just be really unique to our school setting: what to do with our lowest English Language Learner students, our newcomers, because I worry that this is not an appropriate curriculum for students who do not know basic phrases in English. Like, if you cannot ask me to go to the bathroom, you probably should not be doing Wit and Wisdom. We have some other basics things that we need to get you ready for before we dive into this curriculum. I am not saying that they are never going to be ready, but I think sometimes—and this tends to be an issue at the beginning of every year—admin thinks that our newcomers should just jump right into this curriculum. There is a lot of pushback of what should we do with our students, and how can we meet everyone's needs? Yes, so that is definitely a struggle.*
- *When we put a newcomer in front of a four-paragraph essay, what is going to happen, like, it is going to be a complete shutdown.*

- *Wit and Wisdom is academic writing. But what do we do when the kids are still learning how to write? The writing demands are at such a high level, so it's frustrating to try to figure out how to get the kids to a place where they can do that. And that is especially true when we are talking about students who are just learning to speak English.*
- *It can feel like a brick wall every single day trying to get newcomer kids to access the grade-level content.*