

Communicating School Redesign Evaluation 2016-2017



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Executive Summary

The Communicating School Redesign (CSR) initiative convened in August of 2016 for its fourth year as a dual-enrollment course aimed at training youth and adult teams from Vermont high schools to lead the way in building public understanding of 21st century teaching and learning and the education policies that support it – in particular, opportunities for personalized learning and proficiency-based education. To date, the program has worked with 20 high schools across the state of Vermont, and this year included five new and one returning high schools. These schools included North County Union, the Lyndon Institute, Twin Valley Union, Woodstock High School, and Hartford High School, with Harwood Union High School returning to the program for its third non-consecutive year.

The course follows a two-semester structure, designed to allow youth-adult teams to focus on first understanding the principles of strategic framing, school redesign research and the fundamentals of youth-adult partnership before launching into a cycle of participatory action-research with their schools. As part of this cycle, youth-adult teams collect data on stakeholder knowledge of school redesign and Act 77 at their schools. Then, teams analyze this data and use it to select target stakeholder groups for their communication efforts. Teams then design communication strategies, many based in opening spaces for dialogue, to enhance stakeholder groups understanding of school redesign as well as Act 77. According to the syllabus, these strategies ideally lead to engagement with the school board, the faculty and the student body, respectively.

Guiding Questions for the evaluation

The questions guiding this evaluation of the CSR initiative were developed by the researchers in consultation with the CSR faculty. These guiding questions were:

- What factors enabled and constrained the communications teams' ability to communicate successfully with these stakeholder groups?
- What were the strengths and challenges of the process of implementing this work (course structure, youth-adult partnership model, resources, etc.) from participant perspectives that can inform subsequent efforts?
- How have changes in this model over time enhanced or created new challenges for this communication work?

Methods

Two sources of data were used to understand the work of the Communicating School Redesign teams in the fourth year of the initiative. Interviews with adult team members and a focus group conducted with participating youth at the end of the year gave course participants an opportunity to reflect on what they had accomplished for the year, as well as the strengths and challenges of the course design and support they received. In addition to these interviews and the focus group, course participant's final course reflections were reviewed, as well as videos and other documents created during the year. To analyze the data, a preliminary set of codes was

developed using the guiding questions for the evaluation prior to data analysis. A constant comparative method was used as the researcher coded data from all sources (interviews, reflections, and observations) to expand and differentiate additional codes (Saldana, 2015). Codes were grouped according to the guiding questions and used to construct narratives for participant experience with the core concepts and tools of the course, as well as the challenges they encountered and adaptations or strategies they employed to further their communication action plan (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Key findings

Teams engaged in diverse projects to engage their schools in communication about school redesign. These strategies included social media campaigns showcasing flexible pathways, pamphlets, digital announcements and webpages, along with dialogue driven strategies including all-school dialogues, discussion with students in teaching advisories, and exhibition nights in which community member and parents could speak with students who had completed internships or engaged in other types of flexible pathways.

Both youth and adults reported high levels of satisfaction with their overall experience within the course.

- Youth and adults reported being given a variety of tools and examples to support their understanding of key course concepts;
- Youth and adults reported positive feelings about their accomplishments for the year, including both awareness-raising and dialogue-driven communication strategies;

Both youth and adults reported positive experiences and high-levels of learning around the formation and implementation of youth-adult partnerships within the context of the course.

- The CSR course created a “third space” for youth and adults to experiment with new ways of relating to one another;
- Youth felt they had authentic opportunities to assume leadership within their communication projects;
- Adults felt they learned how to navigate the challenges of creating space for student leadership while playing a supporting role as partners;
- However, youth had difficulty finding space for their leadership when working with non-CSR teachers

Teams reported appreciating the balance between theory and practice in learning communication theory; however, some wished for more autonomy in the data-driven decision-making process.

- Tension around the survey led to some teams feeling unsupported in assessing their school’s communication needs;
- Some schools reported low engagement and buy-in around the survey.

Conclusion and recommendations

Through CSR’s work with 20 schools over the course of the last four years, with some returning to continue to move the work forward, many lessons have been learned and the course and the supports that it can offer to schools has evolved tremendously. Many of the struggles

seen in past evaluations of the program are no longer present in the comments from youth and adults participating in the program in 2016-17, indicating that effective supports have been introduced. Several notable aspects of this evolution are:

- The existence of high-quality examples of tools created by schools to communicate school redesign for new schools to use as models;
- The refinement of instruction modules around strategic framing to balance theory with practice;
- More even support for teams throughout the year to support on-going momentum for the work; and
- A more effective balance between team work time and instruction.

Additionally, CSR continues to present an exemplary model of supporting the successful formation of youth-adult partnerships between high-school aged youth and educators who have not previously worked in partnership with one another. For the future, we recommend attention to several other areas within the model that could help to support the amplification and deepening of CSR's objectives: creating meaningful dialogue about school redesign and engaging youth and adults as leaders of change. These recommendations include:

- *Balancing state advocacy needs with school-based needs*

Challenges in adapting the survey point to larger tensions between the variety of needs that Shaping Our Future Together must balance between advocating for change at the state level and allowing teams to have ownership over data collection and analysis at their school level. State and regional advocacy (e.g. see Beattie and Rich, 2017) using aggregated state survey data to make clear the mixed understanding of school redesign across the state is necessary for ensuring broader understanding for the need for this work. However, it is possible that allowing for school-based adaptations of the survey, with support from a methodologist, could allow schools to gather data that is more useful for them overall while still allowing data on key constructs relevant to the overall effort to be collected through the identification of key questions.

- *Using teacher leaders as “allies” to more effectively amplify the benefits of youth-adult partnership*

In isolation, adult to adult opportunities for professional development about youth agency often miss the mark and reinforce the adult-led culture of schooling; however, in conjunction with authentic youth-adult partnership activities such as the Communicating School Redesign program, these opportunities may helpfully reinforce existing youth leadership and partnership within the school culture.

- *Not backing too far away from the theoretical side of communication for social change*

Adults report high engagement with the theoretical concepts of the course and finding transferable applications for this work around other areas of school change. If CSR chooses to support the work of developing teacher leadership to as adult allyship, the critical reflection on school change processes that comes with thinking about strategic framing may be very helpful for supporting adult work in this area.

- *Making “process” best practices available to new schools*

An additional practice that might be useful to schools and would also take the burden off of instructors is to allow veteran schools the opportunity to share “process”-oriented best practices with new schools, including their learning around youth-adult partnership, planning their communication strategies, and working through the ups and downs of maintaining their momentum over the course of the year.

Introduction

The Communicating School Redesign (CSR) initiative convened in August of 2016 for its fourth year as a college-credit and graduate course aimed at training youth and adult teams from Vermont high schools to lead the way in building public understanding of 21st century teaching and learning and the education policies that support it – in particular, opportunities for personalized learning and proficiency-based education. To date, the program has worked with 20 high schools across the state of Vermont, and this year included five new and one returning high schools. These schools included North County Union, the Lyndon Institute, Twin Valley Union, Woodstock High School, and Hartford High School, with Harwood Union High School returning to the program for its third non-consecutive year.

To participate in the course, schools recruited teams of high-school aged youth and teacher leaders to enroll in the year-long CSR course experience. As part of their work for the course, each school committed to complete an action research project and strategic communication plan. Teams began by collecting baseline data on youth and adult understandings of Vermont’s flexible pathways legislation, Act 77, proficiency-based learning and current beliefs about education reform more generally. This was accomplished through the administration of a survey to teachers and students in their schools, along with interviews with key informants in their schools and communities. Teams then analyzed this data and from it, identified priorities for creating a communication action plan designed to target specific stakeholder groups’ understanding of both the legislation and school reform. Through their communication action plans, teams employed a variety of methods of engaging stakeholder groups in dialogue about education reform (or “school redesign” in the language of the course). These strategies ranged from all-school dialogues, to facilitated faculty meetings, to social media campaigns and commercials for personalized learning.

The communication efforts of school-based teams form one of the three supporting pieces of the larger “Shaping Our Future Together” campaign, supported by the McClure Foundation and the Bay and Paul Foundation. In addition to the efforts of school-based teams in their local communities and schools, the Shaping Our Future Together campaign also incorporates strategies to support communicating school redesign statewide and regionally in New England, both online and through traditional print media. One of the goals of the Shaping Our Future Together campaign is to ensure that legislation and other initiatives meant to support school redesign are understood as one integrated effort, rather than separate, individual efforts.

Theory of action

The CSR initiative relies on three central concepts to inform the work of participating schools: strategic framing, dialogue for change, and youth-adult partnership. Referred to as the “three-legged stool” that supports the work of communicating school redesign, the training and coaching provided by the CSR faculty is drawn from peer-reviewed research and field-tested protocols to support the implementation of school team’s communication plans.

Creating a common narrative: The CSR course bases its content on communication theory loosely on the literature on strategic framing. Strategic framing is a concept that derives from the literature on communication for social change. Strategic framing seeks to reframe

stakeholder's mental models of education, teaching and learning by telling a compelling public story starting from a clear statement of values. This story focuses on education as a collective good that builds strong communities and serves to build public understanding of research on cognitive development, positive youth development, and progressive teaching and learning practices that support both of these.

Youth-adult partnership: Youth-adult partnership is the process of youth and adults working together as equal partners towards a common goal (Wheeler, 2000). Youth participation in youth-adult partnerships in school has been linked to increased engagement in school, civic responsibility, as well as positive youth development and well-being (Mager & Nowak, 2012). For adults, youth-adult partnerships can provide renewed energy for their work as educators and administrators (Mitra, 2005). UP for Learning's training, site-based coaching, and dual-enrollment course work consciously draw from the research base supporting the power of youth-adult partnership to support student engagement. Youth and adult contributions to the process of strategic framing and dialogue for change are valued equally and seen as important for creating a plan of action for school reform that includes the input of youth and adult stakeholders.

Dialogue for change: The Communicating School Redesign process sees dialogue as being at the center of meaningful change. Dialogue, rather than discussion or debate, is seen as essential to shifting public understanding. The CSR approach positions students and teachers in a role of leadership for this dialogue, training school-based teams in facilitative leadership and supporting their training of additional youth and adults in facilitation at their schools. The CSR approach relies on field-tested protocols, many from the School Reform Initiative, to focus dialogic encounters in ways that preserve the values of trust, asset-based thinking, and a focus on equity and justice.

An additional tool that helped to inform to CSR teams' work was the "Public Understanding and Support Assessment Rubric". Developed by the CSR faculty, the rubric is meant to "chart changes in the public's mental models over time." The rubric describes three levels of awareness around school redesign. These levels range from pre-awareness, in which "stakeholders have little sense that there is a need for change" to support/advocacy, in which "the community develops a shared set of values that support school redesign." Teams were introduced to this rubric as a tool for tuning the survey and interview protocols created by CSR faculty to collect baseline data on public understanding and support for Act 77 and school redesign in their communities. The rubric was then used as the framework for analyzing both the survey and interview data that teams used to craft their communication plans.

Structure of the course

The course follows a two-semester structure, designed to allow youth-adult teams to focus on first understanding the principles of strategic framing, school redesign research and the fundamentals of youth-adult partnership before launching into a cycle of participatory action-research with their schools. As part of this cycle, youth-adult teams collect data on stakeholder knowledge of school redesign and Act 77 at their schools. Then, teams analyze this data and use it to select target stakeholder groups for their communication efforts. Teams then design communication strategies, many based in opening spaces for dialogue, to enhance stakeholder groups understanding of school redesign as well as Act 77. According to the syllabus, these

strategies ideally lead to engagement with the school board, the faculty and the student body, respectively.

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Methods

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Interviews and focus groups: In the spring and summer of 2017, adult course participants were interviewed about their participation in the dual-enrollment course and their experience implementing CSR as part of their school-based youth-adult teams. All 24 adults in the course were contacted to participate in the study. Of these, four chose not to participate in interviews, and 10 did not respond to repeated attempts to recruit their participation. Therefore, ten adults representing five of the six CSR schools participated in interviews that ranged from 30 to 45 minutes in length. In addition to these interviews with adults, 20 students in the course (representing all of the participating schools) took part of the youth focus group. Both individual interviews and the youth focus group were guided by a semi-structured interview protocol which covered topics related to the experience of youth and adults as peers in the dual-enrollment classroom, planning and implementation of team's communication action plans, most meaningful moments and challenges throughout the year, as well as specific questions around communication with target stakeholder groups and opportunities and challenges associated with communicating with each. In addition to these interviews, an hour-long interview was conducted with one of the CSR course instructors to provide context around the supports given to CSR teams and on how the work this year compared with previous year's work.

Document analysis: Documents from several sources were used to supplement and triangulate interview and focus group data. First, all course participants enrolled for college or graduate credit produced an end-of-the-year reflection in response to questions about the course's most memorable moments, most frustrating moments, the content of the course that participants considered the most valuable, how the course changed them, and what the course could do better in the future. Overall, 15 final reflections were reviewed. Additionally, communication products produced by the teams were made available to the evaluators, including videos, documents and other strategies for reaching school-based stakeholders.

The data was analyzed using the computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software NVivo. A preliminary set of codes was developed using the guiding questions for the evaluation prior to data analysis. A constant comparative method was used as the researcher coded data from all three sources (interviews, reflections, and observations) to expand and differentiate additional codes (Saldana, 2015). Codes were grouped according to the guiding questions and used to construct narratives for participant experience with the core concepts and tools of the course, as well as the challenges they encountered and adaptations or strategies they employed to further their communication action plan (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Findings

Throughout the year, CSR groups followed the action-research approach employed by any of UP for Learning's program in order work as youth and adult partners to craft communication strategies aimed at changing stakeholders' mental models about teaching and learning, as well as school redesign. This process required school teams to learn to work as youth and adult partners, as well as the grapple with communication theory and translate this into practice. In the following sections, we describe the process that groups engaged in during their enrollment in the course, as well as their perceptions of the opportunities, challenges, and benefits of their experience. We also discuss their recommendations for the future.

Collecting data from stakeholder groups

As per the theory of change of the CSR program, CSR groups followed an action-research process that allowed them to assess the communication needs of their stakeholders and then craft communication strategies that would be effective with those groups. According to instructor Helen Beattie, the CSR program has made a conscious shift away from providing explicit instruction in strategic framing towards allowing groups to grasp the key principles of framing by looking at the work of previous years' groups. In this way, groups are able to learn from the successes of the past and more quickly begin the work of crafting communication strategies, which has been found to be key to maintaining momentum over the course of the year (see Biddle, 2015a; Biddle & Dagistan-Terzi, 2016).

Assessing the communication needs of school-based stakeholder groups

At the beginning of the year, CSR groups were provided with a survey by the CSR instructors to assess stakeholder's mental models of the purpose of education, personalized learning, and proficiency-based education, as well as the role of youth in educational decision-making. All of these components are positioned as key to the transformation of stakeholder

thinking from traditional models of schooling towards school redesign. Several groups reported that the survey and making use of data-driven research to determine was helpful for determining where the stakeholders stood in terms of flexible pathways, personalized learning and ACT 77. In describing their approaches to planning in their interviews, many adults made explicit reference to how the survey informed the groups' thinking about stakeholder awareness. Several adults described additional unintended benefits to using a survey to drive the project, including engaging youth in data collection and analysis for research purposes. In the words of one advisor,

I thought [the surveys] were good, I thought they were very good. The thing that I really enjoyed about the whole idea of data-driven research is it introduced kids to this idea of quantitative and qualitative research and an introductory research method course for students. I thought that was really powerful and we did have some wonderful discussions about what the data revealed about our school that was powerful.

This adult acknowledged that the survey did more for the groups than simply provide information; it also provided an opportunity for groups to engage in real world skill development around data collection and analysis – a critical skill for both teachers and youth. Overall, groups had different experiences working with the survey as a tool to support their communication strategies. While many groups found the survey useful for targeting their work, some groups found the instrument design constrained their ability to collect data that they found to be meaningful in their contexts.

Challenges in administering the survey instrument

Some groups found the survey portion of the work challenging for a variety of reasons. Although overall, both youth and adults agreed with the importance of using data to drive their work, one student shared concerns about the accuracy and the reflectiveness of the data because it was challenging to get all the stakeholders to fill out the survey. In their words,

I think the biggest -- well, not a problem -- but a thing we had to solve was trying to figure out a way to survey all the students without them getting bored or annoyed with it. So, we kind of tried to make it like an interactive type thing or something that would like appeal to them. And I think that like was the biggest obstacle that we had to overcome.

Facing disengagement with the survey, some teams came up with creative solutions for investing students in it. In the following quote, one youth explains how they draw the attention of the students to take the survey:

We had found a video, we've said that in our Pecha Kucha about this guy who goes in and sues the school system and it's a reenactment. We thought that it'd be good way to catch their attention and be like "Oh, well! I don't know what this is about!" and that kind of led right into what we were talking about right into the change. So, they were able to get engaged and then be able to sit down and take the survey.

The question of student engagement within the survey is one that UP for Learning has faced in its other programs; most notably, the Youth and Adults Transforming Schools Together program (Mitra & Bidde, 2012). It is possible that using the lessons learned from YATST on successful strategies for creating a positive reception for survey instruments might be useful for CSR groups in future iterations of the course, including possible advertising through signs or videos for the survey ahead of time, buy-in from school leadership for its administration, or providing small rewards to students for taking it, just as one might have to do in any social science research study to compensate participants for their time. One participating school, Twin Valley, was able to do a version of this in administering their survey, using a video entitled “The People vs. The School System” to introduce the survey and its importance.

Other groups found that the design of the tool limited the audiences with whom it could be used. A student described how their group tried to circulate the survey and collect data from the younger students to have more comprehensive data; however, younger students had difficulty understanding the questions:

We really wanted to broaden our audience to younger students that were going to be coming up into proficiency based learning for high school. So, we wanted our 8th graders to be able to experience or not to experience but to get data from them as well for what their understanding was since they're going to be experiencing it soon. And we found it difficult to do that because they couldn't really understand the questions, 'cause they're very detailed. And also with our freshman and sophomore, some of them had difficulty. So, we had to take a longer time to explain the questions to them and I think that kind of worried me for if our data was very accurate.

An adult described how their group addressed this issue by modifying the survey to work with their stakeholder groups of interest:

We modified it just a tad for our setting, and we used that to get a sense of ... To get a snapshot of what are people thinking about school reform both on our faculty and among our student body and also in our community.

While any data collection instrument will have limitations with different audiences, this group’s experience suggests two challenges for the existing CSR survey and the current tools to support its use. First, because of Vermont’s current stage of implementation of both personalized learning and proficiency-based learning, there may be increased interest by teams in understanding the perspectives of younger students. Finding language for describing the key mental constructs the survey seeks to measure may be a worthwhile investment so that teams may be responsive to the needs of their particular schools. A second implication of this group’s experience is that the group did not have the skill set within their own team to pivot or adjust the tool to serve their needs. Additional support from the course instructors or access to an expert on survey methodology on a consulting basis could be useful for groups wishing to adjust this tool to meet their needs. This resource would be supportive of a request from a minority of adult CSR participants who expressed a desire to be able to create multiple iterations of the survey instrument for a variety of audiences.

Identifying target stakeholder groups from the survey

All of the groups reported that the findings of the survey revealed key information for the CSR groups and informed them of the most important areas of need for communication. An example of how the groups made decisions about targeting their communication strategies using the survey as their guide can be seen in this description of one adult advisor of their group's process:

The top three areas that came up with all our stakeholders was an understanding of Act 77 which is the Vermont flexible pathways legislation and understanding brain research in adolescence. And then the third one had to do with proficiency based grading practices and we already had an initiative going to address the proficiency based grading piece so we decided, based on the survey, that we would focus on providing our stakeholders with information around Act 77 and brain research

Each group went through a process to analyze their survey data using the Public Understanding and Support Assessment rubric, assessing where stakeholders in their school or community fell from "pre-awareness" to "support and advocacy". Groups found in both their survey and early communication work at their schools that students as a stakeholder group had complex and multi-faceted communication needs, depending on their existing relationship with school. As one adult advisor put it,

The work of our students in the CSR class is really at the beginning stages. While a lot of the administration and many of the teachers had a pretty good idea of what personalized learning, flexible pathways, and proficiency based learning were. We found at the very beginning when they took the survey that we didn't really have a common vocabulary. Even though we felt like people knew the information, they didn't know how to refer to it or what it was called. Depending on what words you used really determined how well somebody knew the information. Or how familiar they were with it.

Creating a shared vocabulary for key concepts that support school redesign, therefore, was an important part of the work that CSR groups had to engage in with their schools. Teams engaged in this process through the development of common metaphors or brands for proficiency-based learning or flexible pathways in order to frame these ideas in ways that were accessible and promoted engagement with their core philosophies.

Challenges in communicating with students about school redesign

In working with the concepts of school redesign and considering a communication strategy to reach other students, CSR students themselves expressed surprise at their own level of awareness of the existing options available to them to take advantage of to personalize their learning. In the words of one CSR student,

I was surprised at how often and how many of these flexible pathways we already had at this school. I mean I knew a few. I knew about dual enrollment. But other than that I had no idea how many students were actually involved in these things.

Similarly, an adult talked about the ways in which this work fit into the existing work on personalized learning happening at his school and the challenges around its implementation by saying,

Our school has had for a long time, a really strong flexible pathways options, but they tend to serve a pretty, narrow's the wrong term, but I would say limited number of students. Our work for the personalized learning plans is to put that on the table for more people.

The level of awareness of CSR students reported that they had at the beginning of the course points to the challenges of destigmatizing these pathways for all students, a challenge that many CSR groups had to take on within the course of their communication work. CSR students pointed specifically to two groups of their peers with challenging communication needs around these pathways. The first group they identified were the “high-flyers,” students for whom school was already working, who were typically enrolled in higher track classes and performed well consistently in a traditional system. One CSR student elaborated on how for some students these new mandates seemed unnecessary simply because these students were already successful in the old system and didn’t see the benefit of following along with these new initiatives.

There is also this whole population of students that, at least in our school, who push back against not because they don't care but because they really like how the system is working. And you know they're the people who can get straight A's and they can do all these kinds of stuff. So, I think it's about trying to show the benefit for each and every person including all those people who are at the top of the class and get straight A's and all that kind of stuff.

This finding is consistent with challenges faced by CSR groups in previous years (see Biddle, 2015a; Biddle & Dagistan Terzi, 2016), as well as with other UP for Learning programs seeking to change the traditional ways that schools function (see Biddle, 2015b). There is often an assumption within school reform that students will simply adapt to changes presented without question or resistance (Smyth, 2006); however, change may challenge successful students because of the anxiety that it will not preserve the status and privilege that they have acquired in the existing system. One strategy that CSR groups used in their communication strategies to address this fear amongst high-performing students was to address the necessity of traditional courses as one of a variety of strategies for students to achieve balance in their academic portfolio, particularly because of the predominance of traditional education models in higher education settings.

However, high-flyers were not the only students with unique communication needs. CSR students also perceived students who had disengaged with the traditional system as needing targeted communication about the possibilities of school redesign. In the words of one CSR student,

It is...not only with the students that are already okay with the system, but the students that have given up on the system. This is, like, exactly what can help them with their

learning and they don't like want to try at all and I think it's really hard to get them back on path of the system.

Here, this CSR student points to the importance of building trust through a targeted communication strategy with students who have been disenfranchised within the existing educational system, identifying a key challenge for CSR teams in their work.

Examples of communication strategies crafted by CSR groups

CSR teams drew on a wide variety of strategies for crafting communication plans to reach their target stakeholder groups on a variety of topics, including flexible pathways, proficiency-based education, and student voice. These strategies drew on a combination of campaign-based tools to raise awareness to dialogue-driven strategies that aimed to elevate the voices of these stakeholders and engage them in conversations about school redesign. To support the use of both of these, CSR instructors were able to point to a range of previous communication strategies used by part CSR schools, including videos, posters, social media campaigns, and facilitated dialogue in faculty meetings, homerooms, and even organized for the whole school. These strategic tools ensured that the participants had the opportunity to learn the variety of ways of meeting the communication needs of a variety of stakeholders.

In crafting communication strategies, CSR teams relied on metaphors that might resonate with students and adults to describe school redesign. Harwood Union, for example, used the metaphor of high school being like a Choose Your Own Adventure Story, in which you could make meaningful choices about how you wanted to arrive at graduation. North Country Union chose to represent flexible pathways as a subway map, with students able to arrive at different destinations through different travel routes, but within a bounded system. These metaphors are similar to those that have been crafted by CSR teams in past years, such as flexible pathways as a highway, a branding of flexible pathways as an opportunity to design your own path, and metaphors around cooking and adjusting ingredients.

CSR adults suggested that the support that they received during this process was useful in scaffolding their ability to move from the data collection, to survey analysis, to crafting a communication strategy. In the words of one adult,

It was an opportunity to delve into the data about what's happening at your school as far as the school survey and then they [students] analyzed the school survey, and then they put an action plan into place based on that survey, and that they then came up with more than one strategy of how to effectively communicate that up, so it was a real practical course that was using data and evidence to then design a communication strategy about school reform.

CSR teams engaged in activities that could be classified as awareness-raising, such as Instagram or snapchat campaigns, poster-making, branding activities, or creating videos in greater numbers than in previous years of the course. Teams then capitalized on these awareness raising strategies by hosting dialogue-based activities in their schools to more deeply engage stakeholders in conversations about the necessity for school redesign.

Awareness raising strategies

Some examples of awareness raising strategies focused on leveraging increased interest in social media among youth and adults. The Hartford team, for example, created a school Instagram account meant to showcase the broad variety of ways that students were using personalized learning. In the words of adult advisor,

We created a school Instagram account to document what our students were doing in and outside of school. We would add a hashtag or a comment on it saying, "Did you know [student name]'s getting credit for this project." So we did. We also had a school Snapchat account that we did.

Teams coupled these social media based campaigns with more traditional school-based awareness strategies, such as poster campaigns, webpages, advertising on in-school display monitors or pamphleting, to raise awareness amongst students about opportunities for engaging in flexible pathways. Harwood Union, for example, made a flag that represented the variety of pathways that students were engaging in to reach proficiency in required content areas. The team presented the flag at the culminating event for the CSR class, but also plans to take advantage of complementary venues for elevating youth voices present at Harwood – their student-run assemblies – to present the flag to the student body at the beginning of the school year in 2017-2018.

Dialogue-driven strategies

Teams coupled these awareness-raising activities with a variety of strategies to engage diverse stakeholders in dialogue about school redesign, ranging from more traditional styles of youth presentation such as exhibition nights to youth-facilitated chalk-talks. At Hartford High School, the CSR team arranged for two exhibitions of independent learning, in which students showcased their experiences in flexible pathways. These exhibition nights were opportunities for parents, students, and other members of the community to speak with youth (who were present in a science fair-like format) about their projects and internships. As one adult involved with these said,

Those were pretty big deals for us. The exhibition night was a ton of planning so that was kind of our big culmination.

Other groups identified different opportunities for integrating dialogue about school redesign with specific target groups, including teachers and students. At Twin Valley, for example, the team found that one of the biggest challenges identified from the survey data was confusion from all groups about school redesign. They found that there was no “common vocabulary” to discuss these issues in their school, and as a result made their focus building that vocabulary in a way that crossed over between youth and adults. To do this, the CSR team conducted chalk talks with each grade level to spark dialogue about a variety of topics related to school redesign, including grading, relationships with teachers, and students’ philosophy of education. However, the team first presented at a faculty meeting, treating teachers’ communication needs as slightly different than students’ needs, and ensuring the teachers

understood the activities that would be happening with students. Lastly, the Twin Valley team combined students and teachers to discuss these issues, doing a full school wagon wheel activity. The adult advisor for the group described it as follows:

Probably our highest moment was the full school wagon wheel that we did. We had eighth grade through twelfth grade students in the gym. We set up about 23 groups of eight chairs to facilitate a school wide wagon wheel around... relationships, and what it takes to be in a flexible pathway or proficiency based learning. Or develop learning that's more personalized. We also had some parents present and some community members that took place in that conversation. For our students to organize and facilitate that was a huge endeavor that involved about 150 kids probably.

Other groups worked to bring a variety of stakeholders together to participate in similarly facilitated dialogic events, including parents, teachers, students and community members. Here, a member of the Lyndon Institute team talks about meeting the communication needs of teachers, while also bringing in the whole school community to discuss school redesign:

With the teachers, our focus was for our kind of the nuts the bolts of Act 77 and beginning to lay the groundwork for this is the shift and identifying the shifts between tradition high school experiences versus an experience in a Flexible Pathway program. We also worked on a project that tried to bring community members in to inform parents and trustees and those sort of stakeholders, in terms of what this actually looks like in practice versus just words on paper, if you will. We had a week of dialogue. That was our culminating event.

The Lyndon Institute's "week of dialogue" leveraged their existing Teaching Advisory system to use blocks of advisory time to facilitate dialogue for students about school redesign, as well as using text rendering and wagon wheel strategies to work with faculty towards understanding Act 77. They were also able to include community members and their board of trustees in this process through an event they called "Chat and chew."

Perceived benefits of communications work within CSR schools

Participants in the CSR course felt that examining the communication needs of multiple stakeholders within their school around school redesign and working to meet these needs had benefits for themselves as well as their schools. Adults and youth identified new leadership opportunities for youth within the communications process that would not have been afforded them otherwise, and both talked about new perspectives on education and the change process that resulted from their participation.

One CSR participating adult talked about the way in which the CSR process had made her more aware of the communication needs that students might have when it comes to school redesign. In her words,

I have come to appreciate this year how exciting but also how messy this can be, so above else, I have grown to understand how important is to communicate to students WHY the changes we are implementing are happening and WHY we believe these

changes to be beneficial. Without clearly articulated WHYs, students feel like they are simply being experimented on, leading to disengagement and frustration.

As a result of participating in the course, this adult came to see that students, too, need to have the rationale for change made explicit. Change within schools requires experiencing fear and even loss (Fullan, 2007), and this adult affirms that this experience has helped her see that students may need an opportunity to express their fear and loss in school change processes as well as adults.

Other adults found that the strategic framing theories helped them to understand more about communication between all individuals in their own schools. In the words of one adult,

Again, those first few days there was another one, too, about communication theory, and getting to the 'Why,' that I find really helpful in framing. I think a lot of those framing pieces, the brain research snippets use those in a lot of ways, but the messaging piece of getting to the 'Why,' was a bit of a mantra for me

Another adult expressed a similar gain in understanding around communication and school change, saying,

The communicating of a school redesigned course really gets into what are the bigger motivational reasons for doing the school redesign. How does it really serve students better? Let's take that same idea I gave about the system kind of working right for people rather than just 'how do I play the system and how to get to the ends I want?' How are we shifting education to really be much more inspirational and personal in directing students in a way; just to get us in that place. The course itself ... exposed us to different set of materials to help communicate some of those ideas and gave us practice in working on messaging and who we're working with, and the ability to sit with other schools and hear their strategies and what they're going through was really informative too.

Many adults, in particular, benefited from their exposure to communication theory and felt that it helped them understand the change process within their schools.

Youth participants reported positive changes that they saw in their schools as a result of the communicative strategies they created. In the following quote, one youth shares how even though their administration was progressive, they are now more inclined to focus on student-voice.

And I think before our administration was like, there's super progressive and really want to have change but I think now, there are willing to change on accordance to student voice and they are more apt to listen to us. And I feel more comfortable going to them. And if there's something that I'm like "Oh? Why can't we do this? What's the logistic plan" like I'm comfortable going to them asking them why the changes are made and maybe give them feedback. They are open to hearing our opinions and they're much more receptive to it.

Another student shared how there is now a more close-knit community culture in their school. It can be concluded that the communication strategies provided by the CSR teams lead to positive cultural change within the school community. In the words of one student,

One thing that I've noticed that we started to do. We have school wide assemblies once a month, I don't know if it has to do with the things we've been doing right now, but we actually get together as a school and do things together which is something like in my freshman year my school just seemed like we didn't talk to each other and we did our own thing. So we've moved quite a bit from the beginning of my school year.

Although these accounts of school-wide benefits are anecdotal, these students perceived positive changes in their school culture as a result of their team's work within their schools.

Working in youth-adult partnership

A core piece of the CSR theory of change is cultivating effective youth-adult partnerships in the CSR teams that both allows the work to be facilitated by youth and adults equally and models effective youth-adult partnership for non-participating students and teachers in participating schools. This section of the report examines the reflections of CSR adults and youth on how they experienced youth-adult partnership in the context of their Communicating School Redesign work. In keeping with much of the literature on youth-adult partnership and previous evaluations of the CSR program, adults described having to make the mental shift of providing leadership to their collective efforts into seeing themselves as coaches, facilitators, and partners. Additionally, youth had to learn to leadership spaces typically occupied by adults once adults made room for them. Both youth and adults saw benefits of these new roles for themselves and for their schools. The following section presents participants reflections on youth-adult partnership formation within the CSR course and the benefits and challenges to this work that they perceived.

Evolving perspectives on youth-adult roles through collaboration

The roles of both adults and youth evolved as the group dynamic fell into place over the course of the year, as is natural for new youth-adult partnerships in the formative stages. Youth-adult partnerships often require shifts in perspective from traditional models of youth-adult interaction that privilege adult knowledge and youth silence to more fluid power dynamics and less rigid role definition (Zeldin, Camino & Mook, 2005). By the end of the year, many adults and youth reported equitable decision-making power within their groups. Both the adults and the youth thought that the partnership was a fair and balanced collaboration, one that each party contributed in complementary ways.

We have a good group dynamic. We have a dynamic of openness, of real candid, kind of like 'let's get the work done.' We did a good job as far as having that group plant some seeds that reached out further into the school, so I feel like it's a resourceful group. We really worked well as a group.

When asked to reflect on their collaborative efforts, another adult stated,

It was very much so 50/50 student and faculty. There wasn't a decision that was made that a student didn't know about.

One student agreed with these adults assessments, saying,

Obviously we had adults and students on the same team but I felt like we had equal amount of power and equal amount of say. It wasn't us like delegating or the teachers delegating. Everyone had equal amount of work.

Here, the student implies that his expectation of the group was that there would be power that would be delegated by someone to someone else. This is important because it is worth noting that both the adults and the youth were surprised with the way the collaboration evolved. Several of the adults had come to realize that the youth would not be able to take on leadership right away because trust had to first be developed that they would be permitted to lead in these spaces. Another student pointed out a heightened sense of respect they felt through their collaboration with adults. In this quote, one youth shares how different the youth-adult collaboration was from a traditional classroom setting and how she felt more respected by the adults as they had the chance to truly hear her whole opinion.

I think you earn like more respect from them [adults]. So, it's like in the classroom, if you previously had them as a teacher, they don't really get to hear out most of your opinion like you can sometimes stick your opinion in there once or twice a class maybe. But when you're in a room and talking about this stuff they actually fully get to hear about your experience and your whole opinion. So, kind of having them there listening and for them to express their whole opinion back, it kind of just puts you on like a... you earn more respect in kind of a peer way.

Here, this youth emphasizes how important it felt to have more respect by the adults as peers. This evolving relationship based on mutual respect was new to the youth since as students they are used to not being on the same level with the authority. Another student reflected how pleasant it was to get to know their older group members as just adults and not the authority figure and teacher.

I loved being in the same classroom. I got to know them as a person 'cause they tell you about their life, their house, everything, instead of the classroom where they tell you certain stories about just past time. You don't really get to hear the adult part of them instead of just the authority figure and teacher. I was worried that it was going to be more about them conveying what they wanted us to say or to communicate what they wanted to educate people about but it turned into a collaborative experience which I wasn't actually expecting. So, it was kind of a pleasant surprise.

The CSR course, then, became a safe place for youth and adults to experiment with performing youth-adult relationships outside of the school environment in ways that ran counter to the normative teacher-student roles that they must typically perform with one another. The course provided a third space to redesign these norms, which could then be carried back into the traditional school environment.

Both adults and youth reported that they benefited from the collaboration that took place in the CSR course. Youth described a shift in their perspective from adults as the information providers to adults as partners. For adults, students in their groups became partners, leaders and co-researchers rather than information receivers. Youth reported that, by the end of the year, they felt like they were on the same level with the adults as contributors. One youth stated in a focus group,

I didn't have the sense of like I was inferior to them, like they had control over me or something. Like, in the classroom, I feel like that way. And it just made me more confident around adults and talking about things.

Here, this youth makes explicit the normative relationships between youth and adults within school settings characterized by adult power and control. For this youth, the CSR experience subverted that power and control, along with the feelings of inferiority that this youth found typically accompanied their experiences with adults. When power and control is subverted and partnership emerges, youth and adults can experience their relationships with each other in new ways. For example, another student reflected how he felt that the adults were humanized through their mutual learning experience [emphasis ours]:

It was really unique to work in a classroom with teachers rather than for teachers. It sort of brought them down to the level where -- I feel like it humanized them more, like it showed me that they don't always have all the answers. Sometimes they ask questions about things and we have answers for. And so it really... it made it seem more like we were their peers than whether they're inferiors.

This student also makes reference to the feelings of inferiority that arise in traditional student teacher relationships, and discusses the way in which new roles in youth-adult relationships create new possibilities to see each other's humanity in school settings. Additionally, the disentanglement of expertise from adults' power in schools also redefined what youth could contribute within such a collaboration. Youth felt that having the space within the context of the CSR class and school-based work allowed these new dynamics and ways of appreciating one another to emerge.

As a result of the collaborative learning and working style implemented in the CSR course, the adults reported that the students had the chance to really "shine through" as leaders. One adult stated,

I'd been involved in the shifts expected in Act 77 for three or four years now. And this was really the first time that I was able to apply that and really let the student really shine through.

When inquired on where students took on the most leadership, one adult responded,

The whole thing. All four of them have really strong voices and they're all friends with each other so they are very comfortable with each other.

This adult points out to the strong rapport among the youth and how comfortable they were with each other. It can be speculated that this strong rapport made student leadership easier for the youth in that group as peer pressure discontinues being an issue. One thing to consider when trying to look for collaborative youth partners is to attempt to include students that are not acquainted that well with one another. This might challenge the youth in the group more since they would not necessarily know each other that well, but still, the collaborative experience they will have might be more of use to them.

Navigating support for youth leadership and voice as adults

Adults described their emerging piece with transferring power to students, but also figuring out how to navigate the challenge of supporting emerging student leadership. This often meant taking on logistical roles. When asked to share their thoughts on what their role was in their collaboration, the adult participants stated that their roles ranged from being the “facilitator”, the “liaison”, the “middle-man” to being the “organizer”. In the words of one adult,

So, I kind of became kind of like the middle man, if you will. Making sure that the students and checking in with the students that they had read the expected material that, looking over their responses to questions and preparations for meetings... Reaching out to the other adults and making sure everybody was reminded of meeting times and things like that.

While explaining their role as facilitator, one adult pointed out that the youth, at times, seemed hesitant about their newly acquired roles as leaders. As one adult partner put it,

I was kind of the go-between sometimes, but then other times I was in charge of things and running it. Other times I would step back and let the kids deal with it. So, it was kind of whatever we needed that day. We wanted everything to be kid-centered because it's for them, so when they presented to faculty about the Instagram and Snapchat account, I just stepped back. They'd ask me, "Did I forget anything?" but they ran the whole thing.

Regarding the realization of the complexities of role distribution, when reflecting on their perceived role, one adult shared her hope of seeing the students take on the role of leaders and her surprise when she realized it was difficult for them as they didn't have the experience.

I think I ended up being lead facilitator for the most part and it was not a role I had hoped to have because my hope was that the students would take on that role as the leaders and that's one of the things that I think surprised all the adults in the group is that that didn't happen and it was really because they hadn't had much experience at all with being ...

Another adult expressed how important it was to be a good listener and facilitator without telling the students what to do. This adult also highlighted her observation that sometimes with collaborations like these, students might think that their collaboration might not be a true one because of their traditional roles.

I think another role that I played and the other two women played is trying to actively listen to kids, trying to help them decide on a project without telling them what to do. We were really clear, we didn't want to tell them what we thought they should do, we wanted to help them come up with their own ideas. It's really a role of facilitating, of active listening, of support, encouraging them to use their voice because sometimes, when kids and teachers collaborate, the kids think it's not a true collaboration. It's really a role of facilitating, of active listening, of support, encouraging them to use their voice because sometimes, when kids and teachers collaborate, the kids think it's not a true collaboration.

Another adult also shared how complex it was to get into this new role that requires more collaborative efforts than their traditional role does.

It was a real test, I think, for the adults, in the sense of, "Okay, we need to let the students speak." And really being able to step back a little bit and be more coaches as opposed to teachers. So, kind of like guiding the work versus instructing the work.

In addition to being the facilitator, a few adult participants asserted that there were times when they were “in charge of things”. The level of power that adults had within their schools necessarily affected their roles during the CSR course. Thus, it was inevitable, for instance, for the principal to not be perceived as the most authority in the group. In the words of one principal,

I was sitting in the position of the most authority in the group, so I became the -- trying to think of the best term for this -- I would say I became the facilitator -- But it's different than a facilitator because it's more like giving permission; giving permission to act. Giving permission, as you asked about, adult-youth relationships to allow the youth to really have a good strong voice at the table, even if it's for small acts.

This person’s reflection highlights the challenges of translating youth-adult roles created in the “third space” of the CSR course back into the traditional school environment, particularly when power is accorded to adults by the traditional hierarchy of school leadership. However, this principal’s self-awareness allowed them to use that authority to amplify youth partnership rather than to dampen it, suggesting that adult self-awareness is critical for making youth-adult partnership work successfully in schools.

Benefits and challenges for youth of working partnership

Adults noted the ways in which youth took on new leadership roles, particularly in terms of connecting with fellow students about flexible pathways and proficiency-based learning, as well as engaging them around filling out the survey. As one adult noted,

I think in communicating to their peers, the students in our class, in our group, made an effort to connect with peers, both to get them to take the survey, to share the results, and to share their ideas with their peers. That's where they took on the most leadership role, I think, is in that extending outwards to the rest of the student body.

Another adult noted that they saw students' "experimenting with their student voices" and taking on new roles. In their words,

I think in general what motivated students most in this was again, to have that real cause and effect relationship pretty close. So, "Here's the work we're doing, let's go out and use it some ways." I certainly saw students who had goals of doing facilitation, because they thought it was a weakness, being able to facilitate and being those effects.

This adult identifies that a real strength of the CSR program as a vehicle for experimenting with youth-adult partnership work is the real-life application of the work and the clear process in which youth can engage. These factors were supportive of youth taking leadership within this setting and also within their schools.

In keeping with the findings from the 2015-16 evaluation, students suggested that they occasionally found themselves in politically sensitive situations as a result of their leadership in this work. In one student's words:

I had to facilitate a faculty meeting and I did that last week and it was really nerve-racking because there are a lot of teachers and I'm there like saying, "Hey! Get in group.", and "Do this" and "Do that" and I'm asking them to reflect and one of the things I learned was that, I asked them to voluntarily talk like we are now and none of them did. Standing there, I said "I know what you feel, this is what I was doing with you guys for the last three years of my life." And they all looked at me kind of funny. And I said, "You know, you guys are all teachers and I expected you to be on board with this". It was a very uncomfortable conversation talking about their jobs are going to change and talking to a student about that was very intense for them.

Another student discussed the ways in which teachers not participating in CSR struggled to partner with youth to enable their facilitative leadership without taking control. One youth described a situation in which they were facilitating an all-school dialogue:

We had an all school dialogue and it was kids and teachers together. And I was a facilitator for that I say pretty great getting to mark your assistant principal absent to that meeting and like the teachers that were in there were surprisingly kind of disruptive because they were so used to kind of running the show that if kids would misbehave or not do anything they would take it out of their time to go talk to them instead of like sharing with their partner. It is difficult for them to see us in control.

Here, this youth acknowledges how ill-prepared most teachers are to partner with youth leaders when they have not had the experience of working in authentic youth-adult partnerships. These students' experiences suggest an opportunity for the CSR course. As adult self-awareness plays a key role in making room for youth partners in traditional school settings, other adults may be able to play a role in helping their colleagues reflect on how to open up space for youth by talking about their own path to partnership and the type of self-reflection and practice that made it possible in the CSR course.

Strengths and recommendations for the CSR course structure

As in past years, participants in the CSR course were incredibly grateful for the structure and support that the CSR course itself provided for their school-based work. In any course, instructors must figure out the correct pacing for introducing key concepts and assignments, balance between allowing students the independence to work problems out on their own and providing timely guidance, and giving meaningful feedback on student work. Participants in the course praised the instructors for their leadership of the work and the support and wisdom that they offered to teams at different stages of the process. In one adult's words:

Helen and Daniel were huge resources for us. Helen's support was instrumental in training our new team. I mean she drove all the way down here to help train us. She herself, and Daniel Baron -- who was also one of the facilitators -- trained us on how to use these protocols that we use. It was hugely helpful.

Youth felt similarly supported by the instructors, with one saying:

Helen came out for one of our biggest dialogues and was there to share kind of our glory 'cause that was our biggest task and it was the most nerve-wracking and not having one of our administrators there it was kind of scarier. But she was there, she was super-supportive and it was nice to have someone there.

Additionally, for youth, it was very powerful to have the course co-facilitated by a past student, with experience facilitating CSR as a youth leader. A student discussed the impact that seeing this had on her in the focus group, saying:

For me another a strong point was other students that have gone through CSR also like present and help facilitate meetings was really powerful cause sometimes I thought like this is impossible but having those students that have really done it and are explaining what they've done or helping us with what we should do next because they experience that we are simply experiencing. That was really really helpful.

While the correct pacing of the course has been challenging to achieve, many participants felt that the course supported the on-going momentum of school-based teams in this year's iteration. One participant reflected, "I think it felt like a good pace and it allowed enough work time that if you focus you could accomplish everything." In another's words, "Everything about CSR is so well-designed. I don't think the pacing was too slow or too fast." Another participant described the course as "well-balanced," although this person felt that more specific deadlines might help to balance the course work with ever-shifting school-based priorities and needs.

One adult participant who has attended the CSR course once in the previous years was resourceful in terms of being able to reflect and share comparisons. This adult noted that the pacing was better compared to the previous years. In their words,

Yeah, again, I think I felt like the pacing this year was more realistic to meet the needs and demands of schools, so the pacing felt fine and again, in the past, hearing that, "We

need team time. We need team time," I think they provided that more this year, and not only do you get to have team time, but then you have the teachers there available to you during that team time, so that seemed well paced this year.

Other benefits to the CSR course identified by participants were the opportunities to interact with other schools, challenging the norm of relative isolation in which most schools do their work. The structure of the CSR class promotes collaborative learning experiences among the participating schools, giving the schools the chance to collaborate not only within their school but across groups from different schools. In this following quote, one adult shares how effective it was to interact with the fellow participating schools.

It was also helpful during lunches and stuff to talk to other teams. And that happened often informally during lunch. And I thought that was the most effective way for it to happen, which was sort of the time we had a chance to interact with other schools.

Another adult affirmed the usefulness of interacting with the other participating schools and highlighted how important it was to be a part of a network as being isolated as a school can be challenging. Providing the unique chance of getting and staying connected is another strength of the CSR class.

The course itself gave us the ability to sit with other schools and hear their strategies and what they're going through was really informative too. Part of what I really valued in the course was to be able to sit with people from other schools, both faculty and students from other schools because one of the things that I find challenging is the isolation. It's so easy to be, it's really easy to be an isolated school in the state rather than a connected one. It helped us in those ways.

As with any course, differentiation to meet various team and student needs can be challenging. While many of the participants felt that the opportunity to network with other schools, as well as get to know new people within their schools, was a strength, others felt that they were not allowed enough independence during course times. One participant felt that,

There were a lot of times we would get there and so much of it was so structured yet it was supposed to be about independent and personalized learning... We would get on a roll with something finally after we had broken away from group time and then we'd get pulled back together for something else

Lastly, while many of the adults named their learning about communications theory as one of the most valuable parts of the class, one adult suggested that this focus be maintained throughout the year, with deeper elements being introduced as team's get further into their work. In this person's words,

I wished that it ... Seemed to me that the resourcefulness of it, or that learning moment faded a little bit, and it became more based on work time, and I would've liked to have a fusion of more methodology throughout the course... Maybe some of the disappointment was, I was really looking forward to having some time with communications expertise,

but it seemed like that really dropped off a bit. I feel like that's our biggest need struggle, is what are effective communication strategies. I feel like that dropped off through the course.

There are two aspects to this course participant's comments that are potentially of interest for future iterations of the CSR course. First, this comment points to the potential for additional opportunities for learning throughout the year that may prove engaging to adults and support their change efforts and leadership in their schools more deeply around school redesign as they apply learning from the course to other areas of their work. Secondly, it suggests the importance of finding simple, new ways for teams to measure the impact of their communication strategies. Professional communication strategists often use analytic tools to gauge how successful their reach has been. Teams might be encouraged to make use of free analytic tools available on the internet, or could be encouraged to innovate new ways to measure their reach.

Conclusion

In 2017-18, the Communicating School Redesign initiative will enter its fifth year. Through its work with 20 schools over the course of the last four years, with some returning to continue to move the work forward, many lessons have been learned and the course and the supports that it can offer to schools has evolved tremendously. Many of the struggles seen in past evaluations of the program are no longer present in the comments from youth and adults participating in the program in 2016-17, indicating that effective supports have been introduced

Several notable aspects of this evolution are:

- The existence of high-quality examples of tools created by schools to communicate school redesign for new schools to use as models;
- The refinement of instruction modules around strategic framing to balance theory with practice;
- More even support for teams throughout the year to support on-going momentum for the work; and
- A more effective balance between team work time and instruction.

High quality examples of previous school's work is helps to support the work of today's CSR teams in several ways. First, teams are able to see theory in action through the projects that have been done by previous years' teams, including the use of metaphors and strategic framing, dialogue in action, and awareness raising strategies targeted to a variety of audiences. These examples support the ability of the instructors to scale back direct instruction around strategic framing and allow the examples to do some of the conceptual heavy lifting. Furthermore, when teams do not have to reinvent the wheel within their own campaigns, they are better able to maintain a focus on action, which has been shown in multiple evaluations of youth-adult partnership programs to be an important component of success over the course of a year (see Biddle, 2015a; Biddle & Dagistan Terzi, 2016; Mitra & Biddle, 2012).

Furthermore, the CSR course has been able to strike an effective balance between allowing teams to learn from one another and providing time outside of the busy school

environment for teams to move their projects forward. This balance has been challenging to strike in the past as teams at different schools have different planning and collaboration needs, with some finding integrated times in the school day to work with one another and others having to make do with extracurricular hours. As a result, some teams value CSR class time for their ability to be together in a team, while others value the opportunity to gain inspiration from other schools engaged in similar work. In this year's iteration of the course, that balance seems to have been effectively struck, as teams reported gaining both of these benefits in their interviews and the focus group.

Additionally, the CSR course remains an exemplary model of supporting the formation of youth-adult partnerships. Youth and adults reported their satisfaction with their own learning about how to work effectively with one another, with youth reporting their new arenas for leadership and adults describing the ways in which they learned to “get out of the way.” The two-day training at the beginning of the year continues to kick-start group formation effectively, with the survey administration at the beginning of the year providing an opportunity for youth and adults to establish equitable group dynamics in the context of a highly structured task. From this base, groups are free to then capitalize on their working partnership to attempt more creative and less structured tasks, coupled with the support of regular gatherings of the CSR groups in which youth-adult partnership is emphasized through co-teaching with youth.

Recommendations for the future

As the CSR class enters its fifth year, we have several recommendations that we believe will help the CSR class to continue to meet the needs of its students and scaffold the transformation of beliefs in its partner schools and the state around school redesign. These concern several key tensions in both the model and the movement pushed forward through Shaping Our Future Together, as follows:

1) Balancing state advocacy needs with school-based needs

Challenges in adapting the survey point to larger tensions between the variety of needs that Shaping Our Future Together must balance between advocating for change at the state level and allowing teams to have ownership over data collection and analysis at their school level. State and regional advocacy (e.g. see Beattie and Rich, 2017) using aggregated state survey data to make clear the mixed understanding of school redesign across the state is necessary for ensuring broader understanding for the need for this work. Additionally, a pre-defined survey allows teams the opportunity to get their work moving quickly – in 2016-17, the teams which struggled the most with the survey were the most delayed in crafting their communication strategies, which is important for maintaining momentum over the year.

However, it is possible that allowing for school-based adaptations of the survey, with support from a methodologist, could allow schools to gather data that is more useful for them overall while still allowing data on key constructs relevant to the overall effort to be collected through the identification of key questions. Volunteers from the University of Vermont doctoral program or another source could support teams through a one-time consultation session on adapting their survey in methodologically valid ways. While this modification might not be required for every school, increased ownership over the survey may, for some teams, result in greater investment in

the course and its mission and will reduce instances of adaptation on the fly in ways that may not meet accepted standards of methodological rigor.

2) Using teacher leaders as “allies” to more effectively amplify the benefits of youth-adult partnership

Youth to youth interaction has been found to be an important element of success of communication strategies in this and previous years of the course. Youth understand the communication needs of other youth more intuitively than adults, and can serve as trusted sources of information for their peers. While youth are also effective messengers for adults, the importance of youth as messengers in this work may overshadow the opportunities of adult ally work around youth-adult partnership and student-centered learning in schools.

When adults participate in youth-adult partnership, they take on leadership responsibilities not only as adult partners, but also as communicators of the importance of youth-adult partnership as a construct to their colleagues. In previous years, some adults have leveraged this role to great effect by providing adult to adult professional development opportunities in which the agency of youth is stressed (see the example of Mount Anthony High School in Biddle & Dagistan-Terzi, 2016). In isolation, adult to adult opportunities for professional development about youth agency often miss the mark and reinforce the adult-led culture of schooling; however, in conjunction with authentic youth-adult partnership activities such as the Communicating School Redesign program, these opportunities may helpfully reinforce existing youth leadership and partnership within the school culture. Amongst this year’s CSR participants, several groups worked with teachers ahead of planned dialogues so that they understood the importance of “getting out of the way” of youth facilitators while still playing supportive roles. As can be seen in the case of some schools where this type of ally work did not happen ahead of time, youth facilitators and non-CSR teachers occasionally ended up working to cross-purposes. These experiences all point to the importance of supporting CSR-involved adults in developing strategies to effectively communicate adult ally-ship to their colleagues.

3) Not backing too far away from the theoretical side of communication for social change

One the beneficial shifts of the past several years in the CSR course has been to create a better balance between providing direct instruction around the theory of strategic framing and allowing schools to learn theory through practice. This shift has been made easier by the existence of high quality tools created by schools to put theory into practice around strategic framing within their schools. However, one caution as the course continues to evolve is for the course not to move too far away from providing some instruction on theoretical basis of communication for social change. In particular, adults report high engagement with the theoretical concepts of the course and finding transferable applications for this work around other areas of school change. In particular, if CSR chooses to support the work of developing teacher leadership to as adult allyship, the critical reflection on school change processes that comes with thinking about strategic framing may be very helpful for supporting adult work in this area.

4) Making “process” best practices available to new schools

One of the successes of the program over the past several years has been the ability to showcase the creative and innovative communication strategies used by schools in previous years. The practical effect of these examples has been that schools need not reinvent the wheel, but can be inspired by the work of other schools to jumpstart their work at their own sites. One additional practice that might be useful to schools and would also take the burden off of instructors is to allow veteran schools the opportunity to share “process”-oriented best practices with new schools, including their learning around youth-adult partnership, planning their communication strategies, and working through the ups and downs of maintaining their momentum over the course of the year. A panel of previous youth and adult participants could be convened via webinar to support teams and to answer questions or troubleshoot issues. Additionally, previous year’s youth could serve as site-based coaches for new schools, using Skype or other digital technologies to touch base on a regular basis with their assigned team to cheer them on and support their work. In this way, more connection could be made between veteran and new schools throughout the process, amplifying the network effect that participants suggest is a critical part of their course experience.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Personal background

How long have you worked at [school name]?

What is your role at [school name]?

What types of previous professional development opportunities have you participated in?

Individual Involvement

Tell me about how you decided to enroll in [course name].

What do you like best about the dual enrollment course model?

What challenges are there in learning in the same classroom as your students?

What benefits are there?

What do you think could be improved about the course?

Focus/Meaning of the work

What has been the most meaningful part of the course for you?

Why do you think the administrators at your school are interested in youth-adult partnership models like this course?

Course culture/dynamics

How would you describe the dynamics of the class?

Why do you think the other adults got involved in this class?

Why do you think [students] got involved in this class?

What do you see as your role in class activities?

Do you ever feel frustrated with the class? (If yes, ask about specific time/why)

Do you feel like the class has changed in the time you've participated? If so, how?

Do you ever feel limited in what you can say in the class? If so, how? Why?

Outcomes

What is the thing your school team has accomplished that you are most proud of? Why?

How do you think your school team's work is perceived by your colleagues back at school? Your students?

What do you think is the most important thing for your school team to work on next? Why?

How do you feel you've changed since participating in this work?

Has your perspective about your education changed? If so, in what ways?

Has your perspective about your colleagues changed? If so, in what ways?

Has your perspective about your students changed? If so, in what ways?

Big ideas/Final reflections

Why is it important for youth and adults to learn together?

Why do you think this promotes change?

Can dialogue create change? How?

What advice would you give to adults who also want to partner with youth in new ways?

Appendix B: Focus Group Protocol

Personal background

Have you always gone to [name of school?]
What are your plans for the future?

Individual Involvement

Tell me about how you decided to enroll in [course name].
What do you like best about the dual enrollment course model?
 What challenges are there in learning in the same classroom as your teachers?
 What benefits are there?
What do you think could be improved about the course?

Focus/Meaning of the work

What has been the most meaningful part of the course for you?
Why do you think the teachers and administrators at your school are interested in youth-adult partnership models like this course?
Why is this work so important?

Course culture/dynamics

How would you describe the dynamics of the class?
 Why do you think the other students got involved in this class?
 Why do you think [adults] got involved in this class?
What do you see as your role in class activities?
Do you ever feel frustrated with the class? (If yes, ask about specific time/why)
Do you feel like the class has changed in the time you've participated? If so, how?

Outcomes

What is the thing your school team has accomplished that you are most proud of? Why?
How do you think your school team's work is perceived by your classmates back at school? Your teachers?
What do you think is the most important thing for your school team to work on next?
Why?
How do you feel you've changed since participating in this work?
Has your perspective about your education changed? If so, in what ways?
Has your perspective about your classmates changed? If so, in what ways?
Has your perspective about your teachers changed? If so, in what ways?

Big ideas/Final reflections

Why is it important for youth and adults to learn together?
 Why do you think this promotes change?
 Can dialogue create change? How?
What is the most important thing for an adult who wants to partner with youth to know?