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School Portfolios, Critical Collegiality and Comprehensive School Reform

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School Portfolios, Critical Collegiality, and Comprehensive School Reform

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Abstract

Maine's deployment of the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) program has been substantially different from that of other states. It has included the addition of several parameters and operating requirements that have made the school change process that was prompted by CSRD in that state particularly promising and worthy of study (Hamann et al., 2001). Maine's adaptation of the CSRD framework has led to the adoption of school portfolios at 11 high schools. The state urged schools to adopt this measure in addition to focusing all of its comparatively modest CSRD allocation at the high school level and assuring further overlap in each school's change process by tying funding to several practices recommended in the state's otherwise voluntary high school reform framework known as Promising Futures (Maine Commission on Secondary Education 1998). Schools prepare the portfolios annually and use them to document and reflect upon the change process upon which they have formally embarked. External reviewers evaluate the portfolios and schools can use them as sources of "collective generativity" (Lord 1994, p. 193), or sources of ideas that help school personnel decide how to proceed.

It is in this last capacity that we see a tie-in between the practice of school portfolio drafting and the incubation of 'critical collegiality'.¹ As with others in this panel, we see critical collegiality as a needed condition for the intrastaff communication and coordination that enables schools to cultivate an ongoing capacity to self-critique and self-improve, particularly in the contemporary high-standards-emphasizing environment. Based on our familiarity with all 11 of Maine's CSRD high schools and from our further inquiry at seven of those schools, we found that school portfolios can be a mechanism for promoting the elements of Lord's (1994) Model of Critical Collegueship.² Put briefly, critical collegiality refers to school professionals' use of observation, formative feedback, and adjusted practice as tools of self-critique and improvement. Though external advice should figure significantly in this type of a system, peer-to-peer professional commentary is the defining feature.

Even though several professionals at a school collaborate to produce the portfolio, insertion of a portfolio requirement does not assure an outcome of critical collegiality. Indeed, the 'top-down' mandate to produce school portfolios, if not co-opted at the school level into a tool of self-monitoring and analysis and an internally-controlled tool of professional development, can be a source of problematic, contrived teacher collaboration rather than the constructive, voluntary type (Hargreaves 1991). The key variable here is not the origin of the portfolio policy, but rather whether it is or is not 'owned' at the school level.³ Of course, buy-in to the concept of portfolio creation does not necessarily mean buy-in to each of the change steps that the portfolio process is supposed to document. Portfolios may occasion critically collegial conversation without always supporting each of the changes urged by federal CSRD requirements and Maine's Promising Futures framework.

At the 11 schools, contributing to either critical collegiality or contrived (and minimal) teacher collaboration was the most common (and dramatically simplified) outcome of the introduction of the school portfolio requirement. But there was a third scenario. We did find in one instance that a school had taken ownership of the portfolio process, but the portfolio still had a negligible effect on promoting collegiality. That school had enough other professional development mechanisms in play to promote collegial introspection and consensual decision making, and people at the school viewed the portfolio's contribution to that end as redundant.

I. Methodology

To prepare this paper, we distributed a survey with nine open-ended questions to each of the 11 CSRD schools and received responses from seven.⁴ The questions asked schools to describe their first-year experience with the portfolio creation process—including who was and was not involved—and to clarify whether those involved in its assembly perceived the portfolios as a task to be complied with rather than an opportunity to reflect and learn. We then asked more directly about possible links between portfolio preparation and the stimulation and guidance of habits of coordinated reflection and planning. The full questionnaire is included in the Appendix.

That was the most overt part of our methodology, but this paper is, nonetheless, as much informed by our additional professional experiences with Maine high schools, CSRD, and portfolios. Susan Hackett Johnson, this paper's third author and the Maine Department of Education's (MEDOE's) first and current CSRD coordinator, visited each school with either Edmund Hamann or Brett Lane for one-day 'mid-course reviews' during March 2001 as this paper was being drafted. Hamann and Lane have both been studying Maine's CSRD implementation for the last 18 months, and in the process produced Maine's federally required year one CSRD state-level evaluation (Lane and Hamann 2000) and a technical report entitled CSRD Roll-out in Maine: Lessons from a Statewide Case Study (Hamann et al. 2001). For six of the year one portfolio presentations, either Hamann or Lane served as one of three assembled formative evaluators. Johnson was a formative evaluator for all 11. In addition to the 2001 site visits, Hamann and Lane visited 8 of the 11 Maine CSRD high schools during 1999-2000. Thus, we have spent three or four days at some of the CSRD schools. Hamann has also visited six Maine high schools that lack CSRD funding. Johnson knows each of the CSRD schools well and has also come to know several non-CSRD Maine high schools well through the process of coordinating a second round of CSRD applications.

As CSRD coordinator, Johnson helped draft the original CSRD request for proposals that was sent to schools, oversaw each of the 11 CSRD schools' implementation of the program, and visited all of the schools more than once. Most important for this study, she originated the school portfolio requirement. She also reviewed each school's year one portfolio and provided each school with technical assistance in support of their portfolio completion process. Finally, she is the creator of the Continuum of Evidence (see Appendix), which clarifies the structure for each portfolio and makes clear the standards by which the portfolios will be appraised.

Because all three of us have been involved in several capacities with Maine's CSRD schools, we are each uniquely positioned to observe and explain how the school portfolios have fit within the broader and multifaceted CSRD implementation effort. This brings us to an important caveat. School portfolios are part of a process that includes Rider A contracts, mid-course reviews, portfolio presentations, and other modes of communication between the state and schools. (We clarify what Rider A contracts and mid-course reviews are in the next section). The school portfolios, in this context, are part of an overall CSRD school reform process. External events that indirectly relate to the school portfolio can trigger many instances of critical collegiality. Similarly, impediments to the creation of critical collegiality may not be directly related to the portfolios. In other words, the effectiveness of the portfolios for generating critical collegiality has been inseparably intertwined with how other portions of the CSRD implementation effort have proceeded at a given school. Winnowing apart the contributions of one or another of these ingredients seems artificial; they are collectively and complementarily operative. In this paper we consider the viability of portfolios as tools to promote critical collegiality, but we acknowledge that this proposition cannot always be directly and cleanly considered because of the concurrent play of related factors.

Finally, although this paper is not an ethnography (because it is not trying to define ways, orientations, and processes of a distinct group), it is nonetheless informed by ethnographic

methodology. Returning to Hargreaves' (1991) distinction between 'contrived' and 'voluntary' collegiality, this paper is concerned with "ways of seeing" (Wolcott 1999). That is, it focuses on how those charged with completing the portfolio view that task. Do they see the portfolio as a burden to be complied with or as opportunity for documentation, organization, reflection, and learning? As a complementary theoretical lens, this paper tends to the emerging methodological rubric of "ethnography of educational policy" (Sutton and Levinson 2001), which focuses on how policies are created, understood, transmitted, resisted, adapted, and co-opted. As with an ethnography (Wilcox 1982), we used multiple methods of data collection and analysis, including applied ones.

II. Portfolios as Professional Development

In September 1999, to meet the MEDOE's Rider A reporting requirements for documenting the objectives and consequences of any expenditure greater than \$25,000, Johnson, the CSRD coordinator, determined that each CSRD school would produce a school portfolio. These portfolios would describe the CSRD-supported change process upon which the school had embarked and the learning and consequences that resulted.⁵ Having decided this, Johnson found Victoria Bernhardt's *The School Portfolio: A Comprehensive Framework for School Improvement* (1994) and used that as a guide. At the end of each school year, each CSRD school would share its portfolio with the CSRD coordinator and would make a formal presentation of it to her and to other state officials and educators that she had recruited. Though portfolio review was intended largely as a formative rather than summative task, failure to prepare and present a portfolio would be grounds for a school to lose continued CSRD funding.⁶

To support schools that were unsure of the new portfolio task, Johnson developed the Continuum of Evidence which offered straightforward guidelines and benchmarks around which schools could coordinate their implementation and their portfolio drafting. The Continuum of Evidence listed eight portfolio elements with a total of 56 benchmarks, or indicators. (Each portfolio element had from 3 to 11 indicators.)⁷ Some indicators directly considered student achievement. But, consistent with Lord's critique of traditional staff development's prioritization of "instrumental significance" (1994, p. 188), most indicators did not consider achievement directly. They were concerned with proof of substantive restructuring, including that which might not have immediate effect on achievement.⁸ The continuum made explicit both what kind of information should be gathered for the portfolio and how it should be arranged. Schools could also see clearly the criteria or expectations within each category. So, during the course of the year, in both the implementation of CSRD and the assemblage of the portfolio, schools were in a position to appraise their efforts in relation to the indicators.

The development of the school portfolio as a means of meeting the state's contractual requirement (i.e., the Rider A contract) and as a mechanism for enhancing and supporting school reflection (i.e., critical collegiality) illustrates how state departments of education can move toward more supportive roles—rather than monitoring ones—in working with schools and districts (Lusi 1997). Twelve of the indicators from five of the eight portfolio elements can be readily tied to characteristics of Lord's Model of Critical Collegiality.⁹ In other words, the practices, habits, and protocols documented in the portfolio may push faculty to interact in a 'critically collegial' way, and the assemblage of the portfolio may also produce the same result. (This second prospect will be discussed later.) Two of the twelve indicators pertain most directly to Lord's model, but the link between critical collegiality and three other indicators is also worth detailing.¹⁰ Portfolio element #4 focuses on assessing and documenting professional development practices. Indicators 4B and 4E (element #4 has multiple indicators) read:

- (4B) The school-wide system of professional development provides resources tailored to the individual goals and career needs of each employee which include support teams, peer observation and consultation, and access to learning beyond the school and the school day.
- (4E) There is evidence that the opportunities for professional development are varied and include knowledge and skill acquisition, modeling, practice, reflection, coaching, networking, and follow-up.

As with Lord's model, both of these indicators presume the implementation and valuing of an iterative process of practice, feedback, reflection, and adjustment. Both also presume a professional role for peers as well as externally-situated experts.

Indicator 4C queries whether a school's CSRD implementation demonstrates that time devoted to professional learning and growth is integral not just in the abstract, but as a portion of each staff member's "work day, week, and year." Indicator 4D asks whether schools consciously scaffold professional development activities to build knowledge and skills over time, instead of using a more haphazard model that consists of one-shot, non-integrated efforts. Both of these indicators measure requisite conditions for critical collegiality. Lord laments and criticizes how, "Time for reflection is limited by the many demands of teachers' time, and teachers often respond to new classroom challenges or demands by turning to the most reliable routines" (1994, pp. 193-194). That is, routines that recreate the problematic status quo. If sufficiently pursued, the practices and conditions described by these indicators will not reproduce the status quo.

Portfolio element #2 inquires whether schools have organized students and teachers into teams and made the appropriate time, space, service, and facilities adjustments to support teaming. Indicator 2G asks if teacher teams have the flexibility to shape schedules, facilities, and other resources to meet student learning goals. While Lord's critical collegiality does not insist on teacher teams or these categories for flexibility per se, it, like indicator 2G, does assume that professionals engaged in critical reflection and growth with their peers will have the flexibility to adjust practices that their colleagues find ineffective or otherwise of concern. Without a structure and culture that permits self-guided change, obtaining accurate peer diagnosis of difficulties and challenges would be a source of unending frustration rather than an activity that supported improved practice. Fully implemented teaming encourages peer diagnosis of difficulties, but schools need to obtain the other conditions of flexibility and responsibility for that peer insight to matter.

While a list of 56 benchmarks to develop evidence is a tall order, it has helped assure that the very portfolio preparation process would require collegial interaction and collaboration. What constituted evidence? When was evidence too voluminous, scarce, or redundant? Who knew best whether the promised processes were occurring? What was the evidence showing? How could it be synthesized for a portfolio narrative? What points would be highlighted at a portfolio presentation? Each of these was a key question that required reflection, analysis, and communication. Moreover, though the indicators were externally set, portfolios gave educators some of the discretion recommended by Lord regarding the substance of professional development.¹¹ Site-based educators decided the substance of the portfolios, usually in consultation with external coaches and/or with Johnson.

III. The Local Context for Using Portfolios

When Maine schools first encountered CSRD, the mixing of state and federal priorities was already in place. The state had already determined that it would concentrate its comparatively small CSRD allocation completely at the high school level. It had further determined that high schools submitting applications would need to indicate how their proposed reforms would encompass the

goals and practices of the state's new and otherwise voluntary high school reform plan known as Promising Futures. However, three elements that were not anticipated at the time of the initial distribution of Maine's CSRD request for proposals—Rider A contracts, school portfolios, and personalized leadership from the SEA—substantially shaped the actual roll-out of the program and gave it much of its promise. Significantly, the strategy and mechanics of CSRD implementation seem to have so far sidestepped the hazard of overt, school-site resistance to 'top-down' management, and site-based educators appear to be willingly and deeply engaged in substantive attempts at school reform. That does not mean, however, that educators have equally embraced all of the promised or needed steps of reform. Indeed, some educators merely comply with steps like the portfolio rather than subscribing completely to the idea. This is not overt resistance, but nor is it the substantive engagement that effective professional development activities require.

In April of 1999, after the list of CSRD awards had been publicized, Johnson, in her role as Maine's CSRD coordinator, said she "naively" attempted to alert MEDOE's division of finance that the CSRD schools were ready to receive their first-year allocation. To her surprise, the staff of the division of finance explained that they could not simply write a check for each school and pop it in the mail. For any financial disbursement of greater than \$25,000, MEDOE requires the completion of a detailed contract—also known as a Rider A—between the recipient and MEDOE. The Rider A contracts required schools to present a more specific demarcation and documentation of the 'deliverables' that their expenditure would create than MEDOE's request for proposals had required of CSRD applicant schools. Moreover, to receive CSRD funding in year two and year three, schools would need to redraft and resubmit adjusted Rider A contracts for reapproval. This reapproval would depend on success with honoring the first contract.

In May of 1999, Johnson told the leaders of the newly designated CSRD schools that they could not yet receive their money because they had not fulfilled a state requirement (the Rider A) of which they, until that moment, had not been aware. Furthermore, Johnson also told them that Rider A contracts required more substantive and short-term proof of implementation and its consequences than the schools' CSRD applications had. Schools would need to revisit their applications and be much more detailed about their promised deliverables, methods of documentation, and measurement of CSRD implementation than they had initially anticipated. They would need to complete a Rider A contract and agree to a mechanism for verifying their compliance with the contract. During the summer of 1999, Johnson worked with all of the schools on their contracts.

From a different vantage point, however, the Rider A requirement meant that each CSRD grantee school had to review its proposal early in year one and make tangible and acceptable promises regarding what it thought it could accomplish. Schools were asked to clarify their goals, benchmarks, and measurement strategies immediately prior to the start of implementation and to a degree not required in the original proposals. CSRD became a primary focus in a timely manner to ensure its broad incorporation into schools' planning and practice. Thus, the moment schools began to work on their Rider A contracts became a moment ripe with possibility. As long as schools created a vehicle for documentation and measurement, and did not retreat into sudden skepticism or resistance, great opportunities for improvement would exist.

Johnson solved the Rider A dilemma in a highly successful manner as measured by schools' continued willingness to try to enact CSRD. Through her solution, she presented two additional factors that contributed to the creation of the CSRD schools as a tight-knit and optimistic cohort—school portfolios and personalized implementation. After offering a mea culpa regarding the Rider A contracts, she simultaneously indicated both a seriousness of purpose and a receptivity to suggestions regarding how to proceed on the matter of the contracts. Rider A contracts were not

an obstacle that could be sidestepped or resisted. But, Johnson opened discussions and encouraged shared problem solving on how to meet the requirements for careful documentation.

In September 1999, after Johnson had notified each school about Rider A compliance and solicited their input, she determined that each CSRD school would produce a school portfolio describing the change process upon which they embarked and the learning and consequences that resulted. Though continued CSRD funding was contingent on successful completion of the portfolio task, she designed the portfolio review process explicitly to be much more akin to formative evaluation than summative evaluation.

MEDOE's strategic adaptation of a federal policy initiative, including the portfolio requirement, added much clarity to the school-to-school coherence of CSRD implementation and the within-school implementation task. But the adaptation also risked making CSRD seem very 'top-down' in a state where such management was acutely resisted (Ruff 2000). Johnson's mediation of the process from her role as the Maine CSRD coordinator proved integral to sidestepping potential resistance. She was able to eliminate much of the authoritarian feel customarily attached to a mandate by being candid and collaborative in her attempt to outline and resolve the unanticipated obstacles. Johnson helped create a micropolitical ecology at each school that viewed the Rider A, the portfolio, and other CSRD-related practices not as tedious compliance activities, but as integral steps in the school improvement process.

Johnson overcame this skepticism by building her personal credibility at each school and explaining the necessity of state and federal requirements, particularly those requirements that schools had not volunteered to comply with when they first drafted their applications (i.e., the Rider A and portfolio requirements which were not known at the time of initial application). Epitomizing the personalized nature of her interaction with each school, she proclaimed at the end of a day-and-a-half CSRD school training workshop in May 2000: "You all have my phone number." They did and they were accustomed to calling her or e-mailing her for guidance. As leaders of the CSRD implementation team at one of the high schools we visited said of her, "She's been a key person. We'll call her and talk for an hour."

The match between Johnson's previous career experience as a high school teacher and the fact that the whole Maine CSRD cohort consisted of high schools helped her gain the participants' trust. Moreover, she had a credible and specific knowledge base that schools could tap because she had gathered the entirety of her teaching experience at a school that had enacted several Promising Futures core practices (i.e., she had experience with interdisciplinary teaming, heterogeneous grouping, student portfolios, aligning performance-based assessment with standards, and so on).

At the heart of Maine's aversion to 'top-down' initiatives is a skepticism about formal authority (i.e., authority based on rank rather than demonstrated competence). In contrast, Maine educators do not regard functional authority with similar suspicion. Johnson had substantial functional authority as the CSRD coordinator. And in situations where she lacked functional authority, she opted for a collaborative leadership style rather than a hierarchical one.

We mention all this because functional authority seems to be a key ingredient of Lord's framework for critical collegiality. For the subject of a critique to react positively and constructively to critical feedback, the receiver must trust the intentions and expertise of the person or group providing the feedback. Mid-course site visits and other vehicles of steady and candid communication served as the means for credible, state-level guidance of each school's CSRD implementation. But portfolios (among other vehicles) became, in several instances, the means for successful and credible intraschool communication, as will be further illustrated.

IV. Identifying the Presence of ‘Critical Collegiality’

Lord asserts that all critical collegiality has six common elements (1994, pp. 192-193). Each of those elements is considered one at a time in this section. They appear here in the order they appear in his text. In each case, there is evidence from at least one of Maine’s CSRD schools that the portfolio implementation task led to the realization of that particular element. However, none of the elements have been realized at all of the CSRD schools. Nor has any one of the 11 schools achieved all six of the elements (at least not fully), though two schools come close. Because these two schools come close and because several of the remaining nine seem to have met with some success on some of these elements, we maintain our original position that portfolios can promote critical collegiality. However, we hasten to add our caveat that they only seem to do so if school site educators feel ownership of the portfolio generation process. For the portfolio creation process to yield critical collegiality, it must be a collaborative, thoughtful, broadly involving proposition. That has happened only some of the time in Maine. When time constraints, micropolitics, and/or hierarchical school structures interfere with these conditions, the promise of portfolios cannot be fully realized.

1. Productive disequilibrium

Sarason (1990) notes that successful school reform requires disenchantment with processes and outcomes as they currently exist. The courage to seek something better, though unknown, in lieu of the comfortable and familiar can only come from such disenchantment. In a similar light, Lord asserts that effective professional development requires a productive disequilibrium; that is, it requires a sense that things are not quite right combined with a belief that they can be made better. From Lord’s perspective, in order to sustain critical collegiality, participating educators must feel that there is always room for improvement in their practice. They must persist in believing that their craft is not yet as good as it could be.

Because of the caveat of the simultaneous play of several CSRD-related factors that we offered in the methodology section, we do not know if the CSRD portfolios actually created productive disequilibrium. We do know that they occasioned much collegial dialogue and reflection. The CSRD process, including the mid-course reviews, produced or supported productive disequilibrium at some schools (though not necessarily for all staff).

From one perspective, the very fact that the schools sought CSRD funding suggests disenchantment with how things were and a willingness to change practice. However, having visited all 11 CSRD high schools in Maine, we feel this view is a misleadingly generous description of some educators at the CSRD schools. Many educators may think their school could be made better and may be willing to sign on to a plan that brings their school more resources, but this is not tantamount to serious questioning of current practices and structures. These educators are ready for “reform by addition” (Sizer 1983), but not for the restructuring that Lord thinks is necessary to enable all students to achieve to high standards. Perhaps we can characterize the distinction between the two views suggested here as the difference between a willingness to tweak and supplement versus a willingness to take apart, question, scrutinize, discontinue, and rebuild.

From the seven returned surveys about portfolios we learned that, in many cases, the portfolios occasioned reflection by school leadership teams. (All CSRD schools were encouraged to create broadly representative leadership teams that would oversee grant implementation. The actual broadness of these teams varied. In many instances the grant development team became the grant implementation team.) In two cases out of the seven, portfolios provided the context for reflection among the entire school faculty. For example, one school devoted an end-of-the-year professional development day to the entire staff’s perusal and analysis of the portfolio, using it as a springboard

for a conversation about what they had accomplished and what still needed to be done. In their portfolios, four schools included lists or summaries of their successes and barriers that had been developed for the mid-course review (n=4 of 7). Such lists represent a form of ongoing critique and reflection at the school level (see Lord's sixth element, collective generativity).

2. Embracing fundamental intellectual virtues

For this element, Lord includes educators' receptivity to new ideas, their willingness to recognize and reject weak practices and flimsy arguments, and their acceptance of responsibility to acquire and use information relevant to their arguments. We can put this item into context by departing from Lord's broad reference point of collegial interaction and focusing on the more discrete consideration of the portfolio completion task. School personnel were open to this new task (at least at a compliance level) and the work helped them acquire information for the purposes of supporting various contentions about change at their school. This process of marshalling evidence to argue a point is a substantial accomplishment when such a process can be related to changes in other school-site practices. It suggests the deployment of an important intellectual habit. It says much less, however, if its impetus was only to comply with the demands of the Rider A.

The CSR process is itself a collection of new ideas about school reform and professional development. The school portfolio is the mechanism used by schools to collect and document their journey down the path of school reform. However, it is difficult, and perhaps unimportant, to separate how documentation required for the portfolio drives reform processes versus how existing reform processes generate evidence that educators can include in a portfolio. The school portfolio documents the consideration of new ideas and changes in school structure and practice. It embodies the habit of gathering evidence to support a point. The schools' use and creation of the school portfolio supports Lord's idea that professional development activities should create a collective responsibility for tracking teacher practice. In each responding school (i.e., all seven), there was a team of educators who were collectively responsible for creating the portfolio. They essentially created a professional record of teacher (and school) practice and innovation that would meet the requirements of the state for documenting a school's progress.

In three schools, the collective responsibility for creating the school portfolio went beyond the school leadership team and involved the everyday teaching staff. One school formed a separate committee to manage and collect information from teachers for the portfolio. In another school, the staff were not only aware of the CSR portfolio, but each staff member was asked to contribute a piece to it. While many teachers undoubtedly resisted this new responsibility, they were at the very least aware of the portfolio and the prospect of taking ownership of the portfolio process. One could propose that the portfolio generation supported the creation of a "normative culture of responsibility" (Elmore 2000) and increased communication among staff. At one school, educators made the portfolio the centerpiece for an extended state-of-the-school reflection among all staff at the end of the school year. In this example, the portfolio process seems to have enabled critical collegiality.

The responses to our portfolio survey questions also show that in a number of schools there is still a division between what is considered subject to change and what is off-limits. Though he was discussing labor union issues, Paul Durrenberger's (2000) observation is salient here: "The way people think about things is rooted in their daily experience. If what you teach people is in agreement with their daily reality, then education appears to work. However, no matter what you tell people, if it is counter to daily experience, it does not have much impact and will not make a difference." Portfolios brought some proposed changes to the forefront that, though not yet in place, seemed sensible and easy to accommodate. Educators pursued these changes. Portfolios also

included content that pointed to uncomfortable potential changes. When educators discussed those changes, they ignored data and/or contortions were made to sidestep the implications. This hardly amounts to critical collegiality. For example, one can see, by its absence from the portfolios, how student tracking is untouchable, even when there is substantial evidence of common teacher planning time becoming an exhausting logistical feat when tracking is in place.

In almost every school surveyed and visited, a portion of the school staff is not active in the implementation of CSRD, nor in the use and creation of the school portfolio. It is not clear whether these uninvolved educators will find salient an argument made through the use of a portfolio. Unless the people involved share the school portfolio with the entire school, it seems clear that the portfolio will not serve as a mechanism for widespread critical collegiality. But, the prospect remains that critical collegiality might describe the habits, orientations, and modes of interaction of a subunit of a school's staff (e.g., the school's CSRD leadership team).

In the schools where the portfolio is still a task rather than a process with broad staff subscription, the portfolio will likely exist for a few years and a few teachers will embrace it. When those teachers leave or the school moves in a different direction, however, it will disappear. Those individuals who participate in the creation of their school portfolio will engage in critical collegiality, but the longevity of that proposition and the likelihood of persistence in using a portfolio is uncertain.

Survey responses were nearly uniform, with one exception, regarding the value of having chances to reflect. Along with the widespread belief that the portfolios helped organize planning, documentation, and next steps, it seems viable that the portfolio helped schools deliberate about the strength of practices and find the necessary courage to reject weak ones. However, some CSRD schools had time constraints that led to strategizing about the most efficient ways to comply with the portfolio requirement. The concern replaced a necessary conversation about promoting new habits of mind and interaction among educators through the portfolio task. One survey respondent emphatically stated that her school actively limited the prospective role of most of the faculty in the portfolio process because more input meant delay in the portfolio's completion. In contrast, another respondent said her school intended to involve more staff in the preparation of the year two portfolio.

3. Empathetic understanding

This is perhaps the hardest element on Lord's list to try to attach to the portfolio process. There is nothing intrinsic to even the most deeply engaged portfolio production process that directly compels participants to put themselves (temporarily) in the shoes of their colleagues or students. Nonetheless, we did collect some evidence that the portfolio process yielded instances of heightened empathy. According to one survey respondent, participants viewed the school portfolio activity favorably as a means to better understand what the students were encountering when they had to complete portfolios of their own work. Another noted that the "portfolio allowed us to model expectations we had of students." (Setting aside this empathy with students, respondents did not report any among faculty members.)

We suspect that there was an unrecognized empathy element at work among those respondents who credited the portfolio process with "generating greater awareness of what co-workers are doing," promoting "more collaboration in classroom and professional development activities," and "facilitating staff working together." Perhaps staff also felt professional empathy at the school that noted "those involved with the [portfolio] review have developed into a team."

4. Developing and honing negotiation, communication, and disagreement resolution skills

No doubt, those who actually prepared the portfolios developed some negotiation, communication, and disagreement resolution skills because the sheer task of portfolio creation and presentation required the collaborative labor of several individuals. But we found it difficult to substantiate whether these experiences had broad, substantive impact on the school's ability to help all students achieve standards. As Muncey and McQuillan (1996) found in their long-term study of the Coalition of Essential Schools, the deep involvement of just a few in a reform effort (and clearly portfolio creation constituted deep involvement) can exacerbate existing faculty schisms and inhibit the long-term prospects of the reform's success. Possibly, portfolio preparation (a proxy indicator of CSRD involvement) contributed to differentiation and conflict, though it did not necessarily cause it. (To be sure, we are being speculative here.) Clearly, several Maine CSRD schools struggled with disagreements about how to move CSRD forward, how to change classroom practices, and so on. At these divided schools, we have not yet found any evidence of the portfolios' possible contributions to 'critical collegiality' and that collegiality's incubation of disagreement resolution skills, except perhaps in the negative.

On the other hand, evidence of improved goal-setting and increased collaboration (with alleged ties to the portfolio process) at several sites suggests that portfolios at some schools may be vehicles that enable negotiation, communication, and problem resolution. Particularly to the extent that the portfolios are assemblages of information that can support data-driven change, the portfolios have a narrowing effect on the ways in which colleagues can disagree. Empirical evidence can be brought to bear when trying to understand or resolve a conflict. In other words, portfolios may well promote improved communication and negotiation in ways consistent with the notion of critical collegiality. And if the empathy noted in the previous element was a product of the portfolio process, then one could expect that empathetic understanding's contribution to communication and negotiation would also be considered favorable evidence of a portfolio's contribution to critical collegiality.

5. Increasing teachers comfort with ambiguity and uncertainty

There may be indirect evidence of this dimension in comments like "[the] portfolio organized goals and direction of reform" and "reflection gave us confidence." However, it sounded like participants were praising the reduction of ambiguity instead of showing actual comfort with it. Though our survey did not have a direct prompt about this dimension, in our experience, Maine's CSRD roll-out has pointed schools to new but certain places. The 56 indicators in the Continuum of Evidence and the core practices recommended in *Promising Futures* are clear regarding what processes educators should be engaged in. In other words, there has been very little in the use of the portfolios or, more holistically, in the Maine roll-out of CSRD that suggests educators view consistent ambiguity and uncertainty as valuable.¹²

6. Achieving 'collective generativity'

It appears that the portfolios have contributed greatly in this dimension, though they could contribute more. Most schools credited the portfolio generation process with helping to clarify and refine program goals and identify and eliminate weak practices. Participants credited the logistical task of preparing the portfolio with compelling organization and a related confidence about the state of the school change process. That said, the portfolios do not yet seem to have contributed to overcoming the problem that Sizer (1983) refers to as "reform by addition." In other words, the schools have claimed that the portfolio helped them see the path forward more clearly, but they are not showing evidence of integrating programs, eliminating redundancies, or even using the

portfolios in lieu of other accountability mechanisms. Thus, crediting the portfolios with helping educators know how best to proceed needs to be asserted with a caveat.

V. What Teachers Learned

Equating time on task with learning is a flawed proposition. However, it is important to note the hundreds of hours spent by teachers on portfolio reflection at Maine's CSRSD high schools. Some teachers (though not all in most buildings) have worked hard on the portfolio task and, as a result, have gathered data, reflected upon the information, tested proposed next steps in relation to the data, and generated lists of successes and failures. The school portfolios have involved teachers in a tantalizing new way that promises more educator control over the reform process as well as a more deliberative approach to it.

However, much of the promise of the portfolios in regards to forging critical collegiality has not been realized yet. Schools still struggle with the complexity and immensity of the preparation task, and obstacles to reform remain firmly entrenched. Educators continue to use time constraints as an excuse for not engaging further with portfolio creation and review. If the portfolios are to realize their promise to promote critical collegiality and the related processes of school-level self-scrutiny and improvement, three issues need attention:

- Many schools need help involving more educators and a broader cross-section of school staff in the portfolio development process. Those peripherally involved in the portfolio process cannot gain from it.
- Schools need assistance in eliminating factors that impede broader participation in the portfolio's creation. Educators need to strategize about what existing professional development activities they can discontinue to allow school personnel the time to participate with the portfolio. Schools could investigate ways to integrate the school portfolio into existing professional development activities so that the portfolio becomes part of teachers' daily or weekly experiences and is not seen as an addition to their duties. It seems probable that educators could substitute the idea of portfolios as archives of where the school has been and where it is going for a host of previously pursued professional development and administrative tasks or incorporate it into them.
- The 11 CSRSD schools referenced here are soon to begin their third and final year of CSRSD. With the completion of the requirements for the Rider A through the portfolio process, an alternative rationale for continuing the portfolio process must be created, preferably an internal one at each school. Just as schools gain adeptness at portfolio creation, they risk abandoning the practice. Also, schools need to construct a new, though perhaps similar, external portfolio review mechanism so the constructive feedback that is central to critical collegiality can remain a key ingredient of the portfolio process. Absent the review, portfolios would be more like data depositories without the promise of contributing to data analysis, reflection, and the determination of how to move forward.

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¹ This paper was initially prepared to be presented as part of a session entitled “Critical Collegiality and Self-Renewing Schools” at the American Educational Research Association’s 2001 annual meeting in Seattle.

² Lord (1994) sees the enactment of ‘critical collegiality’ as a crucial mechanism for helping schools shift to having all their students achieve to high standards. In this sense, Lord’s views have much in common with Elmore’s (2000) concept of schools’ ‘internal normative culture of accountability.’ Thus, though our analytic lens here is trained on Lord, we think portfolios could be a tool for achieving Elmore’s condition as well.

³ See Lord’s first characteristic for the ‘family resemblance across professional communities’ (1994, p. 198).

⁴ We are not well-positioned to consider whether 7 of 11 is a good or poor response rate. Schools received our questionnaire by e-mail from Susan Hackett Johnson and were to return them to Edmund Hamann (also by e-mail) whom they did not know as well. Schools were given little time to respond to our questionnaire—only two weeks—one of which was a vacation week. Five responses came on time; two arrived late but could still be included. It is unclear whether the other four schools ignored the request or missed the tight deadline and decided it was too late to try to submit something (whatever their willingness otherwise). In all cases, one person filled out the questionnaire, though perhaps in consultation with someone else at the school. We can assure respondents’ central involvement with CSRD and with the portfolios, but we have no direct way of knowing to what extent their responses were representative of school-wide perspectives regarding the portfolios. We do know, however, that during the 2001 mid-course reviews, unlike the reviews of the first year, educators directed much less angst and comment toward the portfolios. Apart from conversations regarding the logistics of portfolio presentation sites and times, portfolios rarely became more than a peripheral topic in mid-course review conversations.

⁵ As in most jurisdictions, CSRD schools in Maine have received \$50,000 per year. Annual funding lasts for three years as long as the school’s expenditures are in accordance with promises specified in the annual Rider A contract submitted to the Maine Department of Education. As of the middle of the second year of the CSRD program, no CSRD school in Maine had lost its funding.

⁶ See Herman, *et al.* (1987) for detailed explanation of the differences between formative and summative evaluation.

⁷ In crafting the list of portfolio elements and indicators, Johnson referenced the six core principles of *Promising Futures* and borrowed from a template prepared by state-level CSRD implementers in New York.

⁸ Lord (1994) is not opposed to improvements in student achievement; however, he does criticize the tradition of staff development oriented towards modest fillips that temporarily nudge scores up but have little long-term impact and are not integrated with a long-term strategy for improvement. A mechanism that chronicles substantive restructuring (as Maine’s CSRD portfolios proposed to do) must capture evidence of changed processes, not just immediate fluctuations in outcomes that are difficult to attribute to any specific factor.

⁹ We describe the six elements of critical collegiality defined by Lord (1994, pp. 192-193) one by one in Section IV of this paper. As indicated earlier, in general they all refer to school professionals’ use of observation, formative feedback, and adjusted practice together as a mechanism of self-critique and improvement. Though external advice can figure significantly in this type of a system, peer-to-peer professional commentary is the defining feature.

¹⁰ Coding the indicator first by portfolio element number and then by the letter attached to each indicator in the Continuum of Evidence (see the Appendix), we attached the following indicators to critical collegiality conditions: 2B, 2F, 2G, 2K, 3B, 4B, 4C, 4D, 4E, 5D, 7A, and 7E. For indicators 3B, 4B, 7A, and 7E, the tie-in to Lord’s (1994) ‘critical collegiality’ is peripheral or the link is plausible but not an automatic consequence of the indicator. In contrast, indicators 4B and 4E practically describe the practices necessary for critical collegiality.

¹¹ Though Johnson (who, as noted, consulted with state-level CSRD implementers in New York and reviewed the core principles of *Promising Futures*) selected the 56 indicators, she established them in consultation with school personnel and in reference to a process—the enactment of CSRD—that 80% of the faculty had accepted in a vote accompanying the original application. In other words, as we worry about educators’ ownership or agency in relation to the portfolio completion process, it is worth remembering that they sought out CSRD, though not the specific school portfolio tool.

¹² This is not intended as a criticism of Maine’s CSRD roll-out; rather, it is only to acknowledge a point of discrepancy between that program and Lord’s (1994) model.

Appendix

Critical Collegiality Survey Questionnaire • Continuum of Evidence

Survey questions for Maine educators who are charged with maintaining their school's CSRD portfolios

BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTION: Please describe your personal role in the year one and year two CSRD/Rider A school portfolio completion and review processes.

MAIN QUESTIONS:

- (1) As a brief overview question (please answer in just two or three sentences), how has the completion and presentation of your CSRD-initiated school portfolio affected your school?

- (2) Please describe the processes your school used to create your year one school portfolio. How aware of the school portfolio requirement were most of the educational staff in your school? How involved were most of the staff in its creation and/or review?

- (3) What have been the effects of the portfolio process on staff collaboration and/or collegiality?

- (4) One of the 'buzz-phrases' of contemporary school reform is 'data-driven change'. Did creating or presenting your portfolio lead to any changes in your school's course of action for school reform (or did it reiterate the utility of any of the changes upon which you have embarked)? Do you think those changes were 'data driven'? (Please explain.)

- (5) Please describe whether, when, and how the year one school portfolio generation and presentation processes compelled reflection about your school by staff at your school.

- (6) How many staff and staff hours did the school need to complete the portfolio during year one? Have you found or do you expect the year two portfolio to differ much from the first year's process (in terms of who does it or how long it takes)?

- (7) What role(s), if any, did either Susan Johnson or your school's CSRD-required external coach play in helping you understand, complete, and/or gain meaning from the school portfolio task? Did anyone else not on your school staff assist you? (If so, please describe.)

- (8) Was the Continuum of Evidence a useful guide that assisted your portfolio creation? Is there anything about the continuum that you would change? Were there gaps or redundancies in it?

- (9) Are there any other comments you would like to share regarding the portfolio process?

Portfolio Element #1

Effective Teaching and Learning Core Practices #6 & #7 (Continued)

By the end of year one:

- G. The school is using performance data to make decisions about the school's CSRD program and model.
- H. The school has established benchmarks that express the adequate yearly academic progress they expect students to demonstrate and has communicated these benchmarks or expectations to staff and parents.
- I. The school demonstrates through local and/or state measures that students are making academic progress.
- J. Students have, at all times, learning goals that focus and direct their activities; they pursue learning activities until their learning goals are attained.

| No Evidence | Little Evidence | Some Evidence | Strong Evidence |
|-------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
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Notes:

Portfolio Element #2

Effective Organizational Core Practices #9 and #10 (Continued)

Indicators

By the end of year one:

- G. Teacher teams, in concert with students and parents, have the flexibility to shape schedules, facilities, and other resources to meet student learning goals.
- H. The time frame in which learning occurs is unlimited; the length and form of a learning day, week, and year are shaped to meet student learning goals.
- I. The co-curriculum is an essential part of the curriculum; students are expected to learn valuable skills and attitudes in each, and all curriculum is designed to address common and individual learning goals and standards.
- J. Resources for learning are not limited to the school building and budget, and include social services, universities, businesses, and public service agencies, among others.

| | No Evidence | Little Evidence | Some Evidence | Strong Evidence |
|----|-------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| G. | | | | |
| H. | | | | |
| I. | | | | |
| J. | | | | |

Notes:

Portfolio Element #3

LEADERSHIP TEAM AND EXTERNAL SUPPORT

The school has a leadership team that guides the faculty in its work and makes appropriate use of high-quality, external technical assistance to implement its CSRD program and model.

Indicators

By the end of year one:

- A. The leadership team is made up of representatives from school stakeholder groups, has an established decision-making protocol, communicates regularly with all constituencies, and its decisions reflect school and community input.
- B. The leadership team meets regularly to discuss and monitor CSRD activities. The team uses school data to inform its decisions and plan next steps.
- C. The school has identified the areas where it will need technical assistance.
- D. The school is aware of a variety of available, external technical assistance beyond the model developer and has begun using technical assistance from multiple sources as needed.
- E. The school has identified other assistance that it needs in order to successfully implement its CSRD program and model.
- F. The school is aware of and is requesting, as appropriate, assistance from the district office.

No Evidence Little Evidence Some Evidence Strong Evidence

| No Evidence | Little Evidence | Some Evidence | Strong Evidence |
|-------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
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Notes:

Portfolio Element #4
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

In implementing the CSRD program and the CSRD model, the school is providing appropriate, high-quality, continuous professional development and training to administrators, faculty, staff, and parents that is designed to increase the school's capacity for continuous, comprehensive improvement of student achievement.

Indicators

By the end of year one:

- A. The school has a detailed, articulated professional development plan that includes sufficient resources to support the CSRD program and the goals set by the school for improvement of student performance.
- B. The school-wide system of professional development provides resources tailored to the individual goals and career needs of each employee, which include support teams, peer observation and consultation, and access to learning beyond the school and the school day.
- C. Time devoted to professional learning and growth is considered an integral part of the staff member's work day, week, and year.
- D. Professional development is scaffolded to build knowledge and skills over time rather than relying on isolated, one-shot trainings.
- E. There is evidence that the opportunities for professional development vary and include knowledge and skill acquisition, modeling, practice, reflection, coaching, networking, and follow-up.

| | No Evidence | Little Evidence | Some Evidence | Strong Evidence |
|----|-------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| A. | | | | |
| B. | | | | |
| C. | | | | |
| D. | | | | |
| E. | | | | |

Portfolio Element #4

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (Continued)

Indicators

By the end of year one:

- F. Parents and representatives from community-based organizations are involved in CSRD professional development activities when appropriate.

- G. Core administrators and faculty have received in-depth training in the CSRD model. All administrators and faculty have received a comprehensive orientation and are able to articulate how the CSRD model complements the school's CSRD program and goals.

No Evidence Little Evidence Some Evidence Strong Evidence

| No Evidence | Little Evidence | Some Evidence | Strong Evidence |
|-------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| | | | |
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Notes:

Portfolio Element #5

STAFF SUPPORT AND PARTICIPATION

The school administration, faculty, and staff are knowledgeable about, and supportive of, the CSRSD program and model and are actively engaged in implementation.

Indicators

By the end of year one:

- A. The school principal and other key administrators are conversant in, and supportive of, the CSRSD program and model and play active leadership roles in implementation.
- B. The majority of faculty and staff are supportive of the CSRSD program and model, have received an orientation and initial training, and are actively involved in implementation.
- C. Implementation of the CSRSD model in the school is proceeding appropriately and is not jeopardizing the fidelity or integrity of the model's framework.
- D. There is a process in place for administrators and faculty to collectively address barriers to CSRSD program and model implementation.
- E. Key district office personnel (superintendent, asst. supt., curriculum coordinators, etc) have been oriented to the school's CSRSD plan and model.
- F. The superintendent has taken steps to address issues/problems that are related to the support and implementation of CSRSD at the district and school level.

No Evidence Little Evidence Some Evidence Strong Evidence

Notes:

Portfolio Element #6

PARENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The school provides opportunities for meaningful parent and community involvement in the CSRSD program.

Indicators

By the end of year one:

- A. There is a building-level decision-making committee (may have already existed) that includes parents in discussions, plans, and the implementation of school improvement initiatives.
- B. Parents and community members have received an orientation on the school's CSRSD program and model and receive periodic information on the progress of the CSRSD program and model.
- C. Parents and community members are actively engaged in meaningful roles related to the implementation of the CSRSD program and model.
- D. Community-based organizations working with the school have received an orientation on the school's CSRSD program and model and receive periodic information on the progress of the CSRSD program and model.
- E. The school board has been briefed about the school's CSRSD plan and model and has received a general orientation. The school board receives periodic progress reports on CSRSD.

No Evidence Little Evidence Some Evidence Strong Evidence

| | No Evidence | Little Evidence | Some Evidence | Strong Evidence |
|----|-------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| A. | | | | |
| B. | | | | |
| C. | | | | |
| D. | | | | |
| E. | | | | |

Notes:

Portfolio Element #7
EVALUATION

The school has prepared and is conducting an evaluation of the implementation and impact of the CSRD program and model.

Indicators

By the end of year one:

- A. The school has identified, developed, and implemented instruments, monitoring and feedback procedures, and information systems that will provide information about CSRD implementation.
- B. The school is collecting and analyzing school-level data that, along with state and district assessments, will provide information about the impact of the CSRD program and model on student academic performance.
- C. There is evidence that school administrators, faculty, parents, and other key stakeholders have examined evaluation information (implementation and impact) that could result in modifications or changes to the CSRD program or model.
- D. The school is disaggregating, analyzing, and interpreting student data by factors such as grade level, race, gender, poverty, dominant language, migrant status, and handicapping condition.
- E. The school has created a portfolio for self-assessment and uses it to organize its school-wide reform efforts. Teachers and other members of the school community are aware of the portfolio and the process for updating and adding information.
- F. The school's evaluation of its CSRD activities has had an impact on the school's plan for activities in the second year.

No Evidence Little Evidence Some Evidence Strong Evidence

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Notes:

Portfolio Element #8
ALLOCATION OF RESOURCES

The school identified the resources (personnel, materials/equipment, service, funds, etc.) that it needs to implement the CSRD program and model and has begun the process of realigning resources to sustain the CSRD program after funding ends.

Indicators

By the End of year one:

- A. The school has included a budget summary that clearly documents expenditures and shows they are related to CSRD activities.
- B. The school has done an analysis of the budget summary from year one to document what resources are needed to implement the CSRD program and model and has proposed a budget summary for year two based on this information.
- C. The school has analyzed its existing resources (local/state/federal funds, personnel, equipment/materials, etc.) and is in the process of realigning those resources to sustain the CSRD program and model.

| No Evidence | Little Evidence | Some Evidence | Strong Evidence |
|-------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
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Notes:

Portfolio Review Summary Feedback

Indicators

By the end of year one:

A. The school is meeting the terms and conditions of the CSRD grant.

| No Evidence | Little Evidence | Some Evidence | Strong Evidence |
|-------------|-----------------|---------------|-----------------|
| | | | |

Summary feedback by reviewers: