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**ORGANISATIONAL SOCIALISATION THROUGH DATA USE IN THE EXPANSION OF AN  
ACADEMY CHAIN**

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**1. Background and Theoretical Framework**

My study examines connections among teacher professional identity, teachers' uses of pupil performance data and modalities of organisational control in relationships between schools in the formation of a new chain of primary academies in the East midlands. Nurturing connections across schools has developed into a prominent feature of policy aimed at broad and sustainable reform in diverse educational systems, and professional interaction around student data is a typical feature of such relationships. Research into the microprocesses involved in school-to-school development in education is limited.

Recent research around variation in teachers' uses of student data to improve instruction has emphasised the close connections among specific practices of data use and organisational processes (Coburn & Turner, 2011; Honig & Venkateswaran, 2012; Little, 2012; Spillane, 2012; Young, 2006). This holistic focus on data use emphasises teachers' practices of data use as one aspect of societal practice within the multi-layered and institutionalised structure of schooling, transcending attributions of variation in data use to single variables, such as 'leadership', or descriptive emphases on generalisable 'best practice' (Coburn & Turner, 2011, p. 174).

The approach this study takes is to focus on the hybrid space created through interorganisational work and how this regulates possibilities for 'identities in practice' (Holland, Lachicotte Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998) as well as how that space is regulated by the existing modalities of the organisations from which it came to be. While possibilities for meaning are mediated by institutional structures, available meanings for a particular person are shaped by social location (Hasan, 2002). The social location of individuals provides the tacit 'rules of engagement' with pupil data as a tool, shapes what the data means and how it will be used as a facet of assessment. Activity around data use for formative assessment may be robust within a school, but a particular teacher's engagement with data use practices hinges crucially on her or his social location.

The hybrid space of interorganisational work offers the potential of trying out new positions that enable making meaning of data in different ways than those within the purview of existing routines. The hybrid space of the school-to-school relationship creates the possibilities for not just the translation of available identities but for new identities in practice to emerge. The creation of the space is conditioned by the emergent and situated character of the discursive regulation of interpersonal relations within the broader frame of social, cultural and historical regulation.

In this study, that broader frame took the shape of a 'lead' school, a newly-converted primary academy, that was recruited by the Local Authority to sponsor a school that had been struggling for many years and was under threat of closure. The headmaster, her assistant head and the chair of the governing body of the school decided to sponsor the struggling academy by forming a charitable trust, with the intention of developing a small chain of primary academies across the region.

## **2. Objectives and Research Questions**

This study examines connections among teacher professional identity, teachers' uses of pupil performance data and modalities of organisational control in relationships between the lead and supported schools. I have been exploring how teachers' patterns of data-use and the organisational contexts of that use are mutually shaped in the Senior Leadership Teams and Years 4 and 6 within each school, as well as in the work that teachers in Years 4, in particular, have done together.

The research questions that guide this research are the following:

1. How is organisational modality realised through patterns of practice that involve representations of pupils through data, within each school?
2. How does the recognition and realisation of modalities of organisational control condition the appropriation of patterns of practice around uses of pupil data across schools?
3. How can the elaboration of alternative patterns of positioning through collaboratively designed protocols engender different patterns of practice and associated modalities of organisational control among teachers and school leaders working within and across schools?

## **3. Methodology**

The research design makes use of an embedded case study to address research questions (1) and (2) and draws on findings from these case studies to develop collaboratively designed protocols (McDonald, Mohr, Dichter, & McDonald, 2007) around data use that will be used in a workshop with teachers from both schools. The case study consists of two primary academies in a formal pairing, a lead school (converter academy) and a supported schools (sponsored academy). The pairing as an embedded case comprises nested, dependent cases—those of the lead and the supported school as unique organisational contexts as well as that of the pairing of lead and supported schools as a hybrid context. Thus, the analysis of the embedded case depends on discerning structural and interactional regulation within each school as well as regulation as it occurs in the hybrid space of professional collaboration between the pair of schools and across the schools.

Fieldwork consisted of data collected over 16 months, June 2012-October 2013. Data was generated during four visits in each of the schools from semi-structured interviews (22) of senior school leaders, year-team leaders, and teachers; naturalistic observations of teacher meetings (8 hours); and review of school documents. All interviews and meetings were documented through fieldnotes and audiorecording. Identified sequences of team meetings were transcribed for detailed discourse analysis. The approach to discourse analysis that I am using is an adaptation of D-Analysis, which examines the interplay between patterns of positioning in interaction and the elaboration of institutional categories related to pupil data use in teaching and learning (Eddy Spicer, 2012, 2013; Middleton, 2010). The analysis traces how institutionalised categories and ways of positioning relate to the ways teachers make sense of their data use practice in collaborative work. Analysis is currently ongoing.

## **4. Key Findings**

My analysis has drawn particular attention to the role of pupil data and teacher meaning-making in *repairing* and *negotiating* identities-in-practice. The exploration of teacher identities-in-practice in

the supported school in the initial phase of school-to-school support revealed initial resistance to the categories used by the lead school to define pupil groups, because of the perceived differences in pupil populations in the two schools. Although both schools served communities with predominantly minority populations, the demographic of the supported school included more children living in challenging circumstances (e.g., single parent households, higher unemployment, lower parental levels of education). What constituted valid pupil data had to be renegotiated with the lead school to gain legitimacy with supported school teachers. This process of negotiation served as a way of acknowledging the supported teachers as valid professionals after their school had been designated as requiring support, and culminated with a realignment of categories of pupils across the two schools. However, tensions subsequently arose around levels of challenge and expectations of pupil progress. This led some supported school teachers to dismiss pupil data as a valid professional tool and others to become more strident about its use. I have also been exploring the notion of *multiple accountabilities* in data use and the variation in school leaders' and teachers' uses of data. At the time of this writing, analysis continues, as does negotiation around defining the 'hybrid space' that represents the interaction between the two schools through the collaborative development of a workshop around data-use (Research Question 3). Understanding how power and control condition the distribution, recontextualisation and evaluation of professional practice offers a way of revealing how institutional elaboration operates between organisations to enforce compliance, catalyze resistance, or promote adaptability.

## **5. Implications for Theory and Policy**

The use of pupil data in school-to-school support is a keystone in the current English government's educational policy, with England at the vanguard of this approach and other national systems observing the English experience. Research into the microprocesses involved in school-to-school development in education is limited. I anticipate that findings from this study will offer practitioners ways of understanding how interaction around data serves to channel the ways in which teachers make sense of individual pupils and classrooms. I hope to develop and pilot protocols that will make explicit underlying assumptions around the uses of data as well as enable teachers and leaders to shape their uses of data more flexibly to the specific needs of particular contexts. This study also aspires to contribute to organisational theory by applying a novel theoretical lens to explain the dynamics of interorganisational control. Such relationships are becoming increasingly critical as patterns of provision of schooling proliferate and the links among the state and schools becomes increasingly complex.

## **6. Future Plans**

I plan to complete data analysis and writing up of a journal article for submission to Teachers College Record. I will also continue to work with leaders and teachers in the school to develop a data use protocol.

## **7. Related Papers and Presentations**

Eddy Spicer, D.H. (forthcoming September 2014). *Organizational control and pupil data in school-to-school development*. Paper accepted for presentation at the International Society of Cultural and Action Research 2014 Conference, Sidney, Australia.

Eddy Spicer, D.H. (forthcoming April 2014) *Modalities of organizational control and teachers' use of pupil data in school-to-school development in England*. Paper accepted for presentation at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA.

Eddy Spicer, D.H. (October 2013) *Organisational socialisation and data-use*. Paper presented at the final workshop of the Structural Reform, Governance and Leadership Research Programme,

British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS).  
Birmingham, UK. 18 October.

Eddy Spicer, D.H. (April 2013) *Re-positioning the professional in the formation of an academy chain*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, California, USA. 29 April. [primarily drew on the first year of Structural Reform funding but also involved discussion of questions explored in the second year.]

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