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THE FIRST LINK PROFESSIONALIZATION IN THE EMERGENCE OF A CHAIN OF PRIMARY ACADEMIES

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Objectives

Understanding the dynamics of control in school-to-school relationships in England is increasingly critical as patterns of provision of schooling proliferate and the links amongst the state and schools become increasingly complex. The question of control is particularly relevant to the development of interlinked groups, or chains, of schools. The past two decades of educational reform have emphasized the development of school chains in the secondary sector. The importance of the primary sector is only now coming into clear view. An emphasis on the project of professionalization in primary schools is particularly germane because chains of primary academies are not as firmly established as chains of secondary academies (Hill et al., 2012) and, more important, the nature of professionalization in the primary school has long been an issue of interest and debate (Jones et al., 2008).

The aim of the research reported here is to improve understanding of the ways in which formal school-to-school pairings, or interorganizational relationships, in the primary sector reshape notions of professionalization. The study investigates interorganizational control as an interactional process of negotiating authority across the levels of profession, organization and person. The study explores the evolution of control in the emergence of a new chain of primary schools. The study draws on the notion of 'figured worlds' (Holland et al., 1998) to describe how particular organizational modalities regulate the construction of authority and shape available meanings. Such charting of institutional regulation draws on Bernstein's sociology of knowledge and schooling to elaborate a systematic way of describing variation in authority based on modalities of interorganizational control (Bernstein, 2000; Daniels, 2008b; Eddy Spicer, 2012; Tyler, 1988). An understanding modalities of control within, between and across schools opens up possibilities for examining the social principles that produce variation in authority.

The study site is a newly-formed relationship amongst five schools and an academy sponsor across two Local Authorities in England. Analysis of patterns of authority based on observations, interviews and documentary sources reveals multiple projects of professionalization which are, at crucial moments, in tension with one another and with the development of adaptive solutions to unique, local circumstances. The study problematizes normative approaches to leadership development (e.g., the promulgation of common standards of best practice) by articulating the complex dependencies amongst professionalization, leadership, organizational form and local setting.

Background¹

The study examined the creation of a relatively new form of ‘academy chain’, one that intended to involve only primary schools. A newly established multi-academy trust, ‘Next Generation Academies Trust’ (NGAT), sought to sponsor ‘Cherry Junior’, a school that had received a series of critical Ofsted inspections, whose rolls of pupils were declining, and which had undergone a number of changes in leadership. At the request of the Local Authority, NGAT brokered the intervention of a National Leader of Education from an outstanding primary school, Bidwell Lower, in an adjoining Local Authority. NGAT had longstanding ties to this school leader due to collaborative work on several National College and formerly London Challenge programmes (e.g., ‘Leading from the Middle’, and the ‘Improving Teacher Programme’ and ‘Outstanding Teacher Programme’). The headteacher of Bidwell thus became Executive Head of Cherry Junior. She sought help from a colleague, also a National Leader of Education, at an outstanding primary school, Firth Junior, in the same Local Authority as Cherry Junior. Both Bidwell and Firth Junior had recently (2011-12) attained academy status as converters. Under increasing pressure from the Department of Education, the Local Authority encouraged the Board of Cherry Junior to become a sponsored academy. NGAT put themselves forward as the sponsor, which the board of Cherry Junior accepted. This relationship aimed to forge the first link in what was anticipated as a chain of sponsored primary academies.

	Cherry Jr	Bidwell Lower	Firth Jr
Age range	7-11	7-9	7-11
No of pupils	173	537	653
Ofsted grade	Satisfactory	Outstanding	Outstanding
FSM	above average	well above avg	above average
SEN	above average	average	below average

Table 1: Key characteristics of three primary schools.

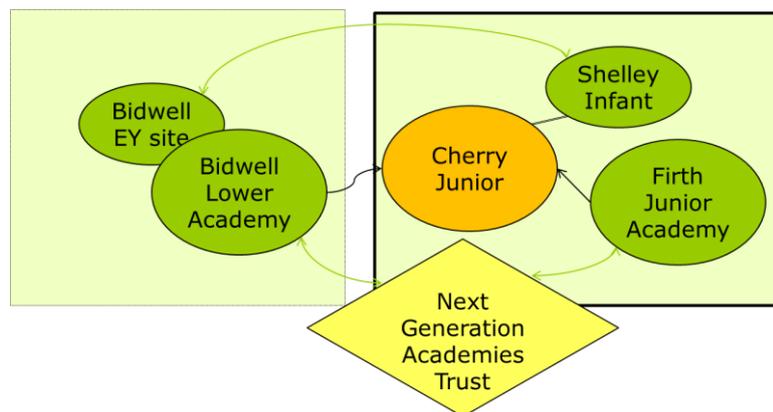


Figure 1: Interorganisational connections.

The background rectangles in Figure 1 represent Local Authorities. The colour of the ovals representing schools corresponds with Ofsted ratings of Outstanding (green) and Satisfactory

¹ I have used pseudonyms for names of people and places.

(orange). Both Bidwell and Cherry Junior had associated schools with younger children. For Bidwell, this was part of the same school but on a site two blocks away from the main school site. Cherry Junior had formed a hard federation with Shelley, an 'outstanding' infant school, the year before the start of the study. The present study concerns only the relationships amongst the three primary schools.

Methodology

A premise of this case study is that devolution has introduced a new phase in the institution of schooling in which ever more articulated, complex and differentiated forms of administration accompany increasing complexity, but not necessarily transformation, of the instructional core (Heckscher & Adler, 2007; Tyler, 1985). The study explores the connections between modalities of authority of the school and the projects of professionalization that reproduce particular patterns of professional practice. I describe this as a process of socialisation at the level of the organisation. The emphasis here is on the organising context and the processes of socialisation structuring that context. This implies the socialisation of the professionals—teachers, teaching assistants and school leaders—who work and learn within but shifts the angle of sight from the person to the project of professionalization structuring the organising context. The specific focus is the emergence of a new chain of 'sponsored' primary academies. Organisational socialisation in these terms emphasises the link between institution and the organisational contexts doing the work of that institution, the institution of schooling and the organising context of the school.

Holland & Lachicotte (2007) examine how social location relates, over time, to patterns of social positioning, the social production of identity. They develop the concept of socially organized and reproduced *figured worlds* which shape and are shaped by participants. This approach is grounded in the notion of a figured world in which positions are taken up, constructed, and resisted. Holland et al. use the term 'identity in practice' to point to the contingent and co-constructed character of figured world (Williams, 2011, p. 131). Discursive constructions, such as talk in professional interaction, serve as 'identity tools' offering means for mediating teachers' and leaders' engagement with new practices introduced by a 'lead' school. Holland et al. highlight four dimensions of the work of 'identities in practice'--the context of figured worlds, the positioning of the self and others with the figured world, the space for authoring the self, and the 'serious play' that can allow for making of new figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998, pp. 270-272).

The conceptual problem that remains is that of theorizing social position in figured worlds in a way that makes the principles of regulation of the socially figured world available for empirical analysis. The systematic description of figured worlds is what I characterize as organizational modality. The term organizational modality highlights the organizing context itself as a cultural, historical product conditioned by underlying relations of power and principles of control that regulate the social relations and available positions produced within that context (Daniels, 2008b, p. 154). Following Bernstein (1977, 2000, 2003 (1990)), this process of regulation is viewed as fundamentally pedagogical, not in the limited sense of teacher and student but in a wider sense. The basic image is of a pedagogic exchange that involves an institutionalized transmitter, an agency recognized as a generator of social positions and associated patterns of practice deemed 'legitimate' by the institution, and an acquirer, an agency in the process of being recruited into the dominating discourse, one whose access to legitimacy is constrained. The line of approach builds on work inspired by Bernstein that explores the school as organizing context in the work of Daniels (1995, 2008a), Tyler (1988), and Gamble & Hoadley (2008).

The dimensions of classification and framing provide means of interrelating social position and patterns of professional practice to the organization of the school (Tyler, 1988). In Bernstein's theory, classification corresponds with power, as manifested in category relations which themselves generate recognition rules (possession of which allows the acquirer to recognize a difference that is marked by a category). In terms of school-to-school work, one such relation might

be the recognition of ‘struggling’ as a category of pupil. Control is spoken of in terms of framing which is manifested in pedagogic communication governed by realization rules (possession of which allows the acquirer to perform –in this case talk – in a way that is seen as competent and realize difference that is marked by a category). Framing is a conceptual tool for understanding the control of social relations through positioning; control molds not only how participants make meaning within interaction but also and, most important, which meanings are available to be made. Institutionally established categories correspond with power as these provide the infrastructure for the discursive construction of meaning; in this way institutionalized categories are the building blocks of organizational context. However, the work of putting those blocks together into a particular building depends on the discursive realization of categories through talk and action. The discursive construction of collective and individual meaning arises through framing, patterns of positioning in interaction. Patterns of positioning shape the possibilities for the ways the tools of interorganisational work come to be used, the patterns of interaction that are legitimate and hence the kinds of meanings that may be conveyed through that interaction (Eddy Spicer, 2011a). Tracing authority as the realization of institutionally established categories through patterns of positioning in collaborative interaction holds the potential of revealing whether and how tools and associated practices from the ‘lead’ school are reformulated and transformed into new strategies and activities that become part of teachers’ ongoing practice in a ‘supported’ school.

The grid below presents a matrix that allows for values of classification varying from strong to weak on the horizontal axis (from strongly-classified and ‘closed’ categories to weakly-classified and relatively ‘open’ categories) and framing (from the strongly framed and predetermined patterns of positioning to weakly-framed patterns that depend not on performance of position but on competence of persons).

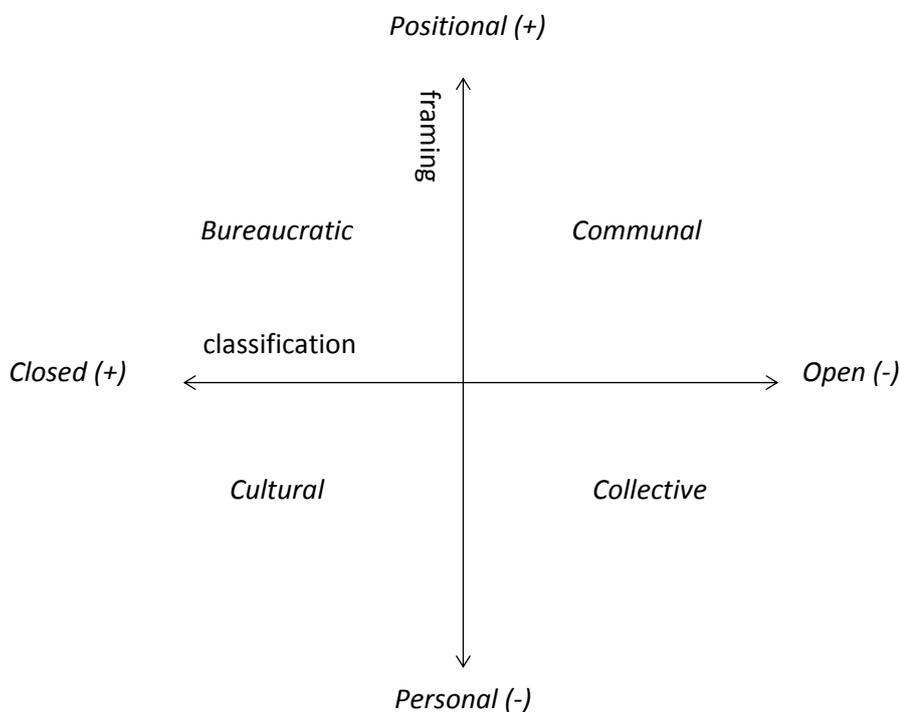


Fig. 1: Realms of ‘figured worlds’ of authority based on values of classification and framing.

The quadrants of the matrix permit us to imagine some characteristics of distinct realms that possible ‘figured worlds’ might occupy.

- *Bureaucratic:* The bureaucratic modalities emphasise hierarchical order both in terms of the base of knowledge as well as ascribed position.

- *Cultural*: The cultural modalities assume a tightly-knit and closed system of classification coupled with an orientation to the personal. The moral order privileges the transcendence of the person over the constraints of the organisation, within a universe of shared and, hence, condensed meanings (e.g., Douglas, 2003 (1996), p. 32).
- *Collective*: The collective pattern of socialisation emphasises autonomy both in terms of person and of the categories of knowledge that are used to define that world.
- *Communal*: This modality provides for the negotiation of meaning within ascribed positions, with the fabric of the organisation dependent on the recognition of professional expertise and trust, which yields increasing complexity and differentiation of patterns of positioning.

We see in these contrasting examples how patterns of institutional positioning establish, in Bernstein's words, "specific relations to other subjects and the creating of specific relations within subjects" (2003 (1990), p. 13). I have advanced a view here of organisations as subjects, positioned within the wider educational field, with those deemed legitimate, 'outstanding', in a pedagogical relationship with those deemed illegitimate, 'in need of improvement'. Socialisation into the dominating discourses of school is akin to organisational re-positioning, a re-calibration of social relations and relations among categories of professional knowledge. The ways in which organizations position themselves and one another in the system of education thus shapes the possibilities for the range of meanings that may be conveyed within any particular organising context.

Research Questions

As a means of exploring how control operates in the emergence of a chain of schools, the unit of analysis adopted in this explanatory case study is that of the dynamics of authority in intra- and interorganisational interactions. This leads to the following questions that consider relations of power and control in terms of the recognition and realisation of forms of authority.

1. How are forms of professional authority recognized and realized within and across schools in the emergence of the school chain?
2. How do patterns in the recognition and realisation of professional authority condition knowledge-building over time within schools and across the emerging chain?

Methods

This nested, explanatory case study (George & Bennett, 2005) explores professionalization as an aspect of control in the relationship of two lead schools (Bidwell Lower and Firth Junior) with the supported school (Cherry Junior) across two Local Authorities in the East Midlands. Data used in the analysis were generated through 24 interviews, 16 observations of key 'intersection encounters' (Hubbard, Mehan, & Stein, 2006) and documents. Data generated within and across schools include non-participant observations of Years 5 and 6 team meetings and related intersection encounters; individual interviews with teachers and school leaders involved in team meetings and key intersection encounters; and collection of relevant school documents. The study employed a semi-structured, hierarchically-focused interview protocol (Tomlinson, 1989) that explored current patterns and historical development of authority relations within the school, historical development of school-to-school relationships, and the identification of key intersection encounters in relation to the current school-to-school relationships. Transcripts of key events were analyzed using approaches that examine the interplay between patterns of positioning in interaction and institutional categories of knowledge around teaching and learning (Eddy Spicer, 2011a, 2011b, forthcoming 2013; Middleton, 2010).

Key Findings

This report highlights key findings from analysis of interviews with school leaders and observations of team meetings. The first level of analysis was to characterise the 'figured world' of professional organisation within each school with reference to values of classification and framing. This characterisation of organizational modality of each school at the beginning of their work together allowed me to address the first research question around forms of professional authority. I then considered the processes of translation—the project of professionalization—through which the 'supported' school was expected to acquire the organisational modality of the 'lead' school. I identified two principal pathways, 'moving up' and 'moving on', the former of successful recruitment through the recognition and realisation of new patterns of authority and the latter of resistance to and/or misrecognition of patterns of authority.

'Figured world' and organisational modality

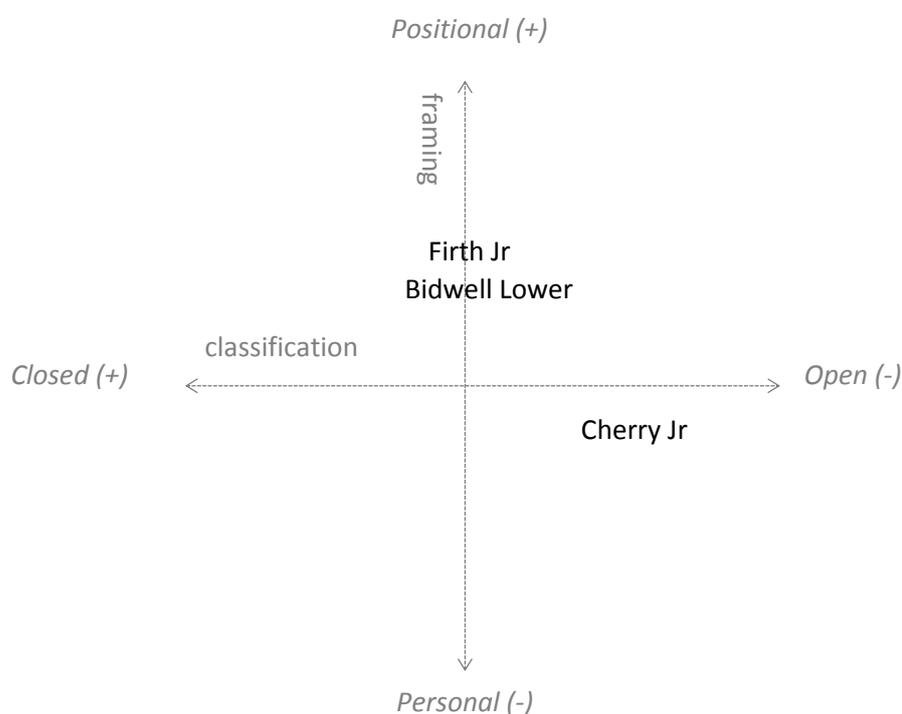


Fig. 2: Characterisation of modalities of authority of the three primary schools.

'Moving up'

Those centrally involved in the school-to-school work described their own trajectories and others with whom they worked in terms of career progression, 'moving up' as one participant characterised it. The stories consistently spoke about seeking out 'opportunities' that presented 'challenge'. Those leading Firth Junior and Bidwell as well as their deputies spoke about their efforts to provide similar opportunities and challenges for teachers in Cherry Junior to that which they provided their staff.

Cherry, however, was a much smaller school than the others and did not readily offer a wide variety of opportunities internally. The staff of Cherry, moreover, did not necessarily recognise what was offered as a valuable opportunity. Those at Cherry Junior prided the school's reputation in the community for focusing on the needs of the most challenged students; however, those from the lead schools saw this as too limited and, ultimately, not aligned with their desire to help pupils exceed expectations by pushing 'children outside of their comfort zone'.

To engender such challenge entailed drawing information not principally from knowledge of the child's circumstances and close monitoring of emotional states. It entailed use of assessment data to chart progress and to know how and when to intervene appropriately. The 'identity in practice' of a professional in the lead schools exemplified this through close monitoring of pupil progress and individualised attention to barriers and opportunities for learning.

'Moving on'

When organisational modalities do not coincide, the result is necessarily conflictual. There appeared to be no non-conflictual way of translating the figured world of Cherry, the supported school, into that of the lead schools. Staff who did not recognise opportunities for 'moving up' are offered opportunities for 'moving on'. The Head of School at Cherry Junior prior to Ceri's arrival took up a secondment at one of the lead schools (Firth Junior), with the intention that this would provide her with a wider vision of the possibilities for Cherry Junior. In other words, it would provide her with an immersion in the 'figured world' that the lead schools hoped to support Cherry in becoming and the opportunity of practicing a new identity that conformed to that world. There were also those who moved on in other ways, by going on long-term leave for stress-induced ill-health, as did one of the Year 5 teachers, or by resigning from the Board of Governors, as did one parent governor over the removal of Diana from the school.

Discussion

The above makes the argument that the most prominent tool in the movement from the figured world of the supported school to that of the lead schools has to do with the clear delineation of a professionalising trajectory, with those successfully recruited into the professionalization project encouraged continually to advance their careers—'moving up'. The counterpoint to that is professional exclusion, with those deemed not aligned with the professionalising project as requiring increased scrutiny and oversight—'moving on'. The legitimate 'identity in practice' is bounded by the modality of organising that the lead schools seek to introduce.

This kind of new professionalism and the web of authority relations it entails are described most keenly by Paul Adler who conceptualised the new professionalism as 'collaborative community' and described its relations to organising in advanced capitalism (Adler et al., 2008). Hekscher & Adler (2007) put forward three archetypes of social organisation in contemporary organisations—hierarchy, relying on managerial authority to sustain the division of labour; market, relying on price as a means of coordinating relations between buyers and suppliers; and community, relying on shared values and norms. The institutionalised organisation of the school (Meyer & Rowan, 1977), according to Adler, et al. (2008), exhibits combinations of all three to varying degrees, and the professional project is one of reconciling these through the reproduction, adaptation and transformation of patterns of professional practice.

Discriminating modalities using Bernstein's notions of classification and framing helps to illuminate the ways in which different structures of knowledge that characterise those modalities (e.g., 'nurturing' for Cherry Junior or 'empowering' for Firth Junior) have formative consequences for professional 'identities in practice' (Beck & Young, 2005). Moreover, it is this work of reconstituting identity that is at the core of organisational socialisation and the curriculum of interorganisational pedagogy.

Implications for Theory and Policy

Understanding how power and control condition the distribution, recontextualisation and evaluation of professional identities in systems of schooling offers a way of revealing how patterns of institutional control operate in the pedagogic relationship between schools to enforce

compliance, catalyse resistance, or permit adaptability. The explanatory framework put forward follows in viewing relations of power and control as central to the construction of a pedagogic relationship operating between schools, establishing one organisation in the role of transmitter and another in the role of acquirer. This is a novel application of Bernstein's work which has hitherto been constrained to analyses of pedagogic formation within schools rather than between them. The conceptualisation of these developmental relationships between schools as pedagogic relationships centred around a project of professionalization is also novel and opens a pathway to generalizable explanation rather than local description.

These insights underscore the tacit work that occurs in interorganisational development. Characterising organisational modalities may help in explaining why certain alliances are so fragile and others so durable. Why is it that some linkages between organisations appear to take off and yield generative results in short order and others founder just as quickly, fractured by conflict and stiff resistance? A close look at the 'figured worlds' of schools and the misrecognition that results 'when worlds collide' yields insights.

Future Plans

I am continuing my work on organisational socialisation and interorganisational pedagogy in two ways:

- Deepening and elaborating analyses of data generated in the current study;
- Extending investigation into organisational socialisation by focusing closely on a crucial aspect of interorganisational work: the representation of pupils through data and the interpretations that are made of that data.

I am planning to publish at least one and possibly more journal articles based on the current data. I am currently preparing one of these articles for consideration by the journal *Organization Studies*.

In terms of a refined focus on pupil data, I received a second round of BELMAS structural reform funding for the project, "Organisational socialisation through data use in the expansion of an academy chain". I am also awaiting a decision from the US-based charitable foundation, the Spencer Foundation, on an application submitted in September, entitled 'Modalities of organizational control and teachers' use of pupil data in school-to-school development in England'. For this proposal, I am developing links with a range of primary multi-academy trusts across England. I have also developed links with those researching similar 'Charter Management Organisations' (CMOs) in the United States. I organised and submitted a symposium proposal for the American Educational Research Association 2013 annual meeting Division L, Educational Policy & Politics, which builds upon a series of exchanges based on this research that I initiated among colleagues at Columbia University's Teachers College, Manchester University, and the University of Washington (Seattle). The symposium sought to bring together two researchers from the US and two from England (myself and Prof Chris Chapman, also a BELMAS Structural Reform grant-holder). Unfortunately, the symposium proposal was not accepted.

Related Conference Papers and Publications

Conference presentations

Re-positioning the professional in the formation of an academy chain. Paper accepted for presentation at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco, California, US. April 2013.

Exploring control in the emergence of a chain of primary schools in England. Annual meeting of the British Educational Leadership, Management and Administration Society (BELMAS). 21 July 2012.

School-to-school support as inter-organisational pedagogy: An explanatory framework. European Group for Organisational Studies annual meeting, Helsinki Finland. 6 July 2012.

Exploring authority in action: School-to-school relationships and systemic change. Department of Education Research Seminar. 18 January 2012.

Pedagogic relations in institutional dyads: An explanatory framework. Paper presented with Harry Daniels at the International Society of Cultural and Action Research 2011 Conference, Rome, Italy. 7 September 2011.

Publications

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