

## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL END OF AWARD REPORT

### For awards ending on or after 1 November 2009

This End of Award Report should be completed and submitted using the **grant reference** as the email subject, to **reportsofficer@esrc.ac.uk** on or before the due date.

The final instalment of the grant will not be paid until an End of Award Report is completed in full and accepted by ESRC.

Grant holders whose End of Award Report is overdue or incomplete will not be eligible for further ESRC funding until the Report is accepted. ESRC reserves the right to recover a sum of the expenditure incurred on the grant if the End of Award Report is overdue. (Please see Section 5 of the ESRC Research Funding Guide for details.)

Please refer to the Guidance notes when completing this End of Award Report.

<b>Grant Reference</b>	RES-000-22-3610		
<b>Grant Title</b>	Distributed Leadership and the Social Practices of School Organisation in England		
<b>Grant Start Date</b>	1st September 2009	<b>Total Amount Expended:</b>	£96,361.70
<b>Grant End Date</b>	31st December 2010		
<b>Grant holding Institution</b>	University of Manchester		
<b>Grant Holder</b>	Dave Hall		
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<b>Co-Investigators (as per project application):</b>	Institution		
<b>Professor Helen Gunter</b>	University of Manchester		
<b>Joanna Bragg (Research Assistant)</b>	University of Manchester		

## 1. NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

The SPSO Project sought to better understand the emergence of distributed leadership (DL) in schools in England as an officially authorised and promoted model of leadership. It involved an examination of the effects of DL upon teachers, support staff and designated school leaders and upon the organisational life of schools in general.

Two thirds of interview respondents associated themselves with the notion of DL suggesting loose and permeable boundaries between their own and officially prescribed ways of talking about their work in schools. Senior school leaders most closely identified themselves with DL.

The impact of officially promoted notions of DL upon individuals and groups in schools was mediated by a range of different factors. Foremost amongst these were the previous professional histories of individuals, the recent leadership history of their schools and the way in which the school as an institution defined itself in relation to DL.

Where the school notion of DL was tightly tied to the delivery of externally defined outcomes leadership could be highly controlling acting to emasculate the professional identities of teachers. Where school notions of DL were less prescriptive, teachers frequently held strong beliefs about DL but with strictly limited opportunities to act upon them. Resistance to the notion of DL, including outright rejection of the idea, was evident amongst teachers not viewing themselves as senior leaders in these latter schools.

At lower levels of school hierarchies some respondents did not recognise the term and had not been exposed to the notion of DL.

## 2. PROJECT OVERVIEW

### a) Objectives

The key aim of the Project was to critically examine discourses and practices in schools linked to distributed leadership through the lens of identity theory. More specifically we sought to better understand:

- how leadership and distributed leadership are understood and articulated by educational practitioners, and how this related to their own professional identities
- how and why professional activity is conducted and articulated in particular ways in schools
- how agency and structure interplay to produce localised models of professional practice in schools
- if and how officially prescribed models of distributed leadership have been communicated to different educational practitioners, and the extent and nature of claims within each school about distributed leadership.

In doing the above we aimed to develop rich descriptions of school organisational and leadership practice giving due regard to localised context and the dynamics of educational practitioner participation. Our intention was that the conceptualisations of leadership discourses and practices arising out of this research would offer a theorisation of organisational and working life that might contribute to the limited evidence base about organisational practice in English schools.

## b) Project Changes

No changes were made to the original aims and objectives of the research nor to the institutional affiliation of the grant holder. Project staffing and funding remained as set out in the original bid.

## c) Methodology

Fieldwork took place in five case study schools (see Table 1) and interviews were conducted with 76 respondents. The schools were selected through an annual survey of a representative national sample of secondary schools. There is a range of school types (selective, faith, single sex/co-educational, size, regional location) and they are positioned differently in relation to their socio economic status and their official performance history over ten years.

**Table 1: case study sample**

Case Study	Socio-Economic Status	Performance History (based on KS3 SATs results)	Other characteristics
Oak Tree	Highly advantaged	Consistently high	Average sized, mixed gender selective school located in a rural location
Lime Tree	Advantaged	Consistently high	Large selective boys' school in a suburban location
Cherry Tree	Mixed	Below national average	Small mixed comprehensive located in a semi-rural location
Maple Tree	Disadvantaged	Improving	Large mixed comprehensive in an urban location
Birch Tree	Highly Disadvantaged	Low	Large faith-sponsored, non-selective academy in an urban location

Drawing on Lawrence Lightfoot (1983) we produced five portraits of schools at work based on data collected over three stages:

### Stage 1: Official leadership model

In order to establish the prevailing leadership structure in each school and gain access to the views, discourses and aspirations of educational practitioners regarding their practice we collected documentation and undertook at least five interviews (Headteacher, Chair of Governors, Senior Leader, Middle Leader and Teacher). A first stage portrait of each school as an organisation was then written with preliminary theorisations about the official discourse.

### Stage 2: Observing Practice

Leadership as a social practice was examined through studying a significant process in each school. Evidence was gathered through observing key meetings, conducting formal interviews, through informal discussions and by obtaining relevant documents/materials. The portrait of each school as an organisation was added to and emerging theorisations around discourse were developed.

### Stage 3: Discourses and Perceptions

Discourses were examined in more detail by using Q methodology (Brown, 1997, McKeown and Thomas, 1988, Woods 2008). A total of 10 people per school (Head, Senior Leader, Two Middle Leaders, Two Teachers, Two members of the Support Staff, Two Teaching Assistants) were taken through the Q methodology. Analysis of these data enabled detailed comparison of the differences/similarities in perception between different educational practitioners, for example a headteacher and a middle manager. Statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS statistical software. Following this analysis each Q participant was interviewed. The interview schedule addressed themes arising from the Q analysis, with the intention of encouraging each participant

to address more closely their views and approaches to school leadership. The interplay between the official discourse, the observed practice and perceptions based on the Q sorting methodology enabled five rich portraits of case study schools at work to be produced. These five case studies were central to the subsequent analytical process of identifying and theorising patterns, themes and idiosyncrasies in leadership practices across the sampled schools.

#### **d) Project Findings**

The professional identities of two thirds of respondent interviewees were found to be inscribed by normative and officially authorised discourses of distributed leadership (DL). Respondents closely associated themselves and their work with the notion of DL in a manner that suggested highly malleable boundaries between officially sanctioned discourses and the discursive social practices of teachers and school leaders.

The impact of these forces of inscription upon professional identities were mediated by a range of factors variously shaping, interrupting and denying the effects of these structuring powers. One such factor was the place of respondents within the organisational hierarchy of the schools studied; senior leaders displayed the most intense identification with the term. Another was the dialogic nature of professional identities in which competing and contradictory practices revealed marked tensions for respondents. For headteachers this was manifested in tensions between a desire to distribute authority and influence and a strong perceived need to remain in control of the school's performance in relation to meeting externally defined demands. This process of dialogism was, in turn, mediated by both the personal histories of individuals and the recent histories of the institutions within which they worked.

For teachers and support staff the capacity of authorised discourses of DL to reach into their professional identities was strongly mediated by the schools within which they worked and the manner in which DL had been institutionalised in such contexts. In each school an institutional logic linked strongly to the professional identity of its headteacher was discerned. The relationship of different individuals and groups to this logic offered important insights into the means by which broader social, cultural and political relations were enacted as everyday practices in particular school contexts. Where the institutional logic was tightly tied to the delivery of externally defined outcomes there was a strong association with forms of leadership that were highly controlling and regulative. In such contexts the development of professional identities was largely emasculated by attempts to create conforming professionals closely identifying their work with the tightly defined aims of the school and discourses of DL were frequently superficial yet highly affirmative.

Identity emasculation of a different kind was evident in schools where demands for professional conformism were less marked and where discourses of DL and institutional logics were tied both to the delivery of externally defined outcomes and to notions of professional autonomy. In such schools DL was frequently imbued with strong personal and institutional meanings, but within settings that could offer strictly limited affordances for the enactment of such meanings. Resistance to the notion of DL was also evident amongst teachers not recognising themselves as senior leaders in these schools. This took various forms including outright rejection of and scepticism towards the possibilities for the application of DL in their institutions.

The discursive turn towards DL was incomplete in participating schools. At lower levels, in particular, of the hierarchies of those school organisations studied some respondents did not recognise the term and had not been exposed to discourses of DL.

#### **e) Contributions to wider ESRC initiatives (eg Research Programmes or Networks)**

Not applicable

### 3. EARLY AND ANTICIPATED IMPACTS

#### a) Summary of Impacts to date

Please summarise any impacts of the project to date, referring where appropriate to associated outputs recorded on the ESRC website. This should include both scientific impacts (relevant to the academic community) and economic and societal impacts (relevant to broader society). The impact can be relevant to any organisation, community or individual. *[Max. 400 words]*

The scientific impact of the project is principally located within the development of knowledge about distributed leadership in general and its relationship to teacher and school leader identity in particular.

Papers directly arising out of the project and focusing upon the relationship between identity and school leadership have been accepted for presentation at the following conferences:

- *American Educational Research Association Conference*, New Orleans, April, 2011. Teacher Identity Regulation and Distributed Leadership in England
- *Critical Management Conference*, Naples, July, 2011. The Regulation and Management of Teacher Identities in England(Hall) and, the Politics of Knowledge Production within New Labour Public Policy and Reform in England (Gunter)
- *European Conference on Educational Research*, Berlin, September, 2011. Leadership Discourses and the Framing and Regulation of Teacher Identities.

A paper entitled 'Hallucinogen, distraction or reality? Distributed leadership and the social practices of school organisation in England' was presented to the *British Educational Management, Administration and Leadership Conference*, Reading, July 2010

A further scientific advance directly linked to this project has been in relation to developing conceptualisations of distributed leadership and their relationship to the production and theorising of knowledge in the field of education leadership. To this end a paper entitled 'Distributed Leadership: A Study in Knowledge Production' has been submitted to the journal *Leadership*. Connections with wider public sector leadership have been made via a chapter in a book entitled *Trust and Confidence in Government and Public Services*, to be published by Routledge.

The current economic and societal impact of the project has been limited to those schools participating in the research with early indications from evaluations suggesting that the findings have been valuable in terms of enabling senior leaders and teachers to critically examine their approaches to the distribution of leadership in their schools. Each school participating in the research has been provided with a report summarising some of the key findings from research conducted within their schools. Early findings from the research have also been shared with the practitioner leadership community in education via the following publication:

Hall, D., Gunter, H., and Bragg, J. (2011) The Discursive Performance of Leadership in Schools, *Management in Education*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp 32-6.

## b) Anticipated/Potential Future Impacts

Please outline any anticipated or potential impacts (scientific or economic and societal) that you believe your project might have in future. *[Max. 200 words]*

It is anticipated that the economic and societal impact of the project will be enhanced through engagement with school leaders and teachers at the following events:

- A conference for school leaders and teachers disseminating findings from the project in collaboration with practitioners in this field
- Presentations to the leadership teams and teachers at each of the participating schools
- A seminar for doctoral and other postgraduate education students specialising in leadership and other related areas.
- A summary report to the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services

As well as additional papers submitted to academic journals and presented at relevant conferences it is anticipated that the scientific impact of the research will be advanced through a variety of seminars and discussion groups with leading members of the education and educational leadership research communities.

You will be asked to complete an ESRC Impact Report 12 months after the end date of your award. The Impact Report will ask for details of any impacts that have arisen since the completion of the End of Award Report.

## 4. DECLARATIONS

Please ensure that sections A, B and C below are completed and signed by the appropriate individuals. The End of Award Report will not be accepted unless all sections are signed.

Please note hard copies are NOT required; electronic signatures are accepted and should be used.

### A: To be completed by Grant Holder

*Please read the following statements. Tick ONE statement under ii) and iii), then sign with an electronic signature at the end of the section (this should be a image of your actual signature).*

#### i) The Project

This Report is an accurate overview of the project, its findings and impacts. All co-investigators named in the proposal to ESRC or appointed subsequently have seen and approved the Report.	✓
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#### ii) Submissions to the ESRC website (research catalogue)

Output and impact information has been submitted to the ESRC website. Details of any future outputs and impacts will be submitted as soon as they become available. <b>OR</b>	✓
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To cite this output:

Hall, D, et al (2011) Distributed Leadership and the Social Practices of School Organisation in England  
ESRC End of Award Report, RES-000-22-3610. Swindon: ESRC

This grant has not yet produced any outputs or impacts. Details of any future outputs and impacts will be submitted to the ESRC website as soon as they become available.

**OR**

This grant is not listed on the ESRC website.

### **iii) Submission of Datasets**

Datasets arising from this grant have been offered for deposit with the Economic and Social Data Service.

**OR**

Datasets that were anticipated in the grant proposal have not been produced and the Economic and Social Data Service has been notified.

**OR**

No datasets were proposed or produced from this grant.

