

Learning to Practice Data-Driven Instructional Leadership: Confronting Cultural and Historical Contradictions

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Abstract: Within schools, data-driven practices have served as the centerpiece for educational reform initiatives focused on improving instruction and student learning, but this process has largely remained insufficiently conceptualized. This case study follows an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) during the 2012-2013 school year as they enacted the data-driven practice of Instructional Rounds (IR). Taking a Cultural-Historical Activity Theory with Institutional Theory framework (CHAT-IT), a discursive analysis of ILT meetings displays the seeming resolution of manifestations of cultural-historical contradictions within the ILT's enactment of the IR practice. Yet, further analysis of and interviews with individual members troubles these resolutions, particularly when seeing IR as a coercive, mimetic, and normative mechanism. As one of few studies adopting the CHAT-IT framework, this case study supports the fruitful, dialogical understanding of organizational learning as culturally and historically situated activity.

Introduction

As an increasingly popular approach to improving teaching and student learning, teachers' use of data has become central to public policy discourse for educational reform. In their review of the literature, Young and Kim (2010) assert that the "importance of using 'data' is now taken-for-granted as an essential strategy for educational improvement" (p. 3). Despite or, perhaps, due to the assumption of its importance, numerous writers contend that the connections between data and instructional practice remain insufficiently conceptualized (Spillane, 2012; Cosner, 2012). This assumption further stems from other problematic assumptions, particularly the notion that data, per se, offers clear guidance to practice as opposed to understanding how data use is situated within activity systems (Spillane, 2012). Essentially, data-driven practices cannot be viewed as an unequivocal good but must, instead, be viewed as an activity system comprising multiple, inherent contradictions that must be resolved if an organization is to learn (Engeström, 1999).

Ogawa and colleagues (2008) put forth a theoretical framework that draws upon conceptual tools from cultural-historical activity theory with institutional theory (CHAT-IT) for understanding organizational learning. Understanding the nature of change within any activity system begins with locating the manifestations of *contradictions* within its enactment, following their "dynamic movement and evolution" over time (Engeström & Sannino, 2011, p. 384). This study aims to adopt the CHAT-IT framework to guide the analysis of an Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) as they work to design and implement the data-based practice of Instructional Rounds (IR). IR involve an iterative cycle of four steps: (1) identifying a problem of instructional practice; (2) observing practice in small groups; (3) debriefing together after the observation; and (4) focusing on the next level of work needed to improve instruction relative to the problem of practice (City, Elmore, Fiarman & Teitel, 2011). Within this context, our specific research questions are:

1. How and what does the ILT learn from engaging in the practice of IR?
2. What contradictions manifest in the activity of IR, and how are they (if they are) resolved?

Theoretical Framework

The CHAT-IT framework guides the analysis reported here. In merging CHAT and IT, this framework takes on the assumptions of those theoretical frameworks. By adopting CHAT, we assume that the individual actions and social structures are mutually constitutive, resulting in an activity system that is both culturally and historically situated. Due to this situativity, activity systems also inherently contain *contradictions*, and activity must go through cycles of internal, critical self-reflection and external searches for solutions to become expansive, or, to learn (Engeström, 1999). Moreover, this assumes that the contradictions of activity systems must be "creatively and painfully resolved by working out a qualitatively new 'thirdness', something qualitatively different from a mere combination or compromise between two competing forces" (Engeström & Sannino, 2011, p. 371). Organizational learning thus becomes an activity in which contradictions manifest, and attempts to resolve these manifestations ideally lead to a qualitatively transformed organization.

Any activity system comprises multiple, mutually constitutive elements. Ogawa et al. (2008) adopt the model first put forward by Engeström (1999), which describes six elements: *subject*, *object*, *mediating artifacts*, *community*, *rules*, and *division of labor*. Within this model, the *object* of an activity system is the purpose that organizes individual actions and connects them to the collective activity, leading to sought after and unforeseen outcomes. The *subject* of the activity system can be either individuals or groups of individuals that are more or less organized. CHAT acknowledges that the subject of an activity system exists within dialectical relationships

with all other elements of the activity system, where the subject both influences and is influenced by the other elements. *Mediating artifacts* enable this dialectical relationship, through both physical tools and symbolic signs. These mediating artifacts afford and constrain activity, and the creation or appropriation of new mediating artifacts allow for subjects to shape their activity.

These three elements form the core of activity, but CHAT expands upon this model by incorporating elements of *community*, *rules* and *division of labor* in its model. The subject-artifact-object relationships occur within *communities*, which are defined by collective social and cultural practices that organize these dialectical relationships (Lave & Wenger, 1991). These practices become enacted and embodied through *rules* and *division of labor*. Ogawa et al. (2008) see *rules* as what “embody and reproduce ideologies in the broader societal context,” constraining and affording participation within the activity system (p. 87). Similarly, *division of labor* legitimates certain forms of participation based upon the subject’s culturally and historically constrained position within the activity system relative to the object. In other words, the central or peripheral nature of a subject’s participation as well as its legitimacy stem from the subject’s dialectical relationships with the other elements of the activity system. Critically, all of these elements dialectically relate to each other ultimately resulting in an *outcome* of activity

With this necessarily brief overview of activity systems, Ogawa et al. (2008) add an additional layer of mechanisms that carry *institutions*, “the systematic expression of dominant cultural values” into formal organizations such as schools (p. 89). By expanding this dialectical view from CHAT to include how institutions sustain and legitimate the practices of organizations, they argue that how organizations learn must include acknowledgement of the *coercive*, *mimetic*, and *normative* mechanisms that enact and carry institutions into activity. *Coercion* includes the formalized rules and regulations of the state. Within the context of schooling, this can be seen embodied within accountability and threats of school turnaround or closure (Smylie, 2010). *Mimicry* occurs when organizations attempt to adopt practices and structures that are perceived as key to success within their field. This results in “isomorphic behaviors” where organizations within a field begin to increasingly resemble one another (Smylie, 2010, p. 32). *Norms* include “professional codes” as well as organizational values that afford and constrain actions deemed as acceptable within an activity system (Ogawa et al., 2008, p. 89).

Ogawa et al. (2008) argue that “CHAT and IT identify conceptually similar elements of social systems, which, taken together, link the immediate settings in which learning occurs to the social contexts of organizations and to the social and cultural forces that shape organizations” (p. 84). A dialectical view of organizational change, or learning, “offers a way to parse, in depth, the multiple contributing pieces that give shape to any particular activity” (Ogawa et al., 2008, p. 87). Following the “dynamic movement” of an activity system within the formal organization of schooling must consider the potential affects of these institutional carriers. Critical to this conception is the dialectical nature of these relationships. Any account of organizational learning with CHAT-IT must account for how these carriers affect and, in turn, are affected by the activity system of a school.

Methodology

Methodological Framework

While organizational learning can conceptually be understood as the resolution of contradictions within an activity system, we have no direct access to contradictions and must instead attend to their manifestations, particularly within the discourse of practitioners. Engeström and Sannino (2011) presented the evolution of the discourse of individuals and groups as “windows into systemic contradictions in the activity system” (p. 385), suggesting a potentially fruitful methodology for exploring the dialectics inherent within the work of the ILT. In their preliminary framework, they discuss four types of discursive manifestations of contradictions: *conflicts*, *dilemmas*, *crucial conflicts*, and *double binds*.

Within their guiding framework, the authors expanded upon four discursive manifestations of contradictions: (1) *dilemmas*, or “an expression or exchange of incompatible evaluations, either between people or within the discourse of a single person,” (p. 373); (2) *conflicts*, which “take the form of resistance, disagreement, argument and criticism,” (p. 373); (3) *critical conflicts*, which are the “situations in which people face inner doubts that paralyze them in front of contradictory motives unsolvable by the subject alone,” (p. 374); and (4) *double binds*, or “processes in which actors repeatedly face pressing and equally unacceptable alternatives in their activity system, with seemingly no way out” (p. 374).

In their analysis of the management group for the city of Helsinki’s municipal home care for the elderly, Engeström and Sannino (2011) linked rudimentary linguistic cues from discourse to these manifestations of contradictions. For example, *dilemmas* were characterized by acknowledgements of competing statements (e.g., “yes, but”; “on the one hand ... on the other”). *Conflicts* were characterized by disagreements in the discourse, linked to cues such as “I disagree” or “this I can accept.” *Critical conflicts* often presented as personal accounts and/or the use of vivid metaphors (e.g., “I now realize that...”). Finally, *double*

binds manifested in rhetorical questions or expressions of helplessness (e.g., “we must”). Further guidance for locating contradictions within activity systems comes from an earlier work by Engeström (1999), where he located contradictions between the central components of the activity system (i.e., subject, object, mediating artifacts, rules, community, and division of labor). Adopting this guiding framework, this report attempts to locate manifestations of contradictions within the discourse of the ILT in an effort to further understand what contradictions it needed to resolve in order to transform its activity and, thus, learn as an organization.

Data Collection and Analysis

To examine the potential of the theoretical and methodological frameworks for gaining insight into data-use practices in schools, the author participated in a single-site case study during the 2012-2013 school year in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS), a large urban school district in the Midwest United States. The ILT of Douglas M. Wilson High School (Wilson; all names including the school’s are pseudonyms) was followed for the course of the 2012-2013 school year. During the course of observation, Wilson enrolled approximately 1500 students, 85% of whom were low-income and 17% were of limited English proficiency.

The specific organizational practice studied was that of the meetings of the ILT that took place once every two weeks, particularly as they attempted to design and implement the new routine of IR for the school. The ILT comprised the department chairs of the school (Math, Science, Social Studies, Fine Arts, English, Foreign Language, Special Education); heads of other organizations in the school (Service Learning, Junior ROTC); administrators (primarily the principal and one assistant principal); an Instructional Support Lead (ISL) from the Network, a partition of CPS that included Wilson; and, at times, would be joined by members from the counseling department. A typical meeting would be organized by an agenda established during the week that the ILT did not meet, and all members of the ILT were able to place items on the agenda for discussion. Topics of discussion primarily focused on instructional matters, including implementation of IR (which constitutes the bulk of this analysis), but also including discussion of school metrics (e.g., freshman on-track rate, attendance rates), reorganizing the utilization of the schools facilities, and student test-scores on EPAS (EXPLORE, PLAN, ACT system). Meetings lasted for one class period (50 minutes) and usually discussions took the entire time.

Analysis occurred through an examination of four data sources: (1) transcripts from audio-recordings of 16 ILT meetings that occurred throughout the 2012-2013 school year and three IR Subcommittee meetings held outside of regular ILT meeting time; (2) transcripts from audio-recordings of semi-structured interviews (one to four interviews per informant) with fifteen individuals comprising members of the ILT as well as other district personnel (i.e., the consultant hired to train this school and others in the practice of instructional rounds as well as a district official overseeing a subset of district schools that included Wilson) that occurred one to four times over the course of the 2012-2013 school year; (3) documents or instruments produced or used by the ILT in their practice, including but not limited to their implementation of IR (e.g., agendas for meetings, evaluation forms, test score reports); and (4) field notes and memos created by the author.

These data sources were triangulated in order to create an account of the activity of IR over time. Focusing on the activity of IR constrained the data. While many discussions about data occurred within the ILT (e.g., student test scores), this analysis focuses on the use of data collected through IR. Excerpts from transcripts of ILT and IR Subcommittee meetings were first identified using Engeström and Sannino’s (2011) framework, and then further coded using a grounded methodology (Charmaz, 2006). As the case study progressed, focus codes such as *evaluation*, *purpose of data use*, *purpose of IR*, *history of CPS*, and *history of Wilson* emerged. These codes informed the structure of subsequent interviews, which primarily took place at the beginning, middle, and end of the school year. Interviews were then used to saturate these focus codes (Charmaz, 2006). The transcripts were then arranged chronologically, in order to provide an account of how the ILT engaged in the activity of IR over the course of the entire school year.

An Enactment of Instructional Rounds

The cultural and historical context of the research context is critical for identifying manifestations of contradictions in the ILT’s work. Prior to this school year, the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) voted to go on strike, which lasted for eight days and delayed the beginning of the school year by seven days. In the resolution of this “bitter dispute” (McCune, 2012, ¶1), the CTU agreed to a new teacher evaluation system called REACH Students (Recognizing Educators Advancing Chicago’s Students). Based on Danielson’s (2013) framework for teaching, this new evaluation system places significant emphasis on students’ growth on teacher- and district-developed performance assessments administered at the beginning and end of the school year (CPS, 2012).

This new accountability system is part of the dominant political discourse in the United States around using data to measure the quality of instruction teachers provide. Beginning with No Child Left Behind and continuing with the current administration’s initiative of Race to the Top, differentiating the most- and least-effective teachers continues to be a significant priority for national educational policy. The CTU strike embodies a growing movement against these accountability-focused policies. In the press release for the strike, CTU argued that using students’ test-score data “is no way to measure the effectiveness of an educator” (CTU,

2012, ¶5). While ultimately agreeing to the new evaluation system, the use of student test-score data for evaluating teachers remains a contentious issue, both socio-politically and in the research literature (Haertel, Rothstein, Amrein-Beardsley, & Darling-Hammond, 2011).

The preceding context serves two purposes. First, it foregrounds the *contradiction of data-use*. Data-use can be characterized as serving either formative, improvement-centered interpretations or summative, evaluation-centered interpretations. Within the context of a formal organization, both interpretations are always present, and a constant negotiation must occur to focus an iterative cycle of data-based practice. Second, it frames IR as a carrier for CPS to “touch” the activity of its constituent schools, including Wilson. As a carrier, IR may serve *coercive*, *mimetic*, and/or *normative* purposes for influencing the object of data-based activity. This manifests another dialectical contradiction: the *contradiction of organization*. Schools must always and already be seen as comprising agentic individuals while simultaneously constituting social, cultural, and historical institutions. Both contradictions significantly manifested in the work of the ILT, leading to a transformation of activity seen as ambiguously expansive.

Manifestations of the Contradiction of Data-Use

During the previous year, the ILT initiated a series of “learning walks,” where a small group (three to four) of teachers visited another teacher’s classroom focusing on a “problem of practice,” which the ILT decided was student engagement for that year. Although similar to IR, City et al. (2011) note that this learning walks “has been corrupted in many ways by confounding it with the supervision and evaluation of teachers” (p. 4). At Wilson, however, the ILT made significant effort to distinguish the practice of learning walks from administrators’ evaluation of teachers. An assistant principal, Ms. Day, reiterates their learning walk protocol:

So, if we want to have the same protocol, where the data team—without me being present at that time, at the data team at all—receives all the documents, and processes, and reports only data that cannot be traced to any particular teacher, any particular classroom. So, we want to keep this part, I think it's an easy to agree part. I believe that we've worked out the issues last year, and that might be easiest to agree on. (ILT Meeting, November 26, 2012)

Despite the decision to retain the previous year’s protocol, disambiguating evaluation from instructional improvement remained a significant conflict for the ILT into this school year. As the ILT discussed their implementation of IR, the introduction of REACH played a significant role in constraining the problem of practice that would become the focus for this year. Initially, the administrators suggested that the problem of practice be connected to REACH, specifically questioning techniques. Several teachers balked at this proposal. Ms. Hentges, the Fine Arts department chair, stated “this is how we’re also going to be evaluated—actually evaluated ... it might actually be disconcerting if this becomes the focus of the learning walk, where it’s their peers.” Ms. Walters, the Special Education department chair agreed, saying, “I think writing kind of objectifies it a little bit more, makes it just a little less personal, a little less threatening ... and we can say whatever we want, there's still a grain, a seed in the back of everyone's head saying, ‘This is evaluating me’” (ILT Meeting, November 26, 2012).

Here, we see that despite the work done in the previous year, the *critical conflict of evaluation* required a re-resolution in the new school year manifesting in this emotional, generalized account of teachers’ reactions to IR. Ms. Hentges echoed this sentiment in an interview, saying, “[the CPS Board] know they can’t come in here and just spy on us, so they’re getting us to spy on each other,” presenting an extreme metaphor for the introduction of IR (Interview, January 10, 2013). Borrowing Roth & Lee’s (2007) notation for dialectical relationships, this critical conflict touches upon both *subject|rules* and *subject|division of labor*. With the introduction of REACH, teachers and administrators needed to renegotiate how data-based practices, whether they were learning walks or IR, could threaten their positions as teachers and their relationships with administrators. Instead, several members of the ILT proposed focusing on the school-wide initiative of writing in the classroom, creating a new meaning for the data collected, and which became the focus for the IR.

Although resolving the critical conflict of evaluation, once decided, the ILT faced another manifestation of the *contradiction of data-use*: the *conflict of purpose*, or defining the purpose of the data collected and, thus, the form it takes. Within an activity system where the *subject* is a collective, negotiating the *subject|object* and *subject|mediating artifact* relationship became the focus of considerable discussion, because data as a *mediating artifact* affords and constrains *object* of the ILT. Initially, the ILT had decided to focus on the presence of informal and formal writing tasks across classrooms. Yet, this decision did not resolve the *conflict of purpose*, specifically of defining the distinction between informal and formal writing tasks. The following excerpt from a subsequent ILT meeting represents one manifestation of this conflict. In this exchange, Ms. Tolbert, the Social Studies department chair and Ms. Marston, the English department chair, argue for the need of a common definition of informal/formal writing with the principal, Mr. Osborn and Ms. Day:

Ms. Tolbert: We have a list of all the things, but we need that definition in order to move forward.

- Ms. Marston: I agree. I don't think we, for English, I don't think we can move forward until we have that. Because, even within English we have different definitions of what that is.
- Ms. Waters: So, that definition would be common to all the departments.
- Ms. Marston: Yeah.
- Ms. Tolbert: So this could be meaningful.
- Mr. Osborn: Yes. Right. That's the thing that links. (ILT Meeting, January 7, 2013)

Despite the trepidation that bringing the decision to the departments would lead to an untenable number of different definitions, the ILT decided to have individual departments assign writing tasks to informal or formal categories. Examples of these writing tasks that were ultimately returned from the departments include: (1) formal writing tasks such as written explanations to mathematical problems (Math), annotated bibliographies (English), REACH style written responses from a prompt (Social Studies), research paper (Science); and (2) informal writing tasks such as showing work and mathematical reasoning when solving problems (Math), reflection journals (English), source content acquisition, analysis tools, and worksheets (Social Studies), Frayer Model (Science) (IR Document, January 28, 2013).

At another ILT meeting, Ms. Hillman, the Instructional Support Leader (ISL) from the district challenged this purpose: "I'm not sure if knowing if it's happening or not matters, because you're going to see formal and informal writing in the building ... so I just really want to get back to what is the purpose of looking for it" (ILT Meeting, January 7, 2013). Other members of the ILT pushed back, supporting the idea of understanding what types of writing were occurring across the school:

- Ms. Walters: I mean, I think part of the-, [Ms. Marston] and I both agree that, at the beginning of all of this, when we started talking about writing, and [Ms. Marston] brought it up was, that this is our school-wide initiative and, is it really happening school-wide was the question where it started with [Ms. Marston], and I think just getting a baseline of how much writing is actually going on outside of an English or a Social Studies classroom, particularly, these two subjects lend themselves to more writing than others, might be helpful.
- Ms. Hillman: Okay, so then, for me, that clarifies it because then your purpose is to see if your school-wide initiative is implemented. So, that's actually a good purpose for the walk. "Did we implement the school-wide strategy of writing and how are we seeing it?" So, that, to me, becomes, now, I have a sense of your purpose for collecting this information. (ILT Meeting, January 7, 2013)

While this resolution of form for the IR allowed the ILT to move forward with their implementation, a further *conflict of authenticity* arose around the validity and reliability of the data collected. During one meeting, Ms. Tolbert worried that "the teachers can produce a writing assignment for that day and forget about it, and I'm afraid that's what's going to happen, I mean, I know that's what's going to happen" (IR Subcommittee Meeting, December 18, 2012). Ms. Day agreed, stating, "I definitely don't want it, again, to be a dog-and-pony show," suggesting that she believed this was the case during their learning walks last year (IR Subcommittee Meeting, December 18, 2012). From this, we see that the *conflict of authenticity* involves the *subject|community* relationship, as the ILT members presumed inauthentic engagement from the faculty with the IR leading to questionable, if not worthless, data. In a later IR Subcommittee meeting, Mr. Metts, the Math department chair, reiterated these concerns:

- Mr. Metts: This is not a good way of collecting data. I mean, we get information but, you know, the best is, as you said, over time, or at random, are a little bit more valuable. And you don't really look at a little better idea of how much is it happening. I don't know if that's what you want to do, as that will cause a lot of stress or whatever. You don't know when they're coming in, but, then again, you know, you're really influencing what you're trying to observe.
- Ms. Walters: You're definitely influencing the frequency of the writing by saying, "We're coming to look for writing," but you're not necessarily going to influence the types of writing that people are doing, so you still might gather data, I mean, you still will, may see some, you know, information about is it informal or is it formal. (IR Subcommittee Meeting, January 18, 2013)

After this point, the discourse within ILT meetings did not question the potential quality (or lack thereof) of the data collected through IR, seeming to provide a resolution to the *conflict of authenticity* as Ms. Walters argued that the data-form would allow for authentic data regardless of the authenticity of engagement from faculty members. At this time, though, a *conflict of outcome* arose around the *outcome* of IR, specifically

with regards to the actions that would arise within the school based on the data collected. Earlier in the year, the ILT spoke about the data from IR “[driving] future professional development” (ILT Meeting, November 26, 2012). Ms. Day reinforced this idea of the IR data providing a focus for professional development (PD) during an interview, where she stated the data from IR “might give us a clear indication as to how those PDs might be structured” (Interview, January 9, 2013).

In spite of this seeming consensus on IR informing future PD for the faculty, other members of the ILT had reservations about how the data they were to collect could serve that purpose. During an IR Subcommittee meeting, Ms. Tolbert raised this concern by saying, “I’m saying that if we’re hoping to have a clear direction for PD out of this learning walk, I don’t think it will be there. I think that it will do a wonderful job in stimulating conversation and reflection within the departments.” (IR Subcommittee Meeting, January 18, 2013). Mr. Osborn agreed with this statement, “And that’s instructional rounds. That’s reflection.” Consequently, the overarching purpose of IR, the *object* of the activity, for Wilson shifted from an initial focus on guiding PD toward one of promoting reflective dialogue within and across departments about the school-wide writing initiative.

By February, the ILT had resolved numerous conflicts around IR: within the *division of labor* and *rules* administration would not see any of the raw data or be involved in its analysis; the *mediating artifact* of data was to categorize tasks as informal or formal to assess the implementation of the school-wide writing initiative; and IR had the *object* of fostering reflective dialogue amongst the faculty. Through these resolutions, the dialectical relationships constituting the activity system of the ILT changed and, critically, an *object* of the activity of IR had been negotiated. After these conflicts and critical conflicts were resolved, discussions of IR were absent in further ILT meetings as the staff began implementing the process. ILT meetings became centered on topics such as reorganizing classroom utilization, upcoming performance management reviews with district representatives, and ACT preparation.

Manifestations of the Contradiction of Institutions

The next and last time IR were discussed in an ILT meeting was several months later when the aggregate results were presented. The entirety of the ILT’s discussion about the results lasted less than ten minutes, with three of those taken up by a discussion of observing IR at another school. Ms. Tolbert, who aggregated and analyzed the data from the IR, summarizes these results “so, I think we can say we writing across the board in all our disciplines here at [Wilson]” (ILT Meeting, April 22, 2013).

Curiously, the ILT never discusses IR during their meetings after this report of the data. Of further note here is the fact that department heads did not share their teachers’ reflections on the data nor did they even suggest that such discussions were had. These observations structured the interviews held at the end of the year, where teachers were asked to discuss what value they gained from participating in IR. Within these interviews, ILT members discussed their perspectives on the IR process, revealing a disconnect between the resolution of conflicts during the ILT and IR Subcommittee meetings and individual members’ ongoing struggle with these manifestations of contradictions. Throughout their accounts, an underlying *contradiction of organization* manifested in a *double bind of agent|worker*. Eliciting this double bind were the different perceptions of IR as a mechanism of institutions that threatened their identities as agents and reinforced their vulnerability as workers. ILT members believed IR to be either *coercive*, *mimetic*, *normative* or some combination of the three, leading to the perception of a lack of autonomy or helplessness.

When asked about what challenges they encountered when engaging in IR and addressing the conflicts manifested during that process, many ILT members pointed to the *coercion* from the Network, the partition of the CPS district that Wilson was a part of, for having to engage in IR in the first place. For example, Ms. Hentges expressed a perceived lack of agency for the ILT as a whole when she said, “we became just a function of the Network, which isn’t bad, of course, we want to please our bosses, but it didn’t really work on the instructional issues that are in this building” (Interview, June 12, 2013). Ms. Tolbert made a similar statement, “learning walks are driven by our Network, so it took up a lot of our time where I don’t think most of us would have voted to put our time there” (Interview, June 18, 2013). From these statements, participation in IR became merely an act of compliance and was not perceived as a means for exercising their agency as teachers and directing the improvement of their instruction.

Exacerbating the *double bind of agent|worker* were further issues pertaining to the *conflict of evaluation*. Although the previous year’s work established a protocol that separated administration from analysis of the data, the confluence of the new REACH evaluation system with the mandate for engaging in IR unsettled this resolution for several members of the ILT. Both administrators from the ILT mentioned this issue when asked about the challenges of implementing IR. Ms. Day summarized this concern and connected it to the institution of schooling, saying, “obviously, again with the strike and the union involvement, it is a part in teachers feeling uneasy about anything that looks like evaluation” (Interview, June 6, 2013).

Recall from the enactment of IR, the *conflict of evaluation* initially became manifest through administrators raising the idea of IR being focused on questioning techniques. However, this connection between REACH and IR did not begin with the administrators at Wilson. Rather, connecting the two was a

deliberate push from the Network and this was communicated within the PD sessions some ILT members attended during the school year. Ms. Smith, a high-ranking member of the Network, characterized this connection by saying, “one [series of professional development] is dealing with incorporating question and discussion techniques in the classroom, and we’ve kind of done that through the lens of instructional rounds” (Interview, May 24, 2013). Accordingly, tying IR to a domain of the REACH evaluation process was a conscious effort from the Network embodied within their messaging and training they conducted for administrators and teachers.

From the perspective of the Network, this connection was seen as a way of establishing IR as a means for improving teachers’ instruction. Mr. Hensen, the consultant who ran several of these PD sessions, also noted this connection between questioning and IR, framed this connection as a focal point for collaboration, saying from a teacher’s perspective, “let’s sit down and hammer those things out together, so that when an ILT comes through my classroom on instructional rounds, or if my principal or my assistant principal comes in for my REACH evaluation, it’s all kind of connected” (Interview, June 15, 2013). Furthermore, Ms. Smith underscored the efforts of the Network to establish this connection in all of its schools, “so we’ve been meeting with school teams one on one to discuss how that can be implemented ... and so, really we’ve been planning on how to incorporate it for the next school year in all the schools” (Interview, May 24, 2013).

In this sense, the implementation of IR was a form of leveraging the institutional mechanism of *mimicry*, attempting to push all Network schools towards focusing on a specific domain of REACH. At Wilson, ILT members immediately rejected this connection to their professional evaluations. In so doing, the ILT resolved the *conflict of evaluation*, yet were left with the challenge of resolving the conflicts of purpose and authenticity that such a connection may have facilitated. This led to multiple ILT members experiencing the *double bind of agent/worker* as they had to comply with a practice that they struggled to authentically connect with their instruction or acquiesce to a connection with their evaluations and a potential breach of the CTU contract. Mr. Robinson made this clear in an interview earlier in the year, stating, “there’s the whole differentiation, which has to be made, between evaluation in the legalistic sense of the term as the Board applies it, and observation ... because there’s only four people in the building [the principal and assistant principals] ... who can make evaluative judgments” (Interview, January 14, 2013). Ms. Marston stated her discomfort with this position, saying, “the Network really wanted, was really trying to push this idea that department chairs are pseudo-administrators, and we’re not, we’re teachers working under the same contract as every other teacher in the building” (Interview, June 10, 2013).

Despite the imperfect transformation of IR, many members of the ILT viewed their participation as valuable in establishing *norms* around classroom visitation and observation and all members of the ILT saw potential in this type of activity, though perhaps not in IR, per se. Ms. Tolbert described this normative process as “reducing, lowering the barrier ... concerns seem to relax over time as they become less threatening because the data isn’t used in a negative way,” suggesting that engagement in IR eased teachers’ apprehensions toward classroom observation and data collection (Interview, June 18, 2013). Ms. Walters saw this value in their collective work, saying, “there was true collaboration [in the IR] and I think [the ILT] has become more collaborative” (Interview, June 17, 2013). From these perspectives, engaging in IR became part of a normative process, lowering barriers to sharing classroom practices and finding value in that activity.

The ISL and administrators shared similar views. Ms. Hillman observed, “[the ILT] don’t want to say that a purpose for something [like IR] until they know that that purpose they set is going to fit in the school’s vision and fit with each teacher, and that each teacher will actually implement it” (Interview, May 28, 2013). Ms. Day expressed hope for future iterations of IR because it “opens the discussion about the teaching practices, ... so there’s a lot to be gained, a lot that we never had a chance to implement because of this tendency for teachers to stay in their classroom” (Interview, June 5, 2013). From these statements, IR provided the ILT another opportunity to increase comfort with having observers in classrooms, helping to establish similar situations as the norm for teachers at Wilson.

Indeed, all the interviewed ILT members made note of the power of classroom observations. While also noting the increased comfort of having people enter and exit the classroom, Mr. Metts suggested that, “if we actually had some serious program we were trying to implement, we would be really interested in how it was being used in other classes and what were the results from the students” (Interview, May 22, 2013). Ms. Marston made a similar remark, stating, “I think that instead of instr- maybe a version of instructional rounds ... if I can go into a teacher’s room who’s teaching the same content that I am and focus on something that our team specifically needs” (Interview, June 10, 2013). Ms. Hentges asserted that regardless of the form it takes, classroom visitation is valuable because, “teachers can’t help themselves when they go into a classroom, they just love learning and looking at other teachers and what they’re doing” (Interview, June 12, 2013). Collectively, it seems that while IR may not have achieved the *outcome* established by the ILT, engaging in the activity was valuable in that it supported establishing classroom observation as a normative practice at Wilson.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper, we asked two questions: How and what does the ILT learn from engaging in the practice of IR? What contradictions manifest in the activity of IR, and how are they (if they are) resolved? From our analysis, we saw that the ILT at Wilson engaged in a cycle of internalization, renegotiating and redefining the dialectical relationships comprising their activity system as they engaged in IR. We then saw an attempt at externalization, where data was gathered from classrooms, yet the *outcome* of reflective dialogue never materialized. This resulted in an incomplete transformation of the activity system and, thus, imperfect learning. However, through increasing the internalization of *norms of observation*, the ILT was able to find value and learn from engaging in IR.

Within the theoretical framework of CHAT-IT and the methodological framework targeting discursive manifestations of contradictions, organizational learning requires the resolution of inner contradictions. While the ILT was able to resolve manifestations of the *contradiction of data-use*, in so doing, its members also opened itself up to being placed in the *double bind of agent|worker*, a manifestation of the *contradiction of organization*. In many ways, this double bind undermined the potential learning that may have occurred through IR, but its tentative resolution through establishing new norms was critical to the learning of the ILT.

As one of few studies adopting Ogawa et al.'s (2008) CHAT-IT framework and applying the methodological framework proposed by Engeström and Sannino (2011), this case study supports the fruitful dialogue between these research communities in understanding organization learning as culturally and historically situated activity. By applying these frameworks in this case study we begin to see the power of conceptualizing organizational learning as an activity occurring within social, cultural, and historical contexts.

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