What are system leaders in England learning about school-to-school support in a 'self- improving' system'?

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Research Context

- System Leaders in this context are four Specialist Leaders of Education, a Broker, two Gateway Heads

- SLEs are deployed through the Teaching School Alliance

- Local intelligences inform need for school-to-school/SLE support

- A County-wide and local associations of System Leaders share intelligence

Professional Development of SLEs: three assumptions

1. That SLE is a consultancy role and so consultancy research should be used to give intellectual coherence to the role in the design of professional development activity

2. Consultancy is a public role and so recent literature on 'organisation', networks and structural reform should be used to provide a critical understanding of the wider policy context necessary for such a role

3. That the process of developing and using professional development activities generated from assumptions 1 and 2 can be framed in terms of a research engagement process

The Research Engagement Process

- Draws on Research Development Diffusion approach (Broekkamp and van Hout Wolters, 2007)

- Research Development Diffusion: practice-oriented research expands on fundamental research to see if applicable to realistic educational situations

- Researcher as mediator:
  - 'development' through generation and introduction of research summaries
  - 'diffusion' through publication of reports, policies, teaching materials and professional development programmes

- Development and diffusion lead to increased likelihood that practitioners apply insights from research and improve educational practice

- Adapted five stage engagement process proposed by Sheard and Sharples (2016)

The Research Engagement Design

Stage 1: Setting the Scene - research summary

Stage 2: Digging Deeper – progressively interrogate research against practice accounts

Stage 3: A Way Forward – menu of professional development activities co-created

Stage 4: Managing Change – tracking an SLE learning-set working with the professional development menu

Stage 5: Capturing Outcomes and Sustaining Change – capturing interplay of practice wisdom and public (published) knowledge and embedding in practice

(adapted from Sheard and Sharples, 2016)

Research Engagement Findings

System leaders were articulating and learning about consultancy and …

- Relationships

- Skills

- Measuring Outcomes

- Wider Policy Contexts

What are SLEs Learning?

Consultancy concepts introduced through the readings clearly enhanced understandings and perspectives on the nature of SLE activity

Journal articles stimulated reflections on the wider context of the public nature of the role particularly reputation, accountability and funding mechanisms.

Senior colleagues found organisational analysis, political coaching and marketization were entry points of particular interest.

SLEs learning: consultancy & relationships

Specialist is, *'an affront to professional modesty'*; Consultant sends the, *'wrong 'market-oriented' message*; **Promotion and representation of the role**

 'if you're not sensitive to the dynamics, that the client might be ashamed of having a problem, then you have to deal with being 'the expert' and a resentful and defensive client' **Psychodynamics of the helping relationship**

'I liked this very much. The way Schein defines this process as constantly recalibrating the responsiveness of the client, has helped me better understand the ways in which I determined how fast to go in my last deployment.' **Mutual Levels of acceptance**

'These can be allies of the primary client, for example, friends of the teacher in the school who are telling them 'you are great, you don't need to do that ...perhaps during dinner time... you will see them chatting...when you return you almost have to rebuild the relationship' **The concept of client – the involved non-client**

SLEs learning: consultancy & skills

I knew that having a conversation with clients at the beginning of the deployment was not enough to set agreements in stone. I used these clouds and post-it notes as ongoing documents. The post-it notes give staff the opportunity of changing their minds until they are sure they had articulated issues they are going to commit to.' **Contracting**

Key to negotiation and delegation was 'giving the client latitude on how to go about the task according to their strengths within agreed parameters.' ***Negotiation and delegation***

'I would say that identifying and working with different forms of resistance and not taking it personally are most relevant to my experience . There are conceivable situations when despite your best efforts, staff won't do things and you simply have to state the situation to the Head.' **Working with resistance**

SLEs learning: consultancy & measuring outcomes

Measurable outcomes beyond pupil attainment: queries raised around measuring, 'value for money', calming strained relationships, increasing sustainability of improved practice

Outcomes and deployment design – reflecting on opportunities to renegotiate length, timing and frequency of visits as a key factor in success of a deployment

Outcomes and dissemination – the role of the headteacher in enabling dissemination beyond the target class such that outcomes can impact upon more children through the 'triad' relationship

Outcomes and impact on career/reputation in the wider system– *'My bread and butter is my own teaching and if my Y6 results go down because of absence from the classroom people will start asking questions'*

Outcomes and politics – *'political coaching is needed to help SLEs understand the covert micro-political activity that goes on before any meeting and the steering and nudging necessary for a positive outcome'*

System leaders learning: consultancy & the wider policy context

Sustainability of funding for SLE work - value for money and funding mechanisms

The broker identified **'Knowledge mobilisation**' as key to deployment of SLEs based upon local intelligences that *'acted within the principles of prevention rather than cure and incremental approaches to school improvement.'*

Research entry point for one Gateway Head was **'redefining public worth in a marketized system'** as key to their thinking about system leadership.

Gateway Headteacher identified **'political coaching'** as relevant to system leadership.

Broker identified '**boundary management in the policy environment'** as pertinent to the influence of headteachers on the future direction of the system, 'conveyors of policy', 'creators of the wider system' or 'mechanism by which the wider system co-evolves with its constituent organisations'.

Researchers' learning about the engagement process

Emerging professional development agenda requests both consultancy skills acquisition and understanding of the wider policy context – the 'educational ecosystem' (Godfrey 2016) within which those skills operate.

Progression of researcher roles within the engagement process from:

- 'Providers' and 'translators' of research summary
- 'Provider' and 'interrogator' of entry points and deeper reflections arising from readings
- 'Co-constructors' of professional development menu of activities
- Prospect of 'co-facilitators' of learning sets moving to 'observational', 'monitoring' and 'recording' as sets become self-facilitating.
- 'Producers' of a public account of consultancy learning for dissemination to groups of schools interested in applying this model.

Future Direction

- System Leaders of Education bring consulting problems from deployment practice and consultancy readings to a learning set.

- The researchers contract to facilitate the opening meetings and then hand over to members.

- The researchers gather data via 'working notes', (Hirschhorn , 1991) over the course of the meetings and look for learning about consultancy supervision in three areas, 'restorative' (dealing with anxiety), 'developmental' (learning from application) and 'managerial (meeting functional targets). (Hawkins and Smith, 2007)

- Learning from the interplay of psychodynamic processes, political relationships and functional outcomes of helping relationships that emerge from problem analysis is used to develop new leaning sets.

Project Readings

Block, P (2011) Flawless consulting. chapter 1:- 'A consultant by any other name'. 3rd edition. San Francisco. Jossey Bass.

Close, P (2016) System Leader consultancy development in English Schools: a long - term agenda for a democratic future? *School Leadership and Management*. Vol 36. no.1. 113- 132.

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12 slides preface findings slides –that answer the questions- with a focus on research engagement process that produces this finding

Title

Context (system leaders are SLEs)

3 assumptions about SLE development

Assumption 3 research engagement process

Research engagement- model, roles and outcomes

Research engagement design(including research summary)

Research engagement findings: 3-4 slides

Discussion

Future directions

Deb –this is the abstract just for info:

BELMAS 2017 CONFERENCE, STRATFORD- ON- AVON 7TH- 9TH JULY.

What are system leaders in England learning about school to school support in a 'self- improving' system'?

Paul Close, Ann Kendrick and Deborah Outhwaite

Sheffield Hallam University ,UK, Cumbria University, UK. Warwick University, UK

There are now over 7000 middle leaders working as 'system leader' consultants on school to school support in English schools (designated by the National College for Teaching and Leadership as 'Specialist leaders of Education') as part of a 'self improving system'. From September 2017, the National College round of funding for school to school support comes to an end and school improvement funding will be finally withdrawn from local authorities. From this time we anticipate that there will be a need for wider understanding and dissemination of what Specialist Leaders of Education are systematically learning from deployments about how such support is identified, engaged with, and planned, coordinated and assessed across a key organising form in the new policy landscape:- the Teaching Schools Alliance.

In anticipation of this need we have been working on a research process designed to support the professional learning of Spec ialist Leaders of Education.(SLE's). This process has been in 3 stages. Stage 1 was the development of our conceptual framework for a professional development agenda, drawn from consultancy research (Close, 2016). Stage 2 used a Research Development and Diffusion model to test out this agenda against existing SLE practice via interviews and interspersed readings with a group of Specialist Leaders of Education, Headteachers and a broker in a Teaching Schools Alliance.(Close and Kendrick, forthcoming). This stage ended with a menu of professional development topics, issues and activities. Stage 3, which we report on in this paper, takes the most preferred activity, the learning set, and tracks our involvement as researchers and producers of 'working notes' (Hirschhorn 1997) for a SLE learning set, drawn from practitioners across a group of Teaching School Alliances. Here SLE's use the menu of topics and issues from stage 2 to consult with each other on practice problems in their deployments.

The professional learning of Specialist Leaders of Education emerging from this research will have relevance for all colleagues, both in the UK and internationally, who are interested in the contribution of universities to Research Engagement and Joint Practice Development approaches across groups of schools...and, more broadly, for those seeking to uphold democratic values through better understandings of the dynamics of school to school support in policy environments of decentralised administrative structures and high stakes accountability.

Close Presentation2016

The use of consultancy research in the development of Specialist Leaders of Education

BELMAS conference 8-10 July 2016

Paul Close and Ann Kendrick

Sheffield Hallam and Cumbria Universities. UK

The argument

'System leadership', the offering of school to school support, now has a 10 year history of research and practice in English schools.

System Leaders of Education who offer such support are essentially consultants. Yet so far, consultancy research has not been used to help system leaders inform and reflect on their practice. (Could this have something to do with consultancy's bad press in the critical business literature?)

 So, we want to find out how such research might be used to inform practice and the design of professional development activity for the most recent tranche of 'system leaders', Specialist Leaders of Education, in the context of a Teaching Schools Alliance.

The research

Overarching question:- If, as a professional community, we believe that education is a public service in a democratic society, what sort of system leader consultants do want in the future?

Stage 1

We produce a research agenda for the consultancy development of system leaders,

 (Close, 2016)

Stage 2

We test out the agenda with a small group of Specialist Leaders of Education in a Teaching Schools Alliance.in the North west of England

Stage 3

We track a SLE learning set working with the agenda over a one year period in this TSA

Stage 1 - An agenda for consultancy development.
(Close, 2016)

Draws from consultancy research across the social sciences.

Scope rather than depth – provides literature signposts for further enquiry and conceptual frameworks for design of professional development activity rather than detailed exposition. (that comes later!)

The research provides the terms of reference for 'consultancy' within six areas of enquiry and propositions for action.

Stage 1:- terms of reference for consultancy development

System leader consultants have a critical understanding of consultancy skills, cycles and role tensions, the psychodynamics of the helping relationship – and of types of client , interventions and the nature of 'impact' and 'outcomes' in consultancy work.

More broadly, system leader consultants are politically astute and ethically aware. They can bring policy appropriate understandings of organisation, change and contracting to their work with individual clients and client organisations, and can contribute to wider policy debates around consultancy and knowledge production. System leader consultants challenge narrow market values in the central endeavour of redefining public worth in a marketised system.

An agenda for consultancy development (Close, 2016)

Areas of enquiry	Propositions for action that use literatures of…..
Contextual dimensions	
Values	**Organisation Development** to introduce the 'consultancy curriculum and ethical codes of practice.
Analysis	**Organisation, structural reform and network theory** to analyse client situations and consultant agency
Change	**Sensemaking, identity formation and loose/tight systems** to understand personal and organisational change
Operating Levels	
Micro	**Political coaching** to exert influence with clients
Meso	**Organisational contracting** to engage strategic partners
Macro	**'Consultocracy' and knowledge production** to question values, interests and knowledge claims of consultancy organisations

Stage 2 :- testing the agenda

Specific research questions

What are we learning from SLE deployment practice in the North West TSA?

What are we learning from consultancy research that can further inform the skills, politics and ethics of such practice?

How can we combine learning from this practice and research to create SLE professional development activities that are relevant to need, easy to organise and relatively low cost?

Stage 2:- testing the agenda:- design and process

Small interview sample of contributors provided both senior and middle level perspectives of SLE practice (Two gateway school Heads, one broker and 3 SLE's in a rural Teaching Schools Alliance in the North west of England).

Process :-A staged reading of consultancy research, interspersed with initial and follow up interviews .

Introductory paper circulated (Close, 2016). Face to face interviews on learning from SLE brokerage and deployment, plus contributors' feedback on 'entry points' to the introductory paper. Circulation of follow up readings that explore specific aspects of the general introductory paper. (Block, 2011, Close, 2010, 2013, Schein 1998, 2002).

Initial Interview checks and further telephone interviews about the follow up readings

Data compiled in a final report as a narrative discussion of potential ideas for professional development activity.

Findings from practice:- SLE deployments

1   The SLE role needs further promotion and explanation.

2   Learning from consultancy practice of SLE deployments is developing skills and sensitivities around client conversations, delegation, time management, coaching and facilitation, negotiation, setting agreements, working with multiple clients and designing deployments for impact.

3   These skills and sensitivities are generating suggestions for 'refresher   training' and wider understandings of ethics and principles in SLE work.

4   The model of brokerage has been key to the success of SLE deployments to date.

Findings from research : the consultancy readings

'Entry points' from the introductory research paper:-

System leader learning sets, consulting skills workshops, debates around measuring impact of SLE work, SLE briefing on funding regimes and Joint Practice Development initiatives, debates around intelligence gathering and 'knowledge mobilisation' and redefining public worth in marketised system.

From the follow up readings:-

Psychodynamics of the helping relationship, and being authentic', matching consulting skills skills to consultancy stages in the consultancy cycle

Senior level understandings of SLE relationships, organisational analysis and 'political coaching'in the current policy landscape.

Combining practice with research: a menu of SLE professional development activities

Action learning sets and consultancy reading groups

Skills in action 1- role play of consulting skills in action at each phase of the consulting cycle.

Skills in action 2- case studies of effective delegation and negotiation and creative ways of setting agreements .

Serving multiple clients - seminar discussion

'Wider picture updates' SLE work across the county, Joint Practice Development, CPD funding, and external consulting activity

The psychodynamics of the helping relationship:- reflective diary keeping.

Ethics workshops:- an SLE code of practice that builds on guidance in the CASL handbook.

Coaching partnerships that develop political and ethical understandings of SLE work.

Designing for impact: understanding personal learning and organisational change in SLE deployments.

Stage 3: future development – the SLE learning set

❑ System Leaders of Education bring consulting problems from deployment practice and consultancy readings to a learning set.

❑The researchers contract to facilitate the opening meetings and then hand over to members.

❑The researchers gather data via 'working notes', (Hirschhorn , 1991) over the course of the meetings and look for learning about consultancy supervision in three areas, 'restorative' (dealing with anxiety), 'developmental' (learning from application) and 'managerial (meeting functional targets). (Hawkins and Smith, 2007)

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Broader issues and some further questions

Do Specialist Leaders of Education have a future in English Schools?

How varied is brokerage and deployment practice in different parts of the country?

How are tensions being addressed between 'service' and 'market' issues in such practice?

Do we know other examples of research being used explicitly in the co-construction of professional development activity in school groups?

What counts as so- called 'Joint Practice Development' in this context?