The Consultant-Teacher Relationship: A Relationship Geared Toward Deep Learning or Increased Institutional Control?

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Approaches to school change, state curriculum implementation and teacher professional learning in many jurisdictions involve the use or support of consultant-like positions that are intended to operate as change agents, facilitators or catalysts for professional learning within school districts and/or schools (e.g. Coburn, 2010; DfEE, 2001). Equally, this role can exist across a wide range of theoretical and policy positions about school practice and teacher pedagogy. Regardless of the type of change design or theory of action, a consultant-like position, coach or expert outsider is frequently involved in teachers and schools delivering

'effective' classroom learning experiences for students (e.g. Coburn, 2012; DfEE, 2001; Medrich, E., Fitzgerald, R. and Skomsvold, P., 2013). While whatever proposed school and teacher improvement practices being supported by consultants are often well articulated and claim empirical support, the ongoing interaction between consultants and teachers within schools—the act of implementation—is under considered as a central component of the potential change itself. Instead, it is the intended pedagogic move, curriculum change or expected student outcome that school consultants are working to develop within a teacher's repertoire or a school's practice which tends to dominate discussion.

Attempts at understanding what is happening in schools as a result of reform efforts should include the day-to-day experience of consultants, teachers and school leaders. This article examines the various ways that consultants interact with teachers within the secondary school social context through an analysis of consultants' experiences of working with teachers. Consultant interactions, complex relationships and way that these relationships may influence the schools and teachers with whom they interact is the central topic of this article.

In the case for the Secondary National Strategy in England (where the research for this article is drawn) there was often relatively little critical attention focused on the relationships between consultants and teachers. In many instances, they were treated as an unproblematic way in which to 'deliver' a resource, change or 'effect' (e.g., DfEE, 2001). In treating the consultant-teacher interactions as an unproblematic delivery tool,

education system reform designs may not be taking into account the inherent social and political processes that occur between and amongst teachers and school leaders within schools (Coburn, 2004; DfEE, 2001).

This article treats the social actions between consultants and teachers as a key subject of the reform itself. Here, the article proposes that the interactive social processes occurring between teacher and consultant are also a critical part of any school district or centrally based change effort achieving its claimed intentions of improving teaching and learning in schools.

This article draws its findings from a four-year case study conducted from 2002 to 2006 that examined the role of the Secondary National Strategy (SNS) consultants in implementing a large-scale reform in London, England. Originally called *The Key Stage 3 Strategy* for its focus on the middle years of schooling (grades 7 – 9), the SNS was a large-scale secondary school reform that operated from 2002-2009. The SNS was designed and developed centrally through the Department for Children, Schools and Families, the national education governance for England and implemented locally through school district consultant interactions with secondary schools. The reform placed an emphasis on teaching and learning in mathematics, English, science and information and communication technology (ICT) as a separate subject. Within this reform's design, secondary schools and departments were meant to identify an area of need through self-review and assessment and apply relevant SNS materials-support towards improving this area.

The social influences of introducing a consultancy structure within school districts (local authorities) potentially created contradictory effects within teachers' workspaces. While SNS consultants were often seeking to further create developmental or learning experiences that resonated with teachers' and departments' experiences, these activities may also have served to further the institutional control over teachers' workspaces. The article examines this potential contradiction in order to gain further understanding about the nature of the consultant role within secondary school efforts—both the potential of such outside expertise as well as the tensions that may be inherent in using such roles within school and system change efforts.

Generalizing across jurisdictional contexts is problematic as each educational system is subject to different political pressures and contexts. Curriculum and assessment vary as do the ways that teachers and students are positioned within each system. However, many jurisdictions do share common structures and daily routines in secondary schooling (e.g., teacher to student ratios, school hierarchical structures, classrooms to school and schools to system relationships or interactions). These similarities provide for potential to gain insights into secondary schooling processes and professional practices within secondary schools in general.

Perspective of Consultant-Teacher Interactions

As detailed, the SNS consultant's role was a district-based position that supported secondary school implementation. The SNS consultants

operated in ways most often associated with consultants in school reform discussion (e.g. Medrich et. al., 2013). They were meant to implement specific SNS reform agendas within schools (DfEE, 2001). An SNS sponsored and centrally trained consultant was assigned to each subject strand within school districts. At the end of this study in 2006, each school district was meant to have an SNS consultant for science, mathematics, English, ICT, foundation subjects (All other subjects falling outside of science, mathematics, English and ICT) and student behaviour.

The SNS consultants served as a link between the design of the reform and the school and school district personnel's daily work. They represented an intermediate agency between the central and the local. Lipsky called such roles within policy implementation the 'agency policy' because the individual actions of these SNS consultants were a part of the 'benefits and sanctions' within the SNS (Lipsky, 1983, p. 1). This is an important concept for this article as it makes the social actions occurring within policy processes the material of analysis for the study. At the same time, viewing policy through social action allows the study to move beyond the framework of policy 'text' to include policy 'experience' within the discussion of reform influence or impact on secondary schools (Ozga, 2011).

Social interaction, especially interaction that involves decision-making and school change, are social events that are both constructed from and guided by the political and the cultural aspects amongst people in organizations (Sarason, 1990). These dynamics operate simultaneously. The cultural and political within social interaction are interconnected

within social phenomena and serve to reinforce each other (Coburn, 2004). Coburn (2004) argues that teachers mediate institutional pressures in 'a process that is framed by their pre-existing beliefs and practices, which, in turn, are rooted in past encounters with institutional pressures' (Coburn, 2004, p. 212). Here, the interaction or interconnectedness between the cultural and political serves to shape or even reinforce each other (Apple, 2004).

Engaging in an analysis of the social interactions that occur between consultants and teachers highlights the importance the local context in which the consultant-teacher experiences are embedded. Much of what takes place in the day-to-day work between consultants and teachers may sit outside the parameters of the outlined work brief. However, these experiences can be ignored or not considered germane to frequently used rational models of secondary school processes (McDermott, 2000) that emphasize causality of relationships, top down strategies, common school characteristics and pre-planned effects (e.g. Avalos, 2011, or EQAO, 2005). The problem here is that effects and roles—who interacts with whom and how—become static or pre-determined. The immediate, complex, rich and, at times, tense life of work in schools is not available for deeper understanding and potential adaptations for school, school district and/or larger system responsiveness, effectiveness .

Such rational approaches to school change privilege the formal power holders within the organization and marginalize, or hide, views of the less powerful (Blasé, 2004). The spontaneous, diverse and conflicting

elements within schools then become a dynamic that needs to be controlled or eliminated (for an example see Fidler, 1996). Conflict, tension and diversity within work relations are indicators of organizational illness that need treatment by 'remediating or managing conflict, treating it as though it were a disease invading and crippling the body of the organisation' instead of explored, questioned and included (Ball, 1987, p. 4).

An institutional frame of reference that includes the social interactions of educators' work lives helps in understanding both the institution and the various processes of change in which secondary schools might be involved (Orr, 1996; Lortie, 2002). Examining interactions and experiences within the school creates what Bacharach and Lawler describe as an action perspective that functions as a phenomenological perspective towards organizations (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980). It is a perspective that privileges the immediate experiences of people within these organizations as an important component in understanding the organization itself. Instead of looking at social interactions as a result of school change efforts solely through the lens of their pre-planned intentions, the interactions themselves are also included within the scope of the study. Potential meanings drawn from the various realities that occur within the school become aspects of any potential school policy, initiative or program. Here, the educators within schools can be re-positioned from recipient/users of school interventions or education policies to actors whom 'mediate and generate knowledge' within the policy context (Ozga, 2011, p. 54).

Case Study Approach

As previously mentioned, this article uses a four-year case study from 2002 to 2006, which examined local implementation of the SNS within urban secondary schools in London through the experiences of the SNS consultants. The study was bound by the work of 15 SNS consultants within London. The work of SNS consultants is its *case* (Hamilton, 2011).

While conducting research, I also worked as an SNS consultant within one school district in London. The tacit knowledge, which I developed through my work in this role, helped shape the study's structure as well as its findings. The questions which framed this study, the fieldnotes collected and my lines of inquiry while interviewing 14 other SNS consultants all were influenced by my working knowledge of the SNS consultant. The case study was a singularity tied to a specific group of people. Thus, the study sat partially within my work as an SNS consultant and partially with a sample of 14 other SNS consultants (Bassey, 2000).

The role of explicitly focusing on my own work as a part of the case study itself had implications in regards to objectivism, bias and knowledge. I recognise that some sort of objectivism needs to be present in doing analytical and reflective thinking within social interpretivism (Bernstein 1976; Denzin 2001). I also follow Denzin (2001) in attempting to 'bracket' or isolate aspects of social phenomenon in a phenomenological sense in order to re-think, reflect and give different meanings to common 'taken for granted' daily interaction within this inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln 2003).

But, in doing this, I also recognize that this study cannot be 'bracketed' without imposing an artificiality to the ways that this study claims meaning and knowledge (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Much of this study operated with little or virtually no distance between what could be considered the 'field' and the researcher. I have been both researcher and a school consultant simultaneously and dynamically in the field in ways that reflect positioning rather than role play (Harré & Langenhove 1999).

In not recognising my position within this study I would be distorting the relationship that I have with the field of inquiry (Coffey 1999). Although there may be a risk of 'going native' within this approach, there is an equally significant opportunity of exposing issues and experiences that are unattainable in any other form of observation (Punch 1993). This is what Coffey (1999) describes as qualities of immersion.

Participants in the Case Study

The SNS consultants who participated were chosen for both opportunistic and purposive reasons. As an opportunistic sample, all the SNS consultants were connected to my work within the region either as a part of my subject strand or a part of one of the two whole-school initiatives in which I took part. I had a chance to approach them at these meetings and invite them to participate. No SNS consultant whom I approached turned down the invitation. All SNS consultants are given false names to preserve personalisation while still providing anonymity.

As a purposive sample, the participating SNS consultants represent all strand (subject) areas of the reform except the whole school initiative in behaviour. They represent thirteen of the thirty-two greater London school districts. Figure 1, below, is an area map of the school district in which each SNS consultant within the study belonged.

Figure 1. Coverage of purposive sample of SNSCs within London (Areas marked by an X represent coverage of case study).

The SNS consultants involved in the study draw from experiences within a range of 140 to 210 secondary schools. One SNS consultant worked with her school district prior to the SNS introduction, one came out of the consultancy of the Primary Strategy. The rest came out of secondary schools—three as second in departments and eight as head of departments (HOD). Together they represented 7-9% of the total working consultants within London school districts at the time. It was difficult to get an exact total of SNS consultants working out of each school district at any given time due to three dynamics within the school districts in London at the time:

- Continual shifts in SNS consultants within the school districts.

- Position overlaps in which one person may assume two roles and,

- Lack of availability of consultants within specific SNS subjects in school districts especially in science and to lesser degrees mathematics.

The interviews with the sample of SNS consultants were unstructured, recorded and transcribed. They were co-constructed events in which the interviewer is a participant (Mishler, 1991). They fit within Gubrium's and Holstein's conceptions of 'active interviewing' in which meaning-making is a co-constructed interpretive process that occurs within the process of the interview (Gubrium & Holstein, 1997, p. 120). An unstructured format allowed for flexibility within the interview to follow lines of thoughts and areas of interest that came up from each SNS consultant's common and varied experiences.

Data Analysis

In arriving at the core themes, I marked or coded areas of conversations in an iterative way while (re)reading the text. These were areas in which the SNS consultants were describing an experience and narrating or making meaning of this experience. Unlike Strauss's (1987) detailed coding, this form of analysis is more closely aligned to Lofland, Snow, Anderson and Lofland's (2006) discussion of emergent analysis in which patterns and features that resonated through the analysis emerge and Denzin's ideas about 'locating the epiphany' or the moments in which the SNS consultants were expressing what their work meant to them through the stories they chose to tell (Denzin, 2001 p. 37).

Although only six of the fourteen voices are represented in this article, the set of excerpts shared here represent all the SNS consultants within the case. These excerpts illustrate common features and variance across the SNS consultant workspace. They are models or types of experiences that best 'coined' moments, which were common to all SNS consultants within this study. They are pieces of narratives joined to tell a fragmented, selected but also coherent story.

Limitations of Methods

The fragmentation, selection and joining of narrative to propose a coherent story presents certain limitations to this article's findings one of which was just discussed earlier in regards to bias and knowledge of participant observation methods. In regards to participating consultants, the study could not connect the various participating consultant narratives with teachers own perspectives of these experiences. Evidence drawn and presented in this article describes relationships between consultants and teachers but it predominately does this through the perspective of participating consultants. Within my own role as a consultant, I was able to access perspectives of teachers and school leaders with whom I worked. However, this evidence was used to inform and frame an approach to the interviews with consultants. The absence of teacher voice in regards to the findings presented creates a selective view of the consultant – teacher relationship that limits a fuller more dynamic view of this relationship. It does not however discount the value of considering the consultancy view of the potential tensions in

this relationship. Nor does it, in my view, discount the insights that can be gained by exploring the interactions between consultants and teachers as part of the material of what is being changed in system-based reform attempts.

The SNS Consultant-Teacher Relationship

As detailed at the outset of this article, the SNS consultant–teacher relationship within the SNS in London was bounded by two contradictory elements or characteristics. In this section, the paper looks more closely at the ways that the consultant–teacher relationship was both:

- A collaborative partnership for learning;
- A relationship geared toward directing or shaping teacher behaviour.

Both characteristics serve as part of a complex and hidden 'effect' of this reform within secondary schools and amongst SNS consultants and teachers. When successful, SNS consultants may have been a way for teachers to gain creative space and reflective moments. In these instances, consultants may have helped teachers situate, reflect and make meaning of their often isolated classroom experiences in ways that have been well documented as an effective professional learning experience for teachers (e.g. Joyce & Showers, 1996; Lieberman & McLaughlin, 1992; Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007).

But these relationships may also have served to further bind and control teachers' behaviour. In these instances, consultants may have

used the language of 'colleague' and 'peer' to further intrude into a teacher's classroom social space. A SNS consultant's position within the school could, at times, have been an effective means by which the school's hierarchy directed and watched teachers. The traditional senior school district leadership observation, visit or 'walk through' is much more of a 'one-off' experience for which degrees of preparation can protect the teachers' workspace. Within the SNS reform, consultants were now 'informally' working with departments or teachers-positioning themselves as fellow educator colleagues while at the same time that they were reporting their work with teachers to the various parts of the school and school district hierarchies. This duality of role created tensions between evaluative expert of effective teacher practice and collegial or peer coach.

These two characteristics are also relational and existed simultaneously within one department and, at times, even shifted within one relationship. A relationship that started as something collaborative and spontaneous within the day-to-day interaction of a teacher and a consultant could change, as the consultant and the teacher interacted with the various individuals across the school district and school hierarchies. The next two sections will explore both characteristics in more detail.

A Collaborative Partnership for Learning

SNS consultants described their most successful and engaging experiences with teachers as ones that addressed specific situations and

needs. In doing these things, the consultant–teacher relationship became collaborative. For the teacher in these instances, the consultant offered ideas from and creates links to the wider educational community, both in the school district and London at large. In discussing the potential of learning networks of teachers as a means of further developing professional learning experiences, Earl and Katz (2005) highlight a similar notion within network learning structures for teachers. Here, teachers are able to tap into both outside knowledge and tacit knowledge in finding deeper meanings both collectively and individually about classroom experiences and student learning through these networks. One consultant, Alex, described this type or relationship in two separate instances:

> We just discussed ideas about teaching, the way she combined [pause] engagement, engaging kids. The actual mechanics of putting her in contact with other people, other – different agencies. She was just marvellous. She is absolutely fantastic. That science department had quite a lot of recognition. They did a science through art fair where they tried to amalgamate two disciplines. That was followed in *The Guardian* (a London newspaper). It was a symbiosis. You know what I mean? Two minds better than one. It was having a think and chipping in ideas [Further in the conversation Alex describes another collaborative situation.]

> I also felt it was important, my reaction afterwards was to, I made a point of going to find them. I made a point of saying, 'Well you did something that I couldn't have done' because that's a skill. You know what I mean? I thought about the learning process for them in the aftermath of that. I thought they might learn from, there might be something in it for them, maybe just in terms of confidence.
>
> They were a little bit taken aback. Quite pleased I think. I think it was the first time that anyone had given them any recognition to what they were doing. Going from that really dark pit, I mean the hardest part of any journey is the beginning or whatever. That is part of learning, I think. (Alex).

Here, Alex describes experiences that have an emergent quality with teachers. They were not SNS-based initiatives nor could they be defined or reduced within the effective discourses from which SNS materials draw (DfEE, 2001). They have an uncertain quality that Clarke discusses and were very much of that moment *in situ* (Clarke, 2005; Earl & Katz, 2006). Alex's use of the word 'symbiosis' highlights the dynamic qualities of these experiences in which both the consultants and teachers are getting things out of the creative endeavour of working together. The relationship itself is multi-directional and deeply aligned to learning as something that is driven within the experience itself rather than from someplace else.

Alex's experiences are what Joyce and Showers (1996) consider as 'moments' in which the consultant's work is personalised to the experience or situation. This approach to change has implications within a pre-packaged reform. The opportunity for 'development' or change, as well as the *type* of change, emerges from the experience itself. In so doing, the relevance of the experiences themselves becomes the focal point of the consultant–teacher relationship. Instead of starting or interacting with the teacher through an introduction of initiatives that are separate from a teacher's immediate classroom situations, Alex is starting from the classroom situation.

Common as these moments are in the work of the SNS consultant, they are also unpredictable and cannot be pre-designed. They emerge. In so doing, there are often high levels of variation of why and how they occur. This can be the case across the same department. Joe, another consultant, discusses this variation in his work within one department. Here, Joe is working at what is thought of as a 'split site' school in which Key Stage 3 (grades 7 to 9) and Key Stage 4 (grades 10 to 12) are in different physical locations within the same school. The variation within Joe's experience reinforces the problematic ways that conceptions of 'consistency' or 'uniformity' were used within the SNS central messages (e.g. DfES, 2002b). Joe states:

> You go in there and leave [resources] there with them.
> And you come back and they've used it in a totally
> different way and it's brilliant. And then [I] taking those
> resources to the other site [same school and department]

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and saying, 'I've seen this work with your kids. We did it at the other site and it worked really well.' Then, demonstrating the resources and them being really successful and then coming back and no-one, apart from the teachers that I worked with, knows anything about it.

There's no dissemination, there's no discussion going on. That's a marked difference between the two sites. At break-time or lunch-time, all the first site will go into the prep room and there will be you know, social chit, chat. 'I've done this and it worked really well.' Or 'Have you tried this?' Lots of teaching and learning discussion going on. Whereas at the other site, they're in the staffroom letting off steam or in the classrooms marking. There's no discussion about teaching and learning going on. (Joe)

The diversity that existed across this department is a characteristic of many departmental experiences detailed by all the consultants who participated. In this instance, the degree and quality of the relationships between Joe and the individual teachers within the department vary widely. Challenging mechanistic forms of school change, these experiences highlight the idiosyncratic, diverse qualities of teachers, which were often ignored in the SNS design and within its resources (e.g. DfES, 2004). In the SNS context, diversity becomes a thing to control, shape or resolve in order to establish 'consistency' of message and action. As such, it brought up dynamics of power within the consultant–teacher

relationship.

<p style="text-align:center">A Relationship Geared Toward Directing or</p>

<p style="text-align:center">Shaping Teacher Behaviour</p>

The introduction of SNS consultants within school relationships may have altered some of the traditional power relationships embedded in secondary schools in England in complex ways. The use of such roles has implications for secondary school change. It may be critical to attend to the ways that the secondary school's hierarchy interacts with outsider roles like consultants at both micro and macro levels. Consultants all described tense experiences in which they actively attempted to intervene or change the teacher's experience in the classroom. These interventions are rationalised via the ethos of student care—done for the benefit of students—that Greenfield (1991) highlights as a key aspect of micro-political relations in schools. They helped define a different type of relationship that can result in increased control of the teacher's workspace that may have served to increase the power over what and how teachers went about their work in the classroom. This played out in three interrelated ways:

- Consultant positioning themselves as gate-keepers of 'good' practice
- Negotiation of power through interactions with teachers and students
- Use of collegial, developmental language to influence teacher behavior

Consultant Positioning as Gate-Keepers

of 'Good' Practice

In answering a question in which I asked whether the education system needs any external accountability, Beatrice revealed some of the power shifts within her general perceptions of the need for a monitoring system. These perceptions were a reflection of the ways that the SNS consultant had partly shifted the power that teachers had within their own classrooms. In contrast to the relative empowerment of individual teachers described in the last section, these shifts may at times served to decrease the personal power that teachers have within the classroom. Beatrice states:

> Of course, the good ones have an internal accountability but you need something for those that aren't so good in whatever way. You may have those that just need a little support but you also may have those that aren't so good, that can't be bothered. And I think there needs to be something in place like a little watchdog who monitors them. It might be that monitoring means they work a bit harder or that they get a chance to develop in ways that they need. So I wouldn't agree with that statement [whether the education system needs any external accountability], otherwise I think you would get crap lessons, or if you're lucky [only] some will become good teachers. (Beatrice)

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Beatrice aligns her perspective closely to the position that the SNS materials take in defining how departments and schools should go about getting 'effective teaching' (DfES, 2002a). It is not clear whether 'good' teachers are actually driven by an internal accountability that the 'not so good' teachers lack. Neither are there any details as to what exactly the differences are between the 'not so good' and the 'good ones', short of the common rhetoric and teaching lists published across the SNS.

What is more relevant for the purposes of this discussion is the ways that we, consultants, justified our role as a 'watchdog'. Far from Alex's perceptions of 'symbiosis', we became gate-keepers to 'good' teaching in ways that may further serve to control teachers' workspace. Given the diversity and variety of teachers' approaches to their classroom that Joe discussed within one department, this perspective brings an additional aspect to the consultant–teacher relations. We are the 'watchers' and, at times, controllers of good practice in relative power is negotiated between consultants and teachers within ongoing interactions in schools.

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Negotiation of Power Through

Interactions with Teachers and Students

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In Maya's experience, this played out in interesting ways. Here, Maya was asked to support a teacher who the school's senior leadership considered weak. Although Maya's story may reinforce this perception of the teacher, the degrees to which she intervened in the lesson shows interesting relations of power and resistance in the classroom and within Maya's relationship with this teacher. Maya states:

So the bell went, I went in, I sat down. The kids are in and out of the classroom. So, no teacher, she comes in, she walks in. Doesn't face the class, doesn't address them in anyway. Gives them a piece of paper. Doesn't explain what they have to do. Five minutes go by, some of the kids make paper airplanes. Some start flicking it around the classroom. And they look at me [whisper] 'What are we supposed to be doing?' Ten minutes go by, 'This is not real.' Anyway, eventually she writes a title and date on the board and then she says 'Right, I want you all over here. I want to show you today's experiment.'

[After the experiment set up doesn't work…]
I couldn't take it anymore. I could not. So I went over to her and I said to her. I said, 'This isn't going to work. How do you expect the ink to spread? Do you want me to show the kids how to do the experiment?'

'Oh yes!'

So she gets the kids to the front, I start talking to the kids and the minute I start talking, she leaves the room. I went outside [the classroom], I found her and I said, 'I am doing this for your benefit. Could you come back into the classroom?'

'Oh, I will be there in a minute,' she says.

After the lesson, I told her what was wrong with the experiment. And she wasn't having it. She says, 'I did my degree in chromatography'. She apologised for being late and she admitted she should have explained to the kids what they should be doing, but what stunned me is that she didn't know how to do chromatography. (Maya).

Maya moved from an observer to someone interacting with the classroom dynamics. In so doing, she played a more active role in the power relations within the classroom and justified this action through the actions of the students. Misbehaviour and the confused whispers of the students drove Maya to try and rectify a bewildering lesson. 'I could not take it anymore. I could not' became a rallying cry for the students' welfare that justified the uninvited intrusion into the lesson.

This intrusion may also be coupled with another interesting aspect of this situation as the teacher did not necessarily acknowledge the power over the relationship that Maya tried to impose on her. The effects of power as observed through both Maya's and the teacher's actions and reactions show the relational and dependent qualities embedded within power dynamics in social interaction (Bacharach & Lawler, 1980). The teacher seems to reject the power dynamics that are being imposed on her. She treated the experience as a collegial interaction. She was free to walk out of the lesson instead of sitting in the space that was offered to

her between the relative powerlessness of the students and the powerfulness of Maya directing the classroom experience. She seemed to be actively resisting Maya's imposition within this experience that Maya was doing to her, for her 'benefit'. It was an example of the consultant–teacher relationship at its most uncomfortable. It also brings in questions as to exactly what types of power SNS consultants used when working with teachers and how this is negotiated, accepted and rejected by teachers. Stephanie touched on these power relations when she described her attempts at setting up situations in which teachers do certain things, but did not perceive that they were being guided towards these actions. She states:

> You keep chipping in the questions. Trying not to tell them what to do because otherwise as soon as you walk away, they haven't thought it through. If they think it through, I think it's the wiring. I am convinced it is the wiring. If you force them to think it through and throw around the ideas or challenge an idea saying, 'OK then, how would that look in practice?' Do you see what I mean? Rather than saying, I think you should do this, this and this. I have to say, it is difficult. I mean sometimes you just think if it works in this department, this shouldn't happen. Do you know what I mean? You take hold of it and shake it and sort it out. Well that's not my job. It's so difficult. How do you get people to do it themselves? (Stephanie)

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In this instance, Stephanie's relationship with teachers took on tense characteristics as questions are 'forced' on to teachers in the hope that they will then discover and learn the pre-designed intentions that Stephanie had in mind from the start. She wanted to 'take hold of' and 'sort out' the teachers in ways that are impossible within these social relations. Instead, teachers became something that Stephanie worked on, much as a teacher might work on a student. Consequentially, these intrusions and approaches to work with teachers may disempower as much as they are intended to empower within the teacher's work life.

In another instance, Alex described a situation that also may have had disempowering effects for the teacher [Alex's voice italicized]:

> *He asked this one kid what transparent means and he said, 'A solid object that doesn't cast a shadow'. And um…*
>
> What did the teacher do with that?
>
> *I stopped the lesson.*
>
> You did? Were you teaching it?
>
> *No, I sort of butchered in rather badly and I said, because the teacher hadn't noticed it. He hadn't realised that it was a really good answer. He just went on to the next kid. He just went, 'Good'. I said, 'Hold on a minute, can we just go back to that comment.' I threw the question out to the class, 'Let's think about that answer for a minute.'*
>
> What was the teacher's response to you about that afterwards when you talked to him?

He said, 'Well you can do that because they will listen to you'.

This particular teacher is a struggling young lad. (Alex)

Alex 'butchered' into the teacher's workspace and the established power dynamics of teacher–student relations in the classroom. Similar to Maya's situation just discussed, Alex used a justification of the potential student learning lost as the authority of action in this situation. Both the teachers in Alex's and Maya's stories have had their lessons taken over. They were faced with either acknowledging a form of teaching 'weakness' or a quality of dysfunction within their craft or disengaging and removing any personal responsibility that they have over the learning in their classrooms at that moment. In these instances, the consultants attempted to show or demonstrate ways that they feel would make these lessons better learning experiences for students. But they also may unintentionally be disempowering the teacher in the process. The teachers have had their lesson taken over, adjusted and re-delivered.

In stating that the students 'listen to you' in Alex's experience, the teacher also appeared to be removing some responsibility that he may have had over the classroom experiences through the uncontrollable factor of forcing someone to listen. These experiences describe a tension and the negotiation of the relations of power between the SNS consultants and teachers. In situations like these, teachers either accept that they are 'doing it' wrongly or choose not to completely engage in the experience. In both Maya's and Alex's case, the teachers, at least partly, removed themselves, one physically, the other mentally, from the responsibility of the learning of the students in their lessons.

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Use of Collegial, Developmental Language

to Influence Teacher Behavior

Although these examples are more overt examples of power relations between SNS consultants and teachers, these relations could also take much less overt forms. They could take on the more subtle, less invasive qualities in which language of development through such notions as 'reflection' and 'collaboration' are used to prescribe and direct behaviour as detailed in Hargreaves discussion of 'contrived collegiality' (Hargreaves, 1991). In these instances, relations were designed to influence a teacher's behaviour or perceptions through a consultant approach which disguised this intention. This is apparent in Beatrice's summary of her work with teachers:

> What I usually do is observe a teacher in one lesson. And I usually start by talking about the things that I have done that have gone wrong and the type of evaluation processes that I went through to try to move me from one place to another. So I usually start by talking about myself. I think what I usually do is observe two or three lessons just to get a feel as to where they are at. Then, I ask them what they would like to develop and hopefully the areas that I have identified are actually areas that they want to develop. It is a very slow process. It is more about getting their confidence really in me. And then moving on to the

type of discussions that I am talking about like looking at

their behaviour management. (Beatrice).

Here, Beatrice shared the vulnerability that she has felt as an educator with the teacher in order to get at an area of the teacher's work that she wanted to influence. Differing from Alex's symbiotic moment again, this was another common approach used in order for consultants to try and shape teachers' 'development'. In 'talking about' ourselves and our own professional struggles, we positioned the relationship as one that is a learning experience that we all are in together. At the same time, we tried to 'move' the discussion on to the topics that we were interested in from the start.

Taken as a whole across these three areas just discussed, these SNS consultant relations with teachers had a quality that served to control teachers' workspace in new ways. Backed by the SNS, as opposed to having any institutional role within the school, the consultant was viewed as both the implementer and spokesperson of the national reform. We used this authority to partly shape the ways that teachers went about their job. Conceptions of how teachers improve and how they approach their jobs are, however, contested (e.g. Ball, 1987; Little, 1995). They change within this process in ways that may endanger critical aspects of teacher decision-making within their work life.

Stephanie's view of teacher autonomy showed the degree to which teacher autonomy was a concept aligned with 'poor' teaching and stagnant classroom experiences within the hegemonic discourses in which we may still currently operate in many jurisdictions. She states:

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> People have done things their own way for a long time,
> whether it actually works or not, and they will continue to
> do this until you come along with your own voice if you
> wish, maybe the SNS backing you up. It's challenging
> their own way of doing things, which I think is the most
> difficult aspect. Once you actually get them around, you
> get them to see that if you try this, it may work. That's
> why I get teachers to try things and after about a term,
> their students are more engaged, the students are better
> behaved, they are having better discussions or are better
> in groups and then they are the ones in the department
> saying that this does work. Then you get people saying,
> 'Alright, let's get her in here and see what she has to
> offer.'(Stephanie).

Stephanie's discussion highlighted an important tension within this role
and roles like it within secondary schools. On one hand, her ability to
constructively 'challenge their (the teachers) own way of doing things'
may be critical in moving teachers into trying different or alternative
ways to engage students and re-think or reflect on their actions and the
students' responses to these actions. In so doing she may have been
supporting or enabling potentially rich professional learning for the
teachers with whom she worked.

On the other hand, in disregarding what it might mean for teachers to
do 'things their own way' in their classrooms, Stephanie could also have
been actively disenfranchising local understanding and practice as a key

form of personal understanding and action. She was counting and discounting what qualifies as effective practice. Although Stephanie brings in key aspects of what many would call good lessons, e.g. student engagement, student behaviour and better student discussions, it is not clear whether she is advertising these aspects as part of good teaching in general or positioning herself as the gate-keeper to these elements. Viewed from the later perspective in which she is positioning herself as the gate-keeper of good teaching, Stephanie's perception of teachers' existing knowledge and practice as potentially detrimental to the classroom learning environment calls into question how teachers actually go about developing and changing within their careers. It highlights a common perception that the consultants held within this position: left to their own, with no pressure or 'challenge' from a role such as the SNS consultant, teachers would stagnate and have done so in the past. Indeed, Estelle Morris, England's Secretary of State for Education and Skills in 2001, said as much offering evidence to this stagnation in the 1970s simply because she had taught then and experienced these qualities at the school where she had worked (Morris, 2003). However, generalizing about an entire generation of teachers from a personal experience is problematic. Weak generalizations like these serve to justify the need for external accountability structures within the schools. They also highlight the ways that we use local history and personal experience to either demonise or glorify old and new reform policies, while reinforcing our position or authority of action (Power, 1992).

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The use of the generalizations just discussed can be politically useful in large system change efforts that use consultancy roles as means to implement change. For SNS consultants, it supported the ways that they used the SNS as something that is 'backing you up' in order to justify action and privilege the consultant position as the developer within departments and amongst teachers. Here, development taking place needed the SNS consultant in order to be valid. 'What works' does not matter unless it is 'what works' as introduced and supported within the department by the consultant.

At its most basic, what seems to be the perspective here is the belief that in influencing aspects of teacher behaviour, teachers are empowered and become better teachers. What is absent from this approach to working with teachers is an understanding and acknowledgement of the ways that pressure and control are used to influence a teacher's behaviour can also (as implied in the examples above) marginalize their experience. Effectively, the use of institutional pressure in teacher professional learning processes can separate the essence of development from its origin within the personal or 'felt' experience of the teacher's work in the classroom.

In these instances, the use of pre-designed initiatives that focus on specific types of teaching behaviours can sideline the teacher's experience for directions from outside the classroom. These aspects of the consultant–teacher relationship may serve to control as much as they enlighten within the work life of teachers and students. They are important elements of a complex relationship with teachers, which may

also influence the ways that SNS consultants interacted with school senior leaders, middle managers and the department as a whole.

Discussion

In this paper, I argue that the social influences of introducing a SNS consultancy structure within secondary schools created contradictory effects within teachers' workspaces in England. These consultant-teacher moments are largely ignored or misrepresented across a wide range of education and policy research. The school improvement debate of the consultancy based English reforms like SNS often position the consultant in three general ways: they are either the operative technicians of these reforms (DfES, 2005), the unacknowledged parts of New Labours interventionist machine (Power & Whitty, 1999) or the expert-followers of the current school-change hegemony that is based on the dominant discourses embedded within the reform (Ball, 1995). Taken together, these conceptions, although all partially evident, do not fully capture what is a complex relationship.

The SNS consultants supported the relevance of department and teacher experiences while also helping to further increase the institutional control over teachers in their classrooms. That is to say, while the SNS consultant was often seeking to further create developmental experiences that resonated with teachers' and departments' experiences, they may also have served to further control the teachers' workspaces to significant degrees. In so doing, they could have marginalized or constrained the influence of their interaction with

teachers to instigate deeper learning experiences. The consultant, in this instance, might have been operating as the 'benign' eye, watching teachers much more effectively than both school management and England's school inspections did or could. The SNS consultant might have served as both a controlling and monitoring structure throughout the system and a catalyst for deep learning experiences that were drawn from the relevance of the teachers' lived experiences within secondary schools.

Thus, in the name of school improvement and classroom 'effectiveness' the SNS consultant became both controlling agent and catalyst. As a controlling agent, the consultancy was an instrument of increased panopticism within the education system that combined with exam pressures to amplify or greatly increase the power held by school and school district hierarchies. As a catalyst, the consultancy operated as critical friend to teachers' professional learning and personal development within the isolated semi-fractured institutional structures of secondary schools.

This complexity is not 'officially' recognized within the reform's own published materials. In their comprehensive review of the pilot of the SNS for the DCSF, Stoll, Stobart, Martin, Freeman, Freedman, Smees and Sammons (2003) listed some of the qualities of effective SNS consultants that were highlighted from the pilot schools. They described an effective SNS consultant as someone who is a 'flexible, adaptable, enthusiastic, confidential, sensitive, challenging, interpersonal, open-minded, collaborative problem solver' (Stoll et al., 2003, p. 40). Although helpful

in getting a feel for the scope and diversity of the consultant's role discussed within this article, this list does not represent the dialogic nature of social relations within which these characteristics are situated, constructed and contested (Harré & Langenhove, 1999). By ignoring this dynamic within local action, the use of school consultants can effectively disenfranchise the same school and school district local knowledge that it is trying to encourage (Gitlin & Margonis, 1995). A more careful treatment of the consultant-teacher relationship might be an important step before a deeper understanding of its implications on teacher professional learning and school improvement processes within school change efforts can be realized.

Earl, Watson and Katz (2003) warn that the use of metaphors within large-scale reforms can limit as many possibilities as they serve to clarify. This may also have been the case with the SNS's key central messages. SNS's policy use of 'cascade' for communication or 'field force' for its consultants, are good examples of this (DfES, 2005, pp. 50 & 52). Used to bring clarity, direction and purpose for schools and the public, they may also serve to simplify, marginalize and falsely systematise complexities and tension embedded in social relations within and between schools and school districts (Earl et al., 2003). Amongst other things, this created a duality between the rhetoric and beliefs from which SNS's version of school change was constructed and some of the realities that were experienced by teachers and SNS consultants. This duality between rhetoric and experience served to keep things unacknowledged, hidden from public view and unavailable for new reform actions, strategy or

direction. In the end, this may have limited the ability of the central reform personnel to use, adapt, learn and re-design reform structures which more adequately reflect the moments of this reforms success and failure.

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