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**Possibilities of partnerships as sites for learning:
Leadership development in English 14-19 consortia**

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Introduction

Major changes in the 14-19 curriculum in England are currently taking place through the implementation of Diplomas. These new awards, which combine theoretical study with practical experience, are delivered in partnership by consortia of schools, colleges and training providers and other organisations. This development is a significant instance of the wider trend for governments to use partnerships as a mechanism for delivering education and training. The problematic nature of partnership working, such as sharing power, building trust, and coping with continual change, is well documented (Hudson *et al*, 1999; Glendinning *et al*, 2004; Huxham and Vangen, 2005). These issues have substantial implications for consortium leaders, who have to contend not only with the inherent difficulties of effective partnership working, but do so in a policy environment that simultaneously promotes both collaboration and competition amongst consortium members (Higham and Yeomans, 2005; Hodgson, *et al*, 2008). Providing support for leaders in these contexts poses particular challenges in relation to the content of development programmes, the engagement of participants, and the ways in which training is delivered.

Our aim in this paper is to explore how the nature of leadership development programmes, consortia conditions and characteristics, and participants act to facilitate and restrict leadership learning in 14-19 partnerships, illuminating more generally the strengths and limitations of partnerships as sites for learning. We draw on the findings of an evaluation of the first year of the national Leadership and Management Development Programme (LMDP) implemented jointly by the National College of School Leadership (NCSL) and the then Centre for Excellence in Leadership (CEL) to support the 146 consortia preparing to deliver the Diplomas in September 2008.

The paper begins by describing the context of partnership development for 14-19 education in England, in particular identifying some of the key challenges of partnership working. It then describes the key features of the LMDP and of our evaluation methods before presenting our main findings, both generally and through two illustrative case studies. On the basis of our findings, we then consider the factors that affect learning in consortia before locating these in relation to learning theory.

The partnership context

Many writers have noted both the frequent advocacy of partnership and collaboration as a solution to problems that cross boundaries between organisations or agencies and the difficulties in making such collaboration work. Thus Hudson *et al* describe collaboration as 'conceptually elusive and perennially difficult to achieve' (1999, p. 236), while Powell and Glendinning refer to 'the indefinable in pursuit of the unachievable' (2002, p. 2). In a similar vein, Huxham and Vangen (2005) distinguish between collaborative advantage and collaborative inertia:

'[Collaborative advantage] captures the synergy argument: to gain real advantage from collaboration, something has to be achieved that could not have been achieved by any one of the organizations acting alone. ...[C]ollaborative inertia captures what happens very frequently in practice: the output from a collaborative arrangement is negligible, the rate of output is extremely slow, or stories of pain and hard grind are integral to the successes achieved.' (p. 60)

Hodgson and Spours (2006) suggest that the post-16 sector has been generally characterised by what they call 'weakly collaborative arrangements', constrained by voluntary engagement, complex governance arrangements and division among institutions leading to partial commitment and lack of sustainability. They place the primary blame for these consequences on the conflicts in government policy between pressures for competition and for collaboration 'with relatively weak policy levers and initiatives [for collaboration] working against a deeply embedded and historical set on competitive institutional arrangements' (pp. 129-130).

The difficulty of achieving effective collaboration in a competitive environment has been well-articulated by many authors. For example, Hudson *et al* (1999) argue that policies that encourage collaboration often depend on two optimistic, or even naïve, assumptions: the rational assumption that organisations will collaborate when they can see that this offers a more efficient way to achieve common ends; and the altruistic assumption that that organisations will collaborate for the good of the community they serve, in our case 14-19 learners. This, however, ignores the realities that typically drive organisational behaviour. As Billett *et al* (2007) argue:

'Even where there is a common set of concerns, the process of working together is complex and challenging, often contested and requiring new ways of working in changing circumstances... Social partnerships work in ways directing towards shared goals or, more likely a common focus of concern. However, it is likely that, even when there are shared goals, a means of securing those goals will be the subject of contested views and practices within social partnerships, which can jeopardise their formation and continuity and the important work they are assigned.' (p. 638)

Indeed, often collaboration is not driven primarily by robustly negotiated shared *goals, values or purposes*, but simply by common *interests*. In such cases, attitudes towards collaboration may be influenced by concerns that freedom to act independently is lost and scarce resources may be used on an enterprise whose eventual benefits may be far from certain. In this context, interests will be weighed and judgements made at a variety of levels about the potential benefits and costs of collaboration and it needs to be recognised that:

'change challenges practices and values. This will result in ambiguities and dilemmas such as managerial versus professional regimes, flexibility versus bureaucratic control and collaborative versus departmental loyalties. The ways in which these ambiguities are resolved in the *micro* domain of individual decision-making will be crucial in determining the fate of *strategic* collaborative initiatives' (Hudson et al, 1999, p. 246)

Higham and Yeomans support this view, arguing, as we do, that 'to a large extent partnership can only be understood in relation to local and institutional contexts and circumstances' (in press, p. 6). They identify local policy drivers and levers, institutional values, cultures and interests and personal missions and careers as key factors in helping to explain the different ways in which particular partnerships develop, while also noting the importance of temporality, happenstance and improvisation in making the reality of partnership evolution less deliberative than accounts often suggest.

Issues that need to be addressed if partnership working is to be effective have been identified by many authors (Hudson and Hardy, 2002; Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Hodgson and Spours, 2006; Billett *et al*, 2007). There needs to be a shared acknowledgement that collaboration will be of value; aims and purposes need to be negotiated; structures for collaborative working need to be established and relationships among partners built up; trust, commitment and ownership need to be developed and maintained; and appropriate and effective forms of governance and leadership need to be established. Particular challenges are also created for individuals in key positions, including identifying and establishing new roles, working across new boundaries and considering the career implications of new structures (Newman, 1994).

Consequently the leadership and management of collaborative partnerships is a challenging one as Billett *et al* (2007) note:

‘Social partnerships do not just happen as a result of external demand: they have to be enabled and supported. Social partnerships themselves need to initiate, develop and sustain the capacities required for partnership work.’ (p. 654)

One response to this challenge is to develop partnerships’ leadership capacity through leadership development activities.

The study

CEL and NCSL were commissioned in 2006, by the then Department for Education and Skills, to jointly develop a collaborative leadership and management programme to support 14-19 Diploma partnerships as they prepared to implement the new Diploma qualifications. The programme was initiated in April 2007 as a menu-driven ‘offer of support’ available to consortia which had passed through the review processes that confirmed their readiness to begin delivery of the first Diplomas in September 2008.

The offer of support comprised a number of activities, of which those taken up most frequently by consortia were one-to one coaching, team coaching, action learning, organisational development and change management consultancy (ODCM), workshops and seminars. Consortia were supported by CEL/NCSL Consortium Leadership Consultants in identifying leadership needs and selecting from the offer of support. Of the 146 consortia eligible for support, 117 participated in the programme during 2007-8. Of these, 44% of consortia participated in one type of support, 36% in two types, 15% in three types and 5% in four or more types of support. In total 523 leaders, from 349 organisations, took part in the programme. Participants included consortium leads (those with responsibility for leading the co-ordination of Diploma implementation), senior local authority leaders and consultants, senior leaders in schools, colleges and training providers and Diploma lines of learning leads (with middle management responsibility for development of a specific Diploma). In this study we focus on those elements of the LMDP that were delivered within consortia, that is one to one coaching, action learning, team coaching, ODCM and customised workshops.

It will be seen immediately that the offer made under the LMDP was a complex one. Although a menu of types of activities was designed and offered, as described above, the ways in which they differed was not always clear and, in the event, similar kinds of leadership development experiences were often delivered under different names. We have found it useful, therefore, to distinguish provision along two dimensions: whether it

was targeted at individuals or at groups; and whether its primary purpose was to enhance leadership capacity by increasing individual or team effectiveness or to produce specific outcomes such as key decisions or implementation plans. Thus, broadly, the purpose of 1:1 coaching was to enhance individual effectiveness; that of action learning was to help individuals explore key challenges or decisions with the help of colleagues; team coaching focussed on the effectiveness of team processes; and ODCM was designed to enable groups to work together on common problems in order to produce concrete outcomes. Workshops focused on specific issues - in particular, collaborative leadership, collaborative quality assurance, and equality and diversity - although often they were tailored to specific consortia's needs. Of course, most activities involved a mixture of process and task, but, in general, the nature of the processes in which consultants engaged reflected one or other of these two primary drivers.

The independent external evaluation on which this paper is based used a combined methods approach. Telephone interviews were conducted with 20 consortium leaders at the beginning and end of the year, four senior Local Authority leaders, nine senior CEL/NCSL managers and consultants, five coaches and ODCM consultants, and five Consortium Leadership Consultants. Six case studies of consortia were undertaken drawing data from interviews with consortium leads, interviews and focus groups with leaders from organisations across the consortium who had participated in the programme, and documentary evidence. 75 responses were received to a survey of participants, representing 17% of the 431 participants for which we had valid contact details, from a population of 532. Two seminars and three workshops were also observed; and the CEL/NCSL participation database and documentary evidence were analysed. In this paper we draw particularly on data from the six case studies to illustrate our findings.

Learning from the LMDP programme

In this section we focus on our six case study consortia, illustrating their *purposes* in engaging with the programme, *who was engaged and in what*, their *experiences* of engagement, and the *outcomes*. We begin by providing a cross-case overview and then illustrate the complex interrelationships between these variables in two of our cases.

Overview

The consortia in our case studies each identified multiple purposes for engaging in the LMDP. These purposes broadly encompassed: building individual leadership capacity, focusing on leading in collaborative contexts and personal confidence, as well as the development of more generic leadership skills and qualities; building the capacity of teams to function more effectively; and the accomplishment of specific tasks, which in some consortia were very tightly tied to Diploma implementation and in others rather more broadly related to 14-19 developments. While all the consortium leads had explicit purposes in mind when embarking on the programme, the specific aims of the different activities tended to emerge through the process of engagement. LMDP participants who had not been involved in decision-making about engagement in the LMDP were often less clear about the intended purposes, why they had been selected to participate or what to expect than those who had. Thus in some cases participants identified for 1:1 coaching felt that their selection indicated a negative judgment on their performance where the opposite may have been the case; and participants in group activities often

arrived with either weak understandings of the purpose of the event, and/or very different agendas to that of the consortium lead and facilitator.

The activities in which our case study consortia chose to participate, and the groups selected for each activity are summarised in Table 1. One-to-one coaching and action learning typically took place over a series of up to six sessions, with the exception of a one-off half day action learning event in Consortium 5. ODCM involved a series of four events in Consortium 1 and a one-off activity in Consortium 2. Team coaching in Consortium 1 involved two intensive events. The bespoke workshops in Consortium 4 and 6 were one day events, both focused on collaborative leadership. There was variation between consortia in the number of activities they chose to engage with and in the degree of focus on Diploma implementation within those activities. For example, in Consortium 2 action learning focused on planning key tasks such as producing marketing materials and planning an employer engagement day. In contrast, in Consortium 3 the 'learning to learn' and 'VLE' action learning sets had less clearly defined foci. In our case studies, as in the programme as a whole, a larger number of middle leaders, working at an operational level to implement Diplomas, participated in the programme than did senior strategic leaders.

Table 1. LMDP Participants and Activities

Consortium	1:1 Coaching	Action Learning	Team Coaching	ODCM	Bespoke Workshop
1	Diploma line leads (4)		LA 14-19 team	Diploma strategic leadership group	
2	Consortium lead Diploma line curriculum lead LA consultant (3 in total)	Diploma line implementation group (1 set)		LA 14-19 team	
3	Young leaders (2)	Young new and aspiring leaders (2 sets)			
4	Diploma line lead (1)	Consortium lead and Diploma line leads (1 set)			Consortium lead, organisation heads, 14-19 curriculum managers, examinations officers, teachers/lecturers and partnership development managers
5		Heads and other senior leaders (1 half day event)			
6	Diploma line leads (2)				School staff involved in any collaborative activity

The LMDP was generally successful in providing high quality support experiences and leading to intermediate outcomes and potentially longer term outcomes. Facilitators were generally thought to be highly skilled, although in a few instances they were perceived to lack sufficient understanding of the 14-19 agenda. One-to-one coaching was particularly well received in our case studies, as it was by all the interviewees and survey respondents across our study.

Broadly, the intentions with which consortia had engaged in the different activities were reflected in the outcomes. In our cases, 1 to 1 coaching, with few exceptions, led to strong personal outcomes and additionally in some cases to task outcomes. In some instances these outcomes were focused on generic issues, such as managing time and workloads or led to increased confidence and recognition of personal success. In others, outcomes were more strongly linked to Diploma implementation, such as changed attitudes towards, and new skills in, working collaboratively.

Many group-focused activities also produced positive outcomes. Action learning in Consortium 4 and Consortium 3 increased the capacity of teams to work collaboratively, whereas in Consortium 2 outcomes primarily involved the accomplishment of tasks in preparation for Diploma implementation. Participant's views on the half-day action learning event in Consortium 5 were mixed. The LA senior advisor thought that it had a longer term impact in leading to schools, colleges and training providers talking more openly with each other, particularly about quality assurance issues. However, one of the heads who attended, while finding the event useful in providing space and time to tease some issues out didn't think the event had moved the agenda forward in the city. ODCM led to very positive team development outcomes in Consortium 2, but had limited impact in Consortium 1 because the team was well-established and key members felt that process-focused work was not what they needed. Likewise, the bespoke workshops led to positive outcomes in one consortium but had little impact in another. In Consortium 4 a useable action plan was created linked to the next set of local priorities and tied into a series of planned meetings. In contrast in Consortium 6 the consortium lead felt that the intended aim of getting the strategic group to take more of a lead had not happened.

Case Studies

The varied ways in which different consortia engaged with the LMDP and the relationships between purposes, engagement, experience and outcomes are illuminated in our more detailed account of Consortium 1 and Consortium 2

Consortium 1

Consortium 1 is based in a small city-based unitary authority with 18 secondary schools, 3 colleges and a number of other training providers. Consortium 1 is one of only 10 consortia with 5 lines of learning in the first Diploma cohort and has 5 more in the second. Strategic management of the Diplomas is by a Diploma Delivery Partnership Management Group (DMG) of about 20, comprising school and college staff with strategic responsibility for Diplomas plus representatives of the Local Authority, LSC, and other agencies. It is chaired by the LA and reports to the LA's 14-19 Partnership Group. The partnership builds on previously good collaborative practices in the LA, but these were at a higher strategic rather than operational level. In this context, the Diploma management structure is seen as new and needing to be developed.

The consortium's response to the programme was led by a member of the LA 14-19 team (the sponsor), whose role was solely concerned with Diplomas. She had a background in HR and was seen as a strong champion of leadership development, determining what aspects of the offer should be accessed and informing others about it. She identified a number of key issues that the LMDP needed to address: improving the management of change across the partnership, especially helping the DMG to work effectively; supporting emerging leaders, particularly the Diploma Co-ordinators; and helping with the planning process generally. The consortium accessed three components of the offer. First, 1:1 coaching was provided for the four Diploma Co-ordinators, the majority of whom undertook six coaching sessions. Secondly, ODCM support was made available to the DMG through a series of about four meetings of 2-3 hours, separate from the normal DMG meetings with their packed agendas. Finally, team coaching was provided for the LA 14-19 leadership team of about six people through two whole-day meetings. The 1:1 coaching focused on individual roles and personal development needs in relation to these; the ODCM activity focused on the DMG's task of moving towards an agreed strategy for Diploma implementation; and the team coaching activity focused on the leadership team's processes and their effectiveness.

Overall the LMDP programme was judged a success, although the team coaching was felt to be less effective than the other two components. Both our interviewees found the 1:1 coaching sessions valuable overall. Both felt the process had increased their effectiveness in their roles both personally and professionally: 'The opportunity to look at myself... Even though I know what my faults are, it's about confronting those faults to change them'. However, when pressed, neither participant could be sure how far any changes that might have occurred in their effectiveness were due to the coaching, to the ODCM activity that they had also been engaged in, or to other developmental experiences they'd had at the same time. Participants' responses to the ODCM work with the DMG were similarly positive. Interviewees identified issues relating both to enhanced group processes and the achievement of tasks in relation to planning for Diploma implementation. One suggested that:

[We] needed to go through the journey... to make the Diploma team a high performing team... It did make us focus over the period of those meetings on what the key tasks were, what the timescales were, strategy to get to the answers, and that was very useful. [The process also] helped us to become more effective as a team.'

These views were echoed by the LA managers interviewed: 'It's a very cohesive group from quite diverse backgrounds... It probably did focus what their purpose was... It probably did bring about a kind of shared ownership... It helped develop trust and appreciation of others' points of view'. In contrast, responses to the team coaching for the LA leadership team varied, but the overall feeling was that it didn't really seem appropriate to the needs of the group given that the team was well-established: 'Because time is so limited, what we needed was a focus on the job, not on us as people ...' (LA manager). With hindsight, the sponsor felt that they should have done the team building activity first, asking as a team how they were 'going to manage this massive agenda for the Diplomas, work more collectively on it', and *then* done the ODCM, rather than doing them in parallel. However, there was a follow-up meeting of the LA 14-19 team that was attended by the ODCM facilitator who had been working with the DMG.

She had brought with her the 'strategic pyramid' that emerged from the DMG activity and this helped the LA 14-19 team work on an action plan. This was very useful, linking the strategic team into the ODCM work done with the DMG.

Consortium 2

Consortium 2, which had approval to run the IT Diploma from 2008-9, comprised thirteen schools, three colleges, work-based learning providers and support organisations such as Aim Higher and Connexions. Although two geographical zones had been established four years earlier to organise collaboration for Key Stage 4 vocational courses, the partnership was only weakly developed. The Local Authority 14-19 team was only fully established during the year prior to delivery of the first Diploma. The large FE college was particularly active, leading on the development of four of the first five Diploma lines. Schools, however, were more reluctant to participate. Over half had been identified in the National Challenge as underperforming schools where heads were focusing their leadership capacity internally on raising achievement. The remaining schools attracted learners who were more likely to do GCSEs and had less interest in vocational courses. Structurally, during the period of the study, Diploma development and implementation was driven strategically by a 14-19 partnership with a Diploma Strategic Group, chaired by the LA, located underneath the partnership. Reporting to the Diploma Strategic Group were Diploma groups for each line of learning. The two geographical learner zones managed operational issues such as transport.

Initially there was no strong thought-through rationale for engagement of the consortium in the LMDP, or the specific choice of LMDP activities.

'We thought a bit of everything was as good as anything really.' (Diploma Line Curriculum Lead)

In part this arose from different approaches made to the consortium by the CEL/NCSL CLC and regional coach, leading to a lack of clarity about the offer, and the late appointment of the LA 14-19 strategy lead. However, through the process of engagement in the LMDP, and negotiation with the consultants delivering the support, purposes became clearer and more focused.

The IT Diploma group undertook a series of action learning sessions, focused on accomplishing key tasks required to implement the Diploma. The LA 14-19 strategy lead, IT Diploma curriculum lead and LA IT strategy consultant participated in one-to-one coaching. The strategy lead primarily used his coaching sessions to plan the action learning sessions, (one to one coaching and action learning were facilitated by the same consultant), and steer the coach in supporting the curriculum lead in developing his collaborative leadership skills. ODCM support was provided to the LA 14-19 strategic lead and a one day ODCM team building event held for the new LA 14-19 team.

All our interviewees identified significant positive outcomes from the LMDP, although there was some uncertainty as to whether some of these outcomes would have happened without the LMDP. One-to-one coaching led to both personal and task outcomes. The curriculum lead pointed to personal outcomes in terms of his understanding of collaborative working:

'[The coach] was very good at making you think about how the decisions you made affected other people and why they were coming at it from that particular angle. She was also very good at confidence building.'

This was confirmed by the strategy lead who thought the curriculum lead had become more accommodating with partners and better able to make compromises. The LA ICT consultant found the opportunity to discuss Diploma implementation issues and the techniques taught by the coach helped him to act as mediator in the Diploma group, supporting them to share out tasks and all feel represented in decision making.

The action learning sessions were very productive in accomplishing the intended tasks such as producing marketing materials and planning an employer engagement event. The coach played a key role in facilitating participation by all members, ensuring decisions were made and focusing the group on setting SMART action plans. However, the extent to which the session built longer term leadership capacity or led to better functioning of the Diploma group is unclear. The Diploma line chair did not participate in the action learning sessions, and there were mixed views on the outcomes for the group. While the LA ICT consultant identified positive outcomes - 'the process and the pain has helped the group bond and develop trust', the curriculum lead continued to see the Diploma group as dysfunctional:

'You have still got the same people who are being awkward and not taking their responsibility seriously We haven't got a Diploma group that works together and solves problems, we've still got a very fractious Diploma group.'

The ODCM team building day was very successful, creating a sense of being a team which has been sustained:

'That was really productive, the feedback from that was really fantastic, the outcome was: before that day there wasn't a team and at the end of the day it felt like a team, and we all knew what each other did and how we could expand, and what our skills were and how we worked,.....the general feeling is that the team is happy, and they felt valued.' (LA Strategy Lead)

Factors affecting learning

Data from our cases enabled us to identify a number of factors that influenced the degree to which consortia engaged with the LMDP and the outcomes that resulted. These factors related to the consortia themselves, to aspects of the programme, and to the participants in the LMDP activities

At *consortium* level, a prior history of collaboration was important in providing an environment within which LMDP activities could be effectively located. However, successful LMDP activities were found in situations where collaboration was underdeveloped or where it had occurred at some levels but not others (for example at strategic but not operational level). As important, therefore, as a history of collaboration was a consortium leadership which was committed to developing collaborative processes and using leadership development to support these. In the majority of our cases the local authority played an important role in consortium leadership, but that was not true in all cases. For example, in Consortium 3 a group of heads provided leadership. In at least two cases an individual 'champion' who understood how

leadership development needs could be identified and was in a position to lead in this area proved critical to LMDP implementation. In Consortium 1 for example, engagement with the programme was led by a member of the LA 14-19 team with a background in human resource development and a strong commitment to leadership development; in Consortium 6 the consortium leader played a similar role.

In contrast, where engagement was poor, it was often possible to identify gatekeepers at strategic level, either in the consortium as a whole or in individual organisations, who did not fully understand or were not fully convinced of the potential value of LMDP activities. Such gatekeepers were able to use their power either to reject aspects of the offer or to prevent the flow of information to others who might respond more positively. For example, key actors in Consortium 5, which engaged very little with the offer, thought it would be too generic and unresponsive:

‘So we get the feeling that no one had put any thought into what’s the job that we’re being asked to do now and what leadership development is required for that. It was: “This is generic leadership development stuff, it’s going to be useful isn’t it”’.

In fact, as will be seen below, much of the provision which was delivered was in fact carefully negotiated. It is unclear whether in this case negotiation did not take place or the potential client decided in advance that this would not occur so did not engage significantly with the programme.

In relation to *the programme*, a number of key factors were associated with perceived success. One was the experience and skills of the consultants/coaches/facilitators, often associated with a perception that their ‘outsider’ status gave them a degree of independence. Another was the degree to which particular interventions were seen as being genuinely adapted, through negotiation, to local needs rather than representing a ‘standard’ menu. This issue was illustrated by the contrast between two workshops in consortia 4 and 6. In one case, workshop design and delivery were shared by the consultant and the consortium lead. The workshop involved a range of participants carefully selected for their roles in Diploma implementation who undertook clearly appropriate activities linked to key local issues in a distraction-free environment. Consequently engagement was high and a clear process was established to link this workshop into the next set of local priorities through a series of planned meetings. In the other case, the session was entirely led by the consultant, took place with a mixed group including a number of staff who were not engaged in Diploma delivery or leadership, and was held on the premises of one of the participating schools as a part of an INSET day from which it was not clearly differentiated. The consortium curriculum lead withdrew, seeing it as more of a general staff development event, leaving the consultant unsupported. Here engagement was limited and the curriculum lead expressed doubts that the group had really grasped the need for immediate action on key issues.

It also seemed that more powerful outcomes occurred where interventions comprised a number of activities extended over a period time leading to an accumulation of learning and, for groups, the development of relationships. In Consortium 6, for example, a series of ‘action learning set’ meetings were held for the consortium lead and the Diploma development managers which supported colleagues in developing personal solutions to key problems; in Consortium 3 AL sets focused on key issues for collective development (a VLE, and ‘learning to learn’ as a theme); in Consortium 2 AL was used

with the group managing the consortium's one line in the initial phase of Diploma implementation; and in Consortium 1 the Diploma Management Group undertook a series of 'organisation development' meetings focused around the development of an action plan for Diploma implementation. In all these cases positive outcomes were identified in relation both to the development of effectiveness of the group and progress with the specific individual and group tasks that they addressed. In particular, these series of activities enabled substantial discussions to take place outside the constraints of long agendas of 'normal' meetings.

Alongside the sustained nature of interventions, another key factor was the inter-relationships between them. The use of a range of interventions aimed at both individuals and groups was not uncommon:

'I don't see how it could be improved. You offered something for the individual, you offered something for the group and something that was task based.'
(Consortium 2 curriculum lead)

However, examples of interrelations between activities being explicitly planned for were rare, although powerful where they occurred. For example as our case studies have illustrated, in Consortium 2 the 14-19 strategy leader was able to use his coaching sessions to explore how action learning could best be implemented for a group; and in Consortium 1, the Diploma strand leads experienced both 1:1 coaching and the ODCM work with the Diploma Management Group, while the facilitator was able to feed the outcomes of the ODCM work back to the LA strategy group which had been undertaking team coaching.

A major inhibiting factor relating to the programme arose from perceptions about the nature of the offer. Some consortia, for example, found its presentation too complex or felt that the purposes associated with specific interventions were insufficiently clear; others weren't sure of the credibility of some of the provision in relation to the specific needs of the sector. Such perceptions sometimes prevented all or parts of the offer being taken up (see Consortium 5, above). Where strands *were* engaged with, a common theme for many interventions was the lack of clarity initially among participants about purposes. This led sometimes to initial engagement on a 'try it and see' basis with ultimate success depending on the ways in which purposes were presented and negotiated in the early stages by facilitators and coaches. Most facilitators seemed very effective at this, but in some cases an inability to take sufficient account of the pressures (including time pressures) under which participants were operating reduced the perceived value of interventions.

Thirdly, success seemed to depend on how *participants* were selected and the levels of motivation that they brought to engagement with the programme. A key question was who were the 'key' actors for Diploma implementation in a particular consortium. Interventions might be targeted at strategic leaders, operational managers or both but, whatever the focus, clarity about *why* particular people – either individuals or groups – were chosen and how it was hoped the programme would influence their thinking and behaviour was extremely important. When key actors were not included, this could inhibit the ultimate impact of an intervention, however successful it was in other ways. Thus while in Consortium 1 coaching was targeted at all the key actors in Diploma implementation, in Consortium 3 coaching was used to support the development of young staff and, although they gained from it, the link to Diploma development was not

very clear. In Consortium 2 some key staff were engaged, but it was felt with hindsight that coaching should have included school senior staff.

Interventions needed to be matched to the expectations of the selected participants, either by effective briefing or programme adaptations to meet perceived needs as indicated above. Engagement was inhibited where potential or actual participants were not felt to have the capacity to respond effectively to the programme, perhaps because of time constraints, inappropriate levels of responsibility or other work pressures. Where interventions were targeted at groups, issues of group size, composition and continuity (either through the period of the programme or beyond) were important considerations. In Consortium 2, while there were positive outcomes from most of the activities, their broader influence was limited because neither the chair of the Diploma group nor leaders from most of the participating schools engaged with them. In Consortia 1 and 2 in contrast, it was noted that while engagement among group members was uneven, with engagement declining most notably among participants who were less centrally engaged in making decisions about implementation, this was not necessarily seen as a bad thing. As one of the emerging 'core' group in Consortium 1 suggested, if they'd kept working with the larger group:

'we wouldn't have got any decisions... You've got to stand together as a team and be singing from the same hymn sheet so to speak...we [the Diploma co-ordinators] are under a remit to make it work... We're on the front line if you like.'

How may we understand learning in 14-19 partnerships?

In seeking to understand learning in 14-19 partnerships we need to ask two fundamental questions - what is the nature of the learning taking place and what are the processes through which learning takes place?

What is the nature of the learning taking place? - Individual and the collective dimensions

We have earlier identified two dimensions of learning in 14-19 partnerships – the individual and collective - in the LMDP programme design, in the purposes for which consortia engaged in the programme, and in the outcomes of participation. In our study individual learning often led to the construction of personal knowledge. This comprises 'everyday knowledge of people and situations, know-how in the form of skills and practices, memories of episodes and events, self-knowledge, attitudes and emotions as well as personalized versions of public codified knowledge (Eraut, 2004, p. 202). For example one-to-one coaching provided participants with the opportunity to consider their own attitudes and emotions and introduced them to generic leadership and management principles and skills. This combined with experimentation and immersion in practice between coaching sessions led to outcomes such as feeling equipped to manage their own work and to manage interactions with others.

The development of personal knowledge is particularly important as it is what individuals 'bring to situations that enables them to think, interact and perform' (Eraut, 2004, p. 202). However, the development of personal knowledge accounts for only part of the learning taking place in consortia. Boreham's (2004) conceptualisation of individual and collective competence, which he argues are mutually constitutive and both necessary for effective working practices, provides a way of articulating the different desired outcomes of

learning in partnerships. Collective competence encompasses 'making collective sense of events in the workplace, developing and using a collective knowledge base, and developing a sense of interdependency' (p. 9). LMDP activities such as action learning, team coaching, ODCM and workshops in their design and outcomes focused strongly on these competences. Members of consortia in our study were working together to construct knowledge in an environment where the existing knowledge base was weak and they were only at the early stages of recognising how they could function effectively both as a group and across organisational boundaries. Developing collective competence in such an environment requires learning that leads to the production of culturally new patterns of activity and new forms of work activity.

What are the processes through which learning takes place? Humanistic and socio-cultural perspectives

There is a tendency for learning theories to be placed in competition to one another, each claiming to offer a more adequate explanation of learning. Theories are seen as incompatible because of their differing underpinning assumptions, particularly with regard to the whether learning is seen primarily as an individual cognitive activity or a social process. However, as Hager (2004) argues, it may be more appropriate to recognise that we need a range of different theories, with their differing assumptions, to enable us to understand the many different types of learning and things that can be learnt. This would seem particularly apposite in relation to understanding the different types of learning (discussed above) that take place within the flux and contradictions of 14-19 partnerships. In this section we consider both adult and socio-cultural learning theories as a means to understand the learning that takes place within partnerships.

Humanistic adult learning theories provide us with insight into the needs and motivations of partnership members and the conditions in which learning from a programme such as the LMDP is likely to be maximised. Indeed, a number of aspects of the LMDP design, such as the attention to building a climate of trust and making learning relevant to participants appear to be implicitly based on andragogical principles (Knowles, 1990). The importance of perceived relevance, one of Knowles's key assumptions about how adults learn, was clearly evident in our study. It was those LMDP activities where participants were unclear about the purposes or where they failed to see the link to their individual, organisations or even the consortia's priorities that were less successful. The decision of individuals about whether to participate in the LMDP and the responses of participants in LMDP activities may also usefully be illuminated through the lens of self-identity. Adults resist participation in learning which they perceive threatens their sense of self. Furthermore, when they find themselves in learning situations where their self-identity is under threat they fail to assimilate that learning as the structure and organisation of self becomes more rigid (Rogers, 1983). This may help explain resistance to participation where, for example, it required headteachers' leadership roles to be rethought in ways which challenged their views about their relative status and organisational autonomy.

Socio-cultural learning theories illuminate workplace learning by situating learning within the complexities of workplace practices and the, often tacit, social, cultural and historical traditions inherent within workplaces. However, socio-cultural learning theory does not constitute a unified field of learning (Lee, *et al*, 2004), particularly with respect to the way in which the relationship between the individual and the social context are conceptualised. Lave and Wenger's (1991) community of practice theory, which has

been particularly influential in shaping thinking about workplace learning, is based on the premise that learning is ubiquitous and the individual cannot be separated from the social context (Wenger, 1998). However, while community of practice theory importantly draws our attention to the role of participatory workplace practices in learning, it appears to have some limitations as an explanatory framework for understanding learning in 14-19 partnerships, particularly at the early stages of partnership development in the Diploma consortia in our study. First, communities of practice share certain characteristics such as: shared ways of engaging in doing things together; a shared discourse reflecting a certain perspective on the world; knowing what others know, what they can do and how they can contribute to an enterprise; and a mutually defining identity (Wenger, 1998). Yet, these characteristics were only weakly developed, or even absent, in most of our case study consortia and in descriptions of consortia provided by the wider group of consortium leads in our telephone interviews. Secondly, while Wenger (1998) acknowledges that people will move across different communities of practice, he does not provide an explanation of how workers learn across multiple changing groups (Boud and Middleton, 2003). This is particularly problematic since our study found a high degree of instability in consortia staffing, and many LMDP participants struggled to cope with the conflicts between the norms, values and practices of communities of practice in their home organisation and those needed for collaborative working in consortia. Finally, the issue of power is also underplayed in communities of practice theory. In our study issues of power were particularly evident in influencing engagement in the LMDP. Consortia leads rarely had the status or power to mandate the engagement of senior leaders in the programme, despite the fact that they often perceived that these leaders' lack of understanding of collaborative working was impeding Diploma implementation. On the other hand, heads and college principals, and in some instances consortium leads had the power to determine whether leaders and managers at lower levels in the participating organisations were offered or denied the opportunity to engage with the programme.

In contrast to Wenger's (1998) claim that all learning is social, Billett (2001) emphasises the need to focus on the interactions between the individual and the social. He identifies dual bases for participation in workplace learning, the affordances or 'invitational' qualities of workplaces for learning and the ways in which individuals choose to engage with these. In the context of the LMDP, the programme itself could be seen to provide an additional base for participation which offers a further set of affordances for learning. In our discussion of the factors affecting learning, above, we have identified the key affordances for learning both within consortia and offered by the LMDP, and the ways in which individuals make decisions on their engagement with these affordances. Thus individuals were more likely to engage where key leaders and managers undertook 'positive gatekeeping', encouraging involvement and where provision was carefully matched to participant needs; while learning was enhanced where provision was bespoke, task and process concerns were appropriately prioritised, members of learning groups shared similar challenges in their roles, and learning activities were provided which were complementary and sustained. Using Billett's (2001) framework to aid understanding of the interrelationships between consortia, programme and individual factors in partnership learning, together with the insights provided by humanistic adult learning theory on individuals' motivations and engagement in learning and the ways in which programme design can facilitate participation and learning, provides a useful way of developing a better understanding of the possibilities for learning in partnerships. Future research could helpfully extend this theoretical frame by exploring more fully how

the conditions within participant organisations and the complex relationships between organisations within a partnership act to create and inhibit workplace affordances.

Conclusion

The challenges of partnership working are considerable, and the history of collaboration in the 14-19 sector in England is a patchy one to say the least. Yet the Government has mandated that a major national curriculum initiative – 14-19 Diplomas – should be delivered through consortia. The ways in which such consortia develop and how effective they become is major research question in its own right. This paper has taken a much narrower focus: How far can a leadership and management development programme support the development of consortia as they struggle to implement a major educational initiative?

Our findings suggest that the potential is not inconsiderable, but that many factors influence the degree to which such programmes are effectively engaged with by consortia's members, the nature and quality of the learning experience that they undergo, and the outcomes that are consequently produced. These factors can be broadly classified as those associated with the context and history of particular consortia, the ways in which particular programme strands are delivered, and the ways in which participants are selected and approach the programme. These variables mean that, while similarities of experience can be identified across consortia, local conditions generate a unique character to each site. The LMDP comprises a complex 'menu' of different types of provision, but we have found that in its various forms, and in the right circumstances, it has the capacity to generate leadership learning that is both individual and collective and outcomes that are embodied both in improvements in the execution of key leadership and management tasks and a growth in individual and team leadership capacity.

In drawing wider conclusions about the potential of partnerships as sites for learning applying socio-cultural learning theories, where the focus is on the interaction between the individual and the social, together with humanistic learning theory, enables us to develop greater insights into the ways in which particular consortia, programme and individual factors interact to either support or inhibit learning.

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