

Educational administration and consultocracy

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Abstract:

The paper reports on research into the role of consultants, consultancy and consultocracy in educational administration in England. Drawing on data from British Academy and ESRC projects the paper will (a) present a mapping process of consultants, consultancy and consultocracy in educational administration, and engage in a critical approach to knowledge production in the formulation and development of education policy; and, (b) consider the trends regarding what Hood and Jackson call 'consultocracy' regarding the power of consultants and consultancy within the policy process.

Key words: consultant, consultancy, consultocracy, critical education policy studies, networks, state, hierarchy.

Introduction

Integral to policy design, delivery and enactment is knowledge production. What is known and what is worth knowing, and, why, and how this is shaped through the political process is vital to the construction and interpretation of texts and activity. The challenge to the utility of knowledge production within and for public administration in England can be traced in recent times to Balogh's coruscating attack in 1959 on the civil service as an example of "the apotheosis of the dilettante" (Kellner and Crowther-Hunt 1980 p24), and a decade later the Fulton Report (1968) confirmed the cult of the generalist as "a man (or woman) of good education and high intelligence who can take an overall view of any problem, irrespective of its subject matter, in the light of his knowledge and experience of the government machine" (Kellner and Crowther-Hunt 1980 p33). In this sense expertise within knowledge production is about "the *processes* of government" (Kellner and Crowther-Hunt 1980 p33, original emphasis) rather than about the substantive focus of the particular public service. To counter act this Fulton recommended specialists within and in support of policymaking as a modernising project, and Saint-Martin (2004) argues that this was an important moment in the opening up of Whitehall to business management consultants. By the time of New Labour

(1997-2010), Craig with Brooks (2006) calculated that £70bn (p2) had been spent on management and IT consultants. An enquiry by the Public Accounts Committee of the House of Commons in 2007 reported that financial investment in consultants and their routine deployment on projects can benefit public services but argued for more efficiency and effectiveness in their procurement and utilization (House of Commons 2007). The growth, role and contribution of consultants and consultancy in government has been independently researched within the social sciences (see Armbrüster 2006, Lapsley et al 2013, Saint-Martin 2004, Sturdy et al. 2009) with wider concerns about the relationship of business practice with the changing role of the state and capital accumulation (Craig with Brooks 2006). Importantly Hood and Jackson (2001) identified that the integration of consultants and use of consultancy in government is such that a “consultocracy” is in existence, not least through how policy texts are replete with “consultantese” (Craig with Brooks 2006 p46).

The growth of consultants and consultancy as a knowledge production process within public education services has been identified by critical education policy (CEPs) researchers in regard to changes to the state (Ball 2007, 2012), the role of consultancy firms (Coffield 2012), and in particular areas of consultancy activity (Cameron 2010, Clark 2014, Gunter 2012, Mills 2011a,b, 2012). However, little use is being made of the contribution of research within the wider social sciences to understandings of consultants, consultancy and consultocracy in public services such as education. As part of our current work in this area (Gunter et al. 2014) we intend in this article presenting a critical analysis of research and theorising within the wider social sciences and CEPs in particular. Notably we examine the evidence and debates about consultocracy, where we argue that CEPs needs to give more attention to the endurance of hierarchy in knowledge production exchange relationships.

Knowledge production and CEPs

CEPs is a label that constructs a border around empirical and conceptual research undertaken by researchers mainly in higher education but also in schools and colleges through both collaborative funded and doctoral projects. The espoused claims from those who locate here is a concern to inter-link professional practice and values based social justice

projects with organisational, community, national and globalised education policymaking. The aims tend to be about revealing a situation (e.g. charting the trends in the privatisation of public education) and giving it meaning, with some seeking to work on the ground for a more socially just education system through collaborative projects and scholarly activism. Research tends to construct data sets based on documentary analysis and interviews, and, accounts of on the ground strategy, processes and outcomes enable activist narratives to be recognised as evidence. Conceptualisations located in social science frameworks tend to draw on particular methodologies e.g. historical studies on the antecedence and trajectories in policy; some are theoretical through the deployment of thinking tools from particular researchers (e.g. Bourdieu, Foucault) or from conceptual frameworks (e.g. intersectionality in the interplay between agency and structure). Overall, CEPs is more concerned with policy scholarship than a policy science, whereby Grace (1995) articulates that:

“Policy scholarship resists the tendency of policy science to abstract problems from their relational settings by insisting that the problem can only be understood in the complexity of those relations. In particular, it represents a view that a social-historical approach to research can illuminate the cultural and ideological struggles in which schooling is located” (p3).

Knowledge production in regard to the relationship between the state, public policy and knowledge is vital to this matter, whereby policy scholarship is concerned to reveal and critically engage with the knowledge exchange processes within such struggles.

Knowledge exchange regarding what is known and what is worth knowing has increasingly taken place within a political, economic and social context in which preferred and regulated forms of knowledge, ways of knowing and approved of knowers have come to dominate. This can be evidenced by the emphasis on professional training rather than education, on training in management and leadership processes rather than preparation and development in pedagogy, and, on the gathering and manipulation data to prove organisational and individual performance rather than on evidence of learning and development. This is located within what Apple (2001) identifies as a highly contradictory alliance of neoliberal privatisation with schools as businesses and neoconservative traditionalism regarding the curriculum and conduct. The current waves of reforms show an emphasis on the school independent of public administration and democratic processes, with various types such as Academies, City

Technology Colleges, Free Schools, and Grant Maintained Status. Such reforms have generated a knowledge production imperative, with an emphasis on private business models of change and organisational cultures, not least in how they can be hailed as modernising and enabling of localised enactment responses to national policies. Importantly it is not just the scale and intensity of reform that is the issue, but the “repetitive, large-scale organizational re-engineering” (Pollitt 2007 p540-541), whereby change is endemic and self-generating as the norm. Hence professionals who are required to improve student outcome scores, generate income streams to fund provision, and lead on school status decisions within or outside of the public governance system, are information and strategy hungry regarding localised policymaking.

A review of the literatures produced over the past thirty years illustrates that knowledge workers who primarily locate in CEPS have produced a body of empirical and conceptual work that has mapped and characterised these agendas and debates about policy antecedence, contemporary matters and unfolding trajectories. In summary, such work has variously focused on (a) field purposes and development, along with researcher positioning and staking of claims for recognition (e.g. Ball 1990, 2008a, Grace 1995, Ozga 1987, Lingard and Ozga 2007, Whitty 2002); (b) the production of data sets and analysis regarding major policy changes (e.g. Ball et al. 2012, Deem et al. 1991, Fitz and Halpin 1991, Gunter 2012, Ozga 2009, Moss 2009); (c) the development of critical and historical analysis (e.g. Fielding 2001, Hartley 2012, Jones 2003, McPherson and Raab 1988, Whitty et al. 1998); (d) the development of conceptual analysis regarding major policy changes (e.g. school leadership Ball 2010, Blackmore 1999, Lingard et al. 2003, Thomson 2009; disadvantage Raffo et al. 2010; student voice Smyth 2006; teachers and professionalism Ball 2003, Smyth 2011); (e) the development and mobilisation of thinking tools and conceptual frameworks from particular thinkers (e.g. Ball 2013, Thomson 2005, Gunter 2014) and the wider social sciences (e.g. Ball 2009, Goodwin 2009); and (f) the debates and development of appropriate and novel methodological approaches to the field (e.g. Ball and Exley 2010). This brief list is of necessity brief, and while this is a field that has sought to enter, position, and retain position within higher education, it is not a particularly ‘happy’ field with Ranson (1995) noting how

debates regarding knowledge claims can be inflected with border disputes and unpleasantness.

CEPs outputs primarily focus on the conditions in which consultants and consultancy have grown. This has tended to be about charting the growth of national and global markets (e.g. Lawn and Grek 2012, Rizvi and Lingard 2010), the privatisation public education services (e.g. Burch 2009, Hatcher 2006), and the generation and deployment of anti-public service discourses and positions, not least teacher professionalism (e.g. Ball 1990). CEPs have witnessed, charted and critically examined how knowledge production has developed in response to these changes: first, differentiation within professionals as a stratified workforce so that those in leadership roles have business process knowledge combined with 'can do' delivery attitudes, and so act as internal and external consultants (see Smyth and Shacklock 1998); second, the secondment of educational professionals into private businesses, and the exchange of public sector professionals with private sector professionals both nationally and globally as a means of learning about and transmitting business identity and strategy (Ball 2008b); third, the growth in commissioned research from government interplayed with the emergence of the entrepreneurial university leading to researchers developing consultancy roles, and in partnership with private research firms (Fitzgerald et al. 2012); fourth, the growth of private sources of funding and know how through philanthropy (Ball 2008c, Scott 2009), and wider commercialisation and privatisation strategies (Koyama 2010, Molnar 2006); and, fifth, the increased involvement in private consultants at all levels of public education provision, from individuals supporting teachers in classrooms to big international companies working on major reforms (Ball 2011, Gunter 2012, Mills 2011a,b, 2012).

Such changes are generating a complex picture regarding knowledge production processes, for examine, in the USA Coburn (2005) talks about "a host of nonsystem actors – independent professional development providers, reform organizations, publishers, and universities – promote, translate, and even transform policy ideas as they carry them to teachers" (p23). This is characterised by Horrocks (2008) as "revolving doors" in the movement between public and private organisations through secondments or job change.

The complexity of networked actors has been forensically mapped by Ball and Junemann (2012) where the circulation of knowledge, know how and exchange relationships can be challenging to trace and pin down. Illustrative of this is an academic who is an employee of a university with a research remit, but who pursues the impact and 'relevance' agenda by acting as a consultant and may even have their own private company (see Ball 1995, Gunter 2012), for example "as academics in business schools pursue an agenda of corporate engagement in which the detached, impartial researcher position is blurred" (Lapsley et al. 2013 p119). What is evident is the growth in what Mahony et al. (2004, p277) call "edu-business" whereby there are established players in the market seeking new opportunities and new players entering as single and networked consultants (Gunter 2012, Mills 2011a,b, 2012). Such businesses may generate new knowledge through primary research, may combine and recombine existing knowledge in new packages, and may popularise established ideas and methods. Importantly as Pollitt (2007) argues "it is the faith inculcated in the cloisters of business schools and consultancies – the belief that we know how to fix organisations and that the key to the solution is always 'better management'" (p541). It seems that the label of consultant may face a 'make-over' in regard to the international guru who is in the know about an issue through to "policy brokers" (Grek et al. 2009) who work at the interface, and so can provide knowledge and use skills and know how to secure policy outcomes. In summary, what has been identified through an emerging research agenda within public policy studies and education policy in particular is what Politt (2007) identifies as the normalisation of rapid, radical and often incoherent change in public administration and how this is inter-linked to a "management reform community" (p536), where consultancy businesses have played a large role in both responding to and generating reform (see Meek 2011). Seemingly disparate individuals and organisations are located in a context where shared dispositions and social practices generates the sense of a business community.

While the conditions in which consultants and consultancy have grown is a key feature of CEPs research, and the changes in who experts are and what legitimises that expertise has been identified, the specific focus on consultants doing consultancy from within and outside of public education is not a major focus. Research synthesis shows that individual and large

companies are involved in the design and delivery of education policy (Ball 2011, Gunter 2011, 2012), and that there are emerging concerns about what this means for public education (Coffield 2012). There are some studies that focus directly on consultants (e.g. Cameron 2010, Gunter 2012, Mills 2011a,b, 2012), and there are studies that focus on the growth of experts both within business but also within systems of governance and within academic portfolios and identities in higher education (Grek 2013, Gunter 2012). However, we take seriously Goodwin's (2009) argument that beyond identifying people, products and exchange activity, there is little clarity about how power is actually exercised. Indeed, Grek (2013) argues for a need to relate knowledge production with policy actors and groups, and while detailed descriptions of activity or the "expectocracy moves and rules" are presented there is little explanatory conceptualisation. While consultants and consultancy in education have been a feature of ESRC projects (e.g. Gunter 2012) there is no equivalent to the size and scope of projects and outputs that have taken place in regard to private sector consultants and consultancy (e.g. Sturdy et al 2009), or the vibrancy of debates regarding contribution and impact (e.g. Lapsley et al. 2013). There is a body of work in doctoral projects (e.g. Cameron 2010, Davis 2009, and Mills 2011a,b), and so there is an emerging interest in this important area of policy activity.

In order to help develop a research agenda for CEPs we intend examining the current state of the field within the broader social sciences and in education policy in particular. We do this through deploying a framework for mapping research that we have developed in a range of empirical and conceptual projects, and we present this as: *Functional*, *Critical* and *Socially Critical* approaches (for antecedence see Gunter et al. 2013). All three speak to the purposes, rationales and narratives of those who seek to undertake projects, and this is sketched in Table 1:

Table 1: An Agenda Setting Framework

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By *functional* we mean research that seeks to describe the situation and to normatively engage with how that situation needs to be and could be improved. Hence in mapping projects and outputs we would expect this to engage with who consultants are and what they do, and how they claim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of exchange relationships with clients. By *critical* we mean research that begins with the realities of a situation, and in mapping projects and outputs we would expect this to engage with the experiences of consultants doing consultancy with their clients, and how complexities and relational encounters interplay over time. By *socially critical* we mean research that locates the meaning of functional and critical questions within wider economic, political and cultural contexts. In mapping projects and outputs we would expect this to engage with the relationship between consultants and consultancy as a business within capital accumulation, and what this means for public services.

We have critically read a range of research texts that have consultants and consultancy as a sole or prime focus, and used the framework to present a map of engagement in the field of social sciences and CEPs in particular. In doing so we do not see these three categories as mutually exclusive but as illuminating the approach to knowledge production within the reported projects and analysis. Our aim is more broad brush than forensic analysis, and in doing so we can examine the contribution within the social sciences and education to our strategic understandings of knowledge production, and how the social sciences can be a resource for how CEPs might further develop its agenda.

Reading Critical Education Policy Studies

We intend in this section to deploy our organising framework in order to examine the current evidence base regarding consultants and consultancy in the wider social sciences and education in particular.

Functional

Studies of consultants and consultancy within the social sciences field show a strong functional approach regarding descriptions of the role and activities of consultants. Such work

focuses on the approach of a particular company (e.g. Rasiel and Friga 2001) or examines a wider field, whereby Kitay and Wright (2007) show variety and diversity, and the contingent and located nature of occupational identity. Research shows a growth in management and industry analysts and how this is related to the lack of in-house expertise (Czarniawska and Mazza 2013). Clients are primarily private business but increasingly state governments are using consultants (Saint-Martin 1998b), where Lapsley et al. (2013) show the range of areas that they are contracted within (e.g. prisons, hospitals), and in particular there has been an increase in ICT consultancy. Importantly, consultants are recognised as integral to state modernisation, and they also shape the market through product development:

“management consultants are seen as a significant part of the NPM movement in which Governments seek to modernise with the adoption of management structures, techniques and processes from the private sector. The management consultants are carriers of this expertise who translate what they consider to be appropriate practices to novel public sector settings” (Lapsley et al. 2013 p117).

Researchers are concerned to examine and theorise about this activity, and in doing so there is an emphasis on identifying abstracted patterns of activity regarding changing roles over time, as well as recognition of how local context impacts on how such roles are designed and developed (Czarniawska and Mazza 2013). For example, Arnaboldi (2013) identifies how consultants take on ‘translator’, ‘mediator’, and ‘explorer’ roles, and this is in the tradition identified by Fincham (1999) that “they are preoccupied with the development of ideas into *practices and techniques*” (p336, original emphasis). In doing so research enables this to be charted, but also acts as aspirational architecture for normative accounts of how consultants might do consultancy in ways that are more productive in the market place (Newton 2012).

What the detailed projects and analysis within the social sciences show is that: (a) the purposes of consultants doing consultancy are to bring expertise about organisational development and efficiency impacts (e.g. ICT), and processes (e.g. performance, leadership); (b) rationales are to deliver improvements in organisational efficiency and outcomes; and, (c) narratives are about the dynamics and complexity of how this is done and the score cards used to account for improvements in outcomes. Such mapping work is evident in education, not least through how the functional case is made for consultants. For example, the role of private consultants as functionally efficient and normatively essential for the modernising

process has been robustly presented by Collarbone (2005) who argues that business sector knowledge workers can do things because of their know how and “radiate a ‘can do’ attitude, no matter how major the task” (p77). Collarbone (2005) demonstrates how consultants were used by New Labour in securing the remodelling of the school workforce, particularly through piloting and using a business based change model. A second example of consultants talking about their work is from PricewaterhouseCoopers, where Larsen et al. (2011) examine the design, findings and contribution of their five-year government commissioned evaluation of the Academies Programme. Here they do not examine their role *per se* but demonstrate their expertise and contribution through the findings and analysis. The inter-relationship between consultants and the government reform agenda is evident in these type of cases, and it is further illustrated by Michael Barber, the former New Labour policy deliverer in Education and at No 10 Downing St, who on leaving government moved to McKinsey and has sought to promote his approach to “deliverology” government (Barber 2007), and to leadership (Barber et al. 2011).

Researchers within and outside of consultancy in education have examined the functionality of consultants and consultancy, not only in relation to product development (Gunter 2012) but also the marketization of public services. Two examples illustrate this: first, Cameron (2010) reports on his doctoral work about consultants involved in the delivery of a major government curriculum reform project. In doing so he shows how their expertise interplays with professionals regarding reform implementation, and as such he identifies how government takes a functional normative approach to consultants as “operative technicians” (p606). Our search of the literatures shows that we have very little of this type of project whereby the prime focus is on who and what consultants and consultancy are, and where activity is mapped and theorised. What seems to be emerging within CEPS is a study of the networks and partnerships in which consultants and consultancy firms are knowledge actors, and this can be illustrated by Coburn et al. (2008) in the US who describes “insider-outsider collaboration” (365) as integral to reform processes. The second example we would like to give attention to is within this tradition, whereby Ball (2011) gives an account of the involvement of KPMG in the Academies Programme and other educational provision. In

examining the relationship between the state and education policy, he identifies growth in networks and what he calls “heterarchies” (p147). In doing this he shows that a consultant as a person and/or a consultancy business such as KPMG are actors and not the only actors in policy construction and development. Indeed, this project (see Ball and Junemann 2012) focuses on the inter-relationships and asymmetrical power processes rather than an individual or a business.

In summary, functional studies of consultants and consultancy are mainly descriptive of the people and processes involved, often with highly normative purposes, rationales and narratives. The role of consultants requires such knowledge production, based on the communication of findings and analysis but also how they must be first choice in the market place through how they have helped national and localised policymaking through process delivery. Those studies about consultants and consultancy do examine functional matters: who are these people, what do they do, and what does this mean? However, other questions are asked about this matter, whereby the examples from education above are also concerned to ask deeper critical questions, and so we now intend moving onto this area within the literatures.

Critical

Critical studies are concerned with the realities of the consultancy process, and as such the claims about consultants can be direct and punchy where they: “are often described in extreme terms, as either experts who bring about radical positive change within organizations, or as clever con-artists who charge huge fees for telling organisations what they already know” (Lapsley and Oldfield 2001 p526). Consultants involved in a social practice of consulting and consultancy is a feature of this work, where Campagnolo (2013) talks about “professional storytellers that frame and persuade, possessing a skill-set more akin to lobbyists or salespersons rather than trained scientists or hired experts” (p164). In this sense critical approaches are about engaging with the realities of this social process with recognition of the dynamic interplay between agency and structure, not least that researchers should not “assume that consultants exist in an empty space, where the only other characters

are client organisations, seen as passive recipients of consultants' management ideas" (p164).

The need to focus on the exchange relationships between consultants and clients has led to critical accounts of consultants and their work (e.g. Ashraf and Uddin 2013, Clark 1995, Clark and Fincham 2002, Clegg et al. 2004, Czarniawska and May 2004), were Lapsley et al. (2013) argue that "consultants make sense of complex situations and enable managers to progress strategic priorities" (p121). Importantly the point is made people and practice cannot be homogenised (Lapsley and Oldfield 2001), because consultants work in different genres and services. Critical research uncovers the consultancy guarantee regarding the outcome of exchange relationships, and how it is veiled with the symbolism of taking the right type of action and advice (Lapsley et al. 2013). Such projects uncover two main things: first, the role of consultants in legitimising a modern, forward thinking business and government (Lapsley et al. 2013); and second, their role as "cultural intermediaries" that goes beyond the technical aspects of the client's remit, in ways that "has a direct impact upon workplace culture as well as the services offered to consumers" (Moor 2008 p424-425). Research accounts make serious claims about this, where Lapsley et al (2013) identify "seeking profits" (p118), "sharp practices" (p118), and consultants as a "colonising force" (p119) or "zealots who enter organisations to preach to the unconverted" (Lapsley and Oldfield 2001 p526). In other words consultants are the "folk devils of the business world" (Fincham 1999 p341), and at best they live off the corporate manager "as a kind of benign parasite" (Fincham 1999 p340).

Such issues have been raised in education, where Grove (2011) notes that Deloitte has reported on how higher education needs to change, with claims that "to succeed in the future, higher education institutions must take a good, hard look at their organising principles... the victors will be those who can support their decision-making with the strongest business case" (p17). He goes on to argue that consultants can be a "necessary evil" but "the key is whether they understand higher education or are merely trying to recycle ideas they've come up with in relation to Unilever or the NHS" (Grove 2011 p17). It seems that the idea of using consultants is more powerful than their actual contribution, particularly since the dynamics of

the consultancy industry are such that it is difficult to assess their contribution, where relationships are “open-ended and structurally symmetrical” (Fincham 1999 p349). In other words power is not a binary of one way flowing but shifts and moves around, is contingent, located and dynamic. This leads Saint-Martin (1998a) to make the case that “the literature on administrative reform has clearly shown that there is no uniformity in the influence that NPM ideas have had on state management practices” (p535). And so the transmission of ideas is not technical but is more about social practices whereby the context in which the ideas are received needs attention. This leads Lapsley and Oldfield (2001) to make the case that consultants “can add value but there are instances of their misuse and many problems that need to be addressed. They should not simply be used ad hoc” (p531). Indeed Lapsley and Oldfield (2001) identify that consultants view the public sector has having problems that need addressing and what is challenging is how their impact can be limited: “...consultants admit themselves that at times the nature of their work is questionable because their recommendations are ignored because of inefficiency and the inability to make decisions” (Lapsley and Oldfield 2001 p532). However, those who have studied a range of projects in public services take a different position, where Craig with Brooks (2006) argue that public services are more complex than the managerial techniques of consultants from private sector can handle and can bring knowledge to.

What the detailed projects and analysis within the social sciences shows is that: (a) the purposes of consultants doing consultancy are in reality diverse, nuanced and contingent in working with and delivering outcomes for clients, and who make the case that limited impacts may be linked to weaknesses in the client organisation; (b) rationales remain focused on functional reasons, but the case is made about creating the conditions in which the idea of consultants as a normal first choice for advice and delivery becomes embedded, and as such serious claims are made about motivation and contribution of consultants in relation to impact; and, (c) the narratives are about the complexity in which consultants do their work, and with strong claims about business generation through colonising public services. Such mapping work is evident in education, not least through accounts regarding the realities of consultants doing consultancy. For example, Cameron’s (2010) study of consultancy and the

SNS reform in schools in England has revealed how SNS consultants were integral to the reform design and delivery. Examining the social inter-relational encounters shows the complexity and dynamics of the process of consultancy, and while this has functional aspects to it regarding the descriptions of activity, the criticality is located in the social interactions which give an account of how consultancy is a relational and complex process. The interplay between consultant and teacher is assessed as: “the SNS consultant often sought to operate to further create developmental experiences that resonated with teachers’ experiences and school or departmental needs. But, while attempting this, they may have also served to increase the control of teachers’ workspaces” (p621). So like the social science research about business and government this study shows the consultant as “benign” and as a “critical friend” (p622) but also “controlling” (p621). On similar terrain to this Coburn (2005) gives an account of the development of Reading Instruction in California, where she shows how ideas secure legitimacy through the inter-relationship of teachers and non-system actors. In other words the relational aspects of encounters does more than deliver a reform, it enables new power relationships to develop and be normalised. When teachers seek support and resources to enable reform delivery, the question is: who do they turn to? The emergence of a ‘contact a consultant culture’ is therefore important in addressing this question by busy professionals (and ministers and civil servants) who are in increasingly risky situations, where schools can be closed (and elections can be lost).

Positioned within the social sciences CEPs has problematized the realities of consultants and consultancy in relation to knowledge production and educational reform. Studies about the relationship between the state, public policy and knowledge have generated important understandings of position taking and positioning of a range of different actors, including consultants and consultancy firms. Illustrative examples include: first, Ball’s (2007, 2012) work on privatisation and his mapping of actors operating with and outside of government in heterarchies; second, Gunter’s (2012) examination of the educational leadership industry regarding the role of individuals and big consultancy firms in generating and selling leadership models through policy scoping and scripting (e.g. Coopers and Lybrand 1988), commissioned research (e.g. DfES/PwC 2007) and by normalisation of the role of the private in delivering

the public (e.g. Barber 2007); and third, Mill's (2011a,b, 2012) project on the National Literacy Strategy in regard to how professionals and consultants working together on the delivery of a major intervention into teaching and learning, and how this relational process not only examines the implementation of literacy products, but how such products are endorsed by government.

In summary, critical studies of consultants and consultancy are mainly about the realities of consultancy and client interactions, with problematizing of the purposes, rationales and narratives. While functionalism remains a key feature of such work, an emphasis on criticality opens up the relationship between consultants and client, and asks questions about the dynamism, complexity and impact of such contractualism. Those studies about consultants and consultancy do examine critical matters: how do they inter-relate with clients? How do they have a shadow remit regarding the normalisation of their role and contribution in knowledge production, and why is that happening rapidly in public services such as education? However, other questions are asked about this matter, whereby the examples from the CEPs field above are also concerned to ask deeper socially critical questions, and so we now intend moving onto this area within the literatures.

Socially Critical

Critical work on business and public services, education included, suggests that there is something predatory and possibly subversive about consultants and consultancy. Social science research has therefore been concerned to move beyond the technical and realities of consultancy towards the morality of funds used to employ consultants at the expense of investment in schools, hospitals and public infrastructure (Craig with Brooks 2006). Importantly both journalists (e.g. Toynbee 2011) and researchers are revealing this, whereby Fincham (1999) states: "consultants are seen as a group that has gained insidious power, unaccountable and unseen, and all the more mysterious because managers seem to remain addicted despite the disastrous failures associated with some consultancy assignments" (p336). This is more than a functional argument about technical inefficiencies or a critical

argument about complex inter-relationships, but is about relating consultants and consultancy to wider issues of capitalism.

The evidence and arguments are focused around three interconnected issues: first, as Thrift (2005) states capitalism is “not a total system but rather a project that is permanently ‘under construction’” (p3), and it has generated and required “the extraordinary discursive apparatus which has been perhaps the chief creation of the capitalism of the post-1960s period, and which I call the ‘cultural circuit’ of capitalism – business schools, management consultants, management gurus and the media” (p6). While there are some givens regarding performance located in routine and data, he goes on to identify a seemingly ‘softer’ but ‘adventurous’ form of performance in cultural messages: “this has produced a process of continual critique of capitalism, a feedback loop which is intended to keep capitalism surfing along the edge of its own contradictions” (p6). Integral to this is the paradox of buying in consultancy to problem solve and deliver, but capitalism requires the production of problems the client did not realize it had. A second issue is therefore how markets are expanded through the normalization and indeed embodiment of business ideas and cultures, and in doing so the pedagogy of consultancy enables particular dispositions to be shaped and legitimized. Nixon and Du Gay (2002) state: “these groups of workers are able to exert, from their position within the cultural institutions, a certain amount of cultural authority as shapers of taste and the inculcators of new consumerist dispositions” (Nixon and du Gay 2002 p497). This enables responsiveness to solutions that are generated outside of government, and Mennicken (2013) shows how the modernisation of the prison service is based on external ideas, where firms such as G4S “sought to expand the markets for their services” (p209). And third, this normalisation process masks enduring hierarchies that are gendered, classed and raced, and while the logic of practice within consultancy is seemingly radical, in reality it replicates advantage and disadvantage, for example, Negus (2002) identifies “aesthetic hierarchies” (p511) in the media and film industries, and how biographies from the British music industry shows “they represented, in condensed form, the preferences and judgements of a small, relatively elite educated, middle-class, white male faction” (p512).

The development of this analysis in relation to government and public services has led to debates about the emergence of a “consultocracy” (Hood and Jackson 1991 p24), whereby elite and influential networks of consultants have been able to obtain a dominant position within the policymaking process. Saint-Martin (2004) describes how “...the idea of an emerging ‘consultocracy’ suggests that consultants have become powerful because, when implemented, the new managerialist model that they advocate tends to remove public administration from politics and thus, from public scrutiny” (p20). The increased ‘busyness’ of political work by ministers has challenged traditional models of responsibility, and the use of non-departmental public bodies means that central control of activity done in the name of the mandate to govern is problematic. The emphasis on technical delivery (or deliverology as Barber 2007 calls it) means politics is subsumed by audits, plans and data, and “once politics is out of public administration... it should no longer be difficult to import into the bureaucracy management ideas and techniques from the private sector because the presence of politics is the only thing that made public sector organizations different from businesses” (Saint-Martin 2004 p21). However, Saint-Martin (1998b), and others (e.g. Hodge and Bowman 2006) argue that the emergence of “consultocracy” should not be overplayed, while private consultants are on the ascendency it does not mean that “consultants are usurping the power of politicians” (p347). Primarily this is because historically consultants are brought into do a job that is controlled by politicians, where “influence is a relational concept and the role of consultants has been more important when they have served the knowledge needs of those who hold positions of political power within the state apparatus” (p348). Hodge and Bowman (2006) make the point that consultants need to be recognised as “a new advocacy group” (p111) and so there is need to give attention to how the public interest is engaged with. Helpfully they suggest that the soft side of consultancy work needs to be given attention as “a lubricant in public sector reform than the policy reform machine itself. It has enabled government policy changes to be implemented with considerably greater speed and ruthless completion than might have otherwise been the case traditionally” (p114).

What the detailed projects and analysis within the social sciences shows is that: (a) the purposes of consultants doing consultancy are about enabling capitalism to develop and

productively respond to internal contradictions; (b) rationales are about modernisation through markets and the logic of business practice in public services; and, (c) the narratives are about generating novel approaches through combining and recombining, and handling contradictions in ways that mask the incoherencies. Such mapping work is evident in education, not least through how the interrelationship between the state, public policy and knowledge is being investigated. For example, Mills (2011a,b, 2012) focuses on New Labour's National Literacy Strategy (NLS) intervention to raise standards of reading and writing in primary schools (DfEE, 1998). The strategy was one of the first major examples of a large-scale education policy being 'contracted out', first, to the not-for-profit company, CfBT (Centre for British Teachers); later (after re-tendering processes) to Capita, a private sector firm with a variety of diverse interests in public sector work. In effect, the local authority based consultants, and academics who worked either full-time or on an *ad hoc* basis for the NLS were, in effect, employed by these companies.

Illustrative of the growth of consultants in education policy is the case of Ruth Miskin who was a primary school headteacher from Tower Hamlets, whose strong connections to New Labour and the Coalition governments are illustrated in research (Clark 2014) and journalists' accounts (e.g. Wilby 2008). Her expertise in early reading was 'taken on board' by the NLS. She later "fell from favour" (her words quoted in the interview with Wilby 2008). She re-emerged in Coalition Government policy circles as a member of important policy platforms, including the group charged with re-framing the 2012 Draft English curriculum. She was awarded an OBE in 2012. She is also the owner and managing director of one of the biggest 'for profit' consultancy companies in the field, *Read Write Inc.* In the literacy field those who 'market' these particular approaches to reading are members of the *Reading Reform Foundation*, who include major publishers such as Richard Jolly, of *Jolly Phonics*, and Debbie Hepplewhite, of *Phonics International*, who have long argued for the primacy of phonics. These "knowers" have been re-instated as policy advisers, members of influential committees. A recent committee chaired by Lord Bew on assessment in primary schools also had Miskin as one of its members. Miskin's career and trajectory reveals the potential for considering a "consultocracy" in education policymaking, and this has been the focus of

investigation and comment (e.g. *Private Eye* 2012), where the evidence base has been questioned (e.g. Ellis, 2007; Wyse and Styles, 2007).

What this case illustrates is that while there is emerging evidence of consultants having a direct role in education policymaking at national and local levels, there is a need to engage further with debates in the political sciences about the role of hierarchy in knowledge exchange processes. Moss (2013) reminds the field of the need to examine “who currently gets to define *which forms of knowledge* will count as useful *for whom*” (p 238, emphasis in original), and as a part of such an agenda attention needs to be on how those in civil society such as consultants are brought into (and out of) policymaking processes, and how those consultants operate in ways that are consistent with the hierarchial demands of those who inhabit public office. Importantly while there has seemingly been a trend towards the charting and study of networks in education policymaking at service (Cameron 2010), national (Ball 2007) and global levels (Grek et al. 2009, Spring 2012) the endurance of hierarchy is evident. Indeed the wider social sciences is helpful here, particularly the work of Davies (2011) who examines how hierarchy has been strengthened rather than replaced by networks, and Scott (1998) who shows how the state controls knowledge production and use through how “seeing like a state” is based on simplifications and standardisations that are backed up by the power of institutions and indeed the arrogance of those who may inhabit public office. In this sense we are aligning with Marinetto (2003) who questions the narrative about “hollowing out” (Rhodes 1994) and argues that this is an exaggeration. What this suggests is that CEPs needs not only to focus on who knows who and who is connected with who, but also there is a need to examine the exchange relationships within the policy process. Work is clearly going on in regard to this (e.g. Ball and Junemann 2012, Grek et al. 2009, Gunter 2012) but there is a need to do on the ground studies of this in action, where we should respect but not hand over socially critical analysis to investigative journalism (e.g. Beckett 2007). Cameron’s (2010) study of the SNS and Mill’s (2011a,b,2012) study of the NLS enable the interplay between hierarchy and networks to be studied forensically. In theorising this we need to give attention to the dominance of the public institution in the form of government and its central offices of state (e.g. Department, No 10, Treasury) and who is invited in to the policy process.

In other words there is a form of *institutionalised governance* emerging (Gunter 2012) whereby the activities of actors can only be scripted in relation to and with those who hold a public mandate through official and legitimate channels. Hierarchies within business and the place of hierarchy in exchange relationships is in need of examination, not least the opportunity to examine potential homologous structures and cultures. Yes, there are socially located power spaces and complexities to study, but political theory is an important resource that can enable the field to think differently about research contributions. In this sense the debate between Goodwin (2009) and Ball (2009) is helpful in scoping out the way in which CEPS is seeking out new conceptual resources for the field, and experimenting with the relationship between the hierarchy and markets.

In summary, socially critical studies of consultants and consultancy are about the relationship between the state, public policy, knowledge and knowledge workers. While there are necessary functional matters about what is done and who by, and critical matters about relationships, socially critical work puts this within a wider context of the relationships between hierarchies in government and businesses.

Agenda setting

CEPs is beginning to do important research and analysis regarding the growth, role and contribution of consultants and consultancy in education policy processes and outputs. Our analysis shows a strong emphasis on the conditions in which new actors and repositioning of actors is taking place, with a multi-layered approach to functional, critical and socially critical work. The projects we have examined in education policy do not focus primarily or solely on functional or critical work, where the main contribution is socially critical. Research is being funded by the ESRC and by postgraduate doctoral fees, where the sites of this work in the UK seems to be concentrated (i.e. London and Manchester Institutes of Education). Indeed, a study of referencing and indexes demonstrates that engagement with knowledge actors such as consultants, consultancy, with a potential for consultocracy is not being made.

We would want to encourage this focus in mainstream CEPs projects and outputs, and we would want to see a continuation of both funded projects and doctoral studies. It seems to us that an important area for development and debates is the relationship between CEPs and political science. Research shows the continued importance of sociology as a resource for the field, and the questions this enables the field to pose about knowledge production are concerned with shared areas of power process and actors, but what political science enables are questions about public institutions and the way politics operates within and beyond them. For example, the focus on networks and networking is helpful but political science enables the power process to be examined in relation to legitimacy and the national mandate. Certainly investigative journalism locates here, and demonstrates the need for primary research (e.g. Cohen 2006, McSmith 2006, Toynbee 2011). So our analysis shows at least two important issues: first, the invitation to consultants and hence the recognition of consultancy as a valid process does not happen without the interplay between public office and those who are elected/appointed to such an office; and second, the exchange relationships are not symmetrical and are not fixed, government is both powerful and powerless in these relationships, but as we have seen we should not accept consultocracy as a fixed or settled way of characterizing this. Hence we should examine the workings of networks (Ball and Junemann 2012) and we should acknowledge the emergence of a policy space within Europe (Lawn and Grek 2012) but such analysis is limited without the recognition of hierarchies, and how they work within and external to public institutions and the organisations that they inter-connect with. Ball (2011) makes the point that in developing ways of recognizing heterarchy there is a need to prevent the displacement of hierarchy, and we would agree with this and go a step further in arguing for a reinstatement of hierarchy as a focus of research. In that sense, we should not lose sight of Saint-Martin's (1998a,b) analysis that shows the importance of the nation state with institutionalized cultures and constitutional arrangements in regard to understanding and explaining knowledge production and the role/contribution of knowledge workers. In doing so we should also recognize the existence of not only Scott's (1998) *Seeing like a State* by sovereign governments regarding large scale modernizing projects such as those in education, but also how those they connect with

externally to support the policy processes *see like little states*, and hence confirm, replicate and influence the legitimacy and endurance of hierarchy in the knowledge business.

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Table 1: An Agenda Setting Framework

	Functional	Critical	Socially Critical
Purposes	Organisational unity based on the model of the 'independent' business.	Uncovering the realities of activity within day-to-day work.	Working for social justice through identifying the limitations of other approaches and developing alternative projects.
Rationales	To use research to remove dysfunctions in order to secure efficient and effective outcomes regarding market advantage and profitability.	To give recognition to how research needs to begin with how people do their work, and challenges in which they try to make sense of the context and devise strategy.	To give recognition to how research is undertaken in a socially unjust world, and so there is a need to examine how power works in enabling advantage and disadvantage.
Narratives	Economising of the workforce and students regarding world-class education through strategy, competition, and data.	The contradictions and complexities in professional practice, and how this is handled in day-to-day practice.	Revealing and debating matters of fairness, recognition and equity in regard to the lives and achievements of the workforce and students.