Finding the right person: external partner challenges in coordinating with schools.

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This is the accepted version.

This article reports on the findings of a small-scale study that explores the co-ordination of external partners into schools and the realities of being involved in this work. The study used one-to-one interviews to explore the perceptions of four school teaching/support staff and 15 external partners from different sectors, attached to two schools in England.

The findings reveal how the range of co-ordinating roles introduced by policies are creating a complexity that external partners are having to navigate. The focus on academic outcomes and reduced budgets, means that the schools are perceived as an invited space where external partner access is controlled. The findings highlighted how the external partners had their own co-ordinators who were working in parallel to the school-based co-ordinators to overcome these challenges. To connect with schools, the external partners highlighted the need to find the decision maker who could exist in addition to a co-ordinator. Despite capacity concerns in the literature, the involvement of the headteacher as the co-ordinator was beneficial for quality, value for money and checking of ethos. The conclusion argues that the co-ordinating roles within the external partners need to be recognised together with the challenges they are facing when

attempting to access schools. Those involved in this work in schools and external partners need to be the right person which is someone with shared values and a mutual understanding of the benefit of this work.

Keywords: networks, school collaboration, partnerships, policymaking, wellbeing

Introduction

The partnerships between schools and external partners have been encouraged since the start of state education, often with the aim of meeting the wider outcomes of schooling such as wellbeing or self-confidence (DfES, 2005; See *et al.,* 2017). To enact these policies, several co-ordinating roles were introduced to provide the supporting function for teachers and schools (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2007; Coleman, 2006). The shift in policy focus towards academic outcomes and the associated funding cuts resulted in reductions to both school staff and external partners involved in this work, although wider outcomes such as mental health remain (Hanley *et al.,* 2017). More recent policies focus on the involvement of employers and there is a suggestion that using brokerage services is more cost effective than school-based co-ordinators (Mann and Virk, 2013; Kashefpakdel *et al.,* 2018). There is limited research about the roles involved in co-ordinating these partnerships or the experiences of teachers and external partners as they continue to respond to these needs. The voice of the external partners is notably absent from the existing literature, which this paper aims to address.

This paper reports on a small-scale study that explores the involvement of external partners in schools in England. It is interested in how these partnerships are co-ordinated and the realities of being involved in this work at the boundaries of schools. This paper draws on interviews undertaken with four teachers/support staff and 15 partners attached to two middle schools and two secondary schools in England. The teaching support staff include a member of leadership, teaching staff and co-ordinators. The external partners included senior leaders, managers, officers, and co-ordinators from organisations across

the different sectors such as businesses, charities, post-16 educational providers and statutory organisations. The participants were asked about who was involved in the co-ordination of the partnerships and the realities of being involved in these collaborations. These interviews were undertaken as part of a doctoral study which had a broader focus as outlined in the methodology, with this paper focusing on these findings around how the partnerships were co-ordinated.

For the purposes of this study, this paper will summarise the existing literature on the topic that is relevant to the content of this paper. It will outline policies which have encouraged these partnerships, the advantages and disadvantages of partnership working and the range of local authority and school-based co-ordinating roles that have supported this practice. This will include research which discusses the realities of being involved in co-ordinating these partnerships. Next will be the methodology which will give a summary of the methods used including details of the sample such as roles and pseudonym settings. The findings and discussion will detail the results of the research and offers reflections on the findings in relation to the aims of the study. Finally, the conclusion will explore the contributions to knowledge and practice, implications for practice and considerations for future research. This will also outline the limitations that are present in this study.

Literature review

Policy background

A range of government policies have proposed that schools should work with external partners including employers, emergency services, businesses, charities, health services, post-16 education providers and community organisations (Barron *et al.,* 2007; O'Connell and Everitt, 2010). Research highlights that the types of partners have broadened or reduced in line with the

policy focus (Everitt, 2020). Current policies have concerns around the delivery of careers guidance and are keen to encourage employers, colleges, and universities into schools (DfE, 2017). Before this, the New Labour government (1997-2010) had concerns for social inclusion to be delivered through joined-up working between schools and a broader range of partners from the private, statutory and third sector such as through the Extended School agenda or Every Child Matters (DfES 2004, 2005). Prior to this from the early 1990s, the new responsibilities on schools such as PSHE (Personal, Social and Health Education) and Citizenship started to result in requests for the involvement of theatre companies, road safety agencies, voluntary organisations, the police, and faith groups into schools (MacDonald, 2009; QCA, 1998). Much earlier in the 1960s, policies began to encourage nurses and social workers into schools for their specialist skills (see Ministry of Education, 1963) to meet additional needs, which has continued through the decades (Barron *et al.,* 2007). Together this highlights the breadth of policies and range of external partners who have been invited to become involved in schools, but there are advantages and disadvantages to forming these collaborations which this paper will now discuss.

Advantages and disadvantages of partnership working

The existing literature discusses the advantages and disadvantages in the practice of schools working with external partners. The desire to connect with external agencies is to address student health and welfare needs (McCuaig *et al.,* 2019). The practice of involving employers in career guidance is to promote job opportunities and post-16 pathways (Bimrose *et al.,* 2014: 2; Percy *et al.,* 2019). Working with the voluntary sector such as uniformed services can support pupils' self-confidence and teamwork (See *et al.,* 2017). Despite this, there are disadvantages or barriers to schools working with external partners such as not being able to locate an appropriate partner, inability to establish a common area of interest, identity or cultural clashes, turf warfare and power struggles (Hill, 2008; Rose, 2011). The human resource cost to funding non-teaching roles to assist with the leading or co-ordination of these partnerships is

problematic, but seen as important (Coleman, 2006; Hill, 2008). This has resulted in a range of co-ordinating roles have been introduced through the local authorities and schools which are discussed below.

Local authority and school-based co-ordinating roles

Several local authority and school-based co-ordinating roles can be identified which have been introduced to support the collaborations between schools and external partners. These roles have been funded by national and local government or by schools to deliver policy outcomes. An early co-ordinating role introduced was the education social worker (ESW) role by local authorities; but quality issues and restructures saw the recruitment of school-based roles (e.g., home school liaison officers) (Malcolm *et al.,* 2003; Henderson *et al.,* 2016). Further school-based roles started to emerge during the introduction of pastoral care, but this was initially delivered by form tutors, heads of year and head teachers (HMI, 1977; Best 1999). The demands around PSHE led to the appointment of PSHE Coordinators which in some cases were teachers who took on this extra role on a minor incentive allowance (Watkins, 1992). The policies of New Labour such as workforce remodelling are significant for the number of non-teaching roles that were introduced to provide a support function for teachers (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2007). These co-ordinating roles included learning mentors, extended school cluster co-ordinators and parent support advisors (Kendall *et al.,* 2005; Edmond and Price, 2009). Research by Coleman (2006) reveals how some larger schools were able to employ their own extended school co-ordinator, whilst but others had to share a co-ordinator across schools; some had to allocate the responsibility to an existing staff member (e.g., bursar) or several staff members. Edwards (2010) reports how five schools introduced 'welfare manager' positions who took over the responsibility for pastoral care from the heads of year and form tutors. The welfare manager roles were advantageous as they were a lower salary scale and were not a timetabled role which Hill (2008) agrees is important. This suggests a variety of co-ordinating roles implemented across schools which had

some overlap with existing school functions, but these roles require certain knowledge and skills as discussed below.

The literature suggests that the co-ordinators require expertise or knowledge to undertake the role. Edwards *et al.* (2010) reveals how the welfare managers possessed 'distributed expertise' or the ability to build links and integrate with others towards mutually agreed outcomes. The 'distributed expertise' includes 'relational agency' which is the capacity to recognise external partner resources. The welfare managers would also 'rule-bend' to meet pupil needs, which had implications for their own role as they worked at the boundaries of the schools. A more recent study by McCuaig *et al.* (2019), reveals how four teachers from different schools in Australia, had created co-ordinating positions in response to the reduced state, but faced stress and wellbeing challenges from the time spent dealing with emotional demands of supporting pupils' needs. The development of relationships and trust were important as the four teachers took on a networker or 'reticulist' role. This is where individuals can navigate the inter-organisational politics to develop networks and relationships (Friend *et al.,* 1974; Easen *et al.,* 2000). This does indicate skills and knowledge required by co-ordinators, but the austerity measures noted by McCuaig et al. (2019) have had an impact on some of this co-ordinating infrastructure, which is discussed below.

The introduction of the Coalition government (Conservative and Liberal Democrats) in 2010 led to a reduction in the co-ordinating roles and signalled a shift towards academic outcomes. There was an emphasis on a shift from the 'peripherals' such as wellbeing, back to teaching (Gove, 2013). This is worrying as research suggests that there are issues (e.g., wellbeing) which pupils face that will not be solved by the achievement of hard outcomes (Rees *et al.,* 2013). Research outlines how the changes to school funding resulted in the reduction of local authority provision (Thraves *et al.,* 2012). Reports suggest that some schools began to employ their own co-ordinators from those originally funded by the local authority, such as learning mentors as they recognise the benefits to individual pupils and staff workload (Kendall *et al.,* 2005; Jefferson, 2012).

Bertram *et al.* (2017) for the DfE explores the provision of extra-curricular activities, which were a component of Extended Schools and reveals how several secondary schools employ a co-ordinator or Community Manager to co-ordinate the extra-curricular activities, apply for funding and liaise with partners, school staff and parents. This appears to be a newer incarnation of the extended school co-ordinator role but with a reduced focus. Marshall *et al.* (2017) for the DfE surveyed school staff to explore the mental health provision offered by schools and external partners. The report reveals that whilst two thirds (68%) of the schools have a designated contact to co-ordinate with external partners, it is the primary schools who are more likely to have a designated member of staff. In contrast the secondary schools are more likely to have a named partner contact. A lack of time was perceived as a barrier for external partners (67%) as opposed to schools themselves (30%); although this was school reported. This suggests that co-ordinating this work was not a resource issue for some schools. Despite this research by Hanley *et al.* (2017) emphases that schools have felt the burden to respond to the need around pupil mental health, with less funding, less pastoral staff and less partners involved in this work. This indicates that there are ongoing needs, but a reduced amount of co-ordinating resource involved.

The most recent policies in England which focus on the involvement of external partners have been concerned with involving employers in careers guidance (DfE, 2017) following the reduction in local authority services (e.g., Connexions). Bimrose *et al.* (2014) for the government, undertook stakeholder interviews and a survey with secondary schools and employers to explore the link with the National Careers Service and employer engagement with pupils. The report reveals how a lack of time is a barrier for both schools and employers to work together, suggesting that co-ordination is required. There is an indication that some schools and employers are unwilling to collaborate, so employers are deemed to require incentives and that a third-party database or brokerage service would assist. A brokerage service is seen as more cost effective and scalable as opposed to individual school co-ordinators, as whilst they can return a better quality, there is a lower volume for the higher cost

(Mann and Virk, 2013). A further report by Kashefpakdel *et al.* (2018) outlines 'What Works' in career-related learning in primary schools using interviews with school staff and experts. The involvement of external partners and employers is an important lesson from practice, but again there are challenges including the lack of time and the crowed curriculum. The lack of a staff member as a co-ordinator is a major barrier, as was the time to develop the links or loss of connection due to staff turnover. Kashefpakdel *et al.* (2018) in line with Bimrose *et al.* (2014) propose using more cost-effective brokerage such as online platforms or offline brokerage service to move beyond the issues of developing informal and individual connections which can be more expensive. Kashefpakdel *et al.* (2018) warns the main cost for schools is finding a suitable person within the external partner and undertaking the 'ask' of them. This raises similar concerns about school and external partner capacity as raised by Marshall *et al.* (2017) but infers that the issues can be improved through brokerage.

This literature review has outlined several government policies which have encouraged schools to collaborate with external partners and the different co-ordinating roles that have supported this practice. There is research which suggests that school staff may step into the co-ordinating role, but these individuals require specialist expertise. Whilst literature advocates the use of brokers for when employers are involved but the cost of a co-ordinator or brokerage service are concerns. Whilst individual schools might have invested in co-ordinating roles, policy changes and funding cuts have reduced some of the local authority infrastructure. It is unclear who is co-ordinating these partnerships within the schools and the realities of being involved in this co-ordination from both the schools and the partners.

Methodology

This paper draws on findings from a doctoral study undertaken at Staffordshire University, which had a broader focus and set out to answer the following research questions:

- Who are the external agents that are involved in the learning and wellbeing of children and young people in the case study schools and what are they there to do?
- What are the perceptions of these external agents in terms of what they believe they are there to do?
- What are the perceptions of key stakeholders including schools, parents, and pupils, in terms of why the external agents are there?
- Are there different perspectives amongst key stakeholders in relation to why these agents are involved?
- Is the involvement of external agents related to government policies and initiatives or do other rationales exist?

The doctoral study arose as I was involved the co-ordination of external partners in schools between 2006 and 2012, initially, as a Community Education Manager working in a Further Education College collaborating with schools to deliver adult and community learning. Then in 2007 I became an Extended Schools Co-ordinator working with 15 schools to provide access to activities and services entitled a 'core offer'. In 2010 I co-wrote a book with a local headteacher aimed at supporting other cluster co-ordinators (O'Connell and Everitt, 2010). The 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review led to redundancies of cluster co-ordinators and in my Masters in Education dissertation that year, I explored the sustainability of Extended Schools using a social enterprise model. I formed a social enterprise and for several years and I offered extended activities and services in schools and partner organisations such as children's centres. This meant that I worked as a commissioner of external partners and then became an external partner myself. The duty on schools to provide access to extended activities and services was removed and the funding was no longer ring-fenced. This impacted on the desire for schools to commission extended activities and services; thus threatening the sustainability of external partners in schools. The aim of the doctorate was to explore the legacy of the extended school agenda and what this meant for the involvement of external partners in schools. However, the literature review

explored a 100 years of educational policies which had encouraged these partnerships and the thesis did not just explore the activities related to the 'core offer' of the extended school agenda but extended this to all partners involved in the four schools and their activities (Everitt, 2018; 2021).

This paper focuses on the findings around how the partnerships were co-ordinated and addresses the following questions:

- Who is involved in the co-ordination of the education-community-partnerships?
- What are the realities of being involved in these partnerships from the perspective of both the external partners and the teachers/support staff?

Four schools were approached through a colleague and all four agreed to take part, which included two secondary schools (Compton Academy and Thornily Academy) for pupils aged 11-16 and two middle schools (Meadows Middle School and Sunnyside Church of England (C of E) Academy for pupils aged 9-13. A teacher/support staff member from each school and 15 partners from the across the four schools participated in a semi-structured interview. Interviews were chosen as the research method as there was an interest in the participants perceptions of events (Cohen *et al.* 2017). The thesis used a collective case study approach to describe the situation in terms of external partner involvement and used an ideology critique to examine the different interests and the legitimacy of the situation.

A list of partners was created from the data collected through the doctoral study methods including the teacher interviews, a pro-forma completed by each school and documentary analysis of information obtained from school websites (e.g., parent letters). Partners from different sectors were invited through purposive sampling. This paper reports on the findings from the interview data. Table 1 below outlines the four schools, four teachers/support staff and 15 external partner roles and organisations.

Table 1: Details of school staff and partners including professional roles and organisation type

Compton Academy	Meadows Middle School	Sunnyside C of E Academy	Thornily Academy
Teacher with responsibility for Careers (IAG)	Teacher and Head of Year	Principal	Co-ordinator for Careers, Enterprise, and Work Experience
Director, at a Theatre in Education Company	Strategic Lead, Counselling Charity	Officer, Road Safety.	Co-ordinator, Engineering Company
Fundraising Manager, Charity specialising in a Rare Disease.	Officer, Together Housing Association	Lead Youth Worker, Christian Youth Charity.	Manager, Building Maintenance Company
Manager, Construction Company.		Co-ordinator, Fire Safety.	Development Worker, Uniformed Youth Charity
Manager, Training Provider			Manager, Further Education College.
			Co-ordinator, University Society.

The interview recordings were fully transcribed and coded to identify significant themes. Content analysis was used to verify the contents in a rigorous manner through analysis, including frequency of words or categories (Cohen *et al.,* 2017). The researcher moved back and forth between the data, research questions and literature, as the units of analysis emerged (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). Codes were subsumed which assisted to create open and flexible coding categories.

The doctoral study had full ethical approval. Information sheets and consent forms were produced using BERA guidelines (2018) and outlined the research aims and objectives. The documents were created to reassure participants such as the right to withdraw and gain their consent. The interviews were audio-

recorded and transcribed. Pseudonyms are used for school names, teachers/support staff and partners' names, job roles and organisation type.

Findings and discussion

The school staff and external partners were asked about the individuals involved in co-ordinating the involvement of the external partners into schools. They highlight the complexity of roles involved in this work, but also the importance of finding the decision maker and the right person which are discussed below.

Decision makers

Literature such as Coleman (2006) have emphasised the value of having local authority or school-based co-ordinating roles to provide support for schools to connect with external partners. Four participants revealed that their involvement in schools also had to be agreed with a 'decision maker' which could be different to the co-ordinator. The Principal of Sunnyside C of E Middle School emphasised how they acted as the decision maker for all staff requests, thereby controlling external partner access to ensure the activity aligned with the school's ethos:

> If anybody wanted to operate in school, they would have to ask me. Nobody operates without my permission…. If a member of staff says that they have got something that they would like to try, and it does involve an outside agency then I'm happy to look at it and [check] does that fit in with what we are choosing to do? (Principal, Sunnyside C of E Middle School)

The Teacher and Head of Year from Meadows Middle School emphasised that the school leadership determined which external partners were granted access. It appeared that the reduced budgets and focus on academic outcomes as

warned by Rees *et al.* (2013) was restricting the number of external partners in the school:

> The management in the school, tend to be quite picky in who they have in … The headteacher has the overriding say. Budget restrictions are massive… you must have a certain amount number of staff that deliver the curriculum and that is a priority. (Teacher, Meadows, Middle School)

The Fundraising Manager from a charity specialising in a rare disease believed that in primary schools the head teacher would act as the decision maker and the co-ordinator in terms of whether the charity could work in a school. Whereas in the secondary schools a range of staff acted as co-ordinators which appeared to be influenced by the different policies and co-ordinators outlined in the literature review such as pastoral care (Best, 1999). The range of co-ordinating roles were creating a complexity that the external partners were having to navigate:

> In a primary school the decision maker does tend to be the headteacher. Whereas in the secondary schools it could well be a charity coordinator-if they have got one or a head or pastoral leader or it could simply be head of year 7 or head of year 8. (Fundraising Manager, Charity Specialising in Rare Disease)

The literature centres on the value of co-ordinators to undertake the support function for schools (Hammersley-Fletcher, 2007). However, The Fundraising Manager added that the external partner also had a co-ordinator who appeared to possess the distributed expertise which is important in school-based co-ordinators (Edwards *et al.,* 2010). This expertise is important to navigate the complexity of school-based co-ordinating roles to gain access:

> The person who is making the telephone call, the fundraiser, or my support assistant they have got to be quite skilled at very quickly,

whoever picks that phone up in reception, they have got to get the information out of them [the decision maker] and hopefully they will put you through. (Fundraising Manager, Charity Specialising in Rare Disease)

The Strategic Lead from the Counselling Charity also noted the range of co-ordinators involved in schools with older pupils, but it in primary schools it would be the head teacher. The roles they outline include teaching, non-teaching and leadership roles, although the literature proposes that having a co-ordinator beyond the leadership team is useful (Hill, 2008). The Strategic Lead revealed how capacity issues might mean that if a headteacher has commissioned their counselling service, then they might have to delegate the co-ordination of this. Despite this they revealed that the involvement of the headteacher as the decision maker is useful for the school to check quality and value for money:

> We have got Head Teachers, Deputy Heads, Assistant Heads, we have got SENCOs, Learning Mentors, Home-School Link Workers, it varies, it depends. We do not tend to have Head Teachers in high schools that would be more likely in a primary school…. sometimes when we first begin the heads want to keep a good feel of what is going on in the service, they want to know if we are providing value for money, if the service is good … sometimes they discover that they can't meet with us on such a regular basis and they have to ease back and then they would choose another member of staff. (Strategic Lead, Counselling Charity)

The Officer from the Housing Association agreed that in schools with older pupils the teachers act as co-ordinators, but liaising with a Head or Deputy Head as the co-ordinator or decision maker was useful for the external partner as it gave them confidence in their activity or service:

> As the kids get older... I do not know if the teachers have more autonomy, it tends to be the individual teachers that will contact us. So,

in each of the first schools we work in it is always the Head or the Deputy Head and that helps us to have confidence to work in there. (Officer, Housing Association).

The Officer from the Housing Association added that they connected with multiple co-ordinators in Meadows Middle School, which developed in an organic manner, some of which was informed by the 'different hats' they wear in the community, which meant the connections lacked uniformity across schools:

> It tends to be, a bit inconsistent in that it has grown organically in that it tends to grow from previous links. At Meadows, the bursar contacted me for something, we have ended up over the last couple of years, through having a reasonable relationship… there is no particular reason why the link would be with somebody. There are a couple of individual teachers that I bumped into in the different hats that I wear and through that we have built a link and there are the pastoral people with a pastoral responsibility would tend to be in touch. (Officer, Housing Association)

The two staff members interviewed from the secondary schools, Compton Academy and Thornily academy, both appeared to be co-ordinators and decision makers. The Careers, Enterprise, and Work Experience Co-ordinator (CEWC) from Thornily Academy revealed the vast number of inquiries the school received from external partners for which they acted as the decision maker by vetting and even controlling what can be discussed, which was influenced by academic outcomes although seen as useful for quality:

> Sometimes you can turn your laptop on and within the space of a day you can be bereft with the number of people who are contacting you…. I do vet them and I have confidence in them, and I do brief them, and they know what they can and cannot say and how to behave with students… You have got to have quality control measures in there. You have got to have confidence in the people who you invite in actually giving the message that you want for your students. (CEWC Co-ordinator, Thornily)

The Teacher at Compton also emphasised that they acted as the decision maker and co-ordinator for external partners in relation to careers. They were pro-active in seeking external partners to work in the school, whilst other schools were less willing as suggested by Bimrose et al. (2004). It was the Teacher's 'belief system' that informed their approach, indicating it relates to their values, but their knowledge of external partners or distributed expertise' (Edwards *et al.,* 2010) was restricted to careers, indicating a reason for multiple co-ordinators:

> It is very school-proactive you know and there are so many schools that are not [and] that just astonishes me really. They have not approached us to say then we would like to teach your kids this. I get them in the building or get them to do a talk and we go from there…. In terms of any other agents, I'm not too familiar with what happens to be honest, only with what I do with IAG, careers and all the rest of it. (Teacher, Compton Academy)

Right person

Several of the external partners, such as the Officer from Road Safety, a statutory agency, talked about the importance and challenges to finding the 'right person' in schools which they addressed in their role as a co-ordinator. The right person is a school-based co-ordinator with shared values and understanding of external partner activities and services. The external partner would approach the types of co-ordinating roles introduced by policies such as PSHE Co-ordinators (Watkins, 1992), but the complexity of roles across the schools and the focus on academic outcomes as suggested by Kashefpakdel *et al.* (2018) were combining to make the right person hard to find and in some cases access to schools was restricted:

> The schools that are aware of us approach us…. The secondary schools especially, it is just getting through to the right person, the head does not really have anything to do with all this, you know they have got so much more to look after, the deputy head sometimes they get involved. But in a lot of cases, it is either the heads of year or the PSHE co-ordinators…. Sometimes you just cannot get, they do not say no, we do not want you in or they just ignore you. … Some schools they want to concentrate on academic stuff. (Officer, Road Safety)

Percy *et al.* (2019) outline how the involvement of external partners can be useful to promote post-16 pathways which was the aim of West College. The Manager of West College revealed how the college outreach co-ordinators liaised with different school-based co-ordinators including heads of year and deputy heads for their outreach work. Despite this, they emphasised that it tended to be the teaching staff who would appreciate the value of the external partner activities around post-16 pathways and be the right person:

> What it has actually come down to is the way that you have the relationships with the school, but it has always been more with either the head of year or in some cases the Deputy Heads, but it tends to be more the teaching staff that can see the value and the benefit of what you do and that tends to be the people that you have your relationship with. (Manager, Further Education College)

The literature review discussed disadvantages to partnership working such as identifying a common area of interest or lack of time (Hill, 2008; Kashefpakdel *et al.,* 2018). The Manager from a Training Provider that offers career talks and taster sessions, stated that sometimes it was about the personality of the school co-ordinator in that role, which meant the co-ordinator in Work Skills had to use their 'distributed expertise' to find another way to connect to the school which took the external partner time:

Some of its just personality, it is the people that are in those roles, as opposed to the role itself… I sit on other forums, community forums etc. so there is lots of contact, there is a lot of leg work that happens to build up those partnerships. And because we are not just a training provider... We have got a charity where we do a lot of support work within schools, so there is lots of ways where schools can be connected to the group itself, so sometimes it is a different person within a school that might be connected to us.

The Manager from a Construction Company that offered careers talks and taster sessions, also revealed how they struggled to access schools and find the right person. The Manager revealed how they worked with the Training Provider who acted as their broker as opposed to a third-party brokerage service as proposed by Bimrose *et al.* (2014). Whilst the broker was helpful to get their 'foot in the door' it was still important to find the right person in the schools:

As an employer approaching the school sometimes you can come up against closed doors, they go 'no, we already work with such and such' and kind of shut you out. I do, a lot of work with [Training Provider], because they have a lot of contact with local schools, so they are kind of my way into schools. I think once you are in, you are in, it is fine but getting your foot in the door can be quite hard. I appreciate the teachers are very busy and they do not always have time for what you are doing, but if you can just get in and speak to the right person you can actually start to do some really great things. (Manager, Construction Company)

The development of individual and personal connections between schools and external partners are valuable but seen as costly and problematic with staff turnover and thus brokers are proposed (Kashefpakdel *et al.,* 2018). The Senior Youth Worker from a Christian Youth Charity, emphasises how schools are invited spaces and making a connection with the both the head teacher, but also the right person with shared values is important for access. In Meadows

Middle School they had a connection with the RE teacher and other staff members, but when the RE teacher left, they were allocated a different co-ordinator where there was no relationship:

> We had a very strong relationship with the RE teacher, when she went, they did not have an RE teacher after that, and so you were given to somebody who maybe was not that kind of keen on RE. So, they did not miss so obviously the importance of what you were doing and then they left and then somebody else came in. So, it was just being passed from pillar to post. I think it was at a time when there was a reduction in staff, so other people were having to take it on. One of the difficulties there was that the people we were given were not necessarily the people we had built a relationship with. (Senior Youth Worker, Christian Youth Charity)

This CEWC Co-ordinator from Thornily also perceived that some staff members would ask her to bring partners into the school to respond to issues (e.g., teamwork or respect) but other staff had a lower appreciation of the wider outcomes of schooling and the value of what external partners can offer:

> I have had very few suggestions from curriculum leaders to get different agencies in… It has been more of a case of maybe I have identified, or I have had an awareness through one means or another …There are some staff who have in my opinion quite a limited awareness of the expectations for young people outside school or what they need in order to survive.

Conclusion, implications, and recommendations

The existing literature discusses policies which have encouraged schools to work with external partners and the range of local authority and school-based co-ordinating roles that have been introduced to facilitate this work. This paper

contributes new knowledge through findings that revealed how the external partners also had their own co-ordinators who were working in parallel to the school-based co-ordinators. The prominence of these co-ordinators was important due to some of the issues because of policies and practice such as the focus on academic outcomes, which meant that these co-ordinators also demonstrated distributed expertise (Edwards *et al.,* 2010) to operate in these boundary spaces. For practice in schools, it is important that these co-ordinating roles within the external partners are recognised. Further research could be undertaken to explore these roles further.

This paper agrees with the existing literature such as Coleman (2006) that having a co-ordinator is important to help connect schools with external partners. The findings revealed how the pressure on school budgets and focus on academic outcomes as emphasised in the literature meant that schools were perceived as invited spaces where external partner access was controlled. The findings contribute to existing knowledge by revealing how co-ordinators were blocking the connection into schools and not all schools were pro-actively working with external partners. This has implications for practice for external partners are it highlights how access to schools might be restricted. Further research to explore how the external partners are navigating these issues would be useful.

The findings add new knowledge by revealing how the range of co-ordinating roles (e.g., learning mentors, pastoral staff) introduced by policies (see Edmond and Price, 2009) were creating a complexity of co-ordinating roles that external partners were trying to navigate. This was particularly prominent in secondary schools where a range of co-ordinators were involved beyond the headteacher. The knowledge or distributed expertise (Edwards *et al.,* 2010) possessed by these co-ordinators was related to their area of interest (careers) suggesting why multiple co-ordinators are involved in schools. This has implications for practice as it highlights the complexity of co-ordinating roles for any external partners considering working with schools. Further quantitative research could

explore the range of co-ordinator roles and functions in a larger group of schools.

This paper adds new knowledge in that is reveals the presence of a decision maker with the authority to determine if external partners could work in a school in addition to the co-ordinator. In some primary schools the head teacher was the decision maker and the co-ordinator, whereas in some middle schools or secondary schools the head was the decision maker on behalf of the range of co-ordinators in the schools. This has implications for practice for external partners as it highlights that there might be a two-stage process to their involvement in some schools.

The findings suggest that whilst a headteacher might act as the co-ordinator there may be capacity issues as emphasised by Coleman (2010). Despite this, the external partners revealed how the headteacher as co-ordinator was beneficial for quality, value for money and checking of ethos. This has implications for practice for schools and external partners as it highlights the value of headteacher involvement.

This paper adds new knowledge as it highlights the importance of locating a co-ordinator classed as the 'right person' which is someone with shared values or a mutual understanding of the importance of the external partner activities and services. Locating the right person was identified as a challenge in secondary schools with multiple co-ordinators. In some instances, this was beyond the job role, indicating a right person needs to possess what Edwards *et al.* (2010) called relational agency where they have the capacity to appreciate the resources of the external partner, but also that they value what they have to offer to the lives of young people. Not all school staff or external partners will have these values. The literature suggests that staff turnover can disrupt this connection (Kashefpakdel *et al.*, 2018), but regardless of a broker to gain access; it is important that that the co-ordinator is the right person who appreciates the value of the external partner activities to the wider outcomes of schooling. This has implications for practice as it indicates that how those

involved in this work in both schools and external partners need to possess certain knowledge and skills. Further research could explore the knowledge and skills of the school-based and external partner-based co-ordinators to see how they compare.

The limitations of this study are that it does not include primary schools as only middle and secondary schools took part. There was a messiness to the identification of the partners, due to gaps in staff knowledge, which meant that the partners identified were only a 'snapshot' of those involved at that time. The convenience sample is helpful for ease of access, but this and the low number of participants can reduce the generalisability to the wider population. It will be for the readers of this paper to determine the relevance (Cohen *et al.,* 2017). In this type of research generalisability is not a priority and instead the aim was to focus on exploring the perspectives of the participants that took part.

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