

BECOMING A SENCO: AN INVESTIGATION INTO WHY TEACHERS  
BECOME SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS COORDINATORS IN ENGLAND

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

In England, every school is required to have a named and trained “Special Educational Needs Coordinator” (SENCO) whose function is to coordinate educational provision for children with special educational needs. In spite of this, little empirical research has been undertaken to explore what motivates existing teachers to take on this important role. This study examined why teachers become SENCOs through a series of interconnected studies. The first qualitative study involved generating reasons for participating in training from a cohort of SENCOs currently training (n = 88). These reasons were then explored further through a national survey of SENCOs (n = 618). Between the qualitative and survey studies, an analysis of Department for Education data was undertaken to establish the characteristics of the SENCO population. The SENCO workforce was found to be largely female and white with a high proportion working part time. Most SENCOs are in the middle or second half of their career, and they are employed on the class teacher rather than the leadership pay scale. Only a minority hold a full master’s level qualification (other than compulsory qualifications associated with teaching and the SENCO role).

The initial qualitative study identified different drivers for those training to be SENCOs which were further organised in an ecological fashion. These drivers were used to develop a structured questionnaire which was the basis of the national survey. An exploratory factor analysis identified four motivational factors: two outward-facing factors (SENCOs commitment to ‘inclusion’ and ‘high quality provision’) and two inward-facing factors (SENCOs interest in ‘educational and professional development’ and ‘leadership voice and status’). Overall, the outward-facing factors were viewed as more important to respondents than the inward-facing factors. There were also some specific motivational differences between sub-groups. Younger SENCOs and those engaged in training were more motivated by ‘educational and professional development’. SENCOs holding school leadership contracts were more motivated by developing ‘leadership voice and status’ compared with their classroom teacher

peers. Moreover, there was a significant overall difference with women reporting a higher interest than men across all factors.

Key recommendations include the need for policy makers to understand and define the SENCO role in greater detail. In the SENCO recruitment process, schools and teachers must be cognisant of each other's expectations of the role to ensure a good fit. Both policy makers and schools must understand the interests teachers express in the role and nurture them to prevent attrition from the profession. Further research is recommended as are suggestions for using the methodological approaches in this thesis for understanding interest in a range of other teacher roles and occupations.

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## PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED STUDIES FROM THIS THESIS

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An adapted version of these studies is found across Chapters 8 and 9.

I also refer to why I did this study in Chapter 10.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ANOVA	Analysis of Variance
AP	Alternative Provision
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DfE	Department for Education
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
FOI	Freedom of Information
FTE	Full-time Equivalent
IEP	Individual Education Plan
KMO	Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (Test)
LEA	Local Education Authority
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
MITA	Maximising the Impact of Teaching Assistants
NASENCo	National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
PPCT	Process, Person, Context, Time
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit
RIASEC	Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising and Conventional
SCCT	Social Cognitive Career Theory
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SEN	Special educational needs
SEND	Special educational needs and disability
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SLTCDM	Social Learning Theory of Career Decision Making
TA	Teaching Assistant
TLR	Teaching & Learning Responsibility Payments
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

# CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Statement of purpose

The present study has been designed to investigate why teachers may enter into the role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). The term SENCO was defined over 25 years ago (Department for Education, 1994). This research emanates from my career working in schools as a SENCO, school leader, and local authority advisor. My interest in the role finally culminated in a university appointment to work alongside SENCOs and local authorities to train and support new SENCOs. This appointment to the University of Birmingham was as the lead tutor on the programme that delivers the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination (NASENCo), which is the qualification that all new SENCOs must achieve within three years of appointment to the role (*The Education (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators) (England) Regulations*, 2008; *The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations*, 2014). During this time, anecdotal observation suggested that SENCOs have a deep sense of duty to promote inclusion rather than use the position for career development or personal gain. It was this that drove my initial interest in understanding why teachers enter this complex role. Even so, this interest and belief in the importance of understanding what motivates this professional group has grown as I have undertaken this study and developed my own professional role as a training provider.

The NASENCo programme is guided by a list of nationally agreed learning outcomes that are published by the Department for Education (DfE) in England (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2014). Providers of

this qualification were traditionally accredited by the DfE; however, more recently the course became subject to an open market approach. The original accredited providers decided to retain contact and form a provider partnership with a diverse range of functions such as lobbying, research, and quality assurance. This approach was regarded as a positive move by the DfE and others (Passy, Georgeson, Schaefer, & Kaimi, 2017).

One recent project of the group has been to work on behalf of the DfE to “develop/review the qualification framework for specialists including making and taking forward recommendations concerning the updating of learning outcomes for specialist mandatory training (e.g., National Award for SEN Coordination and Sensory Impairment)” (Department for Education, 2018c, p. 5). Within the provider partnership, the discussion concerned how these new learning outcomes could be more closely aligned with a reconceptualised role that is more akin to that of a school leadership role. In turn, it was suggested that the NASENCo learning outcomes may be better if they were realigned to nationally agreed leadership standards such as those used for headteachers and senior leaders in schools (Department for Education, 2015). Indeed, this consideration was part of an ongoing discussion based on a wide range of research that has often considered whether the role should be classified as a leadership role or not (e.g., Layton, 2005; Oldham & Radford, 2011; Tissot, 2013).

This reinforced my concern that here was another example of policy making about a group of people that we actually knew very little about. What was lacking within both the research and discussions mentioned above were the reasons why many teachers had expressed an interest in entering this role in the first instance. Without this broader understanding of the people within the



role, it would be impossible to argue the case for whether the SENCO should or should not be a leadership role. However, there was no evidence on which to base this key decision. The purpose of this research, therefore, is to provide insight into what SENCOs want from the role and why they enter the role in the first instance. Thus, the intention is to add more balance by investigating the SENCO as a person, rather than the SENCO as an occupation.

The present research has been designed to provide an accurate overview of the construction of the SENCO role over time and how this can be understood within the wider ecology of policy and wider career interest literature. It progresses by providing an analysis of empirical data collected from SENCOs of the myriad reasons why teachers may be drawn in this professional direction in the first instance. In particular, there is a concern about how their decisions may be understood within the proximal and distal influences of the complex ecology that surrounds them. However, this last proposition assumes that SENCOs are homogeneous, which they are not. As a result, I also wanted to investigate the heterogeneity of those in the role to see whether different groups of SENCOs may have different interests in the role. Here, there was a particular focus in examining whether SENCOs who are leaders and those who are not, actually want different things from the role. However, as the ongoing literature review progressed there was a realisation that other demographic factors such as gender may also intersect or interact with these decision-making processes in the SENCO role (e.g., Mackenzie, 2012a, 2012b). This led to a wider investigation of why different groups of teachers may be attracted or not to the role.

The findings of this study suggest that SENCOs enter the profession for a wide variety of reasons. These reasons can be understood holistically utilising ecological theories of development (e.g., Anderson, Boyle, & Deppler, 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). The findings of the research suggest that the reasons for entering the role may be at the level of the person, including family circumstances; the level of the school, including the desire to change practice; or at the level of policy, including the desire to make schools more inclusive. Another major finding of this thesis concerns the demographic composition of the role within England. The study has provided an accurate overview of the individual characteristics of the SENCO population for the first time. These findings call into question often inaccurate sampling and the findings of research on which policy is sometimes based (e.g., Passy et al., 2017). For example, unlike Passy et al. (2017) the study has revealed a population of SENCOs of which only a minority are school leaders.

This latter finding and the heterogeneity of those in the role is especially important when considering the results of other studies that have not paid full attention to the composition of the actual SENCO population. In the present thesis the collection of themes from the first study were used to construct a scale of 32 items. This scale was distributed as a national survey alongside a request for demographic and school-level data that could be compared against the newly established national population. The 32 items on the scale were subsequently reduced to four factors to explain why teachers were interested in the SENCO role. In turn, these four factors broadly align with individual systems within different ecological theories (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). An example of this being the first factor 'inclusion' which aligns

closely with Bronfenbrenner's conception of the macrosystem. A series of factorial analyses of variance (ANOVAs) revealed that SENCOs often express different levels of interest in these factors according to a range of individual characteristics. These include differences at the macro level of the factor of inclusion. This thesis therefore calls into question:

- reliance on measuring career interest through measures aimed at the level of the person alone (e.g., McCrae & Costa, 2008)
- studies that speak as though SENCOs are a homogenous group (e.g., Tissot, 2013).

## **1.2 Significance of the study**

The significance of the findings of this research can be demonstrated by reflecting on examples of previous work in this field. In past research, the main concern has been in relation to the role or the environment in which the SENCO works as opposed to the person who fulfils this role. For example, Cole (2005) suggests that the SENCO role is overwhelming and organisational in nature. She recommends that it should be specified that this role should be defined by law as a senior management responsibility. Meanwhile, Layton (2005) argues that the NASENCo award should be designed for the development of leadership. Oldham and Radford (2011) suggest that there is tension between the role of SENCO and the need for it to be a leadership role. In this study, SENCOs suggested that their leadership role was highly relevant; however, they often have only limited influence over more senior staff in a performance-based environment. Tissot (2013) performed an analysis of the vision of the role

provided by the government against participants in a SENCO programme. She noticed a difference between those SENCOs who were part of a leadership team and those who were not in the way they perceived their ability to conduct and perform their role. In a study of nine SENCOs, Rosen-Webb (2011) suggests that SENCOs identify themselves in multiple ways, broadly themed as managers or leaders. The findings of the study suggest that both recruitment and development of SENCOs needs to focus on the relationship between the development of specialist teacher training knowledge and management training.

The above discussion provides an overview of the enduring concern for the relationship between the SENCO and leadership status. Indeed, we can also infer that the person and the organisation often seem to have different objectives. What is missing, therefore, is empirical data that helps us to understand the person as well as the organisation. The present study for example has found that:

- only a third of SENCOs are on the leadership scale
- SENCOs who are not school leaders are more interested in professional development than becoming leaders.

These are two of many significant findings that have been missing from the discussion briefly explored above. Yet, as will be discussed later, the studies above are often cited by policy makers to support changes being made to the professional role. Indeed, there are many more reasons beyond school leadership as to why people may become SENCOs.

The research matters as it provides a voice for the SENCOs operating in schools throughout England at the present time. The findings provide important evidence to enable researchers and policy makers to make informed decisions about recruitment, training, retention, and deployment in this key school role. This is especially important in a time where key decisions are being made about how this role may be focused or indeed reconceptualised in the near future (Department for Education, 2018c, p. 5). This makes the focus of the present study unique.

### **1.3 Research questions**

#### ***1.3.1 Prima facia research questions***

The original proposal for this study was presented in February 2016 with a range of prima facia research questions. As Thomas (2017, p. 20) suggests, these are often different from the final research questions. Thomas suggests that after a substantive literature review these questions may need reshaping to provide more focus. Additionally, the questions should be able to be answered in an obvious research design (Thomas, 2017, pp. 96-97). These original prima facia questions were:

- 1) What are the vocational drivers of SENCOs?
- 2) Do their past experiences influence their current practice and their vocational preferences?
- 3) Do they differ in approach from other school leaders?
- 4) How can work, vocational, and individual psychology help us understand the people fulfilling this role?

- 5) What motivates these people to train for this job?

### ***1.3.2 Final research questions***

The literature review found that the prima facia questions incorporated several embedded assumptions. As a result, they were restructured over Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Here, each chapter explored a different facet of the literature with the aim of adding further refinement to the prima facia questions. For example, question two suggested that the position was stable over time and decisions were contextually driven. Here, therefore, was a need to examine the development role in greater detail and restructure the questions accordingly. This was done in Chapter 2. Theoretical approaches to the influence of context on the development of the individual also needed further exploration. This was done in Chapter 3. Questions 1 and 4 assumed that vocational psychology may have something to offer in answering these complex questions. Here, a selection of career interest theory was reviewed within Chapter 4.

Therefore, the intention was to examine a broad range of theoretical and empirical literature relating to the questions prior to a final restructure. Here, the process of reviewing the literature was iterative in nature. This involved reviewing literature relating to the SENCO (Chapter 2); ecological systems theory (Chapter 3); and career interest theory (Chapter 4) to examine literature relating to other questions prior to a final restructure. After this comprehensive review of the literature the questions were further refined to the following research questions.

- 1) Research question 1

- a) What are the factors or reasons reported by teachers on how they developed interest in the role of SENCO?
- b) How can we understand these reasons within the realms of the people and the contexts in which these decisions were made?

## 2) Research question 2

- a) What are the characteristics of the SENCO population?
- b) Does existing literature reflect this population?

## 3) Research question 3

What are the main factors underlying teachers' interest in becoming SENCOs?

## 4) Research question 4

Do these factors interact with school-level variables (i.e., school age range and school quality) and individual-level variables (i.e., SENCO education level, gender, actual or aspirant SENCO, leadership status, and age).

### **1.4 Overview of research design and methods**

The approach to the overall study has been driven by the individual questions. In turn, due to the nature of these questions, the overall thesis may be broadly described as mixed methods. This is because the questions require a range of methodological responses that includes interpretive, statistical, or secondary analysis. The thesis did not adhere to any particular type of mixed methods study (e.g., Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Instead, the design

was more individual to the needs of the overall study but partially influenced by the survey approach described by Oppenheim (1992), which advocates that any statistical survey should be based on well researched questions. Additionally, Oppenheim (1992) suggests there should be a sound understanding of the population that the work professes to speak on behalf of.

Here, Oppenheim (1992) argues that this type of survey work needs a precise design to ensure that the results are valid. In the first instance, exploratory work needs to be undertaken to ensure that any subsequent scale (in this case a scale of motivating factors that a teacher may choose to demonstrate their interest in the SENCO role) is built upon an empirically based set of ideas generated by representatives of the population. These ideas can then lead into accurate questionnaire planning and wording. The next concern is that the questionnaire-based survey needs to draw upon a sample representative of a population. The final concern is that any results should account for any individual differences. In order to ensure that this sequence was followed, four distinct studies were designed:

- Study 1 – A qualitative exploratory study in which 88 SENCOs in training generated reasons they were undertaking this training to be a SENCO.
- Study 2 – A secondary data analysis of the school workforce in England census data to establish the characteristics of the SENCO workforce in 2017.
- Study 3 – A questionnaire-based survey of 618 SENCOs (qualified and in training) to establish what factors influenced their interest in the SENCO role ('SENCO interest factors').



- Study 4 – Further analysis to explore variations across the SENCO interest factors.

These studies are carefully mapped against the revised research questions. Although each research question was addressed separately within each study, this overall design was to examine different facets of why teachers become SENCOs. A more detailed overview of this process is outlined in Chapter 5 (Methodology).

## **1.5 Theoretical framework**

The role of the SENCO is a product of policy. This started with changes to the education system proposed by Warnock (1978) and enacted in Education Acts in 1981 and 1993, which led to the first Code of Practice (Department for Education, 1994). It was this document that established the position of the SENCO in the first instance. The SENCO is therefore a post influenced by macro-level policy decisions, local school decisions, and the individuals themselves. Here, adaptations of the ecological approach offered by Bronfenbrenner and others (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005) have been utilised as a theoretical framework to support analysis.

## **1.6 Thesis structure**

Following the introduction, the thesis consists of four broad sections:

- A review of relevant literature (Chapters 2-4)
- An overview of the research design and methods (Chapter 5)
- The sequential studies (Chapters 6-9)

- Conclusion and implications for policy and research (Chapter 10).

Within the first section, there are a series of three chapters that form the literature review. Their purpose is to iteratively explore the literature with a view to further refining the research questions. In Chapter 2, there is an overview of the construction of the role of the SENCO over time. Here, there is a particular focus on how the role is constructed from policy intended to provide an ecology of support around children with SEN. In the next chapter, the idea of an ecology is further developed through an exploration of theoretical literature in this area. Here, there is a particular focus on the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) and how this theoretical approach can be applied to inclusive education (Anderson et al., 2014). In Chapter 4, a range of theoretical literature on career interest is explored. To maintain the ecological focus, this chapter is organised using the later edition of the bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) to structure the review. Here, theories are organised under the broad heading of person, process, context, and time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). As a result of this review, the *prima facie* questions are restructured, and the final thesis research questions presented.

The second section consists of a single chapter. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the research design and associated methodological concerns. Within this section, the research questions are carefully considered against overarching design issues. Detailed study-specific methods are also considered for each research question and each associated study. These discussions include approaches to the design of each individual study, approaches to the

collection of data, and issues with adhering to a fixed set of ontological and epistemological assumptions.

The third section consists of the four studies in the thesis. Each study is sequential, leads to the next, and is designed to answer one or a set of research questions. As a result, these four chapters are self-contained with a brief additional review of the literature, a detailed overview of methods, the results of the empirical data, and a discussion. Chapter 6 (Study 1) reports findings from a thematic analysis of data from a group of SENCOs on why they entered the role. These data is analysed through an ecological lens (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). Chapter 7 (Study 2) reports on a Freedom of Information request into the demographic characteristics of the SENCO population. Chapter 8 (Study 3) reports on the findings of a large-scale questionnaire-based survey. Here, four factors are constructed from the data. The final chapter of this section (Chapter 9, Study 4) uses inferential statistics to examine differences in response across a range of different groupings such as gender and age.

The final section of the thesis is another single chapter. Here, a response to each research question is provided. Conclusions are further considered within the context of policy and research. The chapter concludes with an overview of the limitations of the overall study and suggestions for further research.

## **CHAPTER 2 – THE SENCO, A PRODUCT OF POLICY**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the development of the role of the SENCO in England. The role has not been static or consistently operationalised, nor has it existed as a permanent feature of the school management landscape. It has developed from the complex relationship between political expediency; policy development; supporting the needs of children with special educational needs (SEN); and the approaches of people who fulfil this role. This review of the literature is linear and has been mapped against the development of legislation and policy over time starting with the Warnock Report in 1978. The opening section provides a brief overview of how Warnock (1978) envisaged the role and how some schools informally created their own SENCOs to fulfil the requirements of the 1981 Education Act. The following section examines the creation of the role through the publication of the first SEN Code of Practice (Department for Education, 1994). Subsequent sections examine the development of the role through further legislative changes during the New Labour era culminating in the most recent reforms initiated under the Conservative and Liberal led coalition in 2014. The chapter concludes with an overview of how a range of factors may influence the way the role is operationalised.

### **2.2 The SENCO – The growth of the role**

#### ***2.2.1 The Warnock Report***

The Warnock Report (Warnock, 1978) was commissioned by a Conservative

education secretary and released in the last days of Callaghan's Labour administration shortly before a long period dominated by successive Conservative led governments. The report highlighted that the two fundamental aims of education for all children were to increase their knowledge and awareness, and to enable the child to transition into society where they would be able to become an "active participant" (p. 5). Education should be open to all children, no matter what disability, as an entitlement (p. 6). This learning would be best served as part of a partnership between the home and school with parents being regarded as "active educators" (p. 5) alongside their teacher counterparts with other professionals supporting them with this work. The report made an extensive series of recommendations. These include the need to change the nomenclature of children with special educational needs (SEN). As such, pejorative terms such as "educational subnormal" should be replaced with "learning difficulties" (p. 338).

The theme of more active partnerships, the dynamic nature of SEN and the right for education alongside peers in the community were common themes within the recommendations of the report. This heralded a significant departure from previous work within this area. It was suggested that the identification of SEN should be a collaborative venture between parents, schools, and other professionals. The assessment should be staged, open, and transparent to all of those involved (p. 339). After identification, the child should have their needs clearly listed in a document named within the report as a "Special Education Form" (p. 340). The objectives and provision on this form should be arrived at through clear multiagency working (p. 340). The progress of the child should be open to continual review, which should happen at least on an annual basis (p.

340). Parents should have a right to initiate this process and should have access to any of the records made on their child (p. 341). Where possible, “handicapped children” would be educated alongside their peers within “ordinary schools” (p. 345). Warnock (1978) recognised that the latter would require investment into the development of the workforce. This would require the expansion of both initial teacher education (p. 355) and continuing professional development (CPD) for teachers already working within the classroom (p. 357).

Leadership of provision would be secured utilising the skills of the headteachers of individual schools. Indeed, it was suggested that the headteacher would retain an important role supporting special educational provision within the setting and reporting the outcomes of this provision to governing bodies accordingly. The committee recommended that this management process would be best served through collaborative practice with the headteacher working alongside other agencies, including special schools and other support services. A further recommendation included the need for the headteacher to:

...delegate day-to-day responsibility for making arrangements for children with special needs to a designated specialist teacher or head of department. Such a teacher should be free to plan provision, including the curriculum, in consultation with the headteacher and members of the proposed advisory and support service. (Warnock, 1978, pp. 109-110)

To ensure the competence of this member of staff, the report advocated that they should be able to participate in a one-year full-time course (p. 234). The completion of this award would entitle the holder to additional payments. This “recognised qualification for teachers with responsibility for children with special educational needs” (p. 355) would be in addition to the more specialist pathways open to teachers of children who are deaf or blind. The course leading to this recognised qualification would have the principle aims of helping teachers with the identification of different needs and the necessary teaching approaches to support the children identified with these needs (p. 356).

### ***2.2.2 Partial enactment of Warnock – The 1981 Education Act***

The 1981 Education Act converted many, but not all, of the Warnock Report's recommendations into law. The Act provided a definition that has largely been unchanged to the present day. Within the initial part of the definition, there was a clear link between the identification of need and the requirement for provision to occur. The Act stipulated that:

For the purposes of this Act a child has ‘special educational needs’ if he has a learning difficulty which calls for special educational provision to be made for him.” (Education Act, 1981, section 1:1)

and ... a child has a ‘learning difficulty’ if... he has a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of children of his age. (Education Act, 1981, section 1:2)

The definition provided a clear description of the child being within compulsory school age. The terminology of the Act had changed to identify a child having a learning difficulty rather than the pejorative terms used under the 1944 Education Act. The first paragraph highlighted the need for provision to occur. Thus, to be labelled as having SEN, the child needed to have a learning need and be receiving special provision. Within most settings there would be a clear range of needs, which would be appropriately met with effective differentiation. The Act stated that there needed to be 'additional provision' needed for the child. If not, the child would not meet the definition and could not be identified with SEN. Thus, a good understanding of effective provision for SEN within mainstream schools was essential. The second part of the description related to a learning difficulty. The Act required that the child be compared with other children within the same age band. However, it did not make it clear where specific cut off points of these learning needs were, where the boundary of learning difficulty lay, nor where the child may stop benefitting from a fully differentiated classroom. Thus, some interpretation of this definition would be needed in order to operationalise it within schools and local authorities.

The second part of the definition considered the environment in which the child was educated. Here, it was suggested that the difficulties associated with SEN could

... either prevent(s) or hinder(s) him from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided in schools, within the area of the local authority concerned, for children of his age...  
(Education Act, 1981, section 1:2)



Thus, a child could be identified with a 'learning difficulty', 'disability' or both together. The 'educational facilities' referred to in this part of the definition do not solely relate to physical attributes of a school environment such as ramps or lifts to accommodate those with physical disabilities or mobility needs. Rather, there was also a clear focus on 'educational facilities'. This latter distinction allows for a broader understanding of the suitability of the school and that which is deemed to be 'educational' in nature, including individual lessons. For children under school age, there was a need to look forward and anticipate need. Thus, if the child were predicted to meet the definition of 'learning difficulty' or 'disability' under the auspices of the Act when they reached compulsory school age then they could be identified as having SEN.

Within the Act, there was a binary decision. The child was identified with SEN or they were not. For the child to be identified, they had to meet the subjective definition described above and a full assessment needed to be undertaken after the parents had been notified (Education Act, 1981, section 5). If the child was designated as having SEN, then the local authority was required to make provision for the child accordingly. This was delivered through statutory mechanisms called 'statements'. These statements provided the child with statutory rights and a formal review mechanism. If a statement was issued for the child, then in the first instance the local authority was charged with securing a place within what the Act still defined as an 'ordinary' school to be taught alongside their peers who had not been identified with SEN. Indeed, parents were entitled to ask for and receive this provision. Schools could only refuse to admit the child if they met three stringent tests of incompatibility. However, later legal cases ensured that these tests were so strong that it would be difficult for

a child not to be admitted. On admitting the child, those responsible for the governance of the school became subject to the 'best endeavours duty', which provided a legal safeguard for the child. This required the governing body to act proactively to ensure that the education required by the child with SEN was being provided, evidenced, and recorded accordingly. Here, therefore, the framework for SEN was established. Although this would be changed over time, the system is similar to contemporary policy. Understanding this process is important as the complexities described assume that:

- There is somebody in the school who is knowledgeable and capable of managing this complex legal procedure.
- There is somebody in the school who understands SEN in its different forms.

However, there were two notable absences in this early policy:

- the defined management role and
- the pseudo specialist of SEN.

The latter point is particularly important as the idea of a specialist teacher had been suggested three years earlier (Warnock, 1978) but ignored by policy makers. Instead, the individual charged with this provision would be defined as the 'responsible person' who would be either the headteacher or their delegate. In turn, this lack of definition or role afforded neither status nor training and instead schools were at liberty to plan provision in a heterogeneous manner. The absence of this role was partly remedied in the iterative development of the original 1981 Education Act twelve years later.

### **2.2.3 The 1994 ‘Code of Practice’**

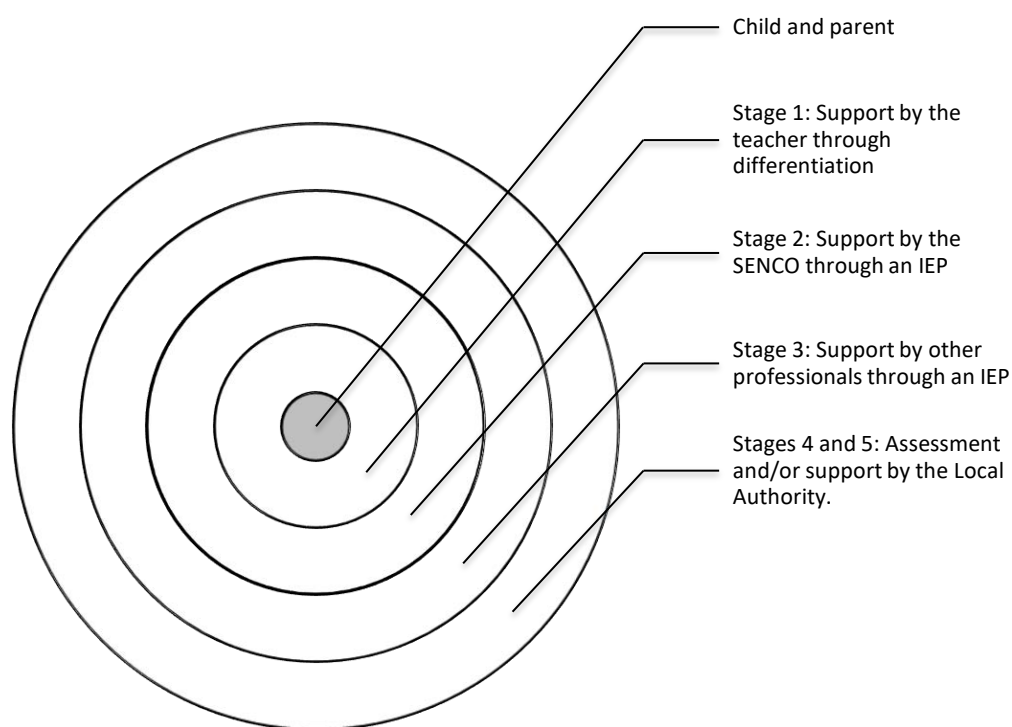
The 1993 Education Act provided a definition which was largely unchanged from the 1981 definition apart from slightly re-ordered statements and references to changed sections within the Act. The establishment of a new form of state funded independent school within the Act, named the ‘grant-maintained school’, required changes to the section on provision. Additionally, the definition of the ‘child’ was expanded beyond school age to include those up until the age of 19, which would ensure that those in sixth form provision could maintain their statutory entitlements.

Section 157 of the 1993 Education Act was key to the establishment of the role of the SENCO. This made provision for the introduction of a ‘Code of Practice’ for SEN. The Act described the Code as practical guidance to enable schools and others to discharge their statutory duties effectively. Nonetheless, within section 158, the procedures for the construction or adaptation of ‘the Code’, as it was now called, appeared much more formal. The Code would be proposed by the Secretary of State through consultation with other interested parties. The draft Code would then be introduced to Parliament prior to adoption. The first Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (Department for Education, 1994) was published a year later.

In the introduction, the Code offered to provide “practical guidance” (Department for Education, 1994, p. 4); however, the document was more than this as it was a synthesis of both advice and direction, with statements within it directly reflective of legislation. In order to add clarity and procedure to the

imprecise definitions of SEN within the 1981 and 1993 Education Acts, the Code proposed a pathway to the identification of SEN. Instead of the binary system of a child not having SEN or being identified with SEN through a statement, a transitional stage was introduced to be met within the school. At the end of this pathway would be the issuing of the 'Statement of SEN'. The emphasis on children being educated alongside their peers in mainstream schools also featured within the Code, with the direction that the special educational needs of most children could be met effectively in mainstream schools. A theme that was further strengthened through subsequent legislation. The description of school types underwent a semantic shift in the Code from 'ordinary' to 'mainstream,' blurring the binary distinction of 'ordinary' and 'special' present in earlier legislation.

The pathway to a statement of SEN identified five distinct stages through which children would pass prior to the issuance of a statement. However, it was now recognised that the statement was not an end in itself and that the needs of those with SEN may often be met without the need for one. The testing of the legal definition was now regarded as a cyclical process of "planning, action and review" (Department for Education, 1994, p. 32) measured by progress (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1: The ecology of support within the 1994 Code**

The first of these three stages would be 'school based'. Here, the management of the process would largely be the responsibility of the newly formed role of the SENCO. If adaptations in one stage did not lead to progress, then the next stage would be initiated. This would provide an ever-increasing ecology of support around the child. This process would be supplemented by carefully considered evidence gathering and a systematic process where evidence would be reviewed. Differentiation was a key concept in the first stage of the Code despite there being no consensus as to how this should be either operationalised or what indeed the term meant (Hart, 1992; Lewis, 1992). At this stage, the teacher would be charged with gathering information and adapting teaching approaches to improve provision. In order to do this, they would also need to liaise with both the parents and the SENCO. Thus, an early

expectation on the SENCO would be to add to and enhance the skills of the teacher. Here, there was an assumption that the SENCO had received sufficient training to be able to fulfil this function.

Within stage two, an individual school-based plan of targets and provision would be created, and parents would be informed. This would be named an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Here, the responsibility for coordination would move to the SENCO who would provide an additional layer of support to the evolving ecology surrounding the child. Again, despite reporting on the potential efficacy of these documents, research later raised issues with their behaviourist stance, the complexity of meeting multiple targets within one classroom, and whether teachers even referred to these after they had been written (Cooper, 1996). This is important as here there is an assumption that SENCOs again had received sufficient training to fulfil this complex and contested function. Stage three is characterised by continuing iterations of provision. This would be supplemented by advice from other professionals such as advisory teachers and educational psychologists, who would also add another ecological layer of support around the child. At each school-based stage, the SENCO had responsibility for coordinating the child's special educational provision whilst continuing to work closely with the child's teachers.

The introduction to the Code stated that 20% of children may present with some form of SEN. However, for the first time, there was some indication of the proportion of the school population that may be entitled to statutory provision through the statementing process. This was set at "perhaps two per cent" (Department for Education, 1994, p. 49). The start of this process would

be the initiation of stage four. At this point, the first macro-level institution would bind to the ecology of support surrounding the child. However, this institution would only interact with the child in a more distal form. Here, the child would be referred to the local authority prior to drawing up a statement of SEN in stage five. After this point, the provision stipulated by the local authority within this statement would influence the child's provision and those who worked more proximally with the child in the school setting.

#### ***2.2.4 The birth of the special educational needs coordinator (SENCO)***

This ever-expanding ecology relied on an internal mechanism of support within the school to mediate these complex stages of ecological transition for the child. A new post holder, the SENCO, was introduced in 1994 as part of this first Code of Practice (Department for Education, 1994) to take responsibility for overseeing this mechanism. The teacher would maintain the closest link with the child and parent, but the SENCO was there in the first instance to support and lead the subsequent school-based stages. Here, there were several assumptions. Amongst others these were:

- The SENCO was able to add value to what the teacher was already doing within the classroom.
- The SENCO had enough leadership and management skills and status to manage the process of identification and support across the setting.

- The SENCO had sufficient understanding of assessment, target setting, and the identification of need to facilitate the processes involved in stage two of the assessment process.
- The SENCO had adequate legal knowledge to understand the complexities of the legal framework that underpinned their work.

The responsibilities of the SENCO were outlined through seven bullet points within the first Code (Department for Education, 1994, pp. 9-10). It specified that a SENCO should be present in all mainstream schools; however, the term 'should' to describe how the role may be operationalised meant that although strongly advised, schools had some leeway with their interpretation of what may be required from their specific SENCO. In addition, the term 'specialist teacher', suggested by Warnock, was changed to 'designated teacher' (now known as SENCO) with no entitlement to the one year of training recommended by Warnock to fulfil the complexities of the role, which 'should' involve:

- the day-to-day operation of the school's SEN policy
- liaising with and advising fellow teachers
- coordinating provision for children with special educational needs
- maintaining the school's SEN register and overseeing the records on all pupils with special educational needs
- liaising with parents of children with special educational needs
- contributing to the in-service training of staff
- liaising with external agencies including the educational psychology service and other support agencies, medical and social services and voluntary bodies. (Department for Education, 1994, pp. 9-10)



The paragraph that followed this list within the Code added further detail on how this role should be operationalised in school (Department for Education, 1994, p. 10). In a small school, the role would ideally be managed by a member of the senior leadership team (SLT) such as the headteacher or deputy headteacher, whereas in a larger school there may be a team. In terms of time allocated for the role, this was to be left to the discretion of individual school governing bodies or headteachers. Despite this call, Dyson and Gains (1995) commented on how the role was marginalised in many schools. They argued that this was often down to the way the role had been attached to existing school structures almost as an afterthought. They suggested that the increasing focus on children with SEN being educated throughout the school required repositioning the role to become more of a whole school role. This led to three proposed solutions, which included the role remaining specialist in nature; becoming a middle management position with additional support from senior leaders; or being embedded within senior leadership structures.

Despite this criticism, early research into the role and its relationship with the Code was generally positive; however, several issues would need addressing if the role was to be effective. Within the ecology, at the level of the school, a clear philosophical stance towards children with SEN needed to be clearly established if the SENCO was to operate the Code effectively within individual settings (Pickup, 1995). There was also a recognition of the opportunities to strengthen the sustainability of this ecology. Professional development could take place to support all who worked directly with the child and their families throughout all stages of the Code (Cade & Caffyn, 1995). For example, these opportunities may include the SENCO being able to

commission others to support the development of teaching staff and thus improve outcomes for children with SEN (Diamond, 1995; Lacey, 1995). However, despite these early hopes, Lewis, Neill, and Campbell (1997) later reported on the continuing need for the training of teachers, SENCOs, and governors. Indeed, despite many of the SENCOs already leading training, many felt unprepared with regards to either content or their skills at training colleagues (as opposed to teaching children).

The operational aspects of the role were also the subject of research. Wheal (1995) argued that the new role should be regarded as a positive development. However, despite this, there were several elements of the position deemed to be onerous. These included the sheer number of children for the SENCOs to manage at stage two of the Code and the paperwork involved when the SENCO became involved. For example, Wheal (1995) suggested that it would be impossible for the SENCO to devise IEPs for large numbers of children. Indeed, these IEPs and the associated paperwork may become both unwieldy (Wheal, 1995) and an end to itself (Harvey, 1995). The implicit operational expectations of the role also brought comment. For example, Wheal (1995) suggested that although the role had been described within the Code (see Department for Education, 1994, pp. 9-10), there were other aspects of the role which went beyond those stated in policy. These included occasions when a SENCO may spend time providing informal advice and supporting the emotional needs of the staff who worked with children with SEN (Harvey, 1995).

What was missing from this early research were the experiences of SENCOs across a wider, more representative sample. Without exception, the

early research had examined those already in the role and had reflected often on opportunities (for example, Diamond, 1995; Lacey, 1995); theoretical and structural issues that needed addressing (Cade & Caffyn, 1995; Dyson & Gains, 1995); and individualised approaches to operationalising the role within individual schools (e.g., Cocker, 1995; Wheal, 1995). To address this gap in the early research, more substantive data on both the implementation of the Code and the SENCO role was commissioned by the National Union of Teachers.

Lewis et al. (1997) provided a synthesis of this research alongside additional data collected by Roehampton Institute. This research reported upon the views of SENCOs within nearly 2,200 schools in England and Wales. Here, the authors suggested that the respondents and school types were largely representative of schools nationally – despite no existing data of what the SENCO population looked like (see Chapter 7). SENCOs reported a significant disparity in what was expected from them and the resources and time available to them to undertake these tasks. Indeed, the perceived burden of additional paperwork and the way the five stages of the Code had been structured often contributed to teachers considering that SEN was not their role, and that the SENCO was to blame for this additional work.

Two institutional approaches to operationalising the role were reported. The first approach often occurred in secondary schools. Here, the SENCO was often taken away from teaching to fulfil administrative and management aspects of the role. The SENCO's teaching responsibilities were then covered by a range of other part-time or temporary staff. Some SENCOs relished this opportunity to be away from teaching, others did not. The second approach was

a reverse of this where the SENCO was not released and was provided with little or no time to undertake the role.

Another major finding related to the leadership status of SENCOs. In secondary schools, SENCOs were unlikely to be school leaders. Conversely, in primary schools many SENCOs were school leaders, albeit with many other duties. This resulted in the time available to conduct the role being significantly impacted upon by the other demands commensurate with these roles. Indeed, it was not just whether SENCOs were school leaders which impacted upon their status. Lewis et al. (1997, p. 7) also suggested that if the SENCO was represented as a part-time member of staff, then this may lead to potential issues with the perceived status of SEN. Here, it may be regarded that children with SEN were only being afforded a fraction of a post to direct their support.

In order to further understand why people undertook and sustained themselves in this complex role, Male (1996) undertook a survey to elicit the career continuation plans of SENCOs. In a relatively small study of 44 participants, the research provided the first emerging description of the population of teachers who make up the SENCO population, albeit this was limited due to its size and lack of a national dataset as a comparator. Within this study, respondents who worked in primary schools were likely to have several roles, whilst those in secondary settings principally focused on the SENCO role. Demographically, 92% of primary SENCOs were female with a mean age of 43 with 18.5 years' experience of being a teacher and 4.5 years' experience of being a SENCO (or equivalent). In secondary settings, 90% were female with a mean age of 45 years with 20.5 years' teaching experience and 5.5 years as a SENCO (or equivalent). Thus, in the early stages of this role, a distinct yet

unproven demographic profile started to appear. Those who visited a SENCO were likely to attend an appointment with a middle-aged woman.

Rather than focusing on why they entered the role in the first instance, Male (1996) examined whether the respondents intended to continue in the role. Thus, the principal focus was on attrition rather than recruitment. Nonetheless, respondents had good job satisfaction (65.5%); were able to influence school policy (88.5%); and had clarity of what was expected from them in their role (91%). They were also generally happy with professional development opportunities (66%) and their salary (66%). However, dissatisfaction came with paperwork (100%), and time to undertake all aspects of their role. Time aspects included the completion of paperwork (82%); the development of the curriculum (84%); and lesson preparation (79.5%). The respondents also did not relish the prospect of sitting in meetings (88%). Despite feeling supported by external agencies, senior leaders, teachers, and parents, most respondents (80%) found the role stressful (80%) and, given the option, 32% were unlikely to choose the role again.

Overall, the early research pointed to a role that was embedded within a clear ecology of school practice. SENCOs were integral to the delivery of the Code but also were being directed by the surrounding envelope of wider policy, which both defined (or not) and contained their role. This was directing the work they completed within their settings, which in turn was impacted upon by the policy and structures of their own organisations. This led to pressures from class teachers from below and leadership and management from above. At the centre of this ecology was the child who would ultimately be affected by the quality of these surrounding systems.

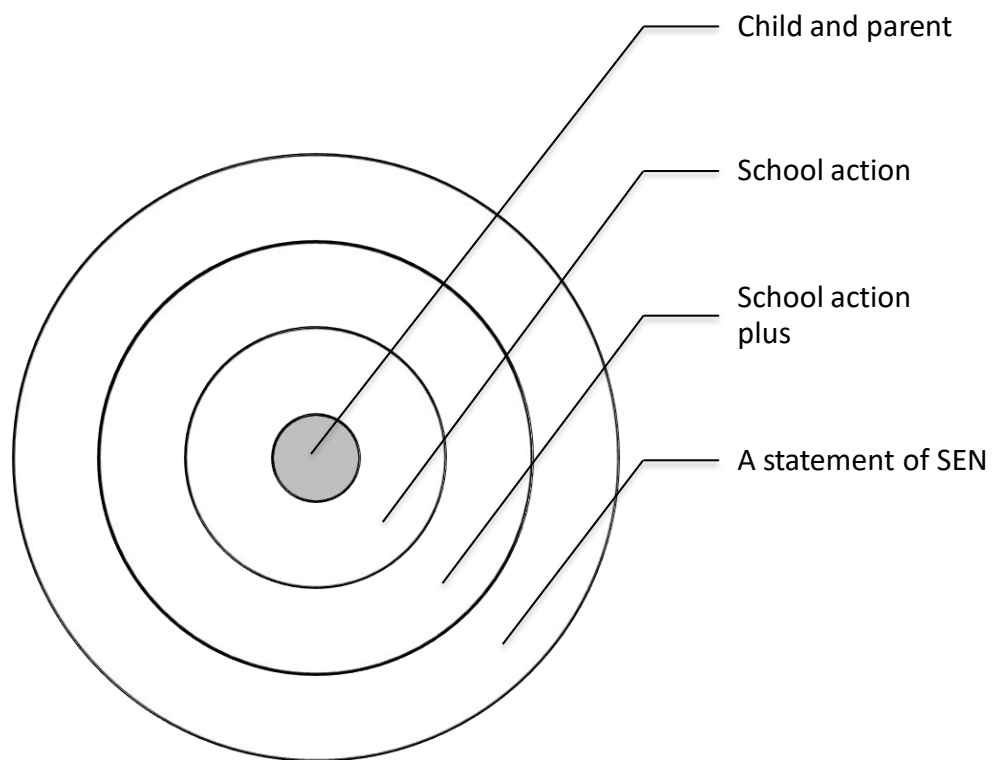
## **2.3 The SENCO – The establishment of the role**

### ***2.3.1 The 2001 Code of Practice***

For 18 years, the development of policy including the 1981 Education Act, 1993 Education Act, and 1994 Code of Practice (Department for Education, 1994) had all been initiated by Conservative Party administrations. In 1997, a Labour administration was elected. The administration was elected with many promises the most notable being “education, education, education” (Blair, 1996). The result of this policy was the increase in the size of the state with the aim to develop a greater ecology of support for parents and children. In 2001, two key policy documents were released. The 2001 Special Educational Needs and Disability Act and a revision of the SEN Code of Practice (Department for Education and Skills, 2001). In the former, the importance of the development of educational provision for children with SEN was further enhanced with a duty to coordinate accessibility for all children (Section 14). This duty focused not only on physical forms of accessibility such as the attributes of a school building but also on accessibility through participation in the school curriculum. Thus, all curriculum opportunities needed to be accessible to all children. The second Code (Department for Education and Skills, 2001) was promoted as an iterative development of the previous Code. A key difference for SENCOs within the Code was the revision of the original five stage model of identifying SEN. This was reduced from five to three stages (see Figure 2).

In the first instance, working alongside parents, the teacher, and SENCO would apply the legal test of SEN through an iterative period of differentiation and additional provision. If the child met the legal test, then they would be

identified with a category of SEN labelled 'school action'. This was a synthesis of stages one and two of the previous Code. Again, in the ecology of support that surrounded the child, the teacher would be responsible for providing a differentiated curriculum in the first instance. The SENCO would then add to this ecology by working with teachers to coordinate everyday provision for children with SEN and devise IEPs. The SENCO would also be responsible for supporting the class teacher to include the child within the classroom setting. Again, as mentioned in section 2.2.3, there was the assumption that SENCOs had the necessary expertise and training to significantly add to what was already occurring in the classroom. However, despite the earlier findings of Lewis et al. (1997), this had still not been addressed. For example, in a study of primary SENCOs, Crowther, Dyson, and Millward (2001) highlighted that despite six years passing between the first Code and their study, few if any of the SENCOs questioned had received any training in specialist areas such as autism or speech and language needs. Instead, training had solely been devoted to procedure or management rather than pedagogy or supporting individual needs. Another noteworthy aspect of this study related to a de facto measure of SENCO preparedness to add value to the work of the teacher: their individual qualifications. None of the participants held a master's degree in any SEN discipline and only 13% held a certificate of SEN. Unfortunately, what was not asked, and so went unanswered, was whether development had been available to SENCOs or indeed whether SENCOs expressed a desire to engage with additional training or development to improve their effectiveness in the role.



**Figure 2: The ecology of support within the 2001 Code**

Surrounding the support at 'school action' was the additional ecological layer of 'school action plus' (see Figure 2). Here, the child would make another ecological transition into support being provided both within the setting with additional, more distal support provided by outside agencies such as educational psychologists. Again, this stage was an evolution of the previous Code with school action plus being a synthesis of stages three and four of the previous Code. The child would be supported by the teacher through differentiation with additional expertise provided by the SENCO. At school action plus, both the SENCO and the teacher would receive additional advice from external agencies. This was if the agencies, or indeed the SENCOs, had time to provide this advice rather reacting to the cycles of "reactive" (Lingard, 2001, p. 190) paperwork and evidence gathering that the Code had deemed to



have produced. If a child was considered to need even more support, then again, the more distal, macro-level institution of the local authority would bind to the ecology of support surrounding the child through the issuance of a statement.

### ***2.3.2 The ‘steady evolution’ of the role – The 2001 Code of Practice***

The 2001 Code added much more clarity to the role of the SENCO but left many of the unresolved issues from the previous Code. In order to fulfil this role, the SENCO in each setting would also need to be knowledgeable if they were to provide the necessary level of professional advice and guidance required by the Code (Department for Education and Skills, 2001, p. 50) The SENCO role was described as one that would entail working alongside the headteacher and governing body. Their primary function would be to raise the achievement of children with SEN through engaging in a range of complex duties that would bring them in contact with parents, children, staff, and others. Thus, the role would be central to the ecology of support that surrounded the child with SEN.

The seven suggested duties outlined within the Code remained, with a slight change to one and the addition of another to make eight (p. 50). The first change inferred a new management function, with the SENCO being involved in “overseeing the day to day operation of the school’s SEN policy” (p. 50) rather than having sole responsibility. Another addition referred to the increasing group of para-teaching professionals being recruited in schools during this period to assist with a wide variety of school functions, including inclusion and workforce reform. Hence, the insertion of “managing learning support assistants” (p. 50)

highlighted a potential role for SENCOs to develop this new and expanding group of education professionals.

The amount of time allocated to fulfil the role originally highlighted by Lewis et al. (1997) was also addressed, as was the recognition that the SENCO's revised role and the expectations of the revised Code (Department for Education and Skills, 2001) would further add to this. Thus, there was a suggestion of time for planning and coordination, teaching children with SEN, liaison, and staff support. There was even the expectation that the SENCO may require a space to work, meet, and was deserving of administrative support (p. 50). Leadership status was again raised, with the Code suggesting that the status of the role should be at the very least in line with those coordinators of core subject areas such as Literacy and Numeracy.

Crowther et al. (2001) recognised that the lack of time for SENCOs was complex and a result of several factors, including the SENCO having multiple roles. This was likely to occur in small primary schools, in response to resource intensive initiatives such as the Code itself or the strategies being delivered by the government at the time, such as the National Literacy Strategy. Indeed, the SENCO may have been a headteacher with many other functions to fulfil. To respond, the revised Code acknowledged the time needed to lead and manage procedure meant that it would not be prudent to have a SENCO with multiple roles. It was also advised that it would be unwise for the role to be held by headteachers or deputy headteachers without careful consideration (p. 51). However, unfortunately, the auxiliary verb 'may' would continue to precede all items within this section leaving much of this advice subject to the interpretation

of individual schools or rejection altogether. This led to continuing heterogeneity in the way the role was operationalised.

### ***2.3.3 A role still evolving – Additional legislation to shape and cement the role***

The role of the SENCO was now embedded in both Codes of Practice. These included explicit guidance of both the requirements of the post and the characteristics of the person who should be fulfilling it. Despite this, many schools casually interpreted aspects of this guidance. Through the Education and Inspections Act 2006, it was deemed necessary to formalise the role in law. Here, schools were told to

designate a member of the staff at the school (to be known as the ‘special educational needs co-ordinator’) as having responsibility for co-ordinating the provision for pupils with special educational needs. (Education and Inspections Act, 2006, section 173 paragraph 3a)

In turn, the Act also stipulated that the SENCO needed both experience and a prescribed qualification. Unfortunately, these were still not defined. In the same year, a select committee (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006) acknowledged that despite legislation dating back to 1981, teachers and support staff were still complaining of a lack of training to meet the needs of children with SEN. The Committee’s report acknowledged that SENCOs had often been made to undertake significant responsibilities often with little or no training. Indeed, in several schools, teaching assistants and other

paraprofessionals had been asked to undertake this role. The report acknowledged that the evolution of the SENCO role had led to a position that had moved beyond specific administrative tasks and record keeping to now include the management of complex multiagency working (p. 74). The report was direct in advocating that

Special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCOs) should in all cases be qualified teachers and in a senior management position in the school as recommended in the SEN Code of Practice. Firmer guidelines are required rather than the Government asking schools to 'have regard to' the SEN Code of Practice. The role and position of a SENCO must reflect the central priority that SEN should hold within schools. (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee, 2006, p. 74)

Additionally, SENCOs should be provided with enough training to be able to undertake the role which should be mandatory (p. 74). The government response was telling and sought to address much of this inconsistent practice. Firstly, there was a recognition that despite explicit guidance that the SENCO should be experienced, skilled, and with authority. It was now proposed that the SENCO should be both a teacher and a member of the SLT (UK Government, 2006, p. 24). Secondly, there was acknowledgement that rather than leave the decision to schools, there was a need for the government to ensure that SENCOs were suitably trained. Here, it was proposed that all new SENCOs should undertake accredited training (UK Government, 2006, p. 24).

The regulations that followed embedded some, but not all of this advice (*The Education (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators) (England) Regulations*, 2008). They stipulated that the role must be undertaken by a qualified teacher who had completed their induction and was working at the school. However, despite the call for the SENCO to be a senior management position, in these regulations the governing body were still given the responsibility to determine how the SENCO role related to the leadership and management functions of their individual schools. Consequently, the latitude for schools to position their SENCO wherever they wanted within their leadership structures remained. Despite this, within the regulations, there followed a list of functions that a SENCO may undertake as prescribed by the governing body; however, these assumed:

- a degree of knowledge in order to advise teachers and contribute to training of teachers;
- seniority to provide opportunity and status to monitor effectiveness;
- access to resources including the ability to secure services; and
- leadership and management status to be able to recruit and develop learning support assistants.

These complex functions were suggested despite the explicit lack of either leadership status or training mentioned within the regulations.

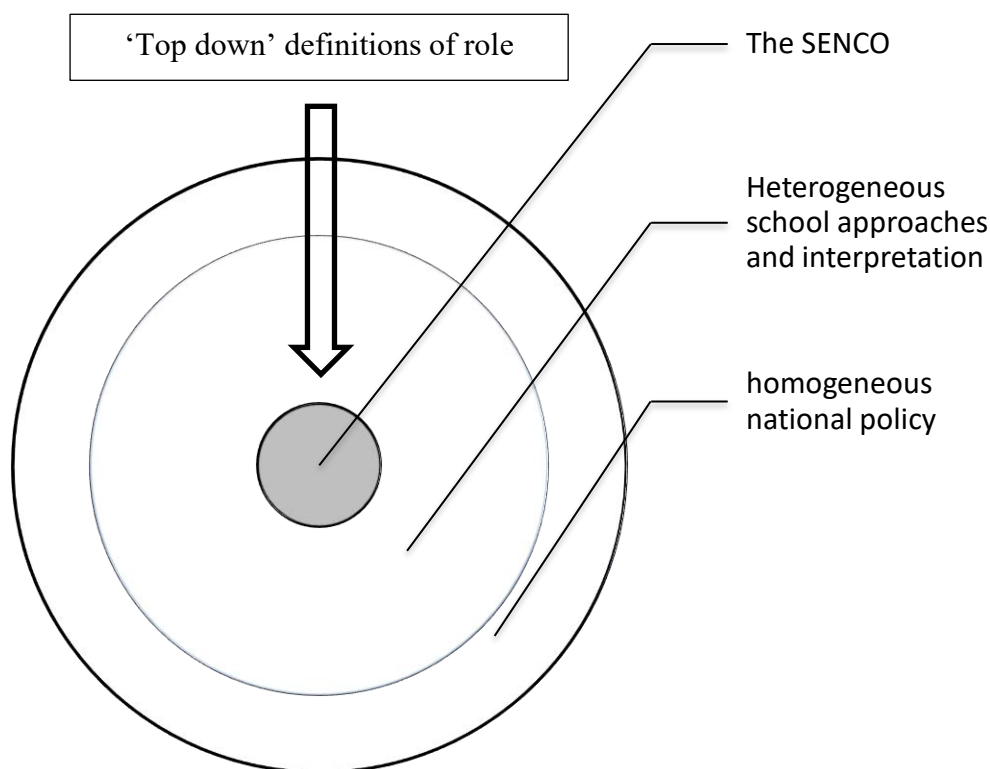
This omission within the regulations led to an additional amendment a year later (*The Education (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators) (England) (Amendment) Regulations* 2009). This amendment insisted that anybody appointed after 2009 must, in addition to the previous provisions, also be

qualified accordingly. They would need to complete a prescribed qualification within a period of three years from appointment. The qualifications would be called the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination (NASENCo award). Thus, 30 years after the first recommendation within Warnock, schools would have the services of the relevant 'teacher' with relevant 'training'. What was unanswered here was whether either training or leadership formed part of the occupational interest of those who were entering the role.

#### ***2.3.4 The evolving role – Heterogeneity at school level***

The combination of rigid regulations and the flexibility for schools to define aspects of the role still led to inconsistency of how it was operationalised. As represented in Figure 3, there was a set of macro-level homogeneous policy statements including Acts of Parliament, Regulations, and a revised Code of Practice. However, there was still latitude for schools to define and construct their own version of the role. This enabled schools to continue to act in a heterogeneous manner as they had done since the inception of the role in 1994 (see section 2.2). In turn, they were able to define the SENCO role at an individual school level. Research adds evidence to this school-level heterogeneous approach. Szwed (2007a) argues that SENCOs work across different contexts, whilst fulfilling different and disparate functions. Meanwhile, Mackenzie (2007) describes a role shaped at a school level by decisions and differing resource allocation made within individual settings. This heterogeneity poses difficulties for any researcher or policy maker who professes to represent the role as a singular homogenous position, because this does not exist.

Cowne (2005) partly provides a solution to this issue. Here, two distinct functions that SENCOs undertake are defined. The first of these is a constant role within all settings. This relates to administration and the production and monitoring of IEPs. The second is defined as an emerging role. Here, practice often differs between settings and SENCOs. This aspect of the role includes diverse elements such as supporting differentiation throughout the setting, supporting classroom practice, and monitoring the quality of interventions and inclusive practice. Here, how much involvement individual SENCOs have within these roles relates to external pressures and commensurate school functions.



**Figure 3: Heterogeneity at school level**

Another area of heterogeneity at school level that was not fully addressed with the publication of the 2001 Code and the subsequent regulations (see section 2.3.3) was the leadership status of SENCOs. Despite clearer 'guidance' in the

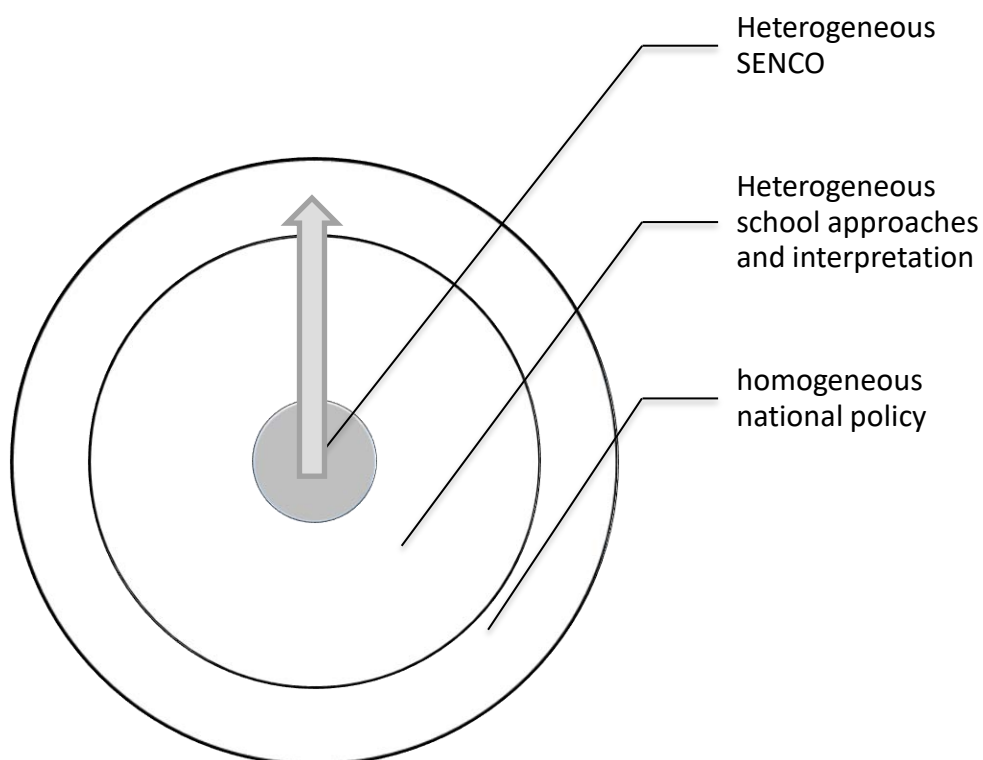
2001 Code, many schools did not employ their SENCOs in school leadership roles and in some cases not even in middle management roles (e.g., Cole, 2005; Oldham & Radford, 2011; Tissot, 2013). In a study conducted three years after the introduction of the revised Code, Cole (2005) surveyed a group of SENCOs across two local authorities in the north of England. Within the 59 respondents, wide variations in practice and status were recorded. SENCOs ranged from main scale teachers (17%) to senior managers (29%). Three years had elapsed since the study and the inception of the revised Code; however, it was apparent that the guidance that SENCOs should come from within senior leadership teams had not been adhered to. Again, despite these statistics, what was still unanswered was whether those in the different groups were motivated to undertake a leadership role or not and whether this could also be a contributory factor in the heterogeneity of school approaches.

### ***2.3.5 The evolving role – Heterogeneity at the individual level***

Heterogeneous conceptualisations of the role were not just the result of school-level decisions. As exemplified in Figure 4, research also pointed to the way in which individual visions or approaches to the role would also seem to impact upon the way it was operationalised. These individual differences were both at the demographic and psychological level. In a small sample of 19 SENCOs, Mackenzie (2012a) examined why those in the role remained as SENCOs. Apart from one participant, one demographic characteristic of the respondents was that they were women, a phenomenon replicated in all other studies where demographic data were collected (e.g., Dobson & Douglas, 2020b; Szwed, 2007b).



Many of these female participants were realistic about the rewards of the role, including salary. This was despite the other professional penalties such as lack of time. Personal factors such as the ability to work part time whilst also retaining a school role was important to some, whilst for others the perceived flexibility of the role and school holidays aided family commitments. These practical considerations were in addition to more psychologically orientated drivers. Mackenzie (2012b) describes these drivers as a vocation and the desire to act in service to those with needs such as children with SEN. Unfortunately, what was missing was a comparator group of male SENCOs. This would have allowed for a greater interrogation of whether the differences observed were empirically evidenced or a result of a sample skewed towards female participants.



**Figure 4: Heterogeneity at an individual level**

Kearns (2005) examined the way SENCOs operationalised their role from an alternate perspective. Rather than asking SENCOs to report on working conditions, school seniority, and tasks accomplished, he undertook narrative research to further understand experiential learning of SENCOs. Although the research was small scale in nature, it did highlight that the role could be shaped and envisaged through the bidirectional dyad of the person and their environment. The research identified five potential approaches to the SENCO role: the arbiter, the rescuer, the auditor, the collaborator, and the expert. These psychological approaches are described below.

**Arbiter:** Here, the SENCO's experiential learning is derived from working within a human relations model to develop those around themselves. They are motivated by developing strategies and participation. They often devolve and delegate SEN responsibility to others. This enables them to observe the practice of others and learn from this accordingly.

**Rescuer:** Here, the SENCO's experiential learning is through supporting children and ensuring programmes are planned accordingly. Their learning is through reacting to others and observing their practice. Rather than driving agendas, they are driven by working under the direction of the teacher who essentially directs the work of the SENCO on a needs basis. Most work is therefore reactive.

**Auditor:** Here, the SENCO's experiential learning is derived from the establishment of codified legal frameworks. They are interested in measurement and the use of precise tools such as psychometric measures to

understand attainment and other factors. Their primary interest is to develop the rights of the child using the legislative code open to them.

Collaborator: Here, the SENCO learns through the experience of working within a democratic process. The SENCO wishes to develop inclusive practice within the school by supporting the training and self-efficacy needs of colleagues. The focus is on the development of an inclusive curriculum and practice within individual classrooms.

Expert: Here, the SENCO has already gained experience and knowledge often learnt through possessing additional specialist qualifications or teaching children with severe disabilities in specialist settings. These SENCOs, Kearns (2005) reported, were very much a minority and often provided additional support beyond their immediate setting.

Analysis by researchers such as Kearns (2005) and Mackenzie (2012b) started to move beyond the difficulties of the role and pressures associated with it. Instead, there was a direct attempt to understand in greater detail the way individuals and their drivers shaped the role. However, what was missing from both studies was an attempt to understand these phenomena or factors through an analysis of a larger sample. This would have allowed them to test these ideas across a wider population. Notwithstanding, here at least was recognition that often the role was shaped not just by policy makers and school settings but also by individuals themselves.

## **2.4 The SENCO – Maintenance of the role**

### ***2.4.1 The transition between administrations – Ofsted***

#### ***damnation and a ‘new approach’***

The next set of changes to SEN legislation came at the intersection of the world financial crisis and the early part of the Conservative led Coalition Government. Here, there were other subtle changes to legislation which impacted upon the SENCO. Lamb (2009) through a review of parental confidence in the SEN assessment system highlighted grave concerns that despite parental participation being embedded within previous Codes, there were still issues. Parents felt that the system was complex, and they were lacking information. Likewise, Ofsted (2010) pointed to increasing numbers of children being identified at both school action stages on the 2001 Code. It was argued in the report that often the children identified with SEN intersected with the government defined classification of being from ‘disadvantaged backgrounds’. The report produced several recommendations including improvements in the identification and assessment of children with SEN, improving the quality of provision, enabling greater access to support, and strengthening accountability processes (pp. 12-14). It was further argued that the definition of SEN was present in legislation but there was significant variance in the interpretation of this despite clear guidance.

Unfortunately, what Ofsted (2010) omitted was an acknowledgement of the lack of training afforded to SENCOs to make the complex decisions required by legislation. After all, despite the call for SENCOs to be formally trained to a high level in Warnock (see section 2.2.1) this had been blatantly disregarded by

successive administrations until the 2009 amendment was made a statutory instrument (see section 2.3.3). The report also argued for changes to the ecology of support that surrounds the child with SEN. These included changes to the categorisation of SEN, the need for early intervention, simplification of legislation, and better joined up thinking between different agencies. The Coalition Government were quick to draw upon these significant criticisms of the system to make changes.

The resultant Special Educational Needs and Disability Green Paper was published in 2011 (Department for Education, 2011a). Despite being entitled, 'A new approach to Special Educational Needs and Disability', the new approach appeared to be many tired, previously stated arguments including improved identification, improved staff knowledge, a focus on outcomes, and improved access to information. Rather than schools relying on local authorities for advice and support, the document argued that this could be better provided by groups of schools working together. The report acknowledged again the pivotal role the SENCO should be playing within the organisation to promote inclusive education. It stated that

While head teachers and governors have the responsibility for ensuring that disabled pupils and pupils with SEN get the right support, it is frequently the SENCO who has the day-to-day lead. In many cases SENCOs work with teachers on mapping the provision for all pupils who need additional support, advising staff on appropriate and alternative interventions as a child moves through school, and modelling effective practice. The relationship between the SENCO and the senior management team within the

school is critical to the effectiveness of this pivotal role.

(Department for Education, 2011a, p. 63)

Again, with regards to assumptions about the SENCO made in this statement, several criticisms could be levelled at the Green Paper. Firstly, the statement “frequently the SENCO who has the day-to-day lead” (p. 63) infers that most SENCOs have the status, capacity, or motivation to lead. Research to date suggests that this was not the case (e.g., Cole, 2005) nor was there a dataset to support this leadership claim (see Chapter 7 for more details). Secondly, by suggesting that “SENCOs work with teachers on mapping the provision for all pupils who need additional support, advising staff on appropriate and alternative interventions as a child moves through school, and modelling effective practice” (p. 63), there is the assumption that all SENCOs are homogeneous and wish to work alongside others in what (Kearns, 2005) describes as the role of a collaborator. This research would suggest that this is not always the case (see section 2.3.5). Thirdly, there is a further assumption that SENCOs have had, and indeed want appropriate training to add value to the work of teachers; this is especially pertinent as training had only become compulsory in 2009 and very few SENCOs to that point had additional qualifications (see section 2.3.1). In summary, the report projected an idealised SENCO envisaged by Ofsted. What was missing was an acknowledgement that this homogeneous SENCO did not exist due to the intersection of a range of individual and school-level factors (see sections 2.3.4 and 2.3.5).

#### ***2.4.2 The Children and Families Act***

Despite these omissions, the Green Paper led to a range of policy changes

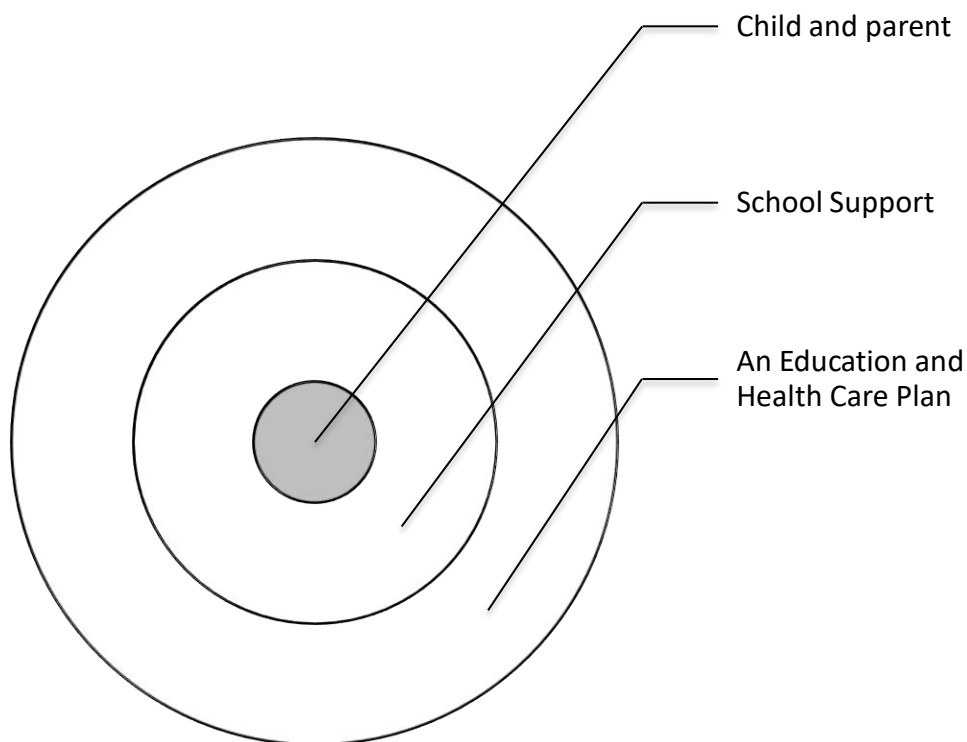
including the 2014 Children and Families Act, a revised set of Regulations (*The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations*, 2014), and a revised Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015). It is noteworthy that for the first time there was the inclusion of a section on the SENCO within primary legislation without the need for amendment. Likewise, within the regulations themselves, a whole section was devoted to SENCOs. (*The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations*, 2014 part 3 sections 49-50). However, these reiterated what had originally been proposed in 2008/9 and provided nothing new.

In addition, there was a list of duties that the SENCO may potentially undertake. Despite repeated calls for it to be stipulated that the SENCO role be incorporated into the SLT, this was still left to the discretion of individual schools. Likewise, despite a list of suggested duties, which were unchanged from those published in 2008/9, these again were left to the individual discretion of schools. Thus, despite the emboldened role described within the 2011 Green Paper (Department for Education, 2011a), there was no direction at the macro policy level to ensure that what was proposed in relation to the SENCO was happening in schools.

### **2.4.3 The 2015 Code of Practice**

The subsequent Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015) was noteworthy with the advice presented. The ecology of support around the learner was again 'simplified' by the stages within the identification process being reduced further. Here, school action and school action plus in the previous Code were replaced by a single category of SEN

support. Acknowledgement of the multiagency requirements and complexity of some forms of SEN were recognised by changes to the Statement of SEN. This was replaced by a multiagency document called the Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP). Despite little change in the official legal definition of SEN, the Code identified a 'new' approach to identification through the 'graduated response', an iterative approach to identification through cycles of teaching which arguably bore little difference from that published within the first Code (see section 2.2.3). The frustration of parents was also acknowledged; schools were now asked to provide more information through the 'SEN Information Report', which was required to outline key contacts and services available in individual schools. The Code also stressed the importance of participation in decision making, a change from the consultative approaches expressed in early iterations of the Code.



**Figure 5: The ecology of support within the 2015 Code**



Thus, as exemplified in Figure 5, the child's route to support through an EHCP would appear to be much simpler, as argued for by both Ofsted (2010) and within the Green Paper (Department for Education, 2011a). Despite this, the Code grew from 217 pages to 292 pages, as did elements of its complexity. For example, through interviews with a range of professionals, including SENCOs, Hellawell (2018) rejects the claims that the Code was straightforward. Instead, identifying tensions between following the Code and ensuring pragmatic operational elements are considered. These operational elements included diverse factors such as wanting to save money whilst also supporting individual children and families. In turn, (Hellawell, 2018) argues this led to an enhanced sense of 'responsibilisation' on behalf of these individuals to operate individually or at school level in an even more bureaucratic framework to meet the macro requirements of the state.

Meanwhile, Lehane (2017) acknowledges the way that legislation over time had done little more than try to resolve mistakes in previous legislation and policy. Using a critical discourse analysis (CDA), it is argued that through the iterative development of the three Codes of Practice, each administration had claimed they had tried to overcome the difficulties in the previous Code. Within the analysis, Lehane (2017) argues that each Code had embedded "macro positioning" (p. 57) with the first Code being orientated towards the practitioner whilst the most recent Code's complexity and use of technical language appealed to the technician. Instead, it is argued that the most recent Code at nearly twice the length of the original Code was designed to be akin to a business proposal. This, like a tender document, could be regarded as an invitation to procurement for commissioning services to offer their services to

those with SEN. It is argued that despite this business-like approach, what is notably missing is the clarity needed to consider what the term inclusive practice actually looks like.

Hodkinson and Burch (2019), in another CDA through a Foucauldian lens suggest that despite the density and volume of the most recent Code (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015), three words are continually represented: support (775 times); independence (122 times); and employment (431 times). The authors suggest that the words independence and employment closely align with the Conservative Party ideology present within policy documents and manifestos. The word support though, it is suggested, has sinister overtones and is not always positive. Here, support is seen as effective but only if it is the right kind and with the right type of outcomes. These include being able to live independently and being prepared for adulthood. The authors suggest that although children can share their aspirations, ultimately the Code contains them into thinking that the best outcome is paid employment. They are entitled to have ambition but ultimately this ambition is constrained by the conservative, neo-liberal work ideology of participation through meaningful employment. Thus, all forms of support should lead towards this primary aim. In turn, the Code and its aspiration for the child should be regarded less positively and more as a framework to ensure “conformity and servitude to the ideology of employment and of making a positive contribution to society” (p. 165).

#### ***2.4.4 The role of the SENCO in the new Code***

The role of the SENCO was further defined and exemplified through a list of

functions. These appeared demonstrably different from the 1994 and 2001 Codes. Table 1 highlights the direct contrast between the suggested role of the SENCO in the previous iteration of the Code and the most recent version. The revised iteration of the Code brought changed and new responsibilities. The management of learning support assistants was removed, as was advising teachers. Standard 5 of teacher standards (Department for Education, 2011b) had stated that teachers needed to

have a clear understanding of the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs; those of high ability; those with English as an additional language; those with disabilities; and be able to use and evaluate distinctive teaching approaches to engage and support them. (Department for Education, 2011b, pp. 11-12)

Instead, SENCOs were asked to advise on the graduated response. This included cycles of assessment of the child with SEN, planning appropriate responses, supporting the implementation of these, and ensuring and reviewing outcomes. Rather than being the SENCO's responsibility, these were designed to be the responsibility of all involved with the child, including both teachers and teaching assistants. This marked a further move away from the SENCO as a support teacher towards a more strategic role. Other strategic responsibilities included advice on legislation such as the Equality Act (2010), liaison with other key staff within school, and financial and resource management, an explicit reminder of the neo-liberal agenda outlined earlier.

**Table 1: Key responsibilities of the SENCO with the 2001 and 2015 Codes of Practice**

<b>Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (2001)</b>	<b>Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 years (2015)</b>
overseeing the day-to-day operation of the school's SEN policy	overseeing the day-to-day operation of the school's SEN policy
coordinating provision for children with special educational needs	co-ordinating provision for children with SEN
liaising with and advising fellow teachers	
managing learning support assistants	
	advising on the graduated approach to providing SEN support
overseeing the records of all children with special educational needs	ensuring that the school keeps the records of all pupils with SEN up to date
liaising with parents of children with special educational needs	liaising with parents of pupils with SEN
contributing to the in-service training of staff	
liaising with external agencies including the LEA's support and educational psychology services, health and social services, and voluntary bodies	liaising with early years providers, other schools, educational psychologists, health and social care professionals, and independent or voluntary bodies  being a key point of contact with external agencies, especially the local authority and its support services
	liaising with potential next providers of education to ensure a pupil and their parents are informed about options and a smooth transition is planned
	working with the headteacher and school governors to ensure that the school meets its responsibilities under the Equality Act (2010) with regard to reasonable adjustments and access arrangements
	advising on the deployment of the school's

	delegated budget and other resources to meet pupils' needs effectively
	liaising with the relevant designated teacher where a looked after pupil has SEN

Despite the obvious changes within the Code (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015), research about the SENCO at this time provided a mixed picture. Pearson, Mitchell, and Rapti (2015) and Curran, Moloney, Heavey, and Boddison (2018) suggest that whether the SENCO was a school leader or not was still a decision being made within schools. Additionally, it is also noted that despite the desire to reduce bureaucracy shared in the Green Paper, most SENCOs were still concentrating on the bureaucratic elements of implementing the Code of Practice. In interviews with a group of 16 SENCOs, Boesley and Crane (2018) found that despite the change in nomenclature of 'statement' to 'EHCP', SENCOs perceived that they were the primary drivers and managers of the process leading to the issuance of an EHCP. In addition, SENCOs also stressed that they fully managed the provision outlined within it. This led to the desire to spread this load and share responsibility with others.

Curran (2019) argues that despite often not having seniority or experience, SENCOs often sought to lead the improvement of provision for children and young people with SEN. They did this through alternative forms of leadership rather than being a traditional member of the senior leadership team. Indeed, often SENCOs did not see their lack of leadership status as a barrier to the implementation of SEN policy. However, despite the 25-year gap between

the first Code of Practice and this study, SENCOs were still confused by the status of their role and the feelings of increased accountability for the development of SEN within their settings.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined the history of the role of the SENCO to date mapped against the macro-level legislative and policy changes that have shaped and impacted upon it. Here, it is important to stress that the role cannot be considered independently of the system-wide approach to SEN that it is part of. At the heart of the system, there is the individual child, supported by an increasingly distal range of support mechanisms which in turn are bound, and often confused by, macro-level national policy statements. Likewise, the SENCO operating within a school can also be observed as part of an ecology or system. Here, the individual who fulfils this role has been seen to approach it differently due to their own demographic or individual differences. Policy has evolved over time to meet, define, and shape the role of the SENCO; however, there is enough latitude within the wording and structure of this policy to enable schools to build individual approaches to the role of the SENCO. Thus, at the heart of this system is the tension of the SENCO with their own individual, needs, desires, and dispositions working within a school that has defined its own expectations for the role.

In section 1.3.1 a range of prima facie research questions were proposed. As a result of this review of the literature, three of these are worthy of further consideration:

- What are the vocational drivers of SENCOs?
- Do their past experiences influence their current practice and their vocational preferences?
- What motivates these people to train for this job?

The current chapter has revealed a socially constructed role which is borne out of an ecological system of policy, schools, and people. All of the *prima facie* questions above are at the level of the person and do not account for the multiple, contextual factors explored in this chapter. Additionally, the original *prima facie* questions make an important but irrelevant assumption, that of 'vocation'. In the present chapter, the literature points to individuals who may not enter the role as a calling. Rather than considering this construct, there is a need to simply understand reasons for entering this role and the context in which these decisions were made. Here, these questions are further refined:

- What are the factors or reasons reported by teachers on how they developed interest in the role of SENCO?
- How can we understand these reasons within the realms of the people and the contexts in which these decisions were made?

In the next chapter, this idea of roles and people situated in processes, and an ecology of policy will be explored further. A range of literature will be explored to understand this system within a theoretical framework, focusing on the relationship between policy, schools, and SENCOs.

## **CHAPTER 3 – THE ECOLOGY OF EDUCATION AND THE SESCO**

### **3.1 Introduction**

Many factors influence the choices teachers make in regard to their career. They may be personal, employment-related, principled, or ethical. Given that my thesis concerns these choices and their motivations, I seek a frame of analysis – a set of tools – for approaching, illuminating, and seeking to understand and explain these motivations and their provenance. As Thomas (2011, p. 53) suggests, no one behaviour can be seen as existing within a vacuum. The work of Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979, 2005) is located within a canon that seeks to recognise that human development cannot be understood outside the context in which it occurs. Indeed, development should not be understood through an analysis of individual variables; instead, it should be understood phenomenologically as a process of change over time within the ecology of the different contexts in which the individual operates.

The ecological approach discussed by Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979, 2005) has been used to understand how a child with SEN is supported within inclusive education systems (Anderson et al., 2014; Thomas, 1992, 2011). It has also been used to provide a theoretical framework for further analysis into the role of actors within the ecology of inclusive education systems. These analyses include specialist teachers who work alongside parents, teachers, and children (McLinden, Douglas, Cobb, Hewett, & Ravenscroft, 2016; McLinden, Douglas, Hewett, Cobb, & Lynch, 2017; McLinden et al., 2018; McLinden & McCracken, 2016).



This chapter provides a theoretical model through which to analyse interest in the SENCO role. It outlines the development of an ecological approach to human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). This model acknowledges individual differences may impact upon development; however, the developing person is also part of a complex ecological system. Individual development is also influenced by a range of systems that are successively distant to the person. These systems may include people, family, and other settings. Additionally, within the framework, there is an acknowledgement that individual development is influenced by even more distant influences such as national policy, legislation, and culture. The present chapter finishes with a recommendation that using the ecological systems theory has significant utility for investigating interest in the SENCO role and a further consideration of the *prima facie* questions. Here, there is a recognition that the SENCO as a developing person needs to be positioned at the heart of the system instead of the child.

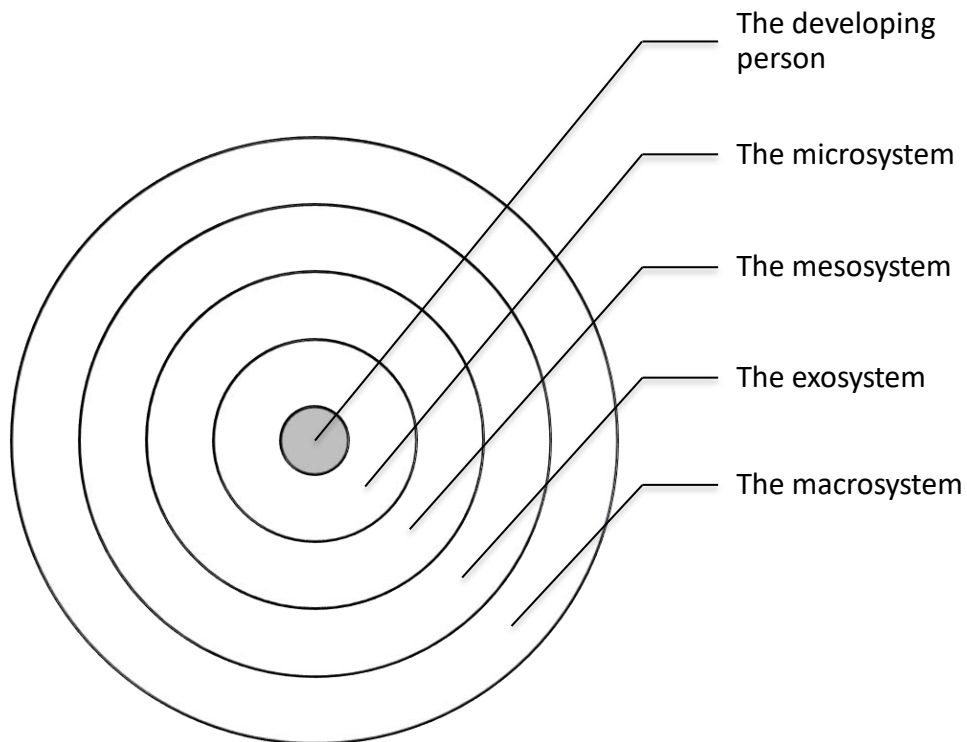
### **3.2 The ecology of human development – ‘The Russian doll’**

Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979) argues that the development of individuals is influenced by more than internal psychological traits, drivers, and cognitive processes such as perception, thought, and motivation. Instead, these variables interact with and are shaped by the environment within which the person is situated (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 3). This interaction is bidirectional, so includes how the person perceives and adapts to the environment and then adapts the environment to themselves. In terms of the developing person within

this environment, Bronfenbrenner (1979) often discusses the child rather than an adult; however, it is acknowledged that the theoretical models are not just for childhood development. Instead, they can be applied linearly through an individual's life course. As an acknowledgement to his Russian background, Bronfenbrenner argues that the environment that interacts with the individual as part of their development is not a single entity. Rather, "The ecological environment is conceived as a set of nested structures, each inside the next, like a set of Russian dolls" (p. 3).

Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979) argues that understanding development outside the context of the environment is misguided. Rather, he conceives development as a series of reciprocated adaptations between the individual person and the settings in which they operate. In turn, these locations may further influence the person due to the interactions and interconnections with each other. The process is not one way; rather, there are mutual accommodations and reciprocity between the individual and the environment. Thus, the individual is shaped partly by their environment and the individual in turn shapes the environment around them. These nested systems do not just exist in isolation and in proximal relations to the person though. These environments expand outwards to more distal zones where one environment is contained within the next. Figure 6 outlines Bronfenbrenner's original conception of this ecological system. At the centre of the system lies the developing person with their own individual characteristics. For the SENCO, this could be tantamount to individual characteristics such as gender or approach to a role (see section 2.3.5). Surrounding this are a series of influencing systems.

These systems start in close proximity to the developing person. Each new system moves away from or becomes more distal to the developing person.



**Figure 6: Bronfenbrenner's original ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979)**

### **3.2.1 *The microsystem***

The most proximal system to the person is named the microsystem. This does not consist of one discrete environment; rather, it is a collection of individual environments that directly impact upon the developing person. Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 22) defines this system as, "A pattern of activities, roles and intrapersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and materials characteristics". Here, the setting is defined as a physical space in which the developing person is present and direct interaction with others can happen. For example, for a child this could be

the physical settings of a home, a school, an after-school care facility, or a sports club. For the adult, this could also represent the home, the workplace, or indeed the physical space of their child's school if the adult is also a parent. Hence, SENCOs may operate in a wide range of microsystems and therefore be open to a wide range of proximal influences.

The next set of factors within the system are described as “elements” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 22) of activities, roles, and intrapersonal relations that the developing person may engage with in these particular settings. The use of the term ‘experienced’ is key within this definition. Here, the objectivist outlook of behaviourism is rejected and instead a more phenomenological approach is adopted. Now, it is argued that experience is not just about an individual being conditioned by others. Instead, human behaviour is influenced by the meanings that the individual ascribes to them. Here, it is proposed that within any given situation, the most powerful influences on behaviour are those which have direct meaning for the individual. Within this last point, Bronfenbrenner explicitly considers meaning with relation to one particular element, that of ‘role’. A role that an individual is acting within can add differing meaning to experience. For example, this role may be as a parent where the developing person is continuing to develop through the experiences of interaction with their child. People interact with children in other roles. These may include the roles of teacher or SENCO. The meaning they ascribe to their interaction in these roles may be different from those experienced as a parent.

In a later iteration of this theory, Bronfenbrenner (2005), acknowledges a significant flaw within his conceptualisation of the microsystem, deeming the concept of the setting within the original microsystem to be neutral. The flaw

was the lack of accounting for the existence and differences of the people within these settings. This led to an additional clause in continuation of the definition above that settings also contained "... other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality, and systems of belief." (p. 148). Here, there is an acknowledgement of the environment in which the developing person operates and the people within this as well. For example, within a two-form entry school, a child may be educated within the same environment but may have access to different teachers with different individual characteristics and belief systems. In addition, these individual characteristics may go beyond the psychological constructs mentioned above. Instead, they may also include discrete demographic attributes. These characteristics could include age, gender, and ability.

### **3.2.2 *The mesosystem***

A deep understanding of the microsystem and its phenomenological outlook is key to understanding the next system. Here, Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 25) describes the mesosystem as "the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates (such as for the child, the relations among home, school, and neighbourhood peer groups, for an adult, among family work and social life). This acknowledges that different microsystems do not always act independently of each other. Rather, there may be formal or informal links between these systems or indeed, the developing person may interact with similar people in different settings. For example, a child may attend a school and a youth organisation held as an outside club but within the school building.

### **3.2.3 *The exosystem***

This system is more distal to the person. Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines this as “one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person” (p. 25). For example, if the developing person is a SENCO, they may be working in the middle management structure of a large secondary school. Their place in this layer of management would form part of their micro and mesosystems. However, they would remain outside of the SLT or indeed the governing body or academy trust who, as the responsible body of the organisation would be accountable for changes and decisions made. Decisions made within this more distal layer would influence the work of the SENCO and indeed their potential approach to the role. Here, the SENCO as the developing person may have little influence; nonetheless, decisions at this level would affect the immediate working of any SENCO and any team that they lead.

### **3.2.4 *The macrosystem***

The most distal system within the theory is the macrosystem. This is defined as “consistencies in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26). Thus, an individual’s development may be influenced by increasingly distal influences. These may include diverse factors including national culture and legislation.

Later, Bronfenbrenner (2005) changed this system to match early changes within the microsystem (see section 3.2.1). His rationale was based on two principles. The first of these was an acknowledgement that the development of an individual is subject to the options and opportunities open to them within their cultural space. The second is the influence of the culture on intrapersonal systems of belief. Here, there is direct interaction between the development that occurs within the microsystem and the cultural norms which drive behaviour within this system. The alternate definition proposed by Bronfenbrenner (*italics from original source*) incorporate these changes:

The *macrosystem* consists of the overarching pattern of micro-, meso-, and exosystems characteristic of a given culture, subculture, or other broader social context *with particular reference to the developmentally instigative belief systems, resources, hazards, lifestyles, opportunity structures, life course options and patterns of social interchange that are embedded in each of these systems*. The macrosystem may be thought of as a societal blueprint for a particular culture, subculture, or other broader context. (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, pp. 149-150)

Bronfenbrenner clarifies his position on macrosystems with two additional points. Firstly, they are the highest form of the structure which overarches the society. Secondly the beliefs and behaviours practised within these structures are passed between generations through institutions such as families, schools, or workplaces over time.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) used the education system as an example of a macrosystem by suggesting that across a country like France, most educational settings operate in a similar fashion. In England, there are different types of maintained, mainstream, state schools including academies, local authority-controlled schools, and free schools. Likewise, these come in different sizes and cater for different age ranges. Despite these differences, they must all adhere to the policy decisions discussed in Chapter 2 with relation to SEN. Thus, one central direction from the distal macrosystem is that all these schools must nominate a SENCO and adhere to the same definition for the identification of SEN. The decisions on how schools constitute themselves, their individual approach to SEN, and their design of the SENCO role will all be made at the individual school level through the governors or trust which form the responsible body. This school-level approach is part of the exosystem described above (see section 3.2.3). Had Warnock (1978) provided radically different proposals, the direction provided from the macrosystem may have looked quite different as recent SEN policy developed iteratively from this point in time. Thus, this event in the macrosystem had a significant influence on macrosystemic government policy but it also impacted upon microsystemic attitudes towards education in general and inclusion in particular (see Chapter 2).

### **3.2.5 *The chronosystem***

The chronosystem was a much later addition to acknowledge how an individual changes over time. Theoretical approaches to understanding development over time had been attempted before (Lerner, 2005). For example, Erikson (1982) argues that individuals pass through a series of eight developmental life stages



over the life course. In turn, these psychosocial developmental stages are progressive, internal, and broadly related to an individual's age band.

Bronfenbrenner (2005) acknowledges that time should also be accounted for within developmental research in a similar way. Here, in keeping with the ecological nature of the theory, it is suggested that other factors such as events and transitions between settings over time can also impact upon the development of the individual.

These events can happen individually, sequentially, or in parallel over the life course and may be as diverse as having a child, changing careers, moving location, or even all of these simultaneously. In turn, these events can provide additional momentum for developmental change. Furthermore, it is suggested that research often inaccurately portrays these developmental sequences as lacking variation with development taking place through one homogenous trajectory. Instead, Bronfenbrenner (2005, pp. 108-110) argues that this invariance does not exist and that these developmental sequences may differ for people from different demographic or cultural groups. These moderator factors, such as gender, societal status, or household composition, should be built into any analysis of the passage of time on development.

### **3.2.6 *Bioecological approaches***

Bronfenbrenner's model developed over time, in a process akin to evolution (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007, p. 824). Additions to the theory were part of ongoing work by Bronfenbrenner and colleagues to refine, redraft, revise and sometimes reject parts of the model. Examples of these changes include revision of the microsystem (see section 3.2.1) and the addition of the

chronosystem (see section 3.2.5). More notable was the introduction of two additional propositions to reconfigure the model from an ecological systems approach (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) into a bioecological approach (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007).

Here, two key propositions are posited. In the first proposition, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007, p. 797) argue that development happens over time and throughout the entire course of an individual's life. These changes happen due to the interaction between the individual and a range of people, symbols, or objects within society at regular intervals over a successive time period. These interactions are described as 'proximal processes'. These interactions can occur within the early life period of the developing infant. Additionally, they could also be used to describe processes over other long periods of the life course during which these proximal processes take place. An example of this would be the development of an individual's career, attitude to work, and the development of the skills to undertake the tasks set before them in the workplace.

In the second proposition, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007, p. 798) reflect on the strength and power of these proximal processes and how these can vary depending upon both the person and their environment. Remote changes in culture can change over time and consequently, these may influence these proximal processes. Although no examples are provided by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007), understanding elements of this proposition can be interpreted within the context of the workplace and indeed the role of the SENCO. For example, prior to 1994 although teachers were acting upon elements of Warnock, it was not until 1994 that there was a distinct Code of

Practice and indeed the position of the SENCO itself (see Chapter 2). Consequently, prior to 1994 a teacher may aspire to work with children with SEN; however, they would not aspire to be a SENCO. After this date, the remote changes made at a national level and the construction of the role would enable the individual to also aspire to become a SENCO. Hence this change at national level may directly impact upon the proximal processes of the individual.

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007) argue that in order to test the two propositions through a bioecological lens, four key elements must be present: process, person, contexts, and time (PPCT). These provide further delineation and complexity to the systems of the original model (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979). The first of these, process, is integral to the revised approach as it denotes the active development of the person. Process is a key driver within this system as this is the interface between the individual and their immediate surroundings, hence the bioecological model. These interactions between the person and their surroundings form the 'proximal processes' which change the developing person. Thus, the person is a product both of themselves and of the environment in which these processes take place.

For the second test, at the heart of the bioecological model lies the person who is continually developing through a range of proximal processes. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007) identified three characteristics of a person that needed to be accounted for here. The first, individual dispositions, may act as a catalyst to start the process. The next characteristic, bioecological resources, is diverse and includes the ability of the individual, learned skills, and the knowledge required to perform functions. The final characteristic is the feedback loop of demand characteristics. Here, the person seeks feedback from

the social environment surrounding them. In turn, this feedback can impact positively or negatively upon development. The differing strengths of each of these three characteristics serve to strengthen or limit the impact of proximal processes. For the SENCO, these bioecological resources may include demographic factors (individual dispositions), workplace experiences including that of leadership, and the skills and knowledge gained through engagement with either CPD or formal qualifications (bioecological resources).

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007) describe the 'context' as demonstrably changing Bronfenbrenner (1979) original conception of the microsystem. There is an acknowledgement that the context incorporates both people and objects. Consequently, an individual's development through proximal processes may be altered by the people that they associate with such as their family, friends, or for adults, their work colleagues. The context can also involve physical spaces such as schools, workplaces, or localities.

The final element of the bioecological model relates to time, where there is an acknowledgement of an error in the original model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007, p. 796). Instead, it is argued that time does not exist as a separate system (the chronosystem); rather, time is layered within each system of the original nested model. Thus, Bronfenbrenner describes time within each stratum. Microtime refers to individual links and disruptions within immediate proximal processes. For a SENCO, this may include an individual planned or unplanned meeting with a parent within a school day. Mesotime refers to longer time periods such as a day or a week. For the SENCO, this may involve pieces of work over the space of their week including teaching and release time when they may undertake some of the administrative and leadership tasks of the

SENCO role (see Chapter 2). Macrotime refers to changes that take place within a culture or society over a longer period, exemplified by the changing landscape of SEN between the pre-Warnock period to the present. Here, there have been changes to the expectations of both schools and SENCOs (see Chapter 2).

### ***3.2.7 Bronfenbrenner – oft misinterpreted***

Bronfenbrenner's work is often cited as the guiding theoretical framework in much research. For example, Adamsons, O'Brien, and Pasley (2007) state that they used the ecological perspective model to test the involvement of two groups of fathers with their children. Tudge, Mokrova, Hatfield, and Karnik (2009) argue that many studies that use the frameworks provided by Bronfenbrenner suffer the fallacy of theoretical inaccuracy. It is claimed that often studies refer to concepts and terms provided in later iterations of the model whilst conceptualising their work with earlier or adapted versions of Bronfenbrenner's work. Indeed, even if the PPCT model is stated as the overarching framework, sometimes this is used inaccurately. For example, the 'time' element of the PPCT model implies a longitudinal design. Tudge et al. (2009) argue that despite claiming full adherence to the PPCT model, the work of Adamsons et al. (2007) does not fully meet the PPCT criteria due to the cross-sectional nature of the study and use of secondary data. In turn, this makes it difficult for them to argue that their work does or does not test the PPCT model. As Bronfenbrenner (2005) himself acknowledged, he had been engaged in a process of "...reassessing, revising, extending – as well as regretting and even renouncing – some of the conceptions set forth in my 1979

monograph” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 106).

Tudge et al. (2009) argue the importance of researchers ensuring that they acknowledge which version of Bronfenbrenner’s work they are using to frame their analysis and how this is being used when engaged in research design. Akin to Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007), they elucidate that if the work is designed to test or use the ‘bioecological model’ then the four tests of the PPCT model need to be fully incorporated into both method and design. Although the assertion made by Tudge et al. (2009) is sound when it comes to testing a theory, it does not resonate with the use of this framework in the present study. Rather than aiming to test the theory, the intention here is to exploit that the “ecological perspective provides a framework without prescribing a narrow set of procedures” (Thomas, 1992, p. 58). It is important to stress that the present thesis does not purport to rigidly test the ecological systems theory. Rather, the theory is being used as a framework or lens through which to organise both thoughts and empirical data.

### **3.3 Ecological approaches and inclusive education**

#### ***3.3.1 A theoretical reproduction of Bronfenbrenner***

The flexibility and holistic nature of the theory (Thomas, 1992) has been utilised by others to examine a variety of different phenomena in a range of different contexts. Anderson et al. (2014) provide an ecologically orientated overview of educational inclusion as a set of systems that surround and influence the development of a child. Their proposition is similar to the approach used to interrogate the various iterations of the Code in Chapter 2 (see Figures 1, 2, 5).

They argue that given the socially constructed and culturally embedded nature of inclusive education, an analysis using Bronfenbrenner's conceptual framework allows for a more holistic overview of the development of a child within an overall ecological system. Here, the authors' aim is to re-purpose Bronfenbrenner's systems to provide a greater theoretical overview of inclusive education. This is as opposed to testing ecological systems theory or bioecological systems theory (see section 3.2.7).

The microsystem is reconceptualised as the learning that the child experiences on both a formal and informal basis. They acknowledge Bronfenbrenner's later iteration of the microsystem by stressing within this system the importance of people, citing the influence of groups such as teachers and friends. However, these people are also contextualised within the routine and culture of the school. The mesosystem acknowledges the connection between microsystems. The reconceptualisation of the exosystem acknowledges the influence of school structures that do not interact directly with the child but influence the quality and focus of the education the child receives. These involve the way the school is run through the structures of the leadership of the setting and the way resources are allocated. Within this stage there is acknowledgement of the local culture of the school and its approach to collaborative practice with those within the school community.

The macrosystem is described in this context as the extensive influences that come from outside the school environment. These include all the contexts within which the school operates. These may include regional and national education systems and indeed the statutory and cultural norms to which these are conjoined. The reconceptualisation of the chronosphere also adheres to

Bronfenbrenner (2005) original concept of this as a relationship between the period that the developing person passes through and the changes through time that may happen. This is despite a significant referencing error whereby the chronosystem was attributed to Bronfenbrenner's earlier 1976 work (Anderson et al., 2014, p. 28).

### ***3.3.2 Application of ecological systems theory to understanding the actors facilitating inclusive education***

The ecological model has been used for more than understanding the development of children. Rather, it has also been used to focus on both professionals and learners within the systems of inclusive education. Utilising a revised version of Anderson et al. (2014) (see section 3.3.1), McLinden et al. (2016) provide an analysis of the role of teachers of the visually impaired. Like SENCOs who also need a professional qualification in England, in the most recent regulations (*The Education (School Teachers' Qualifications) (England) Regulations 2003*) it is stated that these specialist teachers must attain a formal qualification to be able to work in this role. McLinden et al. (2016) position the person with SEN or 'active learner' at the heart of this complex ecological system. The learner is surrounded by microsystems such as school and home, and the mesosystem providing connections between them. The exosystem is reconceptualised as systems outside the learner's direct agency but still part of a school system. Here, the exosystem includes school leadership structures and educational policies within a given setting. The macrosystem is formed by national policies and international accords, which drive the systems that are proximal to the child. The influence of the chronosystem is interpreted as the



transitions that occur during the life course of the active person. These include transition between educational settings and the transition into the workplace.

Utilising the ecological systems theory, this approach is replicated over several different studies, each of which focus on the role of the teacher of the visually impaired. This is noteworthy as it provides evidence of the utility of the theory as a set of tools to illuminate the influence of professional roles within human development. In each study, the developing person is at the heart of the system whilst the case of each study is the specialist teacher of the visually impaired. McLinden and McCracken (2016) use this approach to frame their analysis during the evaluation of a visiting teacher service in Ireland. To ensure a holistic overview of the service, they use the ecological systems theory to conduct an evaluation of the support teachers provide across the systems that surround the child. For instance, within the microsystem examples are offered of the support provided by the teacher in the home and school settings. These supports are diverse and include advising the family, assessing the child's educational needs, and facilitating curriculum access. Several other studies utilise the ecological approach to frame analysis. In a further study, McLinden, Ravenscroft, Douglas, Hewett, and Cobb (2017) look beyond the specialist teacher providing support to the active learner within the different systems. The child is again positioned at the heart of the system; however, the case or subject of the research is the teacher of the visually impaired.

Anderson et al. (2014) suggest that the macrosystem within inclusive education consists of "factors such as the education system or systems... and professional performance" (Anderson et al., 2014, p. 30). It is noteworthy that these professional standards are centrally defined at the level of the state to

ensure that specialist teachers are trained with the most appropriate competencies. Thus, they are macrosystemic; however, the study by McLinden, Ravenscroft, et al. (2017) does not place them here. Instead, through their analysis, they provide evidence of how centrally defined standards of professional performance within the macrosystem can influence teacher behaviours throughout all systems.

The methodological and theoretical approaches used in these studies have great utility for an analysis of the relationship of the SENCO and the child with SEN in mainstream settings. In Chapter 2, it is argued that throughout all the iterations of legislation within England, the child is positioned at the heart of a system. In a similar way to the specialist teachers, as previously described, the SENCO acts as a facilitator working between the systems to improve outcomes for the child. Indeed, the position of the SENCO has been created and refined iteratively over time and as a response to governmental changes (see Chapter 2). The policy that drives the work of the SENCO and indeed the role itself, is embedded within macrosystemic policy changes such as the Children and Families Act (2014), the Codes of Practice (Department for Education, 1994; Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015; Department for Education and Skills, 2001) and other associated legislation, regulation, and guidance. As noted above (see McLinden & McCracken, 2016; McLinden, Ravenscroft, et al., 2017), these macrosystemic policy changes, associated professional standards, and regulations do not only provide the standards by which specialist teachers such as the SENCO are judged. Indeed, they also construct the regulatory frameworks that contain and shape the role and the approach to work practices. Hence, it is difficult to perform any analysis

of these occupational roles outside the national and cultural contexts which drive and define them. By nature, this proposition also applies to any analysis of an individual's interest in the aforementioned roles.

However, the approaches shared in the studies above would only serve partial utility in an analysis of interest in the SENCO role. Instead, the SENCO would need to be the developing person at the heart of the system. Thus, the developing person and the case would be the same. Indeed, by locating the SENCO at the centre of the system, it is possible to perform an analysis on how these influences may actually influence the intending SENCO. This allows for a deeper analysis on their thinking about concepts, for example proximal issues such as their career, but also the place of more distal concepts, like inclusion, in this very personal decision.

### **3.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has outlined how all aspects of human development can be understood as part of a system. At the heart of the system, there is the developing individual with their distinct resources. However, they are surrounded by a range of systems that influence and interact with their development. These include a range of diverse elements, some of which are proximal such as the home, others are more distal such as national policy and culture. These theoretical approaches provide a framework for an understanding of the development of inclusive education as discussed in the previous chapter. In particular, the ecology of education (Thomas, 2011) and the ecology of inclusive education (Anderson et al., 2014; Thomas, 1992) have been utilised as a way of using the ecological systems theory to provide a

theoretical framework to enable a deeper understanding of how a child with SEN is supported within a broad system. More recently, the theory has been used to understand the actors in the system. Here, the analysis has been concerned with understanding how these actors work within the different systems to support an individual child at the centre of the ecology. For the present study though, it is important to place the SENCO at the heart of the system. This allows for a holistic analysis of why they enter this role.

As in the previous chapter, this evaluation of a range of literature allows for further evaluation of the research questions. Previously, two questions had been revised to:

- What are the factors or reasons reported by teachers on how they developed interest in the role of SENCO?
- How can we understand these reasons within the realms of the people and the contexts in which these decisions were made?

The review of the literature on ecological systems thinking validates the inclusion of the word 'context' in the second question. However, this leaves other prima facie questions that need further review:

- Do they differ in approach from other school leaders?
- How can work, vocational, and individual psychology help us understand the people fulfilling this role?
- What motivates these people to train for this job?

There is also a rich body of literature which has been used to further understand career interest across different professions. To gain a more

complete understanding of career interest, it is important to turn to the theoretical and empirical evidence within this field of study. In the next chapter, this research will be examined. Here, the bioecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) will not be tested. Rather it will be used as a frame of analysis to understand and explain these theoretical approaches and their provenance. Career interest approaches that focus on process, person, context, and time will be discussed. This will allow for a review of a range of psychological research into career interest. The intention is to evaluate whether different theoretical approaches can help us to further understand the range of different factors that may motivate teachers to train to become a SENCO.

## **CHAPTER 4 – CAREER INTEREST THEORY AND THE Senco**

### **4.1 Introduction**

In Chapter 2, it was argued that the Senco role could not be understood if it is separated from the context from which it was derived. In the previous chapter, it was argued that an ecological approach provides a useful analytical framework to help with the analysis of the phenomenologically and contextually driven factors influencing why people enter this contextually situated, constructed role. This led to a restructure of two of the *prima facie* questions. In the current chapter, a range of theoretical approaches will be examined. This is with the intention of reviewing the remaining three questions. The objective is to ascertain whether these questions would benefit from further refinement. The third question is of particular note as it asks, 'How can work, vocational, and individual psychology help us understand the people fulfilling this role?' Here, therefore, is a solid rationale to ensure a range of literature on career interest is reviewed.

The structure of the chapter is informed by the earlier analysis of literature in this thesis. It starts with an overview of the term career. The subsequent sections are then structured according to the model offered by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007) explored in the previous chapter (see section 3.3). The intention is not to test the model (see Tudge et al., 2009). Rather, it is used to frame the analysis of different theoretical approaches to career interest to evaluate whether these also account for person, process, context, and time. This is with the view of considering whether there is an opportunity to provide a

holistic synthesis of research on the SENCO, career interest, and ecological theories.

## **4.2 Career – A diverse term**

Understanding why people develop an interest in the SENCO role within the overall career of a teacher is the purpose of the present study. Indeed, teaching as a career has been the product of much costly advertising within England (Carr, 2020); the subject of a developing early career framework (Department for Education, 2019b); and specialist school leadership qualifications (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2014). However, within the proposition of a linear career, there are many assumptions which need to be subjected to critical analysis. Examples of these assumptions include the stability of the construct of career, the ability to choose a career path, and that all demographic groups want the same out of their career. A further assumption is that there is a temporal element to a career and that careers may develop in linear processes over time. Indeed, it is inferred that teachers may pass through different roles, including that of the SENCO. A role that is merely a product of policy development since 1978 (see Chapter 2).

The term 'career' has therefore prompted much discussion. Perhaps there is an assumption that work has a history of having an end goal; however, the term is regarded by many researchers differently. For example, Sullivan (1999) notes that many people are outside a potential career framework such as the self-employed. For those involved in careers, Sullivan (1999) distinguishes two potential definitions. In the traditional career, an individual may be loyal to one or two companies. Their skills are specific to the companies

that they work for and their success in these companies is measured by improvements in pay or status. The responsibility for career management is usually through formal processes within the organisation. The associated training is often derived from formal types of training. For example, the position of SENCO needs to be fulfilled by a qualified teacher who has been formally trained using the NASENCo award (see section 2.4). Although, teachers may move between schools, they are still in the field of education. The boundaryless career is different. Here, an individual's employability is defined by performance and flexibility whilst working for multiple organisations. The individual possesses a range of transferable skills. Rather than measuring success through promotion, they measure their own success through work that is psychologically meaningful, the latter being a point made by Mackenzie (2012a, 2012b) in her analysis of the SENCO role.

However, even these approaches are not seen as sufficient and regarded as too dichotomous by some writers. For example, Richardson (2000, p. 201) criticises the approach to careers as a measure of individual talents, suggesting that those who have access to 'good careers' often do so because of privilege rather than other individual factors. Likewise, Leong and Hartung (2000, p. 213) argue that the term career is synonymous with representing the views of white, heterosexual, middle class men. This latter point is particularly important given the assertion by Szwed (2007a) that the role is largely fulfilled by women. With regards to an examination of interest in the SENCO role, the above studies highlight some important implications. Firstly, the term career has different meanings. Secondly, any analysis of interest without further



investigation into demographic factors may leave research open to the criticism of cultural or demographic bias as posed by Leong and Hartung (2000).

Job roles and indeed the nature of careers have also been understood as socially constructed and construed differently by different people. Coupland (2004) conducted a range of interviews with 54 graduates within one large organisation. The findings suggest that many respondents did not see the term career as an overall, coherent, strategic plan. Rather, the notion of a career is continually being negotiated and renegotiated by those actors within these professions. Using a social constructionist framework, Coupland (2004) argues that a career is fluid and in understanding their roles and career trajectories, people draw from their own experiences and stories to make sense of their work experiences at the micro level. Kidd (2004) meanwhile looks at the relationship between career and the socially constructed concept of emotional labour. Rather than conceptualising a career as a linear row of events within an individual's work trajectory, Kidd (2004) argues that individual workplace events alongside the emotional labour that these often contain can enable a greater understanding of the career choice of individuals. To conclude her microlevel analysis, she suggests that constructionist approaches and qualitative methodologies can support more in-depth research into understanding career choice. The work of Mackenzie (2012b) would appear to draw from this approach, with a life history approach utilising 12 participants where only one was male. Those working with children with SEN described a range of different emotions which were both positive and negative. Again, the balance of men to women in this study was noteworthy, with the comment that

There was a gendered dimension to the way participants discussed the idea of 'caring', which may reflect the largely female nature of the sample. Most participants were parents and often talked (not unproblematically) about the 'maternal' aspects of the role. Participants felt that women were generally more suited to SEN work due to their supposed 'maternal' qualities. Most did not see this as a problem and were perhaps drawing on their own experiences as parents which informed their classroom roles. (Mackenzie, 2012b, pp. 1080-1081)

Whether these proposed demographic differences to the approach of the role exist or not cannot be verified and as such remain a matter of conjecture. However, the findings suggest that any analysis that ignores variables such as gender may not provide accurate answers to any questions posed.

#### **4.3 Career interest – An approach to classification**

Despite the misgivings about the word career and indeed whether the term speaks for all demographic groups, there is a well-developed corpus of research in the field of career interest. Much of this started with the work of Frank Parsons in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century with his trait and factor theory; a theory firmly rooted in logical positivism (Patton & McMahon, 2014, pp. 27-28). Since then, approaches to examining career interest have mirrored those within psychology in general, with the field now drawing upon an eclectic range of ontological and epistemological positions. Attempts at classification of these different types of career interest theories have been attempted by researchers in the field of occupational and vocational psychology. For

example, Osipow (1990, p. 124) suggests that career theories could be classified under four theoretical categories. These include trait, social learning, developmental, and personality-based approaches.

Patton and McMahon (2014) reorganise this classification framework to provide four categories of career interest theories. These are named theories of content, theories of process, theories of content and process, and wider explanations. Theories of content relate to theoretical approaches that draw upon individual differences of the person. This would draw together the trait approaches and personality approaches proposed by Osipow (1990) alongside other approaches to understanding career interest which are located within the person. These theories include psychodynamic approaches and values-based approaches. Theories of process are concerned with how the influence of time impacts upon the development of career interest. Patton and McMahon (2014) acknowledge theories of content and process were added as a later conceptualisation. These include theories which attempt to understand the person and the context in which their development occurred. The fourth and final category of wider explanation would appear to be more of an afterthought. Here, there is an attempt to include theoretical positions that do not fit these main categories. These acknowledge the difficulties related to the concept of career highlighted by Leong and Hartung (2000). For example, within this category are potential explanations of the career interest of women and those in the LGBTQ community.

#### **4.4 An overview of career interest theories utilising the framework of the bioecological systems theory**

In the previous chapter, it was argued that the ecological systems theory holds much utility as an analytical frame to examine interest in the SENCO role, due to the contextually situated nature of the position and its embeddedness in policy. As discussed above, Osipow (1990) and Patton and McMahon (2014) already provide approaches to categorisation of different theoretical positions to career interest for the purpose of review or analysis. However, mere classification and ordering theories in categories is not the purpose of this chapter. Rather, there is a need to examine what many of the different established career interest theories offer to help us understand why teachers become SENCOs. Instead of using just one of the existing frameworks outlined above to repeat a classification process, it is important to consider what these theories offer in a holistic approach to exploring interest in the role.

As suggested in the previous chapters, the ecological approach holds great utility to frame an analysis of the process of people entering a role contextually embedded in policy. Here, therefore, the purpose is not to classify theoretical approaches to career interest. Rather it is to explore how the theories may contribute (or not) to our understanding of why teachers become SENCOs. Consequently, in the remainder of this chapter, how useful a selection of career interest theories to examine interest in the role of the SENCO are considered. This examination is structured within the headings offered by the bioecological systems theory offered by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007) (see section 3.2.6).

## **4.5 'The person'**

Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007) identify three characteristics which have the potential to impact upon the individual through the life course (see section 3.2.6). These include individual dispositions which act as a catalyst to start the process. The next characteristic is bioecological resources. These include the ability of the individual and the learned skills and knowledge required to perform functions. The final characteristic is a feedback loop of demand characteristics. Here, the person seeks feedback from the social environment surrounding them. Theorists interested in career interest have also examined the role that dispositions and bioecological resources have in developing interest in career choices. For the remainder of this section, two of these theoretical approaches are analysed. It is suggested that both these reductionist approaches hold limited utility for the objectives of the current research, despite their popularity in the field.

### ***4.5.1 The five-factor model***

The first of these is an approach embedded within theories of personality and individual differences. McCrae and Costa (2008) suggest that five distinct personality traits or factors can be used to predict “enduring dispositions” (p. 2) for a range of future functions. These functions are varied and include the suitability to perform in occupational roles and whether individuals will be satisfied or perform well in these (Walsh & Eggerth, 2005). It is further stated that these personality traits are fixed and stable over time (McCrae & Costa, 2008, p. 4). Each of these five factors are created from a range of individualised items from established personality inventories. The resulting factors are then

described by a range of adjectives including conscientiousness, neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience. These are further subdivided into a series of different facets. For example, excitement seeking, activity, and positive emotions are facets of the extraversion trait, whilst tender mindedness is a facet of the agreeableness trait.

Pryor (1993) describes the factors in more detail. Extraversion correlates with how the individual relates to others in a positive manner. Low scores for this trait would suggest the individual may be shy, socially awkward, and reserved. Agreeableness relates to the individual's ability to effectively manage social interaction to reduce potential areas of disagreement. Extraversion and agreeableness would appear to be closely related; however, there is a recognition that the two do not need to always correlate closely. For example, an individual might be extraverted but could also be self-serving and obnoxious in their relations with others. Conscientiousness as a trait describes how responsible the person is. These individuals are organised, often assiduous, and detailed in their endeavours and approaches to functions and activities. Neuroticism relates to an individual's emotional stability. A high score in this may suggest an individual who is anxious as opposed to relaxed. The final trait is openness. This is less easy to define due to the breadth of understanding associated with this. However, those who score favourably for this trait tend to be more intellectual and seek out different and fresh life experiences.

Despite the static, rather than dynamic and developing nature of these traits (Patton & McMahon, 2014, p. 36) they have the potential to predict whether the personality of an individual teacher may be suited to the 11 key responsibilities of the SENCO role envisaged within the most recent Code of

Practice (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015, pp. 108-109). For example, in order to liaise with parents of children with SEN (p. 108) the trait of agreeableness would be useful in developing the good relationships needed to work in partnership with these key stakeholders. Likewise, the trait of conscientiousness would be a positive trait to ensure that all record keeping is up to date; whilst openness to experience would be a positive trait to measure whether the SENCO has the necessary desire to learn about what is needed to fulfil this position.

Pryor (1993) suggests that despite limitations, the five-factor model has utility in enabling employers to understand potential employees. It is also regarded as beneficial in enabling prospective workers to understand their own strengths and weaknesses. However, in a stepwise regression analysis conducted with 401 employed and unemployed graduates, De Fruyt (2006) argues that the five-factor model itself has less predictive power than anticipated with only extraversion and conscientiousness holding utility. They also suggest that rather than enabling prospective employees to reflect on why they want a role, the measures derived from the five-factor model possess greater efficacy in the evaluation and measurement of the employability potential of applicants for roles.

A tool of this kind would therefore be of limited use in facilitating an understanding of why the individual SENCO may be attracted to a role. Instead, the five-factor model may be used to provide a personality profile of SENCOs. However, that would assume that SENCOs are homogenous. Instead, the factor structure could be tested on SENCOs and the resulting items could be subjected to a further factor analysis. Likewise, the tool may be used to look for

relationships between personality traits and SENCO duties. However, this would not answer the research questions. What would not be answered is how contextual factors may also be embedded within a factor structure with explanatory power to explain why teachers make the decision to undertake this role.

#### ***4.5.2 Holland's career interest theory***

The five-factor theory is not the only trait-based theory of personality utilising factors to measure career interest. Holland (1992) takes a slightly different approach in his proposed structure of six individual factors. Again, these are lacking any contextual information and are more concerned with measuring individual dispositions. Additionally, in a similar fashion to the five-factor model explored above (Costa, McCrae, & Holland, 1984; McCrae & Costa, 2008), it is argued that these factors remain static and unchanged over time, an idea itself which is disputed (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Lerner, 2005). Here, though, the purpose is not just to provide a personality classification but to argue that their utility lies in being able to match a person to a working environment.

In order to perform a person-occupation fit, the individual is asked to scale items in an inventory. The items are then measured against six established factors. Many work roles are also classified by the same six factors and so the person can be matched to an occupation. The theory presents that congruence between the person and the work environment provides the necessary feedback to make the employee happy and fulfilled in a suitable role or organisation.



Patton and McMahon (2014, p. 43) provide an overview of these six factors. These are described as realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional which are often referred to under the acronym of RIASEC. 'Realistic' describes a practical person who may prefer to work on tasks involving machines or individual skills. According to the theory, realistic people are suited to technical roles such as an electrician, builder, or engineer. An 'investigative' person is analytical and interested in solving problems. They may be more suited to roles such as a university researcher or pharmacist. Individuals who are 'artistic' are described as being imaginative and creative. Suitable professions for these individuals may involve writing or occupations involving design. 'Social' people have good social skills and enjoy working with people. Congruent professions may involve teaching, nursing, and other social and caring professions. Professions involving management, legal work, or sales are more suited to 'enterprising' individuals. These individuals are suited to leadership roles as they have an ability to negotiate with, and lead others to achieve an objective. The final category type is 'conventional'. These individuals are practical and have an ability to work systematically whilst attending to detail. Congruent professions for these individuals would be roles such as banking or accountancy.

The SENCO would appear to fit a number of these categories based on the potential roles outlined in the Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015, pp. 108-109). For example, as a qualified teacher they may be classified as 'social'. However, using the rest of the descriptors may not hold any utility. For example, leaders are regarded as 'enterprising' but not all SENCOs are leaders (see section 2.3.4). However, fundamentally, it

must be questioned whether the use of this tool adds anything further to the research. Employing an inventory to measure the population of SENCOs using Holland's theory would provide an overview of the six dimensions. Again, the responses may be subjected to a further factor analysis to confirm the factor structure. However, this would be descriptive in nature. Additionally, it would not provide any further information on how and why people become SENCOs. Inventories of this type could be utilised for the measurement of demographic differences through scales and inferential statistics. But again, without the contextual information present, which is important to a socially constructed role such as the SENCO, the results would not be addressing the questions appropriately. Rather, they would only be answering questions relevant to demographic differences within either the scales or the theories of McCrae and Costa (2008) and variations of RIASEC (Holland, 1959, 1987, 1992, 1996).

#### **4.6 'Process, context, and time'**

Within this section, career interest theory is considered where it also accounts for context. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007) describe the 'context' as demonstrably changing Bronfenbrenner's (1979) original conception of the microsystem. There is an acknowledgement that the context incorporates both people and objects. The following theories move beyond the approach of the person-based theories discussed in section 4.5 and recognise that an analysis of career interest should also account for context. Indeed, these contexts should account for the people with whom the SENCO may work and objects in the environment from which they may draw influence.

#### **4.6.1 *Social learning theory of career decision making (SLTCDM)***

Mitchell and Krumboltz (1996) acknowledge that the context or environment can impact upon career orientated decision making. Here, four categories that influence career orientated decision making are suggested. In a similar vein to the bioecological resources posited by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007), the first category is an individual's genetic attributes and abilities. These are regarded as innate and are passed down between generations. These are seen as stable after birth when other factors become the focus of change (Krumboltz, 2009, p. 137). The second category is the environment and events within the environment. Here, a range of people and objects are cited which are outside the control of the individual (Mitchell & Krumboltz, 1996, p. 238). These are undifferentiated but akin to the systems of influences suggested by Bronfenbrenner (1979). For example, there are influences akin to those in an individual's microsystem (see section 3.2.1) such as family, the environment in which the individual lives, and education. There are also macrosystemic influences (see section 3.2.4). These include social policies, the education system, and employment law. Indeed, this would indicate significant utility for this theory against the trait and factor approaches explored earlier in any analysis of why people become SENCOs (see section 4.5). This would be especially important when considering the contextually situated nature of the SENCO role (see Chapter 2).

In the third category, there is the influence of Bandura's social learning theory (Bandura, 1986, 2001). In a similar fashion to individuals drawing from microsystemic experiences, here it is suggested that an individual draws upon

two different types of learning experiences, instrumental and associative. Instrumental learning experiences are where the influences of the first and second categories of genetics and environment interact. The individual acts upon their immediate environment to gain and receive a positive or negative response. For example, a teacher may work with children with SEN and find the experience rewarding and professionally fulfilling. This learning experience spurs them on to become a SENCO so that they can support others do the same. Associative learning relates to broader more macrosystemic learning experiences. Here, an individual responds more passively to external stimuli. This in turn, may impact upon their beliefs about any form of occupational role open to them. For example, at a macrosystemic level negative messages about pay and conditions may discourage some graduates from entering the teaching profession (School Teachers' Review Body, 2018). At a microsystemic level, a negative conversation about children with SEN in a staffroom may deter or may inspire an individual from working in an SEN orientated role (Roffey, 2008).

The fourth category is called task approach skills. This category is not discrete and instead works across the other three categories. Here, the focus is on the skills needed to be able to choose and be successful in a particular career path. Therefore, this category includes work habits and performance standards, in addition to cognitive, perceptual, and emotional responses. Datti (2009, pp. 58-59) exemplifies the influence of this final category by suggesting that people who are heterosexual or LGBTQ may approach discrimination in the workplace differently. It is suggested that this is partly due to assumed genetic characteristics. It is also due to the emotional responses derived from what they have learned from the environment about discrimination. In turn, these

experiences will adapt and change their cognitive and emotional response to homophobic behaviour in the workplace.

Indeed, here it is possible to reconsider the claims of Mackenzie (2012a, 2012b) through the lens of the four factors of the SLTCDM. Mackenzie (2012a, 2012b) argues that many women (a genetic endowment) are attracted to the role partially due to their experiences of being a parent and primary carer (instrumental and associative learning experiences). In turn, this may influence their approach to the role (task approach skills). However, this must also be understood within societal structures and constructions that place women as primary carers for children (environmental conditions).

#### ***4.6.2 Social cognitive career interest theory***

Another theoretical approach to career interest which draws from learning from contextual experiences is the social cognitive career theory (SCCT) (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 2000, 2002). This theory also cites contextual and environmental influences as instrumental in developing career interest. However, within it there is also a recognition that the individual has agency in making career choices. This is in contrast to psychoanalytic approaches, which are deterministic in nature, or approaches such as behaviourism, which advocate the malleability of an individual through classical or operant conditioning (Patton & McMahon, 2014, p. 101). Indeed, the incorporation of a cognitive, agentic perspective is perhaps the fundamental difference between SCCT and SLTCDM. For example, in SLTCDM there is a similarity between instrumental and associative learning experiences, and conditional and operant conditioning associated with behaviourism. However, in the SCCT this is

regarded as a less important and instead the desire to fulfil a role may be more agentic in nature.

Lent et al. (1994, 2000, 2002) draw upon the work of Bandura's social cognitive theory with the linked variables of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and goals underpinning the theory (Lent et al., 2002, p. 255). It is suggested self-efficacy beliefs differ from global concepts such as self-esteem. Instead, these are dynamic in nature with people holding different self-efficacy beliefs towards different occupations or career choices. It may not be that an individual has a natural disposition for socially orientated career choice (see section 4.5.2); rather, their success in these areas may lead them towards actively pursuing these career options. For example, a person who has experienced success at teaching children with SEN and organising their provision at a classroom level may feel a desire to follow additional opportunities in this area. These self-efficacy beliefs may drive career choice. This is as long as the individual also possess the necessary person skill set or bioecological resources (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007) and good environmental conditions to achieve these goals.

Self-efficacy beliefs are thought to develop from personal performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. In the context of the SENCO, an individual who has had success as an inclusive teacher (personal performance accomplishment) may observe a successful SENCO at an early part of their career (vicarious experience). The SENCO may persuade them that this is a career option open to them (social persuasion). The teacher considers this advice because they enjoy working with children with SEN as opposed to their year group colleague

who finds this aspect of their role creates anxious responses (physiological and emotional states). Thus, the process of developing these self-efficacy beliefs is through a distinct process of interaction with both people and objects.

Outcome expectations closely relate to self-efficacy. These are the results of career-orientated behaviour. In the previous example, the teacher may consider becoming a SENCO because of their self-efficacy beliefs. In addition though, in a process similar to the feedback loop of demand characteristics (see section 3.2.6) suggested by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998), they also achieve a range of positive outcomes. Thus, career interest in the SENCO role may be further developed through positive feedback from parents, school leaders, and successful performance reviews.

The final variable is personal goals, which are split into two types: choice goals and performance goals. Lent, Brown, and Hackett (2002) make the important distinction here that career choice is not a passive process. Rather, a teacher may set a goal of wanting to become a SENCO because they believe this role aligns with their own constructed views of their own personal characteristics. Thus, this variable links closely with their self-efficacy beliefs and their outcome expectations. The individual draws from people and objects within their environment to measure their performance against their goals. In turn, according to the theory, a teacher may set a goal of becoming a SENCO because they believe they would be good at this role. The feedback they gain from their endeavours in this area will either reinforce or alter both these self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations.

### **4.6.3 *The influence of time***

What is missing from the theories explained in the previous sections is acknowledgement of the influence of time on career choice. In a macrosystemic and contextual sense, it has already been demonstrated that the role of the SENCO has changed over time (see Chapter 2). However, the influence of time can also be evaluated at the level of the person. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007, p. 796) suggest that time is an important variable in human development that is present within all layers of the PPCT model (see section 3.2.6). In a similar fashion, Ginzberg (1988) also suggests that at the level of the person, people change over time. Unlike his contemporary Holland (1992), Ginzberg (1988) originally argued in 1951 that career interest could not be understood as traits that are stable over time. Instead, it is suggested that an individual goes through a series of stages and developmental tasks. This process consists of fantasy choices (up until the age of 11); tentative choices (between 11 and 17); and realistic choices (between 17 and the onset of the 'adult' period).

The influence of time on career choice is also the focus within the life span/life space approach of Super (1980). Although this theoretical approach has been developed over time, the present focus is on its most recent iteration (Super, Savickas, & Super, 1996). In this latter development of the theory, a series of 14 propositions are made (Super et al., 1996, pp. 123-125), an analysis of which demonstrates a number of similarities with the bioecological approach. For example, the first proposition is at the level of the person. Here, it is suggested that people differ in ability, personality, and interests. In terms of process, in proposition five, career development is seen as a process of change over time. The importance of context is acknowledged in proposition six where it



is recognised that an individual is affected by the opportunities afforded to them due to their educational and parental background. Time is a significant factor within this theory, and this is acknowledged throughout several propositions. For example, in proposition four it is suggested that an individual's self-concept may change with both time and experience.

The development of self over time is conceptualised as two parallel processes, 'life space' and 'life span'. Firstly, it is acknowledged that career development does not exist independently of an individual's other responsibilities in life. In their life space, most people have a series of different roles which change over time. These may include the roles of child, student, citizen, and worker. They may also include the leisure and domestic roles of individuals. Indeed, in addition to the occupational role of the SENCO, an individual may have the role of a parent or carer. For example, Mackenzie (2012b) noted the relationship of the two roles of parent and employee that many SENCOs undertake. Here, for many, the SENCO role offered the ability to work part time whilst also retaining a school role. It also offered the flexibility and the option of school holidays which aided family commitments.

The theoretical work of Super et al. (1996) indicates that these multiple roles may interact and thus career or indeed personality cannot be studied in isolation. Indeed, this interaction of an individual's multiple roles can impact upon the meaning that their occupational role brings to their life. Thus, according to this theory, the SENCO role may hold different meanings by an individual with a sympathetic response due to caring for a child who has SEN as opposed to an empathic response of an individual without any childcare roles. This is especially important, as an individual may work in a SENCO role over

time. During this time, their approach to work can also be influenced by the contextual influences within their life space such as becoming a parent.

The acknowledgement of change over time is important within this theory. In a similar fashion to Ginzberg (1988), career and time are related within a series of developmental tasks or stages. Thus, there is the understanding that an individual's career may develop due to both "psychosocial maturation and cultural adaptation" (Super et al., 1996, p. 131). These stages are listed as growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement. Although the stages of growth and exploration are potentially irrelevant to the present study due to the age bands associated with them, a brief description of the associated development tasks are relevant due to the acknowledgement in the theory that not all individuals will pass through these stages.

In the stage of growth, which occurs between the ages of four and 13, an individual passes through a series of developmental tasks such as learning productive work habits, decision making, and working with others. The exploration stage occurs between the ages of 14 to 24. Within this stage, there is the recognition of how an individual may develop the career orientated fantasies developed during their school years into a discrete occupational choice. Thus, at this stage an individual may aspire to work with children and young people whilst they are at school. This may transpire into a decision to become a teacher when they leave school.

The next two stages are particularly relevant to those who are moving into the SENCO role as these are posited to occur during the ages of 25 to 65.

The first of these is establishment. Within this stage, the individual is seen as consolidating an existing occupational position. Here, they start to assimilate occupational culture and norms. For both SENCOs and teachers, these are often fixed at the level of national legislation deriving from the macrosystem (see section 3.2.4). In turn, this informs school culture in the exosystem (see section 3.2.3). Here, there is the development of the earlier relationships within the exploration stage; however, these are now in the more mature form of developing positive working relationships with colleagues. In addition, a task within this stage is not achieved by many. This includes the desire to aspire to new levels of responsibility within their organisation. Hence, the teacher working within their early career may aspire to a role of becoming a SENCO.

The stage of maintenance is exemplified through the question of whether an individual wishes to continue in the role they have chosen for the duration of their working life. Again, in a similar fashion to the ecological systems theory (see section 3.2.6) there is a feedback loop with individuals consulting others within their microsystem. If they do choose to continue, they enter the career development tasks of holding on. Within this stage, an individual could go one of two ways. Firstly, they could continue to innovate and update their skills or knowledge. Alternatively, their career could “plateau” (Super et al., 1996, p. 134). This could be seen as problematic as here the individual is holding on to a position rather than trying to develop it. Indeed, this has particular relevance to the SENCO role which is subject to regular change and may need development (see Chapter 2). The final stage, disengagement is regarded as being within age bands over 65. Here, the developments tasks are seen as reducing impact within the role and developing others to continue in their position. This is due to

an overall plan to retire in the near future and organise a new life structure for themselves.

#### **4.7 Existing theory – A critique**

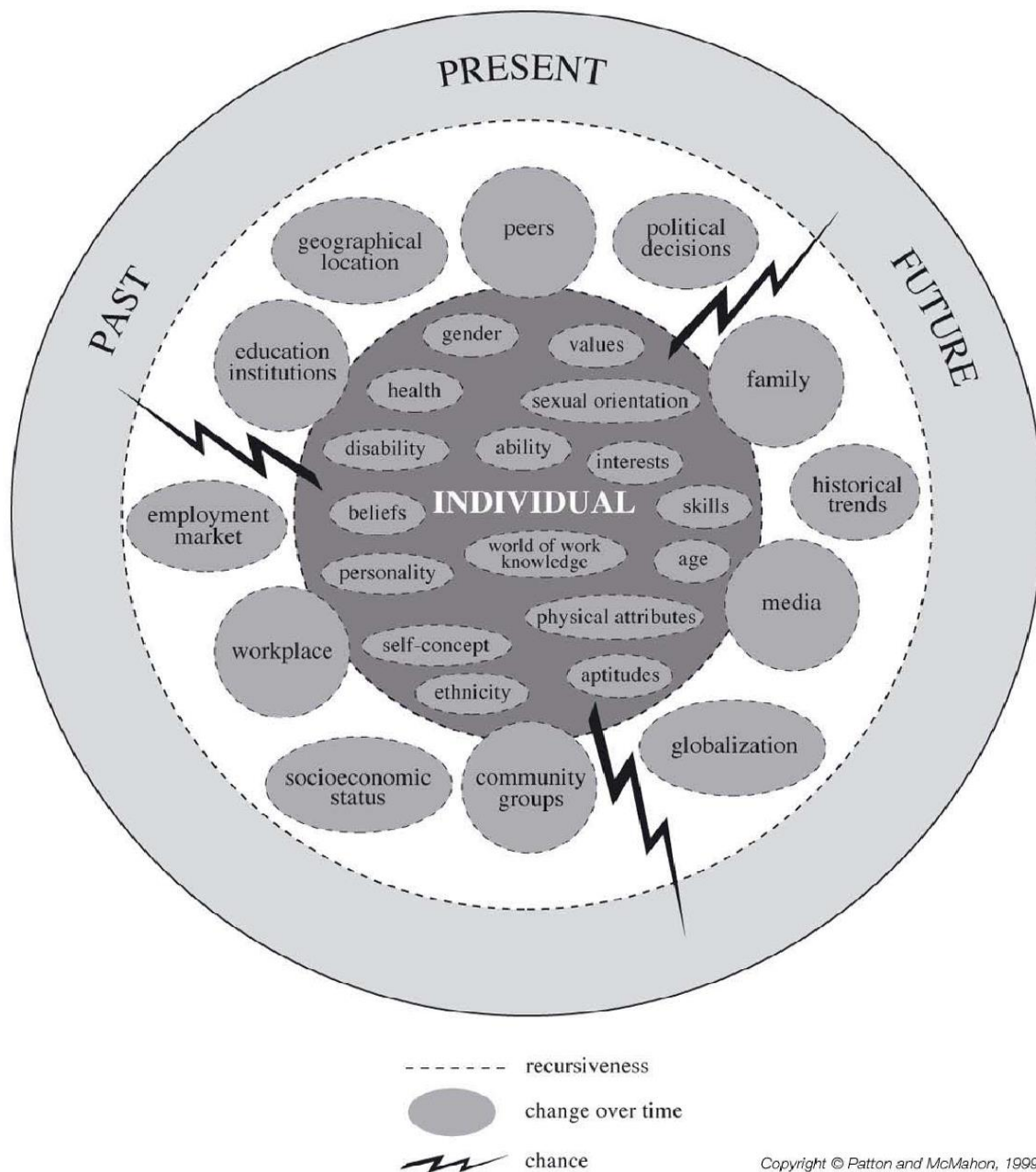
Cook, Heppner, and O'Brien (2002) argue that there are significant difficulties with many of the theoretical positions highlighted above. The first of these is that in understanding career decision-making processes there is an assumption of choice. As they highlight, choice is not a factor in any decision of career making for some people. Rather, for many people in limited economic circumstances, work becomes the need for the acquisition of financial resources; thus, it is a necessity rather than a choice. Additionally, career development suffers from too many underlying assumptions based on a worldview often associated with white, western, middle class males. These assumptions include individualism, the division of work and home roles, and that work is the principal factor in the lives of people. There is also an assumption that career choices are rational, and that career is linear and progressive in nature. For example, Super's theories are largely 20<sup>th</sup> century constructs. In turn, this "portrays the then current societal expectations for a life, especially a male life" (Super et al., 1996, p. 135). This is problematic not only for today's views of work but also in an analysis of a role which is believed to consist mostly of females (e.g., Mackenzie, 2012b; Szwed, 2007a).

The role of gender and ethnicity are at the heart of the arguments of Cook et al. (2002). They suggest that many of the assumptions do not apply to all groups. These include certain ethnicities where notions of individualism are often rejected in favour of a more collective approach to society (p. 293). In

addition, the role of women in the workplace is often viewed through the lens of either an archetypical male employee or a female employee without children or other life commitments (p. 293). Indeed, both Sullivan and Arthur (2006) and Cook et al. (2002) suggest that without understanding contextual factors, it is difficult to fully comprehend the career life choices of women and those from minority ethnic backgrounds. Cook et al. (2002) suggest that due to these concerns, the ecological model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1976) is an ideal analytical frame to circumvent the shortcomings of previous career theory. They suggest that this approach enables a more in depth understanding of contextual factors within career orientated decision making by understanding the interactive nature of the person and their environment.

#### **4.8 The systems theory framework of career development**

Given the issues outlined with other approaches to understanding career interest, Patton and McMahon (2014) propose the systems theory framework of career development (see Figure 7). This theoretical framework is designed to provide a more holistic understanding of the relationship between the person and their career. Here, they acknowledge the structure and definitions within the earlier form of Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1976, 1979), which positions an individual surrounded by the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem (Patton & McMahon, 2014, p. 248). Additionally, like Bronfenbrenner's later work, the theory also acknowledges that career needs change over time through the life span of the organism. These changes are not only related to the demands of the role within the workplace but also the impact of contextual factors such as family circumstance.



**Figure 7: The systems theory of career development (Patton & McMahon, 1999)**

At the heart of the system lies the person. The person is therefore described as an individual system in itself. In a similar fashion to the PPCT model, Patton and McMahon (1999) acknowledge that the person or individual is not a neutral, empty vessel as they also have a range of attributes that go beyond internal traits or personality factors (see section 4.5). Instead, the individual system

incorporates elements or sub systems such as race and gender as additional mediating variables in career interest.

The next test of a bioecological model is context (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Tudge et al., 2009). In the earlier work of Bronfenbrenner (1979), the context is differentiated by proximal through to distal systems. Patton and McMahon (1999, 2014) also acknowledge that context is not simple but rather is an amalgam of different elements. This contextual system is further delineated into the social system and the environmental-societal system. Within the social system, career decisions can be influenced by those within a person's microsystem such as interactions with peers and family members. Participation in groups and larger organisations can also be a contextual influencing factor in the development of a career. These groups may include community groups, work environments, and educational settings.

Rather than creating another separate system, the social system is embedded within the environmental-societal system. This bears some resemblance to elements of the exosystem and macrosystem posited by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005). Within this system, there is an acknowledgement that career choice can be enhanced, defined, or limited by a range of more complex but less tangible factors, such as the physical location of the individual, their socioeconomic status, and the state of the opportunities presented in the employment market at that moment. These more proximal factors are also influenced by contextual factors such as political decision making and global trends.

The final system within the systems theory framework also relates to a test of the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007; Tudge et al., 2009), that of time. In the systems theory framework, this is described as change over time. According to Super (1980), individuals pass through different work-focused life stages (see section 4.6.3). Patton and McMahon (2014) acknowledge Super's developmental stages; however, they propose that life stages move beyond this simplistic classification system. Instead, they suggest that there should be an understanding of how time intersects with all of the multiple factors within the contextual system. In a similar fashion to the idealised view of micro, meso and macrotime proposed by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007), Patton and McMahon (2014) also suggest that understanding the impact of time is broad. They suggest that rather than just examining the micro and meso life spans proposed by Super (1980), there should be an acknowledgement of career adaptability and that career decisions are not always simplistic and linear in nature. Rather, career over time can be influenced by recursive interaction with factors in the contextual system. These may include proximal changes such as changes in family circumstances. This may involve the birth of a child or the need to engage in caring duties. These may also include more distal macrotime changes. For example, a change of policy which eradicates the role of the SENCO would mean a significant career change for those already in this position.

## **4.9 Conclusion**

In this chapter a range of research literature has been considered. This has been reviewed utilising the structure of the person, process, context, and time



(Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Although many of the theories hold some utility to understanding those who take up the role of the SENCO, it has been established that those that examine the person are too reductionist and are devoid of context. Meanwhile, other theories may acknowledge context but may omit the important factor of time or vice versa. The chapter concluded with an overview of a recent attempt to overcome the difficulties of previous approaches to examining career interest by exploring the systems theory framework approach advocated by Patton and McMahon (1999, 2014). This approach suggests that career interest should be examined holistically rather than as a sum of its component parts. However, this does leave it open to ontological and epistemological criticism that if component parts such as age and gender influence the overall system, how can we know this?

#### **4.10 Restructuring the prima facia questions – The thesis research questions**

Within the introduction (see section 1.3.1), a range of prima facia questions were proposed for the current research:

- What are the vocational drivers of SENCOs?
- Do their past experiences influence their current practice and their vocational preferences?
- Do they differ in approach from other school leaders?
- How can work, vocational, and individual psychology help us understand the people fulfilling this role?
- What motivates these people to train for this job?

Throughout Chapters 2 and 3, these questions have been steadily considered and restructured. As a result of work in the previous chapters and exploration of the literature in the present chapter, the process of revision was concluded and the following questions were established:

- What are the factors or reasons reported by teachers on how they developed interest in the role of SENCO?
- How can we understand these reasons within the realms of the people and the contexts in which these decisions were made?

The present chapter has added further validity to the need to investigate the reasons why teachers become SENCOs within the context of how these decisions were made. However, the following questions need further consideration:

- Do they differ in approach from other school leaders?
- How can work, vocational, and individual psychology help us understand the people fulfilling this role?
- What motivates these people to train for this job?

Whether SENCOs differ in approach from other school leaders is noteworthy. The work of Holland (Holland, 1987; Spokane, 1996) would suggest that school leaders do indeed differ from teachers (see section 4.5.2). Indeed, as acknowledged in Chapter 2 some SENCOs are also leaders whereas others are not. However, this is not the fundamental issue with this question. The problem is with the structure of the question itself. The present thesis is concerned with interest in the SENCO role rather than operational efficiency whilst in it. Here,

the word 'approach' implies that the focus of this question relates to what the SENCO does whilst in role. Instead, there is a need to look at the differences between class teachers and school leaders who enter the role. These decisions need to be considered across a range of contextual factors that relate to why they want to do the role. However, the career interest theories explored would suggest in addition to the leader/non-leader dyad there are also other group differences that need a closer examination. For example, Mackenzie (2012a, 2012b) suggests that gender may contribute to difference, whilst age can also be a contributory variable (Super, 1980; Super et al., 1996).

However, in order to understand better these demographic differences, it is important to have an accurate overview of the population of SENCOs as a whole. The literature reviewed in Chapter 2 therefore needs additional consideration. This is not to review the findings, rather it is to consider the implications of the methodological choices made by the researchers against the claims made and the samples against which these claims were made. Only after this process is it possible to claim that a characteristic at the personal level may affect interest in the role when compared to variables at other levels in the ecological system. In addition, there is a need to utilise a reliable measure that can:

- Interrogate differences at the personal level accurately.
- Interrogate these differences through a measure that is derived from the context of those who aspire to fulfil the role of SENCO.

Therefore, the final set of questions are as follows:

#### Research question 1

- a. What are the factors or reasons reported by teachers on how they developed interest in the role of SENCO?
- b. How can we understand these reasons within the realms of the people and the contexts in which these decisions were made?

#### Research question 2

- a. What are the characteristics of the SENCO population?
- b. Does existing literature reflect this population?

#### Research question 3

What are the main factors underlying teachers' interest in becoming SENCOs?

#### Research question 4

Do these factors interact with school-level variables (i.e., school age range and school quality) and individual-level variables (i.e., SENCO education level, gender, actual or aspirant SENCO, leadership status, and age).

## **CHAPTER 5 – METHODOLOGY**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the research design and methods. More detail on the methods and conduct associated with each individual study is found through Chapters 7 to 9. The purpose of this chapter is to consider how the overall study was designed and conducted. It also addresses the nested nature of the studies and questions of ontology and epistemology. The chapter starts with an outline of the research questions and a range of design and strategy decisions that were required in order to address these. Next, a mixed methods approach is considered in more detail with a discussion of the different phases of research and methods used to collect data.

The study was conducted in three separate methodological components. These were specially designed to answer the research questions. These components include i) a small-scale local survey; ii) an examination of the school workforce data as documentary data; and iii) a large-scale national survey to derive factors and look for differences across these. Within this chapter, each phase of the research is considered separately; however, each phase is designed to complete the other stages as part of a sequential strategy to gain a clear overview of the reasons why people become SENCOs.

### **5.2 Research questions and strategy**

Before progressing with outlining the methodology within this section, it is useful to define in greater detail the research questions and the relationship between these and the methods proposed to collect the necessary data to respond to

these. Despite the reservations of some academics on whether research questions are necessary (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 59), it was considered that framing the research around questions was vitally important, albeit with the recognition as Thomas (2013, pp. 18-20) states that the questions will iteratively change over time from those originally proposed. The finished research questions shared below are sequential in nature with one directly influencing the data collection in another. They are as follows:

#### Research question 1

- a. What are the factors or reasons reported by teachers on how they developed interest in the role of SENCO?
- b. How can we understand these reasons within the realms of the people and the contexts in which these decisions were made?

#### Research question 2

- a. What are the characteristics of the SENCO population?
- b. Does existing literature reflect this population?

#### Research question 3

What are the main factors underlying teachers' interest in becoming SENCOs?

#### Research question 4

Do these factors interact with school-level variables (i.e., school age range and school quality) and individual-level variables (i.e., SENCO education level, gender, actual or aspirant SENCO, leadership status, and age)?

Figure 8 outlines these questions and approaches to the collection of data. The first set of research questions (1a and 1b) seek to probe the reasons why SENCOs in the early part of their SENCO career develop an interest in entering this role. There is also the recognition here, that any decision may also be contextually situated. The second set of research questions (2a and 2b) seek to understand the demographic characteristics of the target population at a national level. The third question seeks to identify any underlying factors that explain the motivation of people to become SENCOs. The fourth question aims to identify any potential variation within these factors across the different demographic groups in the wider population of SENCOs.

In Chapter 2, the development of legislation since the Warnock Report (Warnock, 1978) was investigated. Here, there is an acknowledgement that without this moment in history, the current system of SEN and the SENCO role as we know it may not even exist. This provides the context in which the SENCO role was first constructed, conceptualised, and formulated within England. The literature highlights a role that has been constructed iteratively over time in response to legislation. It also highlights how legislation has been shaped and subsequently adapted by not being sufficiently robust in the first instance. We are provided with an in-depth understanding of how the role has been operationalised in school settings and how this has led to a singular legal role, but which is operationalised at a heterogeneous level. This intersection of the law, schools, and individuals has been recognised conceptually as an ecology. Drawing upon theorists such as Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Anderson et al. (2014), there is an acknowledgement that we cannot understand concepts such as inclusion and indeed the role of the SENCO itself without recognising

the influence of other forces including individual schools, legislation, and societal culture.

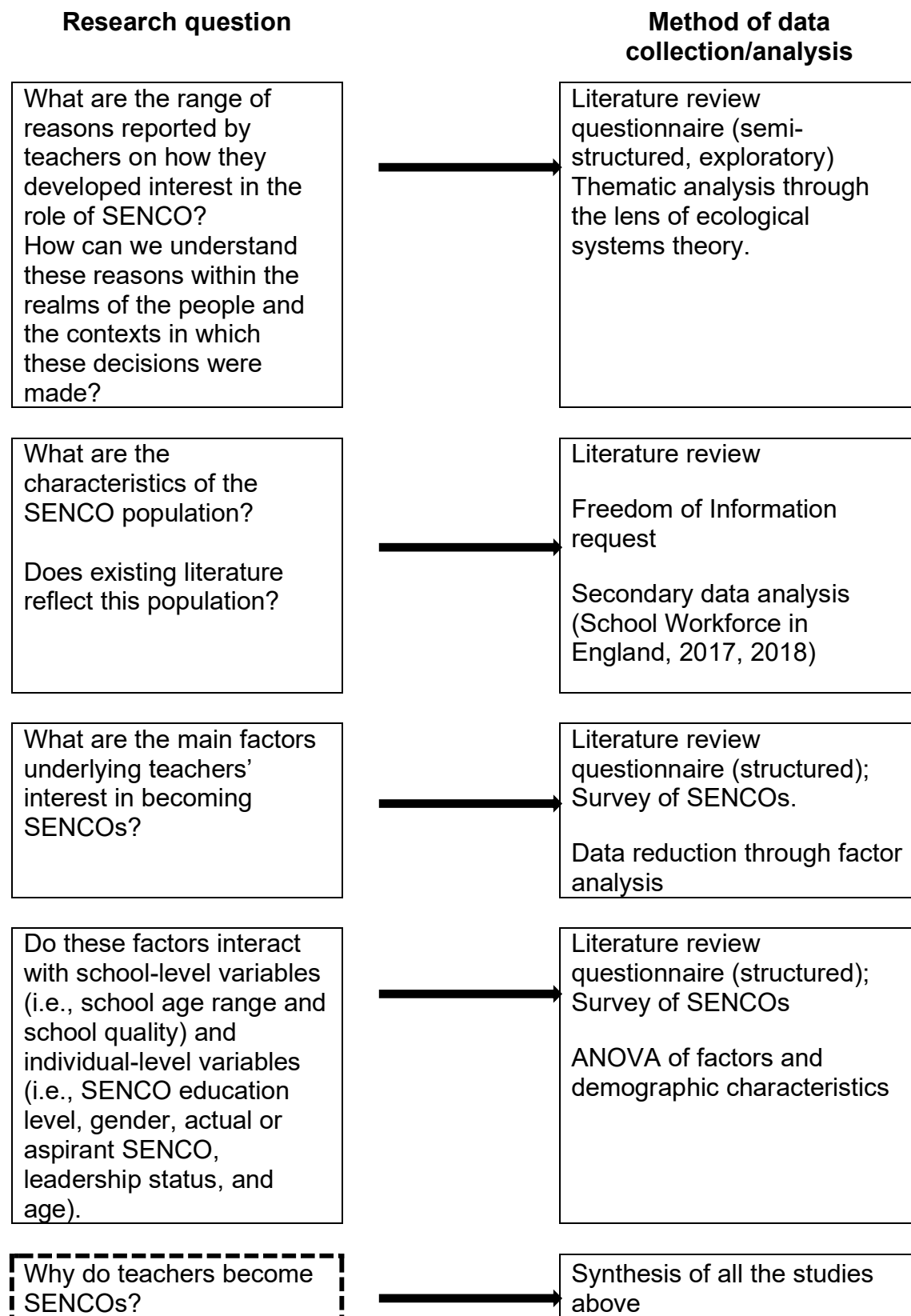
Despite a well-developed awareness of the complexities and difficulties with operationalising the role, we have limited understanding of the process of teachers becoming SENCOs. There is a need to further understand the transition between being in one role at a moment in time (a classroom teacher) and being a SENCO at another moment in time, especially the drivers that operate to catalyse this process. There is also a rich body of research on career interest. Again, this can be understood as internal to the person or located in processes and time. However, the instruments that have been derived from the different theoretical positions have little utility in understanding the complex question of why teachers become SENCOs. Rather, these instruments enable a better understanding of personality (McCrae & Costa, 2008), person-environment fit (Holland, 1992, 1996; Spokane, 1996), or the impact of age on career (Super, 1980; Super et al., 1996).

As a result, many of these theories hold limited utility in appreciating a process of employment transition into a role which is ultimately constructed from the development of legislation over time. A more recent theoretical understanding of career choice has been through an ecological lens. In a similar fashion to Bronfenbrenner (1979), Patton and McMahon (1999, 2014) propose that we need to be aware of the individual and the surrounding ecosystems of their workplace and the legislation in which this is situated. This approach provides greater conceptual utility and ecological validity but not the necessary instruments through which we can understand those who have become or are about to become SENCOs. Rather, its utility is firmly fixed in a projective sense



to enable individuals to better understand themselves and the workplaces to which they are suited.

There is now a need for research that provides an overview of the people who fulfil the role of SENCO. There are many unanswered questions about why people become SENCOs and whether the embeddedness of the role in policy is a contributory factor. This research is crucial in a time when there are concerns about both teacher retention and quality (National Audit Office, 2018) to enable policy makers, training providers, schools, and others to build upon the strengths and driving forces of their SENCOs to further drive and improve outcomes for the 14.9% (Department for Education, 2019a) of children in schools identified with SEN.



**Figure 8: Outline of research questions and methods of data collection**

### **5.2.1 Methodological pluralism**

#### *5.2.1.1 Ontology and epistemology*

Waring (2012) suggests that there are “four building blocks” (p. 15) that need to be considered when conducting research, ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods and that these sequential steps should be worked through when considering any series of research questions. Ontology is described as the nature and arrangement of the social world. It is suggested that this moves along a continuum from realism to social constructionism and social constructivism. Realism is understood as a singular reality. This reality is objective, immovable, and exists independently outside the perceptions of others. Social constructivism meanwhile suggest that realities differ according to personal perceptions.

A useful unit of analysis here would be the term career. Through a realist lens, it may be defined as a singular, linear progression through different working stages. This in turn, would be understood universally throughout different cultures and societies. However, Blustein, Palladino Schultheiss, and Flum (2004) suggest that different people perceive the notion of career and job roles differently. Here, these roles are not real, rather they are understood and socially constructed by individuals within those roles. This latter example would be akin to a socially constructed ontological position.

Waring (2012, p. 16) suggests that once the researcher has established their ontological position, the next ‘building block’ relates to the researcher asking questions about epistemology. Again, a basic overview is provided and

like realism and social constructivism, epistemology can be understood on a continuum. A realist ontology would hold closest to a positivist or post-positivist epistemology. At the other end of the continuum, holding closest to the social constructivist ontology, would be the epistemology of interpretivism. Positivist epistemologies assume that the social world can be directly observed and measured accordingly. On the other hand, interpretivist epistemologies assume that we can only see the social world indirectly through interpreting a range of differing occurrences. Thus, an interpretivist epistemology may be utilised to understand how people make sense of phenomena; for example, their own employment decisions. In contrast, positivist epistemologies may be used to better measure inter and intra group differences.

Methodology and methods are terms which are often confused (Waring, 2012, p. 16). Likewise, the term research design is often used inaccurately to describe methods (Gorard, 2013, p. 6). Waring (2012) argues that methodology should be the next step in the research process. It is suggested that the assumptions underpinning methodology relate to the epistemological positions outlined above. Positivist methodological assumptions should incorporate a potentially experimental or nomothetic design to enable the possibility of generalisation. On the other hand, interpretivism is concerned with understanding the unique nature of individuals and is therefore idiographic in nature. For example, a personality inventory such as that by McCrae and Costa (2008) may be issued to understand a range of nomothetic personality types employed within a role. In turn, this can be used to argue for the generalisation of a personality type being suitable for a role. Meanwhile, using idiographic

methodologies may be more useful to explore experiences that may have led people to engage with occupational roles.

Waring (2012) argues that the final step in the process is to establish the methods through which the data will be collected. These may include many common methods such as questionnaires, interviews, and other tools which may be used to collect data; however, these must be firmly rooted within the paradigms expressed above.

### ***5.2.2 Ontology and epistemology***

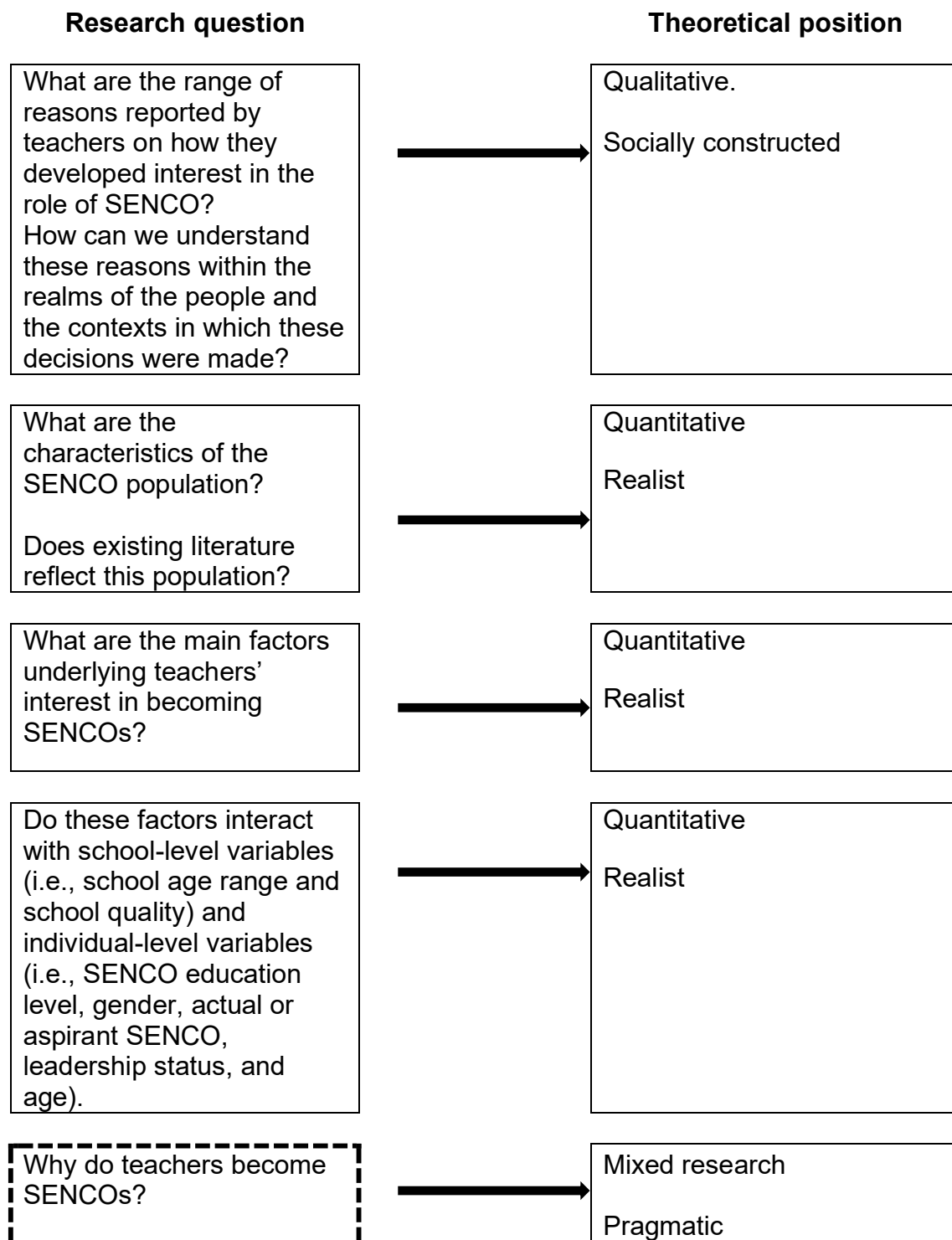
Although Waring (2012) provides a useful process, there is a disconnect between the questions in the present study and the choice of a singular ontological or epistemological position. For example, the first set of questions are exploratory and interpretivist in nature. The aim of these questions is to understand reasons shared by individual participants and draw themes from these. Further, as each context in which they work is also different, understanding context cannot be generalisable in nature. Consequently, this study is focused on drawing themes from multiple accounts of teachers making sense of their relationship with the different environments and situations which may influence decision making. This would seem to make the ontological assumptions of this question socially constructionist in nature. The epistemological position would be interpretivist as the researcher is aiming to understand the phenomena which underpin the mediating proximal processes that facilitate the development of interest in the role of the SENCO. However, this is not the case for later questions.

The third and fourth questions are approached from a different epistemological standpoint. Here, there is an assumption that the social world is not to be interpreted. Rather, these questions infer a reductionist approach to defining factors which can be generalised across SENCOs. In turn, these factors are designed to be used to measure demographic differences in an objective sense. These questions would therefore appear overtly positivist in nature. Ultimately though, these measures are still based on a bedrock of social constructionism to measure a set of specific, contextualised SENCO career interest perspectives.

Robson and McCartan (2016) discuss this issue at some length suggesting that despite the reservations of authors such as Guba (1987, cited in Robson & McCartan, 2016) of paradigmatic incompatibility, there are some who argue that the mixing of methodological approaches and epistemological positions is to be encouraged for a variety of reasons (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Greene, 2008). Indeed, as Robson and McCartan (2016) note, we are only able to use scientific measures to test inferential statistics because researchers have first made judgments about what can count to be of interest, what is valid, and the credibility of the statistical inferences. Furthermore, despite the positivistic scientific rigour apparent in texts such as Oppenheim (1992) originally published over 50 years ago, there is still a full description of the need to use interpretivist methodologies and methods such as interviews prior to constructing questionnaires. It is argued that this phase is needed to establish items that may be used to gather data which can then be subjected to inferential statistics.

#### *5.2.2.1 Methodological pluralism, ecological systems theory, and its derivatives*

This is not to say that there is an outright rejection of ontological and epistemological assumptions. Neither is it for the researcher to utilise a preferred philosophical perspective. Figure 9 highlights the ontological and epistemological nature of the questions. Here, there is evidence for the need to acknowledge the complexity and futility of utilising one ontological and epistemological standpoint to address nested, integrated but divergent sets of research questions, which when brought together can provide a useful, well developed understanding of the social world.



**Figure 9: Research questions and ontological and epistemological positions**



Using different types of studies is not new and has sometimes been oversimplified. For example, Creswell (2014) provides an overview of three types of research: quantitative methods, qualitative methods, and mixed methods studies. In the latter, Creswell (2014) suggests that these often consist of three types of design. A convergent parallel mixed methods design collects qualitative and quantitative data in parallel using both together to compare ideas during the subsequent interpretation of the data. An explanatory sequential mixed methods design starts with the collection of quantitative data followed by a qualitative data collection stage to further investigate the phenomena. An exploratory sequential mixed methods design reverses the former approach. Here, qualitative data collection is a precursor to the collection of quantitative data.

Again, this latter approach is not new, with Oppenheim (1992) already suggesting that all questionnaires should be based on questions derived from interviews and similar methods of data collection. Greene (2008) suggests that the use of mixed methods in fields such as education has come to the fore. This is due to a need for researchers who work in contexts that require “generalisability and particularity” (Greene, 2008, p. 7) to produce results which portray “magnitude and dimensionality as well as results that portray contextual stories about lived experience” (Greene, 2008, p. 7). In turn, it is suggested that this approach makes this type of research fundamentally different from that which starts with a philosophical or epistemological standpoint. Greene (2008, p. 8) describes this “dynamic interplay” as pragmatic in nature and akin to the approaches advocated by John Dewey.

An example of an effective mixed method approach is provided by Betancourt et al. (2011). They required a methodology to devise a culturally appropriate screening tool to evaluate a family strengthening intervention in Rwanda. This would be used instead of the ones available which they argue do not account for the cultural and societal complexities deriving from recent events within meso and macrotime. They highlight significant macrosystemic issues such as poverty, the spread of HIV, and genocide which has influence on the population in some form or another. In turn, these wider issues have impacted upon individual exosystems, with children having to take adult orientated roles to support their families. Consequently, within their individual microsystems, children are living with family members with HIV, anxiety, depression, and other associated challenges borne from the wider ecological system.

After an exhaustive literature search, they concluded that there were insufficient measures to understand and measure this contextually and culturally driven construct; a research problem not dissimilar to understanding the career interest of SENCOs. Instead, they saw the need to design and create measures based on a thorough contextual understanding of the research problem. Rather than describing their work as an exploratory, sequential design (Creswell, 2014), they proposed three sequential steps to data collection, analysis, and utilisation to meet their research needs.

Utilising the methodological adaption of Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed by Onwuegbuzie, Collins, and Frels (2013) it is possible to provide an overview of this approach. 1.) A qualitative study to identify and explore local perceptions. Work was conducted as small-scale research studies where individuals were

studied and questioned within their immediate environment. 2.) A subsequent quantitative study was built from this by using the data in the construction and validation of an instrument with sound psychometric properties. 3.) The instrument was applied to develop their research objectives. The final two studies were administered nationally and took less account of individual stories but instead made use of the vast amounts of numerical data derived from the scale constructed at stage two. Unfortunately, despite the rigour of this sequential research, what was missing from their work was further statistical and documentary analysis to understand the complexity of the population demographics in any way. Therefore, despite their acknowledgement that large numbers of their sample suffered from the upheaval, their documentary proof of how their work relates to the population as a whole is more limited. This secondary data would have provided a relevant context for the process outlined above.

### **5.3 Research design**

Prior to arguing for any research design, it is worth acknowledging the complexity and pragmatic nature of the design outlined in the section above. As outlined within this section, for writers such as Creswell (2014) designs are often described as qualitative, quantitative, or mixed in nature. Even when studies are regarded as mixed, there is often an overarching rigidity imposed upon their structure (e.g., Creswell, 2014; Denscombe, 2014) with studies being referred to with formulae such as “QUAL + QUANT” or “QUAL to quan” (Creswell, 2014, p. 280) to indicate the sequence of steps, the differentiation of the convergent or sequential natures of the studies, and the relative importance

of each study.

Gorard (2013, p. 6) argues that effective design should not be about specifying philosophical positions, methods of data collection, or analysis prior to research taking place as these should come after the design. He further suggests that the work of Creswell (2014) and others is less about design and more about methods and data collection. In the present research, the approach was not to fit within a framework; rather, to meet the requirements of the individual research questions and overarching aim of this work. Instead of using an exploratory sequential design (Creswell, 2014) or even a survey (e.g., Groves et al., 2009), I concluded that an adapted approach would be most effective.

Here, Gorard (2013, p. 6) uses the analogy of an architect to explain that when writers discuss qualitative and quantitative methods, they are considering the building blocks of the structure before considering the design and the materials needed. The design that follows does not make these potential errors. There is a definitive process to research design where three discrete elements need to be considered. These include the cases or participants and the way these may be assigned to specific subgroups, the sequence of the data collection, and any intervention that may be regarded as a manipulation. The following section outlines how these design elements above were applied in this study.

### ***5.3.1 Identification of cases (participants) and allocation to groups***

Gorard (2013, p. 76) argues that the first element of all research design is that

the set and range of cases must be sufficiently large enough to perform the required function to convince a sceptical audience. Indeed, here two terms are defined with the latter being defined according to the nature of a range of approaches employed.

#### *5.3.1.1 Population*

As Gorard (2013) explains, populations are the largest units that research is able to represent. In the present study the population consists of SENCOs. Groves et al. (2009) suggests that the ‘target population’ need to be understood using three criteria, the first of which is accessibility. The second criterion is that the population needs to be finite. The SENCO population in England consists of approximately 20,500 individuals. This is not an arbitrary figure, rather this is derived from legislation that each maintained school in England must employ a qualified teacher who is designated as the SENCO. In addition, there must be a recognition that there may be teachers who are interested in the role but may not yet be SENCOs. Thus, they may be any one of the qualified teachers currently teaching in English schools. The third criterion is that the population must exist within a specific time frame. For this, the population of SENCOs was defined as those who were in the role or teachers interested in entering the role within the period of 2016 to 2019. It is important to define the time frame in the present study as the role has changed over time (see Chapter 2 for full discussion). Unfortunately, little else is known about this population as the data is not published, hence research question 2a and 2b.

### 5.3.1.2 *Sample*

Robson and McCartan (2016, p. 276) suggest there are some occasions when it is possible to survey an entire population. In the present study, this was unfeasible. Thus, for the sake of any form of generalisation, a sample of the population must be considered. The sample may be one of two types, a probability sample/representative sample or a non-probability sample. As Robson and McCartan (2016, p. 276) suggest, an example of a probability sample would be a stratified, random sample where the population of SENCOs would be split into strata such as different ethnic groupings, varying levels of qualification, gender, or school leadership status. A sample would then be randomly selected and specifically designed to match this population profile; thus, it would be representative. Indeed, Oppenheim (1992) argues that an accurate sample such as this is more important than its size.

Notwithstanding, size is also important. Oppenheim (1992) suggests that the size of a sample can impact on research in a number of ways. Firstly, it is generally regarded that a larger sample will generally be more reflective of population parameters. In addition, the fourth research question of the present study is concerned with looking at differences between groups. In order to do this, there needs to be sufficient cases in each group to make this exercise meaningful. This can only be achieved within the confines of a larger sample.

This type of stratified data is available for the population of teachers as a whole and indeed for groups such as headteachers and other key personnel (see Department for Education, 2017b; Department for Education, 2018b). This dataset would allow for the design of a stratified random sample; however, this

data is not published for the SENCO role which made this approach unavailable for the current study, hence the need to address this in questions 2a and 2b. Instead, the present study consists of purely a non-probability sample. This approach risked the precision of the survey and its ability to make generalisations (see Gorard, 2013, pp. 79-85; Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 279). Notwithstanding, this approach to sampling has been used to a greater or lesser extent over every sample that has been used to provide voice to the population of SENCOs across England since 1994 (see Chapter 7 for a more detailed review) and is a reasonable compromise to make (Oppenheim, 1992).

#### *5.3.1.3 Understanding why teachers become SENCOs*

In the first phase of the study, the sample was restricted to SENCOs in training at the researcher's University (n = 88). They were likely to be at the start of their SENCO career, as legislation stipulates that all SENCOs need to achieve the NASENCo within three years of starting the role. In addition, there would be several qualified teachers working in schools who aspire to be SENCOs who would be represented by this strategy, their interest in the role being demonstrated by their engagement with the NASENCo programme. The sample was admittedly opportunistic in nature and open to the criticism levelled by Robson and McCartan (2016) that this approach is "cheap and dirty" (p. 281). However, the sample met all the characteristics of the study, was of sufficient size, was professionally homogenous in nature, directly related to the research questions, and was within the constraints of a sole researcher with limited resources.

#### *5.3.1.4 Understanding the SENCO workforce*

The next phase of the study sought to overcome some of the lack of understanding of the SENCO workforce. The advice presented through supervision was to contact universities, local authorities, and other interested parties to ask for the demographic profile of their cohorts or workforce in the hope that this would provide an overview of the general population. Instead, I opted to conduct a Freedom of Information request to elicit this information directly from the Department for Education. To ensure that this provided a stable account of the population, the same request was submitted for the identical data in the following year. These data could then be compared to overall teacher data to analyse differences between the two populations.

#### *5.3.1.5 Factors influencing the career interest of SENCOs in English schools*

In the next phase of the study, the sample was again opportunistic in nature; however, it was deemed necessary for the sample field to be significantly increased to gain the views of a wide variety of SENCOs in training and actual SENCOs. A questionnaire instrument was shared with participants on the next cohort of the NASENCo award at the researcher's university. The next strategy was to contact the 34 providers of the NASENCo award. The programme lead at each institution was emailed individually in October 2018 asking whether they would share an online version of the questionnaire instrument with their NASENCo students using their university online learning environment. A letter from the researcher was added to the foot of the email which could be used to make an announcement for this purpose alongside a direct link to the



instrument. The call was responded to by 25 programme leads who offered to distribute the survey. In addition, three local authorities and two private support services within the West Midlands region of England were approached and agreed to distribute the questionnaire instrument at SENCO network events. This approach resulted in 618 valid responses.

SENCOs were the only group approached in this study with no comparator group (e.g., teacher, subject coordinators). There were several reasons for this decision. Robson and McCartan (2016) suggest that “design is concerned with turning research questions into projects” (p. 71). As the research questions only concerned the SENCO it was not deemed necessary for any comparator group to be used. To elaborate on this reasoning, it is worth reflecting on the first research question: ‘What are the range of reasons reported by teachers on how they developed interest in the role of SENCO?’ There is little relevance to the question on whether the reasons differ from those of other teachers. The research aims are not to explore if SENCOs have different attitudes, drivers, or motivations from other teachers. Although this may be warranted, it is beyond the scope of, or indeed the aims of the present study.

Within the current study there was a need to undertake some comparisons, but this was limited to looking for differences within the SENCO population. Again, it is worth being mindful of the warning of Field (2018) and Gorard (2013), amongst others, who suggest that prior to an examination of group differences, there must be a clear hypothesis about what we expect to find and an initial design. Without this initial design, Gorard (2013, p. 98) suggests that by calculating hundreds of scores, the researcher is highly likely

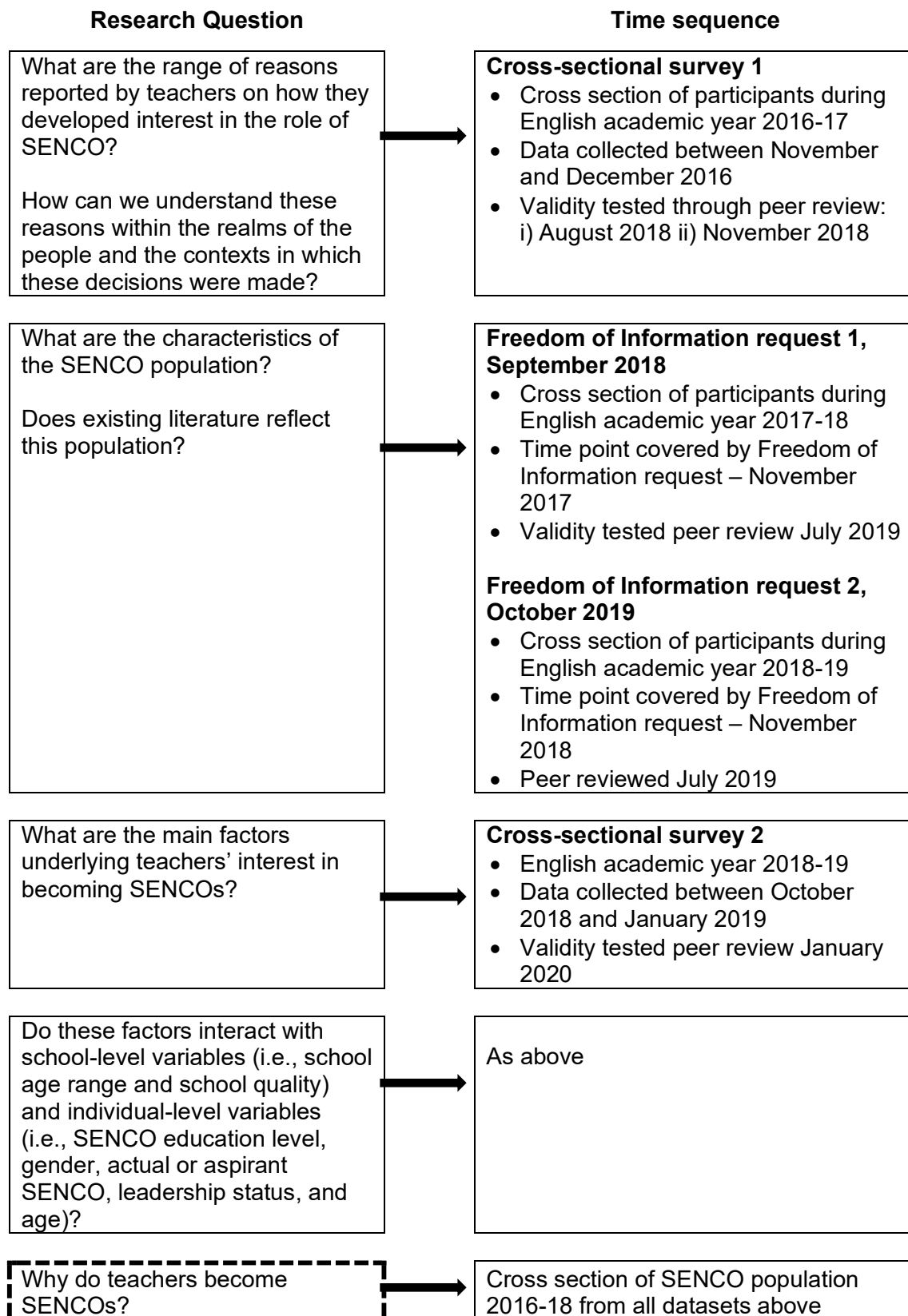
to find a number will prove statistically significant. To prevent this from happening and scores being calculated post hoc, it was decided that any examination of group differences would be restricted to the same categories of teacher demographic data collected by the DfE. Due to the exploratory nature of the study and the lack of research in this field, it would have been unwise and presumptive to make hypotheses. Rather, any significant result would highlight the need for both further analyses and research.

### ***5.3.2 Time sequence of data collection and interventions***

The current research aims to add a better understanding of why people become SENCOs. Robson and McCartan (2016) suggest that designs tend to be either descriptive, predictive, or explanatory. This is tempered with the warning that designs are not limited to these singular objectives. Rather, they may incorporate more than one objective. The current study is descriptive in nature as the primary concern was with documenting the career interest of SENCOs. As earlier sections described, although the formal role of the SENCO has existed since 1994 this role has changed over time. The aim of the current research was to understand why people choose to undertake this complex role now. As, there was no desire to account for how interest in the SENCO role has changed over time there was no need for a longitudinal design.

Instead, the present study has been designed to be a cross-sectional fixed design. This design provides a snapshot at one point in time (Gorard, 2013, p. 111) and with no active or passive experimentation (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 139). One of the difficulties with this approach relates again to the quality of sampling. In ideal circumstances, the sample needs to reflect

the population. However, as already outlined, the lack of a stable and accurate population dataset made accurate sampling difficult. The time period for the cross section of the population ranged over a three-year period. Figure 10 provides an overview of the time sequence of the data collection against each research question. Each time period relates to an academic year in England with the entire data collection taking place over the period of three academic years. This may open the data to criticism that the research did not target the same population; however, as Gorard (2013) suggests, a cross-sectional design should not infer that all data is collected at the same time acknowledging the reality of fieldwork and the constraints and the size of the team gathering the data.



**Figure 10: Sequence of data collection and testing for validity**

The second reason for the sequence of the data collection period was the cumulative nature of the project. Oppenheim (1992) argues that robust survey design requires an equally robust process. Included, in this is a process of data collection to derive themes from which questions may be drawn. Here, it is important to stress that any set of survey questions must be based on some substance. This was partially the purpose of cross-sectional survey 1. Its focus was different from other parts of the process and was qualitative in nature. The purpose of this stage “is essentially heuristic: to develop ideas and research hypotheses rather than to gather facts and statistics. It is concerned with trying to understand how ordinary people think and feel about the topics of concern to the research” (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 67).

Again, Oppenheim (1992) suggests that the way samples are drawn are also essential in survey design. In cross-sectional survey 1, the purpose of the sample was to understand what early career SENCOS felt and utilise these findings to construct meaningful questions for the later studies. Here, the sample was opportunistic in nature. The second survey was also non-probabilistic, but the sample could be compared to the population for representativeness due to the work conducted in study two. This enables the potential to make generalisations with some degree of accuracy.

An integral part of the design was the iterative testing of the validity of the different phases of the research. This was particularly important given the sequential, cumulative, interdependent nature of the work. It was important to test the content validity of all parts of the work throughout to ensure that the results of these phases and any instruments derived from them were valid. Wood, Nezworski, Stejskal, Garven, and West (1999) explain that validity is

defined as what any instrument claims to measure. Throughout this research, each phase depends on the accuracy and validity of the previous stage. Again, a solution was presented to ensure this validity and there was a process of iterative evaluation of each phase through expert review. An adapted multistage approach was used during this research; this is outlined as part of Figure 10.

In the first instance, the first phase of the research, cross-sectional study 1, was collated as a paper for a published journal and subjected to peer review. It was intended to use the sub themes from this study to provide the items for cross-sectional study 2; therefore, it was essential that the rigour of the analysis and validity of each sub theme was tested accordingly. Double-blind peer review was considered acceptable as an alternative to expert review and less susceptible to bias through selection. Following an initial review, the themes were adapted and reconstructed prior to the article being resubmitted to and accepted by the journal in December 2018. An adapted version of this article (Dobson & Douglas, 2020b) is found in Chapter 6.

The next stage of the research was to establish the population of SENCOs. Again, the literature review, analysis, and data were opened to peer review. An adapted version of this article (Dobson, 2019) is found in Chapter 7. The final two phases of the research were conducted together using an instrument derived from the themes established in the first phase of the research. Here, there were two elements of validity to question. First, was the validity and interpretation of the factor structure. Second, was the validity of the use of these factors to define demographic differences. Again, this was opened to expert review through the double-blind peer review process. An adapted

version of this article (Dobson & Douglas, 2020a) is found across Chapters 8 and 9.

## **5.4 Methods**

### ***5.4.1 Combined sequential research methods***

As argued in the previous sections, the need for a variety of methods for this piece of research derives partly from the research questions and the lack of appropriate instruments and measurements. The approach was directly related to the need to answer a variety of complimentary but different research questions. This involved a fixed, sequential design starting with an exploratory study to develop an understanding of the different reasons why people become SENCOs. The second stage of the project was to understand the characteristics of the SENCO population. This involved conducting a Freedom of Information request to elicit an accurate yet hitherto unpublished dataset. The next phase of the study involved using the data derived from the first phase to provide content for a survey of a national sample. The data from this study would be used to construct factors and look for demographic differences across these factors for the different groups identified in the population described in the second phase of the study.

All methodological approaches have limitations, with the current study being vulnerable to criticism that it provides a simplistic overview. Instead, a wholly interpretive position could have been adopted with in-depth interviews replacing the last phase of the research. This could have been used to explore a small group of SENCOs' interest in the role. Although this may be considered

as an approach to additional research later, it would not provide data which could be reduced to factors and tested using tools to support statistical generalisation – thus the final research question would have been unanswered. It was considered, therefore, that the most prudent strategy would be to use different approaches to answer the diverse set of research questions. The data gathered from these different approaches could then be used to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the population of SENCOs and their interest in the role.

Another issue relates to how existing literature is used. One of the difficulties in conducting a sequential study over an extended period of time is that some of the literature can become dated if it is self-contained within a single review. This is especially the case in a field such as education where there are often significant policy changes resulting from changes in administrations. Alternatively, the research questions posed may have been answered by studies being conducted by other researchers working on similar projects. Indeed, this latter point is raised by Robson and McCartan (2016, p. 65) who suggest that there are a range of pitfalls to avoid when formulating research questions. These include deciding on methods prior to formulating research questions, asking questions that have already been answered, and determining findings before research has been completed. As a result, literature was revisited at the start of each study to further refine and focus the research questions; ascertain whether new research could inform the study; and justify any methods used. These short literature reviews (which cross-reference to literature review chapters) are found at the start of each study.



## **5.4.2 A local survey of SENCOs on the NASENCo programme**

### **5.4.2.1 Development of the questionnaire instrument**

Given the lack of research instruments and the need to gather as many diverse views as possible, the questionnaire was designed to be simple and open ended in nature (see Appendix A). It consisted of a short introduction explaining the objective of the questionnaire, informing participants that the aim was to find out reasons why the participant had started to train to be a SENCO. This was followed by an explanation of the four parts which formed the structure of the questionnaire. These included why the individual chose the role, information about the participant, information about their post, and finally information about the establishment in which the participant worked.

Part one of the questionnaire was entitled 'About why you chose this role'. The title was followed by the statement 'Working on your own, list at least three (more if you can!) reasons why you chose to become a SENCO'. This method is both simple and open to criticism. Indeed, in the initial peer review of the study a reviewer commented on the 'superficial nature' of the methodology. However, the questionnaire was specifically designed to be unstructured as at this stage the concern was with the development and addition of clarity to the research problem. The lack of prior research in the field of interest in the SENCO role made specifying a set of items unwise as this would have had no theoretical or research orientated basis. Instead, by not offering participants access to these framing questions, the aim was to persuade participants to record in their own terms matters that were relevant to the aims of the project.

The second part of the questionnaire differed from this aim. Here, the categories related to personal characteristics. To aid later comparison against national statistics produced by the DfE, the categories of age, gender, ethnic background, and highest qualification were identical to those asked in the annual workforce survey (Department for Education, 2017b). In the third part of the questionnaire, specific questions were asked about the participant's role in school. These questions were asked based on existing research to provide an overview of how participants compared against existing literature in the field. These included whether the individual was a class teacher, middle manager, or senior manager (see Curran, 2019; Layton, 2005; Tissot, 2013), and the percentage of time allocated to the role and the type of pay scale and additional allowances (see Curran et al., 2018 for a lengthy discussion). The final section elicited further information about the participant's establishment. Questions included the type of school such as primary and secondary, the school role, and the Ofsted grade of the school.

#### *5.4.2.2 Piloting the questionnaire instrument*

The questionnaire was piloted twice. On the first occasion, it was shared with members of a university support service to evaluate readability, clarity of instructions, and layout. After this initial check, the tables were reformatted and the font size increased. It was further sampled on a small group of 10 SENCOs from a previous cohort. No changes were made after this stage. Although, the responses were valid, the data were not included in the final study.

#### *5.4.2.3 Distribution of the questionnaire instrument*

The questionnaire was distributed to three separate cohorts of students on three separate course days of the NASENCo programme at the researcher's university in November 2016. In total, 88 questionnaires were distributed during all three sessions. The session started with a brief introduction to the research and ethical considerations such as anonymity and confidentiality were shared with participants (see Appendix B). One reservation with this approach was the impact of the relationship between the researcher and participants as one of tutor and students. This could open the research to potential issues of bias such as prestige bias. Here, Chellappoo (2020) suggests that in prestige hierarchies, subordinates (in this case students) may seek out interaction and observe their 'superiors' (in this case lecturer). Through this process of social learning the subordinate would eventually copy the superior. Here, there is a potential for the responses provided in the questionnaire to be what the lecturer wants to hear. However, Chellappoo (2020) also suggests that any explanatory value of prestige bias relates to whether any copying is either deliberate or goal directed and advantageous. Indeed, this issue was highlighted by the University ethics committee after an ethical review was submitted (see Appendix C) who suggested that the name of the researcher should be anonymised to prevent an individual feeling obliged or pressured to take part in the study (see Appendix D) before ethical approval was granted (see appendix E). Altering the letter was a straightforward change but to add rigour, this issue was considered in greater depth. Robson and McCarten (2016) further argue that there is always going to be issues of bias within all forms of research that involve people. Indeed, they go on to suggest that this is a particular issue when there is a direct relationship between the researcher and the respondents, as in the present study. Here

participants may not answer questions truthfully but instead with answers that may be regarded favourable due to societal norms and expectations. To mitigate for this, the questionnaire was distributed at the start of the course so there had been insufficient time for the students to form an accurate picture of the belief systems and attitudes of the researcher (despite the fact that they did not know who this was). The participants were also informed that the confidential, anonymous nature of their responses would ensure that they could share their thoughts without either identification or recrimination (See Appendices F and G).

However, this was not the only way to account for whether bias was present in the responses. Robson and McCarten (2016, p. 172) suggest that searching for evidence of negative cases provides a tool for mitigating against social desirability bias. Here they propose that the researcher should spend time trying to find examples in the data to disconfirm any hypothesis or theory that they may hold. Although holding a hypothesis aligns more closely with experimental fixed designs, it is reasonable to assume a hypothesis that teachers want to become SENCOs for positive reasons such as career development or helping children.

The data were therefore examined to establish whether there were examples of negative cases or alternatively cases where respondents drew upon a specific reason for entering the role. In the first instance, respondents reported a range of negative or neutral reasons. These included a desire to move away from classroom teaching. Reasons also included the desire to protect their employment from the threat of redundancy or justify their pay range. This is exemplified by one participant who responded to 'why did you

choose to become a SENCO?’ in the following manner, “I didn’t! I was Deputy Head and the SENCo left. No-one was keen on the role and Head and I decided I should do it” (BP4c). Meanwhile, another respondent reported, “after nine years of being in the classroom, I was fed up with the monotonous cycle of planning, marking, assessing, change in governmental ideas and was contemplating leaving teaching” (BP7c).

Respondents also provided concrete examples of why they wanted to enter the role. These did not discuss higher concepts such as inclusion. Rather, they were grounded in their own experiences as parents or people who had experiences of SEN in their own right. For example, one respondent reported, “I chose to become a SENCO as a result of having my own child with her SEN needs who was really badly treated by a school who did not understand her needs and did not provide for her needs” (BS1c).

Whilst another respondent reported

My cousin’s daughter XXXX was diagnosed with a brain tumour at the age of 12. She was left unable to walk or talk but still able to access education in a mainstream setting. One day my cousin told me that for XXXX’s geography GCSE field trip they had to sample stones along the beach. XXXX was left at the top of the beach whilst her peers undertook the task. XXXX, in a wheelchair could not access the beach. That can’t be right! I felt outraged. As a SENCo I can ensure that her experiences are not repeated.

(BC1a)

This analysis provided sufficient evidence to suggest that the results from the survey were on the whole trustworthy and worthy of further consideration. In total, 88 valid questionnaires were returned.

#### *5.4.2.4 Data coding and data entry*

At the end of the third day, the process of data entry and organisation began. To start, each returned questionnaire was given a code for identification. Multiple copies of the original questionnaire document were created in Microsoft Word and each copy was labelled with the code for identification. The handwritten questionnaires were transcribed by the researcher into an electronic version. An additional copy was made of these data and stored as a 'raw' file should the data need to be accessed later. The data from part one of the questionnaire was then added to a simple table with three columns created in Word. In the first column, the participant number was recorded. In the second column, the responses from section one of the questionnaire for each participant were copied across. The third column would be used for the second step of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

#### *5.4.2.5 Analysis of questionnaire data*

The questionnaire data were analysed using the six stages of thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), which is explored further in Chapter 6. The first step of 'familiarization' had been achieved due to the transcription of the data. Step two or 'coding' was conducted within the table produced in the previous action. Here, codes were added against the response of each participant. Each code was labelled with the participant reference number,

which enabled each code to be easily cross referenced to the original data prior to the next steps in the process. The labelled codes were transferred across into an Excel document. After this supplementary stage, themes were generated (step 3) and subsequently reviewed (step 4) before being finally named (step 5). The apparent simplicity of the outline of this task belies the complexity of the work. Theme generation (step 3) and review (step 4) was a complex, iterative process to ensure the themes were stable and could be labelled (step 5). The final step of writing up (step 6) was conducted and subsequently peer reviewed through submission to a journal. Following the expert review, adjustments were made at steps three, four, and five.

#### ***5.4.3 An analysis of secondary data – The national population of SENCOs***

This phase of the research was designed to rectify a lack of an accurate statistical overview of the SENCO population. The aim was to establish an accurate cross-sectional statistical representation of the SENCO population in England at two points in time. This would serve two purposes. Firstly, an accurate overview of the population of SENCOs is resolved. Secondly, a clear understanding of the SENCO population would add to the robust nature of the current research.

##### ***5.4.3.1 Data and categories***

On an annual basis, in November of each year the DfE collects data to establish both the size and characteristics of the school workforce. Following the submission of these data by each school, the DfE produce a range of

summary statistics. This usually occurs at the beginning of the following academic year in September or October; thus, the most recent dataset is always one academic year out of date. Schools forward these data to the DfE through a portal using a prescribed set of codes and criteria. Thus, this statistical return is only as accurate as the school-level data, which is inputted into the database in the first instance. The data provides an overview of a range of characteristics of the school workforce within state funded schools. These include data on areas such as teacher sickness absence levels, teacher qualifications, and average salaries. The data provides an overview of different grades of teacher including those paid on the class teacher scale and those paid on the leadership scale. For teachers in secondary schools, there is additional specific information including the subjects that teachers teach and whether they are qualified to teach this subject area.

From this database, it is possible to compare any sample of teachers to the corresponding population from this dataset. However, this is problematic for the SENCO as following this method there is an assumption that the population of SENCOs is identical to the population of teachers. One way to circumvent this issue was to use the Freedom of Information Act (2000). This provides individuals with the right to make a request to a range of public organisations or selected private bodies with public liabilities. Prior to submitting the Freedom of Information request, a search was conducted within the disclosure log of the gov.uk website. This preliminary search of the log suggested that no such Freedom of Information request had been made. The Freedom of Information request was then specified in writing through the medium of email as suggested by government guidance. The process through which this request was



conducted, and the corresponding data is fully outlined in Chapter 7. The same request was made one year later. This allowed for an analysis of another cross section of SENCOs in the subsequent academic year to evaluate the stability of the characteristics of the SENCO population.

#### *5.4.3.2 Analysing the data*

Analysis of the data took two discrete forms. Firstly, the resulting data on the composition of the SENCO population was cross tabulated against the population of all teachers (including SENCOs). This was to compare both populations for any discrepancies. Secondly, it was compared against a selection of research that had been conducted since the inception of the SENCO role. The nature of the data, a full description of how these data were accessed, and the criteria for selection of articles for review are outlined in Chapter 7.

#### **5.4.4 A national survey of SENCOs**

The final stage of the research was designed to provide a broader overview of career interest within the SENCO population and reduce the data collected within the first study into recognisable and testable factors. These factors would allow for further analysis of whether there were any differences in interest in the role between SENCOs with different demographic characteristics. After ethical amendments (see Appendix H), the research took the form of a large descriptive survey. This was conducted using a questionnaire as a research instrument. Although the approach to data collection is not new, the fact that the instrument was specifically based on earlier tested and peer reviewed research

of the career interest of SENCOs makes the content of the work novel and unique.

#### *5.4.4.1 Development of the questionnaire instrument*

The first part of the questionnaire was a cover letter (see Appendix I). The letter started with the aim of the survey and provided a justification as to why its completion would be advantageous to participants. The letter then defined who was included in the survey. This was to ensure that only those who were already SENCOs or aspirant SENCOs completed the instrument. In order to encourage a high response rate, the letter outlined several provisions to encourage both participation and completion of the instrument. Firstly, it was emphasised that the results of the survey would eventually be accessible to those who were initially motivated to take part. Dissemination was described as happening through publication and presentations to different bodies, including local authorities and the National SENCO Provider Group. Secondly, the structure of the instrument was explained in two short bullet points to indicate that there would be limited requirement for any form of written response, followed by an underlined bold statement that the questionnaire should take no more than 10 minutes. The third strategy related to the final statements on the letter, which were written in bold type, thanking participants for their participation and asking for the questionnaire to be completed. The covering letter clearly explained the ethical arrangements and the nature of informed consent within the study. Participants were informed of data protection protocols and who would have access to the data. There were also statements to ensure that participants understood that participation was voluntary and additional

guarantees of anonymity for themselves, their schools, and their responses. Explicit, informed consent was also outlined. Participants were informed that by completing and returning the questionnaire, they were giving their consent to answer the questions. They also provided consent for these data to be used for the purposes outlined in the study. The researcher's email was provided to receive any questions, queries, or concerns alongside the name of the first supervisor should any contact need to be made about the conduct of the supervisee. One participant used this method to contact with a concern about the background that the University embeds within the online survey application.

The questionnaire (see Appendix J) consisted of two discrete sections: a scale and a range of closed questions, and questions involving short phrases. This was another intentional strategy as the instrument was designed to be accessed through a variety of media including mobile phones and tablets. The scale was situated first within the instrument. This was to enable those people who were interested in answering why they had become SENCOs an opportunity to answer questions relating to the objective of the study explained in the covering letter. This was intended to maintain motivation, thus decreasing the potential for uncompleted instruments. There were also strategies to reduce the word count, enhance the readability, and lessen the time needed for completion. Here, the initial items on the scale were preceded by a singular statement asking participants to rate how important items were in contributing towards them developing an interest in becoming a SENCO. To add clarity about time periods open to respondents, they were informed they could reply using present or past experiences. The statement was followed by 32 individual items. These items were to be responded to using a five-point Likert scale.

Response categories ranged between 'extremely important' through to 'not at all important'. Each item was designed to be short, with good readability, thus improving the accessibility of the text, speed of response, and increased likelihood of completion. Perhaps unusually, there was no option of a statement such as 'other' or 'not applicable'. This was not seen as necessary as any statement that was not an interest in becoming a SENCO could be recorded as such. As there is no specific measure for collecting the career interest of SENCOs, all 32 items within the scale were adapted from the 32 sub themes identified by Dobson and Douglas (2020b), an expanded version of which forms Chapter 6 within this thesis. The demographic data asked for was identical to that in section 5.4.2.1.

#### *5.4.4.2 Piloting the questionnaire instrument*

The questionnaire was piloted twice. On the first occasion, it was shared with members of a university support service to assess the readability, clarity of instructions, and layout. Following this, several changes were made to the layout of the instrument to aid readability. The instrument was further sampled on a small sample of SENCOs. No further changes were made at this stage.

#### *5.4.4.3 Distribution of the questionnaire instrument*

The distribution list included universities, local authorities, and private advisory services. The survey was also promoted using social media. Paper copies of the questionnaire were distributed to participants on course days at the researcher's university. Paper copies of the questionnaire were also distributed through local authorities who partner the university within the West Midlands

through a range of SENCO network events.

A link to an electronic version of the survey was sent out to an additional two types of organisation. The first of these were two small independent advisory services, one within the West Midlands and the second within the East Midlands. This approach was pragmatic in nature due to both cost limitations and the potential for questionnaires being easily returned. The second was an email that was sent to a range of higher education providers who deliver the NASENCo programme. Of the 32 providers approached, 25 agreed to share an email with a link to the survey across their current students and recent alumni. This approach returned 618 responses.

#### *5.4.4.4 Analysis of questionnaire data*

The questionnaire data were analysed using IBM SPSS v.26. The first stage of this process was to answer research question 4 and extract factors from these data. In the first instance, the 32 items were tested to ensure that all assumptions were met including the distribution of responses, sample size, and multicollinearity. Following this, the items were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The EFA yielded four factors that were used in the next part of the study (see Chapter 8 for a more detailed analysis of the construction of these factors). To answer research question 4, the factors were analysed against different sets of demographic data through a series of repeated measures factorial ANOVAs. These were designed to see whether these factors might interact with school-level and individual-level variables (see Chapter 9 for a more detailed overview of these analyses). The studies described in section 5.4.4 form Chapters 8 and 9 in the thesis. In turn, these chapters are an

expanded version of Dobson and Douglas (2020a)

## **5.5 Ethical considerations**

This final section provides an overview of the ethical considerations within this study. Ethical considerations like all aspects of research are also open to debate (e.g., Comstock, 2013; Oliver, 2010). Here, two distinct considerations need to be considered: the ethical conduct and the ethical drivers for the study. At all times, ethical conduct was considered through close adherence to the guidelines of The British Educational Research Association (2011, 2019) and the British Psychological Society (2009, 2018). In addition, the studies involving human participants were all submitted to the University for full ethical review by the Humanities & Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee. Further discussion on the ethical conduct of each study is outlined in the section above and in each chapter.

The other ethical consideration relates to the ethical drivers of the study. Here, universities and researchers are charged with “a special obligation to pursue the common good” (Comstock, 2013, p. 274). However, this simple statement is also open to debate. The intention of this research is to generate knowledge which is of genuine value and use to society. It is intended that this research can be used ethically by policy makers and others to understand the population of SENCOs better. This will enable schools and SENCOs to have a joint understanding of the role and the drivers for the role. In turn, this will enable schools and SENCOs to work together to support children with SEN. The research is also intended to support policy makers who may be involved with defining the professional characteristics of the SENCO role. In this case,

the thesis provides a voice for the SENCOs to enable their participation in the process.

However, Oliver (2010, p. 11) argues that the idea of the common good is more nuanced and can be subdivided into intrinsic and instrumental good. Indeed, some research will share characteristics from both theoretical positions. An intrinsic good refers to the fundamental qualities of an idea. For example, the term 'inclusion' implies a common good that all people should be included in education and society. Here, the SENCO may be seen as the instrumental good as they are regarded as being the agents of inclusion. Thus, they are the instrument through which inclusion may be defined in certain settings. In the present study, the intent of the research is to understand the SENCOs better so that they may support the intrinsic good of the value of inclusion. This is important to declare. What cannot be determined is how the research may be used by others and potentially put to another or inappropriate use.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

This chapter provides an overview and justification of the research methodology and approaches to data collection and analysis. The design is considered within the overall aims of the study. The next section reports on the findings from each data collection phase.

## **CHAPTER 6 – WHY TEACHERS BECOME SENCOS THROUGH AN ECOLOGICAL SYSTEMS THEORY**

### **6.1 Introduction**

It was argued in Chapter 2 that the development of the role of the SENCO needed to be situated within the legislative and policy changes that have shaped and influenced it. In Chapter 3, ecological approaches to understanding human development were considered. It was suggested that human development could not be properly understood without accounting for the contextual factors in which it occurs. More recent theoretical work on career interest explored in Chapter 4 has also suggested that career development, as an area of human development, needs to be contextually situated within an ecology or system. The current chapter starts to provide a synthesis of these chapters through the analysis of empirical data. Here, an aspect of human development, career transition into the role of the SENCO, is examined in greater detail.

The chapter has been split into four separate parts. The first section readdresses the literature and how existing work can be reappraised and re-examined within the structures of the macrosystem, exosystem, and microsystem present within ecological theories (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). The next section provides an overview of the research methods for this study in more detail to add to the discussion in section 5.4.2. The cross-sectional nature and use of thematic analysis are explored further. The fourth section shares the findings. The findings emphasise the wide range of reasons why teachers find themselves in the role of SENCO



and what they wish to achieve in this role. Here, teacher explanations are organised into three co-existing overarching themes: 1) the influence of direct experiences; 2) the influence of strategic school policy and approaches; and 3) the influence of policy and culture. Ecological approaches (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005) are used as a framework to structure an analysis within the different systems of influence that draw teachers into this position. The chapter concludes with an emerging discussion of the findings. It is suggested that teachers bring a range of personal experiences and a desire to change school practice; however, this is often set inside uncertainties about the appropriateness of existing national policy and how to navigate it.

## **6.2 A renewed interest in the SENCO at a national level**

At the time of the study, a report delivered by the UK National Audit Office in 2018 (National Audit Office, 2018) highlighted the current challenges of teacher retention, recruiting teachers of the right quality, and regional variations in practice – particularly in the Midlands of England. As part of their response, the Department for Education (Department for Education, 2018c) commissioned work to develop the special educational needs school workforce in England. One strand of this work included providing guidance to headteachers in appointing a SENCO and supporting their initial development. This training is additional to the NASENCo training, which also has a lengthy list of learning outcomes (National College for Teaching and Leadership, 2014)

This study unpicks the reasons why aspirant and new SENCOs are attracted to this appointment in the first instance. As highlighted in Chapter 2, there has been a desire to respond to those who are already in the role through

understanding their individual experiences (for example, Glazzard, 2014; Mackenzie, 2012b); their difficulties with operationalising the role in school (Szwed, 2007a); or the difficulties of negotiating policy frameworks (Robertson, 2012). These concerns have also been raised in international contexts in locales where the SENCO, or equivalent role, has become key to the delivery of inclusive education, such as in Sweden (Klang, Gustafson, Möllås, Nilholm, & Göransson, 2017); Hong Kong (Poon-McBrayer, 2012); and Ireland (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017).

### ***6.2.1 The SENCO in the macrosystem – Existing practice brought together under a title forged in government policy***

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the development of the SENCO role. This is reconsidered as it is important to recognise that when teachers are attracted to the role of SENCO, they are attracted to a role which has developed iteratively through macro level policy changes made over several decades. Indeed, the role was first explicitly constructed in policy terms within two short paragraphs of what a SENCO “should” do in the first Code of Practice (Department for Education, 1994, p. 14), an advisory document to add operational clarity to The 1993 Education Act. Nevertheless, as already suggested, the role of the SENCO was first presented in the Warnock Report (Warnock, 1978) and the 1981 Education Act, which heralded the right for children with special educational needs to be educated alongside their peers in “ordinary” schools (see section 2.2.1). Over time, the role has evolved and been developed as a reaction to policy and change in statutory requirements (see Chapter 2). The role of SENCO is now more than guidance (see section 2.3.3). However, this is

where consistency ends and local interpretation returns through the decision-making powers of the “appropriate authority” (see section 2.3.4), hence the wide variation in practice in how SENCOs operate in different schools.

### ***6.2.2 The SENCO in the exosystem – A history of consistent inconsistency at the school level***

The provisions of the 1988 Education Reform Act are ultimately responsible for this variation in practice. This legislation sits chronologically between the original 1981 Education Act, which introduced many components familiar in the present systems of special education, and the first Code of Practice, which introduced the role of the SENCO (Department for Education, 1994). Within the 1988 Education Reform Act, schools were provided with significant local autonomy and budgetary control for the headteacher through the appropriate authority to exercise at their discretion (Levačić, 1998). Within all legislation relating to SEN since 1994, this appropriate authority and the headteacher have been required to determine the role of the SENCO – hence the wide variation in national practice. Additionally, each successive iteration of the Code of Practice (Department for Education, 1994; Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015; Department for Education and Skills, 2001) has made further changes to the role (see Chapter 2 for extended discussion). Indeed, those who enter this role are unlikely to have seen any consistency across different settings.

### ***6.2.3 The SENCO in the microsystem – ‘It’s a people thing’***

Therefore, the construction of the role is not just a product of top-down imposition of legislation, but it is also constructed through local school-based

interpretation. However, an additional and important factor within this local interpretation is through the SENCOs themselves – i.e., individuals who fulfil roles all perform “different kind[s] of action” (Burr, 2015, p. 5). Rosen-Webb (2011), through interview-based research, argues that SENCOs draw from their own identity values to operationalise their role. Mackenzie (2012b, p. 1080) suggests that SENCOs bring a deep sense of emotional commitment to the role. Kearns (2005) meanwhile, provides a typology of approaches that individual SENCOs adopt in their everyday practice (see section 2.3.5). As a result, perhaps this variation in how the role is operationalised is unsurprising given that both teachers and SENCOs have a range of different values as well as a multiplicity of experiences prior to entering the role (Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, & Gu, 2007).

#### ***6.2.4 The SENCO and ecological approaches – An opportunity for holism in understanding interest in the SENCO role***

It has been argued so far that the SENCO is not a homogenous breed. SENCOs draw from a wide range of resources including experience, school practice, and overarching policy in constructing their roles. The process of this construction can be framed within ecological theories such as that offered by Bronfenbrenner (1976, 1979) and the educational derivatives provided by Anderson et al. (2014) (see section 3.3). It has already been argued that ecological approaches have utility in understanding career interest i.e., the systems theory of career development proposed by Patton and McMahon (1999, 2014) (see section 4.8). Indeed, the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) has also been used to understand career development.

Young (1983) suggests that the career development of adolescents should be understood within the framework offered by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Young (1983) argues that influences such as family, school experiences, peer group and workplace are within the adolescent's microsystem. In turn the mesosystem provides interrelations between these. Influences such as social class, maternal employment, media, family, social network, and public policy are located within the exosystem. The macrosystem meanwhile contains the broad cultural contexts prevalent at that time. At the time of the study, these included the changing role of women, work ethic and job entitlement, and the notion of having a single career. Indeed, these final variables highlight how career should be understood within the context of policy and attitudes at a specific moment in time.

Ecological approaches based upon the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) have also been used by Anderson et al. (2014) to model how the context and policy of inclusive education provides different systems of support around a child with SEN (see section 3.3.1). In turn, more recently, the ecological systems theory offered by Bronfenbrenner (2005) has been used in the research of specialist teachers (see section 3.3.2). These studies provide a much more holistic overview of the behaviours of individuals within the multiple contexts in which they operate. However, despite its utility, it is important to emphasise that within this thesis the work of Bronfenbrenner and the various adaptations by others are being used in the most part as a framework to structure the analysis (see section 3.4).

The primary aim of this study is to explore how trainee SENCOs understand and report the development of their interest in the role. This study

acknowledges the “interactive moderating effects of both person and context” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 78) by aiming to address the following questions:

- What are the factors or reasons reported by teachers on how they developed interest in the role of SENCO?
- How can we understand these reasons within the realms of the people and the contexts in which these decisions were made?

## **6.3 Method**

### ***6.3.1 Research design of this study***

This study aims to make sense of the reasons people present for choosing to become a SENCO. It does this through a simple cross-sectional study within the NASENCo programme at an English university (see section 5.4.2).

### ***6.3.2 Questionnaires***

As part of this initial exploratory study, data were gathered utilising a questionnaire (see Appendix A) where participants were asked to respond to a request to “work on their own to list at least three reasons why they became a SENCO”. This question was designed to provide an opportunity for participants to write openly and with breadth about their thoughts (see sections 5.4.2.1 and 5.4.2.2).

### ***6.3.3 Participants, sampling ethics, and ethics***

The questionnaires were completed by 88 SENCOs in training as an activity on one of the course days. The sample was opportunistic, recruited from students

at the start of the NASENCo Award at the institution where the author is the programme lead. All participants were qualified teachers and early career or aspirant SENCOs. It is a legal requirement that the SENCO be a qualified teacher, employed in a school, and has completed their induction.

Consequently, all participants had met these three requirements so were not regarded as being either vulnerable or lacking in the capacity to provide consent. It was not the aim to generalise the findings to the population of all SENCOs in training so there was little risk of the distortion of findings which may occur because of this limitation with sampling (Thomas, 2017, p. 141). Nevertheless, the sample broadly reflected the characteristics of the workforce within English state schools (Department for Education, 2017b) (with national data parenthesised): 100% (94.7%) holding Qualified Teacher Status or equivalent; 91% (73.9%) identifying as female; 89.7% (86.5%) identifying as White British; all the 27.7% (23.2%) of participants who worked part time were female.

The study adhered to ethical guidelines published by the British Psychological Society (2009) and the British Educational Research Association (2011) and was granted full ethical approval by relevant university authorities (see Appendices C, D and E) . On the day of the study, a consent letter was distributed emphasising that the study was being conducted by a postgraduate student to minimise risk of individuals feeling an obligation to participate (see Appendix F and discussion in section 5.4.2.3). The letter was issued with a participant information sheet (see Appendix G) explaining that the individual had been selected as an aspirant or early career SENCO plus additional information including informed consent and a right to withdraw.

### **6.3.4 Thematic analysis**

The results were transcribed prior to examination using thematic analysis (as defined by Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2013). Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield (2015) share two major approaches to thematic analysis, a “Big Q and Small Q” approach. The “Big Q” used in this study adopted no fixed or pre-set codes; rather, codes were identified through a close examination of the data in a generative “bottom up” approach. Further theoretical analysis was conducted post hoc using the microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem of various ecological systems theories (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) to provide structure to the analysis. However as stated in Chapter 3, this was not to test theory. Rather it was to provide a framework for the study.

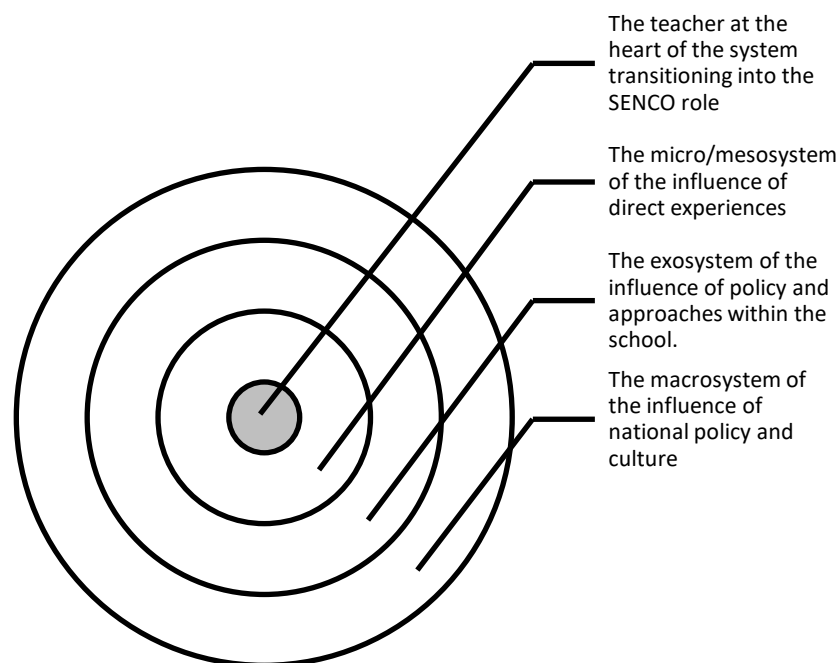
Braun and Clarke (2006) advocate a six-stage approach to thematic analysis. (1) To engage with the data set, all the handwritten questionnaires were entered into Microsoft Word to facilitate further analysis. (2) Sections of the data were highlighted, and these were coded appropriately in a parallel column. (3) The codes (n = 681) and associated data were transferred into an Excel document where themes were identified and clustered. (4) Themes were reviewed and further clustered, before (5) being grouped at the level of the microsystem, exosystem, and macrosystem of various ecological systems theories (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). An additional stage was added following stage (5). The raw data associated with the codes identified at stage (3) were cross referenced against the themes identified in stages (4) and (5). This was to ensure that the raw data applied fully to the later stages of analysis and resultant themes (see Appendix L for a thematic structure; see Appendices M, N and O for examples of data, codes, and defined



themes). This was before (6) the report was written. Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 96) provide a 15-point checklist for good thematic analysis. This was rigorously applied to the data set and the study itself.

## 6.4 Findings

Over 680 codes were identified and extracted from the survey data. These were organised into successive layers of subthemes, themes, and overarching themes (see appendix L for full thematic structure; see appendices M, N and O for definitions of subthemes alongside examples of codes and data).



**Figure 11: The ecology influencing why teachers become SENCOs**

As illustrated in Figure 11, the three overarching themes are conceptually organised in an ecological manner utilising lenses derived from key sources (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). These overarching themes provide an explanation of why teachers become SENCOs:

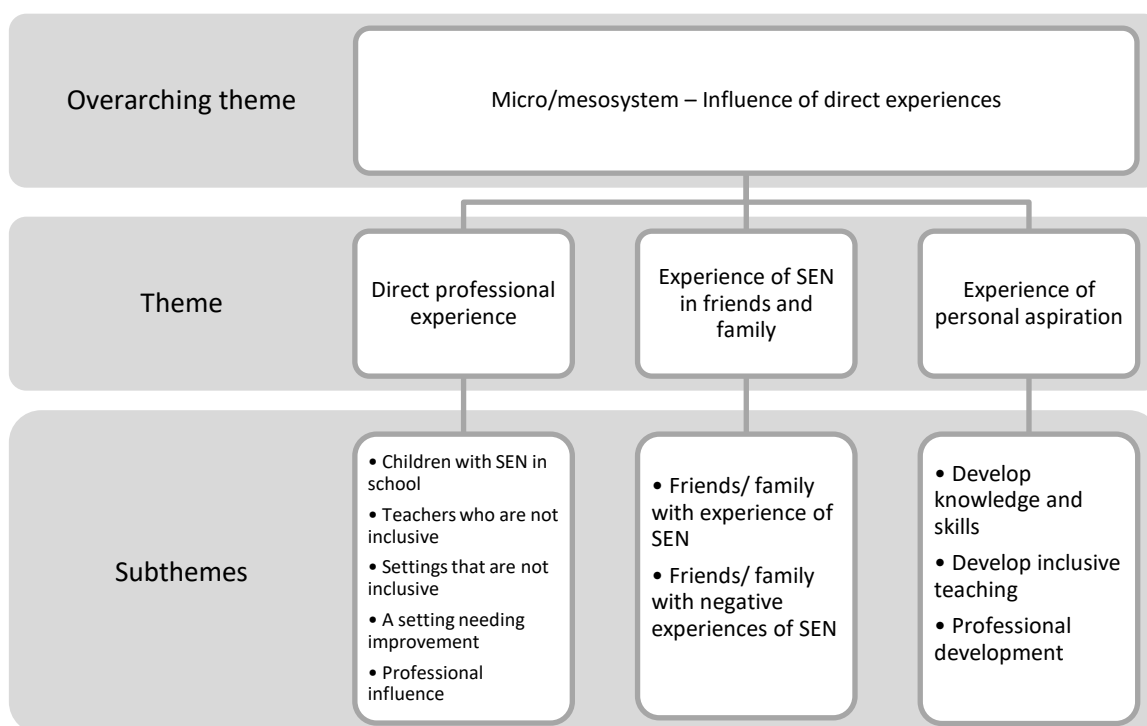
- Micro/mesosystems: ‘Influence of direct experiences’
- Exosystem: ‘Influence of policy and approaches within the school.’
- Macrosystem: ‘Influence of national policy and culture’.

#### **6.4.1 Microsystem: ‘Influence of direct experiences’**

Bronfenbrenner (2005) defines the microsystem as “a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material features and containing other persons with distinctive characteristics of temperament, personality and systems of belief” (p. 148). Anderson et al. (2014, p. 29) suggest that for *the developing child* (which is the central focus of their analysis), these microsystems include teachers, peers, physical learning spaces and individual classroom cultures. A synthesis of both approaches provides utility in understanding how direct experiences influence teachers to become *SENCOs* (which is the central focus of their analysis). Figure 12 provides an overview of the thematic structure of the overarching theme, the ‘influence of direct experiences’. This overarching theme contains three themes:

- Direct professional experience
- Experience of SEN in friends and family
- Experience of personal aspiration

In turn, these themes consist of an amalgam of a range of subthemes each of which is based on empirical data drawn from the questionnaires received in this study (See Appendix M for a range of excerpts from the data illustrating each theme).



**Figure 12: Micro/mesosystem – Influence of direct experiences**

#### 6.4.1.1 *Direct professional experience*

Many respondents suggested that the decision to become a SENCO had been influenced by their professional experiences of working alongside **children with SEN in school** (n = 33) (see example data in Appendix M, section 12.13.1.1).

These experiences are diverse and include working directly within different professional roles or having positive experiences of children and young people whilst working with them. For some, this had been part of their professional development prior to embarking on their teaching career exemplified by one participant who stated, “my first job at the school was to work with SEN children as a TA, and this seemed like a natural progression” (BP1c). Other respondents spoke of the enjoyment that experiences of working with children with SEN had brought to their role including those who “enjoy working with pupils with SEN”

(BS2c), often because they would “enjoy the rewards of seeing them achieve (even the smallest steps)” (BP6c).

However, the largely positive proximal experiences contrast with respondents’ experiences of working alongside **teachers who are not inclusive** within their setting and elsewhere (n = 8) (see example data in Appendix M, section 12.13.1.2). These teachers are regarded as a negative influence, and not to be emulated. Rather, they are a source of disappointment. For example, one participant describes being “frustrated by teachers ignoring the needs of SEN” (BC6e). Other respondents describe experiences of proximity to colleagues who “ignore SEN children” (BP3h) or believe that because “they’re SEN, they won’t make progress” (BP1a) which in turn was contrary to the view of some respondents that the same learners “had a lot of potential” (BP1a).

This proximity to a lack of inclusive practices was not just at the level of individual teachers. Respondents described being influenced by direct, proximal experience of working in **settings that are not inclusive** (n = 17) (see example data in Appendix M, section 12.13.1.3). Respondents described involvement in settings where “SEN was low profile” (BC6e) or worse still, settings where “sometimes children were seen as a problem” (BP2e). Indeed, this resulted in participant acknowledgement of their **setting needing improvement** (n = 17) (see example data in Appendix M, section 12.13.1.4). “A desire to change what I viewed as poor practice” (BP1a) was cited by one participant whilst other respondents focused on discrete improvements needed within their setting. For example, one stated “school has a learning support (LS) centre Many parents like this. It could be better used. I believe TAs are too involved in student work.

This needs to change” (BC4a). Another participant meanwhile declared that “it infuriates me that in my current school the SENCO role has not been done well previously and that the needs of the students have not been met” (BS1c).

The final subtheme within this theme is proximity to a source of **professional influence** (n = 29) (see example data in Appendix M, section 12.13.1.5). These influences are diverse and can be people with whom they have worked. Professional influence can also include being sought out by a colleague and asked to consider the role. Examples given by respondents include “inspiration from [the] past SENCO” (BC6a) or a form of apprenticeship where a participant may have “previously worked alongside leading SENCOs on a project” (BS3c). However, mostly the level of influence resulted from being sought to fulfil the SENCO role due to a variety of attributes such as being “recognised by others as being ‘good’ with SEN teaching so encouraged by leadership into the role” (BS3c) or being “good at completing paperwork” (BS4c). Indeed, this latter point highlights the diverse ways in which both SENCOs and others see how the role should be operationalised (see sections 2.3.4 and 2.3.5 for a further discussion).

#### *6.4.1.2 Experience of SEN in friends and family*

Experiences of SEN within their lives outside of professional contexts also influenced many respondents to express an interest in the SENCO role. These experiences mostly result from direct, proximal experiences within their personal or family lives. The first subtheme draws together proximity to **friends or family with experience of SEN** (n = 19) (see example data in Appendix M, section 12.13.2.1). These influences include the experiences of children of

friends or family. They also include experiences of the children of the respondents. Some of these reasons are quite broad. These include decisions that were driven by the “experience of friends and family with students with SEN [as] part of the motivation” (BC1a). However, these reasons were then often substantiated by detailed anecdotal evidence. For example, one respondent explains:

My best friend has a son with Downs syndrome. He attends a mainstream school. The support they have received has been incredible. How amazing to be able to make the difference to people's lives! (BC1a)

Other respondents focused more on incidence of SEN in their families with one respondent telling of “having a child of my own with medical/learning difficulties who had a statement” (BP1c) whilst another explains “experience of SEN within my family and personal experience of how support in school has helped a family member” (BC5c). However not all of the experiences were positive with many respondents describing **friends/ family with negative experiences of SEN** (n = 13) (see example data in Appendix M, section 12.13.2.2). This is exemplified by a description of a “child with her SEN needs who was really badly treated by a school who did not understand her needs and did not provide for her needs” (BS1c). A sense of cathartic justice was explained by those who considered that they could make it better for others by advocating for them. Consequently, explanations included one respondent who states that “through personal experience I have had to fight for support – some parents can’t do this” (BP2d). These powerful negative influences are exemplified by another respondent who

wrote:

My cousin's daughter XXXX was diagnosed with a brain tumour at the age of 12. She was left unable to walk or talk but still able to access education in a mainstream setting. One day my cousin told me that for XXXX's geography GCSE field trip they had to sample stones along the beach. XXXX was left at the top of the beach whilst her peers undertook the task. XXXX, in a wheelchair could not access the beach. That can't be right! I felt outraged. As a SENCO I can ensure that her experiences are not repeated (BC1a).

#### *6.4.1.3 Experience of personal aspiration*

Many of these professional and personal experiences led respondents to aspire to directly benefit from being a SENCO. Bronfenbrenner (2005) explains that influences are reciprocal between the developing person and their microsystem (see section 3.2.1). This is evident with respondents having a personal aspiration to **develop their knowledge and skills** (n = 42) (see example data in Appendix M, section 12.13.3.1). In the most part, this desire is mediated by their own professional experiences of working alongside children with SEN. For example, one respondent explained that being a SENCO would “extend my knowledge of SEN children” (BC5d) whilst another explained, “I am fascinated with understanding of barriers to learning in terms of cognition and learning/ communication and interaction/ social emotional mental health/ PSN” (BC6b). Other respondents were specific with what they aspired to learn suggesting that the role would provide opportunity to learn how to **develop inclusive teaching**

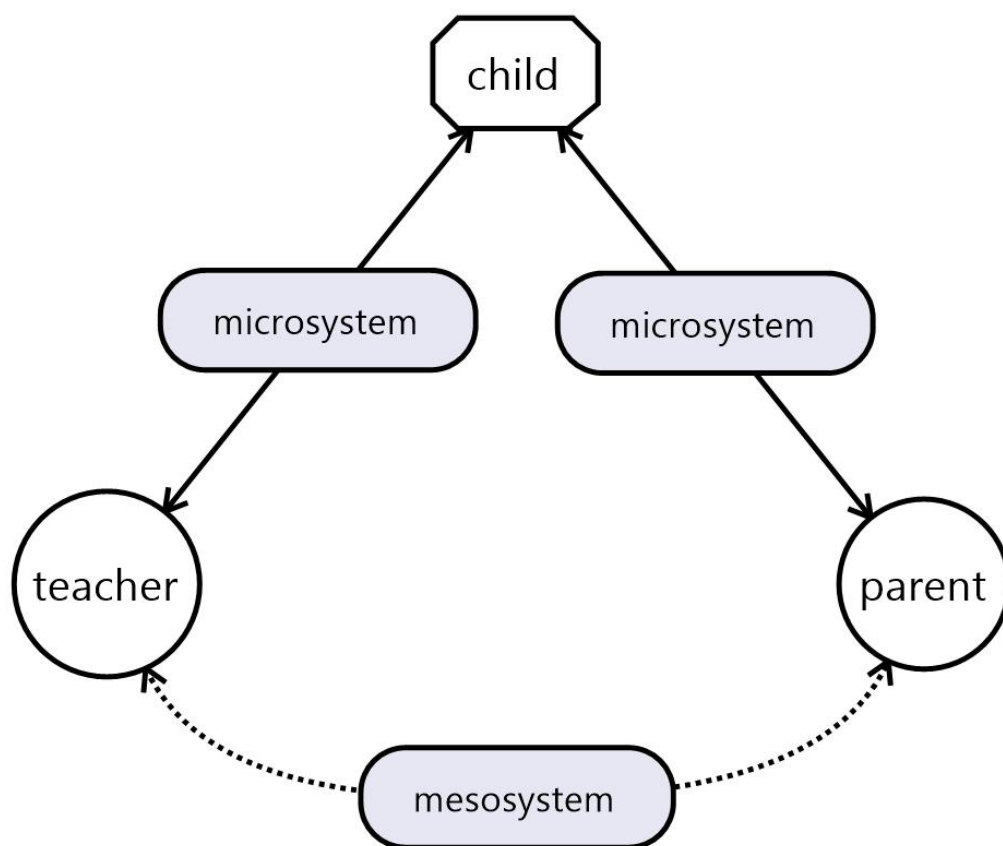
(n = 12) (see example data in Appendix M, section 12.13.3.2). This aspiration is mediated by their own professional experiences of working alongside children with SEN (see section 6.4.1.1). Here, there was a desire to “learn about teaching and learning strategies for a range of needs” (BC3a) due to the reflective process of being “increasingly worried/frustrated about SEN expertise, on a personal level” (BS1c). **Professional development** (n = 20) (see example data in Appendix M, section 12.13.3.3) was important to many respondents. In the most part, this desire is mediated by their own professional needs and aspirations. For some the nature of this professional development was not specified and more general in nature with one respondent explaining, “I knew that the role would open up opportunities for my own professional development” (BC4c). Other respondents though regarded this professional development as more formal in nature with opportunities to “get the points to convert into a Masters” (BC5b) or have an opportunity to “gain a qualification” (BP6a).

#### *6.4.1.4 Mesosystems – a postscript to the ‘influences of direct experience’.*

Although the thematic structure does not directly incorporate or ‘force’ a mesosystemic theme, it is important to acknowledge that there is still evidence of examples of mesosystems within the data. The importance of mesosystems should also be acknowledged when trying to understand why teachers become SENCOs. Bronfenbrenner (2005) outlines the mesosystem as “the linkages and processes taking place between two or more settings containing the developing person [...] or a system of microsystems” (p. 148). As illustrated in Figure 13, within the context of inclusive education Anderson et al. (2014, p. 29) argue that variables within the microsystem are interrelated and are not always isolated



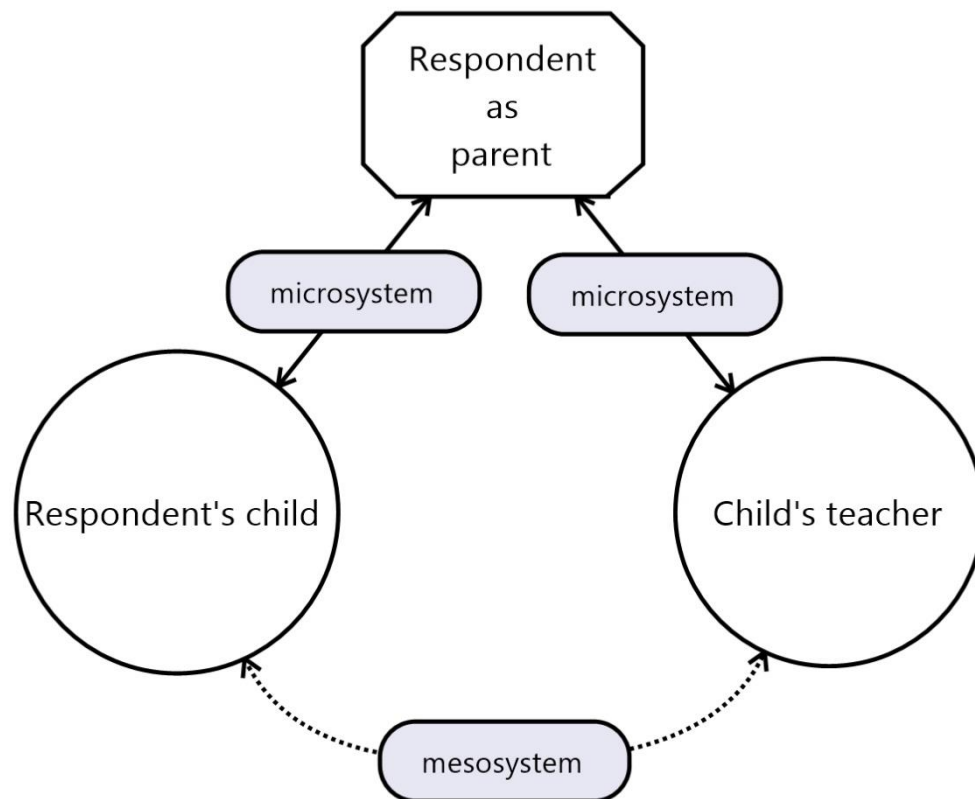
from each other. As Cullen and Lindsay (2019) argue, connections between schools and parents lie with the mesosystem of the child's ecosystem. Here a child will be part of a microsystem with a teacher in the classroom. They are also part of a separate microsystem with their parent in the home. Here the two microsystems form a "linkage" within the mesosystem of the parent and the teacher.



**Figure 13: Mesosystem of the developing child's ecosystem (example of child's parent with child's teacher).**

Part of the difficulties with using Anderson's ecological approach is highlighted earlier in this thesis. In section 3.3.2, it was argued that it is not the child as a developing person who is at the heart of the system within this thesis. Rather, it

is the respondent or SENCO as the developing person who is at the heart of the system moving through transitions in their career. In recognition of this proposition, the systems in Figure 13 can be reorganised into alternative micro and mesosystems to acknowledge this as illustrated in Figure 14.



**Figure 14: Mesosystem of the developing SENCO's ecosystem (example of respondent's child with child's teacher).**

Examples of mesosystems are found within some extracts of the theme of **'experience of SEN in friends and family'** with a particular focus on the subtheme **friends and family with negative influences of SEN**. For example, a respondent who is a SENCO describes negative experiences of SEN within their immediate family. However, it is how this dissatisfaction is ecologically structured that is of interest.

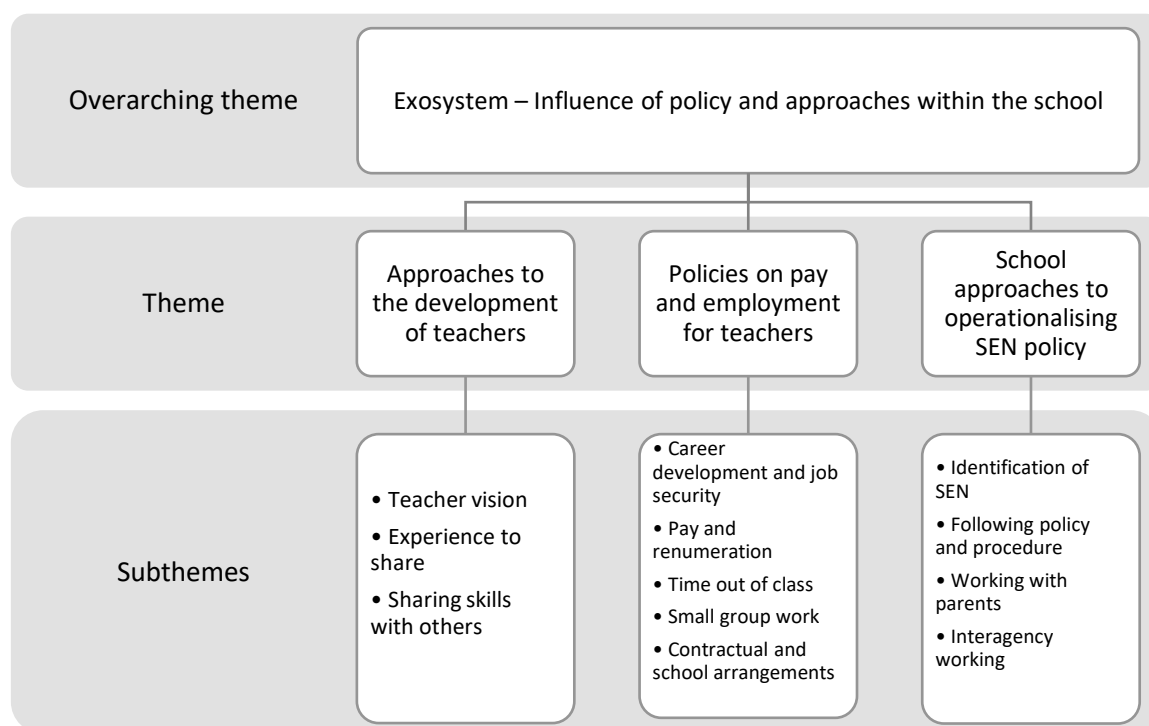
My son is one of the most nervous and anxious people I know. This was definitely made worse by his experiences in Key Stage 2. As a parent I supported him in every way possible, but this was at odds with what the school provided. I was treated by the school as an 'annoyance'. My son was regularly told off by his school for doing things which he could not help. I battled throughout and he eventually ended up school refusing. (BS4d)

Here the respondent is part of a microsystem with their own child within the home. Within the microsystem of the home, they describe the support provided to help their child cope with anxiety and how this influences them. The respondent's other microsystem is as a parent visiting their child's school. In this microsystem, they describe being an annoyance. This is another influence. The mesosystem provides a linkage of these two microsystems – The SENCO's experience as a parent in the home and the SENCO's experience as a parent in their child's school. It is within the SENCO's mesosystem (i.e., the school and the classroom) that the child is being told off for doing things that he could not help. In turn, the influence of this mesosystem motivated the respondent to become a SENCO. Evidence of similar mesosystems are seen elsewhere within the data.

#### **6.4.2 Exosystem: *'Influence of policy and approaches within the school'***

Bronfenbrenner (1979) defines the exosystem as "one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as a participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the

developing person” (p. 25). Within the context of inclusive education, Anderson et al. (2014, p. 29) suggest that part of this exosystem consists of the culture of the school, especially as interpreted through school leadership processes where resource allocation takes place and policy is interpreted. Bronfenbrenner (1979, p. 237) also acknowledges that this “causal sequence may also run in the opposite direction”. This is important in the current context considering how few SENCOs are school leaders and contractually obliged to make strategic decisions (see section 7.3.6) with only 10% holding the status of headteacher (see Table 7). Despite this, respondents are influenced by decisions that are made at the strategic level of the school or wish to make changes that “run in the opposite direction”. (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 237). Figure 15 provides an overview of the thematic structure of the overarching theme, the ‘Influence of policy and approaches within the school’.



**Figure 15: Exosystem – Influence of policy and approaches within the school**

This overarching theme contains three themes:

- Approaches to the development of teachers
- Policies on pay and employment for teachers
- School approaches to operationalising SEN policy

In turn these themes consist of an amalgam of a range of subthemes each of which is based on the questionnaires received in this study (See Appendix N for a range of excerpts from the data illustrating each theme).

#### *6.4.2.1 Approaches to the development of teachers*

Many respondents were driven by **approaches to the development of teachers** within a school led system, a key national policy which argues that schools and teachers are able to drive their own improvement rather than this being driven externally (Department for Education, 2010). Here, respondents wanted to “set in motion processes within their microsystem that have their reverberations in distant quarters” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 237). In the first instance respondents want to affect change in school policy towards teacher development. They have a **teacher vision** (n = 9) (see example data in Appendix N, section 12.14.1.1) of what they want to change. The SENCO position provides a catalyst for this process to start. For example, one respondent describes an opportunity to “share my vision with staff and SLT to create a positive and inclusive environment for all” (BP2e) whilst another is more specific by stating “I am very interested in Websters ‘MITA’ book and [to] explore a change of vision of improved monitoring” (BC4a).

Respondents recognise that some practice needs to be more inclusive and needing to change (see section 6.4.1.1). Additionally, they also want to “set in motion processes” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 237) to affect change as they have **experience to share** (n = 23) (see example data in Appendix N, section 12.14.1.2). Here, respondents regarded themselves as having “expertise” (BP1d). Mostly, this was due to “experience” (e.g., BP3b, BP3g, BP5c), whilst for a more limited number it was due to the “wealth of information” (BP6e), or knowledge acquired over time. For example, one respondent argues that she is fit for the role because, “from all the staff at school I had the most background experience (working in special school 19 years)” (BS4b). Respondents also suggested that they wanted to be involved in a process of **sharing skills with others** (n = 28) (see example data in Appendix N, section 12.14.1.3) “to support vulnerable children – by supporting teachers” (BP1d). Indeed, “being SENCO allows [teachers] to share and develop ... skills with other teachers” (BC4e). Whilst another felt “their experience and (growing) knowledge could be more widely spread than just as a class teacher – [a] desire to influence policy and practice.” (BP6f).

#### *6.4.2.2 Policies on pay and employment for teachers*

This is an anomalous theme and outside of the remit of inclusive education. National pay, policy, roles, and school structures are interpreted, defined, and operationalised at the strategic level of the school (see section 6.2.2). Most respondents do not have a voice at this level, and few have the ultimate decision here as headteacher. Despite their lack of involvement, the entire school workforce are significantly impacted upon by what occurs with regards to

policy here. However, despite this lack of influence, respondents still want to stay active within their own microsystems to pragmatically use and work within the provided employment and school frameworks to develop their career, retain security of employment, or create favourable working conditions.

The first subtheme relates to **career development and job security** (n = 49) (see example data in Appendix N, section 12.14.2.1). Influences included the need to provide worth to “gain a permanent contract” (BP4a) with one respondent succinctly recording “SENCO post available – permanent” (BC4a). Indeed, this pragmatic approach to the role and influence on their lives over which they have no control but are affected by decisions made at this level is highlighted by one respondent who describes that their “school is going through change – there is an anticipated staffing restructure. As schools legally require a trained SENCO, being in this role offers possible job security” (BP2c).

For some, though this also enabled them to achieve “progression in school” and “career progression” (BP1d). However, the SENCO was also seen by some as a vehicle for career refreshment for those who were “in need of a new challenge” (BC3f) or career change. For example, one respondent describes being “interested in becoming an EP” (BC1c). These pragmatic influences are also highlighted by the desire to enhance **pay and remuneration** (n = 7) (see example data in Appendix N, section 12.14.2.2) with respondents suggesting an “increase in pay” (BP6a) or a “salary rise” (BC7f) influenced them to take on the role in their setting.

School leaders have significant latitude on how they define the role of the SENCO (see section 2.4.4). For some respondents, the way the role of SENCO

is operationalised in their school setting influenced their interest in it. Within some schools the SENCO role is defined as a role that is based outside of class teaching or provides **time out of class** (n = 17) (see example data in Appendix N, section 12.14.2.3). This proposition is attractive to some participants who wanted “a change from the classroom” (BC7a) which for some had “become increasingly demanding and stressful” (BC7c) whilst one participant confessed a desire “to move from a 100% teaching role to a 50%” role because “time in classroom can be very demanding full-time” (BP6g). For respondents in other schools, a small number of respondents suggest that they were interested in the role because it provides an opportunity to undertake **small group work** (n = 4) (see example data in Appendix N, section 12.14.2.4) with one respondent explaining that their “skills are better suited to working with smaller groups of children” (BC2b).

The final subtheme related to specific **contractual and school arrangements** (n = 20) (see example data in Appendix N, section 12.14.2.5). Again, the majority of SENCOs are outside of where decisions on school needs are made. This is highlighted by one respondent who explained that “this post would keep me within the Foundation Stage which is where my interests are as a teacher” (BC4c). Meanwhile, another believed the role was “preferable to PPA cover”. For some though, it was a juxtaposition of their status or grade and the school needs. This is explained succinctly in the extract below

The first important point to make is that I did not choose to be a SENCO and was basically manoeuvred into the role as our school did not have a SENCO (statutory reasons). There has historically



not been a SENCO at the school for a number of years and a group of personnel were doing the Inclusion/ SENCO role (BS2d).

Meanwhile, another in the question to why they became a SENCO explained, “I didn’t! I was Deputy Head and the SENCO left. No-one was keen on the role and [the] Head and I decided I should do it” (BP4c).

#### *6.4.2.3 School approaches to operationalising SEN policy*

It has already been discussed that national SEN policy changes over time (see Chapter 2). The responsible bodies of schools have some latitude on how they operationalise policy and the involvement of the SENCO in this process (see section 2.3.4). Respondents may agree with school approaches or have alternative ideas to make changes that “run in the opposite direction” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 237). In turn, this may set in motion processes within their microsystem that have their reverberations in distant quarters” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 237). This includes school approaches to operationalising SEN. This theme explores these approaches and ideas.

Some respondents are influenced to become SENCOs due to further develop skills or change processes in the **identification of SEN** (n = 8) (see example data in Appendix N, section 12.14.3.1). The need for processes for early identification is suggested as a motivating variable by some with one respondent describing the need “to enable the early identification of children’s needs in our setting” (BC4c) as some schools appear to have a “lack of early identification” (BP2d) procedures. However, for others their interpretation of school and national policy is less about identification of need and more about

the process of diagnosis. Here respondents have a “genuine interest in diagnosis” (BP6f) or alternatively react against a process of identification that appears to be about “just lumping children together under a ‘label’ – (SEN)” (BS4d). Other respondents are influenced by **following policy and procedure** (n = 26) (see example data in Appendix N, section 12.14.3.2) to ensure that they are following procedure “properly in accordance with the CoP [Code of Practice]” (BS3e). Other respondents were driven by external factors that dictated the need to follow policy and procedure more rigidly within their school setting. For example, one respondent states “Ofsted – following our inspection it was an action point to make sure all statutory duties were met, including me being registered for the award” (BP2e). Another respondent draws directly from legislation stating “it is a legal requirement for all SENCOs within three years of job role. To gain a deeper, wider understanding of the role – its legal requirements...” (BP6d).

Two significant implications of the SEN Code of Practice (see section 2.4.3) are the need to actively work with parents and work alongside different agencies to support the needs of the child. Here, respondents wish to work directly within their microsystems with both groups of people. **Working with parents** (n = 22) (see example data in Appendix N, section 12.14.3.3) is complex. For some respondents it was procedural in nature with one respondent explaining

I attended a lot of meetings with families regarding provision and all the areas of need and felt the families frustration at times, when communication wasn't as effective as it should have been. I like to believe, that as a SENCO now, I have experienced what families

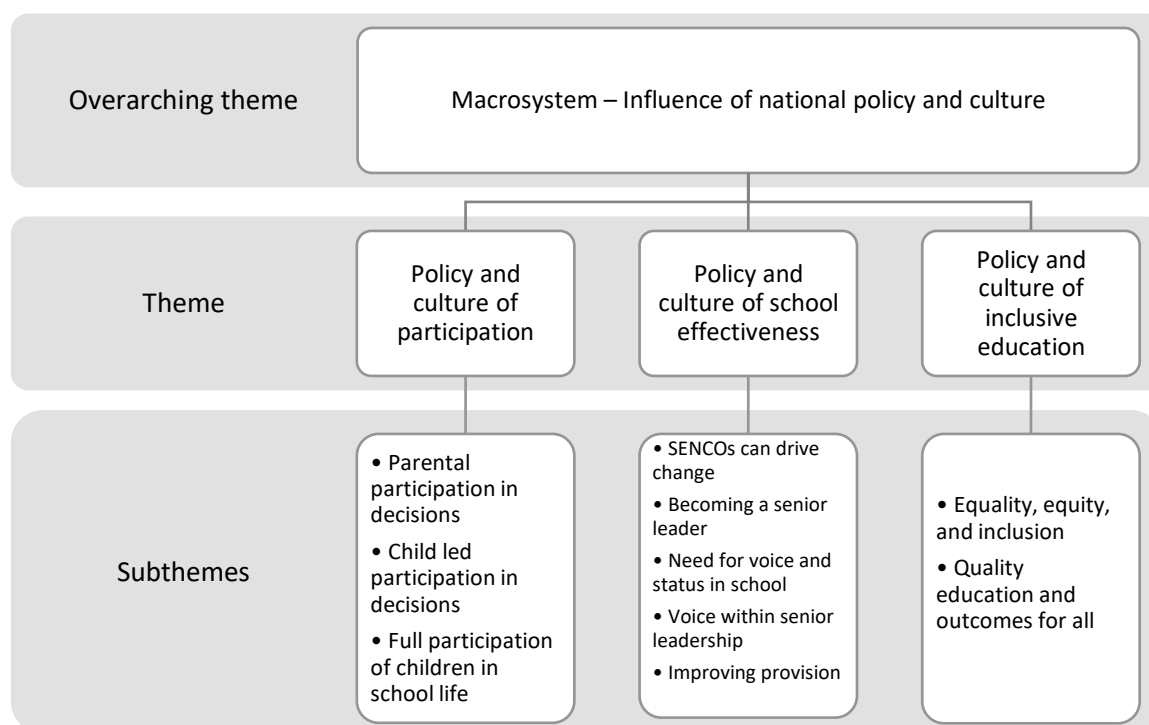
go through and always try to make communication as clear as possible with families and outside agencies and include them every step of the way, where appropriate. (BC2c)

For others, the opportunity to work with parents in school was a more affective driver. For example, one participant described “a wonderful feeling when you have supported the family as well as the child” (BC7e). On the whole there was a recognition that one of the SENCO roles is “to communicate with parents” (BP3b). However, as argued earlier, whether this is part of the SENCO role is at the discretion of the school. The final subtheme of **interagency working** (n = 9) (see example data in Appendix N, section 12.14.3.4) is an influencing variable for some respondents. Here there is a desire to “coordinate and commission services [for] children and their families” (BP2e). For example, one respondent wanted to “develop relationships with external agencies who I already work with” (BP6c) whilst another wants to be able to “‘magpie’ ideas from others” (BC2b). Again, whether this is part of the role is at the discretion of the school not the SENCO themselves. This is especially important considering the time and financial implications involved with working alongside other professionals. Indeed, there are also the implications of having enough status and authority to be involved in the commissioning process – a function more associated with the headteacher through consultation with the appropriate authority (see section 6.2.2).

#### **6.4.3 *Macrosystem: ‘Influence of national policy and culture’***

Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes the macrosystem as consistencies within a

system “that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying that system” (p. 26). In inclusive education, Anderson et al. (2014, p. 30) argue that the macrosystem consists of political or national agendas and externally imposed systems in which the school operates. These include education systems and agendas including achievement, professional performance, and accountability. Here the overarching culture of the English school system provides evidence of “continuities of form and content” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 258) that have been discussed within the previous systems. Figure 16 provides an overview of the thematic structure of the overarching theme, the ‘influence of national policy and culture’.



**Figure 16: Macrosystem – Influence of national policy and culture**

As illustrated in Figure 16, the themes that demonstrate the influence of these

“contexts in which the school exists” (Anderson et al., 2014, p. 30) include respondents operating in and being influenced by the:

- Policy and culture of participation
- Policy and culture of school effectiveness
- Policy and culture of inclusive education

#### *6.4.3.1 Policy and culture of participation*

The first theme that is reflective of wider belief systems or ideology relates to the national and international policy and culture of participation. The most recent iteration of the Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015) states “There is a clearer focus on the participation of children and young people and parents in decision-making at individual and strategic levels” (p. 14). In turn, this is reflective of wider international accords, such as the Salamanca Agreement (UNESCO, 1994, p. 75) which advocated parental participation and Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). This articulated the right of the child to have a voice and participate fully.

Respondents were influenced by the desire to improve **parental participation in decisions** (n = 18) (see example data in Appendix O, section 12.15.1.1). In turn this links to the influences described in themes and subthemes explored earlier that are more proximal to the person (see sections 6.4.1.2; 6.4.1.4 and 6.4.3.3). Respondents wanted to “further develop partnerships in school, particularly with parents” (BC4b) but this was with the proviso of working with them to “ensure ...families are happy with provision at

school.” (BP1f). Respondents were also influenced by **child led participation in decisions** (n = 10) (see example data in Appendix O, section 12.15.1.2). Again, this relates closely to more proximal themes discussed earlier with regards to compliance with SEN procedure in school (see section 6.4.3.3) and personal and professional experiences (see section 6.4.1). Here respondents wanted to “give them a voice” (BC2b) and make them “feel part of the different process involved” (BP1c). Respondents were also influenced to promote the **participation of children in school life** (n = 18) (see example data in Appendix O, section 12.15.1.3). Here there was a focus on both academic provision and wider experiences offered by the school. Some of the responses were general in nature with the desire to improve “school experience” (BP3d). Other respondents focused on making sure that the “best provision is provided” (BC2a)

Other respondents moved beyond this and looked at wanting “to ensure students are supported not only academically but with wider outcomes, this includes transition from primary to secondary and social/emotional outcomes” (BP1f). Indeed, these general examples of participation in whole school life are supported by examples of other data within the microsystems of the respondents that have already been explored. For example, XXXX being excluded from aspects of a field trip (see section 6.4.1.2) provides a sound anecdote of where an individual is not given an opportunity to fully participate in school experiences as a result of her disability.

#### *6.4.3.2 Policy and culture of school effectiveness*

Schools are increasingly operating within an individualistic culture where school

improvement is situated within regimes of teacher accountability and a school effectiveness framework that is both dictated by the state but outside of state apparatus (Apple, 2011). Anderson et al. (2014) argue that in the ecology of inclusive education, professional performance and accountability are located as influences within the macrosystem. Within the English system, accountability is situated at the level of the school and performance is driven by a hierarchy of leaders who have status within the setting. This model for school improvement is driven nationally and has been within dominant national discourses for some time. For example, Sammons, Hillman, and Mortimore (1995) in a report sponsored by Ofsted, advocate that the most effective schools are characterised by eleven factors. The first of these, “professional leadership” (pp. 8-11) is regarded as the key factor in school improvement that should be emulated by other schools. Other factors within this report resemble other elements of school improvement based on a school effectiveness model such as focused teaching and learning, high expectations, monitoring progress and accountability. Indeed nearly 20 years later, Ofsted was still advocating that “leaders transform schools and the lives of the pupils who attend them” (Ofsted, 2013, p. 67). Participants within their microsystems show evidence of being influenced by these dominant discourses. These include their observations made within subthemes such as **a setting needing improvement** (see section 6.4.1.1) and their desire to affect change at the level of the school (see sections 6.4.2.1 and 6.4.2.3). However, these desires are also driven by the influence of the policies of the education system in which they work.

Many regarded that SENCOs had a broader remit than being an individual teacher, coordinator, or bureaucrat. By being in the role, they could

be part of an informal culture of leadership due to the belief that the **SENCO can drive change** within the school and wider society (n = 23) (see example data in Appendix O, section 12.15.2.1). For example, one participant suggested that the role enabled them to “make a difference where it really matters” (BC3c). Indeed, this sense of professional agency was shared by several respondents, most of whom described the desire to “make a difference” (e.g., BC3c, BC3d, BC4a). However, for this “difference” to occur, respondents saw a **need for voice and status in school** (n = 9) (see example data in Appendix O, section 12.15.2.3). Here one teacher described them self as “a strong voice for. . . Children and Young People” (BC4a) whilst another just wished “to have a say” (BC7b). Notably, the importance of status within the school improvement framework is noted by one participant who described her frustration at how “‘lowly teachers’ opinions didn’t seem to count” (BP1a).

Having voice and status with colleagues was only one aspect of the desire to become a SENCO. For some, the desire for voice was specific and influenced by where they saw power and decision making occurring within their setting – “professional leadership” (Sammons et al., 1995, pp. 8-11). Here, they wanted to have direct influence within the school leadership team. Ideally, many respondents considered that this role would enable them to gain the status of **becoming a senior leader** (n = 27) (see example data in Appendix O, section 12.15.2.2). This is encapsulated by one participant who wants to be “part of the leadership team in school and therefore contribute to how the school is run” (BP6a). However, their reasons for aspiring to this position were not universal. For some, this was because “safeguarding and SEN are both passions” (BS1c), whilst for others it is more about “career progression and opportunity to be on



SLT” (BS4c). Additionally, respondents also wanted to have a **voice within senior leadership** teams (n = 9) (see example data in Appendix O, section 12.15.2.4). For example, one participant specified the importance of how the position “allows me to have a voice on SLT” (BC6e), whilst another believes that having this leadership voice would allow for them to “influence and make decisions” (BP1d).

Leadership and voice were not the only factors though. Respondents were also influenced by the wider scope of being able to facilitate and drive **improved provision** (n = 39) (see example data in Appendix O, section 12.15.2.5) for children with additional needs. Thus, this desire for leadership was intended to have the type of impact often described within school effectiveness frameworks such as within the Importance of Teaching (Department for Education, 2010). Examples include containment through management, such as the participant who suggested that “the schools management of SEN needed to be more organised and up to date” (BC1c), whilst another described the process associated with leadership in wanting to be involved in “developing systems in school to ensure that all pupils’ needs are met” (BC3d) and to have “an impact on teaching and learning” (BP1a). However, this was often with the caveat of adhering to predefined regulatory definitions within the school effectiveness frameworks, such as by being able “to have an impact on moving our school into outstanding” (BP6a). Respondents also adhered to school effectiveness frameworks by sharing a projective leadership desire to develop and transform provision “to make sure that all the students’ SEN needs were met appropriately” (BC1c). For example, one stated an interest in “Support[ing the] profile and up skilling of SEN teachers and TAs”

(BC6e), whilst another wanted to work strategically across the school “to support teachers in terms of supporting pupils effectively within the classroom by increasing their knowledge” (BC6b).

#### *6.4.3.3 Policy and culture of inclusive education*

Anderson et al. (2014) argue that in the ecology of inclusive education, the macrosystem consists partly of “social, political, historical and global” (p. 30) contexts. For the final theme of the **policy and culture of inclusive education**, respondents liberally peppered their statements with language associated with “belief systems” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26) which originate within the national and global discourse of inclusive education. These influences of inclusive education are also evident within the microsystems and exosystem of the respondents. For example, some respondents were positively influenced by being able to work with and alongside children with SEN in mainstream settings (see section 6.4.1.1). In turn this is an experience afforded by changes in policy over time (see Chapter 2). Others meanwhile have approaches to teaching and procedures that they want to develop at the level of the school in order to make their setting more inclusive (see sections 6.4.2.1 and 6.4.3.3).

Respondents described placing a strong value on **equality, equity, and inclusion** (n = 14) (see example data in Appendix O, section 12.15.3.1) using terms such as “inclusive” (BC2c), “equality” (BC4b), and “equity” (BP2e). This is summarised by one participant who echoes wider policy through the suggestion that they “always had the view that inclusivity was essential for all” (BP1e), whilst another states “I am passionate about inclusion, and all children feeling confident and achieving at school” (BC4e). Indeed, another participant provides

a link between policies or inclusion and school effectiveness to argue for change within her school structures stating, “I can also share my vision with staff and SLT to create a positive and inclusive environment for all” (BP2e).

Indeed, the language of policy such as potential, vulnerability, support, and outcomes (e.g., Department for Education, 1994; Department for Education and Skills, 2001) was used by many to share aspirations for developing **quality education and outcomes for all** (n = 28) (see example data in Appendix O, section 12.15.3.2). The current DfE Strategy (Department for Education, 2016) makes a distinctive focus on the “potential” of all children measured by a range of “rigorous, well-measured outcomes” (pp. 10-20). Here respondents provided evidence that accords such as this were also an influence on both their approaches to the role and their values. For example, one respondent states their desire “to improve outcomes for pupils” (BP6d) whilst another wants “to support children to gain the best outcomes they can”. (BC3d). Unlike examples given earlier (for example in 6.4.1.1), these reasons are aspirational, projective, and less concrete and would appear to be more idealistic than based on direct experience. This is illustrated by the quote, “my own personal and professional values make me strive for equity and understanding” (BP2e) which provides a clear link between the person and the ecology in which they operate.

## **6.5 Discussion**

At the time of the study, the Department for Education (2018c) had commissioned work to address a further need to “build the specialist workforce and promote best practice” (3:12). This tender had asked organisations to provide solutions to the following statement:

Develop and disseminate a School Leader's Guide to appointing and managing an effective SENCO. (Department for Education, 2018c)

Within this statement, the word appointment is critical as it implies matching people to a role. This research aims to contribute to this wider discussion by trying to explore the reasons why people choose to apply for the role in the first instance. Amongst other things, the successful bidders for the contract were required to develop guidance on how a school may identify and appoint a teacher into the position of SENCO (3:12). Recent work on retaining the teacher workforce has only concentrated on existing issues including workload, regional variations, the need for CPD, and cost of living (National Audit Office, 2018).

Despite the obvious limitations of the data, the significance of this research is that it provides a holistic overview to understand those who are already in the profession who wish to make an “ecological transition” into another more complex school role. Indeed, although these data has not been gathered through exhaustive interviews over time, it does provide a snapshot of a wide range of participants, many of whom are at the start of their career as a SENCO. To support analysis, looking at recruitment through an ecological lens provides a holistic approach that helps us unpick that “the process [of becoming SENCO] is subject to the interactive moderating effects of both person and context” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 78). Indeed, the analysis suggests that there is a distinct and rich interaction between the role of the SENCO and the socially constructed policy from which it is derived that participants use to describe their

career interest. This research has implications for all schools in the recruitment or appointment of a SENCO.

***6.5.1 Good recruitment is not just about appointing the 'right person'. It is about understanding what the role offers and what the person is expecting***

Ellis, Skidmore, and Combs (2017) provide the salutary warning that after recruitment, high rates of teacher satisfaction are commensurate with those who know what the role involved from the outset, or the relationship between the person and context. Ellis et al. (2017) add another dimension by replacing the word “context” with “job” or “organisation”, thus allowing the teacher to make career decisions based on their knowledge of themselves and their knowledge of the job and organisation. This person – job/organisation fit could be potentially mismatched if there is a lack of information provided by the employer. Prior to recruitment, they may provide little more than a generic range of person specifications and a few details about the “ideal candidate” or “in return you will receive”. This makes it difficult for the prospective SENCO (person) to match their career interest with the role and school (job or context) to evaluate its suitability for them.

If we are to build best practice, we need to start with the most essential resources within the system – the people. This includes understanding how different contexts have encouraged individuals to develop an interest in undertaking this complex role. Using an adapted ecological lens (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005) the purpose of this chapter has been to explore why people choose to undertake the role of the SENCO – the person

in the person context fit (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) or the person in the person – job/organisation fit (Ellis et al., 2017). This research suggests that teachers draw upon a wide range of different reasons when they embark on this career trajectory, often through a “pick and mix” approach drawing on a bricolage of personal, school, and wider cultural and policy factors. Schools who are recruiting SENCOs need to have an awareness of expectations of their future employees and that they will also come with a range of expectations and drivers. Importantly, for many participants these factors are not mutually exclusive but co-exist; teachers may simultaneously be ambitious, keen to take on management roles, pragmatic about policy, and also have huge personal and emotional investment in issues of social justice. As teachers draw differently from these varying parts of each system, the study provides a way to help understand why each SENCO is individual and different in their interest and what they want to achieve within the role.

#### ***6.5.2 SENCOs may want different things from the role. Do schools know what they want from the role?***

As Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) suggests, influences upon the person can be both proximal and distal. In a proximal sense, this research suggests that SENCOs may draw from their own experiences when developing an interest in this role. These personal experiences are wide and varied and can involve inspirational colleagues or teachers who they wish to emulate. Conversely, the personal experiences may be negatively driven by experiences of negotiating the system for their own child. Within the data, the participants express a desire to draw on experience to affect change in their settings. Indeed, as Mackenzie (2012b) argues, these proximal experiences appear to lead to a deep sense of

personal mission and emotional labour by many participants. It is important to note that all experiences shared by the participants in this study indicated a deep sense of needing to enact social justice. Indeed, as Thomas and Loxley (2007, p. 18) comment, in trying to improve education, they are acknowledging the successes, failures, and experiences that have emerged from their own learning. This is important to note as each SENCO will bring a wide range of experience to their role, which may be more than just an understanding of pedagogy, procedure, and policy.

Although SENCOs often draw from direct personal experiences, they are also ultimately influenced by much wider factors both within school and on a national level. Following the centralised approach of past Labour governments (Alexander, 2004), the most recent efforts have been in the development of SEN, through facilitating school to school approaches and the development of communities of practice (Department for Education, 2018c) wrapped in the guise of a school effectiveness framework. Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) argue that for communities to be effective, leadership is essential to “foster the integration of an effective knowledge system, and to promote a compelling vision of the knowledge organisation” (p. 159).

However, it is of note that out of this sample, only 38% identified as being in a senior leadership role and this is much less in reality (see section 7.3.6). If the SENCO is going to effect change, it will be important to refer headteachers and other senior leaders to the list of suggested duties within the original SENCO regulations. As an example, we can take the recommendations that SENCOs advise teachers about differentiation (*The Education (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators) (England) Regulations*, 2008, p. Section 5:

para 2(d)). This would imply that the SENCO needs to be exceptionally knowledgeable, able to support teaching and learning, and have opportunities to lead. However, how can this be achieved without adequate time, resource, and authority? Indeed, participants often considered that the opportunity to express themselves in a leadership position was an attraction, explaining why they have embarked on this role in the first instance; another indicator that points to the need to understand the SENCO as a person within the person – job fit (Ellis et al., 2017).

If school leaders are to effectively recruit, retain, and manage this group of professionals, it is important that they have a good understanding about the hopes and aspirations each SENCO brings to their school settings. Indeed, prior to any “management”, the interest of the SENCO could be harnessed by school leaders who perhaps need to take the time to actively agree how the role should be operationalised on a day-to-day basis. This could be easily achieved through a joint agreement of the exemplar expectations of the role, shared in regulation and legislation. Only then will there be a tacit agreement of role and a clear understanding of role boundaries, which are required not only of the appropriate authority but also of the SENCO themselves who is charged with operationalising SEN policy on a day-to-day basis. Ideally, this should be an explicit part of the recruitment process and maintained to retain the SENCO over time.

### ***6.5.3 People often speak using the language of policy***

Finally, it is noteworthy how participants often wish to work within the school effectiveness framework by aspiring to a leadership role in order to have greater



influence. However, Wenger et al. (2002) also argue that effective leadership should continually question the “status quo” (p. 159) and question what is taking place within the organisation. The participants wished to work within and change school structures or school practice. Here, the SENCO is a policy user and a policy actor. Firstly, people have used their interest in the role to use policy to their own ends. The potential attraction of professional autonomy whilst working part time is a factor in attracting some people to the position. Likewise, there is an attraction of escaping the day-to-day stresses of being a classroom teacher for others. These are honest appraisals of the difficulties of working in school settings; however, it is the way that the participants use the language of policy which provides a deeper insight. As a policy actor, participants would seem adept at using the language of policy in questioning what is occurring within their organisations and suggesting change. Ball, Maguire, Braun, and Hoskins (2011) warn that the use of the language of policy to describe a position comes with a warning in that when teachers use policy language to describe intent and action, they may be lacking the criticality required to make change.

Within this study, the participants wish to evaluate their own settings and affect change from within, which is akin to the arguments presented by Biesta, Priestley, and Robinson (2017), who argue that when teachers talk, this is often used to evaluate their settings – the evaluative dimension; and suggest alternatives and change – the projective dimension. However, often this is with the caveat of acknowledging the tacit realism of the policy that they wish to enact, i.e., that the policy itself is good and should not be questioned. Ball et al. (2011, p. 622) suggest teacher evaluation can often be based upon reflecting

on policy and using this to judge their worth as a teacher, often through vocabulary which is almost identical to that within policy itself. Essentially, SENCOs are describing a career interest confined and restrained within a policy echo-chamber. This is not saying that there is lack of agency in what they want to achieve, nor should it be argued that the policy is wrong, although others have posited these arguments (e.g., Allan & Youdell, 2017). Indeed, there remains the possibility that SENCOs may have already considered the merits of current policy and either agreed with it or designed their own pragmatic response to work within it.

Burr (2015, p. 4) argues our action is a production of our knowledge; however, our knowledge is often not based on what there really is; rather, it is a production of a range of different social processes. We only need to look at the different iterations of the Code to understand that policy changes over time and we are now at a time of change, including performativity and embedded market forces (Lehane, 2017). If leaders are going to appoint and manage a SENCO, they need to be aware of what policy statements are influencing those who are expressing an interest in the position. It is important that both the leader and the SENCO has this joint understanding as the policy will ultimately, as Burr (2015) argues, impact upon action.

## **6.6 Conclusion**

This chapter has explored why people become SENCOs through an ecological lens. The findings provide an insight into the complex reasons presented by individuals as to why they enter the role of SENCO. The study has sought to acknowledge that those who choose to work in this complex position draw on a

wide range of personal, organisational, and social factors in making their decision. These can be organised ecologically as the individuals at the centre of each system are influenced by diverse elements such as people, objects, schools, and policy. Ultimately, this is the interest that these individuals express in this position. Suggestions have been made that before considering how these individuals are appointed and managed, it is essential that school leaders should have an in-depth understanding of these different factors. The framework provided presents a way that these data may be organised. However, it also provides a way in which this data can be questioned, interrogated, and considered when recruiting SENCOs.

While the findings do present diverse reasons for entering the position, what is not acknowledged is diversity within the SENCOs themselves. One weakness of the present chapter has been the reliance on comparing the sample to the national dataset of teachers rather than SENCOs. Understanding these demographic differences is essential. For example, Super (1980) suggests that career interest can change over time with age whilst Mackenzie (2012a, 2012b) argues that the sex of an individual may influence their approach to the role. The next chapter unpicks the population of the SENCO and in doing so re-evaluates some of the potential assumptions implied within existing research against this data.

## **CHAPTER 7 – UNDERSTANDING THE SENCO WORKFORCE: A RE-EXAMINATION OF SELECTED STUDIES THROUGH THE LENS OF AN ACCURATE NATIONAL DATASET**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of a Freedom of Information request into the SENCO population in English schools in the academic years 2017 and 2018. As discussed previously, the role has developed organically over time in response to the symbiotic relationship between a wide range of interested parties including policy makers, schools, researchers, and the SENCOs themselves. In the previous chapter, ecological approaches were used to structure our understanding of why people become SENCOs. The empirical data presented suggests that teachers draw upon many contextual drivers when transitioning into the position. However, at the heart of this system is the person and their own individual characteristics. Within this chapter a definitive breakdown of the current SENCO population's demography in England is provided. This is with a view to offering a critical analysis of sampled literature on the topic of the SENCO role to be able to i) evaluate the trustworthiness of claims to generalisability where research using samples of SENCOs have been used, and ii) provide a basis for the evaluation of elements of policy which have been enacted without an accurate assessment of the demography of the SENCO population.

### ***7.1.1 The use of research to shape and influence policy and practice***

As discussed throughout this thesis, the SENCO role has developed iteratively over time. Indeed, as suggested in Chapter 6, the construction of the role has been influenced by policy development within the macrosystem and school interpretation within the exosystem. It has also been developed through individualised drivers within the individual microsystems of teachers, SENCOs, and others over the period that the role has been operationalised.

As the role is one that has a direct counterpart in other countries, researchers elsewhere internationally often draw upon research conducted in England to inform their studies. Conversely, studies conducted in international settings are sometimes cited by researchers working within the English context. For example, Kearns (2005) writing in a Northern Irish context performed analysis at the level of the person. He drew upon 18 SENCOs in a small-scale study to argue that SENCOs may fulfil different functions within schools (see section 2.3.5). This has often been cited by researchers writing in an English context such as Mackenzie (2007) and Rosen-Webb (2011).

Indeed, Fitzgerald and Radford (2017) draw upon all of the three studies above when writing about the role of the SENCO within the context of the Republic of Ireland. In their study, Fitzgerald and Radford (2017) noted the recent introduction of the SENCO within Ireland but acknowledged how little is known about the role in this particular context. Utilising research conducted with a sample of 27 SENCOs in Ireland, they argued that their work could further inform policy. Their recommendations include the need to ensure role

recognition and whether the position should be established as a strategic school leader, an argument made by others within England (Tissot, 2013).

Other research has been conducted within Europe outside the UK and Ireland. Klang et al. (2017) focus on the role of the 'Special Needs Educator' in the Swedish context. They acknowledge that like the SENCO in English schools, there is a need to demonstrate leadership competences by working beyond the classroom by sharing their responsibilities with others (p. 392). They later acknowledge that the role of the Special Needs Educator is similar to that of the English SENCO. Indeed, to support their analysis, they draw upon many of the English studies mentioned later in this chapter and thesis (e.g., Rosen-Webb, 2011; Szwed, 2007a; Szwed, 2007b; Tissot, 2013) and one of the aforementioned Ireland-based studies (e.g., Kearns, 2005). The use of studies conducted in England to drive analysis is also apparent outside Europe. Working in Hong Kong, Poon-McBrayer (2012) argues the need for SENCOs to be provided with both more support and status, drawing upon several studies conducted in England to inform his work (e.g., Cole, 2005; Szwed, 2007a).

The research on the SENCO role conducted within England that has been used to inform both English and international policymakers has employed a variety of research methods, with methodologies using a range of lenses and worldviews. Qualitative studies from groups of participants are frequently used to look at the lived experiences of SENCOs within their day-to-day role. Often these address complex issues such as shifts in the understanding of inclusion, utilising the work of Foucault (Glazzard, 2014; Morewood, 2012), issues such as emotional labour (Mackenzie, 2012b), or career interest (Dobson & Douglas,

2020b) (Chapter 6 in this thesis). Other studies have attempted to provide more of a broad overview of the SENCO's role. However, missing from the literature has been an accurate picture of the demography of SENCOs in English schools. Pearson (2008) noted this as an issue over 10 years ago commenting on the lack of "reliable national data" (p. 40) against which to evaluate the representativeness of samples employed in empirical work.

Recently, large surveys have been conducted on the work of the SENCO by Curran et al. (2018) and Passy et al. (2017). Again, as with the earlier work by Pearson (2008) and Pearson et al. (2015), it is significant that the authors are unable to compare their own samples against an accurate national picture of the population. Although demographic data about the constitution of the SENCO population is collected by the DfE regularly, it is not published. As such, the present chapter provides the first accurate analysis of the population of English SENCOs from data collected by the DfE in November 2017 and November 2018. The chapter also reconsiders many research claims and assumptions in the light of these data.

### ***7.1.2 Demonstrating validity***

The importance of demonstrating the validity of research cannot be understated. Yardley (2015) suggests that it is a prerequisite to enable research findings to be considered "sound, legitimate and authoritative" (p. 257). She continues to argue that validity is important to a wide range of interested parties including other researchers, publishers, and policy makers, such as the DfE. However, she also notes that validity is complex and has different meanings for different researchers. This is often based on the worldview used to frame the

analysis. The discussion on these matters has promoted rigorous debate and forms an essential part of generalist research methods texts (e.g., Thomas, 2017), more focused texts on qualitative traditions (e.g., Smith, 2015), and work on aspects of survey design (e.g., Groves et al., 2009; Oppenheim, 1992). It is beyond the remit of the current chapter to enter this discussion in great depth; however, an overview of some of the debate is worthwhile when making judgements about the validity of the research literature related to the SENCO, especially if this is to be used to inform work of national, strategic importance and provide a voice for a profession.

Thomas (2017, p. 146) provides simple definitions of the different types of validity to be considered within studies. These include 'internal' and 'external' validity. Internal validity is regarded as ensuring that the internal consistency of the analysis within the article has been considered and all threats to this have been considered. For example, within qualitative papers the researcher must be particularly careful with how their findings may be biased through subtle interactions with their worldview and interpretation of the text, a caveat that Rosen-Webb (2011, p. 161) succinctly makes in her work. External validity meanwhile relates to how the results can be generalised across a whole population, hence the need for a clear dataset to which a 'sample' of SENCOs may be compared. Two threats to validity will be considered here. Firstly, the use of clear terminology to ensure explicit clarity for the reader and secondly the need to establish an in-depth understanding of an overall population.

### ***7.1.3 The need for clear terminology***

Here, the issue lies with the oft careless use of the word 'sample'. Oppenheim



(1992) dedicates a significant part of his text to types of sample and how inaccuracies and misunderstandings within sampling can potentially invalidate research. Oppenheim (1992, p. 38) defines two terms of interest. The 'population' is the entirety of the group of people who are to be studied. This may be all SENCOs in England or any other grouping such as SENCOs in English state secondary academies. He describes the sample as "a smaller group usually but not always a representative one, within the population" (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 38). Thomas (2017, p. 143) suggests that the word sample is now overused and used perhaps inappropriately. He further argues that the word sampling carries with it an implicit notion that the group being studied is representative of the whole population of concern when they are often not.

Despite this, the term 'sample' is still used across a whole range of qualitative research. For example, Charmaz (2014) suggests that within the highly qualitative, constructivist grounded theory "to use theoretical sampling, we must relinquish our preconceptions about what sampling means" (p. 197). Rosen-Webb (2011) uses grounded theory in her study of SENCO identity. Nowhere in the article does she mention the word 'sample' instead her preferred term is 'participants' – a word that does not suggest representativeness. I argue that this subtle change in the nomenclature is important if policy makers are to read these articles to make significant decisions. However, this readership may neither have the time nor inclination to immerse themselves in the subtle distinction between representative and theoretical samples to balance their decisions. Indeed, through the article Rosen-Webb (2011) clearly argues the need for readers to consider that the

article cannot be fully representative of the whole (or part) of the SENCO population. Despite this, she still argues that an interpretive study based on nine participants in one local authority can have ‘external validity’.

#### ***7.1.4 External validity, the survey, and understanding the ‘population’***

Thomas (2017, p. 147) suggests that “external validity... is the degree to which the results of a study can be generalised beyond your study sample to an entire population”. The ability to use data to reflect on the wider population is pertinent to survey work, especially that which purports to reflect ‘reality’. This is especially important in subsequent chapters of this thesis. The notion of validity in survey research is also contested (Groves et al., 2009, p. 274) and indeed there are other threats to validity such as response bias to the items presented within the survey itself. Again, this is beyond the scope of the current chapter. Rather, it is important to consider what the SENCO surveys say about the ‘reality of the role’ and reflect on whether claims from the ‘sample’ fully reflect those of ‘the population’. These surveys are often written with the objective of evaluating (e.g., Passy et al., 2017) or shaping (e.g., Curran et al., 2018) policy and so it is important that they accurately reflect those whom they claim to represent. Lack of understanding of the overall SENCO population has always caused difficulties in designing representative samples. It is noteworthy that both surveys cited here had to caveat their findings with this issue.

#### ***7.1.5 Why there is need to understand the population within the present study***

In the previous chapter there was an analysis of interest in the SENCO role.

This used ecological approaches to frame the analysis. However, this theoretical framework also acknowledges that development can be influenced by the person at the centre of the system and their individual characteristics (see section 6.4.1). Likewise, in the field of the psychology of career interest an understanding of individual characteristics or the 'person' is also of importance (see section 4.5). Thus, here it is important to stress that having accounted for the contextual factors that influence teachers to become SENCOs, it is equally important to account for individual characteristics through a thorough understanding of some of these characteristics within the overall population. Yet, it would seem this is not fully considered by many other researchers, or it is simply discounted within methods sections in passing as will be argued here.

## **7.2 The selection of articles for review**

### ***7.2.1 Search criteria and criteria for analysis***

The current study does not claim to be a full literature review or systematic review. Rather the purpose of this chapter is to highlight how selected influential studies make claims based on a limited acknowledgement of the population represented by these studies, a potential foolhardy mistake if individual characteristics can influence a participant's response. Two types of article were evaluated: i) peer reviewed research articles, and ii) national surveys commissioned by interested bodies such as the DfE or national associations. The timespan was set from 1994 to the present day to ensure that the evolving role since 1994 was reflected in the analysis.

The analysis of the corpus of work was carefully structured against set criteria:

- The findings of the research and claims made.
- The method through which the data were collected.
- The sample size and demographic consistency of the sample.
- Whether caveats have been made within the research concerning generalisability or external validity.
- Any worldview or theory used to frame the analysis, given that differing expectations exist about external validity in work from different traditions.

(Yardley, 2015)

Selected examples of this analysis will be discussed in the latter part of this study.

### ***7.2.2 SENCOs – the missing link in the published data on the school workforce***

The original analysis here (concerning SENCOs) is offered against the same dataset from the following year to highlight the stability of this population data over a two-year period. Census data collected by the Department for Education for the *whole* school workforce in England in November 2017 (Department for Education, 2018b) is presented against both sets of data. The school workforce dataset provides for a range of different analyses including:

- The size of the school workforce. This includes teachers, teaching assistants, and support staff.

- Teacher flows. This represents those entering or leaving the profession for a variety of reasons.
- Pupil-teacher ratios. This provides pupil-teacher ratios over time for all state funded schools and an additional separate analysis for ratios in state funded primary and secondary schools.
- Teachers' pay. This analysis enables comparison of different types of school and levels of teaching professionals (namely, headteachers, those on the leadership scale, and classroom teachers).
- Teacher qualifications and curriculum taught. This provides a breakdown of certain levels of teacher qualifications and the first qualifications of those teaching a range of secondary aged subject areas.

While the government statistics (Department for Education, 2018b) give these breakdowns of the workforce, there is no facility in the published data to isolate and/or extract data specifically relating to the SENCO. Whilst additional analyses provide a more in-depth overview of the school workforce data including sickness absence, hours taught, qualification, gender, and ethnicity, the SENCO position here is not evident. Indeed, throughout the whole dataset, there is no mention of the role of the SENCO.

The lack of breakdown is surprising given the census guide (Department for Education, 2017c), which provides the basis for the statistics, requests data on SENCOs and reminds respondents that there are only two expectations of every school: “to have a SENCO and to have a headteacher or executive headteacher.” (p. 15). Indeed, as already discussed earlier (see section 2.3.5), to comply with legislation SENCOs are expected to hold an appropriate

qualification, information on which is specifically requested: “The SENCO qualification must be recorded where present for any SENCOs” (Department for Education, 2017c, p. 61). Whilst the DfE must therefore hold records to be able to ascertain whether schools are compliant with SENCO regulations for both appointment and necessary training, there are no data on this published.

Later in the document, there is a list of standard code sets extracted from the Common Basic Data Set held by the Department for Education (2018a). These enable the classification of discrete items such as gender, ethnicity, post, and role. For example, ‘gender’ code 1, ‘ethnicity’ code MWAS, ‘post’ code TCH, and ‘role’ code SENC would translate as a male teacher with a mixed white and Asian background. They would be employed as a class teacher with the role of SENCO. The addition of code Z201 would indicate that they hold the National Award for SENCO (NASENCo) qualification.

There is an obvious discrepancy, therefore, between the wealth of data collected through the census and that which is published by the DfE for the purposes of understanding the workforce.

### ***7.2.3 Filling the gaps via the Freedom of Information Act (2000)***

The Freedom of Information (FOI) Act (2000) provides a right of access to information which is held by public authorities such as the DfE. Naturally, under the auspices of data protection regulations, personal or sensitive data is restricted; however, the Act sanctions the extraction of data such as that relating to the demographics of the SENCO population. A Freedom of Information request was lodged in September 2018. The same request was

lodged for the following year's data in September 2019. The request was designed to align with standard sets of tables present in the published workforce data. The first request read as:

Based on the data from the School workforce in England:  
November 2017 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/school-workforce-in-england-november-2017>. Please could you provide the following information for the role identifier of SENCOs only (ROLE SENC). The following is based on the working and format of [Tables: school workforce census 2017](#).

The request was then structured to comply with how data is presented within the additional tables in the School Workforce Survey and related to one occupation definition – SENCO. All questions asked were aligned with the presumption of known data sets based on two criteria:

- The information is known about all teachers
- A code exists within the DfE dataset to identify and isolate SENCOs.

#### ***7.2.4 Specific questions related to the DfE dataset under the Freedom of Information Act (2000)***

The following questions were asked as part of the Freedom of Information request. The tables referred to within the questions are those present in the appendix of the School Workforce document. These were provided to the DfE for clarity and to provide an example of what was required.

Request 1: This request is based on **Table 3a**. In a similar fashion please could

you provide the head count and full-time equivalent numbers of SENCOs in state funded schools (Thousands) – The data from this request is presented in Table 2.

Request 2: This request is based on **Table 4**. In a similar fashion please could you provide the full-time equivalent number of SENCOs in state funded schools by gender and age (Thousands) – The data from this request is presented in Table 3.

Request 3: This request is based on **Table 5**. Please could you provide the percentages of the head count of SENCOs in state funded schools by ethnic origin (percentages) – The data from this request is presented in Tables 4, 5 and 6.

Request 4: Please provide the percentage of SENCOs for all state schools who are classified as headteachers, deputy headteachers, assistant headteachers, classroom teachers – The data from this request is presented in Table 7.

Request 5: The percentages of SENCOs identified under the following qualification codes in the school staff survey. PGCE, MAST, DOCT, BEDO, FRST, CTED, NQF4, NNUK – The data from this request is presented in Table 8.

### **7.3 An analysis of the data emerging from the FOI request**

Tables 2 to 8 present an analysis of the new data following the FOI request. To reiterate, these figures give an account, hitherto unpublished, of the entire population of SENCOs in England at the time of the 2017 and 2018 census.



After the presentation of the tables, I shall proceed to discuss the significance of various elements via a review of key pieces of research.

**Table 2: Headcount and percentages of SENCOs in state funded schools divided by gender and full-time or part-time status compared to all teachers in state-maintained schools**

	SENCO headcount <sup>(1)</sup> 2017	SENCO percentage <sup>(2)</sup> 2017	SENCO headcount <sup>(1)</sup> 2018	SENCO percentage <sup>(2)</sup> 2018	Teacher headcount <sup>(3)</sup> 2017	Teacher percentage <sup>(4)</sup> 2017
<b>Men</b>						
Total head count	1,920	9.4%	1,947	9.0%	114,300	24.1%
Full-time head count	1,790	8.7%	1,701	7.9%	105,700	22.3%
Part-time head count	120	0.6%	246	1.1%	8,600	1.8%
<b>Women</b>						
Total head count	18,580	90.6%	19,601	91.0%	359,400	75.9%
Full-time head count	12,780	62.3%	12,410	57.6%	258,500	54.6%
Part-time head count	5,800	28.3%	7,191	33.4%	100,900	21.3%
<b>Men and Women</b>						
Total head count	20,500	100.0%	21,548	100%	473,700	100.0%
Full-time head count	14,580	71.1%	14,111	65.5%	364,200	76.9%
Part-time head count	5,920	28.9%	7,437	34.5%	109,500	23.1%

(1) Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 SENCOs. Totals may not appear equal to the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

(2) Percentages are calculated from figures rounded to the nearest 10 SENCOs. Totals may not appear equal to the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

(3) Figures are rounded to the nearest 100 teachers. Totals may not appear equal to the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

(4) Percentages are calculated from figures rounded to the nearest 100 teachers. Totals may not appear equal to the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

Notes: Figures exclude estimates for missing schools.

**Table 3: SENCOs in state funded schools divided by gender and age compared to all teachers in state-maintained schools**

	SENCO FTE (1) 2017	SENCO FTE percentage (2) 2017	SENCO headcount (1) 2018	SENCO percentage (2) 2018	Teacher headcount (3) 2017	Teacher percentage (4) 2017
<b>MEN</b>						
Under 25	0	0.0%	8	0.0%	5,500	1.2%
25-29	80	0.4%	86	0.4%	19,000	4.2%
30-34	270	1.5%	290	13.5%	21,100	4.7%
35-39	360	2.0%	354	1.6%	19,700	4.4%
40-44	360	2.0%	373	1.7%	16,500	3.7%
45-49	330	1.8%	351	1.6%	15,100	3.3%
50-54	270	1.5%	283	1.3%	11,400	2.5%
55-59	140	0.8%	150	0.7%	6,800	1.5%
60 and over	50	0.3%	52	0.2%	2,500	0.6%
All ages	1,860	10.2%	1,947	9.0%	117,700	26.0%
<b>WOMEN</b>						
Under 25	50	0.3%	61	0.3%	23,100	5.1%
25-29	950	5.2%	908	4.2%	62,500	13.8%
30-34	2,100	11.5%	2,471	11.5%	57,200	12.7%
35-39	2,720	14.9%	3,393	15.7%	49,700	11.0%
40-44	2,900	16.1%	3,620	16.8%	43,800	9.7%
45-49	2,800	15.5%	3,509	16.3%	39,500	8.7%
50-54	2,490	13.8%	2,879	13.4%	32,100	7.1%
55-59	1,530	8.5%	1,902	8.8%	19,000	4.2%
60 and over	640	3.5%	858	4.0%	7,100	1.6%
All ages	16,180	90%	19,601	91%	334,100	73.9%

## MEN AND WOMEN

Under 25	50	0.3%	69	0.3%	28,600	6.3%
25-29	1,020	5.6%	994	4.6%	81,500	18.0%
30-34	2,370	12.9%	2,761	12.8%	78,300	17.3%
35-39	3,080	16.8%	3,747	17.4%	69,400	15.4%
40-44	3,260	17.8%	3,993	18.5%	60,400	13.4%
45-49	3,130	17.1%	3,860	17.9%	54,600	12.1%
50-54	2,760	15.1%	3,162	14.7%	43,500	9.6%
55-59	1,670	9.1%	2,052	9.5%	25,800	5.7%
60 and over	680	3.7%	910	4.22%	9,700	0.0%
All ages	18,030	100.0%	21,548	100%	451,900	100%

(1) Figures are rounded to the nearest 10 SENCos. Totals may not appear equal to the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

(2) Percentages are calculated from figures rounded to the nearest 10 SENCos. Totals may not appear equal to the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

(3) Figures are rounded to the nearest 100 teachers. Totals may not appear equal to the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

(4) Percentages are calculated from figures rounded to the nearest 100 teachers. Totals may not appear equal to the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

Notes: Figures exclude estimates for missing schools.

**Table 4: Percentages of male SENCOs in all state funded schools by ethnic origin compared to all other male teachers in primary, secondary, and special schools**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>SENCOs (November 2017)</b>	<b>SENCOs (November 2018)</b>	<b>State Funded Nursery and Primary (November 2017)</b>	<b>State Funded Secondary (November 2017)</b>	<b>State Funded Special/PRU/AP (November 2017)</b>
White – British	91.4%	91.3%	90.1%	84.5%	84.4%
White – Irish	1.8%	1.8%	1.7%	2.1%	1.7%
Any other white background	2.4%	2.3%	2.8%	3.4%	5.0%
White and Black Caribbean	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.6%
White and Black African	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%
White and Asian	0.4%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.4%
Any other mixed background	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.5%	0.5%
Indian	0.9%	0.9%	0.9%	1.8%	0.9%
Pakistani	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%	1.3%	0.6%
Bangladeshi	0.1%	0.1%	0.4%	0.7%	0.2%
Any other Asian Background	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%	0.8%	0.5%
Black Caribbean	0.7%	0.5%	0.7%	1.0%	2.0%
Black – African	0.5%	0.4%	0.5%	1.7%	1.6%

Any other Black background	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%	0.5%	0.6%
Chinese	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%
Any other ethnic group	0.4%	0.5%	0.4%	0.7%	0.6%
Ethnicity details provided	93.5%	93.2%	93.7%	92.9%	93.8%
Refused	0.9%	1.0%	0.5%	0.9%	0.6%
Information not yet obtained	5.6%	5.8%	5.8%	6.2%	5.6%

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Notes: Figures exclude estimates for missing schools  
AP = Alternative Provision  
PRU = Pupil Referral Unit

**Table 5: Percentages of female SENCOS in all state funded schools by ethnic origin compared to all other female teachers in primary, secondary, and special schools**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>SENCOs (November 2017)</b>	<b>SENCOs (November 2018)</b>	<b>State Funded Nursery and Primary (November 2017)</b>	<b>State Funded Secondary (November 2017)</b>	<b>State Funded Special/PRU/AP (November 2017)</b>
White – British	93.2%	93.1%	88.7%	82.2%	87.6%
White – Irish	1.0%	1.0%	1.3%	1.9%	1.3%
Any other white background	2.1%	2.1%	2.9%	5.5%	5.1%
White and Black Caribbean	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%
White and Black African	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
White and Asian	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%	0.2%
Any other mixed background	0.3%	0.3%	0.5%	0.6%	0.4%
Indian	0.8%	0.8%	1.8%	2.4%	1.1%
Pakistani	0.4%	0.4%	1.0%	1.3%	0.4%
Bangladeshi	0.1%	0.1%	0.5%	0.6%	0.2%
Any other Asian Background	0.2%	0.2%	0.5%	0.9%	0.4%
Black Caribbean	0.8%	0.7%	0.9%	1.3%	1.3%
Black – African	0.3%	0.2%	0.4%	1.0%	0.7%
Any other Black background	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.4%	0.3%
Chinese	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.3%	0.1%

Any other ethnic group	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.8%	0.6%
Ethnicity details provided	95.3%	95.0%	94.3%	92.7%	94.0%
Refused	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%	0.8%	0.5%
Information not yet obtained	4.4%	4.5%	5.3%	6.5%	5.5%

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Notes: Figures exclude estimates for missing schools  
AP = Alternative Provision  
PRU = Pupil Referral Unit



**Table 6: Percentages of male and female SENCOs in all state funded schools by ethnic origin compared to all other teachers in primary, secondary, and special schools**

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>SENCOs (November 2017)</b>	<b>SENCOs (November 2018)</b>	<b>State Funded Nursery and Primary (November 2017)</b>	<b>State Funded Secondary (November 2017)</b>	<b>State Funded Special/PRU/AP (November 2017)</b>
White – British	93.0%	92.9%	88.9%	83.0%	86.7%
White – Irish	1.1%	1.1%	1.4%	2.0%	1.4%
Any other white background	2.1%	2.1%	2.9%	4.7%	5.1%
White and Black Caribbean	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%
White and Black African	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%	0.1%
White and Asian	0.2%	0.2%	0.3%	0.4%	0.3%
Any other mixed background	0.3%	0.3%	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%
Indian	0.8%	0.8%	1.6%	2.2%	1.0%
Pakistani	0.4%	0.4%	1.0%	1.3%	0.5%
Bangladeshi	0.1%	0.1%	0.5%	0.6%	0.2%
Any other Asian Background	0.2%	0.2%	0.5%	0.8%	0.4%
Black Caribbean	0.8%	0.7%	0.9%	1.2%	1.5%
Black – African	0.3%	0.2%	0.4%	1.3%	0.9%
Any other Black background	0.1%	0.2%	0.2%	0.4%	0.4%
Chinese	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%

Any other ethnic group	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.7%	0.6%
Ethnicity details provided	95.1%	94.9%	94.2%	92.8%	93.9%
Refused	0.4%	0.5%	0.5%	0.8%	0.5%
Information not yet obtained	4.5%	4.6%	5.3%	6.4%	5.5%

Notes: Figures exclude estimates for missing schools  
AP = Alternative Provision  
PRU = Pupil Referral Unit

**Table 7: Percentage of SENCOs in different school roles**

<b>Role of SENCO</b>	<b>Percentage in this role<sup>(2)</sup> (November 2017)</b>	<b>Percentage in this role<sup>(2)</sup> (November 2018)</b>
Headteachers	10.6%	10.2%
Deputy headteachers	12.1%	11.6%
Assistant headteachers	15.5%	15.3%
Classroom teachers	61.8%	62.9%

Notes: Figures exclude estimates for missing schools.

<sup>(2)</sup> Percentages are calculated from figures rounded to the nearest 10 SENCOs. Totals may not appear equal to the sum of the component parts because of rounding.

**Table 8: Percentages of SENCOs who hold qualifications**

<b>Qualification of SENCO</b>	<b>Percentage<sup>(5)</sup> 2017</b>	<b>Percentage<sup>(5)</sup> 2018</b>
PGCE	48.3	51.3
MAST	6.4	8.1
DOCT	0.2	0.2
BEDO	44.2	45.5
FRST	77.5	78.9
CTED	7.1	8.9
NQF4	2.4	3.7
NNUK	0.9	1.2

Notes: If SENCOs hold more than one qualification, they will be represented in more than one column. Figures exclude estimates for missing schools.

<sup>(5)</sup> SENCOs are counted against each qualification they hold, if more than one qualification is held, they will be included more than once.

**Table 9: Qualification codes within the DfE workforce survey**

<b>Qualification code</b>	<b>DfE Descriptor</b>
PGCE	Post-graduate Initial Teacher Training Qualification
MAST	Master's Degree, for example MSc, MEd or other level 7 qualifications such as postgraduate certificates and diplomas
DOCT	Doctorate, for example PhD, or other level 8 qualification
BEDO	BEd or other first degree combined with teacher qualifications
FRST	Other first degree (that is; degrees other than BEd or other first degree combined with teacher qualifications) such as BA and BSc, or other level 6 qualification such as graduate certificates and diplomas
CTED	Certificate in Education or equivalent
NQF4	Any other qualification at level 4 or 5, for example level 4 NVQ, diplomas of higher education and further education, foundation degrees and higher national diplomas, and certificates of higher education.
NNUK	Non-UK teaching qualification

Notes: Figures exclude estimates for missing schools.

With this analysis it is now possible to review several existing claims from previous research and to discuss various elements relating to the discovered demography.

### **7.3.1 External validity and generalisation – general issues**

The issue relating to the representativeness and external validity of the corpus of work about SENCOs can be succinctly reflected upon using the work of Szwed (2007a). She conducted research with a group of SENCOs but with the caveat that her work was not representative and highly localised. She asserted, for example, the likelihood of the SENCO being female but was unable to verify

this. Despite her concerns, Szwed's paper has since been cited over 10 times to support several claims about various aspects of the SENCO population. These claims include the complexity and variability of the role (Göransson, Lindqvist, Möllås, Almqvist, & Nilholm, 2017; Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012); the lack of whole school oversight (Klang et al., 2017); the highly gendered nature of the profession (Brown & Doveston, 2014); and that "Research supports the leadership aspect of the SENCO role" (Tissot, 2013, p. 34). All these pieces of research building upon the word of Szwed have then gone on to make further claims which are often based on the work of Szwed (2007a) offering a robust basis for generalisation.

### ***7.3.2 The 'primary/secondary' split***

In January 2018, there were 16,766 (83%) primary schools and 3,436 (17%) secondary schools in England (Department for Education, 2018b table 2e). This makes 20,202 schools. To comply with legislation, it is assumed there will also be 20,202 named headteachers and SENCOs. In the same period, there were 16,100 full-time heads and 1,000 part time heads in state funded primary schools, whilst in state funded secondary schools there were 3,600 full-time heads and 100 part-time heads. This makes a total across both sectors of 20,800. Although this figure comes with a note of caution as it is rounded to the nearest 100, it is near to the school count. The same workforce survey also reports class teachers, deputy headteachers, and assistant headteachers despite these not being statutory roles, but omits the count of SENCOs, which is a statutory role. The Freedom of Information request indicated that there were 20,500 SENCOs within maintained English schools in 2017. Again, this is

broadly in line with the headcount of headteachers and the amount of primary and secondary schools. This actual dataset can now be used to analyse the claims made by a range of research.

The new data reveal that the number of SENCOs is as expected across the phases, given the stipulation that all schools must have a SENCO. It is important to know, in self-selecting samples used in much survey research, that the actual balance of the self-selected sample reflects that in the population, given the differences in curriculum, working style, etc across the phases. Given this issue, the lack of a national dataset has proved problematic. For example, Brown and Doveston (2014) conducted an appreciative inquiry into the perceived impact of the NASENCo award without reference to any accurate phase-based dataset.

The problem is compounded when studies use each other's samples as indications of the population. Brown and Doveston (2014, p. 498), for example, talk of "research populations [sic] in other studies" citing the work of authors such as Cole (2005) to validate their analysis. This is despite Cole noting that her sample "is self-selecting and not necessarily representative..." (Cole, 2005, p. 289). As before, the issue for Brown and Doveston has been the lack of a national dataset via which they could compare their sample to the overall population. Thus, they became reliant on using existing studies to validate their sample. Oppenheim (1992) suggests that sampling can be full of "statistical pitfalls" Oppenheim (1992, p. 43) further suggesting that a "sample's *accuracy* is more important than its size". Pearson (2008, p. 98) later criticises the sample presented by Cole (2005) due to its geographical limitations and sample size,

arguing that more research with a larger sample is needed. The difficulty with this approach is evident when comparing her dataset against the national picture. Of the 266 respondents, 136 (51%) were received from primary schools and 110 (41%) from secondary schools suggesting that despite her small sample size, the work of Cole (2005) is more representative of the primary/secondary split. The current study provides a backdrop against which to resolve issues of this kind.

### ***7.3.3 Gender and part-time working***

Table 2 presents the SENCO headcount rounded to the nearest 10 and associated percentages. This is compared to data extracted from the school workforce data for teachers as a whole. We can now state definitively that SENCOs are overwhelmingly likely to be women, with a large proportion working part time in this role. This means that some school communities will not have access to a SENCO for a proportion of the week. This can now be said with certainty. Indeed, here a potentially interesting trend is emerging with a 5.6% increase of part-time SENCOs between 2017 and 2018.

The extent of the gender split is surprising, with 90.6% of SENCOs being women compared to 75.9% for all teachers in 2017. Several studies have reported the gender imbalance within the SENCO role (e.g., Mackenzie, 2012b; Szwed, 2007a). Studies that have made unvalidated assertions about the gender imbalance have perhaps underestimated the extent of this imbalance. For example, Szwed (2007a) cites an unpublished dissertation to validate her claim that the profession is largely female. Brown and Doveston (2014) then cite Szwed (2007a) to suggest that the profession is largely female. Thus, the

inaccuracy of their comparative dataset has now been used to validate two studies.

In other research, Mackenzie (2012a) conducted a narrative study with 19 teachers. She suggests a range of factors that keep SENCOs within their position. These include being able to plan their time around the needs of their own children and the flexibility of the role including part-time working. She also argues the 'caring' aspect of the work may explain the highly gendered nature of the role. The new analysis provided here adds validity to her argument: it is noteworthy that nearly one-third of SENCOs are part time compared with fewer than one-quarter in other qualified teaching roles. Again, the highly gendered split is evident here with only 120 of the part-time SENCOs in 2017 being men out of a possible 5,920. The dataset can also be used to reappraise the gender balance in other studies. For example, Cole (2005) comments on the gender imbalance of her study with 87% of her respondents being female. Despite her caveats about the potential unrepresentativeness of her sample and lack of comparative data, the figures broadly mirror the national picture at present.

#### ***7.3.4 Age, gender, and part-time working***

It should be noted that the full-time equivalence (FTE) aggregates all part-time SENCOs to create full-time positions. This derivation in the statistics reduces the overall FTE number to 18,030 in 2017. Unfortunately, a methodological decision made within the DfE statistics department makes a direct comparison between 2017 and 2018 difficult. It was noted on Table 3 that the 2018 total figure of 21548 SENCOs made it highly likely that rather than producing FTE figures in 2018, an actual headcount was produced. This irregularity was later



questioned with the DfE who confirmed that despite an identical FOI request, the two figures were calculated using these two different approaches. This latter issue is of note. Even though statistics are collected by the DfE, the manipulation of the data is still prone to either human error or differences between operatives in how data are either manipulated or extracted.

Nonetheless, the difference in FTE SENCOs and the actual headcount of SENCOs does help us understand the potential impact of SENCO presence in many mainstream schools. Here, it is worth noting that the FTE number in 2017 is 10.1% less than the actual number of SENCOs in 2017. It is impossible to ascertain the overall effect of this reduction on individual schools, but clearly 'the role' is not present in some schools for a significant portion of the week – on average 10%, though likely to be much higher in individual cases. This has implications for a wide variety of functions of the role, not least parent access and support systems for teachers and other staff.

Another implication of the data is in succession planning. Of the FTE of 18,030 SENCOs in 2017, 5,110 are over 50. This represents 28.3% of the SENCO population who may be retiring or considering retiring within a 10-year period. Again, in 2017 62.8% of SENCOs are over 40 which makes the current population slightly younger than the more limited sample used by Cole (2005) at 74%. Over 10 years ago, (Pearson, 2008) noted several reasons for SENCO attrition including high turnover due to the role being used to aid promotion. She also argued that the increase in SENCOs approaching retirement can be further related to teachers as a whole. In 2017, with 27.9% of SENCOs as opposed to

15.3% of teachers being over 50, the issue with succession planning for SENCOs is as relevant today as it was in 2008.

### **7.3.5 *Ethnicity and the SENCO***

Tomlinson (2014, p. 47) noted the imbalance of the ethnic origin of those professionally involved in special education and those whom special education was claimed to help:

‘... where large numbers of ethnic minority pupils are processed into special education, the professional groups are still not only middle class but also predominantly white’.

Tables 4, 5 and 6 presents the head count of SENCOs in state funded schools by ethnic origin expressed as percentages. These data are compared to all other teacher roles including SENCOs in state funded primary, secondary, and special schools. An analysis of these tables suggests that despite a more diverse workforce throughout all schools, it is more likely that anybody who seeks advice from a SENCO is likely to be talking to an individual of White British origin.

### **7.3.6 *Leadership status and the SENCO***

Leadership status is a common theme running throughout the literature (e.g., Szwed, 2007b; Tissot, 2013). Table 7 presents the different roles that SENCOs hold. Despite the Code of Practice advocating that the SENCO should be a leadership role, only 38.2% of SENCOs in 2017 are currently identified on the leadership scale with 61.8% who identify as a class teacher. Again, this

highlights validity concerns with existing research. For example, Passy et al. (2017) questioned different groups including SENCOs and headteachers. The national dataset reported here suggests that in 10.6% of cases these are the same person whereas in the research of Passy et al. (2017) only 4.2% of the respondents were headteachers.

The research has differed on the extent to which SENCOs indeed fulfil leadership roles. Pearson et al. (2015) suggest that the proportion may be as low as 19% whilst Tissot (2013) suggests it could be as high as 50%. The actual national figure for SENCOs on the basis of the current research here is near to the mean of these with 38.2% being senior leaders in 2017, unless of course, these 'senior' leaders are being remunerated by Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) allowances rather than being on the leadership scale.

The findings here may explain the differences in the role found by Griffiths and Dubsky (2012) who reported that some SENCOs were strategic leaders or 'landscapers' and others were managers or 'gardeners'. The findings here suggest that the position is that there are now 38.2% who are 'landscapers' and 61.8% who are 'gardeners'.

However, there is added confusion with the teacher scale due to the ability to pay teachers additional allowances. The class teacher scale also includes teachers who have extra allowances such as SEN points and TLR payments. It is likely that some SENCOs receive these; however, it is not possible to identify these using the current dataset. It is questionable as to whether SENCOs qualify for the SEN allowances under the stipulations made under teachers' pay and conditions (Department for Education, 2017a);

however, the role may fit with many requirements of the TLR. A TLR should only be awarded for significant additional responsibilities which:

- 1) is focused on teaching and learning;
- 2) requires the exercise of a teacher's professional skills and judgement;
- 3) requires the teacher to lead, manage, and develop a subject or curriculum area; or to lead and manage pupil development across the curriculum;
- 4) has an impact on the educational progress of pupils other than the teacher's assigned classes or groups of pupils; and
- 5) involves leading, developing, and enhancing the teaching practice of other staff. (Department for Education, 2017a, pp. 45-46)

Specifications for TLR payments are notable by their absence for the requirement of strategic leadership within the present leadership scale (Department for Education, 2017a, pp. 45-46). Indeed, if many SENCOs do receive TLR payments, it highlights the issues that Brown and Doveston (2014) commented on within their sample that SENCOs described their role as more fitting of a middle rather than a senior leadership role. Pearson (2008) notes within her sample that 59.6% were awarded a TLR for the position and that 54.5% of her respondents did not report being part of the 'senior management team'. She notes the requirement of the now defunct Teacher Development Agency national award requirements for strategic leadership (a leadership scale function) of being able to promote teaching and learning to influence the whole school culture. This descriptor is not dissimilar to those found within the leadership section of teachers' pay and conditions (Department for Education, 2017a, p. 45).

What can be asserted, though, is that SENCOs may or may not be part of the SLT but may be rewarded differently and may be accountable to different sets of rules and expectations. At least 38.2% are school leaders by definition of their position on the leadership scale and should be adhering to 'headteacher standards' (Department for Education, 2015). Some SENCO roles may be akin to middle management roles and may be remunerated through a TLR payment and therefore will be operating under 'Teacher Standards' (Department for Education, 2011b, 2017a). Whether this is appropriate remains a matter for debate.

The new data reported here contributes to discussion attempting to understand if SENCOs are operating in schools in 'leadership' or 'management' roles (Oldham & Radford, 2011). It also raises concerns about the tensions that arise between what SENCOs perceive their role to be and how the role is envisaged by the headteacher within the school leadership structure.

### ***7.3.7 The SENCO and qualifications***

The NASENCo award for SENCOs in mainstream, maintained schools is a level 7 qualification. Since 2009, all SENCOs new to the post have been required to achieve this award within three years of appointment. Indeed, since the award of National Professional Qualification for Headship was made non-mandatory for headteachers, this is now the only award which is mandatory for the two designated positions which all schools must fill by law (namely, the headteacher and the SENCO).

Table 8 presents an overview of the qualifications of SENCOs; Table 9 explains this code set. Two figures are especially noteworthy here. Firstly, nearly half of SENCOs (48.3%) qualified as teachers through a postgraduate route. This suggests that they had degrees in subject-specific areas such as the arts or sciences. Secondly, the number of SENCOs who have completed a master's level qualification is 6.4%. This represents approximately 1,312 SENCOs from a total of 20,500. It is not possible to interrogate what the subjects of these degrees are, neither is it possible to identify whether SENCOs have completed postgraduate certificates, diplomas, or full degrees. Over 30 SENCO providers deliver the NASENCo qualification, a postgraduate certificate at master's level. This makes the figure of 1,312 suspect, especially considering it is a legal requirement for SENCOs to achieve this qualification and this should also be classed as a level 7 qualification. This suggests that either the DfE dataset is inadequate, there is significant misunderstanding on the part of schools when inputting this data, or the DfE dataset does not record the NASENCo qualification within the MAST code. Whatever the explanation, it is of note that no investigation into this potential issue has been launched, especially considering that the NASENCo qualification is a legal requirement.

What it does suggest, though, is the need to ensure, as a matter of entitlement, that all schools should be able to employ a SENCO who has experience and suitable critical analysis skills. The latter is a requirement of the agreed framework for level 7 (masters) qualifications (Quality Assurance Association for Higher Education, 2014). Brown and Doveston (2014) note that in one institution, those who had enrolled on the NASENCo programme were often not prepared for the role due to only having been enrolled on several short

courses. Additionally, they report that the lack of postgraduate experience for several students caused several issues when they were expected to engage in critical thinking activities. This is especially noteworthy given an early assertion in this thesis (see section 6.5.3). Ball et al. (2011) warn that when teachers use policy language to describe intent and action, they may be lacking the criticality required to make change. In a fluid and dynamic area such as SEN, critical understanding, and an ability to facilitate change is essential.

Passy et al. (2017) conducted a DfE sponsored evaluation of the NASENCo award. The survey reports on data derived from 1,109 survey responses from SENCOs, school leaders, and teachers. They acknowledge that the respondents may not have been representative due to their self-selecting nature. However, for research that is designed to report on an aspect of mandatory training required by law, the lack of DfE data through which to establish the external validity of their sampling is notably absent. Many respondents commented that they wanted the course to be a 'how to' approach to be a SENCO (p. 33). It is noteworthy that one of these 'how to' approaches asks for guidance on "improving quality-first teaching, selecting interventions, identifying SEND and details on the day to day role of the SENCO" (p. 33) as though these are unproblematic 'givens'. This depth of critical understanding is notionally present in all Level 7 courses, yet this is something that many SENCOs appear not to have experienced.

## **7.4 Conclusion**

This chapter presents a description and analysis of the entire SENCO population. The work reflects on the external validity of many of the claims that

have been made hitherto about the characteristics of this group. This work is essential as it allows for an accurate picture to inform the survey-based work across the next two chapters. These data provide valuable insights that may inform further empirical research on the role and the development of policy associated with it. One might ask why it has taken 25 years for these data to come into the public domain when earlier publication could have helped frame research and policy over the period. For example, policy makers may be interested in understanding how many SENCOs are also school leaders. If one national survey commissioned by the DfE was used (Passy et al., 2017) then it would be possible to argue that 67.5% of SENCOs are senior leaders. If the data presented here are used, however, then the national picture would suggest that up to 62% of SENCOs are *not* senior leaders. This clearly has significant impact on any future policy decisions which need to be made both at a central and local level. This is especially important if the two groups of people have different approaches to the operationalisation of the role.

For a key statutory position such as the SENCO, these data should be produced as a matter of course. Firstly, the data could be issued to i) providers of the NASENCo award so that they may better understand the characteristics of their cohorts; ii) the National Standards SENCO Provider Group who peer review the NASENCo award and quality assurance providers; and iii) any DfE contract work relating to the SENCO. This is essential to ensure that any survey or policy work conducted on behalf of the DfE holds external validity and truly represents the population of SENCOs working across mainstream school settings.



## **CHAPTER 8 – FACTORS INFLUENCING INTEREST IN THE SENCO ROLE**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter provides the findings from study three to answer question set three. So far, it has been argued that it is difficult to understand the interest in the role of potential SENCOs without accounting for the context in which these decisions were made. Chapter 6 presented empirical evidence in which teachers explain wanting to become a SENCO it is not due to inflexible internal states or traits. Rather, when teachers report their decisions, these can only be understood ecologically. Indeed, the ecology that informs these decisions is not a reality, instead it is derived from the socially constructed phenomena of inclusive education within England and its iterative development over time. The current chapter develops the work in Chapter 6 with the explicit aim of reducing these myriad reasons into testable factors.

The chapter is structured sequentially. It starts with a reappraisal of relevant career theories that also use factors to reduce multiple items into distinct traits or career oriented latent variables. The inadequacy of these approaches and their unsuitability for the present study is commented upon. In the next section, the method of data collection is considered, and details given on how the data were collected for the present study. The following section provides the results and a step-by-step description of the process or factor analysis and the decisions made whilst conducting the analysis. This is essential when using a statistical technique that is reliant upon researcher

judgement (Field, 2018; Henson & Roberts, 2006). The chapter concludes with a discussion surrounding the newly established factors and their potential use.

## **8.2 Career interest theory and application to SENCOs**

As discussed in Chapter 4, some of the research and theorising in relation to career interest has often had an individual focus based on measurement (see section 4.5). Based on this psychology of individual differences, Holland (1992, 1996) suggests that career interest can be understood within the context of fitting together two discrete constructs: the person and the environment. In turn, this is called the person-environment fit. Like the present study, the work of Holland is derived from constructing latent variables or dimensions from initial variables or items through factor analysis. Holland (1992, 1996) advocates that at the level of the person, individuals can be measured on six dimensions or factors. In turn, understanding the person in this way can aid in matching them to a suitable working environment, the two being very separate (see section 4.5.2).

However, despite their potential utility, Liao, Armstrong, and Rounds (2008) suggest that these dimensions still do not meet the needs of all career interests. For example, SENCOs may be teachers, school leaders, or indeed both together (e.g., Tissot, 2013). Holland's classification system describes teachers as 'artistic' and 'social'. In contrast, educational administrators (the US synonym for school leaders) are regarded as 'social' but also as 'enterprising' and 'conventional' (National Center for O\*NET Development, 2019a, 2019b). This creates an obvious problem when considering a 'teacher leader' such as the SENCO. Additionally, the application of Holland's dimensions (such as

O\*NET) has been to assign an assessed individual to an appropriate occupation. This does not help us understand the reasons why people choose a role.

This has led some to reject this approach and its use of factors including Lent et al. (1994) (see section 4.6.2). Here, there is a limited relationship to the findings shared in Chapter 6 where teachers reported individually-focused reasons for wanting to become a SENCO in line with the SCCT (Lent et al., 1994), e.g., recognition of being an inclusive teacher (self-efficacy); a desire to share practice with others (outcome expectations); and to become a SENCO (personal goal). Nevertheless, the empirical evidence provided within Chapter 6 indicates that the explanations offered by the SENCOs also refer to broader contextual factors. Drawing upon ecological approaches (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005), it is argued that individually focused motivations are accompanied and influenced by national culture and policy. Here, therefore, there is a synthesis of person and environment rather than two distinct and separate entities.

This broader ecological approach has also been acknowledged theoretically by Patton and McMahon (2014) (see section 4.8). Building upon the thematic analysis conducted in Chapter 6, the current study aims to systematically explore the ecological drivers (social and individual) that motivate SENCOs to do their job. It builds on a more ecologically orientated approach by acknowledging the diverse reasons offered for career interest. Looking beyond much career interest theory that seeks to match people to occupations, the research seeks to understand how people come to develop an interest in a

specific occupation – the SENCO. This chapter seeks to answer the following question:

- (3) What are the main factors underlying teachers' interest in becoming SENCOs?

### **8.3 Method**

A self-report survey of current and in-training SENCOs was undertaken in which they offered views of what motivated them to be a SENCO. Views were gathered through a structured self-completion questionnaire.

#### ***8.3.1 Questionnaire***

The questionnaire (see Appendix J) was specifically designed for the present study and consists of four sections. The first section contains a 32-item inventory covering reasons why the individual became or wanted to become a SENCO. These items were paraphrased versions of the 32 SENCO subthemes identified through study one in Chapter 6. In turn, these 32 subthemes had already been subject to and altered through the process of peer review. For each item, participants were asked to “rate how important the following have been in contributing towards you developing an interest in being a SENCO” on a five-point scale: extremely important (5); very important (4); moderately important (3); slightly important (2); and not important at all (1).

The second section requested demographic information using categories and identifiers from the DfE national workforce database (Department for Education, 2017c) that could be compared to the national dataset of SENCOs

derived from the analysis performed in Chapter 7. These indicators include age, gender, highest qualification held, and ethnicity. The third section requested details about the respondent's current post including current job title, position of role within teachers' pay and conditions (Department for Education, 2017a), whether the role was full time or part time, length of time as a teacher, whether the respondent is currently a SENCO (and for how long), and the amount of time allocated to the role of being a SENCO. The final section requested information about the respondent's establishment: type of school; children on the school roll; and the school's current Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) grade. These data are analysed and utilised in Chapter 9.

The questionnaire was distributed in two formats (though the content was the same): an online questionnaire using the online survey tool Qualtrics and a paper-based questionnaire. Prior to distribution, the questionnaire was piloted in two stages and after the submission of the necessary ethical amendments to the University (see Appendix H). The questionnaire was initially shared with two members of a university support service who commented on both the readability and layout of the written form of the instrument. Based on these recommendations, adaptations to the format of the written questionnaire were made prior to the instrument being piloted with a group of 25 teachers undertaking the NASENCo award who met the eligibility criteria outlined below. No changes were made after this second pilot.

### ***8.3.2 Sample recruitment and procedure***

Eligibility for the survey was restricted to teachers who are current SENCOs or aspirant SENCOs undertaking training by a recognised NASENCo provider.

The recruitment and distribution process were similar for both formats of the questionnaire (online and paper). The survey was distributed to teachers undertaking the NASENCo award at 25 higher education providers nationally. In addition, the survey was distributed to SENCOs at network events run within three local authorities and two private advisory services within the West Midlands area of England. In all cases the recruitment was two staged: recruitment of gatekeepers followed by distribution of questionnaires. All gatekeeper organisations were initially contacted by the researcher. The research aims were discussed, and agreement was sought to distribute the questionnaire to eligible participants with whom they had contact. Each organisation was asked which format of questionnaire (online or paper) they required. These were sent as links (online copies) or distributed physically (as paper copies). Online submissions were automatically stored in an online database. Paper submissions were returned to the researcher and were manually entered into this database.

Each questionnaire contained an introductory letter (see Appendix I) outlining the purpose of the survey, the voluntary nature of participation and the guarantee of anonymity. This resulted in 618 valid responses.

### **8.3.3 Analysis**

The analysis has been driven by the research questions and followed a classic EFA format. Firstly, the EFA was undertaken on the 32-item inventory concerned with reasons for becoming a SENCO. This identified the factors underlying teachers' interest in becoming and being a SENCO, allowing for the creation of factors as variables which could be taken to the second stage of the

analysis explored in Chapter 9.

## **8.4 Results**

Table 10 sets out the mean, mode, and standard deviations for all 32 SENCO interest questionnaire items. As can be seen here, 25 items were negatively skewed between -2.729 and -0.089 and had modes between 3 and 5, suggesting that over the whole sample, these items positively influenced the career decisions of the respondents. This is expected as the items were originally defined from research that was designed to elicit interest in the role (see Chapter 6). Six items were positively skewed between 0.046 and 0.886 and had a mode of 1 suggesting that across the sample most respondents indicated that these items did not contribute towards them wanting to become a SENCO.

While distribution of responses for each item deviated from normality, the results of normality tests were discounted due to the large sample presented within this study (see Field, 2018, p. 249).

**Table 10: Summary and normality statistics for all career interest items**

<b>Item description</b>	<b><i>n</i></b>	<b>% Missing</b>	<b>Mea n</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Mode</b>	<b>Shapiro -Wilk W</b>	<b>Skewne ss</b>
How important the following have been in contributing towards you developing an interest in being a SENCO:							
1. The school-based experiences of close friends or family with SEN.	614	.01	2.6	1.45	1	.854	.305
2. Being close to someone who needed more support in school.	613	.01	2.8	1.48	1	.863	.169
3. Professional experience of working with children with SEN.	613	.01	4.2	.95	5	.782	-1.286
4. Being inspired by a colleague.	613	.01	3.0	1.27	4	.899	-.217
5. It is a good step in my career.	613	.01	3.2	1.26	4	.902	-.290
6. I see it as an opportunity to work with small groups rather than large classes.	614	.01	2.0	1.23	1	.792	.797
7. Being able to work more closely with the families of children.	613	.01	3.6	1.10	4	.878	-.664
8. I want others to benefit from my teaching experience.	611	.01	3.6	1.14	4	.880	-.636
9. I want to change school provision for children with additional needs.	614	.01	4.3	.80	5	.753	-1.339
10. Being SENCO will help me develop my own knowledge and skills.	612	.01	4.2	.93	5	.795	-1.145
11. I want to develop the skills of other teachers to support children with SEN.	614	.01	4.3	.79	5	.762	-1.228
12. I value undertaking further study and gaining qualifications.	613	.01	3.7	1.20	4	.863	-.725
13. To gain or enhance voice and/or status in my school.	612	.01	2.9	1.35	3	.891	-.089
14. I want to learn about inclusive classroom practice to support my own teaching.	614	.01	3.7	1.08	4	.863	-.794
15. I have experience of working in a setting where children with SEN need their provision improving.	612	.01	3.7	1.20	4	.866	-.710
16. Seeing teachers who ignore the needs of children with SEN.	611	.01	3.9	1.14	4	.835	-.925
17. I place a strong value on all children being able to participate together in school life.	612	.01	4.5	.74	5	.660	-1.900
18. I have a clear vision for SEN provision to share with my setting.	613	.01	4.0	.90	4	.842	-.758



19. I want to enable children to get a formal diagnosis of their needs.	614	.01	3.2	1.15	3	.912	-.218
20. Getting a voice on the school senior leadership team is important for me.	613	.01	3.2	1.33	4	.896	-.241
21. Being or becoming a school leader is important to me.	614	.01	2.9	1.33	3	.900	.046
22. Working in a school which is/was unable to support children with additional needs.	614	.01	2.7	1.38	1	.879	.084
23. I want to make sure that the children get their statutory entitlements.	612	.01	4.1	.99	4	.799	-1.220
24. An opportunity to work with a range of professionals to support children.	612	.01	3.9	.98	4	.836	-.968
25. It is important for me for all children to develop their potential in life.	611	.01	4.7	.62	5	.540	-2.729
26. To empower parents to make decisions about their children.	612	.01	3.9	.97	4	.845	-.866
27. I want children to be able to make decisions about themselves.	610	.01	4.2	.89	5	.772	-1.348
28. I place a strong value on developing equity in society.	610	.01	4.2	.94	5	.762	-1.360
29. An increase in pay was an attraction.	611	.01	2.0	1.16	1	.802	.886
30. A belief that SENCOs can make a difference.	612	.01	4.3	.87	5	.769	-1.293
31. I like being given time away from the classroom to perform the role.	612	.01	3.1	1.42	4	.881	-.167
32. If I'm honest, it was quite a pragmatic decision because of my own or school need.	611	.01	2.7	1.39	1	.877	.130

#### ***8.4.1 Purpose of, and issues with factor analysis***

As Henson and Roberts (2006, p. 395) suggest, there are two types of factor analysis with a number of associated derivatives. As one of these, EFA is mostly used to construct or generate theory whereas confirmatory factor analysis is used to test a specific hypothesis based on the nature of factors. Given the nature of the question in this study and the overall aims of the thesis, EFA was the most appropriate method as the concern was with the creation of theory rather than testing established factors.

Given this, the purpose of the EFA then is to take a group of variables from a set of data and use statistical methods to determine whether there are underlying constructs or latent factors/dimensions, which are directly unobservable, underpinning them. An example of this is the work of Borg, Riding, and Falzon (1991). Here, 710 teachers were presented with a self-report instrument. Within this was an inventory of 20 items for teachers to rate their stress levels. These included a variety of prompts including 'noisy pupils', 'inadequate salary', and 'having a large class'. These items created the stimulus for the majority of data for the study. After reporting the results of the descriptive data for the individual items, these were then subjected to a factor analysis. This analysis and subsequent amendments led to these variables being drawn together into statistically related groups. These groups and the items in them were provided with a descriptor that best described the contents. Each group of items was then labelled by the researchers to form four latent factors/dimensions: 'pupil behaviour', 'time/resource difficulties', 'professional recognition needs', and 'poor relationships'.

Thus, an EFA can reduce a larger set of data into clear underlying dimensions. Although the technique is driven by statistical methods, factor analysis forms an interesting and sometimes controversial juxtaposition between the oft used descriptions of quantitative and qualitative techniques. Although the researcher should be bound by certain rules and procedures, Schmitt (2011, p. 304) argues the literature that describes the approach is often seen to be opaque and contradictory. This leaves the researcher with four key decisions: sample size, a factor model, a method to determine factors, and a criterion for rotation. Despite the scientific nature of these terms, there are potentially different approaches due to all these decisions, making the entire process veer towards the subjective. Indeed, as Henson and Roberts (2006) argue, a lot of the criticism of factor analysis derives from the nature of these decisions and their “inherent subjectivity” (p. 396).

Henson and Roberts (2006) further contend this subjectivity can lead to significant issues when the results of studies involving factor analysis are reported. Key to this are the scientific principles of replication. This does not necessarily mean that a reader of the research should be able to reproduce the exact results with a different sample of participants. Rather, it is important that studies that involve factor analysis can be interrogated appropriately so that researchers can be held accountable for any extraneous decisions made whilst processing the data. Unfortunately, with the restrictions on word count in many journal articles, many of these decisions are somewhat condensed or lack interrogation; however, within a thesis the decisions can be expanded upon.

#### **8.4.2 Preparation of the data**

The utility of statistical tools such as SPSS and a plethora of guides enable data to be inputted into this application and an EFA run with very little difficulty. However, in order to extract meaningful and accurate data, it is important to ensure that stringent criteria are met, and the results are understood. This prevents mistakes being made in the process of factor analysis which Field (2018, p. 798) describes as “garbage in, garbage out”. The first of which is the assumption of normality (discussed in section 8.4). The subsequent steps are discussed below.

#### **8.4.3 Multicollinearity**

Multicollinearity is where variables may be closely, linearly related to each other (Field, 2018, p. 1026). For this, it is important to analyse the correlation or R-matrix of items. If items are perfectly correlated, then it will be impossible to ascertain their unique contribution to a factor. This is important because sometimes items may contribute to more than one factor. Indeed, a high correlation may also be of issue because the item may be recording the same construct or idea. For example, ‘Do you like the colour blue?’ and ‘Do you like the colour of the sky?’ are different questions, which may both unintentionally measure a person’s singular affective response to the colour blue. Another consideration are items that have limited correlation. These are unlikely to contribute much towards any factor.

Within the current study, the data ideally should contribute towards the construction of underlying factors/dimensions to understand why people become SENCOs. An item that is extraneous to these dimensions should also be excluded. As a result, it was planned to scan the R-matrix for the following three criteria which

may contribute to multicollinearity: i) correlations that were not high enough; ii) correlations that were too high; iii) items with too many correlations that did not exceed 0.3 (Hair, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2006, p. 131). However, Field (2018) tempers this suggestion with the caveat that this process is likely to be one of trial and error, thus adding the subjective element which was a concern of Henson and Roberts (2006). A further approach is to also examine the determinant within the R-matrix. This should be greater than  $1.0E-5$ , implying that the data is not linear and instead more dispersed in nature (Field, 2018, p. 798)

#### ***8.4.4 Sample size and analysis of the anti-image matrices***

Sample size is regarded as a key element in factor analysis with many studies tending to use larger samples. For example, Henson and Roberts (2006) reviewed sample characteristics across 60 peer reviewed articles with four established psychological journals. Within these studies there was a mean sample size of 436.08 and a median of 267.00. These figures compare to a common heuristic produced by Comrey and Lee (as cited in Henson & Roberts, 2006) who suggest that sample sizes for factor analysis can be classified as very poor (50 participants); poor (100 participants); fair (200 participants); good (300 participants); very good (500 participants); and excellent (1,000 participants). Henson and Roberts (2006) suggest that with a median of 267, many of the published studies that were reviewed had a 'fair' sample size at best. Another approach suggested by Field (2018, p. 797) is to measure the adequacy of sample size against each variable, citing one common rule of having 10-15 participants per variable. Under both approaches, the sample size in the current study at 618 is more than adequate. This would place it in the classification of 'very good' according to Comrey and Lee (as cited in Henson &

Roberts, 2006). Additionally, with 19 participants per variable, it would also be of sufficient size under the approach suggested by Field (2018).

Another common approach is to use a measure of sampling adequacy. One such measure is the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test (Kaiser, 1960; Kaiser & Rice, 1974). This provides a value of between 0 and 1 and a descriptor for the different values between these two scores, with a score of 0.00 to 0.49 being regarded as unacceptable at one extreme and a score of above 0.9 being regarded as 'marvellous' at the other. This test can be utilised in SPSS to examine sampling adequacy for the overall analysis and for each individual variable. The latter is visible as scores of measures of sampling adequacy which appear diagonally across the anti-image matrix output. Despite the sample size of 618 appearing to be adequate, to ensure robust results it was decided to assess the sample size for the model and each variable using the KMO test.

#### **8.4.5 Bartlett's test of sphericity**

This tests the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix. As Field (2018, p. 810) argues, this needs to be significant to reject the null hypothesis. If it is not significant then there may be significant difficulties with the results.

#### **8.4.6 Reliability**

A Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was run for each of the factors to test reliability. Despite the concerns of authors such as Field (2018) and Cortina (1993) about the usage of this statistic, the  $\alpha$  was set at a nominal level of 0.7 commonly regarded as a sound measure of reliability (Cortina, 1993, p. 101). The  $\alpha$  was also examined for each

individual variable within the factor. The decision was made in advance that if the removal of a variable from the factor would improve the overall  $\alpha$ , then the item would be removed and the analysis re-run.

## **8.5 Factor extraction procedure and steps**

To ensure compliance with the suggestion made by Henson and Roberts (2006) that the data should be transparent, a description of each iteration of the process is described below. Although a full EFA was run, this preliminary work was more concerned with ensuring that the assumptions explored in the preceding sections were met. Although this section refers to later parts of the analysis, the main concern here is to discuss the process through which preliminary work was conducted to ensure that the model met the assumptions of multicollinearity, sample size, sphericity, and reliability discussed above.

### ***8.5.1 Exploratory factor analysis – iteration 1***

In the first instance, the factor analysis and associated tests, including the construction of an *R*-matrix, was run with all 32 items. Initial analyses of the *R*-matrix for all items indicated a violation of multicollinearity with a determinant of 1.06 E-6. As the EFA failed this criterion, other statistical tests were not considered. Instead, the correlation matrix was analysed. Five variables had few correlations under 0.3.: item one with one correlation, item two with two correlations, item four with one correlation, item six with three correlations, item 31 with three correlations, and item 32 with no correlations. These items were removed from the SPSS syntax of the procedure prior to re-running the analysis. This approach ensured that each iteration of the data extraction followed exactly the same procedures.

### **8.5.2 Exploratory factor analysis – iteration 2**

In the second analysis, the determinant was 1.232 E-5 suggesting that multicollinearity was within adequate tolerances. The measure of sampling adequacy, the KMO, was .912, the individual KMO values within the anti-image matrices were all above .798 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was adequate at  $p < .001$ . As the conditions for factor analysis had been met, the data were further analysed. Five factors with eigenvalues greater than one (Kaiser, 1960) were extracted, which explained 50.5% of overall variance. With the completion of this stage, a reliability analysis using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for each rotated factor was conducted. This suggested that Factor 1 ( $\alpha = .86$ ); Factor 2 ( $\alpha = .83$ ); Factor 3 ( $\alpha = .76$ ); and Factor 4 ( $\alpha = .80$ ) were appropriate. For Factor 5 ( $\alpha = .68$ ), an interrogation of the individual items suggested that if variable 19 was deleted the reliability of the overall factor would be increased from an alpha of .67 to .68. This variable was deleted from the syntax and the entire analysis was re-run using the same procedure.

### **8.5.3 Exploratory factor analysis – iteration 3**

In the third analysis the determinant was 1.924 E-5 suggesting that multicollinearity was within adequate tolerances. In the measure of sampling adequacy, the KMO was .926, the diagonal scores in the anti-image matrices were all above .799, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was adequate at  $p < .001$ . As the conditions for factor analysis had been met, the resultant factors were analysed further. Five factors with eigenvalues greater than one (Kaiser, 1960) were extracted, which explained 51.3% of overall variance. With the completion of this stage, a reliability analysis using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was conducted. Factor 1 ( $\alpha = .86$ ); Factor 2 ( $\alpha = .82$ ); Factor 3 ( $\alpha =$



.78); Factor 4 ( $\alpha = .80$ ); and Factor 5 ( $\alpha = .69$ ), all of these values were acceptable.

As all necessary assumptions had been met, the structure of the factors was further interrogated. Variable eight, 'I want others to benefit from my teaching experience' accounted for loading of 0.39 and 0.393 on factors two and three respectively. Variable 30 'A belief that SENCOs can make a difference' accounted for loading of 0.409 and 0.41 on factors one and two respectively. Both items were deleted from the syntax and the process was re-run.

#### ***8.5.4 Exploratory factor analysis – iteration 4***

This model met all necessary assumptions with the determinant of 5.824E-5. The KMO was 0.92, verifying the sampling adequacy to be of the highest level, 'marvellous' (see Kaiser & Rice, 1974, p. 112). A further analysis of the KMO for each item was conducted. The lowest item was 0.796 (item 5), which placed all items well within the acceptable limit of above 0.5 (Kaiser & Rice, 1974). With the completion of this stage, a reliability analysis using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  was conducted on the four rotated factors. Factor 1 ( $\alpha = .87$ ); Factor 2 ( $\alpha = .79$ ); Factor 3 ( $\alpha = .76$ ); and Factor 4 ( $\alpha = .80$ ), all of these values were acceptable.

#### **8.6 Further analysis and adjustment of the four factors**

In the previous section, it was suggested that only four factors resulted from the analysis at the fourth iteration of the process. In this next section, the extraction of these factors and the adjustments that took place will be discussed in further detail. Again, Henson and Roberts (2006, p. 410) argue that it is important to report all analytical decisions to allow for a full analysis of the entire process. Here, they make

several recommendations of what should be included in any factor analysis.

Unfortunately, what is omitted from these is the importance of the preliminary analysis described above. Nonetheless, in this section important decisions will be considered including their recommendations in the discussion of the:

- method of factor extraction;
- consideration of the rotation strategy used;
- criteria for retention of factors;
- approach to reporting the full factor matrix; and
- reporting communalities.

### **8.6.1 Factor extraction**

As argued in Chapter 5, it is important to ensure that any methods used within research are chosen due to their relationship with the questions being addressed. For the current study, the singular question sought to arrive at the ‘the main factors underlying the teachers’ interest’. The question, therefore, drove both the approach and the statistical tools used. Field (2018) suggests that there are two types of factor analysis to extract a set of underlying dimensions from a set of variables. The first of these is ‘principal axis factoring’ or common EFA and the second being principal components analysis. Here, three important points are made: i.) in the truest sense of the word, principal components analysis is not a factor analysis and ideally should not be reported as such; ii.) with studies with over 20 variables, there is often little or no difference between the results of both approaches; and iii.) only EFA can suggest underlying factors whilst principal components analysis examines how much a variable may contribute towards a given linear component. Using these criteria, the

most obvious choice for the current study was EFA.

### **8.6.2 *Rotation of factors***

The final analysis revealed 22 factors that accounted for 100% of the variance within the model; however, factors five through to 22 resulted in between 4.48% and 1.04% of the variance respectively. Table 11 presents the factors prior to rotation, here most loading is upon the first factor with limited loading on the other factors. Henson and Roberts (2006, p. 410) suggest that there are different approaches to rotating factors, and it is important to justify why an oblique or orthogonal (varimax) strategy has been used. Indeed, it is recommended that both approaches should be tried before the choice is made (Field, 2018; Henson & Roberts, 2006). Table 12 presents the pattern matrix for the factors after oblique rotation. Table 13 presents the factor matrix after varimax rotation. The factors formed from both types of rotation are identical, the only difference being in the order that the factors are presented. One notable exception to this is variable three in the oblique rotation. The loading on this did not reach the specified 0.4. It was therefore decided to adopt the varimax rotation as the factors were identical between both rotations and the factor loadings in the varimax rotation were higher.

**Table 11: Factor loading for exploratory factor analysis prior to varimax rotation of SENCO interest items**

<b>Item description</b>		<b>Factor 1</b>	<b>Factor 2</b>	<b>Factor 3</b>	<b>Factor 4</b>
How important the following have been in contributing towards you developing an interest in being a SENCo:					
27. I want children to be able to make decisions about themselves.		<b>.72</b>	-.28	-.31	.05
26. To empower parents to make decisions about their children.		<b>.69</b>	-.22	-.29	-.06
24. An opportunity to work with a range of professionals to support children.		<b>.67</b>	.08	-.17	-.12
11. I want to develop the skills of other teachers to support children with SEN.		<b>.66</b>	-.03	.14	-.06
23. I want to make sure that the children get their statutory entitlements.		<b>.66</b>	-.21	.00	-.01
17. I place a strong value on all children being able to participate together in school life.		<b>.65</b>	-.29	.00	.09
18. I have a clear vision for SEN provision to share with my setting.		<b>.65</b>	-.05	.12	.24
25. It is important for me for all children to develop their potential in life.		<b>.64</b>	-.31	-.16	.09
9. I want to change school provision for children with additional needs.		<b>.63</b>	-.08	.28	.05
28. I place a strong value on developing equity in society.		<b>.61</b>	-.26	-.28	.10
14. I want to learn about inclusive classroom practice to support my own teaching.		<b>.58</b>	.05	-.01	-.22
7. Being able to work more closely with the families of children.		<b>.57</b>	-.01	-.12	-.15
10. Being SENCO will help me develop my own knowledge and skills.		<b>.55</b>	.36	.09	-.41
15. I have experience of working in a setting where children with SEN need their provision improving.		<b>.54</b>	-.08	.41	-.03
16. Seeing teachers who ignore the needs of children with SEN.		<b>.53</b>	-.16	.34	.10
3. Professional experience of working with children with SEN.		<b>.48</b>	-.13	.15	-.12
12. I value undertaking further study and gaining qualifications.		<b>.48</b>	.34	.05	-.16
22. Working in a school which is/was unable to support children with additional needs.		<b>.40</b>	-.09	.30	.03

21. Being or becoming a school leader is important to me.	.36	<b>.62</b>	-.07	.37
13. To gain or enhance voice and/or status in my school.	.49	<b>.59</b>	-.02	-.06
5. It is a good step in my career.	.26	<b>.59</b>	-.06	-.16
20. Getting a voice on the school senior leadership team is important for me.	<b>.51</b>	<b>.51</b>	-.05	.42

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Note. Factor loadings >.40 are in bold face. Basic questionnaire adapted from *Who would do that role? Understanding why teachers become SENCOs through an ecological systems theory*, by G.J. Dobson and G. Douglas, 2020, *Educational Review*, DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2018.1556206 (Chapter 6 in this thesis)

**Table 12: Factor loading for exploratory factor analysis with oblique rotation of SENCO interest items**

<b>Item description</b>		<b>Factor 1</b>	<b>Factor 2</b>	<b>Factor 3</b>	<b>Factor 4</b>
How important the following have been in contributing towards you developing an interest in being a SENCO:					
27. I want children to be able to make decisions about themselves.		<b>.86</b>	.03	-.05	.02
26. To empower parents to make decisions about their children.		<b>.78</b>	-.03	-.06	-.11
28. I place a strong value on developing equity in society.		<b>.76</b>	.06	-.05	.08
25. It is important for me for all children to develop their potential in life.		<b>.68</b>	.02	.11	.10
17. I place a strong value on all children being able to participate together in school life.		<b>.52</b>	.01	.30	.10
24. An opportunity to work with a range of professionals to support children.		<b>.50</b>	.09	.02	-.301
23. I want to make sure that the children get their statutory entitlements.		<b>.47</b>	-.03	.29	-.05
7. Being able to work more closely with the families of children.		<b>.43</b>	-.02	.06	-.27
21. Being or becoming a school leader is important to me.		-.02	<b>.79</b>	-.03	-.07
20. Getting a voice on the school senior leadership team is important for me.		.10	<b>.78</b>	.09	.00
15. I have experience of working in a setting where children with SEN need their provision improving.		-.09	-.03	<b>.71</b>	-.09
16. Seeing teachers who ignore the needs of children with SEN.		.03	.04	<b>.65</b>	.08
9. I want to change school provision for children with additional needs.		.10	.08	<b>.59</b>	-.04
22. Working in a school which is/was unable to support children with additional needs.		-.05	.01	<b>.54</b>	.01
18. I have a clear vision for SEN provision to share with my setting.		.28	.28	<b>.43</b>	.12
11. I want to develop the skills of other teachers to support children with SEN.		.23	.03	<b>.41</b>	-.19
3. Professional experience of working with children with SEN.		.16	-.11	.37	-.14
10. Being SENCO will help me develop my own knowledge and skills.		.08	-.03	.10	<b>-.72</b>

5. It is a good step in my career.	-.11	.29	-.10	<b>-.53</b>
13. To gain or enhance voice and/or status in my school.	-.02	.41	.04	<b>-.49</b>
12. I value undertaking further study and gaining qualifications.	.03	.16	.15	<b>-.45</b>
14. I want to learn about inclusive classroom practice to support my own teaching.	.29	-.06	.17	<b>-.37</b>

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Note. Factor loadings >.40 are in bold face. Basic questionnaire adapted from *Who would do that role? Understanding why teachers become SENCOs through an ecological systems theory*, by G.J. Dobson and G. Douglas, 2020, *Educational Review*, DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2018.1556206 (Chapter 6 in this thesis)

**Table 13: Factor loading for exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation of SENCO interest items**

<b>Item description</b> How important the following have been in contributing towards you developing an interest in being a SENCO:	<b>Inclusion</b>	<b>High quality provision</b>	<b>Educational and professional development</b>	<b>Leadership voice and status</b>
27. I want children to be able to make decisions about themselves.	<b>.79</b>	.21	.10	.08
26. To empower parents to make decisions about their children.	<b>.73</b>	.19	.20	.03
28. I place a strong value on developing equity in society.	<b>.69</b>	.18	.03	.10
25. It is important for me for all children to develop their potential in life.	<b>.67</b>	.30	.02	.06
17. I place a strong value on all children being able to participate together in school life.	<b>.58</b>	.43	.03	.06
23. I want to make sure that the children get their statutory entitlements.	<b>.54</b>	.41	.15	.03
24. An opportunity to work with a range of professionals to support children.	<b>.52</b>	.21	.40	.16
7. Being able to work more closely with the families of children.	<b>.45</b>	.21	.33	.05
15. I have experience of working in a setting where children with SEN need their provision improving.	.16	<b>.64</b>	.18	.03
16. Seeing teachers who ignore the needs of children with SEN.	.23	<b>.61</b>	.03	.08
9. I want to change school provision for children with additional needs.	.30	<b>.59</b>	.16	.13
18. I have a clear vision for SEN provision to share with my setting.	.41	<b>.49</b>	.06	.30
22. Working in a school which is/was unable to support children with additional needs.	.13	<b>.48</b>	.07	.05
11. I want to develop the skills of other teachers to support children with SEN.	.38	<b>.48</b>	.29	.10
3. Professional experience of working with children with SEN.	.29	<b>.40</b>	.19	-.05
10. Being SENCO will help me develop my own knowledge and skills.	.19	.19	<b>.72</b>	.08
13. To gain or enhance voice and/or status in my school.	.08	.12	<b>.60</b>	.46
5. It is a good step in my career.	-.05	-.04	<b>.57</b>	.33



12. I value undertaking further study and gaining qualifications.	.14	.21	<b>.51</b>	.22
14. I want to learn about inclusive classroom practice to support my own teaching.	.37	.28	<b>.42</b>	.03
20. Getting a voice on the school senior leadership team is important for me.	.18	.17	.23	<b>.76</b>
21. Being or becoming a school leader is important to me.	.04	.04	.28	<b>.76</b>

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Note. Factor loadings >.40 are in bold face. Basic questionnaire adapted from *Who would do that role? Understanding why teachers become SENCOs through an ecological systems theory*, by G.J. Dobson and G. Douglas, 2020, *Educational Review*, DOI: 10.1080/00131911.2018.1556206 (Chapter 6 in this thesis)

**Table 14: Communalities for each item after extraction using exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation of the SENCO interest items**

Item description	Communality
3. Professional experience of working with children with SEN.	.281
5. It is a good step in my career.	.441
7. Being able to work more closely with the families of children.	.360
9. I want to change school provision for children with additional needs.	.481
10. Being SENCO will help me develop my own knowledge and skills.	.600
11. I want to develop the skills of other teachers to support children with SEN.	.464
12. I value undertaking further study and gaining qualifications.	.370
13. To gain or enhance voice and/or status in my school.	.590
14. I want to learn about inclusive classroom practice to support my own teaching.	.390
15. I have experience of working in a setting where children with SEN need their provision improving.	.466
16. Seeing teachers who ignore the needs of children with SEN.	.429
17. I place a strong value on all children being able to participate together in school life.	.519
18. I have a clear vision for SEN provision to share with my setting.	.501
20. Getting a voice on the school senior leadership team is important for me.	.697
21. Being or becoming a school leader is important to me.	.661
22. Working in a school which is/was unable to support children with additional needs.	.258
23. I want to make sure that the children get their statutory entitlements.	.484
24. An opportunity to work with a range of professionals to support children.	.498

25. It is important for me for all children to develop their potential in life.	.537
26. To empower parents to make decisions about their children.	.613
27. I want children to be able to make decisions about themselves.	.637
28. I place a strong value on developing equity in society.	.508

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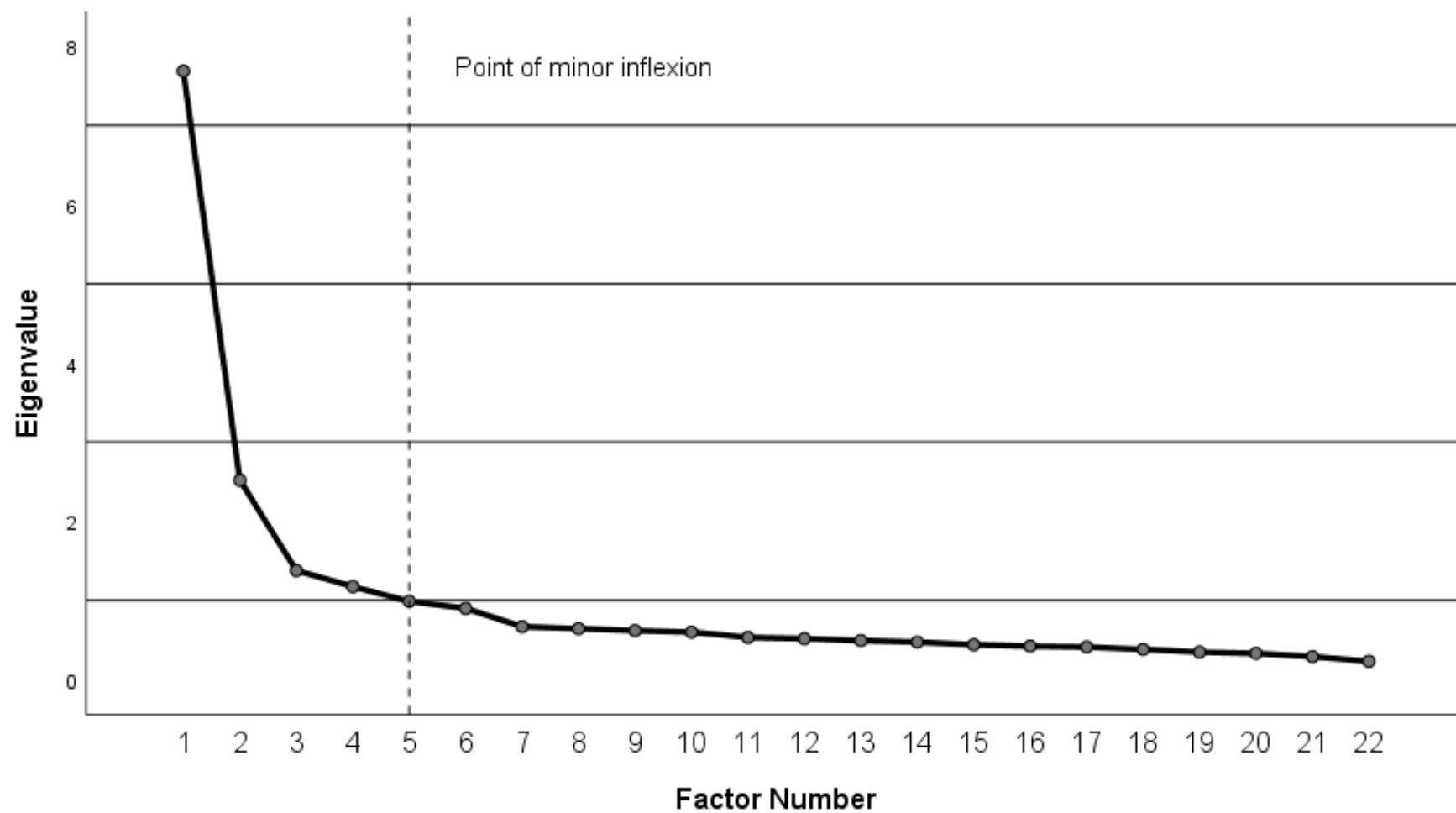


Figure 17: Scree plot of final factor structure

### **8.6.3 Criteria for the retention of factors and issues with communalities**

Kaiser (1960) suggests that factors with eigenvalues greater than one provide a good measure of the appropriate number of factors to retain. However, this assertion is tempered by the suggestion that factors should also be reliable and be psychologically meaningful. Table 13 presents the eigenvalues after rotation. After varimax rotation, four factors with a value of one eigenvalue or greater were extracted. This explained 49.32% of overall variance. Table 15 presents these factors.

At the beginning of this chapter, it was argued that it is important to interrogate any computer output. Here, Field (2018, p. 811) suggests Kaiser's criterion is mostly accurate under the following conditions: i.) there are less than 30 variables with extracted communalities exceeding 0.7; and ii.) the sample size is greater than 250 and communalities exceed 0.6. Table 14 presents the communalities for each item after extraction and varimax rotation. There are a number of items below or close to a communality of 0.6. Another approach is to examine the scree plot and look for a point of inflexion. Figure 17 represents the scree plot of the varimax rotated factors. Here, there would appear to be two potential inflexions. The first of these at Factor 3 would be explained by the dramatic drop off in the loadings from the first factor. If the cut off was before this, only two factors would be retained. The second is a small but noticeable inflexion at Factor 5. This would allow for four factors to be retained.

**Table 15: Eigenvalues and variance for each factor after extraction using exploratory factor analysis with varimax rotation**

Factor	Eigenvalue	Percentage of variance	Cumulative percentage
1	4.00	18.18	18.18
2	2.84	12.89	31.07
3	2.28	10.38	41.45
4	1.73	7.87	49.32

Again, here the subjective nature of EFA is a potential concern. Ultimately the decision of how many factors to retain is not always defined by a set criteria. Rather, it is somewhat ambiguous and requires the researcher to make a value judgement. In a worked example, (Field, 2018, p. 811) suggests that if there is a large sample, then it is possible to consider eigenvalues above one and examine the scree plot for inflexions. In the present study, the retention of the four-factor model was robustly confirmed by examination of the scree plot and Kaiser's criterion. The average communalities for all items was 0.49 making the use of Kaiser's criterion of one problematic for factor extraction. However, due to the evidence derived from both the scree plot and Kaiser's criterion alongside the large sample size it was decided to retain all four factors (Field, 2018, pp. 811-812).

#### **8.6.4 Naming the factors**

A final stage of EFA is naming the factors. Again, Kaiser (1960) argues that factors should be psychologically meaningful. Henson and Roberts (2006) suggest that it is important to interpret connections among the variables within the factor to obtain the latent and therefore unobserved variables. Here, it is suggested that it is important not to provide a label for this latent variable derived from a descriptor from a single item within the factor.

Inspection of the items clustering on each factor led to the proposal of the following 'SENCO interest factors':

Factor 1: 'inclusion'

Factor 2: 'high quality provision'

Factor 3: 'educational and professional development'

Factor 4: 'leadership voice and status'

In the next section, these latent variables and their constituent items will be discussed in greater detail.

## **8.7 Discussion – Why do people choose to become SENCOs?**

Although it must be acknowledged that as a self-report survey the responses may be prone to social desirability bias, the current investigation adds further understanding to why teachers both enter and sustain their interest in the role of SENCO. The factor analysis of the 32 items derived from Dobson and Douglas (2020) (Chapter 6 in this thesis) reveals an underlying structure of four factors. The study points to significant differences between these factors and a hierarchy of interest for those wishing to enter the role of SENCO. The factors are described in greater detail below drawing upon ecological approaches (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005) and career development literature (see Patton & McMahon, 2014). Each factor description is constructed from the individual questionnaire items from which they are derived (and cross references to these are made).

- (1) 'Inclusion' (Factor 1) – The first factor suggests that SENCOs have an interest in promoting equity in society (influenced by policy and international accords). Several statutory mechanisms exist to ensure inclusion (item 23) and SENCOs are interested in these being followed. This will enable them to increase participation of all children in school activities (item 17) and develop greater equity (item 28). The SENCO is interested in working with other professionals who support a given child (item 24). Educational decisions should not be made by professionals alone; rather, SENCOs indicate a concern in decision making being participatory with children and parents in full control. The SENCO expresses a keen interest in working alongside parents and children to facilitate these decision-making processes (items 7, 26, and 27). The SENCO shows concern for enabling the child to reach their full potential in life (item 25).

This factor bears close similarity to the overarching theme of the 'influence of national policy and culture' described earlier (see section 6.4.3) as it appears to draw from a range of national and international accords. It also draws from western liberal democratic notions of participation, equality, and individualism. As a result, the factor entitled 'inclusion' consists of items that are more distal to the person and embedded within macro national and international policy such as "to empower parents to make decisions about their children" (see Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015 section 1) or placing "a strong value on all children being able to participate together in school life" (see UNESCO, 1994; United Nations, 1989). This factor can be further classified as



being 'outward facing' which is defined in this context as the teacher who wishes to use their skills, attributes, and training for the benefit of both society and individuals. Across all participants, this was the highest scoring factor suggesting that people are attracted to the role of the SENCO primarily for these altruistic and ideological reasons.

'High quality provision' (Factor 2) – The second factor suggests that SENCOs have a clear vision of what they would like provision to be like in their setting (item 18). SENCOs have a desire to develop provision at the whole school level (item 9) and develop the skills of teachers to be more inclusive at the classroom level (item 11). Experience appears to be a key component of this dimension. These experiences are proximal such as working alongside individual children (item 3) or more distal such as wanting to change practice within individual classrooms and schools (item 9). The factor suggests that the desire to change practice may also relate to direct observation of teachers not meeting the needs of children (item 16). Additionally, for some, the desire to change provision would appear to be related to working in settings where improvement was needed to support children with SEN (items 15 and 22).

This factor bears some resemblance to the overarching theme of the 'influence of policy and approaches within the school' described earlier (see section 6.4.2). Earlier it was discussed that SENCOs want to operate within school systems where they have limited or little influence. The structure of this factor reveals that SENCOs wish to mediate the change of school provision for the benefit of children with SEN. There is a clear link with the first factor of 'inclusion', albeit with a more proximal focus on school practice. SENCOs wish

to facilitate change at a whole-school level to indirectly affect change for children by working alongside their teachers. This factor is also 'outward facing' as the SENCO is describing an attraction of the role is to develop outcomes for others. As the second highest scoring factor, it suggests that alongside a belief in inclusion, SENCOs wish to develop practice through working developmentally within individual school systems.

'Educational and professional development' (Factor 3) – The third factor suggests that many SENCOs are attracted to the role as a vehicle for developing their knowledge and skills (item 10) and enhancing their voice and status within school settings (item 13). SENCOs are interested in formal learning opportunities such as further study (item 12) and opportunities to develop inclusive practice (item 14). Some also wish to enhance their career prospects (item 5).

The third factor is more personal to the SENCO. Again, this factor aligns with the findings of Chapter 6 and the theme of 'experience of personal aspiration' (section 6.4.1.3) within the overarching theme of the 'influence of direct experiences' (see section 6.4.1) where it is suggested that the SENCO is partly attracted to the position for the purpose of personal development. This factor has been further categorised as inward facing, and as such is dichotomous to the previous outward facing factors. Here, there is the aim to develop personal benefits such as skills, qualifications, and career progression. Although these new skills may benefit individual schools, they ultimately reside within the individual and are portable between settings.

‘Leadership voice and status’ (Factor 4) – The fourth factor suggests that many SENCOs want to be heard at senior leadership level within their school (item 20). They have a desire to be appointed to a position of school leader (item 21).

The last factor relates to leadership. Again, this motivation may be interpreted as proximal to the person and a sign of ambition. Thus, it is further classified as an inward facing factor. The factor structure itself does not provide any explanation as to why this is the lowest scoring dimension. However, this score may be understood within the context of policies where leaders are regarded as key instruments within the self-improving school system (Department for Education, 2010, 2016). Ball (2013) notes the changing perceptions of ‘leadership’ and acknowledges that within policy the individual leader is regarded as a “dynamic visionary” (p. 163) and the process of leadership is regarded as a “generic mechanism for change” (p. 164). This ‘vision’ is evident in the first factor and the ‘mechanisms’ are evident in the second and third factors.

Ball (2013) argues that the “self-managing school must surveil and regulate itself” (p. 163) and that “the leader becomes... the manager of institutional performance” (p. 163). Within this context, SENCO participants wish to operate as an internal mechanism of support for both children and teachers; however, what may be rejected (or at least is not evident within these factors) is a desire to be part of the associated regulatory and performance orientated culture. Curran (2019) adds to this argument. She suggests that some SENCOs want to lead but some have no desire to be formally recognised as school leaders. Based on evidence from interviews collected over the period of a year,

she questions whether SENCOs feel the need to become school leaders. She suggests that SENCOs often do not want to become formal school leaders and they do not regard this as a barrier to implementing change in provision. Instead, they use their deep understanding of SEN policy frameworks to act as “covert entrepreneurs” (p. 85) for driving change in provision and inclusion in their settings. Whether SENCOs wish to avoid the regulatory structures and accountability associated with leadership or they see other mechanisms for driving change is worthy of further research.

## **8.8 Conclusion**

The present chapter has provided a model of four clearly defined independent factors to help understand why teachers undertake the complex role of the SENCO. Put simply, SENCOs are motivated by a desire to improve inclusion by working within school systems; develop high quality provision for all children across their school, especially those with SEN; learn new skills and develop professionally; and be a school leader. All SENCOs express interest in these dimensions; however, it is yet to be determined whether some factors are more important to some groups of individuals than with others.

Being able to define and understand these factors has utility for policy makers, training providers, schools, and individuals alike. All can use the factors as a framework to balance the emphasis and focus of the SENCO role – whether in a given setting or across the sector as a whole. This might enable a good SENCO-school fit (crucial for the school employer and SENCO employee alike), ensuring training programmes can accommodate and value the different

motivations of trainees (including challenging trainees to recognise these differences), and ensuring policy makers are alert to what motivates the workforce should they seek to introduce policies that may not sit comfortably with existing practice.

This latter point is particularly important with a climate of teacher attrition and poor teacher recruitment (Foster, 2019); difficulties recruiting SENCOs (National Association of Headteachers, 2016); and evidence suggesting that a third of SENCOs do not see themselves in the role in the next five years (Curran et al., 2018). If each of these 20,500 SENCOs in England cost a nominal £2,500 each to train through the statutory NASENCo course (based on 2020 fees at an unnamed training provider), this equates to £46.25 million of public investment. Such an investment is wasted if we cannot utilise and harness the motivations of SENCOs to retain them in their current role. Likewise, if a third of SENCOs intend to leave this role within a five-year period, an additional £15.5 million from stretched school budgets will be needed to train new SENCOs.

While the SENCO role explored in this chapter is specific to England, similar roles often exist in other countries, and it seems reasonable to assume that educators of all kinds will be motivated by a range of inward and outward facing factors. This makes the present chapter a significant contribution to the fields of both the career development of teachers and educational leadership. By surfacing the motivations of SENCOs, these discrete factors can now be fully harnessed and utilised in the pursuit of inclusion and high quality

education, the recruitment of a skilled and committed workforce, and the retention of teachers within this field.

In the next chapter there is a focus on whether these factors differ across different groups according to demographic characteristics and school types. This is especially important given the theoretical proposition that differences at the level of the individual can impact upon development in a holistic ecology of development (see section 3.2.6). It is also important to understand whether different groups of people differ in what they may want from the role (see section 4.5).

## **CHAPTER 9 – VARIATIONS ACROSS THE SENCO INTEREST FACTORS**

### **9.1 Introduction**

In previous studies in this thesis, data has been collected and analysed in a sequential nature to understand why people become SENCOs. Within the first study in Chapter 6, a series of responses were collected from a group of SENCOs. These were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) which revealed 32 sub themes. These themes were further structured in an ecological manner using an adaptation of key sources (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). In Chapter 7, the second study of the thesis was explored. Here, a Freedom of Information request answered important questions about the overall school status and demographic characteristics of the SENCO population, the first time this has been done. In the next study, the 32 themes derived from the work in study one were further utilised in study three as discussed in the previous chapter. Here, the 32 themes were incorporated into a survey which was then distributed to actual and aspirant SENCOs to answer the research question – ‘What are the main factors underlying teachers’ interest in becoming SENCOs?’ Through the process of exploratory factor analysis, the 32 items were reduced into four factors named ‘inclusion’, ‘high quality provision’, ‘educational and professional development’, and ‘leadership voice and status’.

This chapter utilises the aforementioned survey data to investigate whether the factors are stable across all different groups of SENCOs to address research question 4 – ‘Do these factors interact with school-level variables (i.e.,

school age range and school quality) and individual-level variables (i.e., SENCO education level, gender, actual or aspirant SENCO, leadership status, and age)? Thus, this final study draws together and utilises all of the empirical and secondary data collected through all stages of this work. The chapter is structured with an overview of how demographic and school-level differences may impact individual differences. It also warns against data derived from work that assumes homogeneity within the SENCO population or reports on findings based on an inaccurate population (see Chapter 7 for an extended discussion).

The chapter starts by revisiting selected literature drawn from throughout the thesis that suggests that it is important to consider these differences in any analysis of the SENCO role. The chapter then continues with an overview of the demographic data, which is compared to the national dataset in Chapter 7. An overview of the process of utilising the data to analyse differences across the factors and within the characteristics of the population is then provided. The chapter concludes with an analysis of the resultant data and a discussion of findings.

## **9.2 The importance of accounting for demographic and school-level data in understanding interest in the SENCO role**

An example of the need to account for demographic differences in any analysis is borne out by theoretical work in the field of career interest. For example, with relation to age, Super (1980, p. 289) conceptualises a “life career rainbow” arguing that career interest is developmental and that individuals adapt and change over time (Watts, 2001) (see section 4.6.3). Drawing upon the analysis of the SENCO population in England in 2017 (see Chapter 7), most SENCOs



fall into the establishment stage (35.3%) or the maintenance stage (59.1%). Following Super's (1980) model, those in the establishment stage can be described as gaining employment and becoming stable in a position followed by a period of consolidation with some seeking advancement into different or promoted roles. Those in the maintenance stage (the majority of SENCOs) are described as having the need to preserve a place within the world of work, which may involve the need to innovate in order to hold on to a role and keep up with others. How these stages intersect with the unique SENCO interest factors discussed in the previous chapter is unanswered. However, it is possible to see links between Super's (1980) construct of wishing to seek advancement and the factor of educational and professional development explored in the previous chapter.

The work on SENCOs also often fails to account for the heterogeneity of the SENCO population. Indeed, most research on SENCOs has been conducted at the level of the organisation or school rather than the level of the person and their individual characteristics and bioecological resources (see Chapter 3). Consequently, most of the literature has focused on how school decision making has resulted in varied SENCO provision (Pearson et al., 2015). Specific examples of research focus include: the continuing debate on whether the role is deemed to have enough status to be a leadership role (Curran, 2019; Tissot, 2013); the need for SENCOs to provide a voice for inclusion (Cole, 2005; Fisher, 2012); whether SENCOs should be involved in strategic school development, including the development of others (Crowther et al., 2001; Done, Murphy, & Knowler, 2014; Qureshi, 2014); and the evaluation of SENCO professional training (Brown & Doveston, 2014; Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012). This

growing body of work adds to the understanding of a role which is regarded as being increasingly self-reliant and an important advocate for children with SEN (Done, Murphy, & Bedford, 2016; Pearson et al., 2015).

Again, what is missing from most of this research is a deeper understanding of the person (SENCO); their needs and interests; and the compatibility of these with those of the organisation (school). Kristof (1996) describes this compatibility of the person and the organisation that employs them as the person-organisation fit. Chatman (1989) argues that all employees are likely to perform better if their employment situations are compatible with their personal motivations. This person-organisation fit (or SENCO-school fit) has been defined as, “the congruence between the norms and values of the organisation and the values of persons” (p. 339). As such, the organisation is only one aspect of the model. The other part is the person or SENCO themselves with their own individual differences. Hardré and Sullivan (2008) suggest that at the level of the person, values and teacher motivation can be understood within a range of demographic differences including age and gender.

As already explained throughout this thesis, there are limited studies that look at the SENCOs themselves rather than the role they fulfil. For example, through an analysis of interviews with SENCOs, Mackenzie (2012b) suggests that the gendered professional profile of the role can influence the way it is operationalised (90.6% of SENCOs in England are female – see Chapter 7). Another example comes from the cross-sectional thematic analysis in Chapter 6. The finding here suggested that SENCOs reported a range of motivations for

entering the role. However, the interpretative nature of these studies has made any statistical generalisation or comparison between groups impossible. The present chapter aims to build on these studies to develop a deeper understanding of the SENCO as a 'person' within this person-organisation fit. Here, the factors established earlier (see sections 8.6 and 8.7) are utilised to address whether these factors feature consistently across the SENCO population described in Chapter 7.

### **9.3 Analysis and results**

The method of data collection has already been covered earlier in the thesis (see section 8.3). Here, the focus is on the resultant individual data, how this was trimmed and organised, and statistical approaches to calculating differences across factors and groups.

#### ***9.3.1 Types of establishment***

All participants worked in schools which varied in size with up to 2,200 pupils on roll ( $M = 474$  pupils,  $SD = 372.5$ ). The school types are presented in Table 16. With a few exceptions, respondents mostly came from primary (ages 5-11) and secondary (ages 11-18) schools which Ofsted had judged to vary in quality.

**Table 16: Respondents school types**

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Type of school</b>		
Nursery or Children's Centre	7	1.1
Primary (including first, infant, junior)	413	66.8
Middle School	7	1.1
All through school	23	3.7
Secondary or High School	123	19.9
Other	34	5.5
Total	607	98.2
(Missing)	11	1.8
<b>Quality of school (Ofsted rating)</b>		
Outstanding	108	17.5
Good.	370	59.9
Requires Improvement	85	13.8
Inadequate	13	2.1
Unsure/NA	29	4.7
(Missing)	13	2.1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>618</b>	<b>100</b>

### **9.3.2 Demographic characteristics of respondents**

Overall, 567 (91.7%) of respondents were female and 46 (7.4%) were male with 5 (0.8%) not answering. The sample broadly reflects the national SENCO gender split of 90.6% female and 9.4% male in 2017 (see Chapter 7). Most respondents identified as White British (89%) which is marginally below the 91.4% of SENCOs identifying as White British nationally in 2017 (see Chapter 7). The mean age of the sample was 40.8 years ( $SD = 8.98$ ). Much of the sample (47.4%) qualified to teach through a postgraduate route with 20.1% of respondents holding a full master's degree.

### **9.3.3 School roles**

Respondents consisted mostly of SENCOs ( $n = 523$ ) and teachers undergoing

mandatory training ( $n = 87$ ). They reported their length of service as a teacher to be between one and 44 years with a mean of 14.94 years ( $SD = 7.87$ ). Within the sample, 523 (84.6%) were the nominated SENCO in school with a mean of 3.5 years' ( $SD = 3.98$ ) experience and a mean of 45.8% ( $SD = 31.24$ ) of their time to undertake the SENCO role. Full-time contracts were held by 453 (73.3%) respondents whilst 154 (24.9%) were part time with 11 (1.8%) respondents not reporting. This is not dissimilar to the national picture where 28.9% of SENCOs in 2017 worked part time (see Chapter 7). Within the sample, 433 (70.1%) of the respondents were employed as a class teacher under teachers' pay and conditions (Department for Education, 2017a). This figure includes those teachers with an additional payment such as the TLR (see section 7.3.6). This is higher than the national figure of 61.8%. Leadership positions such as headteacher (1.6%); deputy headteacher (6.3%); and assistant headteacher (19.4%) were held by 27.3% of respondents with 16 (2.6%) not responding. Differences from these figures throughout the rest of the analysis result from exclusion due to missing data.

Research question 4 is concerned with how the factors might interact with school-level and individual-level variables. This was explored through a series of analyses of variance (ANOVAs). Prior to each ANOVA, selected demographic variables were recoded or regrouped to support the analyses. This gave the following variables:

- *Qualifications (3)* – based upon Department for Education (2018b) census collections, 'degree level qualifications' ( $n = 191$ ); 'postgraduate teaching qualifications' ( $n = 293$ ); and 'master's level and above' ( $n =$

125); respondents who chose to 'prefer not to say' (n = 4) were removed from the analysis.

- *Age group of learners (2)* – split between primary age (n = 420) and secondary age (n = 123); those respondents working in nursery schools (n = 7) were incorporated into primary data whilst respondents working in middle schools (n = 7); all-through schools (n = 23); and other (n = 34) were removed from the data for this analysis.
- *School quality (4)* – was measured using the Ofsted grading system (Ofsted, 2019). Through periodic inspection, schools are classified (sample data in brackets) as outstanding (n = 108); good (n = 370); requires improvement (n = 85); or inadequate (n = 13). Respondents who were unsure or suggested that this item was not applicable (n = 29) were removed from the analysis.
- *Contract type (2)* – split between full time (n = 453) and part time (n = 154). No further adjustments were made.
- *Gender (2)* – split between male (n = 46) and female (n = 567). No further adjustments were made.
- *SENCO/SENCO undergoing training (2)* – split between SENCO (n = 523) and SENCO undergoing training (n = 87). No further adjustments were made.
- *School leadership status (2)* – in line with the two sets of contract scales outlined in teachers' pay and conditions (Department for Education, 2017a), school leader (n = 169) (including headteacher, deputy headteacher, and assistant headteacher) and class teacher (n = 433).

- *Age band of participants (2)* – in line with Super (1980), establishment (25 to 44 years) (n = 408) and maintenance (45 to 64 years) (n = 197); the small number of participants within the ‘exploration’ and so-called ‘decline’ stages were removed from the analysis.

#### **9.3.4 Comparison between SENCO interest factors**

To add numerical values to each factor, in a similar fashion to Borg et al. (1991), the remaining 22 items were reduced to four variables by taking the mean of the items within each of the four factors. Any cross-loaded items were included with the factor with which they had the larger loading (see Table 11).

Prior to an examination of differences across school and individual level variables, an initial analysis involving a one-way repeated measures ANOVA was performed on the data to examine any significant differences across the factors themselves. Within this type of analysis each factor is described as a level. Thus, there are four levels to these data. Each of these levels contains the same people and the mean of their scores. Consequently, in this calculation the people become the dependent variables and the independent variable is across the four levels or factors. This test was designed specifically to establish if there were any significant differences across all four SENCO interest factors for the sample as a whole.

As already discussed in the previous chapter, prior to running any form of analysis it is important to examine the data to ensure that all assumptions are met. Here, the “garbage in, garbage out” analogy made by Field (2018, p. 798) is equally applicable. Any violation of sphericity may provide an exaggerated

result or F-test, which could lead to the assumption of an effect being present where there is none. The data was therefore subjected to Mauchley's test of sphericity (Field, 2018, p. 669). As this was significant at  $p < .001$  the assumptions of sphericity had been violated and there was a need for correction. As a result, the Greenhouse-Geisser epsilon parameter was used to provide a more "conservative" (Field, 2018, p. 671) F-test.

The results demonstrate that the main effect for SENCO interest was statistically significant,  $F(2.06, 1209.99) = 294.30, p < .001$  amongst the factors. This suggests that the four SENCO interest factors differed from one another across the group as a whole. On inspection of the means across the whole sample, the factor representing the largest SENCO interest was 'inclusion' ( $M = 4.15, SD = .67$ ) followed by 'high quality provision' ( $M = 3.87, SD = .69$ ) and 'educational and professional development' ( $M = 3.54, SD = .85$ ). The factor 'leadership voice and status' was the lowest interest factor across the sample although it had the highest variance ( $M = 3.01, SD = 1.22$ ).

As the difference between factors was statistically significant, further analysis of the factors was undertaken through three planned contrasts by adding weights to each variable as suggested by Field (2018, p. 673) as highlighted below:

- Contrast 1: 'Outward facing vs. Inward facing' F1\_Inclusion 0.5  
F2\_Provision 0.5 F3\_Career -0.5 F4\_Leadership -0.5;
- Contrast 2: 'inclusion vs. provision' F1\_Inclusion 1 F2\_Provision -1  
F3\_Career 0 F4\_Leadership 0;



- Contrast 3: 'Career vs. leadership' F1\_Inclusion 0 F2\_Provision 0  
F3\_Career 1 F4\_Leadership -1;

In the first contrast, factors one and two combined as one variable were compared to factors three and four combined as another variable. As discussed earlier (see section 8.7), these first two factors can be described as being outward facing and school focused (inclusion and high quality provision) because the interest in the role is centred around developing inclusive settings based on a rights agenda through good classroom practice. The second set of factors can be described as being inward facing and person focused (professional and career development and leadership voice and status) because the factors are related to the development of the self, including education, experience, and personal standing within the school. This first contrast between these outward facing and the inward facing factors was statistically significant  $F(1, 588) = 439.78, p < .001$  indicating that overall teachers' interest in being a SENCO is driven more by outward facing variables such as rights, inclusion, and the desire to improve provision.

In the second and third contrasts the analyses were focused on looking for variance across the two factors grouped to be outward facing and the two factors grouped to be inward facing respectively. In the contrast of the two outward facing factors, there was a significant difference with SENCOs wishing to develop inclusion over high quality provision  $F(1, 588) = 142.13, p < .001$ . In the contrast of the two inward facing factors, there was a significant difference with SENCOs wishing to enhance educational and professional development over leadership status  $F(1, 588) = 149.73, p < .001$ .

### **9.3.5 Interactions with school and individual characteristics**

The next set of analyses were designed to examine differences between the independent groups within the different demographic factors across all four factors. For example, for contract type, SENCOs indicated that they were either part time or full time. In turn, these form two independent groups or variables ( $n = 2$ ) with different participants in each group. Here, the measurement of variance would be between subject variables of the two groups. In the second calculation, each independent group would be subject to measures of variance across each of the four factors. This would be a measurement of variance within the subject variable. This would form a repeated measure as the same group would be measured each time.

This highlights the needs to synthesise two types of design,

- an independent design for the between subjects calculation; and
- a repeated measures design for the within subject calculation.

This Field (2018, p. 705) describes as a mixed design. Consequently, to test whether there were any demographic variations within the SENCO interest factors, a series of two-way mixed design factorial ANOVAs were conducted with SENCO interest factors as repeated measures variables and demographic items as between-subjects variables. Again, to ensure that the results from the ANOVAs were valid, it was important to ensure that assumptions were met. As Mauchley's test of sphericity (Field, 2018, p. 669) was statistically significant at  $p < .001$ , the Greenhouse-Geisser epsilon parameter was again used to provide

the F-test (Field, 2018, p. 671).

Another issue with this dataset was the imbalance within groups which could potentially lead to confounding. Field (2018) provides exemplars with equal sized groups. Here, experiments or observations that are used as exemplars are always planned to have equal group sizes, a common assumption of ANOVA. However, as already discussed in Chapter 7, the comparison groups are not equal. For example, for gender in the national data set for 2018, 91% SENCOs are women. Likewise, in the present survey, 46 participants identified as male whilst 567 identified as female, providing a sample of 92% female respondents. Carlson and Timm (1974, p. 569) also warn of the problems of using a non-orthogonal data set; however, they acknowledge that this may be inevitable when looking at population frequencies. Consequently, to counteract for the unbalanced design in the present study, the unweighted marginal means method (Maxwell, Delaney, & Kelley, 2018, p. 361) was used to calculate the sums of squares for the different ANOVAs. By utilising the unweighted marginal means or the Type III sum of squares method, results are calculated which are an approximation instead of a precise test. Nonetheless, in all apart from the most extreme cases, this approach does eliminate the potential for confounding, which would otherwise provide an invalid result.

Two types of ANOVA were conducted:

- Across the demographic variables and the SENCO interest factors (within-subjects effects) to test for interactions between different demographics and individual SENCO interest factors.

- Between the different demographic variables (between-subject effects) to test for differences between the various groups across all factors.

**Table 17: Summary of all within subject and between subject effects for SENCO career interest factors and individual characteristics**

	<i>n</i> *	<i>F</i> **	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>	( $\eta^2$ )
<b>Qualifications</b>					
Within subjects' effects	584	1.61	4.10, 1190.33	.167	.006
Between subjects' effects	584	1.36	2,581	.258	.005
<b>Age group of learners</b>					
Within subjects' effects	521	0.80	2.07, 1076.31	.454	.002
Between subjects' effects	521	.205	1,519	.651	.000
<b>School quality</b>					
Within subjects' effects	552	0.61	6.20, 1133.19	.730	.003
Between subjects' effects	552	.447	3,548	.720	.002
<b>Contract type</b>					
Within subjects' effects	583	1.11	2.07, 1201.15	.332	.002
Between subjects' effects	583	3.829	1,581	.051	.007
<b>Gender</b>					
Within subjects' effects	588	0.95	2.06, 1207.25	.389	.002
Between subjects' effects	588	12.90	1,586	<b>&lt;.001</b>	.022
<b>SENCO/SENCO undergoing training</b>					
Within subjects' effects	585	3.51	2.06, 1198.03	<b>.029</b>	.006
Between subjects' effects	585	21.35	1,583	<b>&lt;.001</b>	.022
<b>School leadership status</b>					
Within subjects' effects	577	12.47	2.08, 1195.26	<b>&lt;.001</b>	.021
Between subjects' effects	577	.278	1,575	.598	.000
<b>Age band of participants</b>					
Within subjects' effects	580	6.27	2.04, 1180.05	<b>.002</b>	.011
Between subjects' effects	580	2.187	1,578	.140	.004

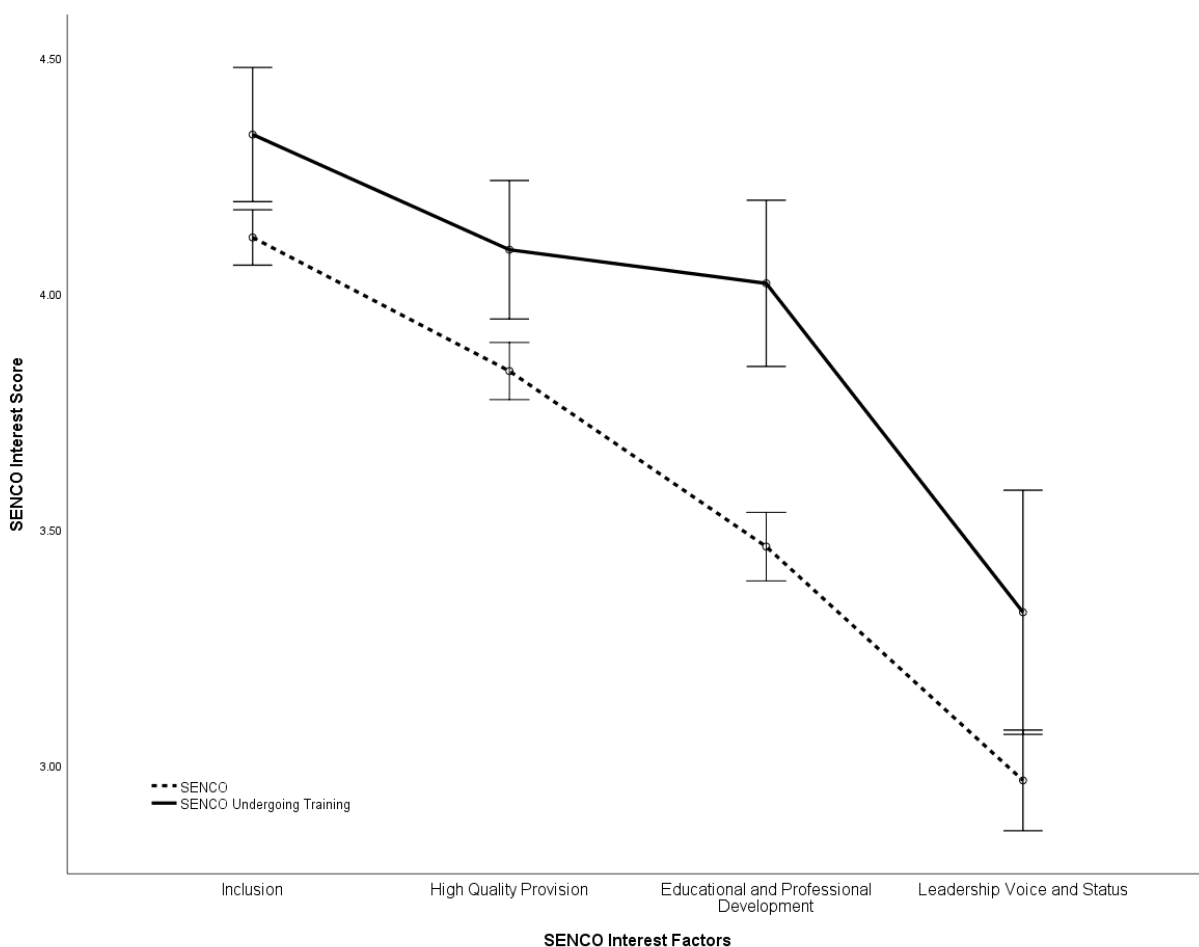
\*Figures differ from those presented earlier because of missing data.

\*\*This is an adjusted F-test as the original degrees of freedom are multiplied by the Greenhouse-Geisser epsilon parameter.

Table 17 lists all the effects between the SENCO career interest factors and demographic variables. In this study, there is no evidence that interest in the role of the SENCO position is affected by variables such as level of qualification held, the age group of learners taught, school quality, or being part or full time. Nevertheless, there were significant results for four between subject variables. Firstly, there was a significant main effect of gender with women being more positive than men across all factors. There were also other significant interactions between the four interest factors: (1) whether the individual was a SENCO or SENCO undergoing training; (2) leadership status; and (3) age. These are described in turn.

#### *9.3.5.1 SENCO/SENCO undergoing training x SENCO interest factors*

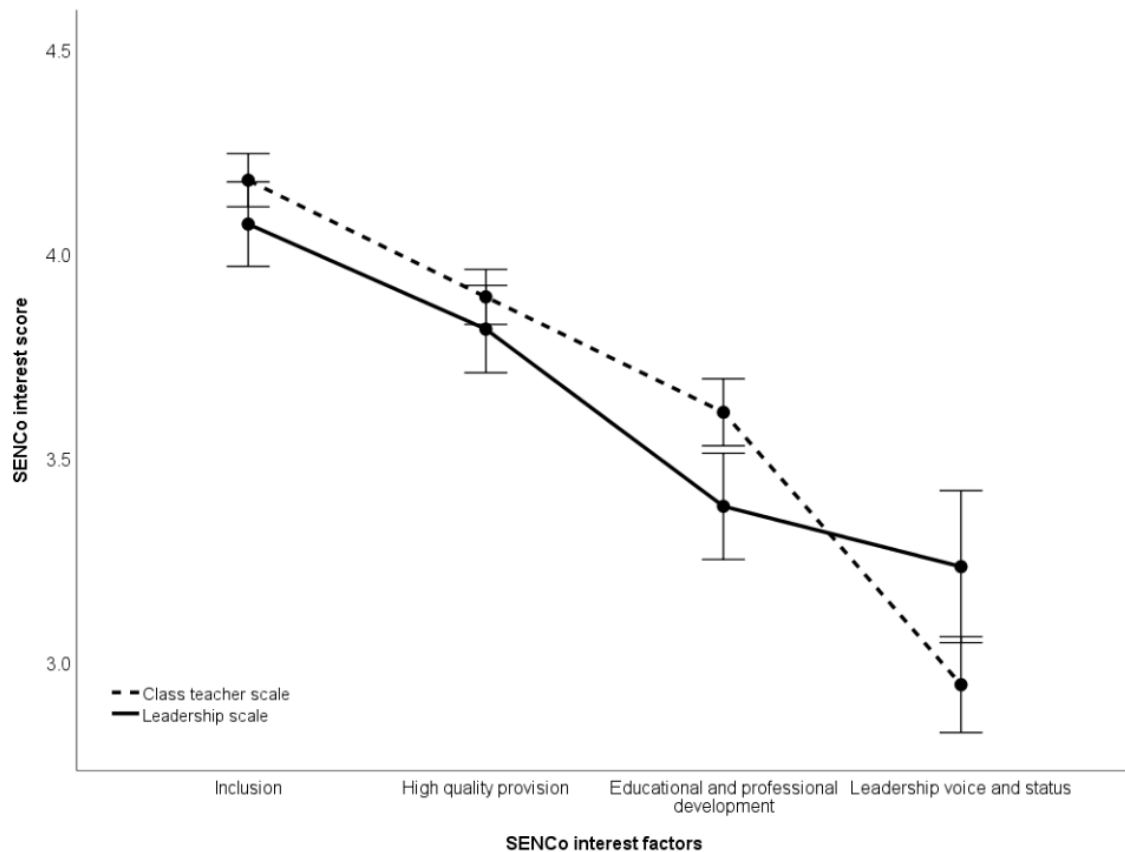
Here, a SENCO undergoing training is defined as those who are not yet a named SENCO but are undertaking the NASENCo award. Those who are SENCOs undergoing training score significantly higher across all SENCO interest factors compared with actual SENCOs (Figure 18). However, the significant interaction shows that the SENCOs undergoing training are particularly more positive in relation to the factor 'professional and career development'. This suggests that their interest in the role may be because it is seen as an important step in being able to further develop their practice through a greater understanding of more inclusive teaching and gaining further qualifications.



**Figure 18: The relationship between SENCO/SENCO undergoing training and SENCO interest factors**

### **9.3.6 Leadership status x SENCO interest factors**

Those on the leadership scale are more positive in relation to the 'leadership voice and status' factor compared to those not on the leadership scale, i.e., class teacher scale (see Figure 19). The reverse appears to be the case for the other three factors. This suggests that respondents on the class teacher scale are significantly less interested in leadership status than their counterparts on the school leadership scale but still value the potential for career development and further study.

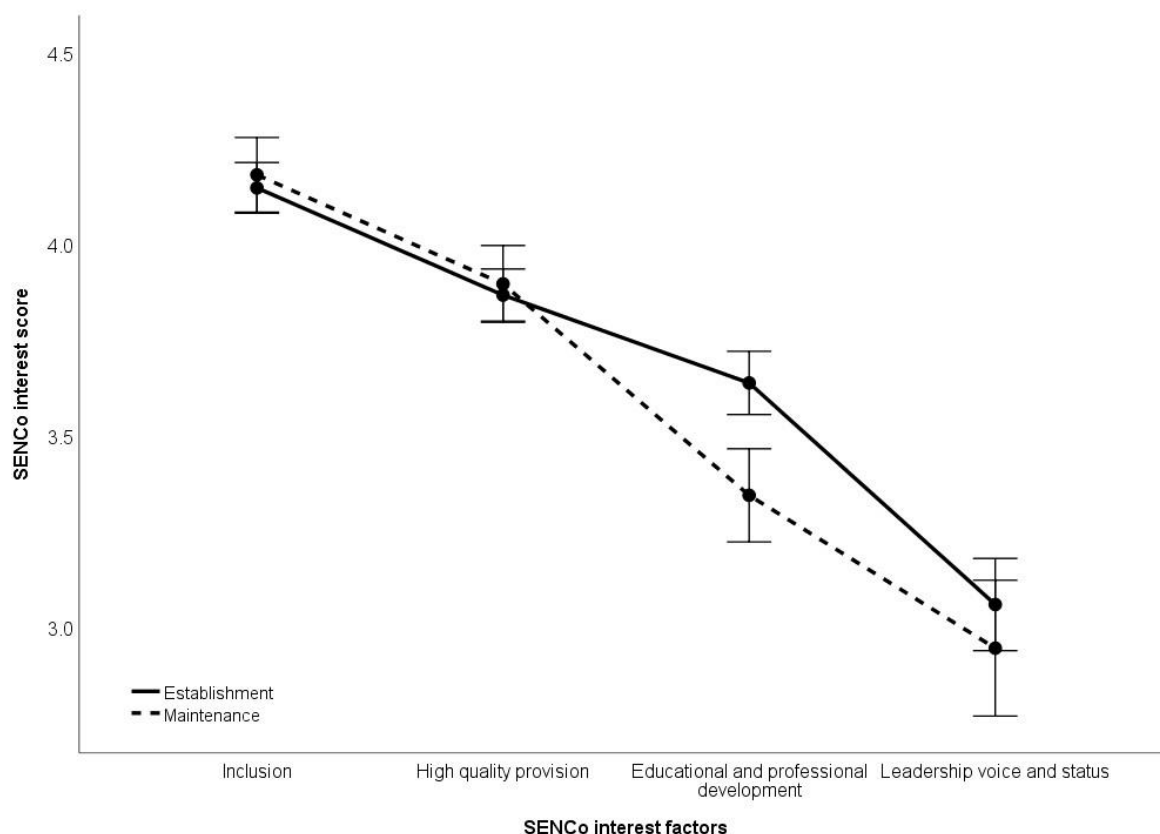


**Figure 19: The relationship between leadership status and SENCO interest factors**

#### 9.3.6.1 Age x SENCO interest factors

There was no significant main effect of participants' age band. However, whilst there are no apparent effects of age on the outward looking factors of 'inclusion' and 'high quality provision', the significant interaction of age seems to be linked to Factor 3, 'educational and professional development' (see Figure 20). This suggests that those in the 'establishment' stage (aged 25 to 44 years) were motivated more by a need to continue developing their knowledge and skill set to establish and further their careers.





**Figure 20: The relationship between age and SENCO interest factors**

## 9.4 Discussion

### ***9.4.1 The importance of context when accounting for interest in the SENCO role***

The focus of this particular study is to look at differences across the factors for the demographic or school-level groups; however, it would be an erroneous conclusion within a mixed method study to interpret the statistical analysis in this simplistic way. Earlier, the factors were presented in order of the level of interest according to statistical analysis. There is a significant difference between the factors across all participants with the outward facing factors of 'inclusion' and 'high quality provision' being reported to be more influential than the inward facing factors of 'educational and professional development' and

‘leadership voice and status’. Put simply, SENCOs express more of an interest in developing inclusion through high quality provision than they do in their own professional and career development. This pattern of results is not just present in the overall sample. It is also present within the analysis of demographic characteristics and different types of schools. Indeed, where any interaction did occur as a result of between subjects effects, it is noteworthy that the factors of inclusion (Factor 1) and high quality provision (Factor 2) were consistently the highest and second highest scoring factors respectively. This arrangement of factors is worthy of further comment.

The first of the outward facing factors ‘inclusion’ bears a resemblance to early discussions about SENCOs being influenced by inclusion and the right of participation described in Chapter 6 (see section 6.4.3). The second outward facing factor is ‘high quality provision’ within school settings. This, Anderson et al. (2014) describe as existing within the structures being developed within the exosystem of the school that surrounds the child (see section 3.3.1). Although in this study the two have been tested to be statistically different from one another, there is a relationship between the factors in terms of the enactment of inclusive policy within school settings; vis-à-vis, the development of high quality provision and practice within a school may lead to increased inclusion.

However, this potentially simple relationship of policy and practice within both outward facing factors is much more complex. In Chapter 2, it was argued that the inclusion of children with SEN in mainstream settings has not always been a reality. Rather, this is partially resultant of the significant policy shift starting with Warnock (1978) that eventually led to the introduction of a new

category of child – the child with SEN (see section 2.2). Additionally, it is also argued that had it not been for this policy development, the position of the SENCO would not exist or indeed may not have been needed at all. Here, the ideas of inclusion described by SENCOs and furthermore defined within the first factor earlier (see section 8.7) bear a distinct similarity to the idealised role specification of the role as described within policy (see section 2.4.4).

It is possible to reject the proposition made above by arguing that the factor structure was partially due to the items presented to participants in the survey. Different items would have produced different factors. However, the items are derived from written data produced by an earlier sample of SENCOs. Therefore, the items presented within the survey were reflective of what SENCOs were thinking and speaking even if, as suggested earlier, they were speaking in a ‘policy echo chamber’ (see section 6.5.3). This policy echo chamber of following statutory mechanisms, promoting inclusion, and working with professionals (see sections 6.4.2 and 6.4.3) would appear to have reconstituted itself as a factor. It is perhaps noteworthy, therefore, that this is the factor with the highest means across the whole sample. There could be several reasons for this or even a combination of reasons.

One may be that SENCOs are primarily driven by developing a policy ideal of inclusion by operationalising it within practice and provision. For this group as a whole, this is more important than potential personal gain such as promotion or professional development. This may be due to the person rather than the context (see section 3.2.6). Here, the individual disposition of the SENCO may drive them to use their bioecological resources to want to develop

inclusion through provision. This person centric reason for the development of inclusion has also been argued by others. For example, Mackenzie (2012b, p. 1080) argues that many SENCOs bring a deep sense of emotional commitment to the role, and they may regard it as a role in which they can demonstrate their passion and caring and alter their own internal state by expressing their own emotional experiences through their work.

Another reason for the strength of this factor may relate to the time in which the overall study was conducted. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) suggest that individuals may be influenced within the macrotime of public policy change (see section 3.2.6). Here, Foucault (1965) provides some insightful arguments to help us understand how a singular concept may be understood differently at different points in macrotime. Through charting and interpreting the history of madness, Foucault (1965) suggests that madness had existed as a word since antiquity. However, throughout the passage of history this singular word has been understood to have different meanings in distinct periods of time. Moreover, the methods associated with understanding, dealing with, and 'treating' madness also differed in time utilising approaches such as banishment, confinement, and 'treatment'.

Within the present work, what is being reported, reconstituted as factors, and subsequently measured may also be contingent on the distinct period in macrotime in which the work was being conducted. Perhaps if the way in which the role of the SENCO is constructed in policy significantly changes in the future, a repeat of this study would produce radically different results. Likewise,

as suggested earlier, if a study like the present one had been performed pre-Warnock, the factor arrangement may also have been radically different.

This latter point is important as many approaches to understanding career interest and personality, for example the five-factor model and the RIASEC structure, do not account for the impact of context and time. Rather, they suggest that there are factors that are stable over time (see section 4.5) and intrapersonal as they exist at the level of the person. Within the current study, factors three and four could also be regarded as intrapersonal as they also exist at the level of the person. Within the current thesis, the first factor that is the highest performing factor across all different demographic groups is perhaps the one which is the most deeply embedded in context and time. As a result, it is more ecologically driven and acts as a measure of the time in which the study was conducted.

#### ***9.4.2 The lack of effect of school-level characteristics on interest in the SENCO role***

One of the key advantages of utilising these factors is to tease out whether differences occur in the interest in the role across different groups of people and types of school. This makes this study unique. As has already been discussed (see Chapter 2), trying to understand SENCOs whilst accounting for individual and school-level differences is rarely conducted. Here though, it is important to recognise that there are two important theoretical distinctions between the aforementioned distinctions. The school-level data are contextual in nature whilst individual characteristics lie at the level of the person.

There are also a number of socially and locally constructed contextual factors that are at the level of the individual school. These include the age range of schools (primary and secondary) and the state assessed quality of schools (measured through Ofsted gradings). The results from the present study would suggest that there are no significant interactions or between subject effects within the school-level variables of school quality and age group taught. These results suggest that on the whole, SENCOs in primary and secondary schools are attracted to the role for similar reasons despite the obvious differences between these two distinct contextual phases of education and their operational and organisational differences. Another key finding relates to the quality of school. Here, quality is measured by the school grading system of outstanding through to inadequate. Again, it is an encouraging finding that schools in all circumstances would seem to be potentially appointing SENCOs who have a primary interest in trying to promote inclusion and develop high quality provision. Indeed, these two outward facing factors will be equally important within schools deemed inadequate, but they are also essential in schools categorised as outstanding to maintain a keen focus on the development of provision for children and young people with SEN.

#### ***9.4.3 The relationship between SENCO interest factors and demographic characteristics***

Despite the lack of interaction between the factors and the variables at the contextual level of the school, there was significant interaction at the level of the person. Here, there were significant differences between the different participant groups of gender, SENCO/SENCO undergoing training, school

leadership status, and age band of participants. However, there were no interactions between the factors and individual characteristics such as qualifications held and contract type.

As discussed in Chapter 2, most work on the SENCO would seem to assume that SENCOs are homogeneous, often reporting that findings are representative of the whole population of SENCOs. Indeed, as also suggested in Chapter 7, many studies do not closely analyse the sample and compare it to national norms, nor report on whether there are any differences of opinion or response according to demographic characteristics. As a result, these studies do not recognise that characteristics of their sample may skew, change, or impact results. The findings from the present research suggest that not accounting for the level of the 'person' in these studies may potentially be foolhardy. Although the categories used to look for differences across groups were rudimentary and simplistic, their use highlights a key implication for all future research that we cannot assume what is reported by those conducting research with SENCOs is representative of all. It also highlights why there is a need to fully understand the demographic and school-level composition of the national dataset when publishing the results of surveys which claim to be the 'voice' of the profession.

For two variables there was no interaction at all. For the variable entitled level of qualifications held it was expected there may be an interaction with the third factor of educational and professional development. Incorrectly, it was assumed that those without higher level qualifications such as master's degrees and doctorates may see the role as an ideal way to pursue these qualifications.

This is especially important in the current context where the legal requirement to undertake the NASENCo award means that all SENCOs would automatically receive a postgraduate certificate. Here, perhaps it would seem that few early career SENCOs aspire to be regarded as in the category of expert as suggested by Kearns (2005) through the possession of additional specialist qualifications. The results of this survey would suggest that as Kearns (2005) reported, this group of SENCOs will remain a minority.

Another encouraging lack of interaction related to the employment status of participants. In Chapter 7 it was revealed that there would be an increasing trend of SENCOs who work part time from 5,920 SENCOs in 2017 to 7,437 in 2018. This will now represent 34.5% of SENCOs nationally. The data from the current survey would suggest that being employed within these different contract types has little impact on interest in these role. Notwithstanding, the large increase in SENCOs who work part time is worthy of further study, especially as this has occurred over a one-year period.

Women responded more positively than men across all factors. There could be several reasons for this difference and may include methodological issues such as sample size or response bias. Indeed, it is noteworthy, that the data in Chapter 7 indicates that women are more likely to be either drawn towards or chosen to become a SENCO. Here, it is important be guarded against a reductionist analysis of the data. For example, women are more interested in the role so this explains why there are many more women SENCOs. However, in line with the work of Mackenzie (2012b, p. 1074) and Pulsford (2019), the observed difference does provide further evidence that



gender may be associated with understanding who is drawn to the role in the first instance. In particular, Mackenzie draws our attention to the gendered, almost maternally orientated, discussions of her participants whose experiences as parents underpinned their practice. Additional work is now needed in this area.

Likewise, those who are training to be a SENCO reported their interest more positively across all factors than those who are already in the role. This finding may reflect that positivity expressed whilst in training may decline once the post becomes a reality, and in that sense is a cause for concern. This could be symptomatic of wider contextual factors such as the perceived enormity of the role and lack of time, resources, and status for those already in it. Consequently, this would appear to lead to both dissatisfaction and high levels of potential attrition (Curran et al., 2018). A positive analysis might be that engagement in training has additional positive consequences which may be lost once training is complete, such as peer support from other SENCOs in training. Consideration of approaches to support potentially isolated SENCOs post training might also be the focus of further work.

Interactions within the SENCO interest factors occurred across three groups of participants. In all three cases, the interactions happened within the inward facing factors (Factors 3 and 4). Again, taking the SENCO/SENCO undergoing training variable, those undergoing training unsurprisingly reported a much higher interest in the development opportunities they perceived the role to bring. Likewise, taking school leadership status, those who were school leaders were significantly more interested in leadership than their counterparts

on the class teacher scale. Once again, this could be symptomatic of individual personality differences between those attracted to teaching who may be 'artistic' and 'social' and those attracted to school leadership who may be 'social', 'enterprising', and 'conventional' (National Center for O\*NET Development, 2019a, 2019b). In addition, SENCOs may wish to avoid elements of the leadership role or indeed not see the need to be a leader to improve the outcomes discussed earlier (see section 8.7).

Finally, considering the interaction with age, in line with the work of Super (1980), the older respondents (classified by Super as in the 'maintenance' stage of their career) were much less interested in 'educational and professional development' than younger participants (classified by Super as in the 'exploration' stage of their career). Why this occurs is not clear; however, Super (1980) offers a suggestion that those in the 'exploration' stage may be seeking new information to place themselves in a new job or role whilst those in the 'maintenance' stage may be concerned with "holding one's own" (p. 292). If this is applied to the SENCO population, then 41.3% (see section 7.3.4) are in the 'holding one's own' stage. If Super's argument of the "temporal importance" (p. 288) of different stages of life is applied to the SENCO population, those who are 'holding one's own' are of concern and worthy of further research.

## **9.5 Conclusion**

The present chapter has both continued and completed the sequential nature of the present work. Here, the four factors derived from the study in the previous chapter have been used to examine whether we should account for school and

individual level differences when researching interest in the SENCO role. It has been argued that not all the factors are of equal importance. This has significant implications for all research into the SENCO role where findings are often reported without due acknowledgement of the weight or importance that the characteristics of the participants or sample within a study may put on these. Likewise, it has also been suggested that the context of policy and ideals such as inclusion would appear to be greater drivers in developing and sustaining an interest in the role than factors at the level of the person, such as the drive for promotion. However, this proposition should be tempered by the acknowledgement that context changes over time and the findings in this study may do little more than represent this (see section 8.7). This has implications for understanding career interest as many theoretical approaches to understanding career interest (see section 4.5) are located at the level of the person. It would also suggest that understanding career interest within an ecology is a worthwhile proposition.

Another important finding is that where there are differences between groups of SENCOs, this is most likely to be due to differences at the level of the person. Here, it was noted that SENCOs differed in elements of their role according to a range of individual factors. Again, this has implications for a whole range of research that does not accurately account for demographic features in research. It also raises several important questions about why these seem to occur. This is especially important for differences such as gender and age. It is also important for the future of the profession and sustaining and maintaining an interest in the role for those who aspire to be in the position and those who have been in it for some time.

## **CHAPTER 10 – CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS**

### **10.1 Summary of the main findings – a response to the research questions**

In the sections below, each research question will be considered and further explored as to why they contribute towards a greater understanding of why teachers become SENCOs.

#### ***10.1.1 Research question 1a – What are the range of reasons reported by teachers on how they developed interest in the role of SENCO?***

The aim of the first question was exploratory in nature. It was designed to gain insight into the reasons why teachers become SENCOs. Prior to this study, it was acknowledged in Chapter 2 that the SENCO role is a product of policy developed over time. In Chapter 3, ecological approaches were considered. Within this ecology, there is both the person and the context. The psychology of career interest was explored in Chapter 4. Here, it was argued that many theoretical positions approach understanding an individual's career interest as a process. This process of career development accounts for people, their contexts, and change over time.

The empirical evidence derived from this study suggests that those who enter the role have a wide range of reasons. Although these need to be understood holistically within the context of an individual's life course, it was possible to provide a broad overview of the themes expressed by the sample as a whole. Here, 32 sub themes were identified. The 32 sub themes could be

further restructured into more complex themes and overarching themes. At the level most proximal to the person, teachers are attracted to this role due to their professional experiences of working with children with SEN and other professional influences. In addition, they also aspire to develop their own skillset through professional experience and formal development. Other reasons include their own experiences of schooling or the school experiences of family members with SEN.

Social cognitive career theory (SCCT) (Lent et al., 1994, 2000, 2002) posits that those who enter different roles are not malleable and conditioned (see section 4.6.2). Rather, these individuals are dynamic and have personal agency. Indeed, teachers wish to enter the SENCO role because they believe in their own abilities to make changes and alter, for the better, what they see within the school. As a result, they have a wide range of outcome expectations (Lent et al., 1994, 2000, 2002) including a personal vision, skills to share, and a desire to share these skills. However, these outcome expectations are tempered, influenced but also enabled by an awareness of needing to follow policy and procedure with relation to SEN. These policy frameworks include a diverse range of functions that attract teachers to the role. These include working with parents, working with and through other professionals, and contributing to the diagnosis and identification of SEN in children and young people.

**10.1.2 Research question 1b – How can we understand these reasons within the realms of the people and the contexts in which these decisions were made?**

There are a range of tensions and dilemmas that would appear to exist throughout many of the contextual reasons provided by teachers on their interest in the SENCO role. The work of Norwich (2013) adds further provenance to the need to surface these tensions including the dichotomies of:

- participation – protection
- choice – equity
- generic – specialist
- what exists as real – relative
- knowledge as investigation – emancipation (Norwich, 2013, p. 7)

For some SENCOs these contexts include their own personal experiences of SEN, whilst for others these relate to their experiences of teaching children with SEN. The context of the school is also important. SENCOs draw from their knowledge of school structures and work being undertaken within their school. The context of the school is also important as many SENCOs report that they are aware of teaching within a school that is not supportive of children with SEN. The results indicate that this contextual information is a driver for some to enter the role.

However, these are not the only contextual factors. SENCOs also share their visions for the role but use the language of current or recent policy to describe their motivations. For example, SENCOs often exemplify that they

would like to promote the right to participation in decisions. They also share ideas around the theme of equality, equity, and inclusion. However, all of this is often limited by the overall national policy, influenced by a school effectiveness framework, dictating to the self-improving school. A noteworthy tension.

As a result, many of the reasons for teachers becoming SENCOs cannot be understood outside the context in which they are made. The provenance of the 32 sub themes can therefore be arranged ecologically (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005). As discussed in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6, it is argued that developmental influences are both proximal and distal to the person. The overarching themes reported can be understood within the level of the micro, exo, and macrosystems that surround and influence teachers when they are considering becoming a SENCO.

One of the central themes of Bronfenbrenner's work is the relationship between person and context in understanding the active and holistic nature of human development. Indeed, this relationship between 'person' and 'context' has been exploited elsewhere for understanding inclusive education (Anderson et al., 2014) and occupational choices (Young, 1983). What draws all of this research together is an acknowledgement that influence can be both proximal and distal to the person at the heart of the system. In the case of this thesis, this is the teacher transitioning into a SENCO.

The findings suggest that the importance of context in fully understanding the reasons why teachers become SENCOs cannot be understated. This holism is exemplified by the reasons provided by participants. These reasons suggest that the context partly determines the motivations; it does not just frame them.

Indeed, the importance of context (policy) influences SENCOs by both enabling them to fulfil their vision but also constrains them due to the limitations, paradoxes, and tensions within policy.

A further exploration of the findings exemplifies these issues. Here, the contextually situated reasons why teachers become SENCOs are not straightforward. Rather, these reasons often highlight the multiple tensions that exist within the English SEN system and indeed the participants themselves. The first theme, 'The 'influence of direct experiences' is akin to the microsystem offered within a range of sources (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Young, 1983). Here, SENCOs describe decisions made in the context of their own individual aspirations both professionally and personally. They also describe their own proximal professional experiences that have led to a sense of personal professional competence. Sometimes, SENCOs describe tensions within their own personal microsystem. These include the tensions of working to affect change within a system where friends or family members may have experienced positive but often negative experiences of SEN provision. Additionally, SENCOs also describe their own professional competence against the tensions of working in professional proximity to colleagues within settings where children with SEN would benefit from improved provision. This latter point highlights an additional dilemma for the SENCO. On the one hand, they want the system to be inclusive, on the other hand, they are framing their arguments in the current discourses of school improvement.

The second theme, 'influence of strategic school policy and approaches' is akin to the exosystem offered by Anderson et al. (2014). Here, SENCOs



describe the contextual influences of external factors that they may not have influence on. However, these influences impact upon their personal and professional development. These are interpreted and operationalised at the level of the school including national SEN frameworks and regulatory frameworks such as teacher standards and pay and conditions. There is also evidence of the continuing drive towards teachers being seen as agents of change who are able to drive improvement in their own settings. Again, there are a range of tensions present. Utilising the work of Norwich (2013), SENCOs appear that to want to change and add value to society but they are constrained or influenced by schools being located within wider societal frameworks. In turn, these frameworks may be seen to serve the social and economic interests of that particular society (p. 97).

The final theme, 'Influence of national policy and culture' is akin to the macrosystem offered by Anderson et al. (2014). This also demonstrates the link between these wider contextual forces and the interests of those within the SENCO role. SENCOs describe their interest in the role using terms and ideas derived from distal contextual influences of national and international frameworks. These include accords that promote inclusion or in some jurisdictions provide a right to participation. Here, there is also evidence of SENCOs describing their interest in the role couched in the contextual language of the performative drive to improve schools through self-improvement. Whether these latter approaches are appropriate remains a matter of debate; nonetheless, the influences of these societal forces is palpable.

Here, three implications are identified. Firstly, schools must be clear about defining their role appropriately and informing those interested in a SENCO role as to exactly what they may expect when employed within the role. Miller and Youngs (2021) argue that even in the early parts of a teacher's career, an inappropriate match between the person and their organisation or school can negatively impact upon retention. Secondly, teachers draw from a range of contextual factors when applying for SENCO roles. Do schools understand these when trying to match a person to a role? The final implication of contextual influences on those interested in the SENCO role relates to the way teachers use the language of policy in describing their interest in the SENCO role. Here, Ball et al. (2011, p. 622) warn that teachers may be operating within a policy echo chamber. This finding also has practical importance in addition to its theoretical implications, especially if policy should change in the future. Arguably, good policy should have a welcome role in influencing the drivers for being a SENCO – or indeed any educational professional. Here, there should be caution that any policy changes do not limit or confine the role. Rather, there should be an opportunity for SENCOs to be able to step outside of and think beyond the confines of the echo chamber and macrosystem to further develop the policy framework.

SENCOs should, therefore, be provided with the space to think beyond issues that limit their discussion towards operational aspects of policy, rather than the values that underpin it. For example, is the drive of the SENCO to manage statements and EHC plans? (operational). Or is the drive to give children and parents voice in defining their needs/requirements and having a say in the support that they receive? (value). This process is not a simple one.

Rather, it means that SENCOs should be provided with the critical tools to understand these tensions and dilemmas within the system.

There are a plethora of reasons to explain the process through which teachers may become SENCOs. However, these decisions cannot be understood outside the multiple layers of context that influence the course of these decisions. The study provides a unique contribution to knowledge in the field. Firstly, no other study has sought to directly collect empirical data on why people become SENCOs. Secondly, the study is novel in that it has used an ecological lens to both structure and support the analysis of the data.

### ***10.1.3 Research question 2a – What are the characteristics of the SENCO population?***

The previous set of questions addressed the relationship between the person and the context. However, it is difficult to speak of both people and their contextual circumstances without a clear understanding of the SENCO population. Here, the population and their characteristics provide important contextual information. Understanding the population also has implications for understanding the people at the heart of any ecological system (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005; Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2014; Young, 1983). It also has importance for understanding the validity of empirical surveys that aim to speak on behalf of a particular population (Oppenheim, 1992).

Within the study are two Freedom of Information (FOI) requests. The FOI mechanism allows researchers to request that government agencies provide

hitherto unavailable data. The information gained from these FOI requests reveal that the majority of SENCOs are mid-career, white women. In turn, this demographic is neither fully representative of society nor the teaching profession as a whole. Indeed, many SENCOs also work part time, with part-time working in this role greater than the teaching population as a whole. The comparison of two separate SENCO populations from two consecutive years suggests that part-time SENCOs are an increasing national trend.

Qualifications and the status of SENCOs is also worthy of comment. Despite the call of Warnock (1978) for SENCOs to have a specialist qualification, there are only a minority with a master's degree. Thus, the experience they bring is more likely to be as a result of experience rather than formal education. Additionally, despite the calls for SENCOs to be part of the school SLT, it would appear that over all types of school setting, only around a third are placed on the school leadership scale. This has implications with regards to their influence to make strategic rather than operational decisions. It also has implications for the contextual influences that impact how they operate within their role. For example, if SENCOs are not part of the strategic body of the SLT, they may not see the need to think strategically due to a lack of contextual influence.

The two datasets reported here are unique and make a significant contribution to research into the role of the SENCO. These are offered to other researchers as population datasets against which sample data can be interrogated for representativeness. This approach to creating bespoke national

datasets utilising the 2000 Freedom of Information Act provides a clear method for future researchers to repeat this data extraction to further inform their work.

#### ***10.1.4 Research question 2b – Does existing literature reflect this population?***

Here, it is possible to revisit the assumptions on which much research on the SENCO is conducted. The first study of this thesis (Chapter 6) is characterised by reporting findings from a sample of the population of SENCOs as a whole. In Chapter 2, the development of the SENCO is plotted against a timeline of policy development in English schools. Here, the literature reviewed often reported on the difficulties faced by SENCOs. Indeed, much of the literature assumes homogeneity of certain school characteristics. It also assumes homogeneity at the level of the person. Only a few studies acknowledge that different characteristics at the level of the person may impact upon approaches to the role (e.g., Kearns, 2005; Mackenzie, 2012a, 2012b).

Whether the populations or types of school are homogeneous or heterogeneous makes a difference to the way SENCOs choose, operationalise, or develop an interest in the role remains a matter of conjecture. A closer analysis of a number of these influential studies and surveys revealed sets of strong claims. However, whether these claims represent the views, opinions or thoughts of the population described above remained problematic.

To date, none of these studies discussed in Chapter 7 have had an accurate population to accurately compare their sample to. Over time, a series of claims have been made based on empirical evidence from these studies. In

turn, many of these claims have been used to develop ideas and questions for other studies. Indeed, much of this literature forms the bedrock of the discussion in Chapter 2. This has often led to spurious claims based upon samples that may not be representative. These claims often report that the majority of SENCOs are women. We now know they are. Other studies meanwhile report the concerns of headteachers that many SENCOs are approaching retirement. We now know that many are. Other studies attest to most SENCOs being leaders. They are not.

In Chapter 5, it was argued that understanding the demographic characteristics of a population is an essential component of any large empirical study. However, despite the role being in existence since 1994, there has been no attempt by either researchers or policy makers to extract the data which described the unique nature of the SENCO population. The potential issues with the lack of representative studies are also highlighted within this study. Here, the samples used to gather empirical data were compared to the accurate dataset derived from FOI requests. This reveals that claims have been made about the SENCO population using the empirical data from samples of respondents that on occasions did not always represent the population. This is not to say that previous work is inaccurate or lacking value. Indeed, we also need to temper this criticism pragmatically by understanding that much research struggles for representativeness and the potential for generalisability of findings. The argument here is that if it exists, having this accurate dataset is important. Thus, the present research can add value to future research where population data forms an integral part of the study. An example of this is the work of

Pulsford (2019) who has already utilised data from this study in his analysis of the changing demographics of the SENCO population.

#### ***10.1.5 Research question 3 – What are the main factors underlying teachers' interest in becoming SENCOs?***

In study one (Chapter 6), empirical data were collected from a group of SENCOs and aspirant SENCOs. These data were subjected to a thematic analysis that generated three overarching themes which were framed ecologically. Within this study, 32 identified sub themes informed the structure of these four overarching themes. In Chapter 4, a range of literature on career interest was discussed. This discussion was structured within the framework of a later iteration of the ecological systems theory and the bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Within Chapter 4, it was suggested that career theories often aligned with theories relating to the 'person', theories relating to the 'process and context', and theories relating to 'process and time'. A synthesis of these theories was finally described that was designed to be more ecologically orientated (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2014). This systems theory framework was akin to the original ecological systems theory offered by Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005). Chapter 4 concludes with the argument that although theories of career interest have utility in matching people to suitable jobs and careers, it is difficult to use them to identify the main reasons why people choose a particular occupation or role. These theories also make it difficult to test for differences between groups whilst accounting for the contextually situated influences explored earlier.

In study three (Chapter 8), the 32 sub themes identified through study one (Chapter 6) were utilised to form the basis of a survey of 618 teachers. The responses were then subjected to a factor analysis to answer research question 3: what are the main factors underlying teachers' interest in becoming SENCOs? This was the first time that a survey of this size has sought to gather empirical data to identify key testable factors. As such, the results from this study provide an original empirical contribution to inform the formulation of policy, design of training, and recruitment of SENCOs. The factors are listed below in order of importance reported by the overall sample in the study (see Chapter 8 for full description of each factor):

- Factor 1: 'inclusion'
- Factor 2: 'high quality provision'
- Factor 3: 'educational and professional development'
- Factor 4: 'leadership voice and status'

The factors are independent of each other whilst still being closely aligned. These factors build upon the existing themes explored in study one as part of research question 1. However, within this study the factors are based upon a wider empirical base. The data that contributed towards them has also been more systematically collected through the use of a large national survey.

Being able to define and understand these factors has significant utility for policy makers, training providers, schools, and individuals alike. Despite differing types of data collection, the structure of the factors closely align with some of the findings in the first study, providing some form of confirmation of



the initial analysis. Here, the factor 'inclusion' is similar to the elements of the theme of 'The policy and culture of inclusive education' discussed earlier. Meanwhile, 'educational and professional development' is akin to the microsystemic theme of 'the experience of personal aspiration'. Thus, the factors not only reduce the data into four testable factors, but these factors appear to be structured in contextual influences that are increasingly proximal and distal to the person.

The value of understanding these factors is highlighted through a series of short vignettes:

**Vignette 1:** Policy makers are reframing a set of national standards for SENCOs. They are persuaded by an argument that most SENCOs aspire to become school leaders and hold other teachers to account. They align the SENCO standards to leadership standards with a focus on accountability and teacher performance. In further deliberation, they consult the factors in this study. This leads to the standards being reframed to ensure there is more of a balanced focus with a greater emphasis on the promotion of inclusion within both settings and classrooms.

**Vignette 2:** A training provider shares the definitions with a group of SENCOs undergoing training at the start of a course. After a reflection activity, the provider is surprised to find that most participants are primarily interested in leadership and professional development (Factors 3 and 4). Indeed, their interest in the factor of inclusion is quite low. The training provider acts dynamically by incorporating materials on inclusion, equality, and human rights into course materials. In further activities, there is good evidence that

participants align their ideas and work with national and international frameworks to promote equity.

**Vignette 3:** The headteacher and school governors wish to employ a SENCO. They envisage the primary role of the SENCO would be to act in a purely administrative capacity by gathering evidence and processing documentation for statutory assessments. They do not foresee that the SENCO will have any wider role across the school. The school recruits an individual who scores highly across the factors suggesting that they wish to promote inclusion by working with other teachers across the school in a leadership role. After a short period, the SENCO leaves to move to another school. In the exit interview, the SENCO explains that ‘the job didn’t meet up to my expectations’. The school spends another £4,000 recruiting and training another SENCO to fulfil the same role.

**Vignette 4:** An enthusiastic SENCO enters a school and fulfils what the school asks from them. After a while, they start to lose interest in the position. The SENCO and headteacher use the definitions within the factors as the basis of a ‘re-energising’ conversation. Both parties identify a significant school need which is closely related to an interest expressed by the SENCO. The SENCO takes on the ownership of this development.

Here, are examples of how the study provides those involved with SENCOs a clear framework through which they may understand why people are interested in the role. Within the study there are a range of items and responses which can be used to better understand motivations for the role.

There are also clear, well defined factors to enable SENCOs and others to reflect upon personal, professional, and career aspirations. As the vignettes suggest, these tools have significant utility for all who are involved in any educational system where inclusion is managed through internal mechanisms of support (Poon-McBrayer, 2012). They provide an insight into the people within the role. These intrinsic motivations can be fully harnessed and utilised in the pursuit of inclusion and high quality education.

These vignettes and observations are almost ethnographic in nature. As a programme lead, I have sat in discussions at a national level about how the outcomes for the National Award should be more closely aligned with leadership standards. This present research suggests that this strategy needs further consideration. In my role at the University, I have come to realise that the most popular module relates to how to support children rather than leadership and legislation. As a previous headteacher, I have come to understand the importance of matching the person to the role to ensure that both the organisation and the individual are 'on the same page'. Finally, as somebody who has been a SENCO in different schools and indeed a local authority advisor, I have understood the need to listen carefully to these trusted professionals. Here, I have worked alongside SENCOs who entered the role to support and work with children only to find that they have spent most of their time in administrative tasks.

Indeed, my career has almost mirrored the multiple iterations of legislation for SEN and the reconceptualisation of the SENCO over time. I have witnessed first-hand many of the changes and felt many of the associated

tensions discussed by Norwich (2013) and others. I have worked alongside SENCOs who have been headteachers, teachers, and, prior to legislative changes, even a parent helper. I also worked with SENCOs whose views of the role has been to change their school. Indeed, I have also worked with others who have relished the prospect of sitting in an office away from the children. These tensions exist throughout this role and the aim of this piece of work is to provide voice for the professionals who experience them.

***10.1.6 Research question 4 – Do these factors interact with school-level variables (i.e., school age range and school quality) and individual-level variables (i.e., SENCO education level, gender, actual or aspirant SENCO, leadership status, and age)?***

The final study (Chapter 9) sought to examine whether the factors derived from study three interacted with either school or individual level variables. In Chapter 3, the bioecological system was discussed (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007). Here, it is suggested that development can be understood by accounting for four discrete variables: process, person, contexts, and time. Within the variable of the individual person, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2007) argue there are three sub systems. These include individual dispositions and bioecological systems alongside the feedback loop of demand characteristics. Individual dispositions are a catalyst to a process. These may include a desire to further a career or even seek more training. The bioecological resources are diverse and include individual characteristics of the person (see section 3.2.6. for discussion on these three sub systems).

In Chapter 4, differences in personal characteristics were also discussed with relation to career interest theory. Here, it was proposed that even accounting for contexts, individual characteristics can influence decisions when it comes to career choice. These include variables such as personality, age, and gender. These principles guide this fourth research question.

In study two (Chapter 7), the true extent of some of these individual characteristics were more clearly established for the first time. Understanding the overall population of SENCOs is important in understanding whether the population speaks homogeneously. Having the utility of testable factors from study three, allows for the first statistical comparison using inferential statistics of differing groups of SENCOs. This provides an important contribution to knowledge because for the first time, direct statistical comparisons can be made between SENCOs with different characteristics.

The study provides novel and significant empirical evidence that the individual characteristics of gender, age, leadership status, and whether the person is a SENCO or aspirant SENCO influences teacher interest in the SENCO role (see Chapter 9 for a deeper discussion). The implications of these findings open up the opportunity for more research in these areas with potential questions arising on why women seem more interested than men in all the factors, or at least seem to report it this way. However, they also provide a salutary warning to researchers who do not fully account for accurate sampling in their studies (see Chapter 7). Here, this study provides statistical evidence that characteristics at the level of the person such as age, status, or gender in some cases interact with other contextual issues such as leadership status or

desire for development. Indeed, this study also provides a further basis to understand where variables may confound, for example, leadership status and gender. This then can influence the responses given and potentially make the findings of studies with imprecise samples open to question.

## **10.2 Limitations of the study – A question of reflexivity**

This study has been designed to present a series of studies conducted in a rigorous manner. The major limitations of each individual study have been discussed within the previous four chapters. The construction of this thesis has been linear in nature – one study following the next. During this time, my expertise as a researcher has grown and developed. This section allows me to record the limitations the study. Here, I will describe obvious limitations such as time, research experience, and sampling. These would provide a fitting end to the thesis; however, to do so would not acknowledge that the areas of this reflexive analysis are shaped by ontological and epistemological assumptions.

Johnson and Duberley (2003) argue that being reflexive is not a single neutral act. Indeed, it is suggested that if there was such a set method to conduct reflexive analysis, it would be guided by a particular ontological and epistemological standpoint. Instead, when performing any reflexive analysis, such as the limitations of a study, researchers need to be aware of the particular epistemological lens through which they are conducting their analysis. Here, Johnson and Duberley (2003) offer a heuristic suggesting that the process of reflexivity may be understood from three different epistemological standpoints, the methodological, the deconstructive, and the epistemic.

### ***10.2.1 Methodological reflexivity***

Most of this analysis will draw from the first of these. Methodological reflexivity is regarded as a process. Here, the researcher aims to remain objective in their analysis by being cognisant of methodological lapses (Johnson & Duberley, 2003). The underpinning ontology of this section is realist in nature and assumes that knowledge is created through an objectivist epistemology. Here, I will describe the limitations of the study couched in the positivist assumption that language is neutral. This assumes the possibility of “differentiation of the knower-researcher from the known-observed” (Johnson & Duberley, 2003, p. 1283).

#### *10.2.1.1 Issues with design.*

The study was designed to answer the research questions. However, as discussed in Chapter 5 this does open the research to the criticism that the work draws from different epistemological positions.

#### *10.2.1.2 The limitations of utilising a particular theoretical framework*

Within the thesis there has been an emphasis on the use of an ecological approach to frame the analysis of why teachers become SENCOs. The rationale for this theoretical approach has been discussed at length through the thesis. Understanding career interest ecologically utilising approaches first developed by Bronfenbrenner has been used before (e.g., Schultheiss, 2008; Young, 1983). Indeed, this has led to yet another adaptation of the theory (Patton & McMahon, 1999, 2014) for this specific purpose. Adaptions of

ecological approaches have also been used to understand how the ecology of inclusive education has enveloped the child (Anderson et al., 2014).

However, just because these are published sources does not necessarily mean that they have been used in a correct or consistent manner. Indeed, the ecological approaches proposed by Bronfenbrenner have been frequently cited but also frequently misused. Many of his ideas are misrepresented and although the framework appears simple to use it is actually more difficult to apply in the context of research than many people anticipate (Tudge et al., 2009). Within this thesis there has been the emphasis on understanding career orientated decisions in the context in which these were made. It has been stressed throughout the thesis that ecological approaches have been used to structure the analysis rather than test the theory or predict what may happen. Nonetheless, using a theory in this way is also a limitation with Tudge et al. (2009, p. 208) suggesting that “to consider his ideas as simply relating to contextual influences on development or even as a plea to examine person-environment interrelations is to do his theory a gross disservice”.

#### *10.2.1.3 Limitations with the interpretation of themes.*

In the first study (Chapter 6), the data was analysed into subthemes and themes. These themes were then organised into overarching themes which were framed ecologically. One of the difficulties with this process is that despite the rigour in which the process was undertaken, different researchers may have arrived at different conclusions with equally rigorous research. One of the ways to counteract this issue is to use the peer review process to try to add validity to



the results. Nonetheless, peer review does not always mean that something is 'right' and that results can be interpreted differently by others. Again, an ecological framework was used to organise data. Within this framework, there is a need to structure data according to systems that are proximal or distal to the person. Here it is important to acknowledge that different researchers may interpret these proximal or distal influences as belonging in different systems.

#### *10.2.1.4 Limitations associated with the use of inferential statistics*

It has already been discussed within Chapter 8 that factor analysis comes with limitations. Here, this procedure is highly dependent upon the researcher to run a series of iterative processes to trim and construct the data. In the final instance, the researcher has to take the clusters of different items within the factors and label these according to a construct. Again, this process is similar to the limitation outlined above in that different researchers may provide different labels for these constructs. The same issue refers to the use of ANOVA to look for the differences between different groupings in Chapter 9. Again, groups may be defined by researchers or by external organisations such as the Department for Education. Regardless, here, if different groups had been chosen for analysis the results may have demonstrated either highlighted group differences or no group differences thus altering the findings of this study and the thesis.

#### *10.2.1.5 Limitations associated with conducting cross sectional research over time*

One specific methodological issue relates to the matter of *time*. In any extended

piece of work, research can become dated before a thesis is completed. This is due to the rapid ever-changing context in which educational research is conducted. Here, limitations are being discussed about data which in some cases has been collected over three years ago. In some fields, this may not matter; however, in a rapidly changing landscape such as education, the issue of trying to conduct cross-sectional research at different time periods may add an extraneous, invisible confounding variable to the data. This is especially apparent between study one and studies three and four. Here, there was a period of over two years between the data collection of both studies. The outcomes of study one may have been different two years later, meaning the questionnaire in studies three and four may also have been different.

#### *10.2.1.6 Limitations with work based on self-reported data*

Another major consideration relates to the self-report nature of this thesis. Many of the responses in study one were positive in nature towards the role. Here, participants often described an almost revolutionary zeal to improve both provision and inclusion for children and young people with SEN. Although this may be the case, it must be acknowledged that the responses here and the subsequent studies on which these were based could be prone to bias. In particular, it could be potentially questioned whether these responses were constructed by participants to reflect what they thought the researcher wanted to hear. This is problematic in any field of social sciences where respondents are asked direct questions. However, for an emotive topic such as SEN this may be even more so. This may lead to selective memory, issues with attribution, and exaggeration on behalf of respondents. Unfortunately, this social

desirability bias is difficult to eliminate unless this is controlled through the use of another measure. For example, Larson (2018) argues that if surveys are controlled through the use of an additional inventory of social desirability then the results may be demonstrably different. However, the length of such a survey may be problematic and indeed may have limited the size of the response.

#### *10.2.1.7 The limitations of the sample and sampling strategy*

The final consideration relates to the representativeness within sampling. Ideally, at all stages the sampling should have been designed to be fully representative in nature. Indeed, one of the findings of this thesis is that studies that fail to account for demographic differences may potentially result in questionable findings. Throughout this thesis any empirical work conducted using participants did not adhere fully to what was argued here. Rather, sampling of participants was much less structured and often related to convenience, purposiveness, or self-selection. This is despite the acknowledgement within each chapter that samples were broadly representative. This significant limitation may have impacted upon the results, factor structures, and the differences reported between groups.

In the study's defence though, to conduct this work with a fully representative, structured, and predesigned sample would be beyond the resources of a lone researcher. Indeed, it is questionable whether the notion of a truly representative sample is also actually possible. Any ethically directed study acknowledges that participants need to provide consent. Here, therefore, a 'pure' stratified sample will not always be possible as the identified

participants may not always provide consent. Corcoran et al. (2004) provide a lucid argument that even when a discrete sampling frame or eligible population is available, using the word representative is also problematic as the term is not commonly understood and often samples do not (or cannot) fully represent the characteristic of a particular population.

The data gathered for study one was gathered directly from the students of the researcher. Here it is important to stress that students are not one homogenous body with respondents in this study being professionals working in schools. Indeed, this approach to sampling has been used many others in this field (e.g., Brown & Doveston, 2014; Tissot, 2013). Nevertheless, as already discussed in Chapter 5, using students as participants has ethical dilemmas (Cleary, Walter, & Jackson, 2014) with the advice that both researchers and those researched should be protected by institutional ethical clearance (Ferguson, Yonge, & Myrick, 2004). This was gained with the proviso that I should not name myself as the researcher. However, by introducing the research and administering the cross-sectional survey in Study 1, the participants in the study may still have either consciously or unconsciously provided answers that are subject to social desirability bias. Despite checks being performed for this (see section 5.4.2.3), it is still important that social desirability bias may still limit some of the findings in the present study.

#### *10.2.1.8 The limitations of secondary data*

The work in Chapter 6 is based on a secondary data analysis that resulted in the first insight into the SENCO population. Due to this research, this dataset is

now open to interpretation, interrogation, or critique. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the data set is always fully accurate. Within the research it was found that there are occasions when different operatives who extract the dataset from a common dataset do so in a different way. It is important to recognise that the researcher has little to no control over this so must trust the operative to do this in a consistent manner. It is also important to recognise that the accuracy of the data is also dependent upon it being inputted accurately in the first instance.

### ***10.2.2 Deconstructive reflexivity***

Despite the use of a range of inferential statistics there is still a significantly relativist side to this work. Johnson and Duberley (2003) argue that this kind of deconstructive reflexivity draws from an extreme relativist or postmodern standpoint. Consequently, in recognising a limitation, there is also the identification of yet another tension or dilemma in this study. Norwich (2013, pp. 8-9) draws upon the work of Allan (2008) who suggests that part of understanding inclusive education is to deconstruct the concept by surfacing aporias or contradictory statements. Examples of these contradictions include raising standards or being inclusive, and a teacher's professional autonomy or controlling closely how people teach. In line with this epistemological standpoint, the objectivity of my interpretation of factors may be called into question. For example, the first factor is reported as being 'inclusion'. This is a nebulous word and may have different meanings to many.

Norwich (2013, pp. 92-112) argues that the concept of inclusive education has changed over time and may hold different meanings amongst

different groups of people. The second factor implies that SENCOs wish to promote inclusion through high quality provision. It could easily be reinterpreted as SENCOs wish to restrict teachers' professional and pedagogical autonomy. The main argument here is that as a researcher I need to acknowledge that language is not always neutral and may be constructed or interpreted in multiple different ways. Indeed, as Johnson and Duberley (2003) suggest, this ongoing surfacing of agency in all parts of this thesis could continue ad infinitum. Thus, this approach may radically alter the findings or interpretations.

### ***10.2.3 Epistemic reflexivity***

Epistemic reflexivity provides a synthesis of the previous two approaches. This approach draws from a need to react to the issues caused by extreme positivism and extreme relativism. Rather, here it acknowledged that

epistemic reflexivity must relate to how a researcher's own social location affects the forms and outcomes of research as well as entailing acceptance of the conviction that there will always be more than one valid account of any research. (Johnson & Duberley, 2003, p. 1289)

In my statement of purpose (section 1.1), I introduced myself as an academic member of staff who teaches SENCOs. Before this role, I was a teacher, deputy headteacher, SENCO, headteacher, and local authority advisor of SEN. I started teaching in 1992 and witnessed the first iteration of the first Code of Practice (Department for Education, 1994) and the commencement of the new role of the SENCO. The research that I have read is familiar to me – because

much of it forms part of my direct experience. Indeed as I have already argued elsewhere (Dobson, 2020), I am the ideal person to conduct this work.

The issue presented though is that there are perhaps too many commonalities between the researcher and researched. This means that I bring a range of preconceptions to this work. As such the distinction between the researcher and the researched argued above (see section 10.2.1) becomes so limited that the two are merged. Indeed, this merger is less of an intersection and more of a union. This is an issue with regard to methodological reflexivity but not with epistemic reflexivity. The argument here is that perhaps those who aim to study this area objectively are equally deluded and do not speak on behalf of those they profess to represent. Epistemic reflexivity allows for this duality to exist. As such, Johnson and Duberley (2003) suggest, “reflexive action [exists] by enabling the development of knowledge and transformative strategies that are practically adequate for coping with and resolving members’ own problems” (p. 1292). Here, by surfacing the aims of my students and colleagues, I hope to achieve this.

### **10.3 Implications for policy**

#### ***10.3.1 Defining and understanding the SENCO role***

Throughout the present research a plethora of different reasons are presented as to why people become SENCOs. The four factors that reduce these into four discrete reasons, attest to a role where those in the profession are primarily interested in developing inclusion through high quality school provision. I would argue that as SENCOs are advocates for those with SEN and champions for

these children and young people within their own settings, this is an encouraging and significant finding. However, whether this idealised position described by the participants in this study is a reality in school settings is another matter altogether.

The most recent large-scale survey into SENCO workload (Curran et al., 2018) reports familiar problems with lack of time, senior leaders misunderstanding the role, and being pulled away from SENCO functions to undertake other duties in school. Here, therefore, lies an interesting paradox. On one hand, people want to become a SENCO to develop and support inclusion. On the other hand, they are provided with insufficient time, status, and understanding of their role to be able to meet these aims. In addition, the fact that they are often pulled away from their duties to undertake tasks not related to the role is likely to be equally frustrating. It is also an indication of the lack of value given to the SENCO. In turn, these would appear to be further examples of the tensions of inclusive education reported by Norwich (2013) earlier.

It is little surprise that in the same survey, Curran et al. (2018) also report that the vast majority of SENCOs intend finding an alternative position in less than five years. This mismatch of people and the reality of being a SENCO needs to be addressed. I would suggest that leaving many of these decisions in the hands of schools has been proven not to work.

### ***10.3.2 Status, power, and leadership***

As discussed in Chapter 2, there is an ongoing discussion about whether the



role of the SENCO should be a senior leadership role. Again, this debate is ongoing. Perhaps the debate is not helped by the constructed distinctions in teachers' pay and conditions (Department for Education, 2017a). In Chapter 7 it was discussed that teachers working in schools could be represented on one of two pay scales: the class teacher pay scale and the leadership pay scale. These roles have different contractual obligations. It was noteworthy that the majority of SENCOs are not on the leadership scale, despite the Code of Practice and other documents suggesting the role should be part of the SLT.

The first issue here represents whether it is necessary to be on the leadership scale to be part of the SLT. Another factor is whether the receipt of a teaching and learning responsibility allowance means that many SENCOs are not represented in the statistics. One of the difficulties here is the loose use of terminology. The Code suggests that they 'may' be part of a team but does not advocate that they should therefore be remunerated on the leadership pay scale. This lack of precise language and leaving the role at the discretion of the school, results in wide variations in both status and power for those in the role.

These variations in status and power are not the only issue. The present research would suggest that in reality those who are in the SENCO role who are also attracted to be school leaders will naturally gravitate towards this position. Those who are in the SENCO role who are not school leaders are much less interested in being on the senior leadership pay scale. This is another noteworthy tension. Irrespective of status, it would appear that SENCOs still value and demonstrate an acute interest in being able to develop inclusion through high quality provision. The only difference it would seem, is that some

wish to achieve this aim through a leadership role and others through developing their own knowledge and understanding (and, of course, many wish to do both).

Here, I would suggest that status, therefore, becomes irrelevant as long as those in the SENCO role are able to perform their function effectively. They must also be included within decision-making processes for any strategic response to the development of high quality provision. This subtlety is absent from policy and needs to be addressed. In addition, those who continue to argue that the role should be a senior leadership position may be actually discouraging able and willing SENCOs who do not want the additional responsibility and contractual obligations that being on the senior leadership scale bring.

## **10.4 Implications for research**

### ***10.4.1 Contextualised research into occupational roles***

The present study has provided a clear research design to allow researchers to investigate the reasons that draw individuals into certain careers. Here, this sequential approach has much utility for not only examining roles within education but also roles in other professional spheres. The thesis has provided a series of steps starting with a literature review that focuses on the construction of the role in the first instance. This is essential when understanding career paths may have been constructed as a direct result of national or international policy change. For example, the SENCO role in this thesis is a role peculiar to England. A similar role in any other country would

need to be understood within the policy frameworks of that jurisdiction.

Likewise, other roles are also restricted and shaped by the policy frameworks which guide and shape these professions. Not to account for context when shaping and designing research is foolhardy.

This latter point links with the approach for collecting and analysing data. The thematic analysis of a singular question asked to a broad range of respondents allows a wide range of data to be collected. Shaping and framing this analysis ecologically (e.g., Anderson et al., 2014; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005) allows for a multifaceted analysis based upon an understanding of the clear reciprocal causal relationships of person, context, and time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998).

Using this thematic analysis to shape further research through the processes of factor analysis and repeated measures ANOVAs also enables a deeper and more comprehensive analysis of any complex role that exists as a product of policy or is influenced by policy. Here, using the themes derived from a more qualitative analysis to construct a survey allows for an approach to reduce this complex data into simple and clear factors that are defined through the clusters of variables from which they are constructed. These factors can then be used to further analyse differences across groups and organisations thus preventing the fallacy of speaking about a group of professionals as though they are homogenous. The thesis provides a clear approach to factor analysis of this type of data through a worked example. Likewise, the procedures through which the repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted also provides a clear approach to dealing with complex data with unbalanced

groups. Both methods sections in these chapters provide a useful overview of how to conduct this type of research.

An example of this approach is the research currently being conducted into why graduates become teachers of science. The exact approach to data collection that has been used is described in the first study (Chapter 6). A paper is currently in preparation (Dobson & Dawkins, 2021). An example of the impact of the relationship between context and individual characteristics such as age has already been identified. Presently, there are a series of tax free bursaries available to encourage graduates in areas of shortage to train to become part of the profession (Department for Education, 2021). Younger entrants report that this payment is a big incentive in wanting to train. For older entrants, the need for this payment is more subtle. Here, many older entrants report being 'able to keep going' with mortgages and other commitments whilst training.

#### ***10.4.2 The reasons for different levels of interest at the level of the person***

Perhaps one of the most important contributions of this research has been to evidence that interest in the role is not homogenous across all the different groups that constitute those within the SENCO role. The use of factors to measure these demographic differences is unique and illuminating. It is noteworthy that gender and age interact with these factors. It is also noteworthy that there is an interaction between those who aspire to the role and those who are already in it. What is left unanswered though is why these differences occur. This leaves a wide range of unanswered questions which are important for researchers to answer to garner a better understanding of those who express

an interest in the SENCO role. There are now opportunities for a range of qualitatively oriented work. Further studies to be considered include:

- Use the four factors to stimulate discussion with different demographic groups of SENCOs to be analysed in an interpretative manner. The focus of this study could be to examine in greater detail the reasons presented for entering this role.
- Examine the storied experience of one or two journeys into becoming SENCOs through a narrative analysis. Thus, to use the argument of Mishler (1986), this would allow for a narrative understanding of these journeys as opposed to these stories being disrupted into themes as in the present study. This may illuminate the different stories presented by people within different demographic groups.

#### ***10.4.3 The importance of understanding and accounting for individual differences in research***

One key finding of the present research is that individual differences at the level of the person can influence interest in the role of the SENCO. However, as has already been demonstrated in Chapter 7, research that looks at the role of the SENCO has done little more than present the demographic make-up of the sample, which in turn has often misrepresented the population (or, at least, over-simplified it). This is an important point to make as the present study suggests that understanding the demographic characteristics accurately is important to ensure that the results of the research are both valid and robust, and results can be generalised and utilised in an appropriate way.

## 10.5 Closure

This research emerged from my interest in the role of the SENCO. This is partly due to my personal experiences of working within primary schools and local authorities within this role. It is also partly due to the contextual reasons for the process through which I became a SENCO. Unlike many who choose this position, the position chose me. This was when I was nominated to fulfil the role due to my senior leadership status and – in all honesty – that nobody else wanted to do it! Fortunately, the right role seemed to match the right person (or at least that is how it has felt and continues to feel to me). Later, as a programme lead for the NASENCo award, I thought it necessary to also understand the reasons why people came into this position and remained in it despite its complexity and challenges. The purpose of the present study has been to understand in greater detail those people who fulfil this important role – people I greatly admire.

Here, the findings suggest that on the whole those people who are in the role do it for the right reasons. Although they often speak through the language of policy, the policies, and practices that they advocate such as inclusion and high quality learning are commendable. This thesis has provided this important group of professionals with an evidence base through which they can share their interests with headteachers, school leaders, and policymakers. Indeed, many have already started to use the findings from this work in a range of different ways (See Appendix K). Although the motivations for choosing to be a SENCO identified within this thesis are commendable, there are tensions which may emerge. These tensions are perhaps most apparent where the SENCO

and the school may expect and envisage two differing roles and emphases. Here, as argued by Norwich (2013), tensions and dilemmas are commonplace in education and certainly in the field of inclusion and special educational needs. An important stage in navigating these tensions is to first surface them. I hope this thesis has contributed to that. Amongst other potential areas of study, the present thesis provides some possible foundations for further research in these interesting and important issues.

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## APPENDICES AND IMPACT



## 12.1 Appendix A – Blank questionnaire for study 1

Title - SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS COORDINATION: A VOCATION OR A CAREER?

### Introduction

In this short questionnaire I am interested in finding out some of the reasons which has led you to train to be a SENCO. There are 4 sections:

1. About why you chose this role
2. About you
3. About your post
4. About your establishment

The questionnaire takes about 15 minutes.

### About why you chose this role

Working on your own, list at least three (more if you can!) reasons why you chose to become a SENCO:

1)

2)

3)

4)

5)

6)

...

### **About you**

This helpful because it gives me an understanding of who is answering the questionnaire, how this reflects the SENCO population, and if different groups answer differently.

What is your age?

20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Prefer not to say
-------	-------	-------	-------	-----	-------------------

How would you describe your gender?

Male	Female	Other	Prefer not to say
------	--------	-------	-------------------

How would you describe your ethnic background?

White	White British	White Irish	White Traveller of Irish Heritage	Romany or Gypsy	And other white background
Mixed	White and Black Caribbean	White and Black African	White and Asian	Any other mixed background	
Asian or Asian British	Indian or Indian British	Pakistani or Pakistani British	Bangladeshi or Bangladeshi British	Any other Asian background	
Black or Black British	Black or Black British (Caribbean)	Black or Black British (African)	Any other black background		
Chinese	Chinese				
Other	Any other ethnic group	Prefer not to say			

What is your highest qualification (tick all that apply)

	Please tick
Degree level (e.g. BA, BSc, BEd)	
Post Graduate Certificate or Post Graduate Diploma	
Masters level (e.g. MA, MSc, MEd)	
Doctoral level (e.g. PhD, EdD)	
Prefer not to say	

**About your post**

What is your current job title?

--

How would you describe your position in school?

Class/subject teacher	Middle manager	Senior Manager	Other (Please describe)
-----------------------	----------------	----------------	-------------------------

Where are you positioned on the 'pay scale'?

MPS (or equivalent)	MPS+ SEN allowance	MPS+TLR
UPS (or equivalent)	UPS+ SEN allowance	UPS+TLR
Leadership scale (or equivalent)	other	Prefer not to say

How long have you been teaching (in years)?

	Years
--	-------

Are you currently a SENCO?

Yes	No
-----	----

If you have answered yes, how long have you been a SENCO?

	Years
--	-------

Are you full time (FT) or part time (PT) (Please complete proportion for PT)

FT	PT
1.0	0. _____

As a percentage of your contacted hours, how much of your time is allocated to the SENCO role?

	%
--	---

**About your establishment**

Type of establishment

Nursery or children's centre	Primary (including first, infant, junior)	Middle School	All through school
Secondary or High School	FE College	Other (Please describe)	

How many children or young people are on the establishment role?

Children or young people
--------------------------

What is the school Ofsted grade?

Inadequate	Requires Improvement	Good	Outstanding
------------	----------------------	------	-------------

## **12.2 Appendix B – Study administration script**

### **Resources:**

- Questionnaires
- Participants sheets
- two large pieces of paper for each table
- pens

Each table is to be given a number so that any variance over the three tasks can be identified.

### **Overview**

#### **Three stages:**

Stage 1:

- Questionnaire: Students to complete the questionnaire and reflect on points why they considered they wanted to become a SENCO
- Questionnaire collected then they cannot be amended

Stage 2:

- Distribute large sheets: Ask groups to consider why they have become SENCOs again and add reasons for their choice of role based on their own thoughts and the thoughts of colleagues in their groups.
- Explain that this is a teaching activity and will not be used in the final study.

Stage 3:

- Distribute new sheets: Ask students to discuss their responses and try and 3 identify broad themes. Report these on to a new sheet.
- Explain that this is a teaching activity and will not be used in the final study.

### **Detailed Introduction script**

Today we are looking at the leadership and management role of SENCOs. As part of the teaching on this day we will be looking at reasons why we have become SENCOs.

A postgraduate researcher would also like to use this as part of a University study.

What students will get from this:

- An idea of how to gather views from an audience
- What ethical implications this may pose if this is like the project that student is considering
- A modelled example of gathering data as a teaching point
- I will provide you with analysed data at the end of the course.
- A brief introduction to a Participant Information Sheet

What if I do not want to take part:

- This is part of the teaching activity so participation in it is part of the teaching day; however, if you do not want your data included in the study, add a cross to the top of your questionnaire and it will not form part of the study.
- The latter group activity, is for discussion only and will not be included in the study.

### **Stage 1**

At this point the questionnaire will be introduced and students will be told:

Please record the reasons for you becoming a SENCO.

- It would be good if you could record as ideas many as possible, even if these seem trivial or unimportant.
- Please do not share your ideas with colleagues. We want to know what you think.
- Please complete the quantitative data on the back, this will help us to understand our sample better.
- Please be honest. Your work is anonymous so you can say what you want.

The work will then be collected.

### **Stage 2**

The students will then be told: We would now like to discuss some of your reasons within your table group. As a result of talking with others, you may

confirm your reasons or develop new ones. This information will not be used within the study.

(After a period of 10 minutes – groups will be asked to add these ideas to a group sheet).

### **Stage 3**

Introduce the ideas of themes. Ask the students whether they see any general themes or overall ideas emerging from the data. Reiterate that this information will not be used in the study.

- Students to discuss these in groups
- Add these overall themes to a new piece of paper.

Collect the sheets.

## 12.3 Appendix C – Application for ethical approval for study 1

### UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW

#### Who should use this form:

This form is to be completed by PIs or supervisors (for PGR student research) who have completed the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review of Research Self Assessment Form (SAF) and have decided that further ethical review and approval is required before the commencement of a given Research Project.

**Please be aware that all new research projects undertaken by postgraduate research (PGR) students first registered as from 1st September 2008 will be subject to the University's Ethical Review Process. PGR students first registered before 1<sup>st</sup> September 2008 should refer to their Department/School/College for further advice.**

#### Researchers in the following categories are to use this form:

1. The project is to be conducted by:
  - staff of the University of Birmingham; or
  - postgraduate research (PGR) students enrolled at the University of Birmingham (to be completed by the student's supervisor);
2. The project is to be conducted at the University of Birmingham by visiting researchers.

**Students undertaking undergraduate projects and taught postgraduate (PGT) students should refer to their Department/School for advice.**

#### NOTES:

- An electronic version of the completed form should be submitted to the Research Ethics Officer, at the following email address: [aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk). Please **do not** submit paper copies.
- If, in any section, you find that you have insufficient space, or you wish to supply additional material not specifically requested by the form, please it in a separate file, clearly marked and attached to the submission email.
- If you have any queries about the form, please address them to the Research Ethics Team.



**Before submitting, please tick this box to confirm that you have consulted and understood the following information and guidance and that you have taken it into account when completing your application:**

- **The information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages**



- **(<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-of-Research.aspx>)**
- **The University's Code of Practice for Research  
([http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP\\_Research.pdf](http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf))**

**UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM  
APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW**

*OFFICE USE  
ONLY:*  
Application No:  
Date Received:

**1. TITLE OF PROJECT**

**Special Educational Needs Coordination: A Vocation or a Career?**

**2. THIS PROJECT IS:**

University of Birmingham Staff Research project ☐

University of Birmingham Postgraduate Research (PGR) Student project ☒

Other ☐ (Please specify):

**3. INVESTIGATORS:**

**a) PLEASE GIVE DETAILS OF THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS OR SUPERVISORS (FOR PGR STUDENT PROJECTS)**

Name: Title / first name / family name	
Highest qualification & position held:	
School/Department	
Telephone:	
Email address:	

Name: Title / first name / family name	
Highest qualification & position held:	
School/Department	
Telephone:	
Email address:	

**b) PLEASE GIVE DETAILS OF ANY CO-INVESTIGATORS OR CO-SUPERVISORS (FOR PGR STUDENT PROJECTS)**

Name: Title / first name / family name	
Highest qualification & position held:	
School/Department	
Telephone:	
Email address:	

**c) In the case of PGR student projects, please give details of the student**

Name of Course of study: Principal supervisor:	Graeme Dobson	Student No:	
	PhD Education	Email	
	Prof. Graeme Douglas		

Name of student:		Student No:	
Course of study:		Email address:	
Principal			

**4. ESTIMATED START OF**

Date:

1/9/2016

**PROJECT**

**ESTIMATED END OF**

Date:

1/3/2022

**PROJECT****FUNDING**

List the funding sources (including internal sources) and give the status of each source.

Funding Body	Approved/Pending /To be submitted
University of Birmingham (Staff) School of Education (£500)	Approved Approved

**If you are requesting a quick turnaround on your application, please explain the reasons below (including funding-related deadlines). You should be aware that whilst effort will be made in cases of genuine urgency, it will not always be possible for the Ethics Committees to meet such requests.**

--

**5. SUMMARY OF PROJECT**

Describe the purpose, background rationale for the proposed project, as well as the hypotheses/research questions to be examined and expected outcomes. This description should be in everyday language that is free from jargon. Please explain any technical terms or discipline-specific phrases.

The third iteration of the SEN (Special Educational Needs) Code of Practice (DfE, 2014) states that all maintained mainstream schools should employ a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) who should be a qualified teacher to lead provision for children and young people with additional and special educational needs. This is now an expected and embedded role within school organisations. It is now 20 years since the introduction of this career and over this time there has developed a rich literature devoted to the role of the SENCO.

However, there would appear to be some important gaps in the literature. Firstly, there would seem to be little attempt to draw on popular discourses derived from the field of work and vocational psychology to inform leadership analysis and provide an examination of areas such as attitudes and motivation. In addition, important questions remain such as who are the people who are motivated to apply for the role

## 6. CONDUCT OF PROJECT

**Please give a description of the research methodology that will be used**

This is an exploratory study as a 'phase 1' of a PhD study. The present study is a short questionnaire and group discussion (as part of teaching activity) which is intended to yield both quantitative information (some details of the participant characteristics) and qualitative information (responses to an open question regarding their motives to train to be a SENCO). It is intended that thematic analysis (e.g. Braun and Clarke, 2006), and potentially some cross-tabulations. Later phases of the project will be developed following this initial 'generative' study.

## 7. DOES THE PROJECT INVOLVE PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE OTHER THAN THE RESEARCHERS AND SUPERVISORS?

Yes ☒ No ☐

Note: 'Participation' includes both active participation (such as when participants take part in an interview) and cases where participants take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time (for example, in crowd behaviour research).

**If you have answered NO please go to Section 18. If you have answered YES to this question please complete all the following sections.**

## 8. PARTICIPANTS AS THE SUBJECTS OF THE RESEARCH

Describe the number of participants and important characteristics (such as age, gender, location, affiliation, level of fitness, intellectual ability etc.). Specify any inclusion/exclusion criteria to be used.

Participants will have qualified teacher status (QTS), will be working in the English school system, and are likely to be living and working within the English, West Midlands conurbation. Participants will be above the age of 18; however, although the exact age range cannot be determined all participants will be above the age of 23 (the minimum age it is possible for somebody to gain the necessary qualifications and experience to enter the course).

Participants will represent both sexes; however, due to the nature of the profession, this is likely to be skewed towards female participants. Participants will be recruited from The University of Birmingham, where they attend the 'National Standards SENCo programme'. This is a post graduate certificate which is only open to Qualified Teachers with a first degree working in English schools. Participants will hence be proficient in English in such a way that they will be able to complete any questionnaires, which will be designed to use comparatively simple language in both lexical and syntactic terms and be checked for readability using an established formula. They will also be able participate in individual or group interview/discussion activities later in the research.

Given the characteristics of the course the participants attend from where they will be recruited from, it is unlikely that they show characteristics of such kind that they could be classified as vulnerable.

## 9. RECRUITMENT

Please state clearly how the participants will be identified, approached and recruited. Include any relationship between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g. instructor-student).

*Note: Attach a copy of any poster(s), advertisement(s) or letter(s) to be used for recruitment.*

Participants will be approached in one way:

- On face to face days of the SENCo programme

Potential participants will be identified, as operating and aspirant SENCos who are taking the National Standards SENCo award at the University of Birmingham where the PG Student is the course lead. In accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, the researcher will be actively involved in the selection of participants on site, that is, no information will be passed on from third parties in such a way that it violates the DPA 1998. There will be no need for stronger protection for the sensitive data listed under this act.

In a first step, potential participants will be told that the PG student is interested in how people have decided to choose the role of SENCo within the school and their reasons for this decision. Volunteers will then be briefed in more detail and, if they agree to take part, be given a questionnaire to fill in straightaway or later (and to return the questionnaire to the PG Student). They will then be asked as a teaching activity to work together in their table groups to discuss the reasons why they chose to become SENCos and add these to a large sheet.

As a condition of course entry, all participants will either be working in paid employment or/and have commitments other than participating in this study; hence, the sample will be an opportunity sample that is, one that is not based on pure probabilistic choice. Any imbalances in this kind of sample (e.g. unbalanced distribution of genders, age groups or languages) will have to be addressed by the researcher on an ad hoc basis by approaching specifically the kind of respondents needed for the study.

## 10. CONSENT

**a)** Describe the process that the investigator(s) will be using to obtain valid consent. If consent is not to be obtained explain why. If the participants are minors or for other reasons are not competent to consent, describe the proposed alternate source of consent, including any permission / information letter to be provided to the person(s) providing the consent.

Following the initial briefing, consent will be sought through the use of consent form. This will be given directly to the participants in the study for completion. Participants will be issued with a Participation Sheet giving all necessary information on how consent may be withdrawn at a later stage.

Given the participants are also students on a programme of study, it will be made clear to them that participation in the research is NOT a requirement of their studies. Participation is completely voluntary.

*Note: Attach a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (if applicable), the Consent Form (if applicable), the content of any telephone script (if applicable) and any other material that will be used in the consent process.*

**b)** Will the participants be deceived in any way about the purpose of the study? **Yes**  
☐ **No** ☒

If yes, please describe the nature and extent of the deception involved. Include how and when the deception will be revealed, and who will administer this feedback.

## PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Explain what feedback/ information will be provided to the participants after participation in the research. (For example, a more complete description of the purpose of the research, or access to the results of the research).

When the analysis has been conducted, participants (along with all students on the programme) will be provided with written feedback based on an analysis of the responses within the questionnaire.

## 11. PARTICIPANT WITHDRAWAL

- a) Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project.

Participants will be issued with a Participant Information Sheet (included with this form). This will outline that:

- participation in the study is only by informed consent,
- they are able to withdraw up until the point the questionnaires are collected (the questionnaires are anonymous, so once handed in it will not be possible to identify it).

- b) Explain any consequences for the participant of withdrawing from the study and indicate what will be done with the participant's data if they withdraw.

There are no consequences for withdrawal. This highlighted on the Participant Information Form

## 12. COMPENSATION

Will participants receive compensation for participation?

i) Financial

☐ No ☒

Yes

ii) Non-financial

☐ No ☒

Yes

If **Yes** to **either** i) or ii) above, please provide details.

N/A

If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with compensation?

N/A

## CONFIDENTIALITY

- a) Will all participants be anonymous? Yes  
☒ No ☐
- b) Will all data be treated as confidential? Yes  
☒ No ☐

*Note: Participants' identity/data will be confidential if an assigned ID code or number is used, but it will not be anonymous. Anonymous data cannot be traced back to an individual participant.*

Describe the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of data both during the conduct of the research and in the release of its findings.

This is outlined in the Participant Information Sheet (see below).

Information will be kept confidential, stored safely and then destroyed securely. Your identity will never be revealed with data published and suitable alternative names will be used so that you cannot be identified. If you refer to places or people that may identify you, these will also be changed. However, it is possible that you may respond using specific phrases that may inadvertently identify you to others as some quotations may be reported word for word. Consequently, whilst no identifying information will be reported, it would not be possible to ensure complete anonymity.

If participant anonymity or confidentiality is not appropriate to this research project, explain, providing details of how all participants will be advised of the fact that data will not be anonymous or confidential.

N/A

## 13. STORAGE, ACCESS AND DISPOSAL OF DATA

Describe what research data will be stored, where, for what period of time, the measures that will be put in place to ensure security of the data, who will have access to the data, and the method and timing of disposal of the data.

The data will be held on a University of Birmingham password protected computer which is situated in a private office. The data will be kept for a period of ten years after which it will be deleted. Access is outlined on the Participant Information Sheet (see below).

'Any information that is held on a computer will be password protected. Only myself, and my supervisor (Prof. Graeme Douglas) will have access to the information that is collected.'

14. OTHER APPROVALS REQUIRED? e.g. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks or NHS R&D approvals.

☐

YES

☐

NO

☒

NOT APPLICABLE

If yes, please specify.

15. SIGNIFICANCE/BENEFITS

Outline the potential significance and/or benefits of the research

Ascertaining why people are motivated to choose the complex role of Special Educational Needs Coordinator has importance to find:

- Why people choose this role and what qualities and motivations people bring to this job.
- Whether intrinsic or extrinsic factors play a part in this career choice
- To better understand the part of the workforce who are key drivers of the school based inclusion agenda
- To understand reasons for career attrition in this role.

16. RISKS

a) Outline any potential risks to **INDIVIDUALS**, including research staff, research participants, other individuals not involved in the research and the measures that will be taken to minimise any risks and the procedures to be adopted in the event of mishap

None

b) Outline any potential risks to **THE ENVIRONMENT and/or SOCIETY** and the measures that will be taken to minimise any risks and the procedures to be adopted in the event of mishap.

None

17. ARE THERE ANY OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES RAISED BY THE RESEARCH?

Yes ☐ No ☒  
If yes, please specify





## 18. EXPERT REVIEWER/OPINION

You may be asked to nominate an expert reviewer for certain types of project, including those of an interventional nature or those involving significant risks. If you anticipate that this may apply to your work and you would like to nominate an expert reviewer at this stage, please provide details below.

Name
Contact details (including email address)
Brief explanation of reasons for nominating and/or nominee's suitability

## 19. CHECKLIST

Please mark if the study involves any of the following:

- Vulnerable groups, such as children and young people aged under 18 years, those with learning disability, or cognitive impairments ☐
- Research that induces or results in or causes anxiety, stress, pain or physical discomfort, or poses a risk of harm to participants (which is more than is expected from everyday life) ☐
- Risk to the personal safety of the researcher ☐
- Deception or research that is conducted without full and informed consent of the participants at time study is carried out ☐
- Administration of a chemical agent or vaccines or other substances (including vitamins or food substances) to human participants. ☐
- Production and/or use of genetically modified plants or microbes ☐
- Results that may have an adverse impact on the environment or food safety ☐
- Results that may be used to develop chemical or biological weapons ☐

Please check that the following documents are attached to your application.

	ATTACHED	NOT APPLICABLE
Recruitment advertisement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Participant information sheet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consent form	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Questionnaire	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Interview Schedule	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

## 20. DECLARATION BY APPLICANTS

I submit this application on the basis that the information it contains is confidential and will be used by the University of Birmingham for the purposes of ethical review and monitoring of the research project described herein, and to satisfy reporting requirements to regulatory bodies. The information will not be used for any other purpose without my prior consent.

I declare that:

- The information in this form together with any accompanying information is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.
- I undertake to abide by University Code of Practice for Research ([http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP\\_Research.pdf](http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf)) alongside any other relevant professional bodies' codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines.
- I will report any changes affecting the ethical aspects of the project to the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.
- I will report any adverse or unforeseen events which occur to the relevant Ethics Committee via the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.

**Name of principal investigator/project supervisor:**

**Date:**

4/10/16

Please now save your completed form, print a copy for your records, and then email a copy to the Research Ethics Officer, at [aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk). As noted above, please do not submit a paper copy.

## **12.4 Appendix D – Response from the ethical committee and revisions**

Dear Dr Douglas and Dr Williams

**Re: “Special Educational Needs Coordination: A Vocation or a Career?”  
Application for Ethical Review ERN\_16-0836**

Thank you for the above application, which has now been considered by the Humanities & Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

The Committee has requested further information and amendments in relation to the following issues, to enable it to reach a decision on your application:

- Given the researcher’s role as Course Lead, please consider whether any individuals may feel obliged or under pressure to take part in the study and how this risk will be addressed. It was suggested that it may be preferable to remove the reference to the researcher’s role as Course Lead from the consent letter, instead emphasising that this is a University of Birmingham postgraduate student project.
  - This has been amended. See the revised consent letter with track changes
- It is understood that the participant information sheet and consent letter are meant to cover both the questionnaire and the focus group; however, much of the information included relate to the questionnaire. It was felt that the participant documentation either needs to be amended to cover both elements of the study in sufficient detail, or separate participant documentation should be produced for the questionnaires and for the focus group.
- Please provide the topic guide for the focus group, once it has been prepared and before it is used with participants.
  - See administration script attached
- Please clarify how focus group participants will be selected and recruited.
  - Section 10 of the AER sheet has been amended to meet this requirement.
- Please be aware of the data storage and retention requirements in the University’s Code of Practice for Research (available at [http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP\\_Research.pdf](http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf)). In particular, please note that following completion of the research, data should normally be preserved and accessible for ten years.
  - The participant sheet has been amended to meet this requirement.

- Section 16 of the AER sheet has been amended to meet this requirement.

I look forward to your response to the points above. When responding, please highlight any changes made to the study documentation and/or provide a separate document/email detailing how each of the Committee's points have been addressed.

Please confirm receipt by return email.

Kind regards

## **12.5 Appendix E – Ethical clearance for study 1**

Dear Dr Douglas and Dr Williams

**Re: “Special Educational Needs Coordination: A Vocation or a Career?”**

**Application for Ethical Review ERN\_16-0836**

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project, which was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that this study now has full ethical approval.

I would like to remind you that any substantive changes to the nature of the study as described in the Application for Ethical Review, and/or any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly brought to the Committee’s attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review.

Please also ensure that the relevant requirements within the University’s Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University’s ethics webpages (available at <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx> ) are adhered to and referred to in any future applications for ethical review. It is now a requirement on the revised application form (<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-Forms.aspx> ) to confirm that this guidance has been consulted and is understood, and that it has been taken into account when completing your application for ethical review.

Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University’s guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University’s H&S Unit at [healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk).

Kind regards



Research Ethics Officer

Research Support Group

C Block Dome

Aston Webb Building

University of Birmingham

Edgbaston B15 2TT

Tel: 0121 414 8825

Email: 

Web: [https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/research-support-group/Research-Ethics\\_](https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/research-support-group/Research-Ethics_)

Please remember to submit a new Self-Assessment Form for each new project.

Click [Ethical Review Process](#) for further details regarding the University's Ethical Review process, or email [ethics-queries@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:ethics-queries@contacts.bham.ac.uk) with any queries.

Click [Research Governance](#) for further details regarding the University's Research Governance and Clinical Trials Insurance processes, or email [researchgovernance@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:researchgovernance@contacts.bham.ac.uk) with any queries

**Notice of Confidentiality:**

The contents of this email may be privileged and are confidential. It may not be disclosed to or used by anyone other than the addressee, nor copied in any way. If received in error please notify the sender and then delete it from your system. Should you communicate with me by email, you consent to the University of Birmingham monitoring and reading any such correspondence.

## 12.6 Appendix F - Consent letter for study 1

Dear Student

26<sup>th</sup> September 2016

You are being asked to participate in a University of Birmingham postgraduate student project into the underlying reasons why people choose to undertake the role of SENCO in schools. I would be grateful if you would help me to collect information for this study.

What it means for your you

At this point in this study, you will be asked if you will complete a questionnaire.

This research will be conducted in line with the Code of Conduct, Ethical Principles and Guidelines set out by the British Psychological Society and the British Educational Research Association.

What happens next

If you are happy to participate, please complete the form (below) and return it to me today. If you would like to find out more, please contact me today or by using the contact details below.

Yours Faithfully,

Graeme Dobson  
School of Education  
University of Birmingham  
Birmingham , B15 2TT  
Direct line: +44 (0) 121 414 3805

-----Tear here-----

In signing below, I understand the nature of this study and I am giving consent to participate in this research. Please provide the following details with thanks.

Name Print \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
(DD/MM/YYYY)



## **12.7 Appendix G - Participant information sheet for study 1**

### **Participant Information Sheet: SENCO**

#### **A study entitled:**

#### **SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS COORDINATION: A VOCATION OR A CAREER?**

##### **1. Invitation**

You have been invited to participate in a research project on the reasons why people choose to become Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) in English schools.

##### **2. What is the purpose of this study?**

The purpose of the study is to seek opinions from early career or aspirant SENCOs on their motivations for undertaking and choosing this role within school. It is hoped that through gathering this data a clearer understanding can be gained of the reasons why people choose certain school based career/ vocational trajectories.

##### **3. Why have I been chosen to take part?**

You have been chosen as you have been identified as an individual who are undertaking mandatory training in this area as an aspirant or early career SENCO (i.e., within 3 years of appointment).

##### **4. Do I have to take part?**

No. At any point before or whilst doing the questionnaire or whilst taking part in the group activity which follows the questionnaire you can withdraw from the study and any data recorded up to that point would be destroyed. There are no consequences if you decide to withdraw from the study.

The questionnaire is anonymised, so once it is submitted it will not be possible to withdraw (unless you provide your name for possible follow-up contact – see below).

##### **5. What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will be asked to complete a short questionnaire which we will be followed up with a short group discussion. Both activities are part of the course day but with permission, the results from the questionnaire will be retained for this research.

These will take place:

- On course day at the start of the day

After the data is collected, the data from the questionnaire will be transcribed verbatim and electronically stored. This written information and any original records will be securely stored. The researcher will be the only person who will look at this work although Prof. Graeme Douglas (the researcher's supervisor) will have access to the written information, which will be made anonymous.

The data will be subject to the storage and retention requirements in the University's Code of Practice for Research (available at [http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP\\_Research.pdf](http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf)). Following completion of the research, data will normally be preserved and accessible for ten years.

**6. What are the possible disadvantages of taking part?**

It is not intended that there should be any disadvantages to this piece of research other than the time required by yourself to share information. Importantly, taking part or not will make no difference to how you are viewed on the SENCO training course.

**7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

There is no intended benefit on an individual basis, though you may feel you have benefited from volunteering and sharing your thoughts. No records will be kept as to if you do or do not take part in the piece of research and there is no incentive to take part.

**8. Will my taking part in the study be kept confidential?**

Yes. Information will be kept confidential, stored safely and then destroyed securely. Your identity will never be revealed with data published and suitable alternative names will be used so that you cannot be identified. If you refer to places or people that may identify you, these will also be changed. However, it is possible that you may respond using specific phrases that may inadvertently identify you to others as some quotations may be reported word for word. Consequently, whilst no identifying information will be reported, it would not be possible to ensure complete anonymity. Any information that is held on a computer will be password protected. Only the researcher, and their supervisor (Prof. Graeme Douglas) will have access to the information that is collected.

**9. What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The analysis of the questionnaire responses and group activity will be written up as part of this research project. The research might also be presented at academic conferences and / or written up for publication in academic journals. The identity of those who took part in the study would never be revealed.

**10. Who is organising and funding the research?**

The research is organised by a postgraduate research student and is funded by the School of Education at the University of Birmingham.

**11. Who has reviewed the study?**

The University of Birmingham Ethics Committee has reviewed and approved this study.

**12. What if there is a problem?**

Any complaint or concern regarding this research can be raised with the course lead in the first instance. Alternatively, if you prefer you can contact:

Professor Graeme Douglas  
School of Education  
University of Birmingham  
B15 2TT

**Contact for further Information:**

PGR student via Graeme Dobson  
School of Education  
University of Birmingham  
B15 2TT

email: [g.j.dobson@bham.ac.uk](mailto:g.j.dobson@bham.ac.uk)

## 12.8 Appendix H – Ethical changes document for studies 3 and 4.

### UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW – REQUEST FOR AMENDMENTS

#### Who should use this form:

- This form is to be completed by PIs or supervisors (for PGR student research) who are requesting ethical approval for amendments to research projects that have previously received ethical approval from the University of Birmingham.

**Please be aware that all new research projects undertaken by postgraduate research (PGR) students first registered as from 1st September 2008 will be subject to the University's Ethical Review Process. PGR students first registered before 1<sup>st</sup> September 2008 should refer to their Department/School/College for further advice.**

- What constitutes an amendment?

Amendments requiring approval may include, but are not limited to, additions to the research protocol, study population, recruitment of participants, access to personal records, research instruments, or participant information and consent documentation. Amendments must be approved before they are implemented.

#### NOTES:

- Answers to questions must be entered in the space provided
- An electronic version of the completed form should be submitted to the Research Ethics Officer, at the following email address: [aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk). Please **do not** submit paper copies.
- If, in any section, you find that you have insufficient space, or you wish to supply additional material not specifically requested by the form, please submit it in a separate file, clearly marked and attached to the submission email.

If you have any queries about the form, please address them to the Research Ethics Team

<b>UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM</b> <b>APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW -</b> <b>REQUEST FOR AMENDMENTS</b>	<b>OFFICE USE ONLY:</b> Application No: Date Received:
-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	--------------------------------------------------------------

1. **TITLE OF PROJECT**

<b>Special Educational Needs Coordination: A Vocation or a Career?</b>
------------------------------------------------------------------------

2. **APPROVAL DETAILS**

What is the Ethical Review Number (ERN) for the project?

<b>ERN_16-0836</b>
--------------------

3. **THIS PROJECT IS:**

University of Birmingham Staff Research project ☐  
 University of Birmingham Postgraduate Research (PGR) Student project ☒  
 Other ☐ (Please specify):

4. **INVESTIGATORS**

**d) PLEASE GIVE DETAILS OF THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS OR SUPERVISORS (FOR PGR STUDENT PROJECTS)**

Name: Title / first name / family name	
Highest qualification & position held:	
School/Department	
Telephone:	
Email address:	

Name: Title / first name / family name	
Highest qualification & position held:	
School/Department	
Telephone:	
Email address:	

**e) PLEASE GIVE DETAILS OF ANY CO-INVESTIGATORS OR CO-SUPERVISORS (FOR PGR STUDENT PROJECTS)**

Name: Title / first name / family name	
Highest qualification & position held:	
School/Department	
Telephone:	
Email address:	

**f) In the case of PGR student projects, please give details of the student**

Name of Course of study:	Graeme Dobson	Student No:	
	PhD Education	Email address:	g.j.dobson@bham.ac.uk
Principal supervisor:	Prof. Graeme Douglas		

Name of student:		Student No:	
Course of study:		Email address:	
Principal			

5. **ESTIMATED START OF** Date:  **PROJECT**

**ESTIMATED END OF** Date:  **PROJECT**

6. **ORIGINAL APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW AND ANY SUBSEQUENT APPROVED AMENDMENTS:**

Please complete the table below for the original application and any subsequent amendments submitted

<b>Title and reference number of application or amendment</b>
<i>Original application</i>
<b>Key points of application and/or changes made by amendment (include: aims of study, participant details, how participants were recruited and methodology)</b>
Phase 1 of the PhD study a short questionnaire and group discussion which was intended to yield both quantitative information (some details of the participant characteristics) and qualitative information (responses to an open question regarding their motives to train to be a SENCO). Following this initial generative study, a thematic analysis has been conducted on the reasons why people choose to become a Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO). Using Thematic Analysis, several themes have been identified and the findings are ready for submission to a journal.
<b>Ethical considerations arising from these key points (e.g. gaining consent, risks to participants and/or researcher, points raised by Ethical Review Committee during review)</b>
Recruitment and consent of participants; storage of data.  The participants in the first study were students on a programme led by the PGR student. Contribution to the project was NOT linked to any assessment or a requirement of the of the programme.
<b>How were the ethical considerations addressed? (e.g. consent form, participant information, adhering to relevant procedures/clearance required)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Information sheet and consent form.</li> <li>• Anonymous completion of the questionnaire.</li> <li>• Participant were able to withdraw up until the point the questionnaires were collected (the questionnaires are anonymous, so once handed in it will not be possible to identify them).</li> <li>• All data was anonymous and stored safely.</li> </ul>

7.

8. **DETAILS OF PROPOSED NEW AMENDMENT**

Provide details of the proposed new amendment, and clearly and explicitly state how the proposed new amendment will differ from the details of the study as already approved (see Q6 above).

This application is for Phase 2 of this PhD study. This second study aims to gain a wider response and potentially reduce this data using statistical methods such as Factor Analysis. A questionnaire has been developed as part of a wider survey which will take two forms (online/ paper).

It is hoped that having two formats will widen the response rate as a link can be forwarded to other Universities involved in teaching SENCOs whilst paper copies can be distributed to large groups of SENCOs in local authority fora. The questions will be the same for both questionnaires. The questionnaire has been designed to ensure that:

- It is easily accessible
- Presents with a low readability score.

The items in the questionnaire have been derived from:

- Themes and sub themes identified in the initial Phase 1 study

The proposal for the present study is to run this questionnaire as a pilot in a paper form with c. 25 SENCOs in training who are undertaking the National Standards SENCO (NASENCo) programme at the University of Birmingham where the PGR student is the programme lead. Once the questionnaire is piloted it will be adjusted as required and distributed to a wider national sample.

9. **JUSTIFICATION FOR PROPOSED NEW AMENDMENT**

This Phase 2 study is seeking to quantify initial findings generated through a local qualitative study. It follows a classic questionnaire / survey design.

10. **ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

What ethical considerations, if any, are raised by the proposed new amendment?

**1) Recruitment for the pilot study**

Potential participants for the Phase 2 pilot stage will be identified, as operating and aspirant SENCOs who are taking the National Standards SENCo award at the University of Birmingham where the PG Student is the course lead. In accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, the researcher will be actively involved in the selection of participants on site, that is, no information will be passed on from third parties in such a way that it violates the DPA 1998. There will be no need for stronger protection for the sensitive data listed under this act.

The participants will be informed that a PGR student is interested in ascertaining why people chose to become SENCOs. Participants will be informed that the questionnaire is a pilot study to test the feasibility of the study prior to a later full-scale research project. Their recruitment and consent will follow the same protocol as Study 1.

The pilot questionnaire and information sheet are presented with this amendment form. Following piloting and adjustment it will be submitted to committee for information, as it will be used in the Phase 2 full study.

## **2) Recruitment for the full study**

Participants for the Phase 2 full study will be recruited through a range of training programme and local authorities from across England. Questionnaire completion will be anonymous and the cover sheet of the questionnaire will provide an information sheet – this will be adjusted from that piloted.

## **3) Storage of data**

This will follow the same protocol as that agreed in Phase 1.

Included: Questionnaire, with associated information sheet

## **11. DECLARATION BY APPLICANTS**

I make this application on the basis that the information it contains is confidential and will be used by the University of Birmingham for the purposes of ethical review and monitoring of the research project described herein, and to satisfy reporting requirements to regulatory bodies. The information will not be used for any other purpose without my prior consent.

I declare that:

- The information in this form together with any accompanying information is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.
- I undertake to abide by University Code of Conduct for Research (<http://www.birmingham.ac.uk/Documents/university/legal/research.pdf>) alongside any other relevant professional bodies' codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines.
- I will report any changes affecting the ethical aspects of the project to the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.
- I will report any adverse or unforeseen events which occur to the relevant Ethics Committee project to the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.

**Signature of Principal investigator/project supervisor:**

**Date:**

  
25/7/18



## 12.9 Appendix I - Letter for studies 3 and 4.

Dear Colleague

The aim of this survey is to gain a better understanding of why people become SENCOs.

As an aspirant or actual SENCO, your contribution is important to understanding those who undertake this role.

This survey is part of a research/ PhD project. At some point, it is intended to **publish this information** and share it with colleagues in the **SENCO provider group and colleagues in local authorities**. This is an opportunity for you to contribute to our understanding of people who becomes a SENCO.

The survey consists of 2 parts:

- 32 questions to rate on a scale
- 14 questions about yourself and your position.

**It should take less than 10 minutes to do.**

When you complete this survey, the organization where you complete your survey will not be able to associate your answers with yourself. All data will be held on a password protected computer for analysis at **The University of Birmingham** alongside **Head of Department and Supervisor Professor Graeme Douglas**

Please understand the following

- You will **not be asked** to identify either yourself or your school in this survey
- Your answers will be entirely **anonymous**
- Your participation is **voluntary**.

By completing and returning the questionnaire:

- You are giving your consent to answer the questions
- You are giving your consent to use your anonymous data to understand why people become SENCOs and how their interest in this role relates to expectations described in policy and their school.

**Please help me to understand SENCOs better by answering all the questions.**

If you have any questions, please email [g.j.dobson@bham.ac.uk](mailto:g.j.dobson@bham.ac.uk)

**Many thanks for completing this questionnaire. It is truly appreciated.**

**Graeme Dobson**

## 12.10 Appendix J – Copy of online questionnaire

Section 1 Please rate **how important** the following have been in **contributing towards you developing an interest** in being a **SENCO**. There are 32 questions in this section.

Your answers can be based on **present** or past **experiences**.

	Extremely important (1)	Very important (2)	Moderately important (3)	Slightly important (4)	Not at all important (5)
The school based experiences of close friends or family with SEN. (1)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being close to someone who needed more support in school. (2)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional experience of working with children with SEN. (3)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Being inspired by a colleague. (4)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
It is a good step in my	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

career. (5)

I see it as an  
opportunity  
to work with  
small groups  
rather than  
large classes.

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

(6)

Being able to  
work more  
closely with  
the families  
of children.

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

(7)

I want others  
to benefit  
from my  
teaching  
experience.

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

(8)

I want to  
change  
school  
provision for  
children with  
additional  
needs. (9)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

Being SENCo  
will help me

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

develop my  
own  
knowledge  
and skills.  
(10)

I want to  
develop the  
skills of other  
teachers to  
support  
children with  
SEN. (11)

I value  
undertaking  
further study  
and gaining  
qualifications.  
(12)

To gain or  
enhance  
voice and/or  
status in my  
school. (13)

I want to  
learn about  
inclusive  
classroom  
practice to  
support my



own  
teaching. (14)

I have  
experience of  
working in a  
setting where  
children with  
SEN need  
their  
provision  
improving.  
(15)

Seeing  
teachers who  
ignore the  
needs of  
children with  
SEN. (16)

I place a  
strong value  
on all  
children  
being able to  
participate  
together in  
school life.  
(17)

I have a clear  
vision for SEN



provision to  
share with  
my setting.

(18)

I want to  
enable  
children to  
get a formal  
diagnosis of  
their needs.

(19)

Getting a  
voice on the  
school senior  
leadership  
team is  
important for  
me. (20)

Being or  
becoming a  
school leader  
is important  
to me. (21)

Working in a  
school which  
is/was unable  
to support  
children with  
additional

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

needs. (22)

I want to  
make sure  
that the  
children get  
their  
statutory  
entitlements.



(23)

An  
opportunity  
to work with  
a range of  
professionals  
to support  
children. (24)



It is  
important for  
me for all  
children to  
develop their  
potential in  
life. (25)



To empower  
parents to  
make  
decisions  
about their  
children. (26)





I want  
children to be  
able to make  
decisions  
about  
themselves.  
(27)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

I place a  
strong value  
on  
developing  
equity in  
society. (28)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

An increase  
in pay was an  
attraction.  
(29)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

A belief that  
SENCos can  
make a  
difference.  
(30)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

I like been  
given time  
away from  
the  
classroom to  
perform the  
role. (31)

<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------	-----------------------

If I'm honest,  
it was quite a  
pragmatic  
decision  
because of  
my own or  
school need.  
(32)



End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Block 2

## Section 2 **About you**

This helpful because it gives me an understanding of who is answering the questionnaire, how this reflects the SENCo population, and if different groups answer differently. The classifications match those asked as part of the teacher survey by the DfE.

There are 14 questions in this section.

### **What is your age?**

Age to the nearest year

20 30 40 50 60 70

Please slide the scale to your age ( )



**How would you describe your gender?**

- ☐ Male (1)
  - ☐ Female (2)
  - ☐ Other (3)
  - ☐ Prefer not to say (4)
- 

**What is your highest qualification?**

- ☐ Degree level (e.g. BA, BSc, BEd) (1)
  - ☐ Post Graduate Teaching Qualification (2)
  - ☐ Masters level (e.g. MA, MSc, MEd) (3)
  - ☐ Doctoral level (e.g. PhD, EdD) (4)
  - ☐ Prefer not to say (5)
-

**How would you describe your ethnic background?**

- ☐ WHITE - White British (1)
- ☐ WHITE - White Irish (2)
- ☐ WHITE - Any other white background (3)
- ☐ MIXED - White and Black Caribbean (4)
- ☐ MIXED - White and Black African (5)
- ☐ MIXED - White and Asian (6)
- ☐ MIXED - Any other mixed background (7)
- ☐ ASIAN - Indian or Indian British (8)
- ☐ ASIAN - Pakistani or Pakistani British (9)
- ☐ ASIAN - Bangladeshi or Bangladeshi British (10)
- ☐ BLACK - Black or Black British (Caribbean) (11)
- ☐ BLACK - Black or Black British (African) (12)
- ☐ BLACK - Any other black background (13)
- ☐ CHINESE (14)
- ☐ Any other ethnic group (15)
- ☐ Prefer not to say (16)

End of Block: Block 2

---

Start of Block: Block 2

**About your post**

---

What is your current job title?

---

---

**With relation to leadership/teacher scale, please indicate are you...**

- ☐ Class/subject teacher (including TLR) (1)
- ☐ Assistant Headteacher (2)
- ☐ Deputy Headteacher (3)
- ☐ Headteacher (4)

---

**Are you full time (FT) or part time (PT)**

- ☐ Full time (1)
- ☐ Part Time (2)

---

**How long have you been teaching (to the nearest year)?**

Time teaching (years)

0      10      20      30      40      50

Please slide the scale to the nearest  
year ( )



**Are you currently a SENCo?**

☐ Yes (1)

☐ No (2)

*Display This Question:*

*If Are you currently a SENCo? = Yes*

**How long have you been a SENCo (to the nearest year)?**

Time as SENCo (years)

0      10      20      30

Please slide the scale to the nearest  
year ( )



*Display This Question:*

*If Are you currently a SENCo? = Yes*

**As a percentage of your contacted hours, approximately how much of your time is allocated to the SENCo role?**

percentage (%) of time

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Please slide the scale to the  
approximate percentage of time (%)



End of Block: Block 2

Start of Block: Block 3

### **About your establishment**

Type of establishment

- ☐ Nursery or Children's Centre (1)
- ☐ Primary (including first, infant, junior) (2)
- ☐ Middle School (3)
- ☐ All through school (4)
- ☐ Secondary or High School (5)
- ☐ FE College (6)
- ☐ Other (7)

**Approximately how many children or young people are on the establishment role?**

\_\_\_\_\_

---

**What is the school Ofsted grade?**

- ☐ Outstanding (1)
- ☐ Good (2)
- ☐ Requires Improvement (3)
- ☐ Inadequate (4)
- ☐ Unsure/NA (5)

**End of Block: Block 3**



## 12.11 Appendix K – Evidence of Impact

### Direct Output

Dobson, G. J. (2020). 'Begin at the beginning': identifying ideas for a PhD. In K. Townsend, M. N. K. Saunders, & R. Loudoun (Eds.), *How to Keep Your Doctorate on Track : Insights from Students' and Supervisors' Experiences*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.

### Direct Output

Dobson, G. J., & Douglas, G. (2020). Who would do that role? Understanding why teachers become SENCos through an ecological systems theory. *Educational Review*, 72(3), 298-318.  
doi:10.1080/00131911.2018.1556206

Citations within peer-reviewed journals, books and completed PhD theses for the above direct output

### Peer reviewed journals

Clarke, A.L. and Done, E.J. (2021), Balancing pressures for SENCos as managers, leaders and advocates in the emerging context of the Covid-19 pandemic. *British Journal of Special Education*. doi.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12353

Curran, H. and Boddison, A. (2021), 'It's the best job in the world, but one of the hardest, loneliest, most misunderstood roles in a school.' Understanding the complexity of the SENCO role post-SEND reform. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*.  
doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12497

Dobson, G. J. (2019). Understanding the SENCo workforce: re-examination of selected studies through the lens of an accurate national dataset. *British Journal of Special Education*. doi:10.1111/1467-8578.12285

Dobson, G. J., & Douglas, G. (2020). Factors influencing the career interest of SENCOs in English schools. *British Educational Research Journal*. doi:10.1002/berj.3631

Hallett, F. (2021) Can SENCOs do their job in a bubble? The impact of Covid-19 on the ways in which we conceptualise provision for learners with special educational needs, Oxford Review of Education, doi: 10.1080/03054985.2021.1898357

### Theses

Almughyiri, S. (2021). Perceptions of preservice teachers of students with autism and intellectual disabilities in their teacher preparation programs in Saudi Arabia (Order No. 28149730). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (2531349611). Retrieved from <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/perceptions-preservice-teachers-students-with/docview/2531349611/se-2?accountid=8630>

### Book chapters

Curran, H. (2021) Developing SENCO resilience: understanding and meeting the challenge of the role. In M.C. Beaton, G.N Codina & J.C Wharton. (Eds.). (2021). *Leading on Inclusion: The Role of the SENCO* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367821463>

### Direct Output

Dobson, G. J. (2019). Understanding the SENCo workforce: re-examination of selected studies through the lens of an accurate national dataset. *British Journal of Special Education*. doi:10.1111/1467-8578.12285

Citations within peer-reviewed journals, books and completed PhD theses for the above direct output

## Peer reviewed journals

Clarke, A.L. and Done, E.J. (2021), Balancing pressures for SENCOs as managers, leaders and advocates in the emerging context of the Covid-19 pandemic. *British Journal of Special Education*. doi.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12353

Curran, H. and Boddison, A. (2021), 'It's the best job in the world, but one of the hardest, loneliest, most misunderstood roles in a school.' Understanding the complexity of the SENCO role post-SEND reform. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*. doi.org/10.1111/1471-3802.12497

Dobson, G. J., & Douglas, G. (2020). Factors influencing the career interest of SENCOs in English schools. *British Educational Research Journal*. doi:10.1002/berj.3631

Hallett, F. (2021) Can SENCOs do their job in a bubble? The impact of Covid-19 on the ways in which we conceptualise provision for learners with special educational needs, *Oxford Review of Education*, doi: 10.1080/03054985.2021.1898357

Pulsford, M. (2020) 'I could have been the caretaker in a suit': men as primary school SENCOs in an era of change, *Education 3-13*, doi: 10.1080/03004279.2019.1659386

## Direct Output

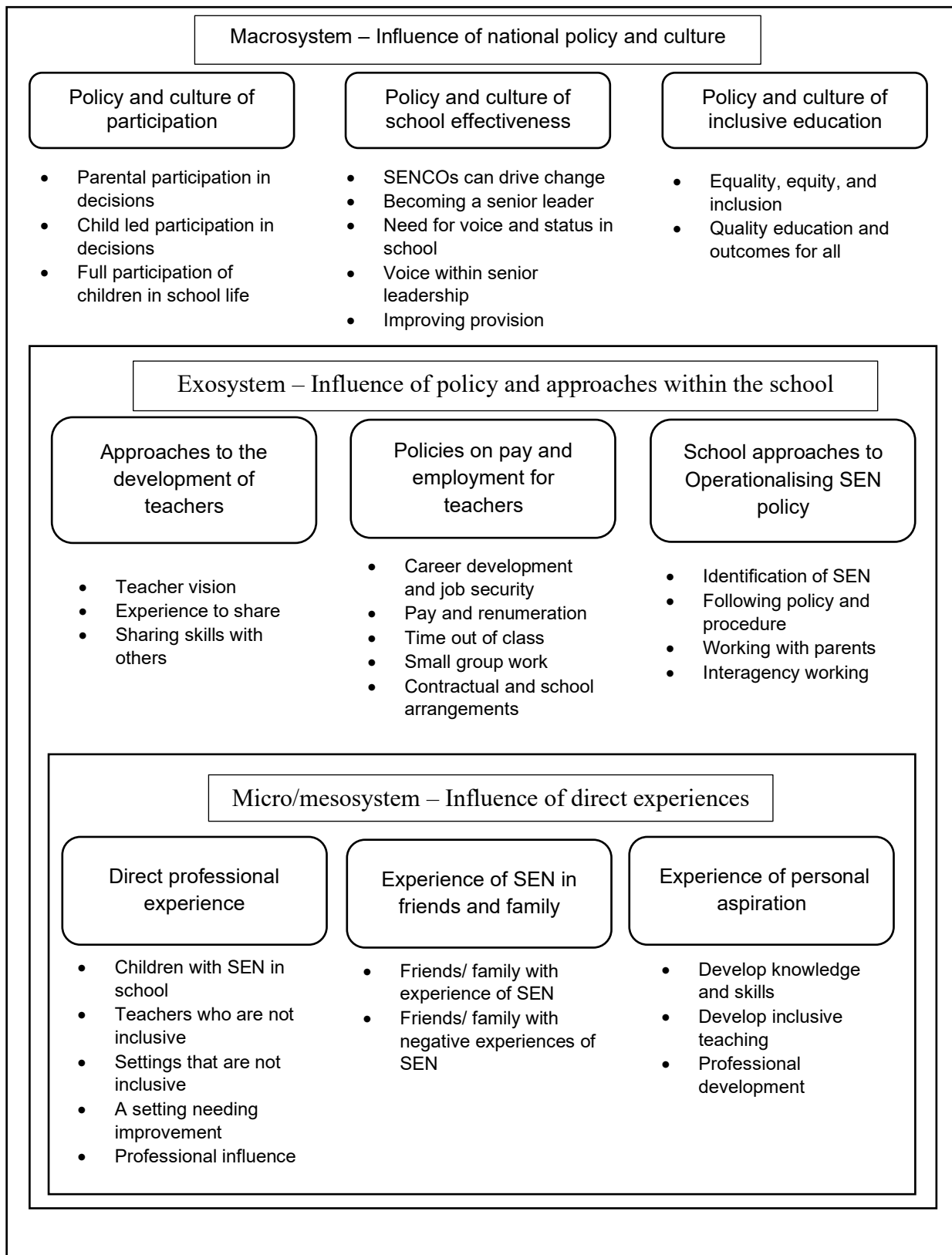
Dobson, G. J., & Douglas, G. (2020). Factors influencing the career interest of SENCOs in English schools. *British Educational Research Journal*. doi:10.1002/berj.3631

Citations within peer-reviewed journals, books and completed PhD theses

Book chapters

Curran, H. (2021) Developing SENCO resilience: understanding and meeting the challenge of the role. In M.C. Beaton, G.N Codina & J.C Wharton. (Eds.). (2021). Leading on Inclusion: The Role of the SENCO (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367821463>

## 12.12 Appendix L – Overall thematic Structure



## 12.13 Appendix M - Illustrative excerpts from overarching theme: micro/mesosystem - Influence of direct experiences

### 12.13.1 Theme: Direct professional experience

#### 12.13.1.1 Subtheme: Children with SEN in school

<p>Definition:</p> <p>Respondents have direct, proximal experiences of working with children with SEN within professional contexts. These experiences are diverse and can be working directly within different professional roles or having positive experiences of children and young people whilst working with them.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC2c <i>Draws off experiences a care worker</i></li> </ul>	In my previous job, I was a care worker for children with SEND
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC2c <i>Feels experienced in field of SEN</i></li> </ul>	My first job was at a local school for children with additional needs and as a SENCO for mainstream, I felt that my experience previously would be useful in ensuring all children, regardless of their individual needs, have access to fulfilling education.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3e <i>Enjoyed teaching SEN children</i></li> </ul>	I have always enjoyed teaching SEN children, when I was a full time class teacher and due to the school I'm in, I have had lots of opportunity to work with children with a variety of SEND – A focus provision school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC5a <i>Drew from own experience at working in the SEMH sector.</i></li> </ul>	I have tended to work for the majority of my career with 'challenging' students and this has always informed my planning and delivery. It was only when I worked for one year at a 'nice' school that I found that my style of teaching and planning was very different to that of most teachers. My differentiation etc has always been a strong point and has continued to improve
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6e <i>Experience as a TA with SEN</i></li> </ul>	I worked as a TA for years and worked mainly with LA/SEN children.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6g <i>Experiences of working with children with SEND</i></li> </ul>	Having had experiences (not always positive) working with children with SEND and their families, they have encouraged me to take my career in this direction. I still keep in touch with these parents.

#### 12.13.1.2 Subtheme: Teachers who are not inclusive

<p>Definition:</p> <p>Respondents are aware of teachers who are not inclusive within their setting and elsewhere. They regard these teachers as a negative influence, and they do not wish to emulate them.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC2b <i>Children written off by teachers</i></li> </ul>	I feel that not enough people understand the reasons for children's difficulties and write them off as naughty or unteachable: I like a challenge and try to support these children to be more 'socially acceptable' or at least enjoy school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6e <i>Feeling that teachers ignore needs of SEN children</i></li> </ul>	Frustrated by teachers ignoring the needs of SEN.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1a <i>Challenge preconceptions about children with SEN by teachers</i></li> </ul>	At one school I was teaching in, and after a lot of PP money had been put into extra intervention teaching, I started to notice comments such as 'they're SEN, they won't make progress'.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1a <i>Frustration of fixed teacher views</i></li> </ul>	'they're SEN, they won't make progress'. This was one particular PP teacher who was working with pupils in my class who I felt had a lot of potential.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP2e <i>Need to challenge the perception of teachers – 'children as a problem'.</i></li> </ul>	I felt I made an impact in the way schools looked at children and their responsibilities in how children and their families are treated and supported before things escalate. Sometimes children were seen as a problem
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP3h <i>Felt injustice at school focus away from SEN</i></li> </ul>	As a teacher in school under pressure of becoming RI, I was told to ignore SEN children and focus on the others. Various other attitudes like this led me to want to give up teacher.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP5a <i>Children overlooked by teachers</i></li> </ul>	To 'fight the corner' of children who can be overlooked, ignored or worse.

### 12.13.1.3 Subtheme: Settings that are not inclusive

<p>Definition:</p> <p>Respondents have direct, proximal experience and awareness of schools that are not inclusive. This may be their setting or elsewhere.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6e <i>SEN low profile so moved school to become SENCO</i></li> </ul>	Motivated to move schools after 15 years in one school, as I felt I could no longer be of benefit as SEN was low profile.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6f <i>Use experience to develop role (perceived as neglected in school)</i></li> </ul>	Challenge – to use skills from previous schools to move area on after years of neglect. Felt that I had skills to help move school on as previous schools moved from satisfactory to good with my area (maths) as a key focus and I could apply some skills to SEND.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP2e <i>Need to challenge the perception of children as a problem in school.</i></li> </ul>	I felt I made an impact in the way schools looked at children and their responsibilities in how children and their families are treated and supported before things escalate. Sometimes children were seen as a problem
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP6c <i>Make a difference – school lacking</i></li> </ul>	it was an opportunity to make a difference and have an impact in school that was currently lacking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS1a <i>To make up for poor LA provision</i></li> </ul>	Lack of provision in my local authority to be able to give these pupils the best service.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS4c <i>Felt own school provision inadequate</i></li> </ul>	Having been in the school my whole teaching career I felt it was an area of school that was mismanaged and misrepresented.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS4c <i>School made SEN children vulnerable</i></li> </ul>	AS HOH I found that the vulnerability of SEN students was prevail and I felt it needed addressing

#### 12.13.1.4 Subtheme: A setting needing improvement

<p>Definition:</p> <p>Respondents have direct proximal, experience of working within a setting where they see that change is necessary to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEN.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4a <i>Frustrated at current school provision. Sees there is a need for change</i></li> </ul>	School has a learning support (LS) centre Many parents like this. It could be better used. I believe TAs are <u>too</u> involved in student work. This needs to change.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4a <i>Provide voice for children. School needs improvement.</i></li> </ul>	I am a strong voice for (CyP) Children and Young People) a bit of a perfectionist and want to support and guide and provide the best provision I can in my school. Whilst there is a lot of good things in place it needs a shake up and moving into 2016. There are a lot of things not in place.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4a <i>Wants to monitor others – school needs change</i></li> </ul>	There is a lack of monitoring. I am concerned about the use of external provision. I need to understand more to build knowledge of how best to use external provision.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6f <i>Use experience to develop role (perceived as neglected)</i></li> </ul>	Challenge – to use skills from previous schools to move area on after years of neglect. Felt that I had skills to help move school on as previous schools moved from satisfactory to good with my area (maths) as a key focus and I could apply some skills to SEND.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC7e <i>Desire to change poor provision</i></li> </ul>	Seeing poor provision in other schools and having the urge to change it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1a <i>Support- teachers seen as poor (practice)</i></li> </ul>	A desire to change what I viewed as poor practice (see over)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP2d <i>Critical of fail rate post 16 in school</i></li> </ul>	As a former FE tutor working with young people who were ‘NEET’ I saw how the ‘system’ had failed them – lack of early identification. Lack of support and even lack of empathy. I want to be able to, hopefully, make a difference to some children’s lives and outcomes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS1c <i>Feeling of SENCO role not being done well in current school</i></li> </ul>	It infuriates me that in my current school the SENCO role has not been done well previously and that the needs of the students have not been met.

#### 12.13.1.5 Subtheme: Professional influence

<p>Definition:</p> <p>Respondents are able to describe a proximal, direct source of professional influence. These influences are diverse and can be people with whom they have worked. Professional influence can also include being sought out by a colleague and asked to consider the role.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3c <i>Asked by leadership (as good with SEN)</i></li> </ul>	Recognised by others as being ‘good’ with SEN teaching so encouraged by leadership into the role.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3e <i>Asked to fulfil role after retirement of postholder</i></li> </ul>	The previous SENCO took early retirement and I was asked to step into an acting position for the rest of the year. I then interviewed for the permanent position at the start of the next academic year and got the job.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4c <i>'encouraged' into role</i></li> </ul>	I was encouraged to apply for the position as the SLT acknowledged that I was 'good' at completing paperwork.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4c <i>Headteacher asked me (as EYFS trained)</i></li> </ul>	At the time, the head teacher wanted someone who was EYFS trained to take up the post and we had few people who were EYFS trained at the point.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC5c <i>Approached by headteacher</i></li> </ul>	Approached by headteacher, 'feel good' factor.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6f <i>Asked by headteacher</i></li> </ul>	Asked to do role by head.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC7d <i>Encouraged by SMT</i></li> </ul>	Encouraged by members of the senior management team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP4a <i>Asked to do role due to staff change</i></li> </ul>	Our SENCO handed in her notice. I was asked if I would consider the role. I said, yes!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS2d <i>Help from wife (who is SENCo)</i></li> </ul>	My wife was SENCO at an adjoining school and thought that she would be of help in the role. (In hindsight this has not been good for relationship!!)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS2e <i>Invited to apply for position (on contract)</i></li> </ul>	It was after a discussion with my headteacher that I was 'invited' to apply for the position.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS3a <i>Aspired to the job from the time when a TA- SENCO supportive</i></li> </ul>	When I was a TA I spoke to the SENCO and decided this was a job I would aspire to do. I knew I really love working with SEN pupils

### 12.13.2 Theme: Experience of SEN in friends and family

#### 12.13.2.1 Subtheme: Friends/ family with experience of SEN

<p>Definition:</p> <p>Respondents are influenced by the educational experiences of those with whom they have close personal, rather than professional contact. These groups of people consist of the children of friends or family. They also include the children of the respondents.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC1a <i>Family with children with SEN</i></li> </ul>	Experience of friends and family with students with SEN was part of the motivation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC1a <i>Feeling anger at primary school</i></li> </ul>	For as long as I can remember I have always felt great empathy for those in society who are less able to fight their corner etc. I can even remember the feeling of anger from seeing peers at primary school suffering as a result of not being able to assess work for example and not being helped.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC1a <i>Positive experiences of SEN provision for children for friend</i></li> </ul>	My best friend as a son with Downs syndrome. He attends a mainstream school. The support they have received has been incredible. How amazing to be able to make the difference to people's lives!

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC1b <i>Deep understanding of the effect of mental health on others</i></li> </ul>	My sister suffers from mental health issues also. I deeply understand the influence of mental health on the well being of the person and goals around them i.e., children.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC1b <i>Mental health in own family – speaks from experience</i></li> </ul>	My family is close, now, but for many years – due to my mother’s mental health issues, my sister and I were isolated from them. My sister suffers from mental health issues also
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC1b <i>Partner and son are ASC</i></li> </ul>	My partner and my son both have Asperger's syndrome – but their traits can display very differently. I feel able to empathise with families of children with ASD and find being around and ‘dealing’ with the issues which arise with everyday life, for these individuals quite natural.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC5c <i>SEN in own family (school provided positive help)</i></li> </ul>	Experience of SEN within my family and personal experience of how support in school has helped a family member.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP1c <i>Own children have SEN</i></li> </ul>	having a child of my own with medical/learning difficulties who had a statement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP2d <i>Mother of child with SEN</i></li> </ul>	As a mum of a young person with SEN I have a personal interest – passion!

### 12.13.2.2 Subtheme: Friends/ family with negative experiences of SEN

<p>Definition:</p> <p>Respondents are influenced by the negative educational experiences of those with whom they have close personal, rather than professional contact. These groups incorporate the children of friends or family. They also include their own children.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC1a <i>Negative experiences of exclusion of family due to disability.</i></li> </ul>	My cousin’s daughter XXXX was diagnosed with a brain tumour at the age of 12. She was left unable to walk or talk but still able to access education in a mainstream setting. One day my cousin told me that for XXXX’s geography GCSE field trip they had to sample stones along the beach. XXXX was left at the top of the beach whilst her peers undertook the task. XXXX, in a wheelchair could not access the beach. That can't be right! I felt outraged. As a SENCO I can ensure that her experiences are not repeated.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC6g <i>Driven by nephew receiving poor quality provision</i></li> </ul>	My nephew has MD has had poor experiences with regards the school at catering for his needs. This was a driving factor for wanting to be a SENCO.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC7a <i>Family experience – brother struggled</i></li> </ul>	Personal motivation; my brother struggled at school with health problems and so I can relate to some families struggling to get the support that their child needs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP2d <i>Fight for rights of SEN (from own experience – advocate for others)</i></li> </ul>	Through personal experience I have had to fight for support – some parents can’t do this.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS1c <i>Own SEN child badly treated</i></li> </ul>	I chose to become a SENCO as a result of having my own child with his SEN needs who was really badly treated by a school who did not understand her needs and did not provide for her needs.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS4d <i>Felt like school saw own son as an annoyance</i></li> </ul>	My son is one of the most nervous and anxious people I know. This was definitely made worse by his experiences in Key Stage 2. As a parent I supported him in every way possible but this was at odds with what the school provided. I was treated by the school as an ‘annoyance’. My son was regularly told off by his school for doing things which he could not help. I battled throughout and he eventually ended up school refusing.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS4d <i>Negative experiences of own child in the SEN system</i></li> </ul>	Because my son has ‘suffered’ with dyspraxia and undiagnosed ASD along with anxiety throughout KS2.

### 12.13.3 Theme: Experience of personal aspiration

#### 12.13.3.1 Subtheme: Develop knowledge and skills

<p>Definition:</p> <p>Respondents are influenced to learn about new knowledge and skills with relation to SEN. In the most part, this aspiration is mediated by their own professional experiences of working alongside children with SEN.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC3a <i>Learn about strategies for teaching and learning</i></li> </ul>	To learn about teaching and learning strategies for a range of needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC4b <i>Developing understanding and skills</i></li> </ul>	Opportunity to develop my understanding and skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC4b <i>interest in the learning process of children</i></li> </ul>	I’m interested in how children learn
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC4e <i>Wanting to learn about the learning needs of children</i></li> </ul>	I find it interesting learning about different needs of children. This might be cognitive, physical or medical.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC5d <i>Extend knowledge</i></li> </ul>	Extend my knowledge of SEN children.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC6b <i>Learning how to overcome barriers to learning</i></li> </ul>	I am fascinated with understanding of barriers to learning in terms of cognition and learning/ communication and interaction/ social emotional mental health/ PSN.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC7e <i>Interest in SEN literature</i></li> </ul>	I have a very keen interest in the literature surrounding SEN.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP1c <i>Gaining knowledge of children</i></li> </ul>	I am gaining insights on how to help/support them and their families while at the school to a greater depth.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP2b <i>SEN knowledge</i></li> </ul>	To improve own SEN knowledge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP4a <i>extend knowledge and skills</i></li> </ul>	It was an opportunity for me to extend my skills

#### 12.13.3.2 Subtheme: Develop inclusive teaching

<p>Definition:</p> <p>Respondents are influenced to develop their own teaching to make this more inclusive. In the most part, this aspiration is mediated by their own professional experiences of working alongside children with SEN.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC2c <i>Feels a need to develop skills set in SEN (CPD)</i></li> </ul>	My degree is in early childhood studies and special needs and inclusion and I have always wanted to develop my skill set further in special needs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3a <i>Learn about strategies for teaching and learning</i></li> </ul>	To learn about teaching and learning strategies for a range of needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC5b <i>new area of teaching</i></li> </ul>	I saw it as an opportunity to learn a new area of teaching me.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC5c <i>Improve knowledge as a teacher</i></li> </ul>	To develop/ further my own knowledge and understanding as a class teacher of how best to support learners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6b <i>Improve 'own' knowledge' of SEN</i></li> </ul>	I want to increase my own knowledge and understanding of how to support pupils with SEN.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6b <i>Interest in understanding SEMH/ ASC</i></li> </ul>	I am really interested in understanding SEMH needs such as ASD/ ADHD and strategies that we can do in order to support pupils with these disabilities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6d <i>Problem solving support strategies needed</i></li> </ul>	I enjoy supporting pupils who are finding learning difficult and thinking of strategies to support them.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS2c <i>Develop as a teacher (CPD)</i></li> </ul>	To develop as a teacher and gain a better understanding of the needs of SEN pupils.

### 12.13.3.3 Subtheme: Professional development

<p>Definition:</p> <p>Respondents are influenced to develop their own portfolio of professional development. In the most part, this desire is mediated by their own professional needs and aspirations.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC2a <i>Sees qualification as having a wider impact on practice</i></li> </ul>	Commitment to myself to make myself more qualified to have a bigger impact on my whole class teaching.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4c <i>Progression development and CPD</i></li> </ul>	I knew that the role would open up opportunities for my own professional development.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC5b <i>Wants Master's degree</i></li> </ul>	I wanted to get the points to convert into a Masters.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC5d <i>To be able to do the course</i></li> </ul>	Opportunity to do SENCO course.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1a <i>CPD and Impact</i></li> </ul>	I have been part of extensive CPD throughout my career so far,
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1a <i>Striving for CPD</i></li> </ul>	Further CPD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP4b <i>Desire for further study/CPD</i></li> </ul>	I wanted to undertake further study.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP6a <i>Qualification</i></li> </ul>	to learn something new/gain a qualification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP6g <i>Learn about needs (medical issues)</i></li> </ul>	To learn more about specific needs and research different medical issues.

**12.14 Appendix N - Illustrative excerpts from overarching theme:  
Exosystem - Influence of policy and approaches within the  
school.**

**12.14.1 Theme: Approaches to the development of  
teachers**

**12.14.1.1 Subtheme: Teacher vision**

<p>“The developing person may set in motion processes within their microsystem that have their reverberations in distant quarters” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 237).</p> <p>Definition:</p> <p>Respondents want to affect change in school policy towards teacher development. They have a vision of what they want to change. The SENCO position provides a catalyst for this process to start. Ultimately, this is conditional upon decisions that take place within the more ‘distant quarters’ of the school strategic and senior leadership teams. It is here where these whole school decisions are made.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4a <i>Change school processes – strong voice</i></li> </ul>	I am a strong voice for (CyP) Children and Young People a bit of a perfectionist and want to support and guide and provide the best provision I can in my school. Whilst there is a lot of good things in place it needs a shake up and moving into 2016. There are a lot of things not in place.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4a <i>Wants to use evidence in practice (ie MITA) – vision of better monitoring</i></li> </ul>	I am very interested in Websters ‘MITA’ book and explore a change of vision of improved monitoring.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC5b <i>News ideas and wants to develop them – lots of ideas</i></li> </ul>	I have lots of ideas as to how I could improve the PRU through developing this role.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP2e <i>Inclusion - vision</i></li> </ul>	I can also share my vision with staff and SLT to create a positive and inclusive environment for all.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP6a <i>Wants to support headteacher vision</i></li> </ul>	because I support my headteacher 100% in her vision for the school and enjoy being a valued member of the team

**12.14.1.2 Subtheme: Experience to share**

<p>“The developing person may set in motion processes within their microsystem that have their reverberations in distant quarters” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 237)</p> <p>Definition:</p> <p>Respondents want to affect change in school policy towards teacher development. They feel that they have experience to share. The SENCO position provides a catalyst for this process to start. Whether they are able to share this is conditional upon decisions that take place within the more ‘distant quarters’ of the school strategic and senior leadership teams. It is here where these whole school decisions are made.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP1e <i>Feeling of experience and status</i></li> </ul>	As an experienced teacher and leader in school I felt my status would ensure I could fulfil the role well
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP3g <i>Help other staff</i></li> </ul>	felt I had got something to offer other staff.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP3g <i>Perception of expertise (ASD)</i></li> </ul>	Was experienced working with children with ASD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP4b <i>Draw on experience</i></li> </ul>	I feel that it is a role that uses the skills I have gained over the years.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP5c <i>Experience as a teacher</i></li> </ul>	As quite an experienced teacher (10 years) felt that I could support staff within classrooms and children with SEN and their families.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP6a <i>Feeling of competence</i></li> </ul>	SENCO in particular (as I realise that these things will lie in other areas of SLT roles...) Because my skills for teaching and learning lie in EYFS and KS1 and think that these strategies are key for some SEN children throughout the school, so I am building on an already good foundation of knowledge.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP6f <i>Chance to influence policy/provision through experience</i></li> </ul>	My experience and (growing) knowledge could be more widely spread than just as a class teacher – desire to influence policy and practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS1a <i>Felt that had necessary skills (unlike everybody else)</i></li> </ul>	I realised there was nobody else with the necessary skills to approach, so I decided to do it myself.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS1d <i>Feeling of prior experience</i></li> </ul>	My previous roles showed it is (direct student support) an area I am skilled in
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS2c <i>Wanting to help children with SEN – strengths as a teacher</i></li> </ul>	I enjoy working with pupils with SEN and my strengths as a teacher allow me to help specifically SEN pupils.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS4b <i>Feeling of experience compared to other staff</i></li> </ul>	From all the staff at school I had the most background experience (working in special school 19 years)

### 12.14.1.3 Subtheme: *Sharing skills with others*

<p>“The developing person may set in motion processes within their microsystem that have their reverberations in distant quarters” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 237)</p> <p>Definition:</p> <p>Respondents want to affect change in school policy towards teacher development. This subtheme is more than just having experience. Here respondents have a sense of agency and wish to share their experiences. Ultimately, whether this happens is conditional upon decisions that take place within the more ‘distant quarters’ of the school strategic and senior leadership teams. It is here where these whole school decisions are made.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC4b <i>self-awareness of experience to share</i></li> </ul>	It relates closely (and further develops) my work as EYFS leader. (As NQT Induction Tutor) Opportunity to share my knowledge and greater understanding with my colleagues – particularly NQTs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC4e <i>Want to share ideas and skills with other teachers (because creative)</i></li> </ul>	I feel being SENCO allows to share and develop my skills with other teachers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC5d <i>Work with TAS – improve practice</i></li> </ul>	To work with TAS - change practice – roles in our school, motivate and them.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC6b <i>Support teachers by increasing ‘their’ knowledge’</i></li> </ul>	I want to support teachers in terms of supporting pupils effectively within the classroom by increasing their knowledge.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC6e <i>Share extensive skills</i></li> </ul>	Built up a wealth of information regarding SEN and wanted to share my skills.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC6e <i>Wants to 'upskill' teachers</i></li> </ul>	Support profile and up skilling of SEN teachers and TAs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC6f <i>Use experience to develop role (perceived as neglected)</i></li> </ul>	Challenge – to use skills from previous schools to move area on after years of neglect. Felt that I had skills to help move school on as previous schools moved from satisfactory to good with my area (maths) as a key focus and I could apply some skills to SEND.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP1d <i>Being able to share skills</i></li> </ul>	Opportunity to share expertise and support teachers to do the best for their SEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP1d <i>SEN Children as vulnerable</i></li> </ul>	To support vulnerable children – by supporting teachers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP2b <i>Working with colleagues as expert.</i></li> </ul>	To share any knowledge to support parents/ other professionals with children who have SEN.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP2e <i>Support the staff to see the positive</i></li> </ul>	support and/or interventions enabled both staff and children to feel more positive and change to begin to take place.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP3b <i>Significant experience to be shared with others</i></li> </ul>	Having taught a range of children different SEN needs I wanted to share my experiences.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP6a <i>Feels able to draw from early roles in EYFS/KS1 (as though SEN is about going back in time)</i></li> </ul>	SENCO in particular (as I realise that these things will lie in other areas of SLT roles...) Because my skills for teaching and learning lie in EYFS and KS1 and think that these strategies are key for some SEN children throughout the school, so I am building on an already good foundation of knowledge.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP6f <i>Better role than 'just class teacher'</i></li> </ul>	My experience and (growing) knowledge could be more widely spread than just as a class teacher – desire to influence policy and practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS4b <i>Share practice (from special)</i></li> </ul>	To share practices from my past teaching career within a special needs environment. Just because a child has SEN does not mean that they cannot learn.

### 12.14.2 Theme: Policies on pay and employment for teachers

#### 12.14.2.1 Subtheme: Career development and job security

<p>Definition:</p> <p>National pay, policy and workforce roles are interpreted, defined, and operationalised at the strategic level of the school. Most respondents do not have a voice at this level. Here, they wish to develop their career or retain security of employment. They have to do this within the confines of the opportunities within their school.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC1a <i>Change from classroom</i></li> </ul>	Looking for a change. I have been a classroom teacher for 17 years and a head of faculty for 12 of those.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC1c <i>Aspire to become EP</i></li> </ul>	I am also interested in becoming an EP

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC2a <i>Aspires to move into special school – SENCO as a bridge</i></li> </ul>	In order for me to be able to make the move to a hospital/ SEN school within the next five years – giving me more experience of conditions and processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC2a <i>Negative experiences of past schools (told couldn't teach)</i></li> </ul>	I am 26 and have been a class teacher for 5 years. In that time I have had 2 perm positions but have been a class teacher for more than five years 'due to the fact' they told me 'I couldn't teach' and then worked on supply for a year and a term – in which I had 2 long term supply roles and worked day to day in 4 schools. One of the schools I worked in called me and offered me a position and it is where I work now.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3f <i>Career development</i></li> </ul>	progression in school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4a <i>Promotion</i></li> </ul>	Promotion
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4a <i>Security of permanent position</i></li> </ul>	SENCO post available – permanent
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC5a <i>Career prospects</i></li> </ul>	Career prospects – I've always been a middle manager or above (since year 2 to teaching) but took a job in a different school as a classroom teacher on a part time basis after having a baby
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6d <i>Family commits prevent SLT position</i></li> </ul>	I have held a middle leader position (head of MFL) for eight years and wanted a different challenge, but due to family commitments, did not want to move into senior leadership.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6e <i>Perceived as a good career move</i></li> </ul>	A good career move to become SENCO as it increased my profile within school and allows me to have a voice on SLT.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC7a <i>Career progression</i></li> </ul>	A chance to progress in my career.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC7b <i>Wishes to become an EP</i></li> </ul>	Possible future desire to become educational psychologist so useful experience.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC7b <i>Interest in special education</i></li> </ul>	Considered working in a special school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC7d <i>Desire to be a specialist</i></li> </ul>	Opportunity came up in school I saw it as a way of becoming more specialist which could open up all the areas in my career.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1d <i>SENCo as a career step</i></li> </ul>	Career progression
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP2c <i>Job security because of statutory position of the role</i></li> </ul>	School is going through change – there is an anticipated staffing restructure. As schools legally require a trained SENCO, being in this role offers possible job security.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP4a <i>Permanent contract in school</i></li> </ul>	It was an opportunity for me to extend my skills as well as gain a permanent contract.

#### 12.14.2.2 Subtheme: Pay and remuneration

<p>Definition:</p> <p>National pay, policy and workforce roles are interpreted, defined, and operationalised at the strategic level of the school. Most respondents do not have a voice at this level. Here, they wish to take advantage of opportunities for more pay. However, they have to do this within the confines of the opportunities within their school.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3c <i>Career and money</i></li> </ul>	Career opportunities/ money has encouraged/ motivated me.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4a <i>The money (husband retiring)</i></li> </ul>	Husband retiring – promotion both financially and for my career is good for us at this point.



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC7d <i>Top of pay scale so provided 'more responsibility'</i></li> </ul>	At the time I was top pay scale (MPS) and needed to take on more responsibility.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC7d <i>Enhanced pay and release time</i></li> </ul>	Paid role with a degree of release time unlike other coordinator roles in school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC7f <i>More money</i></li> </ul>	Our SENCO left, I was already part of SMT (assessment) and so I made a sideways move (salary rise) to fill the role.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP6a <i>Pay</i></li> </ul>	Increase in pay
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS2a <i>Pay</i></li> </ul>	Pay/ progression
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS3e <i>Been doing role for years (but not in pay or status)</i></li> </ul>	Finally, I've been doing the elements of role for many years anyway so it makes sense to get the training, so I can be remunerated for the work

### 12.14.2.3 Subtheme: Time out of class

<p>Definition:</p> <p>National pay, policy and workforce roles are interpreted, defined and operationalised at the strategic level of the school. Most respondents do not have a voice at this level. Within some schools the SENCO role is defined as a role that is based outside of class teaching. This proposition is attractive to some respondents.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC7a <i>Different from classroom</i></li> </ul>	A change to do something different, a change from the classroom.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC7c <i>A way out of the classroom – stressful</i></li> </ul>	Hoped it might be a way out of classroom teaching which has become increasingly demanding and stressful.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC7c <i>Fed up with classroom</i></li> </ul>	I felt ready for a change in my career. I was fed up with classroom teaching!
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC7d <i>Enhanced pay and release time</i></li> </ul>	Paid role with a degree of release time unlike other coordinator roles in school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC7f <i>Like finding out about teaching.</i></li> </ul>	I liked the idea of being out class for three days so that I could get a greater understanding of all school teaching.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP2c <i>Wants out of the classroom</i></li> </ul>	Having been in the classroom as a class teacher for over 20 years, I felt that I needed a new challenge and change.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP3f <i>Change from class teaching</i></li> </ul>	A change from being a classroom teacher! I'd done this for a very long time.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP4b <i>Change from being a class teacher</i></li> </ul>	I wanted a role that was not 'class teacher' – a new challenge
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP5d <i>Fed up with government initiatives</i></li> </ul>	After nine years of being in the classroom, I was fed up with the monotonous cycle of planning, marking, assessing, change in governmental ideas and was contemplating leaving teaching.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP6g <i>Reduce teaching load to 50%</i></li> </ul>	To move from a 100% teaching role to a 50% time in classroom - can be very demanding full-time.

### 12.14.2.4 Subtheme: Small group work

<p>Definition:</p> <p>National pay, policy and workforce roles are interpreted, defined, and operationalised at the strategic level of the school. Most respondents do not have a voice at this level. Within some schools the SENCO role is defined as a role that provides opportunity for small group teaching or a chance to work with individual children. This proposition is attractive to some respondents.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC2b <i>Sees skills as 'working with small groups'</i></li> </ul>	My skills are better suited to working with smaller groups of children.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC2b <i>Wishes to spend individual time with children</i></li> </ul>	I like being able to give more individual time to children.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP4b <i>Enjoy children (with barriers)</i></li> </ul>	I enjoy working with children who face barriers to learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP5a <i>Wanted to focus work and do this better</i></li> </ul>	Wanted to do more focused work, better.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP6g <i>Help individual children</i></li> </ul>	To help individual children who have specific needs.

### 12.14.2.5 Subtheme: Contractual and school arrangements

<p>Definition:</p> <p>National pay, policy and workforce roles are interpreted, defined, and operationalised at the strategic level of the school. Most respondents do not have a voice at this level. Within some schools, decisions are made at this level with regards to school personnel structures that directly impact upon respondents. Here respondents may be presented with a role or presented with a choice of roles within this structure.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4c <i>I could stay working within the foundation stage</i></li> </ul>	I also knew that this post would keep me within the Foundation Stage which is where my interests are as a teacher.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC7a <i>Better than other part time options</i></li> </ul>	Preferable to PPA cover.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1e <i>Feeling of duty to the school</i></li> </ul>	I did not really have any choice – school budget is in crisis and I knew by absorbing the TLR salary of the previous SENCO would be a great help for the school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP2c <i>Committed to school – best interests</i></li> </ul>	My school was in the position of having no SENCO. I am very committed to my school and therefore felt that me taking the role was in the best interests of the school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP3a <i>No desire to join the SLT</i></li> </ul>	I have no aspiration to become a senior leader
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP3h <i>Needed a role to fit in with children at home</i></li> </ul>	Work/life balance with family and two young children at home.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP4c <i>Made to do the role</i></li> </ul>	I didn't! I was Deputy Head and the SENCO left. No-one was keen on the role and Head and I decided I should do it
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP4d <i>Part of new role within the a school structure role (deputy head)</i></li> </ul>	The needs of the school required and inclusion team to be formed, and this linked in well with my other roles as deputy, assessment and attendance coordinator as well as parental partnership.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP6d <i>Already covering long term absence</i></li> </ul>	Covering the long-term absence of school's SENCo

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS2d <i>Manoeuvred into the role</i></li> </ul>	<p>The first important point to make is that I did not <u>choose</u> to be a SENCO and was basically manoeuvred into the role as our school did not have a SENCO (statutory reasons). There has historically not been a SENCO at the school for a number of years and a group of personnel were doing the Inclusion/ SENCO role.</p>
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### 12.14.3 Theme: School approaches to Operationalising SEN policy

#### 12.14.3.1 Subtheme: Identification of SEN

<p>“The developing person may set in motion processes within their microsystem that have their reverberations in distant quarters” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 237)</p> <p>The identification of SEN is outlined within documents such as the 2015 Code of Practice and the Children and Families Act 2014. Schools are required to follow these rules but may do so in different ways. School approaches are ultimately defined by and are at the discretion of the school leadership team. Respondents have a desire to influence processes through which children may be identified with SEN.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC4c <i>Wanting to be able to identify children</i></li> </ul>	To enable the early identification of children’s needs in our setting.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bc6a <i>Identify needs for child</i></li> </ul>	To build effective relationships in order to identify needs of each child.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bc6a <i>Pupils individual needs - identify</i></li> </ul>	To build effective relationships in order to identify needs of each child.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP2d <i>Make a difference early</i></li> </ul>	lack of early identification. Lack of support and even lack of empathy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP4d <i>Supporting parents with diagnosis</i></li> </ul>	Working with the parents to help them find out more about their child's diagnosis was an area of the role I found I enjoyed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP6f <i>Interest in ‘diagnosis’</i></li> </ul>	Genuine interest in diagnosis or learning for children/adults with SEN.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS4d <i>Critical of bureaucracy – identify and support</i></li> </ul>	As a teacher, I value <u>people</u> not paperwork. I felt that a greater impact can be achieved if the SENCO knows the children and families. As a class teacher I couldn’t do this. I also wanted to ensure that the provision we make for children in <u>pertinent</u> to the <u>individual</u> . – not just lumping children together under a ‘label’ – (SEN)

#### 12.14.3.2 Subtheme: Following policy and procedure

<p>“The developing person may set in motion processes within their microsystem that have their reverberations in distant quarters” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 237)</p> <p>The identification of SEN is outlined within documents such as the 2015 Code of Practice and the Children and Families Act 2014. Schools are required to follow these rules but may do so in different ways. School approaches are ultimately defined by and are at the discretion of the school leadership team. Respondents have a desire to ensure that schools follow national procedures.</p>	
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Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC1c <i>No one allocated in school – volunteered</i></li> </ul>	My school had no one allocated to this role, so I put myself forward. I felt the schools management of SEN needed to be more organised and up to date with code of practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC5a <i>Learn how to complete the paperwork</i></li> </ul>	I now wanted to make this more official and learn properly how to complete paperwork etc.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP2a <i>Ofsted required it</i></li> </ul>	Ofsted – following our inspection it was an action point to make sure all statutory duties were met, including me being registered for the award.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP2d <i>Make a difference early</i></li> </ul>	lack of early identification. Lack of support and even lack of empathy.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP3f <i>Advocate for children – support allocated</i></li> </ul>	Wanted to ensure the children who required extra support were given it. Advocate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP4d <i>Experience of success in role whilst covering for sick colleague – following procedure</i></li> </ul>	During covering the SENCO role I held reviews and managed to secure statements for two pupils, who required special schools meet their needs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP6d <i>To gain deeper understanding of legal issues (CPD)</i></li> </ul>	it is a legal requirement for all SENCOs within three years of job role. To gain a deeper, wider understanding of the role – its legal requirements, tasks, best practice and SEND provision/interventions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS1a <i>Alarmed at SEN children being excluded (not identified)</i></li> </ul>	An interest in the increasing numbers of pupils being excluded from my local authority with <b>clear</b> SEN but no identification or paperwork.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS1a <i>No SENCO in school</i></li> </ul>	As a deputy of educational provision, I identified we have no SENCO.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS3e <i>Wanting to do the role in accordance with statutory</i></li> </ul>	so I can make sure I'm doing it properly in accordance with the CoP.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS4e <i>Wanted to help colleagues (effective)</i></li> </ul>	Help colleagues do their job more effectively. introduction of EHCP – 230 students with statements needed to coordinate process.

### 12.14.3.3 Subtheme: Working with parents

<p>“The developing person may set in motion processes within their microsystem that have their reverberations in distant quarters” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 237)</p> <p>The identification of SEN is outlined within documents such as the 2015 Code of Practice and the Children and Families Act 2014. Schools are required to follow these rules but may do so in different ways. School approaches are ultimately defined by and are at the discretion of the school leadership team. Respondents have a desire to ensure that schools follow national procedures with a particular focus on working alongside and with parents.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC1b <i>Empathy with families who have ASC – work with</i></li> </ul>	I feel able to empathise with families of children with ASD and find being around and ‘dealing’ with the issues which arise with everyday life, for these individuals quite natural.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC2c <i>Draws from experiences as a care worker worked experiences family frustration</i></li> </ul>	I attended a lot of meetings with families regarding provision and all the areas of need and felt the families frustration at times, when communication wasn't as effective as it should have been. I like to believe, that as a SENCO now, I have experienced what families go through and always try to make communication as clear as possible with families and outside agencies and include them every step of the way, where appropriate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC3a <i>To support parents (in finding strategies for own lives)</i></li> </ul>	To support parents in finding strategies to lead happier, supportive lives
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bc6a <i>Help parents to support their own children</i></li> </ul>	To help parents support the needs of their child
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC7e <i>An internal change of state when helped family</i></li> </ul>	The wonderful feeling you have when you have supported the family as well as the child.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP1f <i>Working with parents and children to improve provision</i></li> </ul>	I would like to work closely with parents to ensure students/families are happy with provision at school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP2c <i>Need for parental confidence</i></li> </ul>	provide parents with a confidence that the role would be maintained and consistent. I felt that I could achieve this.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP3b <i>Communication with parents</i></li> </ul>	Develop community and communication with parents.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP3b <i>Need to help parents with sharing SEN news based on own experience</i></li> </ul>	I think it really helps my parents at school to know I share their frustrations with appointments. It reassures them that someone else's children have medical issues. I knew that using my own experiences, especially the initial shock diagnosis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP3b <i>SENCO as communicator</i></li> </ul>	SENCO job to communicate with parents.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP3e <i>Family support and access</i></li> </ul>	I like to have close links with families and enjoy supporting them to find/ access services that would benefit them and their child.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP4d <i>Supporting parents with diagnosis</i></li> </ul>	Working with the parents to help them find out more about their child's diagnosis was an area of the role I found I enjoyed.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP5b <i>Enjoys working with and liaising with parents (frustrated)</i></li> </ul>	I feel this is where my strength lie and in liaising with parents, particularly when parents frustrations build (which is the key reason I was chosen for role initially).

#### 12.14.3.4 Subtheme: Interagency working

<p>“The developing person may set in motion processes within their microsystem that have their reverberations in distant quarters” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 237)</p> <p>The identification of SEN is outlined within documents such as the 2015 Code of Practice and the Children and Families Act 2014. Schools are required to follow these rules but may do so in different ways. School approaches are ultimately defined by and are at the discretion of the school leadership team. Respondents have a desire to ensure that schools follow national procedures with a particular focus on interagency working.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC2b <i>Leading interventions</i></li> </ul>	I have the opportunity to develop specific interventions with our therapy team so I can ‘magpie’ ideas from others.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC2b <i>Team work and working with external professionals</i></li> </ul>	I enjoy the close team working we have and also developing relationships with external professionals

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bc6a <i>Build relationships (between professionals)</i></li> </ul>	To build effective relationships in order to identify needs of each child.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC6c <i>Working with external agencies</i></li> </ul>	I wanted to develop relationships with external agencies who I already work with.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC7f <i>Work with professionals</i></li> </ul>	I wanted to make a difference, work closely with adults and professionals.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP2e <i>Needing to commission services</i></li> </ul>	I was an advocate for the child and built a network in the area to coordinate and commission services children and their families
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP3f <i>Desire for interagency working</i></li> </ul>	Enjoy working with the agencies involved in the children's care.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP4a <i>Wish to work in a team</i></li> </ul>	I enjoy being part of a collaborative team.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS3b <i>Interest in partnership with other professionals</i></li> </ul>	Working in partnerships - other professionals

## 12.15 Appendix O - Illustrative excerpts from overarching theme: Macrosystem – Influence of national policy and culture

### 12.15.1 Policy and culture of participation

#### 12.15.1.1 Subtheme: Parental participation in decisions

<p>Definition:</p> <p>International accords and national legislation advocate for the participation of families when decisions are made about children and young people. Respondents show evidence of being influenced by these distal accords when they describe why they wish to become SENCOs.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC2c <i>Draws from experiences as a care worker worked experiences family frustration</i></li> </ul>	I attended a lot of meetings with families regarding provision and all the areas of need and felt the families frustration at times, when communication wasn't as effective as it should have been. I like to believe, that as a SENCO now, I have experienced what families go through and always try to make communication as clear as possible with families and outside agencies and include them every step of the way, where appropriate.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4b <i>improve parent partnership</i></li> </ul>	Further develop partnerships in school, particularly with Parents.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1f <i>Working with parents and children to improve provision</i></li> </ul>	I would like to work closely with parents to ensure students/families are happy with provision at school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP3e <i>Family support and access</i></li> </ul>	I like to have close links with families and enjoy supporting them to find/ access services that would benefit them and their child.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS3b <i>Interest in partnership with parents</i></li> </ul>	Working in partnerships - parents

#### 12.15.1.2 Subtheme: Child led participation in decisions

<p>Definition:</p> <p>International accords and national legislation advocate for the participation of children and young people when decisions are made about their future. Respondents show evidence of being influenced by these distal accords when they describe why they wish to become SENCOs.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC2b <i>Give children a voice</i></li> </ul>	To support children with additional needs – give them a ‘voice’
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3b <i>Need to support children</i></li> </ul>	I’d like to think I was motivated by a sense of moral purpose and a desire to help children/ families affected by learning difficulties.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6c <i>Impact on choices for children (with SEN)</i></li> </ul>	I wanted to have more impact on choices for SEN children in our school.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP1c <i>Working with children and families is central</i></li> </ul>	I wanted to help children and their parents as much as possible to understand and feel part of the different process involved.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS3a <i>Advocate pupils (unable to ask for support)</i></li> </ul>	An advocate for pupils/parents – I want to support and guide pupils who are unable to seek support.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS3e <i>Working with young people with barriers</i></li> </ul>	I enjoy working with young people and their parents/carers to figure out what their barriers to learning are and how they can be overcome
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS4d <i>Want to know children – give voice</i></li> </ul>	As a teacher, I value <u>people</u> not paperwork. I felt that a greater impact can be achieved if the SENCo knows the children and families. As a class teacher I couldn't do this. I also wanted to ensure that the provision we make for children in <u>pertinent</u> to the <u>individual</u> . – not just lumping children together under a 'label' – (SEN)

### 12.15.1.3 Subtheme: Full participation of children in school life

<p>Definition:</p> <p>International accords and national legislation advocate that children and young people should be able to participate fully in schools and educational opportunities. Respondents show evidence of being influenced by these distal accords when they describe why they wish to become SENCOs.</p>	
Code	Evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC2a <i>Want to support students in provision</i></li> </ul>	The support that I can give to both staff and children in ensuring best provision is provided.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC4e <i>Children need to like coming to school</i></li> </ul>	I want them to love coming to school, and feel like they are achieving to the <u>best</u> they can.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP1f <i>Inclusion as a wider concept</i></li> </ul>	Inclusion is vital within schools benefiting all students not just SEND – students learn to support each other and accept differences.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP1f <i>Support is more than just standards</i></li> </ul>	I want to ensure students are sporting not only academically but with wider outcomes, this includes transition from primary to secondary and social/emotional outcomes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP3d <i>Experiences for children</i></li> </ul>	hopefully help with coordination of SEND and improve children's school experience.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP4a <i>Driven by own values system</i></li> </ul>	It's important for me in my work to do something meaningful that can have a positive impact on children's and families lives – values driven.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS4a <i>Pupils are entitled to an education</i></li> </ul>	I want to be part of ensuring pupils with SEND receive a full education and are treated equally.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS4b <i>Children don't want to be in school</i></li> </ul>	To make learning fun especially with students who don't really want to be in school.

## 12.15.2 Theme: Policy and culture of school effectiveness

### 12.15.2.1 Subtheme: SENCOs can drive change



<p>Definition:</p> <p>English schools operate within an individualistic culture where school improvement is situated within a school effectiveness framework. Influence is situated at the level of the school and driven by a hierarchy of leadership who have status within the setting. This model for school improvement is defined nationally. Respondents show evidence of being influenced by the distal ideas of the school effectiveness framework when they describe why they wish to become SENCOs. Here respondents draw from this culture by suggesting that by becoming a SENCO, they can drive change to make settings more effective.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC1a <i>SEN reach potential</i></li> </ul>	I feel motivated to try my best to help all students but especially those with parents and personal circumstances that don't provide the support they need in which to thrive and reach their potential in society.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC2c <i>Opportunity to provide effective management</i></li> </ul>	I felt, that as a SENCO, I would have more power in beginning these transitions early and managing them in a more effective way.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC2c <i>Sees SENCO as a place to have power and affect change</i></li> </ul>	As an upper KS2 teacher, I have noticed that transition to high school for children with SEND needs to be completed early and to a high standard.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC2c <i>Thinks the role of SENCO not effectively conceptualised in school (no status)</i></li> </ul>	In the future, I would like to focus mainly on being a SENCO, as at the moment I am teaching full-time. I feel that to do the SENCO role effectively, you need to have time to do it; at the moment, with teaching in years six, it doesn't feel that the SENCO role is seen as a 'vital' element to an effective school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3c <i>Make a difference</i></li> </ul>	Can make a difference where it <u>really matters</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3f <i>Making a difference</i></li> </ul>	I enjoy 'making a difference'
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4a <i>Wanting to make a difference – inclusion as a vision</i></li> </ul>	Highly organised and passionate about making a difference. Current provision very dated and in need of pulling back into the body of the school.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC5a <i>Sees SENCO role as admirable and invaluable</i></li> </ul>	Within the setting I have recently moved to, all the students have special educational needs and the tasks involved built by a SENCO are therefore on a huge scale. I wanted to make myself available to help to do this within a place I see as invaluable and doing necessary and admirable work.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bc6a <i>Make a difference - pupils</i></li> </ul>	To make a difference for pupils with SEN
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1b <i>Wanted the role (welcome) aware of challenge</i></li> </ul>	I welcomed the challenge that role presented
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP3f <i>'make a difference'</i></li> </ul>	Opportunity to make a difference.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP4a <i>Sees self as a rescuer (making a difference)</i></li> </ul>	I like to make a difference to those I'm working with. I think I am a 'rescuer'.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP4b <i>Ability to affect change (make a difference)</i></li> </ul>	I feel I can make a difference
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS3a <i>Make an impact</i></li> </ul>	To make an impact – to really support pupils to access their education.

### 12.15.2.2 Subtheme: *Becoming a senior leader*

<p>Definition:</p> <p>English schools operate within an individualistic culture where school improvement is situated within a school effectiveness framework. Influence is situated at the level of the school and driven by a hierarchy of leadership who have status within the setting. This model for school improvement is defined nationally. Respondents show evidence of being influenced by the distal ideas of the school effectiveness framework when they describe why they wish to become SENCOs. Here respondents draw from this culture by suggesting they wish to enter leadership hierarchies to drive change.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3a <i>Leadership development</i></li> </ul>	To advance my leadership/ learn new skills in coaching
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3b <i>Wants an SLT role</i></li> </ul>	It seemed like a natural progression as I was quite ambitious and wanted a SLT role. It also combined other aspects of my experience such as being a SLE for Literacy/ EAL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4b <i>work across the school – big picture</i></li> </ul>	Opportunity to work on different levels - individual to whole school (big picture)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC5c <i>Leadership progression</i></li> </ul>	Progression to a leadership role – stepping stone.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC5d <i>Leadership skills</i></li> </ul>	Extend my leadership skills.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6e <i>Perceived as a good career move</i></li> </ul>	A good career move to become SENCO as it increased my profile within school and allows me to have a voice on SLT.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1a <i>Senior team membership inclusion needed (impact)</i></li> </ul>	I wanted to be included on SLT in order to have an impact on teaching and learning (see over)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1a <i>Teaching and learning is key – SLT needed</i></li> </ul>	I wanted to be included on SLT in order to have an impact on teaching and learning (see over)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1d <i>Different route to leadership</i></li> </ul>	A different avenue you can take to be part of leadership
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1d <i>Senior team membership inclusion needed (impact)</i></li> </ul>	Being part of SLT - influence and make decisions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP2a <i>Feeling of necessary skill set and on SLT</i></li> </ul>	as a member of the SLT and as someone who had capacity and the necessary skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP3b <i>Career progression - Leadership</i></li> </ul>	Move up professionally to a leadership role.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP3f <i>Desire to become a leader</i></li> </ul>	Leadership opportunity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP6a <i>Leadership team role</i></li> </ul>	To be part of the leadership team in school and therefore contribute to how the school is run.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP6g <i>Leadership role/ career development</i></li> </ul>	To move up the leadership ladder and learn more about strategic vision.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS2b <i>SLT</i></li> </ul>	To become a member of the senior leadership team
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS4c <i>To be on SLT</i></li> </ul>	Initially career progression and opportunity to be on SLT.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS4e <i>SLT BUT desire external agenda (special measures)</i></li> </ul>	Reorganisation of SLT following Ofsted special measures.

### 12.15.2.3 Subtheme: Need for voice and status in school

<p>Definition:</p> <p>English schools operate within an individualistic culture where school improvement is situated within a school effectiveness framework. Influence is situated at the level of the school and driven by a hierarchy of leadership who have status within the setting. This model for school improvement is defined nationally. Respondents show evidence of being influenced by the distal ideas of the school effectiveness framework when they describe why they wish to become SENCOs. Here respondents draw from this culture by suggesting that becoming a SENCO will provide them with sufficient status to be heard across the school.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC2c <i>Opportunity to provide effective management</i></li> </ul>	I felt, that as a SENCO, I would have more power in beginning these transitions early and managing them in a more effective way.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4a <i>Change school processes</i></li> </ul>	I am a strong voice for (CyP) Children and Young People a bit of a perfectionist and want to support and guide and provide the best provision I can in my school. Whilst there is a lot of good things in place it needs a shake up and moving into 2016. There are a lot of things not in place.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6d <i>Advocate for SEN children</i></li> </ul>	I wanted to be an advocate for those pupils in school who need extra support (and sometimes don't get it).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC7b <i>To have professional voice (leadership)</i></li> </ul>	To have a say in what provisions take place for children with SEN.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1a <i>Teachers are unable to affect change because of their level</i></li> </ul>	felt I wasn't able to make an impact in school with the wealth of knowledge I'd obtained. 'Lowly' teachers' opinions didn't seem to count.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1d <i>Desire for agency/ to be listened to/ change practice</i></li> </ul>	Your views are listened to and this can influence change to improve practice.

#### 12.15.2.4 Voice within senior leadership

<p>Definition:</p> <p>English schools operate within an individualistic culture where school improvement is situated within a school effectiveness framework. Influence is situated at the level of the school and driven by a hierarchy of leadership who have status within the setting. This model for school improvement is defined nationally. Respondents show evidence of being influenced by the distal ideas of the school effectiveness framework when they describe why they wish to become SENCOs. Here respondents draw from this culture by suggesting that becoming a SENCO will provide an opportunity to for them have a voice within senior leadership to have impact across the school.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC5d <i>Work with SLT</i></li> </ul>	Work closely with SLT.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6e <i>Perceived as a good career move</i></li> </ul>	A good career move to become SENCO as it increased my profile within school and allows me to have a voice on SLT.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1a <i>Senior team membership inclusion needed (impact)</i></li> </ul>	I wanted to be included on SLT in order to have an impact on teaching and learning (see over)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1d <i>Senior team membership inclusion needed (impact)</i></li> </ul>	Being part of SLT - influence and make decisions.

### 12.15.2.5 Subtheme: Improving provision

<p>Definition:</p> <p>English schools operate within an individualistic culture where school improvement is situated within a school effectiveness framework. Influence is situated at the level of the school and driven by a hierarchy of leadership who have status within the setting. This model for school improvement is defined nationally. Here respondents draw from this distal culture of school improvement by suggesting that becoming a SENCO within a school is a route to changing provision within this school effectiveness framework.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC1c <i>To support teachers to support child</i></li> </ul>	I felt the schools management of SEN needed to be more organised and up to date with code of practice.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3d <i>Ensure good learning opportunities</i></li> </ul>	Ensuring all children (inc SEN) are given good learning opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3d <i>Support for pupils</i></li> </ul>	To provide appropriate support to pupils that find learning difficult.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3d <i>To improve school systems</i></li> </ul>	Developing systems in school to ensure that all pupils needs are met.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4d <i>Children – learning journey/ experience</i></li> </ul>	Ensure all chd. get the best possible experience in their learning journey
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bc6a <i>To change perception of SEN in school</i></li> </ul>	To influence the way SEN viewed within a mainstream school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC6f <i>Use experience to develop role (perceived as neglected)</i></li> </ul>	Challenge – to use skills from previous schools to move area on after years of neglect. Felt that I had skills to help move school on as previous schools moved from satisfactory to good with my area (maths) as a key focus and I could apply some skills to SEND.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC7b <i>Improve provision</i></li> </ul>	I wanted to make sure that all the students SEN were met appropriately.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC7e <i>Desire to change poor provision</i></li> </ul>	Seeing poor provision in other schools and having the urge to change it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1a <i>Senior team membership inclusion needed (impact)</i></li> </ul>	I wanted to be included on SLT in order to have an impact on teaching and learning (see over)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1a <i>Support- teachers seen as poor (practice)</i></li> </ul>	A desire to change what I viewed as poor practice (see over)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1b <i>Improve provision (passionate)</i></li> </ul>	I'm passionate about providing effective provision for children with SEN.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1b <i>Wanted to make improvement</i></li> </ul>	I wanted to make improvements to provision at the school where I worked.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1e <i>Improve provision</i></li> </ul>	to ensure the best provision for the SEN pupils.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1e <i>Provision – quality/ consistent</i></li> </ul>	essential for all children to receive quality, consistent provision
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP2a <i>Interest in SEN both personal and professional</i></li> </ul>	Personal/ professional interest in ensuring all children receive the best quality provision and experience at school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP2a <i>move provision forward</i></li> </ul>	move our SEND provision forward.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP3g <i>Enjoys school development work</i></li> </ul>	SEN provision needed updating – I enjoy exploring and developing processes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP6a <i>Wider school impact</i></li> </ul>	To have an impact on moving our school into outstanding.

### 12.15.3 Policy and culture of inclusive education

#### 12.15.3.1 Subtheme: Equality, equity, and inclusion

<p>Definition:</p> <p>International accords and national legislation advocate inclusive education. Respondents show evidence of being influenced by these distal accords when they describe why they wish to become SENCOs.</p>	
Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC4b <i>equality for children</i></li> </ul>	Opportunities to ensure equality for all children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC4d <i>Awareness of difference in children</i></li> </ul>	Chd. Come in all shapes, sizes, creeds and abilities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BC4e <i>passionate about inclusion</i></li> </ul>	I am passionate about inclusion, and all children feeling confident and achieving at school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP1e <i>Promotes inclusion</i></li> </ul>	I have always had the view that inclusivity was essential for all
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP1f <i>Belief in equality of access</i></li> </ul>	I believe that everyone should have equal access to education.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP1f <i>Inclusion as a wider concept</i></li> </ul>	Inclusion is vital within schools benefiting all students not just SEND – students learn to support each other and accept differences.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP1f <i>Notion of difference</i></li> </ul>	We should promote and celebrate our differences
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP1f <i>Students may be defined as SEND</i></li> </ul>	SEND – students learn to support each other and accept differences.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP2e <i>Equity</i></li> </ul>	My own personal and professional values make me strive for equity and understanding.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP2e <i>Inclusion</i></li> </ul>	I can also share my vision with staff and SLT to create a positive and inclusive environment for all.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP2e <i>Professional values stated (based on experience)</i></li> </ul>	My own personal and professional values make me strive for equity and understanding.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BP2e <i>Wanting to share vision</i></li> </ul>	I can also share my vision with staff and SLT to create a positive and inclusive environment for all.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS2c <i>Improve provision for pupils</i></li> </ul>	To try and give all pupils a good experience at school and to challenge inequality.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS3e <i>Overcome toxicity of the system</i></li> </ul>	I enjoy the challenge of trying to manipulate what is essentially a dehumanising and toxic system into greater flexibility.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BS4a <i>There is a need for equality</i></li> </ul>	I want to be part of ensuring pupils with SEND receive a full education and are treated equally.

#### 12.15.3.2 Subtheme: Quality education and outcomes for all

<p>Definition:</p> <p>International accords and national legislation advocate all children are entitled to a quality education regardless of background or disability. Respondents show evidence of being influenced by these distal accords when they describe why they wish to become SENCOs.</p>
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Example codes	Example evidence
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC1a <i>SEN reach potential</i></li> </ul>	I feel motivated to try my best to help all students but especially those with parents and personal circumstances that don't provide the support they need in which to thrive and reach their potential in society.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC1c <i>Needs of students needed meeting</i></li> </ul>	I wanted to make sure that all the students SEN were met appropriately.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC1c <i>Personal passion – feeling children can achieve</i></li> </ul>	I have a personal passion to help children in SEMH schools, as I feel they have just as much potential as children in mainstream, given the right support.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3d <i>Ensure good learning opportunities</i></li> </ul>	Ensuring all children (inc SEN) are given good learning opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3d <i>Focus on outcomes</i></li> </ul>	Been able to support children to gain the best outcomes they can.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3d <i>To improve school systems</i></li> </ul>	Developing systems in school to ensure that all pupils needs are met.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC3e <i>Enjoyed seeing small steps of progress form SEN child (as opposed to average)</i></li> </ul>	I have always enjoyed seeing the small steps of progress for a SEND child compared to the 'average' progress made by a none SEND child.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4b <i>all children can achieve</i></li> </ul>	I'm an optimistic person – I feel all children can and should achieve
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4b <i>improve children 'outcomes'</i></li> </ul>	Improve outcomes for my children – help all children
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BC4d <i>Children needing to reach potential</i></li> </ul>	I want to be instrumental in ensuring all chd. with special educational needs achieve their potential.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1a <i>Resisting stereotypes</i></li> </ul>	'they're SEN, they won't make progress'. This was one particular PP teacher who was working with pupils in my class who I felt had a lot of potential.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP1f <i>Student futures</i></li> </ul>	I feel that it is important to support these students in their education to hopefully secure better prospects that their futures e.g., working life.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP2a <i>'full potential'</i></li> </ul>	to reach their full potential
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP3b <i>All children learn (belief)</i></li> </ul>	belief that all children can learn.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BP6d <i>Pupil outcomes</i></li> </ul>	To improve outcomes for pupils
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS3b <i>Improve outcomes pupils (additional needs)</i></li> </ul>	Wanted to improve outcomes for those students with additional need.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>BS4e <i>Students reach full potential</i></li> </ul>	I want to support our students to reach their full potential.