Exploring the Role of the Special Educational Needs Organiser

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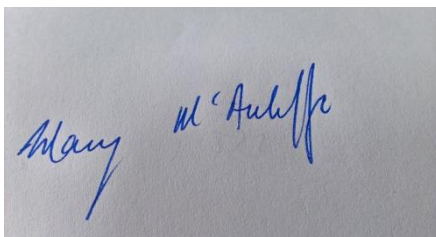**Principal Supervisor: Dr. Órla Ní Bhroin**

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this material which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Education is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not, to the best of my knowledge, break any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: Mary McAuliffe

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Abbreviations

ASD	Autistic Spectrum Disorder
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
GAM	General Allocation Model
HSE	Health Services Executive
IEP	Individual Education Plan
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
LEA	Local Education Authority
NBSS	National Behaviour Support Services
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SENO	Special Educational Needs Organiser
SERC	Report of the Special Education Review Committee
SESS	Special Education Support Services
SET	Special Education Teacher
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
VT	Visiting Teachers

Abstract

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The focus of this exploratory study is the role of the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) which was initiated in the Education for People with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN)(Government of Ireland, 2004). This legislation established the National Council for Special Education (NCSE) to support the significant policy change that sought to transition the educational structures in Ireland from a segregated to an inclusive model of education. The legislation conceptualised the SENO as the Council's local agent in its endeavours. The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions and experiences of the role by SENOs themselves and key stakeholders. The SENO role has received limited research attention to date and this research seeks to fill that gap and produce a significant contribution to an understanding of the position.

An interpretive multi-perspective triangulated study provided an appropriate design to gather participants' perceptions of the SENO role within a real world setting. In depth interviews with 19 participants, review of the relevant legislation, department circulars and NCSE publications along with a brief parental survey of 137 parents all contributed to an informed exploration of the SENO position. The research in the field was conducted between the autumn of 2017 and the summer of 2018. Participants included parents, principals, teachers, other educational and clinical professionals, and those engaged as SENOs.

Data analysis supported the emergence of three main themes: gatekeeper, juggler and facilitator. These themes facilitate a conceptualisation of the role that allows implications for policy and practice to be considered. Such implications can assist in making a contribution to the evolution of the role in the light of recent policy changes to resource allocation for students with special educational needs which significantly impact SENO practice.

Introduction

This study seeks to explore the role of the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) which was initiated in the Education for People with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (Government of Ireland, 2004). This legislation provided the legal framework for the adoption of an inclusive model of education. It conceived the SENO role in the context of facilitating significant policy change that sought to transition the educational structures for learners with special educational needs in Ireland from a segregated to an inclusive model of education. As such, the role is intrinsically linked to supporting the development of inclusive education. The role was established in the context of the successive policy documents and Government sponsored reports such as the Government Green Paper Education for a Changing World (DE, 1992), the Government White Paper Charting our Education Future (DE, 1995) and the Report of the Special Education Review Committee (DE, 1993). Litigation added a very important stimulus to this process: the O'Donoghue Case, 1993 and the Sinnott Case in 2000. Key legislative changes provided the necessary framework to implement change and included the Education Act, (Government of Ireland, 1998), the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) and the Disability Act (Government of Ireland, 2005) which transformed the Irish educational landscape. The role of the SENO is initiated and outlined in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) and it is this position that this study will explore using qualitative data to delve into the perceptions and experiences of a diverse group of participants who have experience of engagement with at least one SENO.

This opening chapter will briefly outline the Irish educational landscape in which the SENO role was conceived and provide relevant contextual information to introduce the role to the reader. It will articulate the research problem and present the rationale for the study and explain its significance. It will briefly indicate the methodology used to explore

participants' perspectives and experience of the role which is the focus of the research question. Finally, it will consider the scope and limitations of the study and outline the various chapters in order to provide the reader with a clear road map of the study.

1.1 The Context surrounding the birth of the SENO role

The role of the SENO, like the inclusive model of education, is a relatively recent arrival to the Irish educational landscape. Segregated settings of educational provision were the "established orthodoxy" (Ní Bhroin, 2017, p. 16) from the foundation of the Irish Free State (Shevlin, Kenny & Loxley, 2008; Ware et al., 2009) up until almost the end of the twentieth century. It was only in the 1990s that changes towards inclusive education began to emerge. A complex matrix of socio-economic factors, international practice and parental demands which sought judicial support (Dorn, Fuchs & Fuchs, 1996; Drudy & Kinsella, 2009; Farrell, 2001; Florian, 2008; Lipsky 2005; Shevlin et al., 2008) resulted in legislative reform such as the Education Act (Government of Ireland, 1998) and the Education for Persons with Special Needs Act (EPSEN), (Government of Ireland, 2004). New structures were required to meet new approaches. It is within this context that the SENO role was created (Government of Ireland, 2004). An outline of the pathway towards this legislative reform is helpful in gaining an understanding as to the how the SENO role emerged.

1.1.1 A pathway towards an inclusive model of education

Educational provision for students with special educational needs in Ireland predates the foundation of the state (Coolahan, 1981). With the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922, the structure of such provision, similar to provision for all students in the state, was adopted with little or no systemic change. Segregation of pupils with special educational needs was the norm both before and after independence and continued so for most of the

twentieth century (Shevlin et al., 2008: Ware et al., 2009). Some exceptions to this pattern did exist among children with sensory impairments whose enrolment occasionally occurred in mainstream settings supported by Visiting Teachers, despite the lack of legislative reform (Mathews, 2017). By 1993, the Department of Education recognised 111 special schools and 192 special classes (DE, 1993). Seventy four percent of special classes identified in this report were in mainstream schools showing evidence of some level of "localised integration" (Ní Bhroin, 2017, p. 14) emerging in the last decade of the twentieth century, driven by local parental demand (McDonnell, 2003). Special schools provided segregated education based on disability and were in the vast majority of cases run by the religious orders. Ireland remained relatively immune to the winds of change in other western education systems which fostered inclusive models of education.

The landmark Supreme Court case in the U.S.A Brown v Board of Education of Topeka in 1954 opened the door to the development of inclusive practice and later the Warnock report, 1978, in England, Scotland and Wales enquired into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People, introduced the term special educational need and provided a major stimulus towards inclusion. Table 1.1 below provides an international chronology of legislative change towards inclusion and demonstrates the lethargic pace with which Ireland embraced such change. Coolahan argues that "harsh economic and social circumstances" and "the social conservatism of the body politic and of the churches at that period" (1981, p.45) explain the conservative nature of Irish education during this period. The insular reality of much of Irish life combined with these conservative forces to limit the influence of progressive educational thinking in other jurisdictions. Ireland's response to inclusive education was "a very cautious, pragmatic one which tried to balance economic considerations with educational principles" (Mac Giolla Phadraig, 2010, p. 289).

1975	USA
1977	Italy
1981	U.K
1991	Iceland
1994	Denmark
1994	Germany
1994	New Zealand
2004	Ireland

Table 1.1 Timeline for International Adoption of Inclusion (Adapted from Ní Bhroin: (2017, p. 15)).

A complex matrix of changing consciousness, socio-economic factors, international policy and practice and parental demands combined to generate currents of change (Dorn, Fuchs & Fuchs, 1996; Drudy & Kinsella, 2009; Farrell, 2001; Florian, 2008; Lipsky, 2005; Shevlin et al., 2008): According to Kinsella & Senior "the impetus towards and the rationale for inclusive education, represents the confluence of several streams of thoughts" (2008, p. 651). Factors such as the Civil Rights movement in the United States highlighted inequalities based on race initially and spread to include issues of gender and later disability (Ainscow, 2005; Farrell, 2001; Florian, 2008; Gallagher, 2014; Lipsky, 2005; Rioux, 2014). The Special Education Review Committee (SERC), (DE, 1993) was a significant milestone which sought to review practice and plot a path to guide the changing patterns towards inclusion emerging at the behest of parents in some local schools. Parents' pursuit through the courts for equal rights of access to education for their children who were presenting with special educational needs proved a major catalyst for change both in Ireland and internationally (Farrell, 2001; Lipsky, 2005). Two key examples of such parental pursuit include the

O'Donoghue case (O'Donoghue v. Minister for Education, 1993) and the Sinnott case

(Sinnott v. Minister of Education, 2000)

1.1.2 An Emerging Response: From SERC to EPSEN.

It was in this milieu that the inspectorate found themselves struggling to respond to

the changing landscape where students with special educational needs were increasingly

enrolling in their local schools and where schools were seeking additional support in order to

meet the needs of these students. Pressures began to build for new structures to be developed

as existing structures struggled to keep a pace with demand. "Initially the responsibility for

processing resource applications was assigned to inspectors. However members quickly

realised the sensitivities involved and lobbied very strenuously through their union to be

relieved of this decision making" (Ní Bhroin, 2017, p.28). The Education for Persons with

Special Educational Needs Act, (EPSEN) (Government of Ireland, 2004), was the legislative

response which established an inclusive model of education as the preferred option for

children with special educational needs.

> The education of people with special education shall, wherever possible, take place in
>
> an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs, to provide that
>
> people with special educational needs can have the same right to avail of and benefit
>
> from appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs, to assist
>
> children with special educational needs to leave school with all the skills necessary to
>
> participate to the level of their capacity in an inclusive way in the social and economic
>
> activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives (Government of
>
> Ireland, 2004, Section 1, p.5).

The Act provided, albeit with significant qualifications, the legislative foundation for

an inclusive model. The conceptualisation of inclusion internationally at this time was

influenced by a "variety of interpretations and applications" (Avramidis, Bayliss & Burden, 2000, p. 158). The issue of Human Rights occupied a central place in the international discourse: "the most pressing issue, faced globally by persons with disabilities, is not their specific disability but rather their lack of equitable access to resources such as education" (United Nations, 2011, p. vii). Access, within the context of a continuum of provision, to support the rights of those with disabilities was an undergirding principle of the EPSEN Act as evidenced in Section 1 above (Government of Ireland, 2004, Section 1, p.5). The Psycho-Model identifies disability as a child centred deficit with an emphasis on "normative assessment, diagnosis, prescription and to the extent possible remediation of those identified as requiring intervention" (Gallagher, 2014, p. 819). This conceptualisation of inclusion is strongly evidenced in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004). Other conceptualisations such as the Social Model which argued "that it is always political, cultural and economic arrangements rather than impairment that excludes (Riddell, 2007, p. 42) had far less impact on the presentation of inclusion evidenced in the Act. Within the understanding of the time in Ireland, key features of the Act were concerned with placement (moving from a segregated to a mainstream location), access to additional teaching supports and clinical assessments/supports to remediate the child's disability. The SENO role was perceived within the context of supporting such an understanding of inclusion (Government of Ireland, 2004, Sections 8 & 9, p. 15).

The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) established the administrative structures to support such a model with the statutory formation of the National Council of Special Education, (NCSE). The Act identified the new role of Special Educational Needs Organiser, (SENO), as the local agent of this organisation: "the Council may appoint such and so many persons as it determines to perform the functions expressed by this Act to be performable by special educational needs organisers" (Government of Ireland, 2004, Section

26(1)). While not clearly evident in the Act, this role was to become the response to the pressures felt and exerted by the inspectorate in the allocation of the additional resources required. A general outline of this study will now provide an introductory sketch of how the research was conducted.

1.2 The Research Problem

The varying interpretations of what inclusion means in an educational setting (Ainscow, 2005; Connor, 2014; Florian, 2008, 2014; Gallagher, 2014; Hegarty, 2001; Hegarty, 2014; Lipsky, 2005; Norwich, 2002, 2007, 2008, 2009; Oliver, 1996; Rioux, 2014) contribute to diverse expectations of what the SENO role involves. The suspension of sections of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) which identified the SENO position as having an important role within the context of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) did not assist the promotion of a broad consensus among those wishing to access the service as to what the role actually entailed. This is further compounded by the limited research exploring the role of the SENO since its conception. The most significant research in that period is a study conducted for the NCSE on parental attitudes to and experiences of local and national special education services (NCSE, 2010). This provided valuable insight into parents' perspectives on their engagement with SENOs. It recommended further research to explore parent SENO engagement over time. While recognising the valuable contribution of this work on parents' views, albeit limited due to the lack of the recommended follow up research, there is very limited evidence of any comparable research among other stakeholders. Given the importance of collaborative practice as a means to promoting the best outcomes for students with special educational needs (Ainscow, 2005; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Kearns, 2005; Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Kugelmas & Ainscow, 2004; Liasidou & Svensson, 2014; NCSE, 2006), there is a need for research engaging a cross section of

perspectives and experiences of the diverse stakeholders with whom SENOs engage. This study proposes to address this gap.

Another aspect of the research problem this study plans to address is the changing face of the SENO role. Resource distribution was not identified in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) as a function of the SENO role but within a very short period of time after the first SENOs were recruited in late 2004 and early 2005, they were appointed to take over the role of resource distribution (DES, 2005a, b & c). The individualised nature of resource allocation for children with more complex needs meant that each application had to be assessed individually to determine if the applicant met criteria as laid down by the DES in the relevant circulars. This process required examination of both the individual application and all the individualised reports relevant to the application. This was a time consuming job (as evidenced by the serious concerns the Inspectorate raised regarding the impact such a process was having on their work (Ní Bhroin, 2017). It also required a level of expertise and experience to assess the clinical reports and determine the outcome of the application. The DES were keen to devolve this onerous task to the NCSE (DES, 2005a, b & c) very soon after the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) came into effect. The SENO, as the local agent of the NCSE with responsibility for performing its functions at local level, was tasked with determining applications for additional resources. This model of resource distribution of additional teaching support continued for 12 years from 2005 up to 2017.

In 2014, the NCSE presented a report to the Minister for Education and Skills recommending changes to the model operational since 2004. Departmental circulars subsequently introduced a new model of allocation (DES, 2017a & b) which changed the individualised method of resource distribution based on individualised applications. In this new model, the DES using an algorithm predicated on a combination of factors, (see Section 3.3.4), established a school profile for every school in the country. Resource distribution of

additional teaching supports was determined by the DES based on this individualised school profile. This meant that the SENO was no longer engaged in resource distribution of additional teaching hours as and from September 2017. At the time of writing, the NCSE advice to the Minister of Education and Skills regarding both the distribution of SNA support and the conceptualisation of the SNA role itself, remains with the Minister (NCSE, 2018). It is unlikely, given this advice and the changed policy trajectory away from individualised allocation adopted by the Department (DES, 2017a & b), that the current model of allocation of SNA support will remain unchanged. Any changes will have further significant impact on current SENO engagement in both the distribution and review of SNA supports for children with complex needs who present, in the school setting, with significant care needs arising from their disability. This study is therefore timely as it aims to explore the SENO role as it currently exists and to identify the positive and negative contributions of the role as noted by SENOs themselves and key stakeholders, thus providing valuable information to assist in shaping new and evolving conceptualisations of the SENO role. It is hoped that such an exploration of the role will maximise its potential as it evolves in the coming years.

1.3 About the Study

In this research, a cross section of perspectives and experiences were sought through an interpretive triangulated study design to obtain relevant data to address the research question. Participants were gathered from those who engage with SENOs on a regular basis either as service users or in their professional capacities. They included parents, principals (from primary, post primary and special schools), teachers (from the primary and post primary sectors), psychologists (educational and clinical), clinicians in the health services, and those working as SENOs. In-depth interviews were conducted with each participant. This cross section of participants yielded diverse perspectives and experiences. Given the

individualised nature of special educational needs (Mitchell, Morton & Hornby, 2010), it is not surprising, and indeed is supported by the literature review, that the perspectives and experiences of participants present common areas of agreement but also very diverse and at times diametrically opposed viewpoints. A small online parental survey supported the gathering of important information to inform the research question.

The research in the field was conducted between the autumn of 2017 and the summer of 2018. The new model of allocation of additional teaching hours was made operational in the autumn of 2017 (DES, 2017a & b). Many of the semi-structured interviews were therefore conducted either prior to or just after the roll out of the new model. This was a period of concern and anxiety for many as they tried to anticipate how the new model would function in reality. Despite this, the data gathered proved rich and informative. All interviews were conducted at a time and location of the participants choosing with a view to supporting participant convenience and allowing due respect for their busy professional and personal lives. Participants were happy to consider the likely changes to the SENO role and to make suggestions in light of the adoption of the new model. A reflective milieu was promoted which provided data that can inform future policy on the SENO role. Due recognition was afforded throughout this research study to ethical concerns and procedures and ethical guidelines approved by the St Patrick's College Research Ethics Committee (subsequently DCU Institute of Education) as detailed in Chapter 4.8.

1.3.1 Rationale for the study and its significance

The gaps in research regarding the SENO role have already been outlined in Section 1.2 above and addressing this gap supports the conduct of the study at this time. The current evolution of the role provides further rationale for this study. This research aims to capture a broad range of perspectives and experiences both of SENOs themselves and of those with whom SENOs engage on a regular basis which has not been previously researched.

I also have a professional interest in seeing the role reach its potential as I am currently working as a SENO in the field and am committed to inclusive education. I believe the SENO role can play a valuable part in promoting such a model. I wish to collate, in this study, various perspectives of the role which can assist its evolution. The rationale for this study is rooted in my professional career in education which more accurately is described in the Scottish conceptualisation of "additional needs" than in the area of special education as understood in this country. The overriding passion of my professional life has been to support access to education for those in society who for various reasons have difficulty accessing appropriate opportunities. Whether as a post primary teacher in the early years of my career in a disadvantaged area, or as a principal of a post primary girls school in Kenya where access to post primary education for girls was available to less than 10% of the relevant population, or working with homeless teenagers in Dublin's inner city, or with children who were on Home Tuition Scheme funded by the DES due to expulsion from post primary schools or due to lack of appropriate placement options for these students, access to appropriate education for all has been a driving principle of my career. Both as a professional and as a parent, I believe that those of us who have been privileged with opportunities to gain access to third level education, have a responsibility to ensure that this privilege is used for the service of others and supports opportunities for them to reach their potential. While third level education is accessed by a high percentage of the relevant student cohort in Ireland, albeit inconsistently across the various socio-economic sectors (Finnegan & Merill, 2015), this can mask the fact that such opportunities are still rare across the world wide educational landscape. Such opportunities must still be recognised as a privilege that brings responsibilities as well as opportunities. This perspective is rooted in my Christian faith which identifies life and the opportunities it unfolds as gifts to be shared for the service of all: "You call me Teacher and Lord and rightly so for that is what I am. If I then your Lord and Master have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an

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example that you should do as I have done for you" (The Bible, New International Version, John, 13:14-15,).

This study is one small contribution to that commitment both professionally and personally. The core significance of this research rests in its ability to capture the varied perspectives and experiences of its diverse range of participants which this study has engaged with. In so doing it has the potential to provide a relatively comprehensive view of the current SENO role and also assist in the evolution of the role in the face of significant policy changes.

1.3.2 The Research Question

In the context of the research problem driving this study and in fulfilling the exploratory purpose of the study, the research question is articulated as follows: How do SENOs and other stakeholders perceive and experience the role of the SENO in the Irish Education system?

The research question hangs on four pillars of enquiry designed to facilitate a wide ranging harvest of participant perspectives:

- Providing a reflective space where participants could consider and relate their personal engagements with SENO and tell their own story.

- Capturing participants' perspectives on SENO practice in the field: a participant led response was designed to support an ease of reflection and an ability to explore in depth certain areas of particular interest to the participant and relevant to the research question.

- Harvesting their stories and perspectives in relation to the positive and negative outcomes in their engagement with SENOs thus facilitating a holistic

exploration of the role and allowing a strong participant voice to be heard n
the final report.

- Gathering participant considerations on whether the role has a future in light
  of their experience and if so what way participants might suggest would best
  support an evolution to maximise any potential in the role the participant had
  referenced.

1.3.3 Research Methodology

An interpretive paradigm within the constructivist tradition using qualitative research was deemed an appropriate method to explore the perceptions and experiences of SENOs and key stakeholders of the SENO role thus fulfilling the purposes of the research and appropriately addressing the research question (Crotty, 1998). This-methodology is in keeping with the researcher's constructivist epistemology which holds the view that meanings and knowledge are socially constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty, 1998). A triangulated study provided the exploratory construct to support the gathering of rich data and inform the research question. Five groups, each consisting of parents, principals, teachers, clinicians/educational professionals (all of whom have had engagement directly with SENOs) and SENO participants enabled "an empirical investigation of a particularly contemporary phenomenon within its real life context" (Robson, 2011, p.136). The selection of in depth interviews as the research instrument of choice was consistent with an interpretive approach seeking to "understand the subjective world of human experience" (Cohen, Mannion & Morrison, 2011, p. 17). It allowed participants the opportunity to relate their own stories and reflect openly on their perceptions of the phenomenon in question and enabled them "to express how they regard situations from their point of view" (Cohen et al., 2011, p.409).

The use of a multi perspective triangulated study supported data triangulation (Denzin, 1988b) to "enhance the rigour of the research" (Robson, 2011, p. 158). This triangulation was further supported by a small online parental survey the primary purpose of which was to access parent participants. Considerable steps, which are well documented in Chapter 4, were taken both in the design and administration of the research to support the emergence of a robust study which readers could have confidence in as a valid and informative piece of research.

Due recognition was afforded throughout this research to ethical concerns and procedures and the ethical guidelines approved by the St Patrick's College Research Ethics Committee (subsequently DCU Institute of Education) were strictly adhered to. Informed written consent supported by a plain language statement explicitly outlining the purposes and procedures of the study (Cohen et al., 2011) and a right to withdraw from the research at any time without explanation (Cohen et al., 2011) supported adherence to these guidelines. Standards of evidence were assured by taping interviews and maintaining a "systematic and careful documentation of all procedures" (Freeman et al., 2007, p. 26). An audit trail "traces the route" (Robson, 2011, p. 157) of the research and demonstrates how interpretations were reached. Manual thematic analysis and coding was supported by NVIVO software to enhance robust data analysis. In keeping with ethical considerations and regard for participant confidentiality, no personal details which might reveal a participant's identity were used (Robson, 2011). Individual coding supported anonymity of responses (Cohen et al., 2011). However given the relatively small community of SENOs, parents, principals, teachers and clinicians, who share valuable experience of engaging with students who present with special educational needs in this country (whose experience is vital to address the research question), it was impossible to guarantee anonymity for participants and this was explained in the plain language statement. Respect for the participants was assured at all times. Ownership of the

data was retained by the researcher in a secure setting and clarified with the participants while obtaining consent prior to the research (Porter & Lacey, 2005).

1.3.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this research is the exploration of participant perspectives and experiences of the SENO role. Given the dearth of research already outlined this study aims to fill an evident gap in the research field and also provide a timely exploration of the role. As already outlined and given the role's current evolution in relevant policies in recent years, it is hoped that this study will also provide some pertinent information for possible changes in the role over the coming years.

The positive and negative impacts of the form of enquiry adopted are explored thoroughly in Chapter 3. Briefly, the benefits of the methodology chosen for this research include an empirical enquiry examined within the context and culture within which it exists. Data gathered in this way are attention provoking and supports the "potential to generate rich subjective data" (Borg & Gall, 1983, p 489). The methodology's attention to "the subtlety and complexity" (Cohen et al, 2000, p. 18) of the SENO phenomenon makes it a particularly attractive choice given the various conceptualisations of an inclusive model of education (Ainscow, 2005; Connor, 2014; Florian, 2008, 2014; Gallagher, 2014; Hegarty, 2001, 2014; Lipsky, 2005; Norwich, 2002, 2007, 2008, 2009; Oliver, 1996; Rioux, 2014) within which the SENO is required to operate.

Limitations with this procedure of enquiry however include its inherent difficulty with drawing wider conclusions (Borg & Gall, 1983) as the small sample size of participants in this study (19 in depth interviews combined with 137 online survey respondents) does not render it available for generalization. Participatory research demands a delicate balance between being "deeply involved and closely connected to the scene" (Lincoln, 2002, p.9) and

the researcher who is currently employed as a SENO was very aware of this throughout both the research in the field and the analytical process. Continual reflection on research stance and engagement were incorporated into the study. Steps taken to acknowledge and address positionality are detailed in 4.7 below. The researcher was conscious of providing "enough distance from the phenomenon to permit recording actions and interpretations relatively free of the researcher's own stake" (Lincoln, 2002, p.9). Given the researchers' professional engagement as a SENO the threat of imposing interpretations or "hearing" what confirms predisposed theories, "how the knower shapes the known" (Freeman, 2007, p.29) was recognised and given continuous consideration. Padgett (1998), provides strategies to deal with such threats as bias and researcher/respondent relationship which may interfere with data accuracy and these were given due significant attention. Careful attention was given to participant selection (see Chapter 4) to limit the possibility of a convenient sample confirming predisposed theories.

1.4 Outline of Remaining Chapters

This chapter seeks to give the reader a useful guide to the scope and purpose of the research and provide a brief outline of how the study was conducted. Chapter 2 provides an in depth analysis of the selection of a conceptual framework with which to scaffold the research and explains the choice of the researcher to use Bolman and Deal's (2008) Four Frame Model. Chapter 3 outlines the search and selection methods used to access this relevant literature and provides a review and critique of this literature with reference to the study's substantive focus. Inclusion, while not the subject of this study, is considered in the literature review given its centrality to the development and intention of the SENO role at the time of its formation. The evolution of the conceptualisation of inclusion is discussed at various points in the study in so far as it impacts the evolution of the SENO role. Chapter 4 provides an in depth guide to the methodology of this study briefly outlined in 1.7 above.

Chapter 5 presents the findings of the study. It allows participants' voices to be captured in a way that provides the reader with something of the diverse experiences and perspectives of the research participants who graciously engaged with this study. Chapter 6 presents a discussion of the findings within the context of the extant literature, with reference to the study's conceptual framework. Finally Chapter 7 sets out the conclusions of the research and makes recommendations based on the analysis of participant contributions in the context of the relevant literature reviewed.

1.5 Summary

In summary, this chapter sets out the context in which the SENO role was birthed and currently exists. It outlines the research problem resulting from the gap in cross sectoral research exploring the role of the SENO, the impact of diverse understandings of inclusion and current changes in policy impacting the role. It provides an overview of the study indicating the diverse backgrounds of participants and timelines in which the field research was completed. It provides a rationale for the work and indicates its anticipated significance. It details the research question and provides an overview of the methodology used. Finally it addresses the scope and limitations of the study and outlines the focus of each chapter.

This research plans to generate an original body of evidence regarding a relatively recent arrival to the Irish educational landscape namely the Special Educational Needs Organiser and make a significant contribution to understanding the expectations, perceptions and understandings of SENOs and key stakeholders regarding the role. I anticipate it will be personally and professionally rewarding and of benefit to SENOs and the NCSE directly and indirectly beneficial for other key stakeholders. It is anticipated to make a contribution to the evolution of the role. Finally the opportunity for personal reflection which this research

offers, will, it is anticipated, enrich my commitment to an inclusive model of education and

my work in supporting parents and teachers in supporting the pursuit of the best educational

opportunities for students with special educational needs.

Chapter 2: A Conceptual Framework

This chapter addresses the selection of a conceptual framework to provide "a structure for organising and supporting ideas (and) a mechanism for systematically arranging abstractions" (Weaver-Hart, 1988, p.11). The five various conceptual frameworks that were considered for this research are examined in this chapter and reasons for the final selection of Bolman and Deal's Four Frame Model (2008) are identified. It is intended that this choice will provide a "map of the territory" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p.33) and assist the reader "make sense of the data" (Bouma, 1993, p.20) in what is a complex field which frequently evidences diverse views and experiences. It will be referenced throughout the research report as it is seen to provide " a scaffold within which strategies for the research design can be determined and fieldwork can be undertaken...and to shape how research conclusions are presented" (Leshem & Trafford, 2007, p. 99).

2.1 The Personal Epistemology within which the Research Resides

Considerable consideration was given to the selection of a conceptual framework that would provide the most useful mechanism capable of facilitating the purpose of the research (Crotty, 1998). I first reviewed my own epistemological viewpoint. The choice of qualitative research seemed a natural choice given the fact that I believe meanings and knowledge are socially constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. This constructivist approach is consistent with Crotty's argument that "different people may construct meaning in different ways even in relation to the same phenomenon" (Crotty, 2003, p. 9). This perspective appears particularly relevant to the research question which seeks to explore how SENOs and key stakeholders construct their different perspectives and experiences of the role. It recognises that "subject and object contribute to the construction of meaning" (Crotty, 2003, p. 9). A research design was sought in keeping with this epistemology that would support the exploration of "a wide array of dimensions of the social

world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants" (Mason, 2002, p. 1). The conceptual framework of choice needed to be capable of facilitating the identification of the complex and frequently emotive issues inhabiting the world of special and inclusive education (Norwich, 2002) within which the SENO is professionally located.

2.2 An Outline of the Five Conceptual Frameworks Considered

The first framework considered was the historical framework which orders policy activities chronologically and can assist in demonstrating which actors have particular influence at different stages. The collective narrative is critical in policy translation and the historical framework allows significant insights into the milieu in which policy change is seeded (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992; Jenkins, 1993). Its logical chronological approach was attractive to the researcher. It can however suggest that policy follows a clear path from initiation to completion. Weaknesses in the linear historical frame emerge therefore in respect of the dynamics of policy change (Jenkins, 1993). Policy design and implementation rarely "take(s) place in such an ordered fashion" (Jenkins, 1993, p.30). Within this context, the historical framework did not appear to the researcher to sufficiently capture the complexity inherent in the SENO role and evidenced in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004). It was unlikely to sufficiently facilitate an exploration of the SENO role as it lacks an "understanding of behaviour and motivation (which) is central to an understanding of policy outcome and impact" (Jenkins, 1993, p 37). It was thus deemed inadequate in addressing the complexities of the research question.

Chalmers, in his analysis of the Civil Rights movement in the United States, argues that it "sought to reach through conscience to consciousness, through consciousness to institutional change, through institutional change to behavioural change and through behaviour to consciousness" (2012, p.xvi). This cyclical framework was considered as a

second option. It is, however, one much less acknowledged in the field of educational

research. This framework benefits from its evolutionary approach as it captures the

interaction of conscience, consciousness, institutional change, and behavioural change. It

offers the possibility of effectively capturing significant factors raised in the literature

regarding inclusive education such as attitudinal change (Ainscow, 1995; Cole, 2005;

Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Paul & Ward, 1996) and addresses the identification of behaviour

and motivation as central to policy outcomes as advocated by Jenkins (1993). However, as a

framework it proved somewhat ephemeral to the researcher. While philosophically

attractive, on examination it appeared that the researcher using this framework would require

an in depth knowledge of psychology to maximise its potential. While having studied at

undergraduate and master's level, this researcher did not consider herself sufficiently adept in

this field to use this framework to its full potential.

The policy triangle proposed by Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) "describes three contexts

within which education policy is formulated and enacted" (Hodgson & Spours, 2006, p. 14).

This framework has the advantage of being previously tested in research to analyse and

evaluate educational policy in England most particularly in relation to the 1988 Education

Reform Act (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992). Potentially it could provide a clear, structured and

very logical approach to the research question of how the role of the SENO is perceived and

experienced by SENOs themselves and by key stakeholders. It gives recognition to the

importance of context in a triangular structure which identifies influence, text and practice as

the three vertices of contextual importance. The examination of the context of influence

provides recognition to both the initiation and construction of policy and to the place where

"interested parties struggle to influence the definition and social purposes of education"

(Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992, p. 19), an issue very relevant to special education and the role of

the SENO.

Bowe, Ball and Gold's model captures the tension often seen between policy and practice referenced in the literature (Cole, 2005; Crowther, Dyson & Millward, 2001; Jenkins, 1993; Lipsky, 1993). They argue that "writers of policy texts suffer from the single change perspective and themselves fail to grasp the complex interdependence of school decision making" (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992, p. 166). This framework acknowledges that "policies are textual interventions but they also carry with them material constraints and possibilities" (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992, p. 20). This conceptualisation of policy implementation seemed to the researcher a particularly appropriate understanding of the constraints and possibilities the SENO role contends with in its day to day reality. The discretion of workers at "the sharp end of resource allocation in a situation where demand far exceeds supply" (Hudson, 1993, p.394) is critical to policy implementation. Lipsky supports such a view and states that " public policy is not best understood as made in legislatures or top floor suites of high-ranking administrators, because in important ways it is actually made in the crowded offices and daily encounters of street-level workers"(1993, p.390). The use of this framework in educational research has had the strong advantage of presenting clarity about the interface between policy and practice: "policy is not simply received and implemented ….rather it is subject to interpretation and then 'recreated'" (Bowe, Ball and Gold, 2012, p. 22). The collation of participants' contributions in this study was seen to have the potential to inform our understanding of how participants perceive the SENOs interpretation and "recreation" of the policies undergirding inclusion.

However the researcher had some reservations as to the framework's flexibility and ability to capture nuance, most particularly attitudinal change. Given the many references to the importance of attitudinal change in the effective promotion of inclusion in the literature (Ainscow, 1995; Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Paul & Ward, 1996) this was felt to be a significant weakness with this particular framework. A further weakness considered with

regard to Bowe, Ball and Gold's framework was its limited ability to capture an evolutionary process. Given recent changes in policy (DES, 13/17 and 14/17) which altered the method of allocation of additional teaching hours, the role of the SENO is currently evolving and the capacity of a framework to capture such evolution was considered important. While these reservations persisted, the researcher saw potential in the attention given to contextual realities in this framework and thus included this as a criterion in the final selection of a framework.

A fourth framework considered was a socio-ecological one developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). It has provided an effective framework in previous educational research (O'Donnell, 2003). It captures an ecological process and the concentric circles of influence from the immediate microsystem which most immediately impacts the subject through to the five different spheres of influence: the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem. In its conceptual presentation, it captures some of the key issues relevant to the research question including direct personal engagement, cultural and structural influences and the importance of context. The introduction of a new species has implications for any ecological system and effects change. The introduction of the SENO, into the Irish educational landscape could be examined within this context. However despite having such strengths to recommend it, I found it difficult to use effectively to address the research question. The central figure of the microsystem in research on inclusion would be the child/student. The teacher and parent would inhabit the mesosystem and the SENO the exosystem. Given that the focus of this research is an exploration of the SENO role through the lens of the perspectives and experiences of SENOs and key stakeholders, a central focus on the child/student seemed inappropriate. The position of the SENO in the exosystem seemed incongruous with the research which was exploring the role as its central point of focus.

The Four-Frame Model developed by Bolman and Deal, (2008) presented in "Reframing Organisations" was the fifth model assessed for suitability as a conceptual framework which would best scaffold an analysis of the research question. Their central argument supports what they term "reframing" as a tool to analyse real life experiences. This offers the opportunity to look at the same phenomena through different lenses: a symbolic frame, a structural frame, a human resource frame and a political frame. This reframing is based on the supposition that "no single story is comprehensive" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p.19) and allows for the integration of different perspectives as no single perspective is going to provide a full account of the research issue (Lewis, 2003). A four frame approach is considered appropriate to best interpret the phenomenon in question as it provides the opportunity for multi-layered analysis. This allows "a palette of options" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 19) with which to paint a comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon in question. It is attractive as it allows the research question to be examined through different lenses, each of which potentially speaks to a particular aspect of the role of the SENO and captures something of the complexity of the interactive forces at work.

The symbolic frame focuses on how we make sense of our world "since life is mysterious, we create symbols to sustain hope and faith. These intangibles then shape our thoughts, emotions and actions" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 252). This constructivist interpretive aspect of the framework is in keeping with the research epistemology chosen for this study and outlined already. The importance of symbols cutting deeply into the human psyche as referenced by Freud (1899) and Jung (1912) are noted by Bolman and Deal (2008) in their explanation of this frame. Given the importance of culture and attitude referenced in the literature on inclusive education (Ainscow, 1995; Cole, 2005; Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Macrae, Maguire & Milbourne, 2003; Paul & Ward, 1996), this analytical tool appeared to have potential to address the research question in focus. Bolman and Deal reference the

importance of stories, ceremonies, metaphor, and humour within the context of this symbolic frame all of which inform both the cultural context and prevailing attitudes. This concurs with the interpretive approach of this study. The metaphor associated with this frame is the theatre and the key components of the attendant skill set are vision and creativity.

The core premise of the structural frame by contrast is that it provides "clear, well understood goals, roles and relationships" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p.46). It dwells in a rational positivist domain. This may be contrary to the constructivist tradition employed in this study but it was considered nonetheless to have potential to illuminate the research question in light of the positivist influences which SENOs have no control over and indeed which emanate from a different organisation such as pre-determined criteria (DES, 2005a & b) to which the SENO must attend in his/her decision making. This framework can enlighten a consideration of legislation, policy statements, guidelines, circulars and strategic statements in relation to the phenomenon in focus. Its associated skill set includes administrative and bureaucratic skills. The metaphor used to describe this frame is the factory.

The human resource frame "highlights the relationship between people and organisations" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 137) and highly values investment in people. Its basic tenets are that organisations exist to serve human needs (and not the reverse), that people and organisations need each other and "investing in people is a key to successful performance" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p.140). In this it shares a key premise of inclusive education that policy and practice should serve the needs of all and not some (Florian, 2014) and that any inclusive model of education demands additional investment if it is to meet the needs of children presenting with special needs (Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan & Shaw, 2000; Cole, 2005; Cowne, 2005; Kisella & Senior, 2008; Tissot, 2013). Its associated skill set include listening, empathy, networking, supporting, nurturing,

communication and relationship building. The metaphor used to describe this frame is the family.

The final lens that Bolman and Deal identify is the political frame. It focuses on the allocation of resources in the context of "scarcity and divergent interests" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p.190). It references power, which it defines as "the ability to make things happen" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 196). It identifies bargaining, forming coalitions, negotiating and conflict resolution, as key components of the required skill set to address issues arising within the context of the phenomenon being examined. In the context of the role of the SENO, all these aspects require attention and this frame is anticipated to illuminate the often contentious matters that can arise in a SENOs day to day practice. The metaphor for organisational activity associated with this frame is the jungle, capturing a very different atmosphere to the previous frame.

This four frame model appeared to have the potential to allow for drilling into the data to learn more about what impacts the perspectives and experiences of SENOs and key stakeholders with regard to the SENO role. The symbolic frame has potential to illuminate the cultural and attitudinal factors at work through participants' stories and experiences. The structural frame has potential to explore the organisational demands SENOs experience, while the human resource and political frames provide considerable scope to illuminate the relationships in which SENOs engage in their day to day reality.

Bolman & Deal recognise that "every structure is forced to re-model at some stage" (2008, p. 87). In the context of the adoption of an inclusive model of education, the Department of Education and Science and subsequently the Department of Education and Skills had to re-model in order to meet the demands for additional resources for students with special educational needs. These resources included additional teaching posts, SNA posts and the processing of applications for assistive technology and transport. The response of the

Inspectorate to the pressures of such demands on their workload resulted in the formation of the SENO post. SENOs were quickly given the administration of these additional resources once the role was established.   In 2017 the system of distribution of additional teaching hours based on individualised applications was changed. A new methodology for a school allocation based on different criteria was introduced (DES, 2017a & b) and administered by the DES. The role of the SENO was forced to re-model in light of this change, given their intensive role in the allocation of such resources prior to this. This framework offers a tool with which to explore changes in the role as perceived by stakeholders and SENOs themselves and their considerations as to how such a re-modelling of the role might assist in maximising the role's potential in the future. The significant change in the model of resource allocation adopted in March 2017 and the re-configuration of the NCSE to include Visiting Teachers, the National Behaviour Support Services (NBSS) and the Special Education Support Services (SESS) demanded that structures "re-model" and this framework appears to support analysis of such re-structuring in respect of its influence on the SENO role.

2.3 Conclusion

On reflective assessment of each of the frameworks outlined above, the four frame model (Fig. 2.1 below) was systemically attractive as it provides different vantage points with which to view the landscape of the research question. Its consistency with the constructivist interpretive approach of this study supports its selection as the conceptual framework of choice for the study. It presents as a framework which can illuminate participants' perspectives and experiences anticipated to emerge in the triangulated study design chosen for this research. The four lenses and the differing perspectives they cultivate, were tested in the early data analysis and were found to provide the "pallet of options" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p.19) proposed by its designers. It was therefore adopted as the conceptual framework

of choice to underpin the exploration of the perceptions and experiences of the SENO role by key stakeholders and SENOs themselves.

Fig. 2.1 Four Frame Model Conceptual Framework

HUMAN RESOURCE "Family"

Listening, networking, communication, relationship building and collaboration.

POLITICAL "Jungle"

Negotiating, conflict resolution, problem

FOUR FRAME MODEL

SYMBOLIC "Theatre"

Creative & Visionary Skills

STRUCTURAL "Factory"

Administrative & bureaucratic skills
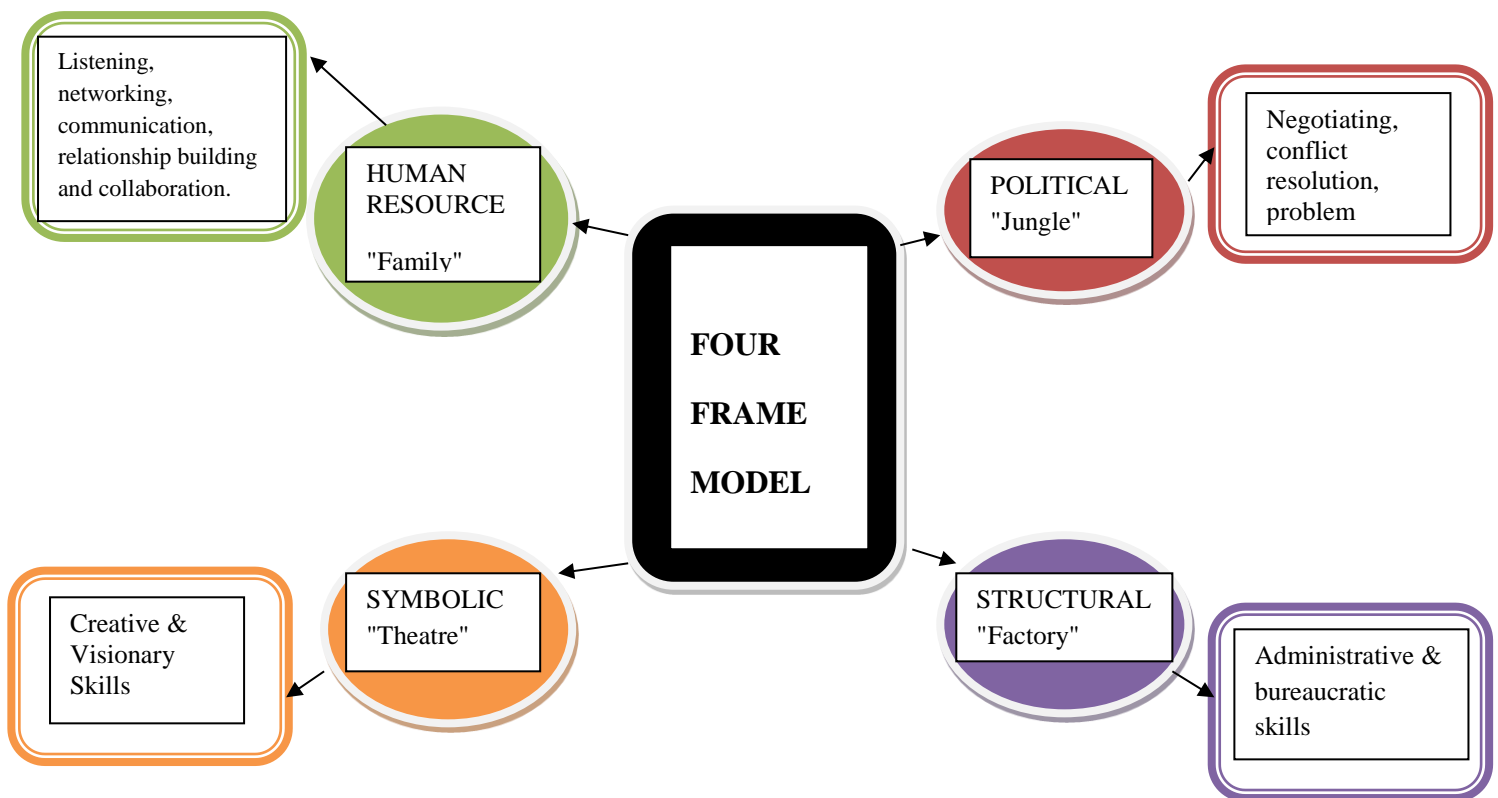
Chapter 3 Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive review of the relevant literature and offer the reader a thorough description of issues arising in the literature relevant to the SENO role (Bryman, 2008). The process of searching and selecting literature relevant for review will be examined initially. This will provide the reader with information as to the breadth of the selection process, books and databases accessed, search terms used and the basis of choice when selecting or discarding material accessed. The subject of inclusion itself with its many and varied interpretations (Ainscow, 2005; Connor, 2014; Florian, 2008, 2014; Gallagher, 2014; Hegarty, 2001, 2014; Lipsky, 2005; Norwich, 2002, 2007, 2008, 2009; Oliver, 1996; Rioux, 2014) will be considered and discussed at various times in this chapter. This is a very broad arena with many varied interpretations but the discussion in this chapter will confine itself to issues emerging in the literature on inclusion which can and do influence the SENO role in its day to day reality.

Factors influencing the development and evolution of the role will then be examined. These include historical, philosophical, political, cultural and social factors which shaped the position. The politics of resource distribution and tensions inherent in both the policy and practice of inclusion will be discussed in respect of their influence on the role's evolution. These reflect the significance of the political lens of the Four Frame Model (Bolman & Deal, 2008) in respect of the SENO role. The establishment of the NCSE and the SENO position will be outlined.

An examination of the relevant legislation, policy documents, guidelines, and circulars issued by the DES and the NCSE will provide details in relation to the role's

specific functions. This will seek to distil the stated and implied functions of the role as outlined in the legislation and relevant documents and review these in the context of current literature. Evidence of the growth in the distribution of resources, administered by SENOs between 2011 and 2017, will be presented and demonstrate structural impacts (Bolman & Deal, 2008) on the functions of the role as it developed over this period. Such an examination will support the emergence of a relevant skill set for the role. These skills include the provision of advice and support which reflect the human resource lens of the Four Frame Model (Bolman & Deal, 2008) and administrative and bureaucratic skills which reside within the structural frame of the model.

The new model of allocation of additional teaching supports introduced in 2017 (DES, 2017a & 2017b) is then discussed in relation to its impact on the SENO role. Having noted the spirit of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) encapsulated in its use of language commensurate with the human resource lens of the Four Frame Model (Bolman & Deal, 2008), particular attention is given to collaborative practice and its relevance to the SENO role. The focus of such collaborative engagement as envisaged in the relevant legislation included the facilitation of cultural and attitudinal changes. The attention given to such change is extensive in the literature on inclusion (Ainscow, 1995; Cole, 2005; Gartner & Lipsky, 1990; Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2014; Paul & Ward, 1996; Tissot, 2012). This function of promoting cultural and attitudinal change resides in the symbolic frame of Bolman & Deal's Four Frame Model (2008). The development of social capital is one way of conceptualising collaboration which appears to have particular resonance for the SENO role and is therefore explored at some length.

The conceptual framework (Bolman & Deal, 2008) adopted for this research and outlined in the previous chapter, will provide "a structure for organising and supporting ideas" (Weaver-Hart, 1988, p. 11) and assist the reader's journey (Miles & Huberman, 1984)

in gaining an understanding of the SENO role.   It will assist in illuminating an extensive
volume of literature pertinent to the research question.

3.1 Search and Selection Process

At the outset of this study, books, ebooks and articles encompassing different
perspectives on inclusion were reviewed to assist in situating the study in its relevant context.
The role of the SENO having been introduced into the Irish educational landscape
contemporaneously with the adoption of inclusion in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland,
2004), meant that any exploration of the role necessitated an awareness that "definitions,
concepts and principles of inclusion are many and varied contributing to multiple
interpretations in practice" (Ní Bhroin, 2017, p. 1). Subsequent to this, online databases were
then explored using three search topics: special educational needs organiser (SENO), special
education needs coordinator (SENCO) and special education needs officer. These databases
included DCU databases ERC, ERIC, JSTOR and SAGE Journals online. Wiley Online
Library, Taylor and Francis Online and Google scholar were also searched. All the databases
listed here were continually searched throughout the lifetime of the study. Relevant articles
and reports were downloaded and saved. Government websites (ncse.ie and education.ie)
were also searched for reports, circulars and other documents that could contribute to the
research.

Comparative contemporary roles in various jurisdictions were identified in the search
and selection process and are summarized in Table 3.1 below. Commonality of functions can
be identified between the SENO and SENCO role (as presented in various jurisdictions) such
as engagement with key SEN personnel in schools, with parents and with multi-disciplinary
meetings. Distribution of resources is a recognised function of both roles with the notable

difference that SENOs are responsible primarily for distribution <u>to</u> schools and SENCOs for distribution <u>in</u> schools. Unlike the SENCO role, the SENO and LEA Officer share limited direct engagement with students. The SENO role does not engage in assessments while the organisation of these is a key function of the LEA Officer.

Engagement	**SENO Ireland**	**SENCO England**	**SENCO Hong Kong**	**Inclusion Coordinators Israel**	**SENCO Belgium**	**SEN Officer New Zealand**	**Classroom Support Officer Australia**	**LEA Officer England**
Engage directly with students	On occasion	X	X	X	X	X	X	On occasion
Engage in/with key SEN personnel in school	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Engage directly with parents	X	X	X	X	X			X
Engage with multi-disciplinary meetings	X	X	X					X
Resource Distribution	X	X	X		X			
Professional qualification	X	X	X	Degree status, not necessary to have professional qualification	X		Diploma or Certificate	
Engage in or organise assessment for individual students		X	X					X

Table 3.1 SENO and comparative international roles

The national and international literature uncovered limited material directly corresponding to the role of the SENO as it is a position somewhat uniquely developed in this country. The majority of results found on the databases listed above dealt with the role of the SENCO. Selection of material of interest gathered was based on an initial elimination of articles which were subject specific such as the SENCO and physical education or mathematics. A review of abstracts in the remaining material facilitated the selection of articles which had potential to inform the research question. Citations within these articles

provided additional direction to access relevant material. The search did provide valuable

material in relation to the role of the Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) which

encompasses similar attributes while at the same time engaging in different foci of operation.

The SENCO is an official post in England and refers to teachers with responsibilities for the

administration of the resources a school receives for students with special educational needs,

for engaging with parents and clinicians and for fostering inclusion in the school setting

(DfES, 2001). The Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) also identifies responsibilities in the areas

of culture and attitudinal change, capacity building and other leadership responsibilities.

While this title is not formalised in Ireland, it is used quite frequently to refer to teachers with

similar functions in schools here. I suggest that it is possible to identify themes from this

literature on the role of the SENCO such as resource distribution, parental engagement,

multi-disciplinary engagement, the promotion of cultural and attitudinal change, all of which

share a commonality with the SENO role as outlined in the relevant legislation (Government

of Ireland, 2004) and Departmental circulars detailed below. In referencing the relevant

legislation, policy documents, guidelines, circulars and strategic statements, it is my

contention that such themes are common to both the SENCO and SENO role and this

research will seek to explore the relevance of such themes in the perceptions and experiences

of SENOs and key stakeholders. The documents accessed on the SENCO role therefore

provided vital literature for this review.

3.2 Factors influencing the development and evolution of the SENO role

The attention of this review will now turn to the factors influencing the development

and evolution of the SENO role. A broad aperture will first reflect on the historical and

philosophical influences that led to the adoption of inclusion in the EPSEN Act (Government

of Ireland, 2004) and resulted in the development of the SENO position. Current political,

social and cultural factors which influenced the development and evolution of the role will

then be considered. The politics of resource distribution and their impact on the role as it

evolved will be discussed, followed by consideration of the inherent tensions in inclusive

practice as recognised in the literature which have impacted SENO practice.   .

3.2.1 Influential historical and philosophical factors

The conceptualisation of the individual unfolded at the time of the Renaissance

(Cassirer, 1963; Lukes, 1971) and provides a bedrock to the development of inclusive

thought.   Inclusion itself is a concept of modernity, a modernity which echoes with the cries

of the French Revolution, cries for equality, liberty and fraternity. The Age of Enlightenment

in the 17th century, with its development of consciousness in such works as "the Rights of

Man" (Paine, 1791) provided the climate within which inclusive practice finds its embryonic

development. Much of the argument for inclusion derives from a rights based perspective

(Rioux, 2014) which demands greater equality. The centrality of the Individual Education

Plan (IEP) in the literature on inclusion, to guide the individualised teaching strategies and

learning targets for students with special educational needs (King, 2006; Mitchell, Morton &

Hornby, 2010; Rose et al., 2012) is testimony as to how important the individualised

approach is in the area of special and inclusive education. The EPSEN Act, (Government of

Ireland, 2004) locates the SENO as central to the facilitation and ongoing review of the IEP.

This aspect of the role will be reviewed in more detail in Section 3.3.1 below.

The influence of the Age of Enlightenment on the embryonic development of

inclusive thought was enhanced in the second half of the twentieth century by the Civil

Rights Movement which developed concepts of the enlightenment (equality, fraternity and

liberty) and influenced cultural and attitudinal changes in society. In the formulation of a

changed consciousness, the power of image and symbolic action was well understood within

the Civil Rights Movement both here and abroad. Martin Luther King's famous speech "I

have a dream" at the Lincoln Memorial in 1963 powerfully captured the demand for those,

previously disenfranchised, to have a voice. Similarly the Civil Rights movement in Derry provided vivid and powerful images of the previously voiceless speaking out. This political climate fostered the empowerment of certain sectors previously silent or with little effective voice. It allowed structures to be questioned in many areas including education. Such symbolic actions enabled parents in Ireland to dream new horizons for their children with special educational needs. The time span of over twenty years (1969-1993) between such civil rights activity and the impact of this on education in the Irish Republic is evidence of the conservative nature of Irish education during this period (Coolahan, 1981). The violence that followed the peaceful pursuit of civil rights in Northern Ireland also stunted the growth of the pursuit of rights in the Irish Republic. The winds of change however were gathering during this period.

The O'Donoghue case (O'Donoghue v. Minister for Education, 1993) and the Sinnott case (Sinnott v. Minister of Education, 2000) were not only practical acts of litigation to secure access to an appropriate education for the children concerned but also became symbolic actions demonstrating the potential of parental voice to demand institutional change. These cases fostered a question in many parents' hearts as to why their child could not be educated locally. They evidence "a decline in the power of professionals, increased parental power, an emphasis on parental choice and increased attention to the voices of children" (Kinsella & Senior, 2008, p. 651). Indeed these cases were very influential in contesting resistance to change within the DES (Coolahan, 1981; O'Donoghue v. Minister for Education, 1993; Sinnott v. Minister of Education, 2000).

3.2.2 Political, cultural and social factors influencing the SENO role

Education and the policies that undergird it, do not exist in a vacuum but rather are crucially impacted by political, social, cultural and spiritual factors in the environment within which it operates (Dorian, Fuchs & Fuchs, 1996; Farrell, 2001; Florian, 2008; Rioux, 2014).

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In respect of the development of inclusive models of education both here in Ireland and internationally, the influence of the political and social context is at least as significant as any pedagogical influence from within education itself. Inclusive education is identified as a means towards equality in society (Dorian, Fuchs & Fuchs, 1996; Florian, 2008), and presented as a matter of rights (Farrell, 2001; Florian, 2008; Rioux, 2014). The importance of culture, attitudes and a changed consciousness is well identified in the literature as critical to inclusive education (Ainscow, 1995; Florian, 2008, 2014; Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Lipsky, 1990; Norwich, 2006). Cultural influences design the way in which a phenomenon is conceptualised and such conceptualisations impact how the phenomenon is delivered in practice (Cline & Frederickson, 2007). Attitudes impact the intangibles that "shape our thoughts, emotions and actions" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 252) and form "the superglue that bonds an organisation, unites people and helps an enterprise accomplish desired ends" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 253). Parental pressure, in the context of a changed consciousness on the rights of the child to an appropriate education, was fundamental to the cultural and attitudinal changes that led to the adoption of inclusion in Ireland (Farrell, 2001) and the formulation of the necessary legislation to effect this change. Within this context, the role of the SENO was conceived as part of the infrastructure required to facilitate the policy change EPSEN (Government of Ireland, 2004) promoted.

3.2.3 The politics of resource distribution

The allocation of additional resources for inclusion proved contentious for the Inspectorate prior to the establishment of the SENO role and the literature would suggest that resourcing continues to present as a source of conflict in many jurisdictions (Armstrong, Kane, O'Sullivan & Kelly, 2010; Cole, 2005; Fong Poon-McBrayer, 2012; Kearns, 2005; Pearson, 2008) and "requires political understanding and negotiating skills" (Kugelmas & Ainscow, 2004, p.140). The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) did not clearly

identify the distributors of resources in the new inclusive model it established, only stating that "The Minister .....shall provide such monies and other resources as are determined by him or her for the purposes of the preparation and implementation of education plans prepared" (Section (13(1)). Thus in the legislation, the responsibility for the provision of resources rests with the Minister. Circulars however clearly situated the distribution of such resources with the NCSE and the SENO became the local agent of allocations. The context of finite resources highlights the political dimension to the SENO role and the requirement for a political skill set commensurate with the political frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The complexity of issues presenting in inclusive education (Kearns, 2005: Norwich, 2013) does not facilitate easy solutions to difficulties emerging along the educational path of a child with special educational needs.

Additional resources are often seen as the solution to difficulties emerging on the ground (Cole, 2005). In this context, conflict can arise between those in receipt of resources and those delivering such resources: "conflict and change are inevitably interlocked as any redistribution of power and privilege will be sought by some and resisted by others" (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992, p.174). Furthermore, delivering an inclusive model of education which requires changes in existing structures (Kinsella & Senior, 2008, McDonnell, 2003) is "rarely political neutral" (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992, p. 174). Neither the EPSEN Act nor the Circulars, refer to such conflict potential but it would be naive to expect that conflict, bargaining and negotiating are alien to the SENO role given the attention these issues generate in the literature. Scarcity of resources is seen as limiting teachers' capacity to respond to the needs presenting (Cole, 2005; Curran, 2019; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017; Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012; Pijl, 2014; Qureshi, 2014; Tissot, 2013). Similarly parents identify the allocation of resources as a source of frustration: "assessment processes and the subsequent allocation of resources appear to have caused parents the most frustration"

(Armstrong, Kane, O'Sullivan & Kelly, 2010, p. 17). A recent report stated that primary and post primary participants in their survey indicated that "the resource application system is efficient in terms of speed of response and decision-making in processing applications and that this process has improved since the establishment of the NCSE and the appointment of SENOs" (Kinsella, Murtagh, Senior & Coleman, 2014, p. 200). However, perceived and actual scarcity of resources combined with "the demands, conflicts and dilemmas of managing special educational needs in mainstream schools" (Kearns, 2005, p. 133), explain why tensions can emerge between the different stakeholders in the implementation of inclusion. The political nature of inclusion is indeed acknowledged in the literature where some see "conflict as inevitable" (Crowther, Dyson & Milwoard, 2001, p.96). Factors contributing to such conflict include a lack of training which can foster a resistance to change (Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012; Skrtic, 1995), a multiplicity of understandings of what constitutes inclusive education (Ainscow, 1995; Dorian, Fuchs & Fuchs, 1996; Florian, 2014; Lipsky, 2005; Norwich, 2008; Runswick-Cole, 2011) and competing policy goals in schools (Crowther, Dyson & Millward, 2001). Political understanding, negotiating skills, bargaining and problem solving (Cole, 2005; Cowne, 2005; Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Liasidou & Svensson, 2014) and "a willingness to struggle" (Kugelmas & Ainscow, 2004, p. 140) are named in the literature as requisite skills to deal with the areas of conflict arising. These issues prompt this study to attend to a political skill set which includes negotiation, bargaining, conflict management and problem solving. This research will explore what evidence emerges from the research participants as to conflict between stakeholders and SENOs and, if so, in what way such conflict presents. Strategies identified by SENOs and/or key stakeholders which are noted as being helpful in dealing with such conflict will be examined and participants' perceptions of SENO capacity to utilise the attendant skill set will be explored.

3.2.4 Tensions inherent in inclusive practice: their influence on the SENO role

Literature on inclusion reference dichotomies in practice such as the standards agenda versus inclusive policy, managerialism versus professionalism versus consumerism (Cole, 2005; Crowther , Dyson & Millward, 2001; Hegarty, 2014; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Liasidou & Svensson, 2014; Norwich, 2002; Robertson, 2012). Given that the discourse on inclusive education inhabits the philosophical genre of modernity and is based on the ideals of the French Revolution of liberty, equality and fraternity with a keen interest in social justice (Burton & Goodman, 2011; Cole, 2005; Liasidou & Svenson, 2014; Morewood, 2012; Takala & Ahl, 2014), it is not surprising that dichotomies exist in practice given the current context of neo-liberal thought frequently referenced in the literature (Cole, 2005; Crowther , Dyson & Millward, 2001; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017; Hegarty, 2014; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Liasidou & Svensson, 2014; Norwich, 2002; Robertson, 2012). Liasidou and Svensson refer to the diverse policies on raising educational standards and inclusion as a "highly contentious and contradictory policy framework" (2014, p. 785). This neo liberal political milieu promotes a standards agenda, managerialism and educational consumerism. Tensions between the standards agenda and inclusive policy along with a significant growth in bureaucracy and a perceived decline of independent professional decision making is extensively referenced in the SENCO literature (Cole, 2005; Crowther, Dyson & Millward, 2001; Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012; Takala & Ahl, 2014; Tissot, 2013). Educational consumerism (Cole, 2005) results in the "undermining of professional roles and identities" (Liasidou & Svenson, 2014, p. 793). This research will seek to explore whether participants see these conflictual realities as significant in their experience of engagement with the SENO role and if so what skill set SENOs evidence to address such realities.

3.2.5 The establishment of the NCSE and the SENO position

Policy changes such as the adoption of inclusion frequently require changes in existing structures if such policies are to be implemented effectively (Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Jenkins 1993; McDonnell, 2003). This section explores the initiation of structures in legislation which influenced the development of the SENO role. The EPSEN Act, (Government of Ireland, 2004) provided that the education of people with special educational needs

> shall, wherever possible, take place in an inclusive environment with those who do not have such needs, to provide that people with special educational needs can have the same right to avail of and benefit from appropriate education as do their peers who do not have such needs, to assist children with special educational needs to leave school with all the skills necessary to participate to the level of their capacity in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives (Government of Ireland, 2004, S.1, p. 5)

This adoption of inclusive education necessitated significant architectural alterations in the educational landscape. The structural alterations established with the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) included both the formation of the National Council of Special Education (NCSE) and the birth of its local agent, the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO). "An unprecedented increase in resource applications to the DES at a volume which proved extremely difficult to process" (Ní Bhroin, 2017, p. 28) resulted from the increased numbers of children with special needs attending main stream schools at the end of the twentieth century and into the early years of the twenty first century. Schools demanded additional resources to meet the needs of these students. The existing structures, most particularly the inspectorate, voiced their inability to meet such administrative/ management demands. Structures to administer and manage such resources had to be

considered in the new legislative framework being developed. Structural design is very

significant in supporting the effective delivery of organisational targets: "clear, well

understood goals, roles and relationships with adequate coordination are essential to

organisational performance" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 46). The EPSEN Act (Government of

Ireland, 2004) is a critical factor influencing the conceptualisation of the role and also

provides significant detail on the functions it envisages the role will fulfil. These functions

will now be considered in detail.

3.3 Functions of the SENO role

A review of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) and relevant circulars

issued by the DES provide insights into the conceptualisation of the role at its origins and its

outworking in practice. The growth in the level of resources also has implications for the role

in practice. From these various perspectives, an emergent skill set for the position can be

identified.

3.3.1 Functions of the SENO role identified in the legislation

Sections (3, 8, 9, 11, 14, 15, 17, 18, 20 and 26) of the EPSEN Act (Government of

Ireland, 2004) outlined the newly created role of the SENO. They presented a

conceptualisation of the SENO as the local agent (Section 8(7), p. 13) of the NCSE attached

to a caseload of particular schools (Section 3(5) & 3(9), p. 8). The functions of the role

outlined in the legislation included engaging with schools, parents and relevant health and

education professionals at a local level and supporting the cultural and attitudinal changes

necessary to effectively promote inclusion. It anticipated SENO involvement in Individual

Education Plans (IEPs) (Section 3(5)(a), p. 8) and gave some attention to the qualifications

relevant to the role.

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The functions of the National Council for Special Education identified in the legislation involve the planning and co-ordination of the provision of education and support services to children with special educational needs. This includes the planning "for the integration of students with special educational needs" with the general student population (Section 20(1)(c), p. 21). The continuum of provision was specifically named and it was identified as a responsibility of the Council to ensure its availability (Section 20(1)(g), p. 21). The monitoring and review of progress for these students was identified as a key function of the Council along with the review of the resources allocated on the basis of the students' diagnosed need. A further important task detailed was to ensure that parents were informed as to their child's entitlements. The fact that the SENO was acknowledged as the local agent of the NCSE (Section (8(7), p. 15) "having responsibility for the area in which the school is situated" meant the SENO was anticipated "to perform the functions expressed by this Act" (Section 26(1), p.26) under "the direction and control of the Council" (Section 26(2), p. 26) at local level. It is worth noting that while the act identifies the review of distributed resources as a function of the Council, the responsibility for the provision of such resources clearly remains with the Minister:

> The Minister and the Minister of Health and Children……shall provide such
> monies and other resources as are determined by him or her for the purposes of the
> preparation and implementation of education plans prepared in respect of children
> with special educational needs (Section (13(1), p.18)

Individual Education Plans (IEPs), which seek to identify learning targets for individual children with SEN (Blackwell & Rosetti, 2014; King, 2006; King, Ní Bhroin & Prunty, 2017; Mitchell, Morton & Hornby, 2010; Rose, Shevlin, O'Raw & Zhao, 2012), were a central focus of EPSEN (Government of Ireland, 2004). In this, the legislation was following international practice. The SENO role was conceptualised (Section 3, p. 8) as

being involved with the school and the parents both in the consultative stage (Section 3(5)(a), p. 8) and in the final formulation of the IEP. The act also conceptualised SENOs as providing advice and assistance to schools (Section 15, p.20), facilitating access to necessary assessments (Section (8(3) and 9(10), p.15) and supporting the implementation of inclusion promoted in the legislation. IEPs were envisaged to demand the convening of multi-disciplinary meetings (Section 8(5), p.15) where SENOs, parents and principals would have access to particular expertise in the areas where more complex needs and difficulties demanded a cross section of expertise. Transition planning for students at critical times of change such as movement into primary or post-primary education or into adult services also envisaged SENO involvement through this IEP process (Section 9(10), p.15; Section 15, p. 20). This focus on individualised supports reflects the conceptualisation of inclusion within the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004)

The credentials and qualifications of the role were not specified stating only that "a special educational needs organiser shall have such qualifications, expertise and experience relevant to the education of children with special educational needs as the Council considers appropriate" (Section 26(3), p. 26). The absence of precise qualifications and duties evident in this quotation provides a structural frame which is somewhat ambiguous. It lacks the clarity of definition desirable "to dictate the optimum social structure" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p.62) but may also provide for a flexibility and diversity in recruitment which may be advantageous. This research will seek to explore how the absence of precise qualifications in the legislation have impacted the establishment and development of the SENO role as perceived by SENOs and key stakeholders. It will explore participant's perceptions of their engagement with SENOs, cognisant of the functions laid out in the legislation such as SENO engagement in the IEP process, review of resources allocated to schools, and their engagement with schools, parents and multi- disciplinary teams at local level.

The challenge of promoting cultural adaptation and attitudinal change is seen in the

literature as often presenting the most significant barrier to inclusive practice (Ainscow, 1995;

Cole, 2005; Gartner & Lipsky, 1990; Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Kugelmass & Ainscow, 2014;

Paul & Ward, 1996; Tissot, 2012). The many differing interpretations of inclusive practice

(Ainscow, 2005; Connor, 2014; Florian, 2008, 2014; Gallagher, 2014; Hegarty, 2001, 2014;

Lipsky, 2005; Norwich, 2002, 2007, 2008, 2009; Oliver, 1996; Rioux, 2014) make this

challenge all the more complex. A significant function of the role of the SENO, as

conceptualised in the EPSEN (Government of Ireland, 2004), was to collaborate with the

principal, parents, boards of management and clinical personnel at local level. Such

collaborative practices provide "the cornerstone for change" (King, 2014, p. 108) and are seen

as necessary to facilitate the cultural and attitudinal changes conducive to delivering inclusion

in the individual school (Government of Ireland, 2004, Section 8, p.13).

Within the English education system, SENCOs are identified as "agents of change"

(Qureshi, 2014, p.218). They are seen as critical to the kind of change management and

capacity building (Cowne, 2005; Qureshi, 2015; Tissot, 2012) that the effective adoption of

inclusion demands (Booth et al., 2000; Kinsella & Senior, 2008). Their strategic influence in

building teaching skills and in developing positive attitudes towards more inclusive practice

are highlighted (Qureshi, 2014; Tissot, 2012) and acknowledged as key components of the

necessary capacity building to deliver inclusive schools (DfEE, 2001; Kinsella & Senior,

2008). The diverse demands of this role include "the day to day management skills of

teaching pupils with special educational needs which might be compared to 'gardening'

whereas the deeper and broader leadership vision for developing inclusive policies, practices

and cultures could be compared to 'landscaping'" (Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012, p.164). Such

leadership has been recognised as crucial "in precipitating and maintaining inclusive

education reforms" (Liasidou & Svensson, 2014, p. 786) and in "identifying and transforming

multiple and diverse forms of exclusion endemic to current schooling" (Liasidou &

Svensson, 2014, p. 786). Such leadership requires an understanding of the challenges and

opportunities that change generates when moving towards a more inclusive model of

education, and the building of effective relationships (Kugelmas & Ainscow, 2004). SENCO

literature acknowledges this leadership role (Cole, 2005; Crowne, 2005; Qureshi, 2014).

The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) incorporates such attributes into the

SENO role and like the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) "firmly shapes the role towards

leadership" (Tissot, 2013, p. 34). In its promotion of SENO engagement with principals,

parents, teachers and clinical professionals to support knowledge sharing, problem solving

and a coherent approach, it envisages SENOs being part of the leadership required to

optimise the potential of the student with special educational needs and enhance the changes

required for an inclusive model of education to be embedded effectively (Kinsella & Senior,

2008; McDonnell, 2003;) in the Irish educational system. Given that "a crucial dimension for

long-term school improvement is sustaining change" (King, 2011, p. 150), this research seeks

to explore what influence SENOs had on the cultural and attitudinal changes required to

implement the envisaged policy change in the perspectives and experiences of SENOs and

key stakeholders. Evidence of creative leadership and visionary skills associated with the

landscape metaphor (Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012) will be attended to in participants'

contributions reflecting the symbolic lens in the conceptual framework (Bolman & Deal,

2008). In capturing the stories, metaphors and images participants contribute, this research

will dig deeper into participants' perceptions of the SENO role and explore participants'

experience of SENOs' contribution to cultural and attitudinal change.

From the early days of the role's inception a structural dilemma emerged which is

critical to understanding the evolution of the SENO Role. The EPSEN Act (Government of

Ireland, 2004) was commenced in 2004, with two provisions of the Act enacted and an

intention that it would roll out in full over a 5 year period (Armstrong, Kane, O.Sullivan & Kelly, 2010). In 2008 its full implementation was deferred indefinitely. This suspension meant that the "clear, well understood goals, roles and relationships" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 46) for the SENO role were seriously compromised. Sections of the act pertaining to the implementation of the IEP were suspended with a view to further consultation. These sections have remained suspended for the fourteen years since the legislation was passed, despite many recommendations for them to be fully implemented (NCSE, 2013b; Rose, Shevlin, Winter & O'Raw , 2010). The SENO role therefore lacked a clarity of purpose subsequent to the suspension of sections of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) the impact of which will be explored in this research.

The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) provides valuable insight into the stated and inferred context within which the SENO is expected to act. Such words as consult, consent, co-operate, convene, teamwork, inform, advise and assist indicate actions expected of the SENO and provide insights into the required skill set. These images of the role are consistent with the human resource lens developed by Bolman and Deal (2008). They suggest the promotion of collaborative practice, as referenced above, between SENOs, principals, parents, health professionals and teachers to best inform and support the optimum educational opportunities for the child with special educational needs. Such collaborative practice is seen as critical to inclusion in the relevant literature: "the culture in an inclusive school is characterized by discussion and collaboration" (Kinsella & Senior, 2008, p.654).

Individualised planning for the students presenting with special educational needs requires such collaboration for the IEP process to be effective (King, 2006; McCausland, 2005; Mitchell, Morton & Hornby, 2010; Rose, Shevlin, Winter, O'Raw & Zhao, 2012). The EPSEN Act outlines the responsibilities of the principal to consult with the SENO and parents in the formation of the IEP. The principal is required to furnish a copy of the IEP to

the parent and the SENO (Section 3(9)(b)) and to report on its progress, having conducted a review of same at least annually. Where the parents request it, the SENO is be consulted on changes in the IEP (Section 9(9)). Where timelines in the IEP process are not being fulfilled, the principal is required to seek SENO engagement (Section 3(9)(b)) presumably to facilitate a review. The SENO is required to convene a team to provide advice in the preparation of the plan (Section 8(3)). Section 8(4)) specifies that this team must include the parents (subject to their consent) (Section 8(6)), the school principal or delegated teacher in the school 8(4)(a) and may also include the child/student, a psychologist (Section 8(4)(b)), or other professionals with qualifications in the relevant fields appropriate to the child's needs as determined by the parents or the SENO (Section 8(4)(c). This team was also to "have regard to any needs other than educational needs of the child concerned" (Section 8(5)).

The convening of such teams obviously envisaged multi-disciplinary meetings where the SENO, parents and principals would have access to particular expertise, such as psychology, occupational therapy or speech and language therapy, depending on the areas of need presenting. Such a facility was seen to have value in informing the development of the IEP in the first place and also being utilised in circumstances where "the goals specified in the plan have not been achieved in the SENO's consideration" (Section 11(3)). In such circumstances the facility for the SENO to reconvene the team, with additional or different expertise if required, was envisaged. All this was anticipated to take place in a spirit of co-operation: "the Board of Management of a school shall cooperate to the greatest extent possible with the Council and its employees" (Section 14 (1(c)). Within such a milieu of co-operation, SENOs were required to provide "all such advice and assistance as is reasonable to the principal and teachers of the school concerned in their performance of functions under this Act" (Section 18(2)).

Such advice and support was also anticipated to extend to parents as SENOs were "to make available to parents of children with special educational needs information in relation to their entitlements and the entitlements of their children" (Section 20(d)). In this respect SENOs were required to inform both schools and parents. The co-operation anticipated between schools and SENOs was also expected to extend between SENOs and health service personnel where effective networking could be fostered "to ensure that the activities of those designated within the Council and those in the health boards/personnel are coordinated and that the respective functions are consistent (Section 17(b))".

In the context of legislation, the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) provides extensive attention to the functions of the SENO role as outlined above. This research will seek to explore if participants perceive and experience these functions being delivered in their engagement with SENOs. While much of the relevant sections of the Act remain suspended, this research will explore whether the spirit, if not the letter, of EPSEN is evident in participants' experience. It will provide insight into the impact of the conceptualisation of the role as envisaged in the legislation on the practice that emerged in the subsequent years.

3.3.2 Circulars that give insight into the functions of the SENO

The translation of policy into practice is complex (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992; Jenkins, 1993; Lipsky, 1993, Ní Bhroin, 2017) as "educational policy is a construct of many factors (*and*) expert teaching is a product of many inputs" (Hegarty, 2014, p. 943). This dilemma of policy and practice is acknowledged in relation to the SENCO role where "there remains a considerable gulf between the ways in which SENCOs operate and the role envisaged by policy-makers" (Crowther et al., 2001, p. 95). The circulars issued by the Department of Education and Skills constitute a form of policy guidance for practice in the Irish education system. They detail how the Department envisages particular sections of policy to operate at

school level. In relation to its policy of inclusion and the role of the SENO a number of key circulars are relevant which will now be examined.

Circulars predating the formation of the NCSE (DES, 1999, 2002(a), 2002(b), 2003) did identify the method of application for two key resources namely the Resource Teacher (DES, 1999, 2002b, 2003) and the Special Needs Assistant (DES, 2002a). The application process became the responsibility of the NCSE shortly after its establishment (DES, 2005a & b), with a SENO providing the local administration for the application, determination and delivery of these resources. These circulars gave initial clarification on the role of the NCSE and the SENO and gave administrative clarity to the legislative directions in EPSEN (Government of Ireland, 2004). The SENO was identified as a "local service" (DES, 2005a). This circular issued shortly after the initial group of SENOs commenced in the NCSE in December, 2004, stated that seventy SENOs were initially employed (DES, 2005a). It provided greater clarity on the qualifications and experience of SENOs than had been outlined in EPSEN stating that all the SENOs recruited "have a qualification and previous work experience in service delivery to children with disabilities" (DES, 2005a). It identified that SENOs were responsible "for co-ordinating and facilitating the delivery of educational services for children with disabilities at local level" and further identified SENOs as "a focal point of contact for parents and schools" (DES, 2005a). Regular and detailed engagement with organisations such as health authorities, the Department, the Inspectorate and NEPS were clearly anticipated functions of the role as well as the processing of applications. The second circular issued by the Department in 2005 introduced the General Allocation Model (DES, 2005b) for primary students with what the Department termed high incidence needs (that is having a high incidence of presentation in the general population). The allocation of this support was retained within the remit of the Department and not transferred to the NCSE. Post Primary students in the same category initially had to make individual applications

through the SENO but in 2011 this too came under a General Allocation Model (DES, 2012) and was dealt with directly by the DES though made available to the school on documentation issued by the local SENO to the school.

Just as the allocation of teaching posts for children with more complex needs moved from the inspectorate and became the remit of the NCSE, administered by the local SENO, so too the responsibility of SNA allocation for children presenting with care needs arising from a disability or medical condition was relocated from the DES/Inspectorate to the NCSE (DES, 2005b). Applications were sent by schools to SENOs who were required to observe the child in the school setting and verify that the care needs identified in the professional reports were occurring in the school setting. They also were given the responsibility of determining the quantum of support that the child was to access. Cline and Frederickson argue that "the frameworks for resourcing provision are likely to have a considerable influence on the actual form that provision takes" (2007, p. 51). Certainly this appears to be the case in relation to the allocation of SNA support. The diverse understandings of what the SNA role (NCSE, 2018) entails has meant it has become one of the most contentious aspects of the SENO role. The allocation was not prescribed as per disability as with resource teaching but was dependant on the needs presenting as determined by the SENO with reference to the clinical professional reports, parental considerations, the school report, and the SENO observation. Other applications for which the SENO gained certain responsibilities were School Transport and Assistive Technology (DES, 2005c, 2013) for individual students with particular special educational needs. The SENO was required to make a recommendation to the DES based on the Department's criteria.

These circulars outlined the basic structural process for applications for additional resources for students with special educational needs and the SENOs role in the decision making process regarding resource distribution. From the birth of the role until 2017 these

responsibilities have seen little variation. Guidelines were issued to Boards of Management and School Principals each year based on these circulars. More recent documents such as the Customer Charter (NCSE, 2013a) re-iterated the role of the SENO to "sanction additional resources" (NCSE, 2013a, p.4). This recognised the 'gatekeeper' role that had emerged since its inception and reflect the structural lens of the Four Frame Model (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The trajectory of the growth in these additional resources with reference to the work and role of SENO will now be examined.

3.3.3 Evidence of growth in the resources allocated, 2011-2017: Implications for the SENO role

Figure 3.1 below illustrates the rate of growth in the allocation of additional teaching posts between 2011 and 2017 which the SENO was engaged in sanctioning. The number of SNA posts allocated in the same period is illustrated in Figure 3.2 below and again demonstrates the rate of growth in the allocation over this six year period. Figures 3.3 and 3.4 demonstrate the number of students accessing SNA and additional teaching hours in the same period.

Low Incidence Teaching Posts Allocated 2011-2017
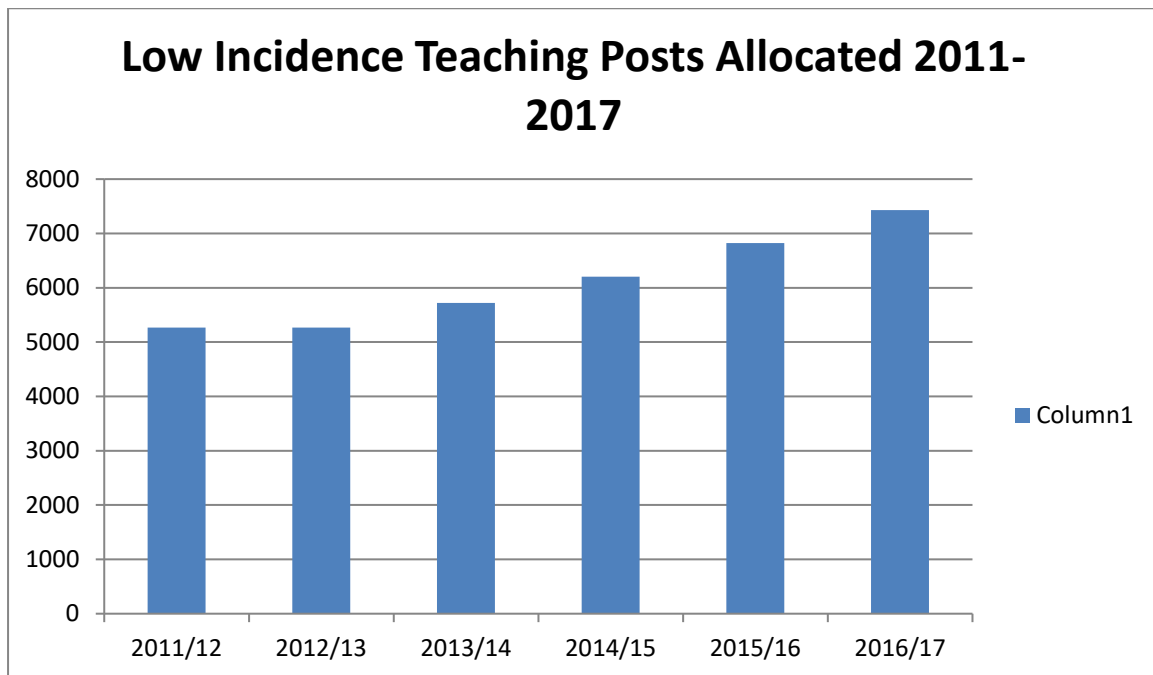
Fig. 3.1: Allocation of Additional Teaching Posts 2011-2017
  (Adapted from NCSE Annual Report 2017)

Number of SNA Posts Allocated 2011-2017
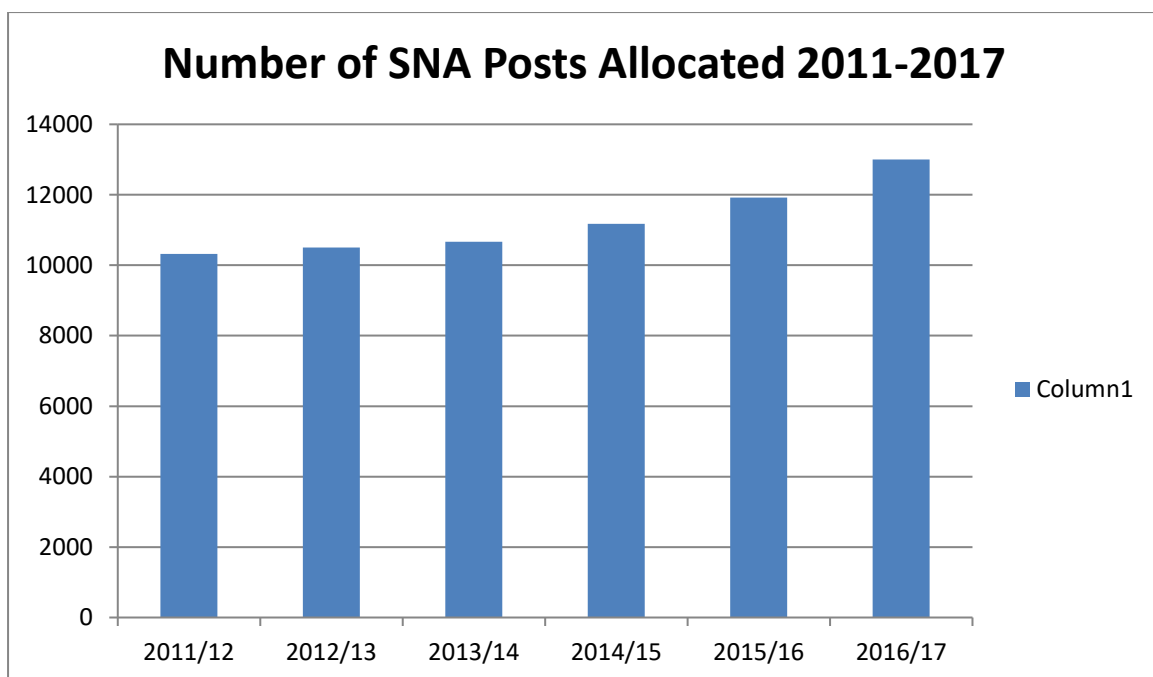
Fig. 3.2: Allocation of SNA Posts 2011-2017
  (Adapted from NCSE Annual Report 2017).

It is worth noting that these tables evidence significant and continual growth in the

level of additional resources being sanctioned by SENOs. During the period 2011-2017 there

was a 26% increase in the number of SNA posts and a 40% increase in the number of teaching posts. The table below evidences why such increases were needed given the growth rate in the number of students qualifying for access to such supports. Each of the posts captured in these figures resulted from applications assessed and determined by SENOs. In order to make a determination on applications received, SENOs are required to engage with schools, parents and clinicians in the pursuit of valid determinations.
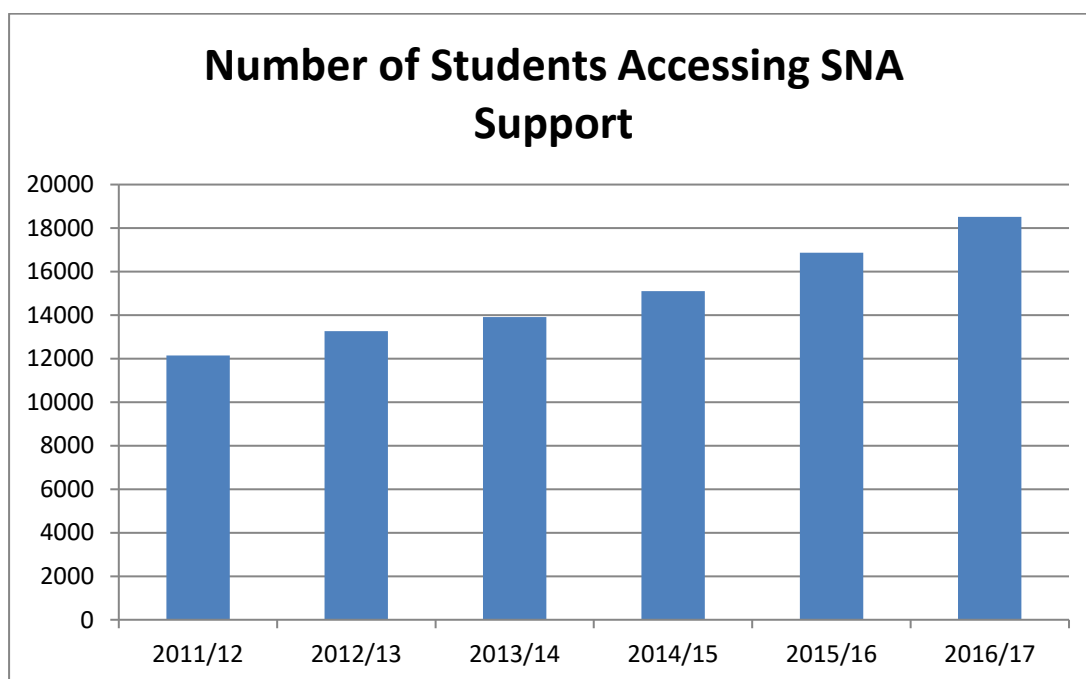
Fig. 3.3: Number of Students Accessing SNA Support, 2011 - 2017.
(Adapted from NCSE Annual Report 2017)

Number of Students Accessing Low Incidence Teaching Hours
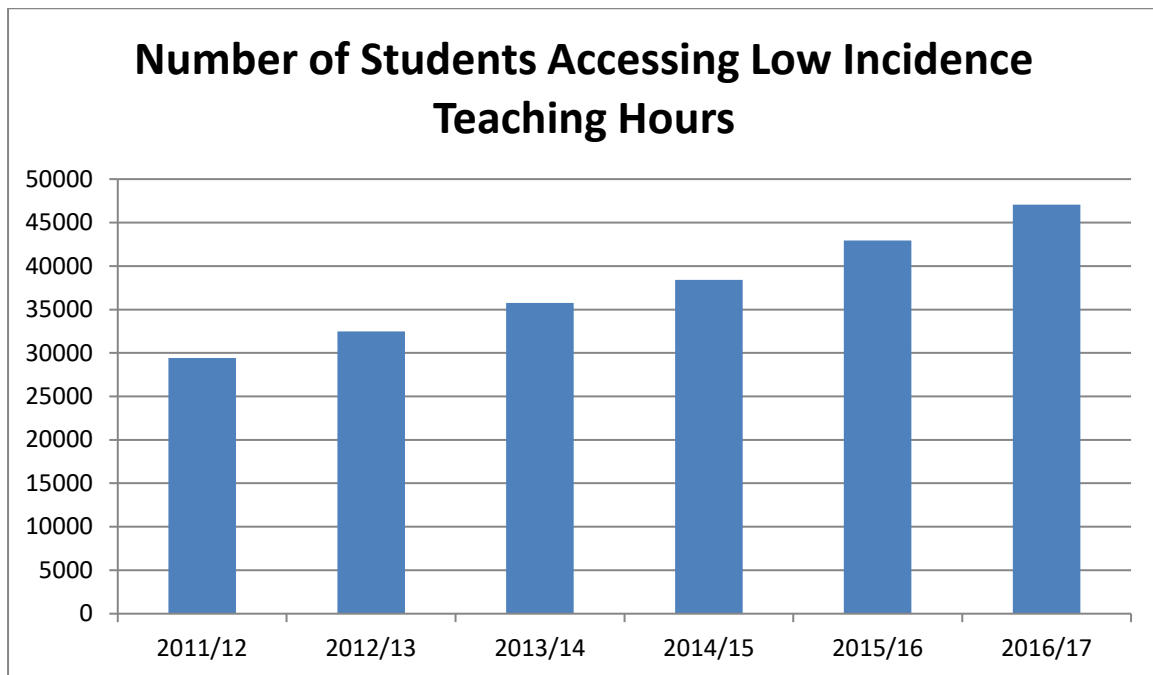
Fig. 3.4: Number of Students Accessing Low Incidence Teaching Support, 2011 - 2017. (Adapted from NCSE Annual Report 2017)

While the increase in SNA posts rose by 26% over the period in question, the number of students in that time accessing SNA support rose by almost twice that, over 50%. More startling is the growth in the number of students accessing Low Incidence Teaching hours which supports the needs of children presenting with the more complex needs. This grew by over 60% in the same period. The table below evidences an even more dramatic rise in the number of special classes which saw a 90% increase between 2011 and 2017. The establishment of special classes requires SENOs to assess and determine local demand, negotiate with the individual schools where demand is evident, (frequently such negotiation requires SENOs to engage in significant persuasion and journeying with schools in order to have positive outcomes to such negotiations), and finally issuing the official sanction letter for the class (Ware et al., 2012; NCSE, 2016).

Number of Special Classes
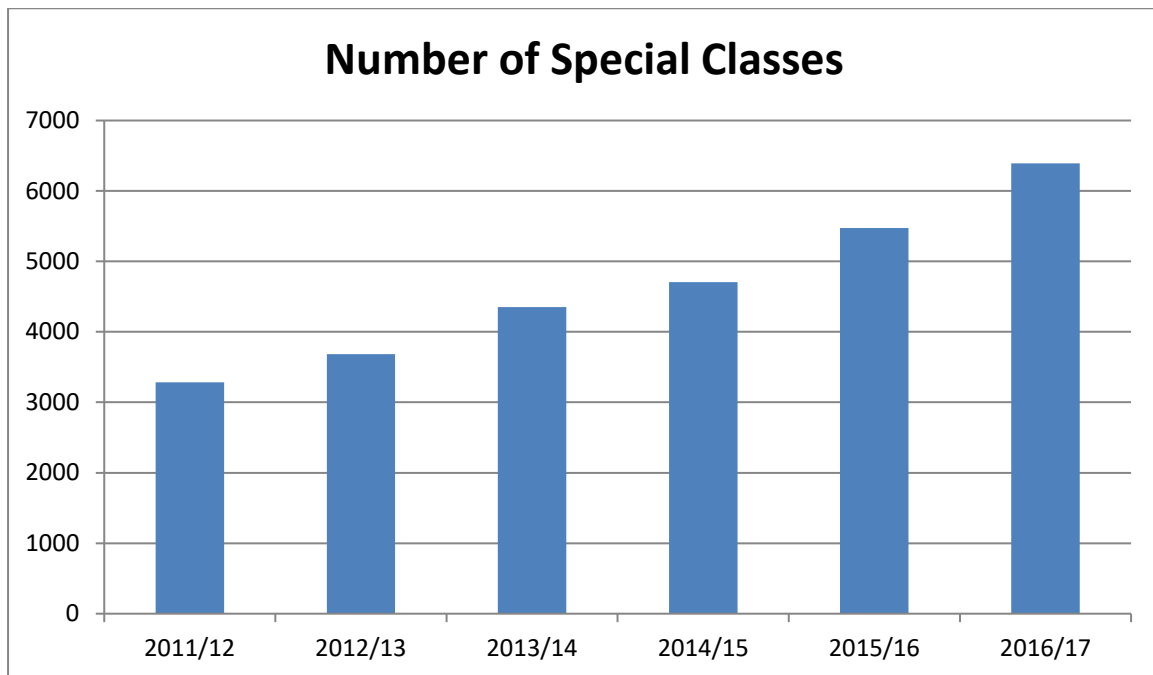
Fig. 3.5: Expansion in Number of Special Classes, 2011-2017. (NCSE Annual Report 2017)

The Implementation Report (NCSE, 2006) reported that 80 SENO posts had been authorised and employed with an anticipated ratio of 1 SENO per 500 students. The projected growth, outlined in the report, recognised that "additional SENO posts would be required" (NCSE, 2006, p.133). Armstrong, Kane, O'Sullivan and Kelly, referenced "a network of 80 SENOs" (2010, p.11) confirming little or no growth in the number of SENOs employed since 2006. In 2011, at the beginning of the allocation period captured above, there were 85 SENO/Snr.SENO posts (NCSE, 2017, Appendix 2). However, at the end of the allocation period there were 78 SENO/Snr.SENO posts (NCSE, 2017, Appendix 2). This equates to a 9.5% decrease in staffing while the level of support rose at the pace outlined above. This research will seek to explore the perceptions and experiences of SENOs and key stakeholders in relation to this decrease in the number of SENOs juxtaposed with the growth in resource distribution as outlined in the tables above.

3.3.4 An emergent skill set

It is possible to conceive an emergent skill set for the SENO position from the functions identified. As stated previously, sections of the EPSEN Act, most specifically in

relation to the IEP, were suspended in 2008 and remain so. However the presence of such

terms as advice, consultation, co-operation, teamwork, assist, and inform in the legislation

indicate an anticipation of relationships being built between SENOs, principals, parents,

teachers and local health personnel. The Customer Charter (NCSE 2013) provides additional

and more recent information on the conceptualisation of the SENO role as it had evolved

since its inception in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004). It sets the overall

context of the NCSE as "person centered" and "family focused" (NCSE, 2013a, p. 3). The

current Customer Charter reaffirms these attributes and expectations of SENOs by the NCSE

(Customer Charter, NCSE 2017). It confirms that the role of the SENO is to "give advice

and support to schools" and strongly re-iterates the local nature of the role which facilitates

the development of effective working relationships with schools, parents and health

personnel. A designated SENO in each school is expected to provide "local, accessible,

personal and timely service" (NCSE, 2013a, p.7) providing a "single point of contact at local

level" for both schools and parents. Such local engagement can facilitate the development of

relationships critical to problem solving (Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012; Pearson, 2008). The

Act, subsequently supported by NCSE documents such as the Customer Charter (2013,

2017), therefore indicate skills commensurate with the human resource frame (Bolman &

Deal, 2008). These include listening, networking, communication, relationship building and

collaboration to support the implementation of the policy change initiated in the EPSEN Act

(Government of Ireland, 2004). Such a skill set imply a leadership role intended to support

the effective delivery of inclusion in practice.

Circulars, in their translation of policy into practice, provided concrete functions

which the SENO role was expected to deliver. Much of their focus was on the process of

resource distribution in line with the criteria laid out by the department. The growth in the

demand for additional resources for students with special educational needs, as outlined

above, combined with the intent of the circulars to develop administrative and bureaucratic functions for the role reflective of the structural frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008). Neither the legislation nor the circulars openly referenced the tensions that could emerge within this process of resource distribution. The skill set appropriate to resolving such tensions, such as negotiation and conflict resolution, which abide comfortably within the political frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008) are at best implied in both the legislation and the circulars. This research will seek to explore the demonstration of the attendant skills as expressed and implied in the documents examined above in the experience of the participants.

3.3.5 A new model of allocation: Its impact on SENO

In 2014 policy advice was formulated and presented to the Minister by the NCSE outlining an alternative structure for the allocation of additional teaching supports for children with special educational needs: "A better and more equitable way, Delivering for Students with Special Educational Needs" (NCSE, 2014). A review of the resource allocation process (Kinsella, Murtagh, Joyce & Coleman, 2014) highlighted weaknesses and inequities in the system in operation since 2005 in relation to its over reliance on a medical conceptualisation of disability based on specific diagnoses and the resulting inequity of access to additional resources in school for students who could not easily access such diagnoses. This perspective reflected developments in the inclusive discourse which were moving away from the concept of individual pathology associated with the medical model which "assumes that the disabled adult or child is deficient but it is hoped alterable" (Runswick Cole, 2008, p.176) towards a social model which defines disability as "the product of specific social and economic structures" (Runswick Cole, 2008, p. 177). This alternative construct "differentiates between impairment as a bodily function and disability as social oppression" (Connor, 2014, p.117). Such a concept of disability places the onus on public

bodies, including schools, to make organisational changes to accommodate difference (Riddell, 2014).

Hermeneutics were also influencing the re-conceptualisation of inclusive practice as the voice of those with disability was gaining access to the discourse (Grandin & Panek, 2013). These various models for understanding disability along with the Difference/Disability Discourse (Norwich, 2008) have been influential in changing attitudes from identifying individual disability (and resourcing accordingly) to a greater acceptance of difference: "Educators need to transcend discussions of diversity as a classroom problem and regard it as a natural, desirable and inevitable occurrence that enriches the educational experience for both teachers and students" (Sapon-Shevin, 2000, p.34). Florian argues for a "shift in focus from differences among learners to learning for all" (2014, p. 15) and that this focus should not be confined to "most and some" but should include "everybody" (2014, p. 17). Alongside the proposed re-conceptualisation of difference, the hermeneutic model provided real insight into the experience of those with particular disabilities for example Temple Grandin and autism (Grandin & Panek, 2013). The advent of their voice fostered the demand of "nothing about us without us" (Charlton, 2000, p.3)

This diversity of understandings presented challenges to the profoundly medical model as outlined in Circulars (DES, 2002(a), 2005(b), 2014) under which SENOs were administering the allocation of additional resources. Significant evidence of uneven and inequitable distribution of resources was a further challenge (NCSE, 2014) and demonstrated an intolerable inequity in the allocation process. This was due to the fact that those who could pay for assessments and provide evidence of a diagnosed disability, in line with the medical model outlined above, were accessing resources significantly quicker than those who had to wait for the public health service to provide assessments (NCSE, 2014). This resulted

in advice being presented to the Minister (NCSE, 2014) suggesting a significant change in the method of distribution of teaching resources to schools.

A new model of allocation of additional teaching resources came into effect in September 2017 and was detailed in Circulars (DES, 2017a & b). These circulars established a new special education support teaching allocation which replaced both the GAM and the individualised allocations for students. The new model of distribution was based on an algorithm informed by a schools cohort of students with complex needs, the STEN scores being forwarded to the Department by schools themselves and the gender and socio-economic profile of the student population. The resulting determination of appropriate teaching resources was made by the DES and granted for a two year period. This new model no longer has any individualised allocation. It is determined by the DES on the basis of the algorithm outlined above without any SENO engagement. A key principle of this new model, outlined in the DES Guidelines "Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools" (DES, 2017) is that "pupils with the greatest level of need should have access to the greatest level of support and whenever possible, these pupils should be supported by teachers with relevant expertise who can provide continuity of support" (DES 2017, p. 5) as determined by the school principal.

Between 2005 and 2017 certain key circulars were significant in providing "clear, well understood goals, roles and relationships" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 46) which informed the role of the SENO both for SENOs themselves and for key stakeholders. A significant divergence is apparent between the role as identified in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) and the subsequent circulars issued by the Department. The circulars outline a major role for the SENO in resource distribution whereas the legislation specified no such role. This evidences disparities between policy and practice frequently referenced in the literature (Hudson, 1993; Lipsky, 1993; Hegarty, 2014) and resonates with challenges

presenting in SENCO practice (Cole, 2005; Cowne, 2005). Since 2017, the SENO role in the determination of additional teaching resources for students with low incidence disabilities has ceased. The impact of this change on the role in the perceptions and experiences of SENOs and key stakeholders cannot be determined within the context of this research as participants' in depth interviews straddled the period before and immediately after the confirmation of the adoption of the new model (DES, 2017a & b). This research will however seek to explore the influences that DES circulars in general have had on the perceptions and experiences of participants and how these circulars have framed and shaped the role to date. It is also hoped that this exploration will inform future policy considerations and practice as the SENO role evolves in light of the current changes.

3.4 The SENO position and Collaborative Practice.

Many of the characteristics of collaborative practice are connected to the formation and review of the IEP process in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004). As stated previously, the suspension of that section of the Act relating to IEPs meant this particular focus around which these human resource characteristics were expected to develop was removed and a valuable opportunity for collaborative practice and multi-disciplinary engagement was jeopardised. Notwithstanding that qualification, this research seeks to explore whether such collaborative characteristics, clearly envisaged in EPSEN (Government of Ireland, 2004) materialised in the perceptions and experience of SENOs and key stakeholders in the day to day outworking of the role. Given the importance of collaborative practice in the literature on inclusive schools (Booth et al., 2002; Kearns, 2005; Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Kugelmas & Ainscow, 2004; Mac Giolla Phadraig, 2010) it is worth examining this subject in more detail. School cultures are identified as critically important in developing inclusive learning environments (Norwich, 2006). Culture shapes the "agreed values and hopes" (Kugelmas &

Ainscow, 2004, p.134) of a learning community, creates a "shared language" (Kugelmas & Ainscow, 2004, p.139) or language of practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992) and is often best represented through image rather than word (Kugelmas & Ainscow, 2004). Cultural characteristics required to foster inclusive education include "collegial decision making…..replacing a top down direction" (Kearns, 2005, p.133) "developing a culture of collaboration" and "a shared commitment" (Kugelmas & Ainscow, 2004, p.140) with a view to creating "a collaborative and democratic learning community" (Liasidou & Svensson, 2014, p. 739). The NCSE Implementation Report 2006, defines collaborative practice as "….an interactive process where a number of people with particular expertise come together as equals to generate an appropriate programme or process or find solutions to problems" (NCSE, 2006, p. xi). Such a process promotes a co-constructed reality that can foster cooperation. Key elements of such practice include "responsibility, accountability, coordination, communication, cooperation, assertiveness, autonomy and mutual trust and respect" (Bridges et al., 2011, p.2).

The benefits acknowledged in the literature when collaborative practice is successfully engaged include building capacity, enhancement of skills required, increased reflexivity, improved problem solving, shared language, risk taking and experimentation encouraged, increase in shared consciousness and better networking practices (Denton, 1998; Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018;). Professional collaboration "boosts student achievement, increases teacher retention and enhances the implementation of innovation and change" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, p.1). Collaborative practice can also help "develop an appreciation for the ways in which differences between individuals provide opportunities for enrichment" (Kugelmas & Ainscow, 2004, p.138). These assets which collaborative practice foster, are critical to the building of inclusive schools (Booth et al., 2000; Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Florian 2014: Florian & Black Hawkins 2011). Different

levels of collaborative practice exist (Bauwens and Hourcade, 1995; Cook & Friend, 2010; Kugelmas & Ainscow, 2004; Lacey, 2001) which can extend from simple liaison, to "deep and sometimes demanding dialogue, candid but constructive feedback and continuous collaborative inquiry" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018, p. 3). This research will seek to explore if evidence emerges of SENO engagement in collaborative practice, at what level participants perceive this practice occurring and also whether the benefits outlined are referenced by participants in their experience of engagement with SENOs.

Factors that can impede the effectiveness of collaborative practice have been identified as: differing goals and agendas, differing attitudes, differing language and previous parental experience both in education and with professionals which has been somewhat negative (Hornby, 2011). Moreover, it has been argued that "trust, rapport and collegiality will be tested where there are ill defined barriers of privacy and status, and lack of resources or time" (Kearns, 2005, p. 133).

Within the Irish context, factors recognised to impede collaborative practices include patchy and uneven access to support services across the country (Day & Prunty, 2010; Travers et al., 2010; Ware et al., 2009) and a traditional chasm between health and education (Rix, Sheehy, Fletcher-Campbell, Crisp & Harper, 2013). Internal capacity in the different agencies must also be considered within the context of an embargo on recruitment and incentives for early retirement in the public sector (Department of Finance, 2011) following the economic collapse of 2007/2008. This reduced the number of experienced professionals available to engage in such collaboration. This was evident in schools and among the SENO cohort itself despite the growing numbers of children (Fig. 3.4 above) attending school who required such collaboration to maximise their potential. Evidence emerging in the perspectives and experiences of SENOs and key stakeholders of barriers and impediments to collaborative practice will be explored in the course of this research.

3.4.1 SENO engagement with Parents

It is worth dwelling on engagement with parents as the importance of such collaboration is well corroborated in the literature on inclusive education (Cox, 2005; Eccles & Harold, 1993; Hegarty, 1993; Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2010) and is further substantiated in the specific literature on the SENCO role (Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Qureshi, 2014, 2015; Vincent & Martin, 2010). It is also identified as an important feature of inclusive schools (Booth et al., 2000; Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Kugelmas & Ainscow, 2004) and is well supported in legislation and the relevant guidelines and publications (Code of Practice, 2001; Desforges & Aboucher, 2003; Government of Ireland, 1998; Government of Ireland, 2004; NCSE, 2006, 2013, 2017). The benefits of such parental involvement in their child's educational journey is noted by Mac Giolla Phadraig: "there is a large degree of consensus among educational researchers that children's academic achievement and general development are beneficially influenced by the extent to which their parents are involved in their education" (2010, p.73).

Despite such a strong case for collaboration with parents, the challenges such collaboration faces, continues to be a source of concern. Vincent & Martin reference "the impermeability of schools to parental voices……despite schools establishing and supporting their respective parents' forum, it was difficult for any controversial parental views to get a hearing" (2010, p. 475). Given the complexities and sensitivities of special education, parental involvement in such cases may indeed appear controversial. "The illusion of voice without a voice itself" (Bachrach & Baratz, 1970, p. 44) presents a dichotomy between rhetoric and reality. In both the legislation and the documentation issued by the DES and the NCSE in relation to the SENO role, the importance of collaboration with parents is clear. It is deemed necessary for informing them of their rights and their children's rights (Government of Ireland, 2004) and in providing the necessary advice and support (NCSE,

2013a, 2017). This research will seek to explore the efficacy of SENO collaboration with parents' from their perspective and give attention to the concerns in the literature regarding a gap between rhetoric and reality. Furthermore, given the identification in the SENCO literature regarding lack of training for such collaboration, (Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012; Liasou & Svenson, 2014), SENO CPD will shortly be explored. However prior to this, it is advantageous to reflect on one conceptualisation of collaborative practice in relation to the expansion of social capital.

3.4.2 The SENO role and the expansion of social capital

The discourse on Human Capital which began in the 1950s has had a very significant influence on policy formation in education. In the 1980s the concept of social capital began to gain traction. Contemporaneously, though in different locations, Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988) were identifying the contribution of social capital. Human capital in education tends to conceptualise the teacher in terms of the "solo practitioner" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 1992) whereas social capital values collaborative endeavour. Human capital refers to the development of teachers' knowledge and skills. Social capital refers to teachers working collaboratively to share other people's human capital including parental knowledge. Each is seen to be interdependent. The benefits of social capital include the expansion of trust and expertise, an incentive for innovation and reform, enabling improvement in teaching and learning, teacher commitment and productivity, improving student attendance and achievement and facilitating opportunities for making tacit knowledge more explicit and therefore more readily available to others (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Spillane, Hopkins & Sweet, 2015). It builds transactive memory which identifies where particular expertise lies in an organisation (Spillane, Hopkins & Sweet, 2015). In the context of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) an image of collaborative practice around the IEP is presented involving the principal, parents, the SENO and also clinical/educational

professionals with specific expertise to inform the IEP. As such it focuses on the

development of social capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) and the creation of teams

(Government of Ireland, 2004, Section 8).   Bourdieu, 1986, one of the great architects of the

concept of social capital, argues that social ties are neither " a natural given" nor "social

given" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 249) but rather must be cultivated if they are to flourish and

maximise their potential. This research will seek to explore if, in the experience of

participants, SENOs cultivate social capital by engaging effectively in collaborative practice.

One warning, relevant to the promotion of collaborative practice, is the possible

emergence of "counterproductive conformity among organizational members" (Spillane,

Hopkins & Sweet, 2015, p. 76). The reality of groupthink within organisations certainly

poses challenges to the benefits for which collaborative practice is lauded. Social capital

operates at both intra-school and inter-school and "external ties are more likely to provide

access to new information, reducing the likelihood of conformity and groupthink" (Spillane,

Hopkins & Sweet, 2015, p. 76). SENOs by their very nature are external to the schools yet

closely linked to them having specific caseloads which predominantly remain the same from

year to year. This research will seek to explore whether, in the perceptions and experiences

of research participants, SENOs contribute to the benefits of social capital as anticipated in

EPSEN (Government of Ireland, 2004). It will also explore whether participants give any

indication of SENOs developing such inter school engagement which limits the development

of conformity and group think.

3. 5 Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and the SENO role

Given the centrality of the provision of advice and support, the distribution of

resources, the promotion of cultural and attitudinal change and the resolution of conflicts

emerging in the SENO role as highlighted in this chapter, the expertise of SENOs to meet the demands of such a diverse skill set will be explored in this study. SENOs come from a variety of backgrounds, for example teaching, disability services, psychology and social work and therefore have the potential to bring a diversity of experience and training. In light of the importance of professional development in a changing and reforming educational landscape (Guskey, 1994; Day et al, 2007), it is important to explore how the diversity of experience among SENOs is both capitalised upon and expanded through CPD. The correlation between educational provision and improved professional practice is well documented: "Every modern proposal to reform, restructure, or transform schools emphasises professional development as a primary vehicle in efforts to bring about needed change" (Guskey, 1994, p.3). As might be anticipated, recommendations regarding CPD are well represented in literature on the SENCO role (Cole, 2005; Liasou & Svenson, 2014; Pearson, 2008). Indeed as part of the evolution of the role in England, the need for CPD was recognised and structures to support and resource such training were included in the more recent edits of the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) and in government legislation, (OPSI, 2009). CPD outcomes include improved individual capability and confidence, improved team capability, the fostering of cultural change in schools (including improved systems and processes), improved engagement with colleagues and parents, increased reflexivity in their practice and improved short term and long term outcomes for pupils (Coldwell & Simkins, 2011; Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012). Liasidou and Svensson (2014) provide an additional viewpoint on the need for CPD in terms of developing a social justice agenda. Given the recognised importance of CPD, this research will seek to explore what perceptions of CPD SENOs have, how key stakeholders perceive SENOs professional development and what access to CPD SENOs have experienced to date.

Facets of the human resource frame including investing in people, teamwork, advocacy, emotional intelligence, relationship building and leadership (Bolman & Deal, 2008) are evident in the activities associated with the SENO role as extrapolated from EPSEN (Government of Ireland, 2004), the Implementation Report (NCSE, 2006) and the Customer Charter (NCSE, 2017). The suspension of sections of the Act relating to IEPs meant that the primary context, in which the skill set associated with the human resource frame was expected to develop, was compromised. It will be interesting for this research to explore SENOs' and key stakeholders' perspectives and experiences of SENO capacity to demonstrate the effective use of the relevant skills required.

3. 6 Summary

In this Literature Review, the process of searching and selecting literature relevant for review was presented for the reader. Factors influencing the development and evolution of the role were then outlined. A review of the relevant legislation, DES circulars and NCSE publications was combined with a review of the literature relevant to the SENO role, from the broad aperture of literature on inclusion to the more focused lens of SENCO literature. This provided a detailed presentation of the functions of the SENO role presented in the various documents examined (EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004); DES 2005, 2013. 2014; NCSE 2006, 2013, 2017) and allowed for the presentation of an emergent skill set for the role. The new model of allocation of additional teaching supports introduced in 2017 (DES, 2017a & b) was also reviewed in relation to its impact on the SENO role. Some disparity between policy and practice emerged consistent with the literature (Brain, Reid & Boyes, 2006; Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992; Jenkins, 1993; Ní Bhroin, 2017). EPSEN (Government of Ireland, 2004) emphasises skill sets appropriate to a human resource frame such as support, advice, listening, communication, relationship building at local level and collaborative

practice while DES circulars stress the allocation of resources demanding a structural skill set dependent on administrative and bureaucratic expertise.

Noting the spirit of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) encapsulated in its use of language commensurate with the human resource lens of the Four Frame Model (Bolman & Deal, 2008), attention was given to collaborative practice and its relevance to the SENO role. Both inclusive and SENCO literature recognise the importance of parental engagement for students with special educational needs. This view is also strongly represented in the documents analysed. Attention was therefore given to this aspect of collaborative practice. One conceptualisation of collaborative practice, the development of social capital, was explored at some length as it appears to have particular resonance for the SENO role.. The attention given to collaborative practice in this literature review is in keeping with the epistemology of the researcher that resides primarily in a constructivist interpretive demesne, believing that meanings and knowledge are socially constructed by human beings. The methodology of this research, emanating from such an approach will now be examined in Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 Methodology

Introduction

An interpretive paradigm within the constructivist tradition using qualitative research was deemed an appropriate approach to explore the perceptions and experiences of SENOs and key stakeholders of the SENO role. A multi-perspective triangulated research design was chosen as a meaningful way to address the research question given its ability to support "an empirical investigation of a particularly contemporary phenomenon within its real life context" (Robson, 2011, p.136). This chapter outlines both the choice and implementation of the research design chosen. The ontological and epistemological perspectives of the researcher are first clarified to explain the milieu within which the research was conducted and the rationale for the research approach used in this study is explained.

The research design is outlined and explained with reference to the research question and the limitations of the selected design are recognised. The choice of stratified purposive sampling of participants is outlined. The strategy of inquiry using semi-structured interviews and a small survey is clarified and the analysis of data then examined in detail. The rationale for the data analysis methodology chosen and the steps this methodology demands are detailed. Procedures used in this research to maximize credibility, dependability and transferability are clearly outlined. Ethical issues arising in this sensitive area of education and which are of paramount importance are discussed. Finally a summary of the chapter succinctly presents key aspects of the methodology to support clarity for the reader as to how the findings in Chapter 5 emerged.

4.1 The Research Approach Selected

In choosing an appropriate research approach considerable thought was given as to which research tradition would provide an effective means of capturing the perceptions and experiences of SENOs themselves and other key stakeholders in order to explore the SENO role. As outlined in Chapter 2, the choice of my conceptual framework was influenced by the fact that, as a researcher, I reside in a constructivist demesne which "emphasises the world of experience as it is lived, felt and undergone by people acting in social situations" (Robson, 2011, p. 24). Within this constructivist tradition, this study adopts an interpretive paradigm the central endeavour of which "is to understand the subjective world of human experience" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 17) thus facilitating a disclosure of the understandings and meanings that individuals attach to the phenomenon of the SENO role.

In keeping with such an epistemological perspective and cognisant of the research question, qualitative research was considered an appropriate choice. Its capacity to valorise the subjective, value peoples' perceptions and afford recognition to the importance of context (Robson, 2011) was considered when selecting it as appropriate for this study. Its ability to "explore a wide array of dimensions of the social world, including the texture and weave of everyday life, the understandings, experiences and imaginings of our research participants" (Mason, 2002, p. 1) renders it an appropriate vehicle to explore the multiple realities of the SENO role in the complex and frequently emotive world of special and inclusive education. Taking the emic perspective, the choice of qualitative research provided an effective avenue to explore participants' understandings of the SENO role.

4.2 The Research Design:

The pursuit of multiple perspectives to support an understanding of the phenomenon in question led the researcher to initially chose a case study design but due to early

complexities emerging in the recruitment of participants (see 4.2.1 below), a triangulated study became the research design of choice. Such a design is consistent with the constructivist tradition previously outlined. This method of empirical inquiry allowed the phenomenon of the SENO be examined within the context and culture within which it exists and supported a "multiplicity of perspectives which are rooted in a specific context" (Lewis, 2003, p. 52). It promoted the "potential to generate rich subjective data" (Borg & Gall, 1983, p. 489) and advance knowledge of the SENO role. Attention to "subtlety and complexity" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 18) was facilitated by such a design thus making it an attractive choice given the various conceptualisations of an inclusive model of education within which the SENO is required to operate (Ainscow, 2005; Connor, 2014; Florian, 2008, 2014; Gallagher, 2014; Hegarty, 2001, 2014; Lipsky, 2005; Norwich, 2002, 2007, 2009; Oliver, 1996; Rioux, 2014).

The triangulated study was anticipated to support a reflective space for participants and provide an effective means to access their experiences of interacting with SENOs and the perceptions of the role that have developed from these interactions. It also allowed for the integration of different perspectives as no single perspective was going to provide a full account of the research issue (Lewis, 2003). The heuristic quality of such a research design was identified as having the potential to uncover new meaning thus facilitating a generative purpose for the study. In allowing "complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 2536) to be captured, the ~~ease~~ triangulated study was identified as having the potential to produce new ideas to contribute to the development or refinement of policy thus providing a "step to action" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 256). This potential to inform future educational policy-making (Merriam, 1998) was seen as relevant given the likely changes required in the SENO role following policy changes in

resource allocation (DES, 2017a & b). The limited research in the field as previously detailed in Chapter 1, made this an important benefit to be considered in the design of the research.

4.2.1 Development of the Research Design

Initially multiple case studies (Maxwell, 1996) were selected as an effective means of gathering rich data to inform the research question exploring the perceptions and experiences of SENOs and key stakeholders of the SENO role. However the necessity for "constant review of decisions and approaches" (Lewis, 2003, p. 47) proved necessary as the study unfolded. The initial design included five case studies predominantly organised around the various school settings that SENOs work with: Primary, Post primary and Special schools. Consideration was also given to such factors as a rural/ urban mix, schools with special classes or without and those with DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools) status. It was determined that four of the five case studies would be bounded by the school settings and include the SENO in whose caseload the school was situated, the principal of the school, a teacher, a parent and a student from the school community A fifth case study was to include clinical and educational professionals who engage directly with SENOs but are not part of a school community: psychologists, occupational/speech and language therapists and educational professionals.

In the early stages of recruiting principals, reservations were expressed concerning the research design. School principal participants were concerned about how such engagement might adversely impact a school's allocation of resources and how anonymity for principals could be effectively maintained given the small educational professional community in this country. While the delicate relationship between SENOS and principals had been considered when drafting the original design, it had not been anticipated that it would prove quite such an obstacle to participation. However it is also true that this emerging problem demonstrated sensitivities in the field that proved a valuable caution to the researcher. It exposed the

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broader reality of sensitivities in special and inclusive education well documented in the literature (Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Kugelmas & Ainscow, 2004; MacGiolla Phadraig, 2010; Norwich, 2009) as a very real issue for the role of the SENO. Reflecting on the challenges emerging in the field during the very early stages of the research, it was evident that further consideration would have to be given to the choice of case studies as the research design of choice as it proved no longer tenable within the bounded nature of such a design (Cohen et al., 2011). However the pursuit of multiple perspectives to support an understanding of the phenomenon in question remained a key target of the research. These factors combined to result in the revised choice of a triangulated study design.

A further issue that presented at the pilot stage was in relation to student participation. One pilot participant queried how student voice might be accessed and more importantly whether students would have had sufficient exposure to the SENO role to have an understanding that might enlighten the research question. It was argued that due to the discretion required by SENOs during school visits, to protect student anonymity in the allocation of resources, students generally would be unaware of the role. Attention to student voice is considered very important by the researcher who concurs strongly with the view that "young people have unique perspectives on learning, teaching and schooling; that their insights warrant not only attention but also the responses of adults; and that they should be afforded opportunities to actively shape their education" (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 1). However discussions with potential participants led to a consensus among prospective parent and teacher participants that students would frequently be unaware of SENO involvement in their individual cases even if they were aware that the SENO was visiting the school. As such, student potential to provide rich data on the SENO role was constrained due to their limited experience of engaging with SENOs. The evolving design chose not to include student participants in the research as a result.

4.2.2 A Triangulated Study Design
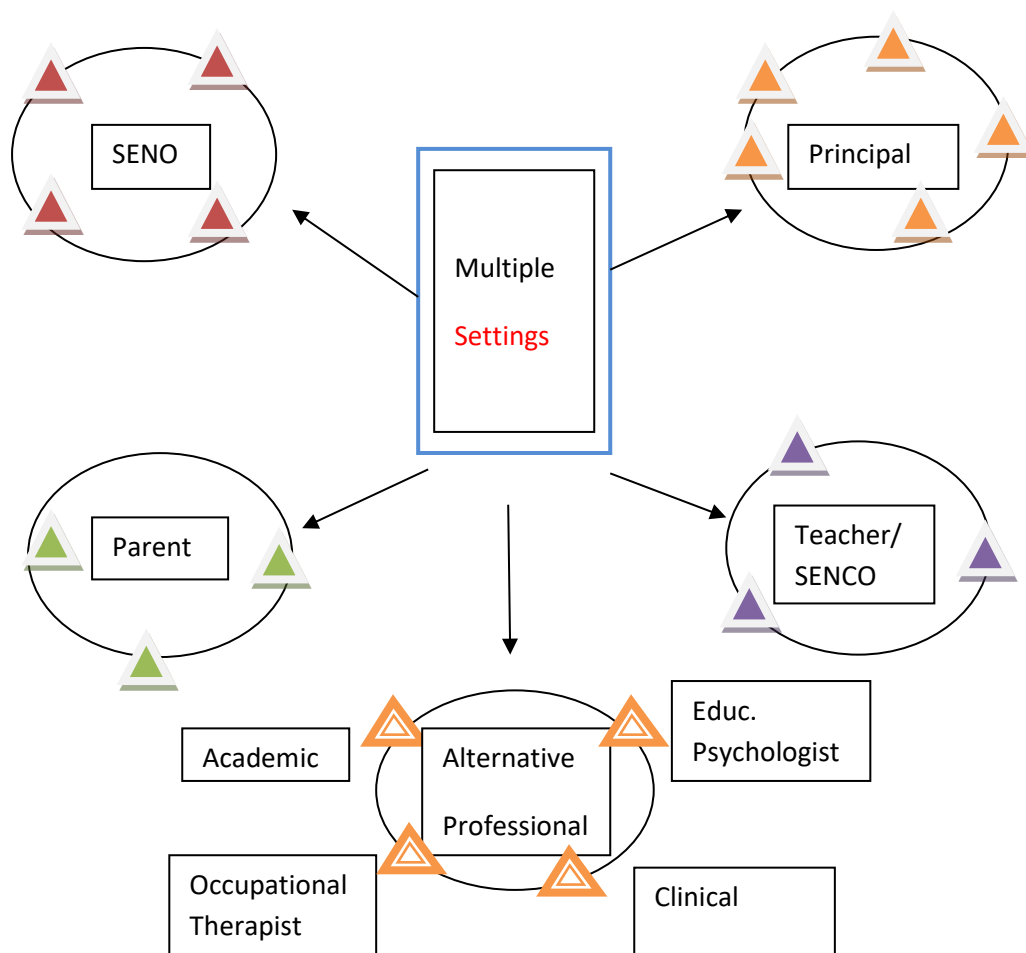
Fig. 4.1 Triangulated Study Design

Each set in the triangulated study was defined by participant function (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995) giving rise to five sets: SENO, principal, teacher, parent, other relevant professionals (clinicians or educational professionals who engaged with SENOs regularly and/or have particular knowledge of the role). There were nineteen participants in total: four SENOs, five principals, three teachers, three parents and four other relevant professionals (one principal who had worked as a teacher/SENCO for many years was made a principal between the time of agreement to engage and the actual interview). (See Fig.4.1).

4.3 The Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted prior to the commencement of the research study to explore the feasibility of the proposed research design and the methods of data collection (Robson, 2011). One teacher and one principal, each with very considerable experience of engagement with multiple SENOs, were forwarded an invitation (Appendix 1) to participate along with a Plain Language Statement indicating the purpose of the study (Appendix 2) and an Informed Consent Form (Appendix 3). Both participants expressed a willingness to engage in the pilot study and individual interviews were arranged at a time and place of their choice. These interviews and their subsequent analysis allowed the researcher have confidence that the revised research design was sufficiently robust to capture strong data with which to address the research question. Some changes were required to the topic guide, the ordering of questions on the interview schedule and the elimination of dichotomies in the interview questions before the study proceeded.

4.4 Participant Selection

As is common in small scale qualitative research where the focus is on an in-depth study, non-probability sampling (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 1998) was employed in this study to select research participants that would "best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question" (Creswell, 2013, p.189). A cross section of participants, each of whom had experience of engaging extensively with SENOs, supported the gathering of diverse perspectives. Participants were chosen because they could "enable detailed exploration and understanding" (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003, p. 78) of the research topic as experienced by participants. Five sampling frames for each of the varied functions of

participants were formed facilitating "a multiplicity of perspectives" (Lewis, 2003, p.52) as is appropriate in a triangulated study.

The first sampling frame consisted of SENOs and was constructed using the NCSE website which provides information on all SENOs operating around the country. Phone and email contact details are available on the website. This allowed categorisation by geographic location with due regard to demographic spread within the Republic of Ireland. The four categories consisted of SENOs in Dublin, Leinster, Munster and Connacht/Ulster respectively. Research randomizer was used to determine 25% of SENOs in each area (5 SENOs). Letters of invitation were sent outlining the purpose and nature of the research. The response rate from SENOs was very encouraging: 47%. Given the high response rate in Leinster (80%) compared to the considerably lower response rate in Munster (40%) (based perhaps on the researcher's own location in Leinster) and the demands on time and travel to conduct interviews, it was determined to opt for two SENOs from the Leinster region rather than one from Leinster and Munster respectively. Purposive sampling was used to select four SENOs from the cohort of positive responses. The criteria for selection sought to include a diversity of SENO experience based on their caseload type (rural/urban predominance), gender and years of experience in the role which was determined by a brief questionnaire accompanying the initial letter of invitation. As all SENO caseloads include primary, post primary and special schools, it was not necessary to consider these particular strata for SENO selection. On selection of four SENOs in this manner, a more formal letter of invitation (Appendix 1) was then issued accompanied by the Plain Language Statement (Appendix 2) and the Informed Consent Form (Appendix 3). All four SENOs responded positively to the invitation.

The second sampling frame consisted of school principals. Purposive sampling was used to select principal participants and aimed to capture data from the diverse strata of

schools SENOs operate in: Primary (with and without special classes)/Post Primary (with and without special schools) /Special Schools/DEIS schools/rural and urban schools. Given the correlation between special needs and socio-economic profile as recognised both in the literature (Banks, Shevlin, McCoy, 2012) and in the algorithm determining the allocation of additional teaching resources to schools adopted by the Department of Education and Skills (DES 2017a & b), it seemed appropriate that three of the five principals selected would work within DEIS schools (with at least one at primary and one at post primary level). Schools in these areas were identified through the use of various websites (DES, ETB, Diocesan, Educate Together) and principal contact details across the country ascertained. Similar to the criteria used for the purposive selection of SENOs but notably also including school type (primary, post primary and special schools), purposive sampling initially selected five principals based on location and professional knowledge. Letters of invitation (Appendix 1) accompanied by Plain Language Statements (Appendix 2) and Informed Consent Forms (Appendix 3) were sent to them. Invitations were followed after a number of days with phone calls which provided any clarifications principals required and which also sought to establish a sense of trust and confidentiality given the difficulties exposed in this area in the early design structure. Three principals responded positively. Two more principals were selected from the sample and the same procedures were followed with them. Both of them agreed to engage in the research. The profile of the five principals agreeing to engage is captured in Table 4.1 below:

The third sampling frame comprised teachers (both primary and post primary) who were working as SENCOs and thus had considerable experience of engaging with SENOs. Purposive sampling for this frame was facilitated by the researcher's personal and professional engagement over many years in the field of special education along with attendance at many relevant courses. This provided an expansive network of contacts. It also

facilitated a "process of reference from one person to the next" (Denscombe, 2003, p. 17), a form of snowball sampling which facilitated access to participants. Teachers thus identified were sent initial letters of invitation. Positive indications to engage with the research study were then followed by a more in depth letter of invitation (Appendix 1) which was accompanied by a Plain Language Statement (Appendix 2) and Informed Consent Form (Appendix 3). Three teachers were thus identified (two from the post primary sector and one from the primary sector) and individual semi-structured interviews conducted at a time and place of their choosing.

The fourth sampling frame consisted of educational and clinical professionals not situated in a school setting with many years of experience of engagement with SENOs. As with teacher participant identification, purposive sampling was used to identify possible participants for this study from among those who had been suggested to me by other participants in the research. This set comprised one educational/ and one clinical psychologist, an occupational therapist and an academic professional in the field of special education. All participants in this case had experience in the field since the role of the SENO was first launched. The psychologists and occupational therapist engaged regularly with SENOs over the intervening fourteen years and included engagement with SENOs in multi-disciplinary settings. This provided the researcher with confidence that these participants would provide a detailed exploration of the role from their individual perspectives.

SENO Participants			
ID	**Caseload Perspective**	**Location**	**Gender**	
S1	Suburban	Leinster	F	
S2	City	Leinster	F	
S3	Large Town	Leinster	M	
S4	Rural	Connacht	F	

Principal Participants				
	School Type		**School type**	**DEIS status**
Pr1	Primary	Rural Town: Leinster	With Special class	DEIS Status
Pr2	Post Primary	Leinster	No special classes	
Pr3	Primary	Regional Town : Connacht / Ulster	With special class	DEIS Status
Pr4	Post Primary	Large City School: Dublin	With special classes	DEIS Status
Pr5	Special School	Leinster		

Teacher Participants				
	School Type	**School Location**	**School type**	**DEIS Status**
T1	Primary	Leinster - outside Dublin	No special classes	
T2	Post Primary	Leinster - outside Dublin	No special classes	DEIS Status
T3	Post Primary	Dublin	With special classes	DEIS Status

Parent Participants				
	School Setting experienced	**Location**	**Gender**	**Approximate no. of years engaging with SENO**
Pa1	Primary/ Special School	Connacht	F	8
Pa2	Primary	Leinster	F	1-2
Pa3	Primary, Special School & Adult Services	Leinster	F	Since SENO role began

Clinical/Educational Professional Participants				
	Clinical/ Educational Participant	**Location**	**Gender**	**Approximate no. of years engaging with SENO**
CE1	Ed. Psychologist	Leinster	F	Since SENO role began
CE2	Academic	Leinster	M	Since SENO role began
CE3	OT / SLT	Leinster	F	Since SENO role began
CE4	Clinical Psychologist	Leinster	M	Since SENO role began

Table 4.1 Participant Profile

The fifth sampling frame comprised parents. Access to parents was supported by a short survey with an invitation for parental participation posted on the websites of 9 different parent support groups. These groups captured a broad spectrum of special needs including, visual and hearing impairment, Down syndrome, physical disability, autism, acquired brain injury and intellectual disability. The survey sought to capture parental views on their engagement with SENOs. One hundred and thirty eight surveys were completed online, and captured parents whose children attended various school settings: primary mainstream (with supports) 50%, primary special class 19%, special school 14%, post primary mainstream (with supports) 7% and post primary special class 4%. 6% of the respondents identified the school setting their child attended as "other"(Appendix 4a). 34% of respondents had engaged with SENOs for 1-3 years, 29% for 4-8 years, 9% for over nine years. 12% had only engaged with SENOs within the past year and 17% intimated that they had never engaged with a SENO (Appendix 4b).

The survey included a question as to whether the participant was willing to engage in a more in-depth phone call, 37 (27 %) of which indicated willingness to be contacted by phone to discuss the survey further. Eight of those who had stated willingness to engage further either omitted to include a phone number or the phone number given proved incorrect. Of the remaining, 17 were successfully contacted.

No. of Respondents to Survey	No. indicating willingness to engage to be contacted by phone	No. indicating willingness and successfully contacted
137	37	17

Table 4.2: Parental response to online Survey on multiple parental sites

The survey thus supported the identification of possible research participants. Purposive sampling was used to identify and request engagement from three parents for in depth semi-structured interviews to form the parent group. These were selected as having significant personal experience as a parent of a child with special needs two of whom had

engaged with two or more SENOs. Each also were significantly engaged in a parent support

group where they had supported other parents of children with special needs from a variety of

disabilities and therefore could draw from a wide perspective. As in the case of educational/

clinical professionals above, initial letters of invitation were followed (on receipt of an

expression of interest) with a more in depth letter of invitation (Appendix 1) which was

accompanied by a Plain Language Statement (Appendix 2) and Informed Consent Form

(Appendix 3). Any queries arising were addressed and in depth interviews conducted at a

time and place of their choosing.

4.5 Research Instruments and Data Collection

Having determined the triangulated study as the research design, three research

instruments were selected: in depth individual interviews and the small parental survey. In

depth interviews were the primary means of enquiry for this study and provided an

opportunity to gather the perceptions and experiences of participants of the SENO role thus

aiding an unfolding of the constructs people use to understand the SENO role. Such

interviews "permit the respondent to move back and forth in time - to reconstruct the past,

interpret the present and predict the future" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 273). The choice of in

depth interviews allowed participants the opportunity to relate their own stories and reflect

openly on their perceptions of the phenomenon in question. It enabled them "to discuss their

interpretations of the world in which they live and to express how they regard situations from

their point of view" (Cohen et al., 2011, p.409). The focus on the individual's own story

provided an opportunity for detailed investigation of each participant's personal perspective,

and for an in-depth understanding of the personal contexts in which the phenomenon of the

SENO role was experienced. This research instrument thus allowed for the gathering of rich

data: "very complex systems, process or experiences are generally best addressed in in-depth

interviews because of the depth of focus and the opportunity for clarification and detailed understanding" (Lewis, 2003, p.58).

The flexible nature of such interviews facilitated an emergent exploration of the SENO role within the broad parameters attached to the various themes identified in the literature (Cole, 2005; Cowne, 2005; Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012; Morewood, 2012; Qureshi, 2014, 2015; Tissot, 2012). These included administrative workload, clarity concerning the parameters of the role, engagement with collaborative practice, change management and leadership, dichotomies of practice and what value SENOs were perceived to bring to the promotion of inclusion. An adaptable and flexible approach was adopted in keeping with qualitative research (Lewis, 2003). The topic guide and interview schedule (Appendix 5) provided an "aide-memoire" (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003, p. 136) for the researcher. They reflected the themes identified in the literature review, provided some consistency across the spectrum of interviews but did not rigidly adhere to pre-determined questions (Cohen et al., 2011). This promoted a natural flow of participant consciousness in the interviews. An open unbiased stance by the researcher was maintained and every effort was made to create a relaxed and trusting atmosphere thus facilitating free participant reflection and discussion of their experiences and viewpoints. The choice of in depth interviews as the research instrument proved an effective vehicle with which to capture such multiple realities (Stake, 1995).

All 19 interviews were conducted on an individual basis at a time and location of the participant's choosing. Interviews lasted for forty five minutes on average. The format of the interview was designed to support a reflective, relaxed space for the participant. The researcher began with an opening explanation of the purpose of the research and re-established the consent of the participant to engage. Broad open "content mapping" questions (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003) were initially used to allow the participant relax and

facilitate a flow of consciousness conducive to more in depth considerations as the interview proceeded. The topic guide proved a useful tool in supporting the researcher to relax and ensured the areas of focus emerging from the literature review were being considered without unduly influencing the views being articulated. Participants flow of thought was facilitated by the researcher (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003) to enable them discuss their understandings, feelings, views and experiences in relation to the SENO role. "Content mining" questions (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003) were used as the interview proceeded and supported greater detail of participants' perspectives. Amplificatory probes supported clarification and elaboration from the participant where necessary to ensure the point being made was understood by the researcher correctly and the meaning captured on the recording. On points of particular participant interest or where an original perception of the role was mentioned, further exploratory and explanatory probing questions were added to ascertain the participant perspective in more detail (Legard, Keegan & Ward, 2003).

Participants were supported in their reflective engagement with questions by the use of pause and a quiet space. Brief notes were made by the researcher during the interviews to support robust data collection. These included noting verbal and non-verbal communication. The interview concluded with a brief summary of the main points as the researcher understood them and confirmation was sought from the participant as to the accuracy of this summary. Finally within a short period of concluding the interview and having thanked the participant for their involvement, a reflective space was sought by the researcher away from the research site. Field notes were made comprising of the researcher's immediate interpretations as to the key points the participant made, the ease at which the participant engaged and any particular impressions or understandings unique to the individual interview (Creswell, 2014; Robson, 2011). This proved useful in the analysis stage of the research as

these notes rekindled the general atmosphere of the interview and the individual response of participants.

All interviews were audio-taped, with the participants' agreement, on two devices and later transcribed by the researcher. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored on a password protected laptop and USB and hard copies kept locked in my own home. The transcripts of the nineteen interviews were on average eight pages in length (single space). The combined interviews total was 147 pages in length (single space).

The second research instrument, the parental online survey, was considered of more minor importance in this research as its main purpose was to provide an avenue of access to parental voice. It involved a small survey of parents. An open invitation to participants was put up on the websites of nine parent bodies representing parents of children with a diverse range of disabilities. Ten questions in line with the topic guide used in the in depth interviews were used in the survey (Appendix 4a-j). As indicated earlier, (Table 4.1 above), one hundred and thirty seven parents responded, 37 of whom indicated a willingness to engage in a phone call to discuss the survey in more detail. Seventeen of the 37 respondents were successfully contacted. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured at the beginning of the call. Given the very limited information available to the researcher on the informant, it was unlikely that any identifying features would emerge. The purpose and format of the research were outlined and the ability to stop the call and withdraw at any stage without giving a reason were clarified. Only then was consent sought to proceed with the call. Confirmation of information sought in the questions with a likert scale was initially sought. Comment boxes had been included in the survey and the phone call proceeded with a discussion of these comments briefly ascertaining clarity of the participant's perspective. Participants were given an opportunity to add any further comments and the phone call

concluded with an appreciation of their willingness to engage being expressed by the researcher.

4.6 Data Analysis

This study generated considerable data, rich in descriptive image and personal reflection, capturing the perspectives and experiences of participants. It yielded a diverse range of conceptualisations of the SENO role among those interviewed. The analysis of initial interviews assisted the conduct of subsequent interviews as it supported more confidence in the researcher who in turn could support deeper reflection by the participant. The analysis of the initial interviews also supported the use of more probing questions if a participant reflected something commented on in an earlier interview (Robson, 2011). It also reinforced the benefits of initial summary writings, memos, and reflection notes (Creswell, 2014) for the analysis process. When faced with valuable and extensive information and the demand to keep participant voice to the forefront, winnowing the data (Creswell, 2014) is a challenging but necessary function of the analysis process. It was given due attention by the researcher in the knowledge that such analysis would facilitate accessibility for the reader of the study and provide them with the context, weave and texture of the interviews. It was also recognised that it would allow readers determine their affinity with the participants' experience and thus expand the opportunity for generalization to their own circumstances (Robson, 2011).

An amended version of Creswell's layout of Data Analysis in Qualitative Research (Creswell, 2014, p.197) captures the steps that were taken in conducting the data analysis for this research (see Fig. 4.2 below). Recordings were first listened to by the researcher in order to "gain an overview of the data" (Spencer, Ritchie & O'Connor, 2003, p.217). The attendant interview and post interview notes were read with each recording so as to capture both the

verbal and non-verbal communication (Creswell, 2014; Robson, 20110) thus capturing a more holistic overview of each participant's perspectives and experiences. Each individual interview was then transcribed by the researcher and an ordered body of texts allowed for more in depth preparation and data analysis. The interviews were each read individually.

Manual coding was supplemented by relevant software, Nvivo 11. It "provided analytic support to aid the process of analysis" (Spencer, Ritchie & O'Connor, 2003, p.217) and facilitated robust analysis. The initial steps of the manual analysis were consistent with the initial steps outlined in the Six Step Approach to Thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006): the reading of transcripts, becoming familiar with an overview of the data. Data were then coded in a systematic fashion across the entire data set. Initial codes were allowed to emerge and capture interesting features of the data (Creswell, 2014). The first level of coding produced 33 individual codes. Appendix 6 identifies the codes emerging and lists their frequency of occurrence in the transcripts of the individual semi- structured interviews. Collating codes (Appendix 7) facilitated the search for potential themes and the gathering of all data relevant to each potential theme. Codes were clustered on the basis of related meaning thus "grouping the initial codes into a smaller number of themes" (Robson, 2011, p. 474). The Four Frame conceptual framework (Bolman & Deal, 2008) supported the data analysis as the skill set identified with each frame illuminated the clustering of codes. Codes such as systems and procedures, administration dominance and workload appeared to coalesce and capture points of relevance and importance in relation to an administrative/bureaucratic skill set. They were thus clustered together. Similarly codes such as advice and support, advocacy, relationship, networking, empowering and facilitator were clustered together given their similarity of purpose relating to skills required within a human resources frame of reference.

An iterative process allowed these potential themes to be checked in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set. This process of first and second level coding (Miles & Huberman, 1994) supported a reflective opportunity for the researcher and involved the writing of memos, noting thoughts and ideas generated as the data were analysed. Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme followed and this generated clarity concerning the name and definition of each theme emerging. Figs. 4.2 and Table 4.3 below evidences this analysis showing the development of themes from codes and clusters. This extensive process yielded the themes discussed in Chapter 6 entitled Discussion.

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           │  Interpreting the Meaning of   │
           │  Themes and Descriptions.      │
           └────────────────────────────────┘
                          ↑
           ┌────────────────────────────────┐
           │  Interrelating Themes/          │
           │  Descriptions                   │
           └────────────────────────────────┘
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           │  Themes          Descriptions   │
           └────────────────────────────────┘
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    ┌──────────────────┐  ┌──────────────────┐
    │ Coding the data  │  │ Coding the data  │
    │ manually         │  │ using Nvivo      │
    │                  │  │ software         │
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           ┌────────────────────────────────┐
           │  Read through all the data.     │
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           │  Organise / prepare Data for    │
           │  Analysis                       │
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           ┌────────────────────────────────┐
           │  Raw Data: Listen, Transcribe,  │
           │  Type up field notes.           │
           └────────────────────────────────┘
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Validating the Accuracy of the
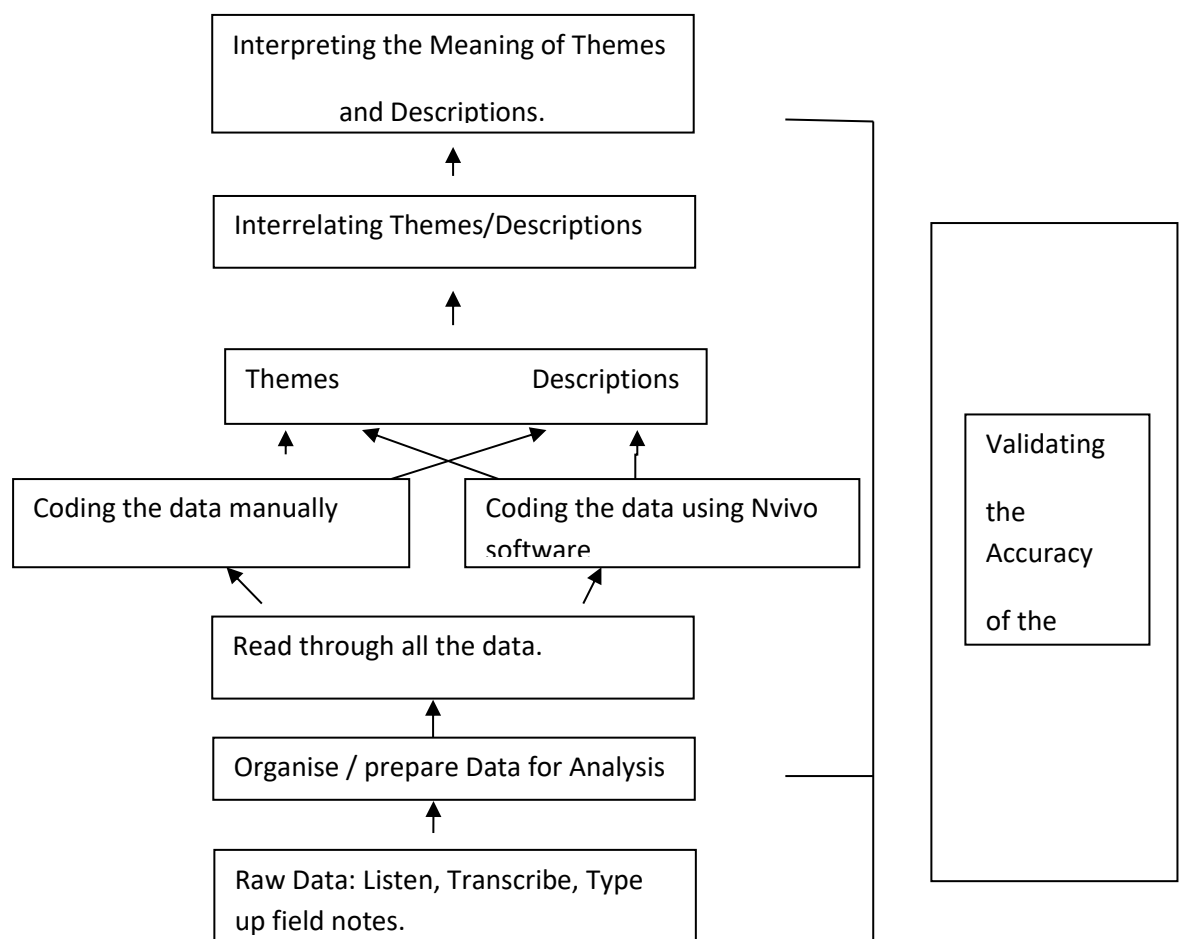
Fig 4.2: Data Analysis format conducted in this research (Amended from Creswell, 2014).

The use of the Nvivo 11software was found to be helpful in the "storing and organizing of data, search capacity for locating all text associated with specific codes, interrelated codes for making queries of the relationship among codes and spreadsheets"

(Creswell, 2014, p. 195) allowing for clear collation of the data. The software facilitated the different analytical tasks such as comparing different cohorts of participants for example parents and principals, as well as identifying commonalities and outliers all of which assisted in validating the analysis.

THEMES	CLUSTERS	CODES	
Gatekeeper	Systems and Processes Administrative Dominance Workload Clarity of role	Inclusion Systems and Processes Advice and Support Deficiencies Expertise Administrative Dominance Conflict Capacity Building Relationship Attitudes and Attitudinal Change	
Juggler	Conflict Power Problem Solving	Power Image Advocacy Local Workload Clarity of role	
Facilitator	Advice and Support Capacity Building Relationship Culture and Attitudinal Change Advocacy Local Networking Communication Link Facilitator Empowering Listening Sensitivities in Special Education Empathy	Networking Culture Communication Socio Economic Influences Reflective practice Link Facilitator Empowering Dichotomies Future Practice Problem Solving Independence Listening Sensitivities in Special Education Empathy	
Broad Factors presenting impacting all themes	Inclusion Expertise Deficiencies Image Socio Economic Influences Reflective practice Dichotomies Future Practice		..

Table 4.3 Emergence of Themes from initial codes

The survey data were analysed with the support of Survey Monkey analysis (Appendix 4a-j) and notes taken by the researcher during the follow up phone calls were read. This provided the researcher with a good working knowledge of the data gathered. The survey was primarily used to access parent participants but did yield some interesting data despite its small size and limited influence on the research as a whole. This is reflected in Chapter 5 entitled Findings.

The process outlined above might inaccurately suggest a linear approach. An iterative process of moving back and forth between the coding analysis and the data (Spencer, Ritchie & O'Connor, 2003; Robson, 2011) was necessary in order to corroborate the coded extracts, make sense of the evidence collected and review the themes emerging to ensure they accurately reflected participants' interviews. The outcome provided the researcher with confidence that the interpretation of the data effectively sought to understand participants' perspectives and experiences and the meaning that the SENO role held for them

4.7 Procedures to support Credibility, Dependability and Transferability

"The trustworthiness of inference drawn from data" (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992, p. 644) is a central question for researchers. The issues associated with qualitative research such as an over emphasis on subjectivity, a difficulty in replicating the research (most particularly the researcher's modus operandi and analytical methods), researcher bias and the small sample size (Creswell, 2013; Shaughnessy, Zechmeister & Zechmeister, 2003) were given consideration in the planning and implementation stages of the research. Researcher effects were attended to: "the researcher filters the data through a personal lens that is situated in a specific socio-political and historical moment" (Creswell, 2003, p. 182). The fact that the researcher is currently engaged as a SENO had the potential to compound this

challenge. However, this was carefully monitored throughout the project and steps were taken to promote credible and dependable findings and conclusions.   Positionality, credibility, dependability and transferability will each now be discussed.

Given the researcher's professional engagement as a SENO and knowing that "all writing is positioned within a stance" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 225), the threat of imposing interpretations or "hearing" what confirms predisposed theories, "how the knower shapes the known" (Freeman, 2007, p. 29) was recognised. While this researcher believes that bias cannot be utterly excluded, the steps outlined below were used to limit any threats to the credibility of the study. A comprehensive application of reflexivity and the acknowledgment and disclosure of personal engagement in the field (Cohen et al., 2011) are seen to reduce such threats. Professional engagement in the field of study being undertaken also can contribute to research. The researcher's understanding of the diverse school settings across the continuum and the experience of working with principals, teachers and parents who work within these diverse settings, supported an understanding of the everyday context of participants represented in this study. The researcher's personal experience of teaching in a post primary school, and also being a principal in that setting, along with pastoral experience of children from very disadvantaged backgrounds outside of a school setting all proved valuable in understanding the contexts within which this study is situated.

Initial engagement with participants through phone conversations, email and/or letters, the Plain Language Statement (Appendix 2) and Informed Consent document (Appendix 3) all sought to develop a sense of trust and mutual understanding of the research. Clarifications were sought during the interviews and comments made were fed back to participants to confirm the "researcher's interpretations and representation with participants" (Freeman et al, 2007, p. 25) thus helping to ensure the trustworthiness of the inferences being drawn (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992). Flexibility in the research design and in the in depth

interview process facilitated an accurate capturing of participants' perspectives and experiences of the SENO role. Reflective practice was constantly engaged in by the researcher throughout this study and a continual questioning of the researcher stance supported a credible study. The research design with its reflective component for participants, facilitated interviews which promoted the discovery and presentation of participants' multiple realities (Stake, 1995). This reflective space, attended to in the in depth interviews, was noted by a number of participants as a valuable experience. In their view, it promoted an opportunity for consideration of their own practice and beliefs which they noted is not frequently available in their busy professional lives. Such reflective practice also promoted alternative ways of looking at issues (Schon, 1983) currently presenting for participants in relation to their engagement with SENOs. The nature of the triangulated study, involving multiple participant sources enhanced "the rigour of the research" (Robson, 2011, p. 158) and supported the study's credibility.

Taping of interviews, a "systematic and careful documentation of all procedures" (Freeman et al., 2007, p.26) facilitated good standards of evidence (Freeman et al., 2007). An audit trail (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) comprising of transcripts of interviews, field notes, a researcher journal and details of data analysis "trace the route" (Robson, 2011, p.157) of the study and provide a clear paper trail of the process by which themes emerged. The final report with the relevant appendices further supports the study's dependability. All data gathered, was stored safely in the researcher's home. Audio versions and their transcripts were stored electronically on password protected devises. Due diligence to the skills and characteristics identified as desirable in the researcher which include an enquiring mind, a capacity to listen to both the verbal and non-verbal communication and a non-judgemental stance were to the fore in the researcher's modus operandi (Robson,2011). These factors, combined with a knowledge of the subject matter given the researcher's experience in the

field, supported the dependability of the research. Supervisor input at the various stages of the data collection, analysis and interpretation proved a very helpful sounding board in assessing how effective the above measures were and also in highlighting additional considerations that proved very supportive. This study sought to provide the reader with rich thick descriptions of the data gathered so as to maximise the reader's potential to explore and compare his or her own context with the research case, thus maximising transferability within the acknowledged limitations of a small sample size (Cohen et al., 2011). The ultimate judges are the readers who interpret the transferability of the material to their specific circumstance.

It is hoped that this research will provide valuable insights into the SENO role and contribute to any future changes in the SENO role that might be considered in light of policy changes in the allocation of additional teaching posts (NCSE, 2017). As such this study strives to ensure "that research leads to action" (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 187). It supports the premise that "researchers should engage in research not just to produce knowledge but also to make positive change in the lives of those who participate in research, change that the participants desire and articulate for themselves" (Moje, 2000, p. 25). Contributions from a diverse range of participants in this research have demonstrated strong arguments and passionate engagement which it is hoped can inform future policy direction.

4.8 Ethical Issues

Due recognition was afforded throughout this research study to ethical concerns and procedures and ethical guidelines approved by the St Patrick's College Research Ethics Committee (subsequently DCU IoE) were strictly adhered to. As the researcher is currently engaged professionally as a SENO, issues of ethical concern revolved around bias, researcher interpretation, participant reticence to discuss issues comfortably and frankly given their knowledge of researcher's current role as a SENO and any emergent "imbalance of power

between the inquirer and the participants" (Creswell, 2014, p. 188). A number of steps were taken to limit these ethical concerns. No participants were sought from personnel engaged in schools where the researcher had a role or influence in the distribution of resources to that school. Concerns regarding "backyard" research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) were taken into consideration where interviews with SENO colleagues were involved. Such participants, while randomly selected, were chosen from SENOs who would have very infrequent contact with the researcher in her professional capacity.

Initial engagement with all potential participants clearly outlined the purposes and procedures of the proposed study (Creswell, 1998). Copies of Plain Language Statements (Appendix 2) and Informed Consent forms (Appendix 3) were attached to initial invitations (Appendix 1) so that participants could have a clear understanding of what the study involved and seek any clarifications they required. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. In reporting the findings of this research, pseudonyms were used to protect participant anonymity. No personal or identifying features that might reveal participants' identity were used (Robson, 2011). Participants were made aware that the data collected would not be used for any purpose other than that identified at the outset without the permission of the participants. Participants were also informed that while every effort would be made to ensure anonymity, a complete guarantee was not possible given the interrelated nature of the educational community in Ireland. All participants were assured of the right to withdraw from the study at any time should they so wish (Cohen et al., 2011).

Participants were assured that all data gathered during this research (transcripts, recordings, contact details) would be stored on a password-protected USB key/ tablet/ PC and that hard copies would be stored under lock in my home until such time as the outcome for my dissertation is determined after which all data would be destroyed in an appropriate manner. Only when these ethical requirements were met were participants then asked to sign

the Informed Consent Form (Appendix 3).   Respect was afforded to the participants at all times (Robson, 2011) and the researcher strove to create a setting where participants felt their contribution was highly valued and experienced "an empathic yet neutral stance" (Legan, Keegan & Ward, 2003).

4.9 Conclusion:

An interpretive triangulated study using thematic analysis was adopted in this research and provided the exploratory construct to support the gathering of rich data to inform the research question. The choice of an emergent flexible design proved valuable as it allowed necessary changes to be made without undue disruption to the study. The selection of in depth interviews as the primary research instrument of choice similarly supported a reflective space for participants which allowed an exploration of their perspectives and experiences of the SENO role. Considerable steps were taken both in the design and administration of the research to support a credible and dependable study to emerge which readers could have confidence in as a valid and informative piece of research in keeping with ethical considerations supported by robust analysis of the data gathered. The emerging themes of this study will now be examined in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5:   Findings

Introduction

This chapter seeks to capture the context and weave of the in depth interviews (Mason, 2002) from this research. This is compatible with a personal epistemology that resides primarily in a constructivist demesne where meanings and knowledge are socially constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are seeking to understand. Context is seen as critical to understanding real world phenomena (Robson, 2011) and the contextual complexity of special and inclusive education is well documented in the literature (Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012; Hegarty, 2014; Ní Bhroin, 2017) which acknowledges the many variables which are at play contemporaneously. It is within this context the SENO operates. The findings in this research provide evidence of that complexity and diversity. Drilling down into the participant interviews captures an understanding of the research participants' perspectives and experiences in respect of their engagement with SENOs. The sub themes emerging from the analysis of participant interviews include resource distribution, administrative dominance and bureaucracy, workload, clarity of the role, advice and support (including communication, relationship building and networking), conflict, advocacy and the power to effect change. A brief online parental survey supported the emergence of these sub-themes which will now be presented.

5.1. Resource Distribution: The Dominance of Administrative Tasks and Bureaucracy

Administrative dominance was noted by all participants and is consistent with issues arising in the literature (Cole, 2005: Cowne, 2005; Crowther, Dyson & Millward, 2001; Qureshi, 2014). Resource allocation was identified as the primary task of the SENO. The historical emergence of the role was noted by one educational professional (CE2) engaged in

the development of much of the early planning for a more inclusive model of education for those with special educational needs both prior to and after the passing of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004). He saw the distribution of resources as the role's raison d'etre: "when the explosion came, the inspectors were totally overwhelmed" (CE 2). This clearly captured the fact that an alternative administrative process for the allocation of resources was required given the very significant increase of those with special educational needs attending mainstream schools from the late 1990s.

One parent stated that, in relation to resource allocation: "the SENO is the key player" (Pa2). A school principal described the position: "the role of the SENO is to allocate resources, scarce resources, to the students who need them most, to match the students to the resource, based on the rules at any given time" (Pr4). Fifty eight percent of all parents surveyed stated that the primary reason for engagement with a SENO was to enquire about an application for additional resources for their child (Appendix 4c). This percentage rose to 67% in the case of children attending primary school in a mainstream setting (Appendix 4c). A very succinct summary offered by one clinician stated: SENOs "are seen as the yes or no people"(CE3). A review carried out in 2009/2010 impacted negatively on SNA allocations in special schools and in some cases gained very wide media attention. It was in this context that the slogan (SayNo for SENO) was first heard (Pr 5). Such comments evidence a consistent understanding by stakeholders.

As participants acknowledged the supremacy of the administration of resources in the SENO role, they also identified difficulties associated with this aspect of the role. One psychologist (CE1) spoke of the fact that "it is about granting and restricting resources" and as one school principal argued "if every application that goes in was granted access there was no need for a SENO. There has to be a gatekeeper" (Pr3). The term gatekeeper was also used by some parents (Pa 1, Pa 2) and appears to be an appropriate term in the perceptions of

participants. In one of the most negative connotations in this respect, a clinician referenced the varied practice he had met in his work with SENOs depicting some "who see their job as gatekeepers and who are like bean counters, boffins to use that English term"(CE4). This comment provides one image of the role and demonstrates that decisions by SENOs to refuse an application can be a source of conflict. This will be revisited in more detail in Section 5.6 below.

The volume of paperwork required to access resources is echoed in the literature (Cole, 2005) and in the findings of this study. Given, that in the Irish system, the applications for additional teaching resources up until 2017, for SNAs and other resources were all directed to the local SENO, it is logical that concerns over the volume of paperwork expressed by SENCOs in England (Cole, 2005; Cowne, 2005) should be shared by SENOs. It was identified as having increased over the years: "it got more official and more and more paperwork came on board" (Pr 1) or as another Principal stated in reference to the present SNA application process "once it was a one pager, now it is a thesis" (Pr3). This reflects an increasingly bureaucratic system referenced in the literature (Crowther, Dyson & Millward, 2001). Across the SENO cohort of interviewees, there was almost unanimous agreement that current practice involves "a high administrative emphasis" (S4) and that it was a "very administrative job" (S3). SENOs were in agreement with other participants that the level of administrative content has increased considerably relative to the other aspects of the job. The economic downturn beginning in 2007 was cited as the main reason for this increase in "administratively driven targets" (S1).

The appropriateness of such administrative dominance and its impact on the other aspects of the role were questioned by a number of SENOs: "I think SENO engagement could be seen as just another layer of bureaucracy whereas I think there has to be scope for so much more"(CE4). The research demonstrates that there is evolutionary capacity in the role

given the changes that have taken place. SENOs suggested that the role has "capacity to deliver a more comprehensive service if you weren't chasing a round of allocations… or an SNA cap" (S1).   The administrative increase was believed to produce outcomes "more to suit the Department than to suit the children" (S4) and was seen as "negative for the children" (S4). The increased administrative demands, evidenced in the words "chasing an allocation" (S1), have caused significant stress and frustration among SENOs: "I think there are eighty highly motivated and highly qualified (people) with a huge range of experiences who are now pushed into positions of administrators sitting at a desk" (S4).

The administrative process for applying for resources was consistently identified as an issue of concern among stakeholders (T1, T2, Pr 5, CE 1, CE 2).   Participants were critical of the rigidity of the systems in place (Pr 1, Pr 2, Pr 5, T3). One parent's image of the SENO was that they were "well-intentioned but bound by red tape" (Pa 3) while a clinician's image was of "kindness corralled" (CE4). It should be noted that the majority of interviews were conducted prior to the establishment of the new allocation model rolled out for September 2017. While all participants were aware of the model and schools had already received their allocations prior to the interviews being conducted, it was a time of change when the exact nature of how the new model would effectively function was an issue of concern in many quarters. Some of the comments by interviewees referenced issues which hopefully the new model will address over time. Issues such as the rigidity and inflexibility of the criteria for allocation reports being written to meet the criteria of circulars rather than capturing the strengths and needs of the individual child (CE 3 CE 4), varying practices among SENOs in their decision making (CE 4) and also the impact of the national financial crisis on the system of allocation (CE 4, Pr 5, S1, S2, S4, T 1, T2) were all listed as difficulties in the process of resource delivery to schools. Participants' perceptions of SENOs, who are seen as "key players" (Pa2) in this process, were clearly impacted by these difficulties. SENOs were

identified by some as rigid and lacking empathy (Pr 1, T2, T3). These issues are consistent with difficulties identified in the literature. The imposition of heavily bureaucratic systems and increased regulation is identified as a source of frustration for service users (Crowther, Dyson & Millward, 2001). The inflexibility of the system administered by SENOs was indeed referenced by principals, teachers, parents and clinicians alike. Prescriptive categories of special education need were identified as a major source of frustration (CE2). The system's perceived inability to capture the broad and diverse needs presenting in children was clarified by one clinician: "I would be very frustrated around, for example children with huge needs who are not fitting into one of the boxes, SENOs are so limited by the prescriptive categories ….it is just so frustrating" (CE 1).

Further dissatisfaction perceived by clinicians was "the time wasting that is required to find a set of words that meet the criteria, I find this utterly frustrating" (CE4). Such descriptions as "a tick box exercise" (T1) and "a game" (Pa1) evidence the perception of an inadequate system which impacts the perceptions of the role itself.   Writing to the circulars was indicated as an example:

> The system forces psychologists and other people to make the most of problems
>
> to fit the criteria... so you will over emphasise the care needs, you will be
>
> delighted if he has had an accident with the toilet once so that you are able to say
>
> he has accidents with the toilet (CE4)

The negative, deficit type approach this system appears to foster was noted (Pa 1). The identification of strengths did not appear to have a place in the application process in one parent's experience (Pa 3). While a number of these issues may well be addressed by the revised model of resource allocation (DES, 2017) (explained in Chapter 3), the difficulties most certainly persist in relation to SNA applications and indeed it was in respect of such applications that the comments were most significantly targeted.

A further source of frustration referred to by teachers and principals was the introduction of closing dates and deadlines for application (DES, 2011) where previously resources could be applied for throughout the school year. A principal of a special school referred to the particular strain these deadlines were putting on parents during the very difficult time of transition from one educational setting to another (Pr 5). Some participants recognised that the constraints were the result of Department criteria to which SENOs had to adhere (Pr 3). Nonetheless these constraints have a negative impact on the perceptions and experiences of principals, teachers, parents and clinicians alike in respect of the SENO role. It was also noted that the criteria were not always consistently applied by SENOs (CE4).

The impact of the economic downturn since 2007 was seen to have exacerbated this situation:

I certainly would have noticed during the worst days of the cuts that SENOs would have been so apologetic of not being able to do what they saw as their job which was to support and they just saw themselves as saying no all the time and cutting back, and knowing that people dreaded them coming into schools ….I would say that in practice, this has damaged the role of the SENO (CE4)

Among SENOs, there was also concern expressed regarding the impact of the financial collapse on the process of administration, consistency of practice and fairness in the delivery of resources. SENOs view on the implementation of DES criteria differed somewhat from other participants. They saw adherence to criteria as the best way to ensure a consistent and fair distribution of resources regardless of where students lived (S1). Some key stakeholders (Pr 5, CE4) disagreed with this view arguing that the structure of resource administration was supporting equality and consistency of practice. All participants agreed that a noticeable increase in systemic demands had occurred. Perhaps this was most descriptively put by the principal of a special school who stated "this business model is being

put on top of this little round egg and by God they are going to get this box on top of it. But we are very, very, oval (laugh) and there is no getting this box on top of us" (Pr 5).

In summary, the allocation of resources is perceived as the dominant purpose of the SENO role and was noted to have become more bureaucratic since its earlier years and to have impacted negatively on other aspects of the role. The present system of application was identified as inflexible, frequently inappropriate in representing the diversity of children's needs presenting in schools (PR 1, CE 4), likely to generate reports which were not always giving the most appropriate assessment of the student (CE 4) and a source of considerable frustration for parents, principals, teachers and clinicians alike. The effectiveness of the system to produce consistent practice among SENOs was also questioned. Such an understanding of the system of resource delivery, as presently outlined, directly impacts stakeholders' perceptions of the SENO role in so far as the SENO is the local agent of that system. It is hoped that the new model of allocation (DES, 2017) will address some of the limitations of the process which participants have identified and also provide opportunities for more positive engagement between SENOs and stakeholders.

5.2 Workload

Another theme emerging theme from the data was a perception both by SENOs themselves and by those with whom they engage, of an increasing workload particularly over recent years and the negative impact this was having on the delivery of service (Pr 1, Pr 3, Pa 1). These findings are consistent with SENCO literature which also identifies difficulties regarding the workload (Cowne, 2005) and its impact on adherence to good practice (Crowther et al., 2001). Two reasons were identified as causing this increase namely the demographic increase (S1 and S2), and the Assessment of Need process. (S1 and S2). One

SENO calculated this increase to be in the order of 100%: "I would have had 400-500 kids on my caseload… (*now)* I have over a thousand on my caseload" (S2). This particular participant worked in a suburb of a large city with considerable demographic growth. The Assessment of Need (Government of Ireland, 2005) is provided by the health services. It entitled children who presented with possible special needs to be assessed if a parent requested it. This assessment, judged by one SENO as "obviously very welcome, has now meant that children are assessed at a much earlier age" (S2) thus increasing the number of children for whom application for additional supports were being made. This level of increase is borne out in the figures presented above (Chapter 3: Figs. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 & 3.5). The national financial crisis which resulted in the embargo on recruitment in the public service, from 2011-2017, has meant that this increase has not been calibrated with SENO staffing levels as was anticipated in the NCSE Implementation Report (NCSE, 2006).

The increased workloads were noted to have impacted on the level of engagement possible by SENOs on the ground. The ability to support school capacities was seen as considerably more limited in the context of these demands (CE 3, Pr 1).

> The SENO would come, having been in many schools and seeing many different
> situations and impart that experience saying they did that there and that worked
> well. There isn't even the time for that. The overload of work has diminished that
> and that was available a little more in the earlier years (Pr 2)

Similarly. a parent referenced pressures on SENO engagement "so that they can't engage with everybody to the best of their ability" (Pa 1). Knowing the individual needs of the child and the context in which those needs are presenting was recognised by one principal participant:

It is all right to have records and all that but sometimes you have to have a good

working knowledge of the child and realistically that became impossible because

of the size of the caseloads and the districts SENOs had to cover (Pr 1)

Teachers spoke of their reticence to contact SENOs knowing the work demands

SENOs were facing (T1 & T2). Other consequences of the increased volume of work

included the stress impact on SENOs often referred to in the context of the differential

between previous and present practice (S2). In the past, SENOs, during recurring school

reviews, would readily identify many of the children they had sanctioned supports for,

particularly in relation to SNA. This was now much more difficult given the number of

children on their caseloads and SENOs reported the concern and anxiety this caused them as

they recognised the importance of their decisions in the child's relatively short window of

opportunity in education. This concurred with the principal's view previously quoted that a

working knowledge of the individual child was vital to effective resourcing (Pr 1). The

increase in the SENO workload was given considerable attention by participants yet few

solutions were put forward. One teacher/SENCO who has responsibility for making

applications for additional resources suggested that administrative staff should be considered.

"Certainly if a SENO had a secretary, they could do a lot of that paperwork, while the SENO

could use their experience and their knowledge to talk to the like of CAMHS and parents"

(T2). This concurs with one SENO's sentiments noted above who felt that their expertise and

knowledge were being underutilised in a role increasingly dominated by administration (S4).

5.3 Clarity concerning the SENO Role

Poor definition of the SENO role was repeatedly raised by participants. One SENO

stated "the role was not defined well enough" (S4) while another described it as

"undefined"(S2). The suspension of those sections of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland) relating to the role of the SENO was repeatedly given as a cause of blurring the role's parameters: "in the beginning…it was like the SENO was the answer to everything" (S2). While all SENOs recognised the centrality of resource allocation in the role's present format, it was pointed out that "allocating resources isn't actually in the Act" (S2). Some principals were indeed very surprised when this was brought to their attention. One teacher who has been working in special education for many years and who has engaged with four different SENOs in her various roles reported that "last year I have had to ask the SENO what her role was"(T3). The increase in administration over recent years seemed to her to have diminished the availability of SENOs locally to assist and support schools in addressing difficult and complex issues arising in the school. Similarly, a principal reported having to ask the SENO to define her role and he questioned whether "really they were doing something that now some algorithm is going to do … and do it faster" (Pr 4). He was referring to the adoption of the new resource model of allocation (DES, 2017b) and the fact that the present administration of additional teaching supports to schools will no longer be dealt with by SENOs. Some parent participants also echoed confusion as to the purpose of the role: "I think the SENO role needs to be clarified 100% for parents, many of us have no idea what they do or what value they add" (Pa 3).

Many of the SENOs interviewed who were in the organisation for eight years or more, identified the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) as a clear motivational influence in their decision to join the NCSE. The expectations arising from the Act, were summarised by one SENO, "we were supposed to be doing Individual Education Plans (IEPs), monitoring outcomes, looking at adult education, designating schools"(S2). SENO participants who were with the NCSE from its inception, were clear that the role was evolving in the early days and noted that many of their first engagements with principals

were difficult. The context in which the SENO role was rolled out in 2004 included both the introduction of the General Allocation Model (GAM) (DES, 2005a) to primary schools by the Department and an audit of the SNA allocation countrywide being conducted by the Inspectorate. SENOs reported that "a lot of schools were asking questions" (S2) and that SENOs were met with hostility to the GAM by principals in their introductory meetings. In their initial training, SENOs "were told we definitely will have nothing to do with allocating SNAs" (S2). Yet six weeks later they were tasked with finishing the SNA audit and within six months "we were doing the resource allocation…..which made liars out of us" (S2). This combination of the suspension of EPSEN and the initial misinformation given to SENOs to deliver on their first visits to schools was identified by SENOs themselves as resulting in confusion and the development of unrealistic expectations.

The NCSE, at the time of writing is undergoing significant structural change and expansion. The Special Education Support Services (SESS), the National Behaviour Support Services (NBSS) and the Visiting Teachers have recently been integrated into the organisation (Irish Government News Service, 2015). One SENO reported: "we need to know where we are going and … where our place naturally lies in the whole delivery of service to children….we are now at a crossroads" (S2). The evidence of this research is that issues around clarity of the role persist.

The sub-themes emerging thus far have included the dominance of administration, the systems and processes involved, the workload of SENOs and clarity concerning the role itself. Regarding the conceptual framing of this study, these issues naturally coalesce around the structural frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008) with its attendant administrative and bureaucratic skill set. Findings will now shift to sub themes emerging which will be illuminated by the human resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008) and require an alternative skill set including listening, networking, relationship building and collaboration.

5.4 Advice and Support

The Customer Charter (NCSE, 2013, 2017) identifies advice and support to schools and parents as a key function of the NCSE. Given that the SENO is the local agent of the organisation, this research was keen to access participants' perspectives on advice and support offered by SENOs. A cross section of participants identified this aspect of SENO practice as foundational. It was noted as a motivating factor by SENOs for initially seeking the post (CE 3, S1, S2, Pr 2). It was recognised as an essential aspect of the role (Pa 1, Pa 2, Pa 3,CE 1, S1, S3), while room for improvement in this area was also referenced (CE 4, Pr 3, T3, Pa 2, Pa 3). Twenty two percent of parents surveyed indicated that such advice and support was the primary reason for their engagement with a SENO. In the case of parents of children in primary school in a mainstream setting this rose to 42% Appendix 4c). The purpose of such advice and support as noted by the participants' was to inform and empower (CE 1, Pa 1, Pa 2., Pa 3 to problem solve (CE 3) and to clarify options by identifying the benefits and limitations of the different educational options (CE 1, CE 3, S1, S3 and T3). An image that captured this aspect of the role was "to open pathways" (S1), favourably seen by one clinician who said "good solid advice, the options et cetera, the limitations of choosing one option versus another, so, that is all knowledge which actually is a great service to provide for people" (CE 1).

The benefits of such advice and support were recognised as impacting both parents and schools but in different ways. In both cases providing information was seen as critical. In the case of parents this was seen to empower them (Pa 1, Pa 2, Pa 3). It was recognised that parents often felt vulnerable and fearful in approaching schools with their queries. One parent stated that it was "lovely to be able to go to someone when you are confused who can guide you, who will meet you and is available" (Pa 3). Another parent stated "the first SENO

I met with allayed my fears" (Pa 1). Therefore "journeying with them" (CE1) was seen as a valid and valuable aspect of the role in the often difficult and very emotive journeys parents of children with special educational needs have to make. It included having what one SENO described as "these sensitive, difficult conversations" (S1). A clinician with lengthy experience of working with parents and children captured the importance of such "journeying" (CE1). Another clinician, reflecting on a broader spectrum of such support both in health and education stated:

> I think one of the big flaws we have across our system is that we don't have
>
> enough resources or we haven't prioritised that level of support that families
>
> need around the emotional changes their lives have taken on (CE 3).

The image of "a listening ear" which was referred to by parents (Pa 1 & Pa 2) in their description of the SENO role demonstrates the need for and delivery of such support: "parents need to be listened to" (Pa 2). Parent Information Sessions which are held nationwide to inform parents prior to their children starting primary school were seen by SENOs as critical to developing a route of access to such advice and support. SENOs felt that parents were more likely to feel comfortable in contacting them again should the need arise. (S2, S3). Evidence of the need to promote positive engagement with parents emerged from the parental survey with 48% stating they found engagement with the SENO helpful or very helpful while 42% found it unhelpful or very unhelpful (Appendix 4d)

The expertise that SENOs can bring to schools was recognised and appreciated by many participants (Pr 1, Pr 2, CE 1, CE 4, Pa 2, Pa 3, T 3). This was acknowledged to come from their professional backgrounds and experiences of being in different school settings, across the continuum of provision, thus having opportunity to see practice in operation, described by one principal as "the helicopter view" (Pr 3). One educational psychologist noted:

SENO involvement at the coalface, working with staff members, teachers, even

going into classes doing observations, requires quite an amount of skill and very

good negotiating with the teachers in order that they trust (SENOs) to do that

piece of the work. So, over the years, I would see that they have developed a

lot of knowledge about teaching methodologies, around different practices,

around negotiating with teachers, communications, so that they are quite expert

now in what they do. A lot of competencies are needed for the SENO job (CE1)

This psychologist also raised the issue of whether boundaries needed to be more

defined in a context where SENOs would be asked to comment on practice or give advice and

problem solve (CE1): *"do SENOs in some way influence practice because you observe good

practice and bad practice and so does that become more in terms of advice around teaching

methodology or that you are giving some psychological guidance or whatever?"* (CE1). This

comment suggests concerns about SENOs overstepping their remit and entering into

discussions for which they may not be suitably qualified. This reflects issues in the literature

around boundaries in multi-disciplinary engagement (Hargreaves & Fullen, 1992; Lindqvist,

Nilholm, Almqvist, & Wetso, 2011) which will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Participant experience of the advice and support given by SENOs was not uniform. A

notably different perspective was given by a principal of a special school who stated that in

the case of a difficulty emerging "I would never think of going to the SENO" (Pr5). She

reflected that in the early days of engagement this was very different. A strong collegial

engagement offering advice and support had previously existed. However she felt this had

now completely evaporated and suggested that this was a result of the increase in demands

for additional resources in light of the increased in the number of children with complex

needs presenting in special schools. Her statement that "I really feel we have just been

abandoned" (Pr 5) was stark and her appeal for a system "more supportive of special schools"

(Pr 5) suggested that in her case at least the provision of advice, and certainly of support, was poor. Another principal also found this aspect of the SENO role wanting: "I have been very disappointed on a number of occasions where you look for a degree of expertise and a degree of advice that wouldn't necessarily be available in the school and I have been disappointed with what has come back from the SENO" (Pr 4). His experience suggested that schools were now sufficiently robust in their capacities to deal with the issues emerging for 90% of students with special educational needs but that the SENO was critical to that small percentage of cases where schools really struggle. This opinion was re-iterated by a SENCO (T3) who had lengthy experience and significant qualifications in special education. Despite negative views of the support SENOs provide among these particular participants, all without exception argued that such provision was an essential, if unfulfilled, aspect of the role. A cross section of participants expressed the hope that with the adoption of the new allocation model, where SENOs are no longer engaged in the allocation of additional teaching hours, the role could now be re-calibrated (Pr 1, Pr 3, T 1, T 3, Pa 2):

> If this new system works, then the role of the SENO in deciding whether he does or doesn't get resources, really should be much more diminished, so I think the role could be re-written around really providing that sort of conduit and support between the families and the school (Pa 2)

A number of participants perceived SENOs as contributing to capacity building in different ways. Their provision of resources was seen within this context: "resourcing will give the capacity to actually support our children" (CE1). Fear was identified by some participants (Pa1, Pr2, CE1, PaT 19) as an obstacle to inclusion. One antidote to such fear which SENOs contribute was noted:

> SENOs way of being and engaging in schools can create perspectives and confidence building that can overcome fear........I think SENOs are

instrumental in helping schools to take that first step into the water, to take

on the challenge of it (CE1).

Supportive relationships fostered by SENOs were seen as important in

creating greater capacity among school communities for the inclusion of children

with special educational needs: "having that positive engagement creates capacity

because it gives you energy, it gives new ideas" (CE3). One principal perceived

SENOs as a source of empowerment facilitating an expansion in a schools

capacity:

> Support from the SENO *can* help the principal to be able to do what they
>
> have to do. If you have those supports to help you, then you have the
>
> knowledge and the support to sell it to the rest of the staff (Pr 2)

The increased workload SENOs have experienced was identified as negatively

impacting the time available for SENOs to engage directly in schools and in this respect was

seen to detract from their potential to encourage capacity expansion within the school setting:

"I don't know if the capacity is there (in schools) to deliver or if the SENOs have capacity,

like in this area, there is one SENO and *it* could probably do with four SENOs" (CE3). The

dominance of administration and bureaucratic demands were similarly seen as negative

factors inhibiting capacity building. One participant questioned the speed of change that

EPSEN (Government of Ireland, 2004) unleashed. He argued that "such speed is

incompatible with quality" (CE2) and that SENO potential to support the necessary

expansion of capacity in schools was limited given the pace of expansion which ensued

(Chapter 3: Figs. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 & 3.5). One parent echoed this level of uncertainty:

> I think there are great people out there who want to make it work but they
>
> don't know how. Perhaps they have no experience of that particular need

before, they want to make it work but they don't know how....SENOs

could have a role in that, in making teachers aware, in encouraging and

providing sharing opportunities (Pa 2).

SENOs identified parental socio economic factors as influencing the level of expertise

and advice some parents pursued: "some parents engage more than others and really it is the

others that need the advice and support, but we are not catching them sometimes" (S2). The

reasons suggested for this inconsistent pattern included "a poor history of school, learning

difficulties (among the parent cohort) and behavioural problems" (S2). The latter negatively

influenced co-operation with those seen as holding positions of authority. The Parent

Information Sessions were again seen as important in addressing this issue. Participants

suggested greater marketing of this aspect of the role was critical to developing its

effectiveness (Pa 2, CE4). SENOs also raised the need for Continuing Professional

Development in order to keep a pace with changes in the field. SENOs unanimously agreed

that the provision of CPD made available to them was poor. While the benefits of timely and

effective delivery of advice and support by SENOs is well recognised across all participants,

it was identified as not reaching its potential: "I think that it has huge potential to be a better

advisory service and I think that is probably how it is also intended but my own sense is that

that is not how it works in practice" (CE3). Participants' views of one essential constituent

for improvement, effective communication, will now be examined.

5.4.1 Effective Communication

Good communication with parents and schools was seen as very important by all

participants. Qualities of good communication were identified in the context of the SENO

role. Attentive listening was seen as a vital component: "you are the person to go to who will

explain all these options and they (parents) have a place to ask questions and be listened to."

(CE1). The provision of a safe space where parents in particular could discuss their concerns

was recognised by SENOs as an important aspect of their work (S1, S2, S3, S4). In response to the request to share the first image that came to mind when the SENO was mentioned, a parent described "a good listener" (Pa1). The fact that SENOs were not employees of schools was seen as a significant advantage by a cross section of participants (S1, Pa 3, CE 3) and supported an "honest broker" (Pa 2) who was "emotionally unattached" (Pa 3). One parent clarified the value of such a role:

> Because you are involved a lot, it becomes personal and you take it personally
> and that clouds your judgement. You need to be able to talk to someone, who
> can say I'm here for you, this is the way it is, or right we will try to do
> something about that. Just to talk to a person who knows the system (Pa 2)

This comment captures the emotive nature of inclusive education and the need for a person who is a step removed from the immediate issues that may be presenting in the school, who can bring clarity in an emotional cloud. It recognises the benefits of a sounding board with good knowledge of the system to assist a parent in deciphering what are realistic expectations for them to have of schools. It also identifies the importance of empathic listening which is critical if this aspect of the role is to reach its optimum potential. While such engagement was recognised to be time-consuming and at times challenging (CE1), the benefits of such communication with parents were clearly recognised (Pa1, Pa2).

Good communication was also identified as facilitating the optimum benefits of multi-disciplinary engagement. One clinician noted the difference between the lens used by clinicians which are predominantly focused on the individual child with additional needs and the lens used by teachers who, while being child centered, must by necessity focus on the needs of all the children in his/her remit. The SENO was identified as an effective bridge which could help marry these different lenses.

We as Occupational Therapists or Speech and Language Therapists had only that child that we were thinking about which was fine for us. But the school has all the other children in the classroom to consider as well, it didn't marry. SENOs can facilitate that piece (CE2).

One education professional suggested SENOs, within that context, might facilitate imaginative thinking (CE 3). Again the "honest broker" / independent voice with expertise and experience in different settings was seen as a valuable asset in a field where imaginative problem solving is well documented in the literature as a key component of successful inclusive practice. It clarifies how effective communication assists problem solving which was noted by SENOs to be a real motivator in their option to take up this position (S1, S2, S 4). In their opinion, the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) had clearly envisaged such a role but its suspension limited their effectiveness in this regard. It is clear from participants' perspectives that good communication skills are an important aspect of the skill set SENOs require. The efficacy of communication rests on effective relationships. A significant number of participants made reference to this fact and some interesting data emerged which will now be addressed.

5.4.2 Relationship Building and Networking

One clinical participant spoke of how important the relationship between schools and SENOs was in her opinion: "schools are more likely to engage in inclusion when they have that relationship, that relationship is formed over time and is local" (CE 1). This comment identified two key aspects of the relationship which can nurture inclusion: the importance of the time required to develop good relationships and the local nature of the role. Another clinician supported such a perspective:

It is those local relationships that actually build the relationship we have

with the SENO in terms of understanding what we do, the children we support.

The SENOs know the children we support, the schools are local to that area

and with that local knowledge there can be a greater shared understanding. That

local piece is critical (CE 3).

One participant argued that: "SENOs have much more credibility than when they

walked in on day one, they have much more influence" (CE 1). Without credibility, expertise

can sometimes bear little fruit. The local nature of the role was seen to be of great benefit in

building relationships which foster credibility and make networking effective. As one

clinician put it you "are able to pick up the phone….that local piece is really critical" (CE 2).

Indeed such was the importance of this, it was suggested that "it should be replicated…..and

more resourced" (CE 2). The benefits are noteworthy when one considers the role of the

SENO being originally conceptualised within the context of inclusion: "we would be

building towards a better future in terms of inclusive education" (CE 2). Building effective

relationships was seen as critical to building trust: "I have found that where I have a

relationship with somebody it is easier to have that conversation, and where the answer is

no…you are inclined to trust them" (CE 4). Such trust allows for honest engagement and can

inform practice. Such relationships are not consistently the experience of clinicians:

I have found that working with SENOs is as variable as that. I would be very

confident that if I had a particular difficulty with a child and certain SENOs I

know were responsible for the area where this child is, then we could have a

very good conversation about that. And I will be very confident that I would

come off the phone with a decision or a bit of guidance that would make a

difference… Some who are sticklers for the rules will nonetheless tell you what

you need to know and are utterly fair. Having that kind of relationship is important to me (CE 4).

This clinician apportioned the same level of importance to relationships between SENOs and parents and spoke of his perception of parents' experiences as they had discussed them with him regarding the SENO.

So many people had the image of the SENO whose job it was to say no. And then to meet the person who very kindly explained what the requirements were and I won't say apologetically or unapologetically but would explain the difficulties. People came away with a sense well that was a fair person (CE 4).

A parent too echoed such sentiments:

I think most parents are fairly reasonable and there is an understanding that there cannot be an unlimited pot of resources. And the vast majority of parents in my experience just want a fair crack of the whip and to feel that their voices are heard (Pa3).

Such comments evidence the importance participants apportion to developing trust and building constructive relationships.   The consequences of not laying such a foundation were starkly exposed by the comment of one parent "you have to get on with your SENO or your child will suffer" (Pa 2).

This research sought to explore principals' perspectives on their relationships with SENOs. A varied picture emerged. One principal described "a very good relationship with SENOs" having worked with 3 different SENOs and commented "I think if you are fair with them and up front they will develop that relationship with you" (Pr 4). However, the spectrum of principals' perspectives on this issue was broad and echoed contrasting experiences. The principal of the special school wanted "more of a dialogue" and indeed

went so far as to say "I suppose we have been disengaged really" (Pr 5), a comment which would suggest that the relationship had essentially broken down. In response to the researcher's further probing, that principal went so far as to say "No, I don't think special schools would miss them (SENOs)" (Pr 5). Another principal described the SENO as lacking empathy (P1) and the image conveyed of "a school mistress" (P1) did not suggest a very positive relationship. Within these diverse perspectives, the issue of effective networking may present challenges.

The networking aspect of the SENO role is captured in this research by such terms as "link" (CE 1, Pa 1, Pa, 2), "conduit" (S1) and "go-between" (Pa 3) used by participants. This aspect of the job was identified as important in providing information for parents: "the SENOs have taken on the role of a link between schools and parents and providing parents with the information which maybe is available but which parents do not find easy to access" (CE 1). This connectivity was seen as fundamental and identified as supporting change by providing a "very strong link with schools which may help the school take a different approach" (CE 1). This was verified by parents who stated "I knew that she was the link between me and the system" (Pa 1) and "I felt I could lift the phone and I felt that she was the person between me and the school or the department" (Pa 3). While valued in this way, one parent stated the connectivity could be more effectively marketed: "they (SENOs) need to be more visible in terms of the triumvirate between schools, family and others" (Pa 2).

Clinicians too referred to good networking experiences with SENOs: "we have that open communication and we can ask them elements of their work that might be unknown to us" (CE 1). The purpose of such networking was "to try and support everyone coming to the table toward the inclusion that might be in the best interests of the child" (CE 2) and to promote "frank discussions with different opinions" (CE 2) all of which were seen to support

the development of inclusive practice. Inter-agency networking was however at times seen as disjointed:

> There is a piece that is missing – to pull it together. It is based on the goodwill of people working and taking the time to understand each other's perspectives. We have this system where the schools are doing IEPs which is really fantastic, and we have, under our piece, we have to do family support plans (FSPs) with families. They can be very different to IEPs but what we have identified is that it is not beneficial for families having them separate. The child's needs or the family's needs are so complex, they need to be integrated (CE 2).

One clinician compared the rather ad hoc system in Ireland with a very integrated system in England where formalised structures of engagement were seen to be far more effective. This reflects the need for a holistic approach to the child's needs and an understanding of all the factors at play in the child's life. The fruit of good networking practice whether built on individuals' personal commitment or more systematically constructed was well captured by one participant: "having that positive engagement creates capacity because it gives you energy, it gives you new ideas" (CE 2). SENOs appear to highly value networking opportunities and recognised their value (S1, S4). Other participants felt SENOs had the capacity to promote such positive engagement and develop it further if given the structures to do so (CE1, CE 2). Such engagement with parents, schools and clinicians in a multi-disciplinary framework was what many SENOs had anticipated when they applied for the job based on the expectation that the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) would be rolled out in full (S1, S2, S4). This positive attitude by SENOs to networking opportunities was acknowledged by one clinician when she stated "I would see a very open group in terms of working with their allied professionals" (CE 1). Also the desire

for networking practice in line with the spirit of EPSEN was well captured by one clinician and might provide a glimpse into how the SENO role might develop:

> I would like to be able to see, for example, if I write a report that rather than give that report to the parents and the teacher that there would be a meeting whereby… you would go through the report and the recommendations and that you would together come up with an implementation plan that respects the fact that there is a finite amount of resources but also respects the fact that there is a need (CE 4)

This pattern suggests a way forward that participants appear to view as desirable and the data gleaned in this research suggests that SENOs would welcome such developments. The integration of disparate support services namely the Visiting Teacher Service, the National Behaviour Support Service and the Special Education Support Service into the NCSE in 2017 was identified by one SENO as an opportunity to foster a more integrated service (S1) and was seen as a positive step toward more effective networking opportunities. In respect of the conceptual framework adopted for this study (Bolman & Deal, 2008), the theme of advice and support, with its pillars of communication, relationship building and networking, naturally reside within the human resource frame of the Four Frame Model (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The skill sets associated with this frame have potential to render multiple benefits and diminish disparate practice that often leads to misunderstandings and conflict.

5.5 Conflict

This research sought to explore the contexts of engagement between SENOs and key stakeholders and participants' experience of negotiation, bargaining, conflict management and problem solving in their engagement with SENOs. Sensitivities presenting in the field of

special and inclusive education are well documented in the literature (Armstrong, Kane, O'Sullivan & Kelly, 2010; Ferguson, 2008; Mac Giolla Phádraig, 2010). These include sensitivities around resource allocation (Cole, 2005; Curran, 2019, Poon-McBrayer, 2012), parental vulnerability (Blackwell & Rosetti, 2014; Ferguson, 2008; Mac Giolla Phadraig, 2010; Vincent & Martin, 2010), change management (Liasidou & Svensson, 2014; Qureshi, 2015) and a sense of accountability to meet the demands presenting in schools (Cole, 2005; Curran, 2019; Tissot, 2013). Analysis of data from interviews and online survey of parental attitudes revealed the conflictual nature of some of the engagement between SENOs and key stakeholders for example in the administration of resources. It is worth analysing how participants perceived the causes of this conflict, its impact, and also whether any resolutions are suggested.

5.5.1 Causes of conflict.

The emergence of conflict in SENO engagement with schools was well captured by one educational psychologist when she stated that SENOs are "out in schools talking to principals about allocating resources but it is also about restricting resources or removing resources" (CE1). The finite nature of the resources available and the optimum level of resourcing to meet the needs of children with complex needs while at the same time promoting independence was identified as a frequent source of debate and not infrequently of disagreement (Pr3). Added to this dilemma of practice, one psychologist referenced the very sensitive nature of special education where SENOs "are dealing with a population of children who have significant needs and a stretched parents group, it has been a difficult journey for them" (CE1). This was also acknowledged by SENOs: "when you are dealing with parents, they are very vulnerable" (S1). It is not uncommon for SENOs to encounter parents when their child has had a recent diagnosis (S1, S3) or when their child is struggling significantly in school (S2). Parents can be fearful that their child may be at risk of exclusion. The

emotive nature of such engagements is not surprising and was persistently raised by participants. In this milieu, the seeds of conflict can easily germinate. Participant accounts of resource allocation represent the context of conflict: "Parents and schools are fighting for the same thing…fighting for the maximum support they can get from the SENO…..you feel that you are fighting all the time for resources, almost begging for resources" (T1). This language captures the emotive and difficult context of SENO decision making and is often influenced by a perception that "SENOs really only come in when they are going to cut you" (Pr 5). This perception that the SENO goes out to the school "to cut" appears dominant in schools:

> You see the main one (image) would be that the SENO is coming all the time to reduce the staffing levels. …it would be lovely to think that they were coming to give you support, which in effect they do, but that is the image (Pr 1)

> This image in schools can initiate and enflame parental concerns. When asked to offer the first image that came to mind when the SENO was mentioned, one participant referred to "the grim reaper" (T2).

Lack of clarity concerning the role could generate a negative environment for engagement. One parental participant captured this very succinctly with the question: "who is this person the agent for? Are they there to help my child access the resources he needs or are they there to protect the resources of the system?" (Pa 2). The parent who asked this question also acknowledged the challenge of managing expectations: "there is the whole reasonable managing of expectations versus what the child actually genuinely needs even though resources are restricted" (Pa 2). In this regard she spoke of the "over-theraping" (Pa 2) of the child. The determination of what is the appropriate level of resourcing was also referenced by a school principal who stated "there is naturally going to be conflict, there are schools and parents and principals who are looking for the impossible" (Pr 3). Given the frustrations with the system of application and resource delivery (Armstrong et al., 2010), it

is hardly surprising that frustration with the processes in place was identified as a significant cause of conflict by SENOs themselves: "Parents and principals can get frustrated that they are dealing with a child every day but they can't get the paperwork to back it (the application)"(S3) to release additional resources. The misconception by some, of the autonomy of SENOs within this process of decision making, was identified as another factor generating conflict (S4). SENOs questioned whether their limited flexibility (S3), when applying criteria laid down by the DES, was known. Participants identified that nowhere was conflict more accentuated than in the context of the SNA allocation (Pr 2, Pr 3, Pr 5, T1, T2, Pa 3). Concerns regarding job security mean that SNAs often feel very vulnerable when SENOs conduct care needs reviews. It was reported that "the review for them is about reviewing their job in their mind and it is difficult to allay their fears" (Pr 5). The nature of school communities is such that this vulnerability of job security is felt by the whole staff. This does not provide a positive forum for a discussion of the child's progress (Pa 3). It is hardly surprising that given this context conflict emerges. The national financial crisis, 2009-2017 was seen to have exaggerated these difficulties.

One final source of conflict which was referred to by one Principal was in relation to SENOs themselves:

> I think there is a huge conflict for the person themselves who is the SENO. They have gone into this role because they are into inclusion and they want to help the kids with special needs and then they find themselves having to do the lawmaker and laying down the law with people (Pr 2).

The frustration of SENOs with the increased administrative nature of the role, as previously outlined, would support such a view. In summary the main cause of conflict identified by participants was resource allocation most particularly in reference to the allocation of SNAs. The national financial crisis fuelled an already tense environment.

Dilemmas of practice emerging from this conflict will be discussed further in Chapter 5. Possible resolutions proposed by participants will now be considered.

5.5.2 Strategies for the resolution of conflict.

Diffusing conflict was identified by SENOs as a key aspect of their role but one which they felt was not always sufficiently valued (S1, S2, S4). Clarifying the basis of decisions made and providing information as to what was missing in an application was seen as critical:

> I think sometimes there might be a misunderstanding as to what we do or that we are being harsh in what we do, so that can be contentious. But generally when people realise, well that is the criteria, it is applied fairly across the board, they do understand that that is what has to happen (S1)

> Giving time either on the phone or meeting directly with parents and with principals, "being a listening ear" (S1) supported the building of relationships as previously discussed and was also seen to help de-escalate tensions arising. The Parent Information Sessions for parents whose children are due to start in primary school was also seen as a good opportunity to prevent anxieties escalating and thereby decreasing the likelihood of difficulties emerging later (Pa 2, S1, S2, S3,). Having met their local SENO face to face and been given their contact details, at the initial step along their child's educational journey, SENOs felt that parents were empowered by the information and felt less vulnerable: "Parent Information Sessions have been great, you are getting out and meeting a group of people and explaining this is my role, this is the role of the teacher, the SNA and so on, so they have clear information" (S2). It was also felt that parents were more likely to contact the SENO again should needs arise (CE 4, S1, S2). Clinicians too recognised these inputs as likely to assist in

supporting harmonious relationships (CE 1, CE 2, CE 4). Good communication with parents

was seen across the spectrum of participants as a key to reducing conflict.

5.6 Advocacy

This research sought to identify participants' perspectives and experiences on the role

of SENOs as advocates. One difficulty that emerged was the wide-ranging understanding of

the term advocacy. The researcher did not seek to be prescriptive as to a particular definition

but rather sought the individual response to the open question: Do you see SENOs as

advocates for inclusion? This generated quite a wide range of responses across the

participant landscape and also within responses from the same cohort of participants. In the

parental online survey parents were asked "Do you see SENOs as advocates for inclusion?":

42.5% responded "not at all", 36.6% stated SENOs "have a small advocacy role" and 20.8%

said SENOs "advocate for inclusion strongly" (Appendix 4h). Within different school

sectors (primary, post-primary, special class or special school), it is interesting to note

varying perspectives emerging. Parents of students in special classes at primary level (that is

special classes attached to mainstream schools) appeared to have less faith in SENOs as

having an advocacy role with 50% of parents who identified themselves in this category

stating "not at all" in response to the question above.

Analysing the semi-structured interviews of SENOs and clinicians, there was a clear

indication that advocacy for inclusion was a motivating factor in taking on the role: "I think

that would be part of the reason we are SENOs……that certainly would have attracted me to

the role and several SENOs that I have talked to" (S4). Others would not have identified it as

a primary aspect of the role but rather "a vein that runs through the work we do" (S1). One

psychologist stated she saw SENOs as advocates for children rather than advocates for

inclusion and identified the need of a SENO to have a broad range of expertise to affect change and advocate effectively for the child (CE1). These skills included a requirement for the SENO to have "a wealth of experience of schools, of the knowledge of education, of the knowledge of the different complex needs of the child and an understanding of parents" (CE 1). The effectiveness of the role therefore as an advocate for the child was identified as directly proportionate to the complex skill set identified and was seen as slow moving: "the SENO is chipping away to try and get that to happen" (CE 3).

The variation among parents' perspectives on the question of advocacy was a notable feature of this research. Indeed, this variation was identified by one of the parents, who was categorical in stating that her experience with two different SENOs was not necessarily everyone's experience. Her involvement in a national parent organisation gave her a broad perspective evidenced in her comment: "I had two SENOs as advocates. You could talk to people who would never have had the kind of experience that I had and they would go Advocate? What are you talking about?" (Pa1). Another parent had no such question in relation to the Visiting Teacher whom she clearly identified as an advocate for her child. A further insightful question she added in this respect was "if part of the SENOs role is around advocacy ... what autonomy do they have? …. Do they have power to influence?" (Pa 2). This issue will be examined in the next section.

Among principals, the question of advocacy generated quite a significant level of response with SENOs seen as having quite a significant role in this respect. One principal, in keeping with the psychologist previously quoted, felt the SENO's personal expertise was very important. She referred to the need to "hasten slowly....my fear was that the SENO may have an unrealistic expectation of it (*inclusion*) and didn't fully see that this is a process and that for some children it takes a couple of years" (Pr 1). Another principal saw SENOs as advocating for inclusion through their engagement with and empowering of parents. She

identified parents being intimidated by the school system and outlined the scenario where the SENO, having been contacted by the parents, "can come in and sit down with the principal or the resource team within the school and say hold on, this is the way you really need to work with this child" (Pr 2). It is interesting to note that this comment by a school principal was seen as a positive aspect of the role. It indicated her understanding of how parents can be intimidated by the school system and how SENO engagement can be seen as critically constructive, facilitating necessary change rather than as a nuisance or source of conflict for the school. Again it also indicates the kind of skill set required of the SENO to positively negotiate such change. Another principal identified the efforts of SENOs to get special classes up and running among a cross section of schools as clearly fulfilling the advocacy role. This principal had special classes in his school but was keenly aware of how SENOs had struggled to get other schools to co-operate in opening such classes (Pr 3). In this respect, he echoed a view expressed by a number of participants in relation to the authority needed to be an effective advocate and questioned whether SENOs had the power necessary to affect the level of change required (Pr 2, Pr 4).

The sub-themes of conflict and advocacy reflect the political frame of the Four Frame Model (Bolman & Deal, 2008). It is evident from participants' contributions to this study that such themes can generate difficulties, not least in how they negate positive outcomes generated by the skill set associated with the human resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008). It is also true however, that they "can be a vehicle for achieving noble purposes" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 228) and are a necessary part of the cultivation of change essential in the adoption of inclusion (Kearns. 2005; Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Kugelmas & Ainscow, 2004; Liasidou & Svensson, 2014; Qureshi, 2015; Tissot, 2013).

5.7 Power to Effect Change

At a recent NCSE Research conference the issue of power versus persuasion was encapsulated in a statement by one presenter which was strongly contested by one of those in attendance during the Question and Answer session that followed the presentation (NCSE Research Conference, 2017). Towards the end of this presentation, Peter Hicks stated that "inclusion cannot be imposed, people have to be won to it, and brought on a journey together". A person attending the conference disputed this arguing that rights were non-negotiable and that history teaches that while some may be persuaded, statutory authority backed by legislation is essential for the effective delivery of individual rights. This vignette, I believe, captures much of the discourse in the interviews conducted in this research around the role of the SENO with regard to power versus persuasion.

As has been quoted earlier, SENOs were referred to as the "yes or no people"(CE3) and in one case a principal argued that SENOs "have the hiring and firing of staff"(Pr 5). Such comments might suggest a very significant level of authority. An in depth analysis suggests a much more complex reality. This research would seem to present a broad consensus among participants, though not unanimous, that despite the comments quoted, SENOs in fact have limited power or authority. In respect of schools' practices one psychologist stated "I don't think you have the strings or the power to do anything about that" (CE 1). Both parents and clinicians spoke of their early expectations as being naive (CE 3, Pa 1, Pa 3). "I couldn't understand that you weren't the dog wagging the tail" (Pa 2). They spoke of coming to a realisation more compatible with another parent's passionate response: "My son's education was as important as anybody else's but there is nobody intervening with any power" (Pa 1). Interviewees identified the particular areas in which this perceived deficit was most pronounced including the establishment of special classes and the ability to confront barriers to inclusion. They suggested that greater authority for the SENO role would

be appropriate in the distribution of resources in schools and in challenging soft barriers. Soft

barriers to inclusive practice have been documented numerous times in reports (Meegan &

McPhail, 2006; Cosgrove, J., McKeown, C., Travers, J., Lysaght, Z., Bhroin, Ó. N., &

Archer, P., 2014 Travers et al, 2010). One principal stated that in her experience

> there was a lot of schools out there that manage to block, block, block and don't take
>
> their fair share………I think the SENO is trying but I think they don't have enough
>
> power to push it where it needs to be….there would be a lot of schools out there who
>
> haven't changed at all (Pr 2)

The term 'soft barrier' appears a bit of a euphemism when you meet with parents who

find the barriers to enrolment at times anything but soft. The issue of the refusal by some

schools to establish special classes, was identified as one of the key areas by a cross section

of participants where attention needs to focus: "if we had the power to designate schools that

would make a big difference" (S2). In this context, it is worth noting the recent legislation

(Government of Ireland, 2018) giving the Minister power to insist schools open special

classes where the NCSE have evidenced demand. Not only was the refusal by some schools

to establish such classes a major cause of concern, but also the review of students' progress

within special classes was identified as a matter requiring attention (S1, S2, CE1). Given that

SENOs sanction the setting up of classes and also the resources for the class, it seems

realistic, in the opinion of those interviewed, that some sort of review should be part of the

process.

A number of SENOs identified the root cause of the deficit in effective authority as

the suspension of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004). The role in EPSEN,

clearly outlined a position where SENOs and principals would both be in a position to call

multi-disciplinary meetings to focus on the strengths and needs of the child and to plot a

course of action through the mechanism of the IEP. An annual or bi-annual review would

ensure that learning outcomes could be measured and that where challenges were emerging action could be taken to effect results. In the absence of the legislation being enforced, SENOs noted diminished ability to engage effectively. The absence of such IEP engagement resulted in a focus on resource allocation without any structures to determine whether those resources were effectively meeting the needs of the students and supporting inclusive practices as outlined in EPSEN through the IEP process (CE1).

However, it was also noted that the role was not without influence. One clinician identified the power of persuasion: SENOs

> are expected to solve a lot of problems, people come expecting that it is your role but SENOs don't have a lot of authority to implement some of the recommendations or changes. You can suggest it is good practice, it is more about persuasion (CE 3)

The limitations of such however, were well captured by a parent who stated "the reality is some people don't want to change and you can bring the carrot but if you don't have the stick, you don't have the stick. And some people just don't like carrots!" (Pa2). This viewpoint was supported in the parental survey where 16% felt SENOs had enhanced inclusion considerably, 28% felt they had enhanced it a little , 41% felt SENOs had no impact on inclusion and 15% felt SENOs obstruct inclusion (Appendix 4f). It is worth noting that in the case of parents of primary children in mainstream classes, the view of parents varies somewhat with 22% feeling SENOs enhanced inclusion considerably (Appendix 4f). The vignette referenced earlier echoes the question raised the question raised by participants as to whether everybody can be won to inclusion by persuasion. Considerable consensus by participants that SENOs required greater clout was evident but the purpose of that power differed conspicuously depending on who you were speaking to. Parents, clinicians and some principals identified a need to give SENOs the power to open special classes in schools where demand was evidenced in their community. One principal (Pr 3) advocated for greater

power for the SENO to place children in appropriate educational settings when parents were disinclined to opt for such settings. This would be inconsistent with parental constitutional rights and a level of power for which SENOs in this research demonstrated no appetite.

The importance of cultures and attitude was seen as critical by participants in opening the door to inclusion "its massive, a massive key" (Pr2). The SENO role in promoting such cultural and attitudinal change was perceived by the various interviewees in different ways and to varying levels of effectiveness. It is interesting to note that those outside the immediacy of schools, clinicians and parents, tended to identify the SENO as having more influence in this regard than those working in schools, namely principals and teachers. This is an interesting insight into the way different participants perceive the way cultural change occurs. It may be possible that schools, tending to be islands of considerable independence, perceive change happening primarily from within that island and at times are resistant to external pressures and influences. This is very relevant to inclusion when one considers that in the literature the pressure for change from a segregated to an inclusive model is seen as emanating from external as much as internal pressures.

The various perspectives of participants on SENOs contribution to cultural and attitudinal change inhabited a spectrum stretching from one clinician who argued that "certainly SENOs had a major contribution in shifting cultures and attitudes in schools" (CE1) to a teacher who saw SENOs having no role in this. Most points along this spectrum were captured by one or more participant. For example, in contrast to the clinician just quoted, one principal stated he was not so sure about SENOs' contribution but certainly felt some credit must be due to them (Pr4). His experience was that the level of cultural change that has taken place in respect of inclusion was a "sea change" in the Irish educational landscape (Pr4). He acknowledged that SENOs had a part to play in this but was unsure as to the measure of their contribution.

The provision of resources was identified as contributing to cultural and attitudinal change and involving SENO participation, whether through securing additional teaching hours or SNA, or the opening of special classes. Participants saw the setting up of structures which facilitate cultural change on the ground as primary to the SENOs' contribution in this area. SENOs engagement in directly confronting the issues that inhibit such change were seen as much less significant in altering schools' cultural norms. These contributions naturally reside in the symbolic frame of the Four Frame Model (Bolman & Deal, 2008), the central concerns of which are "meaning, belief and faith" (Bolman & Deal, 2008, p. 248). Such qualities are the building blocks of an organisation's culture and also the attitudes and actions its culture generates.

5.8 Summary

The sub-themes emerging from the data analysis in this research proved multi-faceted and diverse. The extent of SENO involvement in administrative and bureaucratic processes presented as a major sub-theme and a source of frustration among many of the participants, SENOs and stakeholders alike. The provision of advice and support by SENOs rooted in the EPSEN Act and acknowledged in NCSE documents (Customer Charter 2013, 2017) was acknowledged as valuable by participants. However, a somewhat negative trajectory in the delivery of this aspect of the role since its inception was identified. The increased workload noted by participants and evidenced by NCSE Annual Report (2017) was identified as a cause of the decline in such provision by SENOs. The centrality of the local aspect of the position, good communication skills, attention to relationship building and good networking were all named by participants as critical factors in maximising SENO provision of advice and support. Diverse viewpoints were expressed by participants as to the evidence of these key skills in their individual engagement with SENOs. However, even among those who felt

SENO provision in this area was inadequate, there was consensus that this aspect of the role should be maintained and improved.

The new model of allocation of additional teaching supports, though only beginning at the time of the research in the field, was noted by many as an opportunity for a re-calibration of the role to support greater engagement in this area. Such changes were seen as beneficial for a number of reasons including supporting resolutions to emergent problems and conflicts. Conflictual realities were recognised by participants as inherent in the role. The scarcity of resources and the bureaucratic nature of applications were acknowledged as contributing to such conflict. The importance of advice and support by SENOs was to the foreground in participants' explanations of strategies necessary to reduce such conflict. Providing clarity as to what was required in applications was considered valuable in this respect. SENO capacity to support change at a systems level in schools was generally viewed as limited by participants and confined to the power of persuasion. The provision of additional resources was recognised to support a more receptive context.

Multi-faceted aspects of the SENO role were captured in participants' reflections on their engagement with SENOs and reflected the variety of skills demanded in carrying out that role. The four frame model (Bolman & Deal, 2008) outlined in Chapter 2, with the attendant skill sets, assisted in providing "a structure for organising and supporting ideas (and) a mechanism for systematically arranging abstractions" (Weaver-Hart, 1988, p.11). The diverse and varied skill set required of SENOs as captured by participants illuminated the clustering of the diverse data to support the emergence of the three themes which will be discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the themes emerging from participants'
perceptions and experiences of the SENO role with reference to current literature and data
gathered in this research. This will reflect the perspectives of participants and the shades and
nuances of their experience in light of current literature discussed in Chapter 3 and be
informed by the conceptual framework underpinning the study. A diversity of views
emerged from participants drawn from varied backgrounds. Three themes emerged from the
sub themes outlined in Chapter 5: gatekeeper, juggler and facilitator and are illustrated in
Figure 6.1

Fig. 6.1 Four Frame Model and the Themes Emerging
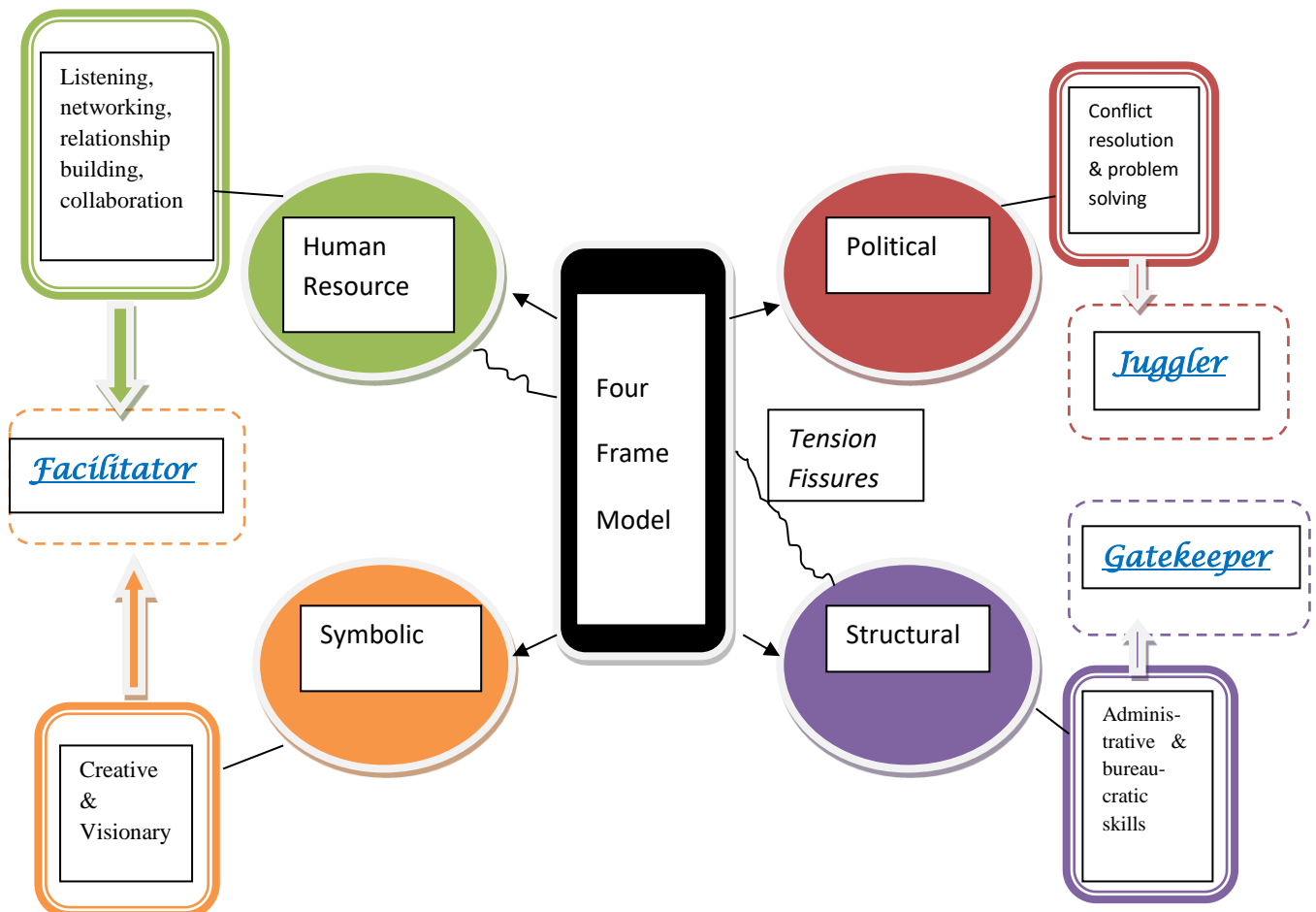
In participants' perceptions, as generated in this study, SENOs fit into a policy actor typology as translators (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012,) whose constituent parts consist of accounting, reporting, monitoring, supporting, facilitating. The themes of gatekeeper, juggler and facilitator provide a magnified view of the translator role. The four frame model (Bolman & Deal, 2008) with its human, political, structural and symbolic frames illuminate this magnified view. While interconnected, the themes of gatekeeper and facilitator generate tensions and fissures which the juggler role seeks to address. The details relating to each theme will be documented in the three sections which follow. Limitations of the themes are considered in the fourth section with concluding comments in the final section of the chapter.

6.1 Gatekeeper

The issue of SENOs as distributors of resources or "gatekeepers" dominated participants' perceptions and experiences of the role and emerged as a major theme in the research. Sub themes emerging in Chapter 5 which gather around this theme are participants' perceptions of the administration of resources, current systems and processes, SENO workload and clarity concerning the role's primary functions. These reflect aspects of the SENO role relevant to the research question which reside comfortably within the structural frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The perception of the dominance of administrative tasks appears to be shared by all participants including SENOs themselves and results in the emergence of the "gatekeeper" as a theme. This dominance in participants' experience has increased significantly over the lifetime of the role to date, 2005 -2018. Participants identified the national financial crisis as one cause of this increase and also the outworking of the Assessment of Need (Government of Ireland, 2005) process which was seen to have generally resulted in earlier diagnoses. Furthermore, this dominance reflects an image of a managerial role which relies on what one principal referred to as "a business model". Such a structural design of the SENO role was perceived by a number of participants to poorly

address the diversity and complexity of the subject of special educational needs. It reflects a dichotomy noted in the literature between the policy of inclusion and managerialism. (Liasidou & Svensson, 2014; Morewood, 2012; Goodley, 2007). This administrative trend is in keeping with a trajectory presented in the SENCO literature (Cole, 2005; Crowther, Dyson & Millward, 2001; Curran, 2019; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2012; Poon M-Brayer, 2012).

The gatekeeper role was seen to have evolved over the years since the role's inception and was viewed by participants as having a negative trajectory. The increasing administration was noted as detrimental to SENO's work on the ground which is consistent with SENCO literature in England (Cole, 2005; Cowne, 2005; Qureshi, 2014, 2015; Tissot, 2013) The imposition of increased regulation and the growth of heavily bureaucratic systems are common in other jurisdictions, and a source of frustration for service users (Crowther, Dyson & Millward, 2001). Research participants echoed such frustrations identifying a decrease both in the quantity and quality of SENO engagement in schools in more recent years. A negative corollary was seen to persist between the increased bureaucracy of the job and SENOs' other responsibilities resulting in frustration that expertise is underutilised. One principal, who referenced the value SENOs contributed in the early years to the practical evolution of inclusive practice, bemoaned the decrease in their contribution in recent years. Participants recognised that a significant contributory factor to this negative trajectory was the very considerable increase in the SENO workload. This was seen to mitigate against SENOs ability to contribute positively as had been the case in its early years. Notably this was referenced by schools and parents alike.

It would also appear from participants' contributions that the criteria for resource distribution to schools by SENOs have not evolved in line with the current discourse on inclusive pedagogy (Florian & Black Hawkins, 2011). A trajectory of thought captured in this discourse has moved away from the concept of individual pathology known as the

medical model to organisational pathology (Thomas & Vaughan, 2004) and "supports an approach to inclusive education that supports a universal response" (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017, p. 455).   Resource distribution, as delivered by SENOs, did not appear to facilitate "a continuum of pedagogy to meet the continuum of need" (Ní Bhroin, 2017, p. 38). At the time the research was conducted, the deficit model appeared, in participants' perceptions, to be an intrinsic part of the system presently being administered by SENOs. In the experience of some clinicians, reports are being written to meet the criteria of circulars rather than capturing the strengths and needs of the individual child and one parent noted that the principal of the school where her child attended, informed her that the identification of strengths did not have a place in the application process. Such strategic behaviour (Pijl, 2014) to generate resources is not appropriate in the current discourse and the fostering of such practice raises an ethical issue. It appears, in the perceptions of some participants, to be a direct result of the bureaucratic system in place at present. It is not in keeping with the current emphasis on learning without limits (Hart, Dixon, Drummond, & McIntrye 2004) and the capabilities approach to understanding special educational needs (Terzi, 2010). Participant perspectives of SENOs delivering a system that appears to highlight individual needs, appears to have them out of step with the trajectory in current discourse and fosters a gatekeeper image.

However, in this context, it is important to note the current changes in the allocation of teaching resources which impact the SENO role. The new model of allocation (DES, 2017a & b) allocates additional teaching supports based on an algorithm consisting of differently weighted factors. A school profile is thus formed which determines the additional teaching allocation for each school. SENOs are therefore no longer involved in the assessment process for a school's allocation. This change was instigated in 2017 while participant interviews were being conducted. The new model was being cautiously

welcomed by participants. A certain nervousness existed as to what level of allocation

schools might receive. However within this cautionary atmosphere, it was noted by

participants with some optimism that this new model would allow SENOs to engage more

proactively with schools and parents. Given the negative perspectives with respect to the

SENO role as the gatekeeper of resources, this was identified by participants as an

opportunity to recalibrate the role to support more positive engagement with all stakeholders.

The SENO role was instituted in the legislation adopting inclusive education as the

state's option for education in the twenty first century. The role is thus intrinsically linked to

the policy of inclusion. The evolution of the role since its foundation has, in the perspective

of participants, resulted in a decrease in the contribution of SENOs to support schools and

parents in the daily outworking of inclusion. The administrative construct of the role was

identified as a source of frustration both for those seeking to access resources and for SENOs

themselves who are presented as the "gatekeepers" of these resources. The system was

identified by participants as over rigid with an inability to capture and respond to the

diversity of children's developmental and educational needs. These factors combine to

negatively impact the perception of the role, captured by participants' image of the SENO as

"the grim reaper" and "headmistress". That being said, the experience of participants also

acknowledged ways in which SENOs contributed to inclusion in schools within the

gatekeeper theme through the allocation of resources. This reflects what has been identified

internationally and already referenced regarding the necessity of additional resources to meet

the demands presenting in an inclusive model of education. (Cole, 2005; Curran, 2019;

Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012; Pijl, 2014; Poon Mc-Brayer, 2012; Qureshi, 2014; Tissot, 2013)

Such demands were anticipated in the SERC report (DE, 1993). Additional teaching support

is seen as necessary to create conditions that allow for differentiation to address child specific

learning targets (Mitchell, Morton & Hornby, 2010; Rose et al., 2012). The IEP was

envisaged in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) to have an important role in facilitating such inclusive practices and anticipated the SENO contributing to these plans. While such engagement did not materialise for reasons previously outlined, it would appear from the data gathered in this research that the allocation of resources by SENOs did, in the perception of some participants, indirectly contribute to inclusive practice even if this was not in the manner or to the measure originally conceived in the legislation (Government of Ireland, 2004).

One way this contribution unfolded, as perceived by participants, was in the development of special classes. Special classes were seen by some participants to offer opportunities to children with the more complex special needs to attend within a mainstream setting. SENOs were seen as critical to the expansion of these classes as they not only sanction the classes but were also responsible for their specific designation based on the data gathered by SENOs locally evidencing the demand for such classes. The expansion of special classes in primary and post primary schools, as evidenced in the Fig 3.5 (Chapter 3), was seen to facilitate the inclusion of students who otherwise may not have been included in mainstream schools and participants also noted the cultural and attitudinal changes these classes promoted. One principal participant suggested that the greatest beneficiaries of special classes were not those who attended them but rather the whole school community as these classes promoted a greater understanding of difference previously not experienced in the school. Parental perspectives on SENOs contribution to inclusion through the setting up of special classes was quite diverse. In the on line survey among parents, 56% of parents with a child in a mainstream primary school with support saw the SENO as enhancing inclusion as opposed to 28% in primary special classes. This diversity of thought possibly reflects the diversity of conceptualisation in respect of inclusion (Florian, 2014; Gallagher, 2014; Hegarty, 2014; Rioux, 2014; Runswick & Cole, 2011). This diversity gives rise to

multiple interpretations and produces very varied perspectives on how inclusive special environments are: "the very resources provided to facilitate inclusion can contribute to separate, fragmented, marginalised and often times exclusionary teaching-learning experiences for learners with special educational needs" (Ní Bhroin, 2017, p. 156). This is a debate beyond the reach of this research but is important to bear in mind in the context of the very significant of special classes in recent years which SENOs have sanctioned. However varied perspectives on the inclusive or segregationist characteristic of special classes influences perspectives on SENOs as gatekeepers of resources..

The data gathered in this research demonstrates the dominance of circulars rather than legislation in the translation of the SENO role into practice. The evidence of this research strongly suggests that in the view of research participants, the fact that the distribution of resources was detailed to SENOs by circulars despite little evidence that this was in keeping with the role initially envisaged in EPSEN, was a structural factor of primary importance which negatively impacted participants' perspectives of the role and fostered the image of SENO as the gatekeeper.

6.2 Juggler

A multiplicity of factors were noted by participants to contribute to tensions in the SENO role. These tensions were seen as diverse and conflicting demands which necessitated SENOs adopt skills akin to a juggler. Such aspects of the role, mirror the political frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008) and require a political skill set to effectively defuse controversies arising. Participants identified the scarcity of resources, the perceived reality of a "cut" in resources administered by SENOs, the sensitivities of special educational needs and an inflexible system of application and distribution as the causes of such tensions. Resources and their means of distribution is a major theme in SENCO literature (Cole, 2005; Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012; Qureshi, 2014; Tissot, 2013): "there is a great deal of consensus that without

proper funding it is difficult to close the huge gap between policy and practice" (Cole, 2005, p.298). SENCOs' assertions concerning complexities for practitioners at the coal face of delivery (Burton & Goodman, 2011; Cole, 2005; Crowther, Dyson & Millward, 2001), reflect the diversity and complexity of needs presenting for students with special educational needs. It is difficult for policy makers to devise a system of resource distribution which caters for such diversity and yet is equitable to all. In this context, it is perhaps easy to see why the allocation of scarce resources requires the juggling of diverse demands and impacts participants' perceptions so strongly. Some participants' images such as "boffin" and "bean counter" demonstrate inherent tensions formulated within this context. These perceptions are interesting to consider in the context of the overall cuts in state resources across the public service between 2011 and 2016 during the financial crises. It may be that participant perceptions regarding the allocation of resources were influenced by the nationwide experience of austerity and its impact on public services such as the 15% cut in resource teaching allocation (DES, 2011). The figures in Fig. 3.1 and 3.2 (Chapter 3) suggest a significant growth in resources during the period but this must be considered within the context of significant demographic growth as evidenced in Fig. 3.3 and 3.4 (Chapter 3).

Other factors causing inherent tensions in the SENO role as evidenced in this research include the sensitivities of special education for parents and teaching staff. This concurs with evidence in the literature (Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Kugelmas & Ainscow, 2004; MacGiolla Phadraig, 2010; Norwich, 2009) which note the particular importance of such sensitivities in the area. The fact that SENOs frequently engage with parents at times where they feel vulnerable (Blackwell & Rosetti, 2014; Conaty, 1999; Ferguson, 2008; MacGiolla Phadraig, 2010; Walsh & Farrell, 2012) means sensitive, difficult conversations are required. Such times include a recent diagnosis of a disability or when their child is struggling in school. Fear and vulnerability are very keenly felt by parents at such times and make for tense

discussions. The vulnerability of parents when dealing with schools or people in places of perceived authority, is referenced in the literature (Farrell, 2001; Ferguson, 2008; Mac Giolla Phadraig, 2008; Mathews. 2017**).** In such circumstance it is understandable that parents look to resources as the solution to the needs emerging and the determination of their allocation becomes all the more fractious in such a milieu.

Hargreaves and Tucker (1991) present an interesting perspective on teachers trying to meet the needs of all the students in their care and the resulting sense of what they term depressive guilt. Within this context, the demand for additional resources can become urgent and at times fractious. The data from this research show the strength of conviction among educators that additional needs require additional resources and SENOs, as "the gatekeepers" of such resources, can be perceived as a barrier to the receipt of same. Such a perception of the role will promote conflict as referenced by one principal "fighting" for the maximum support. The perceived rigidity of the process further aggravates tensions between practitioners on the ground, principals, teachers, and SENOs. For SENOs to build the kind of collaborative practice outlined in EPSEN (Government of Ireland, 2004) which includes advice, support, consultation, networking, teamwork, and the administration and distribution of scarce resources as per circulars (DES, 2005 a & b), these tensions must be juggled by the SENO to limit negative outcomes.

The literature on inclusive education provides ample examples of both the diversity and complexity of its conceptualisation (Florian, 2014; Gallagher, 2014; Hegarty, 2014; Rioux, 2014; Runswick-Cole, 2011) and also dilemmas that inhabit the field (Norwich, 2002, 2009; Paul & Ward, 1996). The literature on the SENCO role echoes a similar recognition of these complexities (Cole, 2005; Crowther, 2001; Liasidou & Svensson, 2014; Pearson, 2008; Qureshi, 2014). Pearson describes the SENCO role as a job "bedevilled by unresolved tension" (2008, p. 105). Data analysis in this research showed some evidence of how such

dilemmas invade SENO practice with subsequent tensions emerging. The tension existing between managerialism and professionalism is clearly evidenced by the principal who stated "this business model is being put on top of this little round egg and by God they are going to get this box on top of it. But we are very, very, oval (laugh) and there is no getting this box on top of us" (Pr 5). This comment reflects an assertion that policies of inclusion exist in a culture which is increasingly being described as "quasi market" (Cole, 2005, p.5). This tension was recognised to exist in a systemic way as already outlined. It also was noted by one principal as a possible unresolved tension for SENOs themselves (Pr 2): "because they believe in inclusion" and then finding themselves "having to do the lawmaker" (Pr2). SENOs themselves corroborated this evidence. These inherent tensions capture the need for SENOs to adopt a skill set akin to a juggler.

Strategic behaviour (Pijl, 2014) can exacerbate tensions between policy and practice (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992; Jenkins, 1993; Hegarty, 1993, 2014). Evidence from this research confirms this. One clinician referenced clinical practice that "writes to the circulars" (CE4) and a parent commented that the principal advised her to only include negative aspects of her child's presentation when applying for resources. Within this context, the SENO has a responsibility to deliver an equitable and evidence based response to applications and to juggle demands with DES criteria in an effective manner. While the frustrations of bureaucratic demands were recognised by teachers and SENOs, one SENO did argue that a certain rigidity was required to ensure equitable and consistent decision making.

Such dilemmas are part of SENO practice on a regular basis. Given participants perceived negative trajectory outlined under the gatekeeper theme, the tensions resulting appear to be increasing rather than decreasing. Strategies for resolution noted by participants include negotiation, explanation, conflict resolution and problem solving and require SENOs to demonstrate a political skill set juggling diverse and conflicting demands. Chapter 7 will

address some recommendations that might be considered to deliver resolutions to such tensions.

6.3 SENO as Facilitator

Exploring the research question through the human resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008), the third theme to emerge from the exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences of the SENO role was that of facilitator. Factors which participants identified as supporting this theme included communication, networking, relationship building, and collaborative practice with key stakeholders which was supported by the local nature of the job. These were all seen to facilitate inclusion. Influences impacting the early development of the role and the consequential effects on stakeholders' perspectives of SENOs as facilitators will first be discussed. Attention will then move to areas where the SENOs, in the perspectives and experiences of participants, are seen as facilitators of inclusion through the advice and support offered to parents and schools, collaborative practice and the development of social capital. Limitations to the role as facilitator will finally be discussed

6.3.1 SENO as Facilitator: Early influences on participant perceptions

The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) was identified by many of the research participants as a key document in forming the early perception of the SENO role. It provided significant foundations for the development of the role as a facilitator of inclusion but, in participants' experience, its suspension in 2008 meant that the role's initial formation was somewhat confused. In the view of one educational professional, the refusal of teacher unions to engage with the IEP process as outlined in the legislation and the acceptance of this action by the department, meant that the IEP process and SENOs' engagement with it was in

effect "condemned to never" (CE 2).   This uncertain beginning impinged on the development of clarity regarding the role and allowed diverse interpretations to be fostered. Such lack of clarity remains a consistent theme to the present day as evidenced in this research. Such a milieu does not help to support good working relationships, effective networking or a sense of confidence in the service that SENOs provide as facilitators. The SENCO literature (Robertson, 2012; Tissot, 2013) evidences the value of these characteristics in the facilitation of change.

Another early influence which did not assist the development of positive relationships with schools was the contemporaneous adoption of policies which were not initially welcomed by schools. SENOs interviewed for this research, who have been with the NCSE since its inception, reported their early engagements with schools. These early meetings were seen as critical to building positive working relationships with schools. SENOs, as per their initial training, informed principals that they would have nothing to do with resourcing and sought to build relationships outside the thorny issue of the resources being given to the schools. Yet three months later, they were directed back to schools to inform them that not only would they be dealing with additional teaching hours but also with the SNA allocation. This practice fostered distrust rather than confidence between schools and SENOs in those important early days. Given the fears that any significant change in education policy will generate (Shevlin, 2002; Ware et al., 2009), conflicting messages in these early days did not support the facilitation of positive networking or the collaborative practice that the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) envisaged.

Another influence which did not bode well for the fledgling role, was particularly significant in special schools. With the introduction of the inclusive model of education as legislated for in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004), special schools felt vulnerable within a changing landscape (Ware et al., 2009). It was vital therefore that the

NCSE and their local representatives, SENOs, would foster relationships with special schools to both support the change and assure special schools of their role within the continuum initially outlined in the SERC Report (DE, 1993) and further supported within the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004). In this context, the review of the SNA allocation in special schools which had been begun by the inspectorate prior to the recruitment of SENOs and which was handed to the SENOs to complete, was likely to cultivate conflict and a negative perspective of the SENO as facilitator. A further review carried out in 2009/2010 impacted negatively on SNA allocations in special schools and gained wide media attention. It was in this context that the slogan (SayNo for SENO) was first heard. This negative perception of SENOs in relation to the granting of resources, according to the data gathered in this research, continues to persist. The suspension of EPSEN (Government of Ireland, 2004), the introduction of the GAM at the same time as SENOs were first visiting schools and the decision to use SENOs as instruments of resource allocation all combined to produce an early perception among schools and parents alike that was not conducive to the conceptualization of the SENO role as facilitating inclusion as EPSEN (Government of Ireland, 2004) had intimated. This perception will now be discussed in the context of the role's more recent history.

6.3.2 SENOs as facilitators of inclusive practice

Combined with the practical expansion of supports, the relationships SENOs develop with schools was identified as important in facilitating the promotion of inclusive practice. The local consistent nature of the role was seen as a positive stimulant supporting both schools and parents particularly where the effective inclusion of the student required negotiating and problem solving. However, the interpretation of the SENO role as a positive agent for inclusion was by no means universal in this research. Amongst SENOs themselves, there were varying perceptions of their impact on inclusive practice. Some participants felt

SENOs were neutral to inclusion and others identified SENOs as opening pathways through resourcing and the provision of information. This diversity of opinion was also reflected in the parental online survey (Appendix 4f) where 44% of participants saw SENOs as enhancing inclusion, either considerably (15.7%) or a little (28.48%), while 41% felt SENOs had no impact on inclusion. Indeed, 14.7% felt that SENOs obstruct inclusion. If we drill down into these figures it is interesting to note that parents of students in mainstream primary schools had a markedly more positive view of the role's impact on inclusive practice than the parents of students in special schools (Appendix 4f). Perhaps this reflects a positive sense of their child being included in their local educational community and proportioning some of this outcome to the role of the SENO whereas parents of those in special schools feel excluded from their local educational community which correspondingly reflects on the SENOs role. It is perhaps also evidence of the association in stakeholders' perspectives of the connection between inclusion and the SENO role.

Participants echoed what the literature clearly outlines in relation to the importance of school cultures in the development of inclusive models of education (Booth et al, 2000; Kinsella & Senior, 2008). As in other areas of exploration a diversity of experience was forthcoming. Varying perspectives of the SENO as a facilitator of change were offered. What is of note in these diverse viewpoints, is that clinical and educational professionals other than teachers and principals, tend to have a significantly more positive view of SENO influence in supporting the cultural and attitudinal change necessary for the transformation of schools from a segregated model to one of inclusion. These diverse perspectives raise an interesting question. Teachers and schools are "living organisations" (Kinsella & Senior, 2008, p. 659) engaging in "a complex endeavour that is embedded in contexts that are highly diverse" (Guskey, 1994, p. 7). This complex endeavour evidences some "conservatism and resistance to innovation in teaching" (Hargreaves & Fullen, 1992, p. 11). While significant change has

occurred across the Irish educational landscape (Day & Travers, 2010; Fitzgerald & Radford 2017; Ní Bhroin, 2017) in the past twenty years, it may be that a resistance to pressures, external to the school community, persists. This is relevant to the inclusive discourse when one considers that in the literature, the pressure for change towards the adoption of an inclusive model, is seen as germinating in political, philosophical and human rights domains rather than within pedagogical discourse. While the latter is very important to the development of changed practice, the stimulus for such change is primarily rooted in parental litigation (Farrell, 2001; Griffin & Shevlin, 2007; Lipsky, 1993; Shevlin, Kenny & Loxley, 2008), social justice (Rioux, 2014) and philosophical change (Farrell, 2001; MacGiolla Phadraig, 2010; Shevlin, Kenny & Loxley, 2008). There is considerable evidence in research to date of resistance to change or barriers towards embedding inclusive practice to support "deep change" (Kinsella & Senior, 2008; McDonnell, 2003; MacGiolla Phadraig, 2010; NCSE, 2013; Paul & Ward, 1996; Runswick-Cole, 2011). The perspective of participants on SENOs capacity to facilitate cultural and attitudinal change, since the adoption of an inclusive model of education under EPSEN (Ireland, 2004), has to be considered in this context.

6.3.3 SENOs as facilitators of change

Promoters of change are required if inclusion is to be embedded within educational systems (Kinsella & Senior, 2008). Given Ireland's trajectory from a segregated to an inclusive model of education and the fact that it was so late to this process when compared to its international neighbours, it is not difficult to see why agents of change were required. The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) recognised this necessity in the establishment of the NCSE and the SENO role to support the development of an inclusive model of education. This research evidences SENO appetite for such. The need for a transforming force is echoed in the literature on the SENCO role in the English education system (Cowne, 2005; Qureshi,

2014; Qureshi, 2015; Tissot, 2012). SENCOs are identified as "agents of change" (Qureshi, 2014, p.218) and are seen as critical to change management and capacity building (Cowne, 2005; Qureshi, 2015; Tissot, 2012). Their strategic influence both in building teaching skills and in developing positive attitudes towards more inclusive practice are highlighted (Qureshi, 2014; Tissot, 2012) and acknowledged as key components of the necessary capacity building to deliver inclusive schools (DfEE, 2001; Kinsella & Senior, 2008).

The power to facilitate change is therefore critical in the delivery of an inclusive model of education and this research sought to explore participants' perceptions of the SENO role in this respect. Participants noted the lack of authority in the SENO role to "push it (inclusion) where it needs to be" (Pr2). Interviewees not only identified a lack of authority but also areas in particular in which this deficit was most pronounced. These included SENOs' inability to confront soft barriers to inclusive practice and their limitations in establishing special classes in schools where local demand for such provision was evidenced. While questions arise in the literature as to whether special classes are instruments of inclusion and facilitators of inclusive pedagogy (Freeman & Alkins, 2000; Kauffman & Hallahan, 2005; McCoy, Banks, Frawley, Shevlin, Smyth & Watson, 2014; Travers, 2009; Ware et al., 2009) participants in this research identified them as part of the framework providing inclusive education. It is clear from the progression evidenced in the development of the Code of Practice for SENCOs in England, this issue of power to effect change is recognised. As it has evolved over the years, the SENCO position has been given more authority within senior management in order to accomplish the necessary cultural and attitudinal changes required on the ground. No such evolution in the role of the SENO was identified by participants in this research. Rather the data gathered in this research drew an image of SENOs as a somewhat impotent force in facilitating change management in schools. The responsibility of the SENO role was recognised but seen as ineffective in the task of

affecting real change. This is consistent with research exploring the SENCO role in the Irish

post primary sector where SENCOs were noted to have "little agency to effect changes to

whole school inclusive practice" (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017, p. 464). Participants'

contributions evidence the difference between persuasion and power: SENOs "are expected

to solve a lot of problems.... but SENOs don't have a lot of authority to implement

....changes.... it is more about persuasion" (CE3). Parents similarly perceived an impotency

in the SENO role to facilitate change identifying that SENOs. One suggested SENOs only

having "carrots" and no "stick" (Pa2). In the perceptions of a number of SENO participants,

the cause of this deficit in efficacy vis-à-vis change was rooted in the suspension of so much

of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004).

In summary, SENOs were identified to facilitate change primarily through the

allocation of resources. The relationships SENOs have developed at local level with schools,

parents and clinicians were also seen as a positive contributor at local level. However

SENOs were generally perceived as relatively ineffective facilitators of change most

particularly in relation to the barriers to inclusive practice evidenced in the literature (Mac

Giolla Phadrag, 2008; NCSE, 2013; Runswick-Cole, 2011). The provision of advice and

support by SENOs was more positively reflected on by research participants.

6.3.4 The advice and support offered by SENOs: a factor supporting the

facilitator theme.

The provision of advice and support for schools and parents, is referenced in the

literature as foundational to the development of inclusive practices (Cole, 2005; Crowne,

2005; Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012). The data emerging from this research identified the

provision of advice and support to parents and schools as an essential aspect of SENO

practice. This suggests practice conforming in some measure with policy as outlined in key

documents (Government of Ireland, 2004; NCSE, 2013). It also reflects key components

identified in the literature (Cole, 2005; Crowne, 2005; Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Qureshi, 2014). This aspect of the provision of advice and support to schools and parents was identified as a motivational factor for many SENOs in their decision to join the NCSE. The provision of advice and support, in the view of participants, empowered parents through the provision of relevant information particularly at transitional or difficult periods along their child's educational journey as evidenced by one parent who stated that it was "lovely to be able to go to someone when you are confused who can guide you" (PaT2). This viewpoint was supported by an educational professional who stated that SENOs provide "good solid advice, the options etc., the limitations of choosing one option versus another; so that is all knowledge which actually is a great service to provide for people" (CE1). This research demonstrates participants' perception of the importance of providing good advice if parents are to effectively engage in their child's education. Such parental engagement is critical to the effective education of children as referenced in the literature (Lipsky, 2005; Mac Giolla Phadraig, 2008) and promoted in the legislation (Government of Ireland, 2004). The vulnerability of parents when engaging with schools is acknowledged (Ferguson, 2008; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Riddell, 2007), and echoed by parent who engaged in this research: "the first SENO I met with allayed my fears" (Pa1). Parents' fears, limited knowledge of the educational system and in some cases poor personal experience of school can combine to deter parental engagement. The independence of the SENO role was noted to facilitate parental engagement and build a bridge between home and school when required. The fact that SENOs were external to the school was seen as a positive factor facilitating an "honest broker" (Pa 2) role. One educational professional identified SENOs "journeying with" (CE 1) parents as a valid and valuable aspect of the role. The fact that SENOs were identified as travelling with schools and parents along a somewhat difficult, if adventurous, journey is significant within the context of relationship building and in the development of inclusive practices, problem solving and creative thinking to identify possible solutions in difficult

scenarios. The local nature of the role and the consistency of engagement for parents with one local person as their child progressed through his/her education was identified as a significant factor in facilitating the kind of relationships that promote parental engagement.

6.3.5 SENOs as facilitators of collaborative practice

The factors influencing the early years of the role's development identified above, cultivated a difficult environment in which to operate collaboratively with schools, parents, clinicians and other educational professionals. The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004, Section 8) and many of the NCSE documents (NCSE 2006, 2013, 2017) promoted qualities residing in a collaborative framework such as consultation, co-operation, teamwork, provision of information and facilitation of multi-disciplinary engagement. In seeking to explore perceptions and experiences of the SENO role as facilitator, analysis of the research question through the human resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008) shed light on aspects of the role requiring attention in this study: relationships, communication and collaboration.

In the data gathered through the semi-structured interviews, evidence exists from clinicians and principals of the kind of engagement envisaged in the legislation and promoted in the relevant literature ((Denton, 1998; Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018). Working together to "accomplish a task.....by reaching a mutual understanding of how to solve problems and resolve complex ethical and practical dilemmas" (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010, p. 92) is important when seeking to find ways students can maximise their potential. Such practice allows people learn from the perspective of different disciplines to inform professional knowledge and practice. SENOs saw multi-disciplinary engagement as a positive and effective part of their practice. Such practice appears to bear dividends in the experience of other research participants who identified the SENO acting as a bridge who could help straddle the disparity of perspectives between health and education professionals.

Diverse perspectives among parents were evidenced on the accessibility of SENOs and the support they provided Of those surveyed 48% stated they found engagement with the SENO helpful or very helpful while 42% found it unhelpful or very unhelpful (Appendix 4d). Of the parents interviewed, a more positive perspective was enunciated on accessibility and the support SENOs provide. From their engagement in national parental organisations, they did note that their positive responses were not necessarily universally felt. Key components of this collaborative engagement included guidance, information, and explanation of DES criteria for successful applications. These were evidenced by parents in their experience with SENOs. The importance of SENO facilitation in this area, given vulnerability of parents (Mac Giolla Phadraig, 2008; Ferguson 2008), was evidenced by one parent who on interview appeared a very strong advocate for her child yet stated:

> I had a fairly positive relationship with the school. There were times there
> were difficulties but because you are dependent completely on the school, there is a
> huge fear of saying anything…..even to ask a question, you might not always be right
> …*pause…*but you want to know is this right. You are not asking them (SENOs) to
> take sides, you just want to bounce something off them. Just to say this happened to
> me, can I tell you confidentially, can you tell me is that ok or am I being
> unreasonable (Pa3)

Such comments demonstrate the real vulnerability of parents of children with special needs, despite what many identify as a hegemony transfer in the educational landscape (Farrell, 2001; Ferguson, 2008; Mac Giolla Phadraig, 2008) and also evidence a vital component of the SENO role given the importance of effective parental engagement if students are to maximise their potential.

The local nature of the SENO role was seen as particularly positive in terms of promoting collaborative practice: "you are able to pick up the phone" (CE 3). Proximity of

actors promotes both planned and casual collaborative practice as evidenced in research (Spillane, Hopkins & Sweet, 2015). One clinician captured this in her statement: "with that local knowledge there can be a greater shared understanding" (CE 3).

The benefits of this were clearly evidenced: "having that positive engagement creates capacity because it gives you energy, it gives new ideas" (CE 3). Trust is well documented as a critical ingredient of collaborative practice (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) and again the local nature of the role appears to sustain practices that build such trust: "I have found where I have a relationship with a SENO it is easier to have that conversation and where the answer is no, you are inclined to trust them" (CE4). Given the challenges of the SENO role as 'gatekeeper' as previously outlined this is a particularly significant comment and demonstrates just how important collaborative engagement is for the SENO role as a facilitator of inclusion.

6.3.6 SENOs as facilitators of social capital expansion

While the terms advice/support/ expertise are used to cover a broad range of services which foster the development and growth of all three aspects of capital, human, social and decisional (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012), it is worthwhile differentiating which aspects may be within the remit of the SENO facilitation and which aspects may be best served by other professionals. In the context of inclusive education, human capital is best understood in terms of up skilling teachers to best meet the needs of students presenting in their classrooms. Much of the focus on the expansion of human capital centers around professional development (Guskey, 1994; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012) targeting both individual and whole school teaching skill sets, the aim of which is to nurture evidence based pedagogically sound practice in relation to specific needs. Within this context, a balance has to be reached between strategies for specific disabilities and an inclusive pedagogy which focuses on "extending what is generally available to everybody as opposed to providing for all by

differentiating for some" (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011, p. 813). This pedagogy is not a recent arrival to the discourse but has gained significant traction in recent years. Ysseldyke (1987) argued that there were no teaching strategies and techniques that were uniquely effective for certain categories of children. In more recent research "the continuum of pedagogy to meet the continuum of need" (Ní Bhroin, 2017, p. 38) conceptualises a capacity in schools for more diverse strategies within the concept of a universal design.

Within this debate the focus on the expansion of human capital needs to be conceptualised in a broader vein than frequently occurs. However taking the narrow concept of human capital asset development as meaning the upskilling of teachers with diverse teaching strategies and methodologies, I would argue that the role of SENOs within this understanding of advice/support/ expertise is limited and resides more in facilitation than in direct delivery. The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) seems to envisage such facilitation in the meetings and reviews it proposes. This facilitation would include SENOs providing advice and support as to where schools might best access the particular skill set they are identifying as an area of need in respect of specific issues arising on the ground for the teaching and learning of students with special educational needs. Direct capacity building and growth in human capital in schools I suggest, is best served from within what previously was known as the Special Education Support Services (SESS) and the National Behaviour Support Services (NBSS) both of which have now been subsumed into the NCSE and form a part of the Support Services it offers. NEPS also have a key role within this vital area as do the Universities who are involved in providing both initial teacher training and continuing professional development for teachers. This differentiation is important as due to issues surrounding clarity of the SENO role as discussed earlier, this research captures evidence of a demand for such support among principals for expertise which may be better sourced outside the remit of the SENO. SENOs are well positioned, given their diverse engagement across a

cross section of schools and practices, to act as signposts for parents and schools both to those services just listed and also to other services such as the local Network Disability Teams, the Middletown Centre of Autism, Dyslexia Ireland to name but a few. While advice/support/expertise is identified as a contribution of SENOs by participants in this research and indeed is considered not only essential but also worthy of attention with a view to developing it further, this contribution more accurately fits within the context of social and decisional capital.

Social capital values collaborative endeavour and conceptualises professionals working together to share human capital and capture a broad cohort of expertise including parental knowledge (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Decisional Capital combines both the outcomes of human and social capital to aid decision making and sound judgements (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) legislated for meetings between SENOs, principals, parents and other professionals with the relevant expertise to support the effective engagement of children with special educational needs. This legislation clearly planned for the purposeful cultivation of social capital by SENOs and others within such a structure. Substantial evidence emerges from this research to substantiate the view that SENOs can be a conduit that promotes the expansion of expertise. Of particular note in respect of the expansion of expertise and trust was the comment made by one clinician who clearly saw the SENO role as providing a bridge to facilitate the cross pollination of expertise among health and education professionals based on the relationship of trust SENOs have with both schools and clinicians. This building of trust, so beneficial to facilitating the expansion of social capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Spillane, Hopkins & Sweet, 2015) was also evidenced by an educational professional's perspective when she spoke of her experience of seeing SENOs "journeying

with" (CE1) parents. Parent participants evidenced perspectives which verified this clinician's comment.

One benefit of social capital identified in the literature is that it can incentivise innovation and reform (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Spillane, Hopkins & Sweet, 2015) and provide a "cornerstone for change" (King, 2014, p. 108). The promotion of an inclusive model of education in the EPSEN Act, (Government of Ireland, 2004) demanded significant reform which required innovative responses both at a national level and at an individual school level. Principals referenced the early support of SENOs in their role to lead such innovation.   While this is a journey with considerable progress yet to be achieved based on parental responses to this research, the progress to date has been substantial in the views of some research participants and has been supported by SENO engagement on the ground.

Social capital is also recognised as facilitating opportunities for the transfer of tacit knowledge and building transactive memory (Spillane, Hopkins & Sweet, 2015) which supports the identification of particular expertise when required. In this research participants reflected on their experience of the building of transactive memory and recognised SENOs as signposts which assisted in locating required expertise. SENOs cross sectoral engagement across the continuum of provision and their multi-disciplinary engagement with both clinicians and educational professionals was recognised as providing them with opportunities to become aware of where different expertise can be located. Such reflections evidence SENOs supporting "communities of practice" (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017) . While the relevant sections of the EPSEN Act are currently suspended, this research provides evidence that SENOs nonetheless contribute to the transfer of tacit knowledge and possibly more effectively to building transactive memory which can support teachers and principals as they seek to deal effectively with the challenges that an inclusive model of education can present.

Participants noted features of SENO practice which could support the limitation of some of the negative risks associated with social capital and identified in the literature. Engagement by external professionals and organisations is noted as one antidote of importance: "reducing the likelihood of conformity and groupthink" (Spillane, Hopkins & Sweet, 2015, p. 76). SENOs by the very nature of their role are external to the school and described by one parent as an "honest broker" (Pr 2). SENOs were seen as useful in facilitating the promotion of alternative discourses based on their experience across the continuum of provision thus giving schools and parents information on other provision and practice which may be supportive in facilitating a resolution of particular challenges the student with special educational needs is experiencing. Evidence of such inter-school engagement promoted or supported by SENOs was presented by one principal when speaking of SENOs encouraging her to engage with other schools who already had special classes when she was considering expansion in this field. This was seen as a useful tool for principals to facilitate an expansion of such inclusive practices among their own staff.

The development of social capital facilitated by SENOs reflects the symbolic frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008) and demands a skill set which includes creative and visionary leadership skills to support the development of the more nebulous characteristics of inclusion which are relevant to the promotion of an appropriate nurturing culture (Booth et al., 2000; Florian, 2014; Kinsella & Senior, 2008).

6.3.7 SENO expertise and facilitation

The role of facilitator requires a level of expertise if it is to effectively nurture inclusion, provide the advice and support identified by participants as helpful and engage fruitfully in collaborative practice across the cohort of stakeholders. The legislation

establishing the role did not specify particular qualifications but did imply a level of expertise required in the functions outlined in the act. This research therefore sought to explore participants' perceptions of SENO expertise and what had been their experience of engaging with SENOs in this respect.

The literature referencing the SENO role in the Irish context is very sparse as previously discussed so where it does exist it requires particular attention. Ní Bhroin (2017) argues:

> Where personnel to audit and sanction resources for the education of people with special educational needs may be necessary, as a capacity building measure, the potential to maximise the facilitator role of the SENO in promoting inclusive practice has been greatly diminished by not securing qualified teachers with experience of teaching for this position (Ní Bhroin, 2017, p. 29)

Concerns regarding the expertise of SENOs did not present in the foreground of data gathered in this research. SENOs were recognised as bringing additional expertise into the local school setting by a wide cross section of participants, principals, parents and clinicians alike. Their "helicopter view" fostered by their engagement in a large number of schools across the continuum of provision was identified as helpful in cross pollinating models of best practice. This expertise was identified by many participants as being rooted in SENOs own professional backgrounds and also their SENO experience which allows them engage in the various settings across the continuum of provision (mainstream classroom, special class, special school, early years, primary and post primary). One principal identified the role as a conduit of best practice where SENO experience in one educational setting could be translated and inform the discussion in another setting. Such perceptions were not shared unanimously across the educational landscape. One principal did question the SENO expertise he experienced in the case of very complex presentations. This statement was in the

context of the challenges which students with very complex needs present in mainstream schools and the need for greater expertise in this area not just among SENOs but across the broad spectre of both educational and clinical professionals supporting schools. Another principal noted the benefit of SENOs having teaching qualifications and experience: "SENOs have different backgrounds. Whether they come from education or not, seems to have an impact on how they see school life….. I do think it helps if they have a teaching background" (Pr 5). Less than 2% of parents surveyed queried the level of expertise SENOs provide based on their experience of engagement. Positive perceptions of SENO expertise dominated this cohort of contributors and SENO delivery of expertise was seen as effective. One parent reflected the SENO "knew enough and had experience. She spoke the way I could understand and it was logical to me" (Pa 1). This data would suggest that the construct of the SENO role as outlined in EPSEN (Government of Ireland, 2004) coming from a variety of professional backgrounds where "a special educational needs organiser shall have such qualifications, expertise and experience relevant to the education of children with special educational needs as the Council" (Government of Ireland, 2004, Section 26(3)) does not present as a serious flaw in supporting the SENO role as facilitator.

Further questions do arise however, both in respect of Ní Bhroin's (2017) query regarding capacity building and continuing professional development. SENOs themselves referenced concerns as to their own expertise in the face of what they perceived as little or no access to continuing professional development supported by the NCSE. Their reliance on their experience and expertise prior to becoming a SENO was seen as inadequate in the face of the increasing complex needs presenting in schools. It was clear in this research that SENOs themselves had concerns regarding their level of expertise and saw the lack of continuing professional development as a factor negatively influencing their capacity to deliver as facilitators in all the areas already outlined.

6.4 Detrimental factors for maximising the role's potential identified by participants

Factors referenced in this research as detrimental to the SENO role fulfilling its remit with respect to the three themes identified included initial perspectives generated by the contemporaneous and unpopular introduction of changes in teacher allocation (DES 2005b) and a national review of the SNA allocation. The latter was particularly detrimental in special schools in supporting a conceptualisation of the SENO role as a facilitator. These early perceptions were seen to have long lasting impact in the experience of participants. Other factors of note were the SENO workload, the gatekeeper role and the perceived cut backs in resources. The increased workload over the years since the role was initiated (Fig. 3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4 & 3.5 in Chapter 3) (Kinsella, Murtagh, Senior & Coleman, 2014) was observed to limit the quantity and quality of local relationships identified as so effective in supporting the facilitation SENOs were seen to provide. Two principals argued that in the early years of the role, the engagement on the ground and the sharing of expertise was far greater than in recent years – as one principal stated "we were learning together" (Pr 1). This negative corollary between workload and practice is echoed in the literature (Cole, 2005). The gatekeeper role was perceived as having a negative influence on the capacity of SENOs to be facilitators. One principal reported very diverse experience since the inception of the SENO role. In the early years the sharing of expertise between the school and the SENO were commonplace whereas in recent years, should a difficulty or question arise the principal stated: "I would never think of going to the SENO" (Pr 5). When questioned further, the factors identified as contributing to this were the perceived "cut backs" in resources to the school which had seriously impacted the SENO relationship with the school. In this case, the perception of the SENO as "the gatekeeper" was seen to detrimentally affect SENO facilitation.

The very limited opportunities for CPD were identified most particularly by SENOs as limiting their development of the necessary expertise to support parents and schools. The increasing complexity of needs presenting, most particularly in special schools, was cited as underlining the importance of CPD. In the literature on inclusive practice in general and the SENCO role in particular, recommendations regarding CPD are well represented (Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012; Guskey, 1994; Liasou & Svenson, 2014; Pearson, 2008; Qureshi, 2014, 2015). The benefits of CPD on daily practice are well documented in the literature. Outcomes such as improved individual capability, increased reflexivity and improved team capability (Coldwell & Simkins, 2011: Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012) would support the SENO role as facilitator. The paucity of CPD opportunities, as noted by SENOs in this research, requires consideration. However it is important to caution that the focus of such CPD should not "conform to departmental regulations under an umbrella of accountability and performativity in a new managerialist system" (King, 2011, p. 150) but rather promote the outcomes already noted above.

The new model of allocation (DES, 2017a & b), though only in its early days of implementation at the time of participant engagement, was noted to provide opportunities for these limiting factors to be addressed and for SENOs to thus effectively grow the role of facilitator.

6.5 Conclusion

Three themes emerged from the data analysis and were supported by the identification of skill sets relevant to each theme (Fig. 6.1): gatekeeper, juggler and facilitator. The increasing dominance of administrative tasks over the lifetime of the role was noted by participants as very significant and in many ways negatively influencing other aspects of the

position. This identified growth in bureaucratic processes is consistent with similar views expressed in the literature on the SENCO role which references the "largely operational" (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017, p. 452) nature of the role. Such bureaucracy, administered by SENOs, was seen to be contrary to the trajectory in the discourse on inclusion from a deficit to a social model. It was also seen not to adequately reflect the diversity of needs presenting in schools. The distribution of resources in the context of scarcity, parental and teacher sensitivities around special needs and the establishment of special classes were considered to contribute to conflict between stakeholders and SENOs and required a skill set from the SENO akin to a juggler. The diverse conceptualisations of inclusion, well documented in the literature (Ainscow, 2005; Cole, 2005; Connor, 2014; Hegarty, 2014; Gallagher, 2014; Norwich, 2006; Runswick-Cole, 2011) were noted to contribute to diverse and at times conflicting understandings of how the policy on inclusion should be delivered. Adeptly handling these tensions required a political skill set including negotiating, bargaining, conflict resolution and problem solving.

Finally the theme of facilitator was perceived by a number of participants to be a key aspect of the role but only partially fulfilled to date. Features supporting this aspect of the role were noted to include the diverse school settings SENOs engage in, which provides something of a helicopter view and promotes cross pollination of ideas and practices from one setting to another. This was seen to support problem solving as SENOs aware of strategies and practices in one setting could support resolutions to similar problems in other settings, thus assisting in creative solutions. The professional backgrounds of the SENOs themselves and their multi-disciplinary engagement facilitated the perception of SENOs as bridge builders between the school and the home and between the school and health personnel. This third theme which requires skills within the human resource domain such as listening, good communication, relationship building and networking was seen to support and

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empower parents through the provision of information, advice and support. The fact that SENOs were assigned to a particular local area was identified as helpful in building the trust and the relationships necessary to support collaborative practice. The role of facilitator was noted to contribute to social capital as the SENO had a knowledge of the location of diverse expertise and could be an effective signpost to schools and parents alike.

The dominance of the gatekeeper theme in the experience of stakeholders was identified by them to limit the capacity of the facilitator aspect of the role to reach its potential. SENOs also identified the need for greater access to CPD so as to maximise the potential of the facilitator role. The recent changes in the allocation of additional teaching supports and the anticipated changes in the allocation of SNA support were widely considered to be an opportunity for addressing the tensions between the diverse themes to be addressed and recalibrating the role to support the growth of facilitation by SENOs. It is hoped that this research can provide assistance in future discussions in this regard.

Chapter 7 Conclusions

Introduction

This study explores the role of the SENO through the perceptions and experiences of SENOs themselves and key stakeholders. The limited research on this topic to date allows this study to contribute to an understanding of the role, its functions and purpose since the role was constituted in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004). In the fifteen years since the role began, only one significant piece of research has focused on this question. A National Survey of Parental Attitudes to and Experiences of Local and National Special Education Services (NCSE, 2010) did give some attention to parental views of the SENO role. It recommended further research in this field. This study responds to that recommendation. In the literature review, a gap in research examining other key stakeholders' considerations of the SENO role was identified. This study therefore gathers the perceptions and experiences of a diverse range of stakeholders: parents, principals, teachers, clinical and educational professionals not located in school settings and SENOs themselves. The use of an interpretive multi-perspective triangulated study provided an appropriate design to gather participants' perceptions of the SENO role within a real world setting. In depth interviews, along with a brief parental survey, contributed to an informed exploration of the SENO position. A conclusion of the key findings of this research, the associated implications emerging for policy, practice and continuing professional development and suggestions for further research will be considered in this chapter. A concise reconsideration of the study's limitations will also be presented.

7.1 Conclusions of Key Findings

The key findings of this exploratory study focus on the factors identified in the perceptions and experiences of participants which have impacted the role since its inception: administrative demands, increased managerialism, the requirement for recalibration, conflicts occurring, clarity of boundaries and facilitation.

7.1.1 The impact of administrative and bureaucratic demands

In the perceptions of research participants the current outworking of the SENO role in practice was identified as having such a level of administrative dominance that other aspects of the role were negatively affected. The level of administration perceived by participants reflects policy and practice dilemmas well referenced in the literature on the SENCO role (Cole, 2005; Crowther, Dyson & Millward, 2001; Curran, 2019; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017; Takala & Ahl, 2014) and in literature on the broader topic of policy and practice (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992; Ball, Maguire & Branu, 2012; Jenkins, 1993; Lipsky, 1993). While the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) provided the first construct of the SENO role and can be understood as the statement of policy with regard to the position, it did not provide any indication of the role administering resource allocation, a task which at the time of the Act's publication was the remit of the Department of Education and Science. Circulars which followed grew the role in this direction and in the perceptions of some participants constructed a tangent of practice which has over the years moved quite a distance from the original conceptualisation of the role as presented in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004.

The increasing dominance of administrative tasks and bureaucratic demands since the position was first launched in 2004 was recognised by many participants in this research as a source of frustration for stakeholders. The rigidity of the application process which was seen to have increased and become more burdensome on stakeholders, rendered the process of

application for additional resources more difficult and was seen to have increased the potential for conflict between SENOs and key stakeholders. Participants identified the national financial crisis which began only three years after the NCSE was established in 2007 and which so drastically impacted public finances from 2009-2017 as a major cause of increased bureaucracy.

7.1.2 Increased managerialism and a decline in professionalism

The additional bureaucratic demands evidenced in this period were accompanied by an increase in managerial directions. In light of the national financial crisis and the need to manage the national finances, such a development was understandable but it was seen to frustrate stakeholders and SENOs alike. The dilemma of managerialism versus professionalism is well documented in the SENCO literature (Cole, 2005; Crowther, Dyson & Millward, 2001; Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017; Liasidou & Svensson, 2014) and evidence of similar difficulties emerged from participant contributions in this study. Just as SENCOs find their professionalism contested within an increasingly neo-liberal managerialism, SENOs themselves and key stakeholders referenced the difficulties SENOs experience in the role with the increase in managerial demands. SENO motivation for applying for the position in the first place was recognised by a number of participants as seeking to improve the inclusive educational opportunities for children with special educational needs. Their professional capacity to fulfil this role is understood to have been compromised within a managerial construct that demanded a dominance of administrative functions within tight constraints. This construct was perceived as not easily facilitating the diversity of needs presenting and the flexibility of resourcing models required. The increase in the number of students applying for additional resources, which resulted from demographic growth and the implementation of the Assessment of Need (Government of Ireland, 2005) for children whose parents were concerned that their child required additional support and assessment, were also

recognised as driving increased administration in light of a significant growth in applications for additional resources. This was at a time when the embargo in the public service meant no new SENOs could be recruited. While resourcing of schools by SENOs was seen to support inclusion, the allocation model impacted negatively on perceptions of the SENO role.

7.1.3 An opportunity for a recalibration of the role

The new model of allocation of additional teaching support (DES 2017a & b) was identified as assisting a change in perceptions of the role as SENOs are no longer engaged in the process. Participants in this research identified this change as an opportunity for the role to recalibrate and reduce the administrative dominance of recent years. However it was also recognised that the changes to date only impact one sector of the allocation of resources by SENOs. Some of the most conflictual aspects of allocation remain unchanged, most notably the allocation of SNAs. Anticipation for changes in this allocation model were briefly referenced and potential for change identified. The dominant perception of the role to date as an administrator of resources has assisted the conceptualisation of the role as "gatekeeper". This impacted negatively on perceptions of the SENO position thus limiting other aspects of the job identified by participants as important and beneficial. A change in this structural configuration, which could support a reduction in the "gatekeeper" role, was identified by participants as facilitating the growth of other aspects of the role in keeping with the human resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

7.1.4 The reality of conflict

It would appear unrealistic to expect an absence of conflict between SENOs and stakeholders given the resource allocation space which they occupy. The scarcity of resources is "rarely politically neutral" (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992, p. 174). The sensitivities of special education (Crowther, Dyson & Millward, 2001; Norwich, 2006, 2007, 2008, 2013), various conceptualisation of inclusion itself (Ainscow, 2005; Cole, 2005; Connor, 2014;

Florian, 2014; Gallagher, 2014; Hegarty, 2014; Norwich, 2006; Rioux, 2014; Runswick & Cole, 2011), parental vulnerability in the face of their child's disability (Bachrach & Baratz, 1970; Hornby, 2011; MacGiolla Phadraig, 2010; Vincent & Martin, 2010), staff vulnerability as SENOs fulfil care needs reviews which may result in diminishing contract hours for SNAs and indeed SENO internal conflict balancing the demands of DES criteria against individual need all combine to nurture an atmosphere which can be frequently contentious. The intensity of language used by some participants when describing their pursuit of additional supports, having to "fight for" such, suggest a level of conflict that makes for difficult engagement. The change in the allocation of additional teaching supports may have defused some of the impetus for such conflict but the evidence gathered in this research demonstrates that resourcing of SNAs persists as a source of considerable frustration among stakeholders. This is consistent with one of the few pieces of research previously conducted which focused on parental perspectives and of their engagement with SENOs (NCSE, 2010). It identified "assessment processes and the subsequent allocation of resources appear to have caused parents the most frustration" (Armstrong, Kane, O'Sullivan & Kelly, 2010, p. 17). That continues to persist in the perspectives and experiences of SENOs and key stakeholders gathered in this study. When this research was conducted in the field, there existed among stakeholders an anticipation that further changes in the resource allocation model, in line with recent research (NCSE 2018), may well contribute to reducing the level of conflict presenting and facilitate the emergence of more positive perceptions of the role. A considerable skill set among SENOs was evidenced in participants' experience. These included juggling the contentious demands of the role and facilitating resolutions to problems emerging at local level. Such a skill set resided comfortably within the human resource frame (Bolman & Deal, 2008). This skill set primarily revolved around good communication with stakeholders and this aspect of the role was extensively attended to by participants.

7.1.5 Clarity concerning the role's parameters

Another dilemma named by a number of participants was the lack of clarity concerning the role. The suspension of many parts of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) in 2008 which had provided a reasonably comprehensive construct of the role was seen to have resulted in a lack of definition of the role's central purpose and of an identification of boundaries so critical to effective collaborative engagement. Circulars from the Department of Education and Skills defined functions of the role which had not been indicated in the legislation (DES, 2005a & b). Schools were directed to forward all applications for additional resources to SENOs who became both the recipients and decision makers for the vast majority of such applications. This proved beneficial for the Department when faced with a large volume of applications for additional resources which were being dealt with by an Inspectorate who saw this work as seriously limiting their capacity to fulfil their core functions. The fact that circulars diverted from the legislative construct of the SENO role, expanding it to include the resourcing of schools, and the fact that clear boundaries for the role were not established has left the way open, in the view of some participants, for various expectations of the role to develop. These diverse expectations in the experience of participants, have impacted negatively on perceptions of the role as different stakeholders demand different functions fostering the development of diverse expectations. The diverse understandings of inclusion itself have further compounded this difficulty. Recent changes in the allocation of additional teaching supports (DES, 2017a & b) have impacted SENO engagement in such allocation. Expansion within the NCSE to include previously autonomous services known as SESS, NBSS and Visiting teachers has also raised questions as to the SENO role within this expanded reality. The recent changes have compounded the dilemma of diverse interpretations and expectations of the SENO role and participants expressed the need for clarification so as to maximise the role's potential.

7.1.6 Facilitation and the SENO role

The language of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) supports a conceptualisation of the role as a facilitator of inclusion. Such terms as "advice, consult, co-operation, teamwork, assist, and inform" in the legislation indicate an anticipation of relationships being built between SENOs, principals, parents, teachers and local health personnel and support the facilitator perception of the role. This is reiterated in NCSE documents such as the Customer Charter (NCSE 2013, 2017) and is consistent with SENO motivation in seeking the position both as expressed by SENOs themselves in this research and as understood by many of the study's participants. It was identified as a valuable aspect of the role by the vast majority of those interviewed, though one which had yet to reach its full potential.

The benefits of such facilitation were outlined by participants. For parents, the facilitation of access to relevant information, through both the Parent Information Sessions and through individual meetings with SENOs, assisted them in understanding school structures and the criteria for applications for additional resources. Such engagement was deemed to empower parents who often felt vulnerable when approaching schools not knowing what rights and entitlements they could realistically expect of the school. SENO provision of a "safe space" and a "listening ear" was recognised by some parents as helping them clarify realistic expectations for their child in the school setting within the context of an "emotional cloud" when a school reports difficulties in their child's educational journey. Some principals recognised the contribution SENOs advice and support provides for parents and acknowledged that SENOs can act as a bridge between home and school. Such engagement was seen to facilitate the development of a mutually agreed understanding. Principals and teachers noted the knowledge SENOs can contribute in schools in building capacity because of their broad spectrum of engagement across the continuum of provision,

described as "the helicopter view". This perspective identified SENOs capacity to signpost where schools could access additional advice and support over and above what they themselves could provide. SENOs knowledge of the mechanisms of resource application allowed schools and clinicians a clear understanding of DES criteria. These aspects of advice and support were seen by a number of principals to facilitate problem solving when difficulties arose in the school setting. Clinical and educational professionals not engaged directly in schools noted the value of the SENO role in again acting as a bridge, this time between health and education services. The advice and support they provide were noted as facilitating clinical understandings of the educational sector.

The roots of the successful implementation of the advice and support aspect of the role were identified as consisting of good communication skills, empathy, capacity to build and sustain relationships even in difficult circumstances and collaborative skills which could support effective networking across diverse groups: schools, parents and health personnel. The application of such a skill set, comfortably residing with the human resource frame 9Bolman & Deal, 2008) was acknowledged to support the reduction of tensions when difficulties emerge in the school setting. These skills are reflected in the language of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) and the perceptions and experiences presented by participants in this research suggest that while much of the EPSEN Act was suspended in 2008, the spirit of the Act continues to influence the SENO role.

The facilitation of inclusion by SENOs was seen as more effective in the early years of the role's development but a negative trajectory over the lifetime of the role was presented by a number of participants. This was noted to result from the substantial increase in the SENO workload and the increase in managerialism both of which impacted negatively on the capacity of SENOs to engage directly in schools, meeting parents, principals, teachers and SNAs. For some principals this negative trajectory was very keenly felt, most notably the

principal of the special school interviewed. The EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004)

in its conceptualisation of inclusion supported the previous Special Education Review

Committee (SERC), (DE, 1993) recommendations of a continuum of provision which

included mainstream, special class and special school options. The fact that SENO

engagement with the special school educational sector was depicted as deteriorating

significantly over the lifetime of the role is a cause of considerable concern, given the state's

commitment to the continuum of provision and the fact that the special school sector serve a

small but significant proportion of the most vulnerable students in the Irish education

system.

The conceptual framework adopted for this study allowed for systemic understanding

of the role through each of the four frames while at the same time, supporting a synthesis of

data analysis that allowed the three key themes to emerge. It proved effective in the

exploration of how the role of the SENO is perceived, experienced and understood by SENOs

and key stakeholders.

7.2 Limitations of the Study Revisited

The interpretive triangulated study design selected for this research imposes

limitations on its transferability (Borg & Gall, 1983) as the small sample size does not

support generalization. The use of purposive sampling may restrict reader confidence in the

data generated and the fact that the researcher is currently engaged as a SENO is important

for the reader to remember when evaluating the study. While these limitations are

acknowledged, the steps taken to address these restrictions were considerable and are clearly

outlined in Chapter 4. This study sought to provide the reader with rich thick descriptions of

the data generated, allowing the reader access to the individual insights gleaned in in depth

interviews thus allowing the specific to "illuminate the general" (Denscombe, 2003, p. 124).

This provides the potential for the reader to explore and compare his or her own context with

the research case, thus maximising transferability (Stake, 1995) within the acknowledged limitations just outlined.   The ultimate judges are the readers who interpret the transferability of the material to their specific circumstance. This research was conducted at a time of significant change in the model of resource distribution. This model had remained substantially unchanged for thirteen years and the changes introduced to the allocation of additional teaching supports (DES 2017a & b) were introduced as the in depth interviews were underway. The research could not capture the effects of these changes on the SENO role though anticipated changes by participants are noted in the findings. Geographical spread is restricted given the small size of the study and the constraints on time and travel. Absence of certain stakeholders' perceptions does present as a limitation for this study. While student voice was given consideration in the planning stages of the research, consensus among prospective parent and teacher participants was that students would frequently be unaware of a SENO's involvement and that their potential to inform the research question was therefore constrained. However their absence does present a limitation. Attempts to gather the perceptions of the Inspectorate were unsuccessful on this occasion. Thus the broadening of the participant base and the capturing of data from senior management in the NCSE and the DES, absent in this study, could be considered in future research.

7.3 Implications

The following implications emanate from this study and warrant attention.

7.3.1 Implications for policy and practice

The tension that exists between policy and its implementation in practice is well referenced in the literature (Bowe, Ball & Gold, 1992; Jenkins, 1993; Ní Bhroin, 2017) and receives considerable attention in the literature on the SENCO role (Cole, 2005; Liasidou & Svensson, 2014; Pearson, 2008; Qureshi, 2014). The themes emerging from this research evidence this fact. Tension exists between the SENO role as gatekeeper and the role as

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facilitator. In many respects the third theme of juggler emerging from the research, represents the attempt in practice to reconcile this tension. The role of gatekeeper is primarily rooted in DES circulars whereas the role of facilitator results from the language of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) and its conceptualisation of the role. The role of juggler is little attended to in the documents reviewed for this research but is understood by participants of this research as an essential part of the role in its day to day practice. Attention to some measure of reconciliation of this policy and practice dilemma for the SENO role requires attention if the role is to more adequately fulfil its potential.

Based on the findings of this research, specifically in relation to how the role of the SENO is conceived and developed in future policy, certain implications deserve attention. The changes in the allocation of additional teaching supports and the anticipated future changes in the allocation of SNA provide an opportunity for the SENO role to be reconsidered. Participants conceived a realignment of the position in terms of it more accurately reflecting the role's conceptualisation in EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) thus allowing policy impact practice more effectively. This restructuring of the role was anticipated by participants to increase the capacity of SENOs to provide advice and support to schools, parents and clinicians, an expectation welcomed by the vast majority of participants even those who expressed negative experiences of the role to date.

7.3.2 Implications for diverse jurisdictions: A separation of functions

Different jurisdictions have implemented various models of resource distribution in their implementation of inclusion (Pijl, 2014). This has frequently involved the adaptation of models of funding to more effectively support the implementation of "deep change" (McDonnell, 2003). In each jurisdiction, criteria for distribution must be applied by public servants. This research evidences the challenges when the person thus engaged is also involved in the provision of advice and support to key stakeholders. It may be wise to

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acknowledge the conflict of interest between the distribution of scarce resources and the provision of advice and support and to separate these functions to separate roles.

7.3.3 Implication for the development of social capital

The contribution SENOs make to the expansion of social capital is recognised and valued by participants of this research. Any proposal to facilitate an evolution of the role should ensure that this aspect of the role is maximised.   A number of participants expected that such a recalibration would help reduce identified tensions occurring in SENO day to day practice. While the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) conceptualised the role around the IEP, the data generated in this study identified that the expansion of social capital, supported by SENO practice, permeated a broad number of areas. The suspension of those sections of the Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) dealing with the IEP impacted the development of the role but did not paralyse SENOs' contribution to the growth in social capital. Among participants, a desire for the role to expand its use of the human resources skill set is evident. This is in keeping with the spirit of EPSEN but, in participants' perceptions, is not confined to the IEP process as was originally envisaged. Policy development needs to attend to the expansion of elements of communication, relationship building, networking and collaborative practice as worthwhile aspects of the role thus facilitating further development of social capital, given the benefits it can contribute to inclusion (Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Spillane, Hopkins & Sweet, 2015)

7.3.4 Implications for public perceptions of the role

A further recommendation emanating from this report is that consideration be given to providing greater clarity as to the role's functions and boundaries. Principals and parents noted a lack of clarity around the role's current functions and suggested this be addressed by the NCSE. Parents suggested greater marketing of the role should be considered. Greater clarity would reduce the diversity of expectations and meet current SENO concerns as to the

evolution of the role in the context of changes within the NCSE itself. Within this pursuit of greater clarity, a new branding of the role might be considered. The term Special Educational Needs Organiser is referenced in the legislation thus limiting the use of alternative terminology. This term in itself may well be more associated with a deficit model of special needs than a social model of inclusion which seeks to address societal obstacles to the fulfilment of all students' potential. The name of Special Needs Assistant has received some consideration in the recent NCSE review of that role (NCSE 2018) to more accurately reflect this move away from the frequently criticised medical model in the conceptualisation of inclusion. The term Special Educational Needs Organiser may have to be retained in contractual employment and legal documents given its place in the legislation. However, lessons can be learnt from the recent rebranding of the Educational and Welfare Officer's role that could be usefully applied to the rebranding of the SENO role in the context of increased clarification and marketing of the position.

7.3.5 Implications for SENO CPD

It is evident from SENO contributions to this research that an appetite exists for continuing professional development focusing on expanding SENO expertise to facilitate the inclusion of students with special educational needs in a context of increasing complexity among a small cohort of these students. This study provides evidence which supports an expansion of CPD to SENOs. Conflict resolution could be included in such CPD based on the contributions of participants in this research. Opportunities for SENOs to consider the diverse ways other countries engage with inclusion would provide a broader frame of reference than is currently available and be a valuable asset in their day to day practice. Utilising the expanded cohort of expertise within the NCSE since 2017 which now includes Visiting Teachers and Advisors (formerly SESS and NBSS), to provide internal CPD for all NCSE staff, would be beneficial in this respect and also support internal collaborative

practice. Such engagement could deliver asset growth for the organisation in terms of human capital, provide a greater clarity of the boundaries surrounding each role and support a growth in collaborative practice and social capital between these diverse strands. It could help unify the diverse threads of the organisation and hone a more effective tool for supporting schools in developing inclusive practices for all. CPD for SENOs targeting particular areas of complexity generating difficulties in student retention should be considered in light of emerging concerns about student attendance on reduced timetables and students being absent for considerable periods due to complex needs generating levels of anxiety which limit school engagement (Holland, 2019). Given participants' acknowledgement in this research of SENO capacity to support home/school engagement, a contribution by SENOs, trained in this area, could facilitate greater student engagement in full time education.

7.3.6 Implications for future research

A final recommendation of this report is that similar research capturing the perspectives of the diverse body of stakeholders and SENOs themselves be conducted when the new allocation model has had an opportunity to bed down. The timing of such research may best be considered subsequent to any actions resulting from the Comprehensive Review of the SNA scheme (NCSE 2018). This review has the potential to further change the day to day functions of the SENO role. While the National Survey of Parental Attitudes to and Experiences of Local and National Special Education Services (NCSE, 2010) provided a valuable lens with which to view the SENO role, the advantage of capturing a broader cohort of stakeholders is evidenced in this report and should be emulated in future studies.

7.4 Concluding Comments and a Final Reflection

The SENO role is intrinsically bound to the policy of inclusion having been initiated within the legislation undergirding an inclusive educational environment (Government of Ireland, 2004). Definitions of what constitutes inclusion have remained highly contested in the years since the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) was passed (Ainscow, 2005; Connor, 2014; Florian, 2008, 2014; Gallagher, 2014; Hegarty, 2014). Diversity of interpretation can present both challenges and opportunities in the translation of policy to practice (Hegarty, 2001). The inclusive discourse emerging since the Act was passed has supported policy changes and in turn impacted the SENO role over the lifetime of this study. As outlined in Chapter 1 of this study the conceptualisation of inclusion presented in the EPSEN Act provided legislative support to the concept of equitable access to educational opportunity for students with special educational needs (within a continuum of provision), was heavily influenced by the Psycho-Medical model and gave significant attention to placement/location. The SENO role was perceived, within this perspective, to support access to additional resources at local level.

Over the lifetime of this study, research evidencing the lack of equitable access to such supports (Kinsella, Murtagh, Senior & Coleman, 2014) challenged the basic principle of equity in the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004). The resourcing structures SENOs were implementing in line with DES policy (DES, 2005a, b & c) were not favourably reviewed. A new model of distribution, more reflective of the social model of inclusion (DES, 2017a & b), was introduced with the DES determining school allocations based on school profiles. This replaced individualised allocations based on diagnosis of a disability previously administered by SENOs. The recent adoption of the SIM model (DES, 2020) for September 2021 is anticipated to result in further changes in SENO practice similar to that which emerged subsequent to the changes in the teacher allocation model (DES, 2017). A

further change to the SENO practice may well emerge in response to the inclusive discourse emerging in the UN Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 4: Quality Education (2019) concerning lifelong learning. SENO engagement with adult learners has been very limited to date. Furthermore, recent indications of policy changes in relation to special school provision, as proposed at the recent NCSE Research Conference (Nov. 2019) may also impact the evolution of the SENO role.

In light of these currently unfolding changes a reflection on what the SENO role might look like in 5 years' time may be beneficial. The perspectives and understandings of the role as offered by the participants in this research, a review of the literature and current policy changes and personal reflection as this work draws to a close provide a platform for such reflection. The central focus of the role to support inclusive education in Ireland should remain unchanged. To measure its success or failure, a clear conceptualisation of inclusion in the context of the role is necessary. I propose the image below as one such conceptualisation which would provide a framework for such an evaluation. My personal conceptualisation of inclusion is captured in the image in Fig. 7.1 below. Inclusive education involves supporting a child/student engage in an educational setting which maximises his/her sense of achievement and sense of belonging. The sense of achievement is in keeping with the core values of education namely learning and development (Hegarty, 2001) while the sense of belonging strikes at a foundational reason for the adoption of inclusive policies in education namely social inclusion and social cohesion (Salamanca Statement, 1994; Sustainable Development Goals Report, 2019).
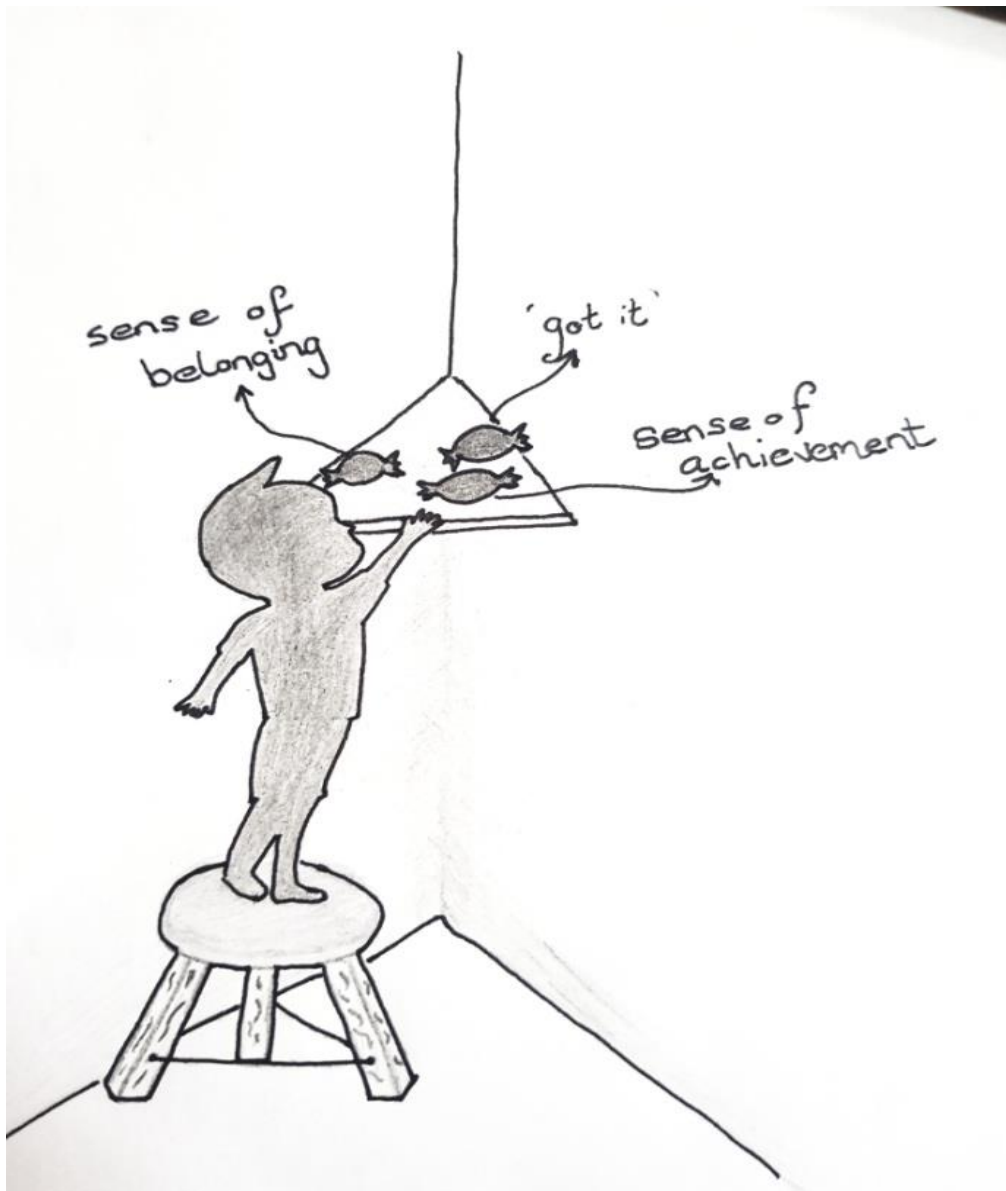
Fig. 7.1: A Personal Reflection on Inclusive Education and the SENO role

In the image above, the child can be seen reaching enthusiastically. Parent and teacher are central supportive actors in this endeavour as depicted by two legs of three legged stool making possible the child/student's attainment of the goal he/she is reaching for. Within this understanding of inclusion, the legs of the stool are strengthened by "sinews" to give additional strength and stress-absorbing capacity to the structure. This I believe captures the role of the SENO: to strengthen key actors and support the absorption and re-direction of tension to enhance the child's pursuit. The "sinews" extend as connective threads between

the parent, teacher and clinical supports (third leg to the rear) again strengthening the educational structure and utilising tensions generated to advance the final result. This reflects the importance of social capital discussed in this study.

Based on this conceptualisation of inclusion the following key components need to be embedded in SENO practice as the role evolves. Building relationships at a local level is critical to SENO efficacy and supporting social justice (King, and Robinson, 2017). The importance of such local relationships with all stakeholders is evidenced in this study. Sustaining and improving these local dynamic relationships of collaborative practice is a critical aspect of the SENO role that must be continued and extended in the future. Such relationships offer opportunities for extensive and ongoing consultation with key stakeholders which can promote pro-active local responses, empower parents, teachers and principals through the provision of advice and support to facilitate students' education. This study evidences SENO support for the expansion of social capital to build more inclusive settings which can promote a sense of achievement and a sense of belonging for all.

The rebranding of the role has already been suggested in the implications above. The SENO "brand" does require some marketing given parental contributions in this report. However in many sectors it appears to be well known. Given the conceptualisation of inclusion just outlined, I would suggest that rather than changing the job title, SENO identifications, such as those added to signatures at the end of documents, logos for the role or other identifying tools should be altered to include: "**SENO**: **S**upporting **E**ducation, **N**urturing **O**utcomes". In keeping with the current inclusive discourse, this is not SEN specific but more in keeping with a universal response (Florian, 2014). It also deals with the culture often surrounding the discourse on outcomes which is frequently dominated by a managerial/business model which can misrepresent the complexity of education (Kinsella & Senior, 2008; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010) and reduce it to a factory model of inputs and

resulting outputs. I use the term nurture advisedly as I think it more appropriately captures the vocational, creative and visionary conceptualisation of the SENO role in keeping with the spirt of the EPSEN Act (Government of Ireland, 2004) and with SENO motivation in the field. Perhaps future research could further explore this conceptualisation of the role.

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Appendix 1: Invitation to Participate

Re: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Dear   ,

I am presently pursuing a Doctorate in Education and my topic of research is the role of the Special Education Needs Organiser. I am wondering if you would consider becoming a participant interviewee. The research aims to explore perspectives and experiences of both SENOs themselves and key stakeholders.   The research is essentially a qualitative piece of work with individual interviews and I would really appreciate if you would be kind enough to agree to participate in a 30 or 40 minute interview. This would be a relaxed interview, all data will be kept anonymous and confidentiality assured to the highest possible standard. The interview will be organised at a time and place convenient for you.   If you are willing, you might respond to me either by email to marymcauliffe77@gmail.com or phone me on 087 6949543.

I should note that while I work as a SENO in Kildare, this study is a purely personal pursuit.

I look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely,

_____

Mary McAuliffe

Appendix 2: Plain Language Statement

Dear   ,

As part of my studies on the Doctorate in Education (EdD) in St. Patrick's College, DCU, I am exploring the role of the Special Educational Needs Organiser (SENO) in Ireland for my dissertation.

This research seeks to explore the perceptions, expectations and experiences of the role of the SENO by SENOs themselves and by key stakeholders: education professionals, health professionals, parents and pupils.

I would like to invite you to participate in an interview on an individual basis at a time and place of your convenience. The interview will last no more than 35 minutes and will be conducted in a relaxed, reflective manner. You will be asked questions about your perceptions and experiences of the SENO role. You will receive an outline of interview questions prior to the interview and the interview will be audio taped for purposes of data analysis. It is anticipated that findings from the study will have the potential to inform future policy and practice.

Before commencing the study I need your written permission to indicate your willingness to participate. I want you to know that participation is voluntary and that you may withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason for the decision to withdraw and without penalty. I can offer you an oral or written summary of my analysis of the findings on completion of the dissertation should you request it.

I will take all necessary precautions to ensure that your confidentiality is respected. In reporting my work, I will use a pseudonym for you. No personal details and no identifying features will be recorded in my written account of the findings or in my completed dissertation. However as the sample size is small, it may be impossible to guarantee complete anonymity of participant identity. You should also be aware that confidentiality of information provided can only be protected within the limitations of the law.

I would be very grateful if you would agree to assist me in my studies and facilitate me by participating in the research.

Mary McAuliffe

Appendix 3: Informed Consent Form

For the Adult participants: - Individual Interview

<u>Research Study Title</u>: The Special Education Needs Organiser

I agree to engage in research which is exploring the role of the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) in Ireland. I understand that this will involve an in-depth semi -structured interview lasting approximately 45 minutes.

I also agree that you may use the findings from the study for the purpose of analysis for your dissertation and possibly for presentation at conferences and/or publication in relevant journals.

I am aware that if I agree to take part in this study, I can withdraw from participation at any stage. There will be no penalty for withdrawing before all stages of the research assignment have been completed.

Arrangements to protect confidentiality have been explained to me and I understand that all data will be securely stored for the duration of the research and will be destroyed after the final mark for my dissertation is published.

I have read the letter (Plain Language Statement) which accompanies this consent form and I have had an opportunity to discuss the proposed study with you.

Please complete the following:

(Circle Yes or No for each question).

Have you read or had read to you the Plain Language Statement?   Yes/No

Do you understand the information provided?   Yes/No

Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study?   Yes/No

Have you received satisfactory answers to all your questions?   Yes/No

I have read and understood the information in this form. The researchers have answered my questions and concerns, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project
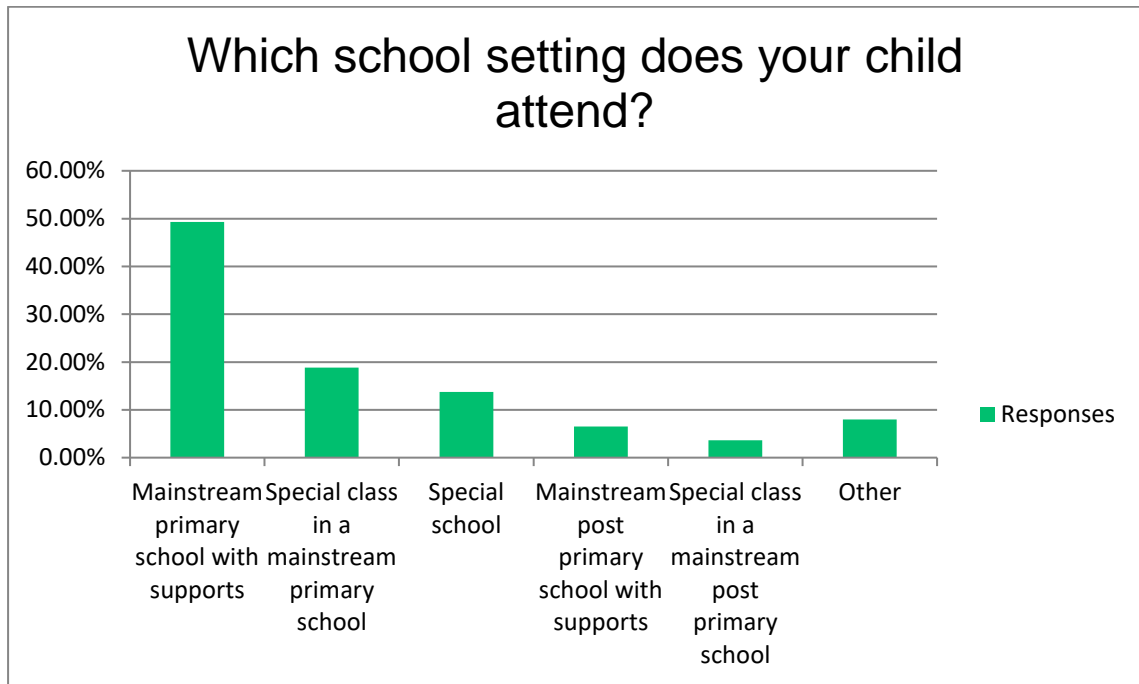
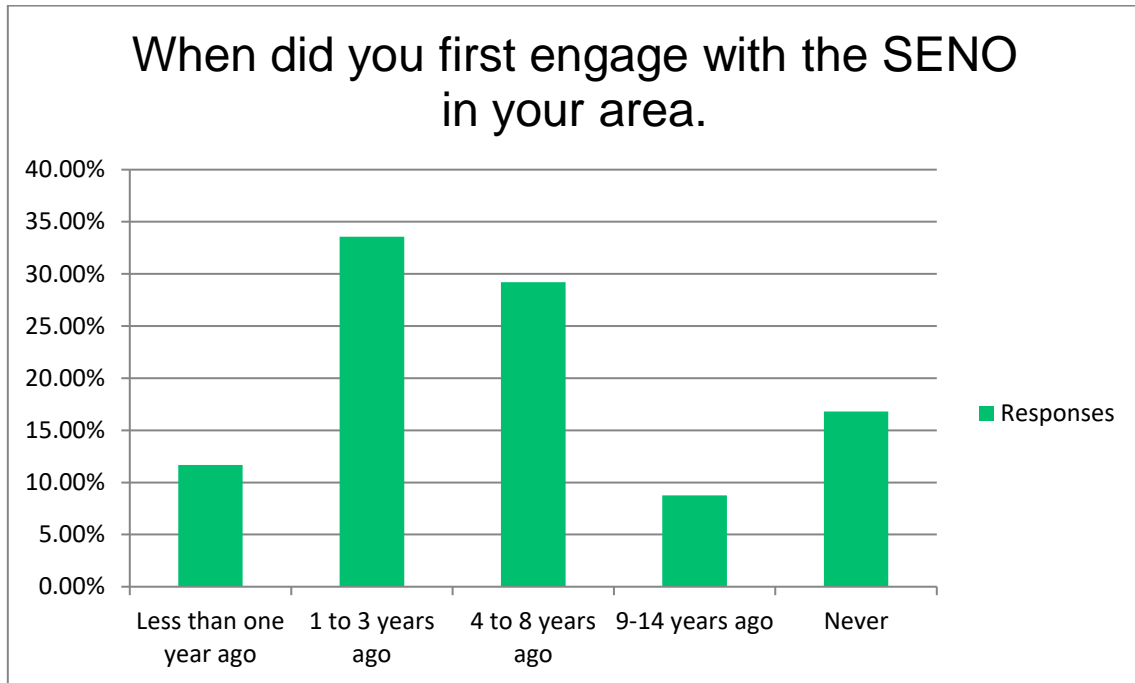Participant's Signature:

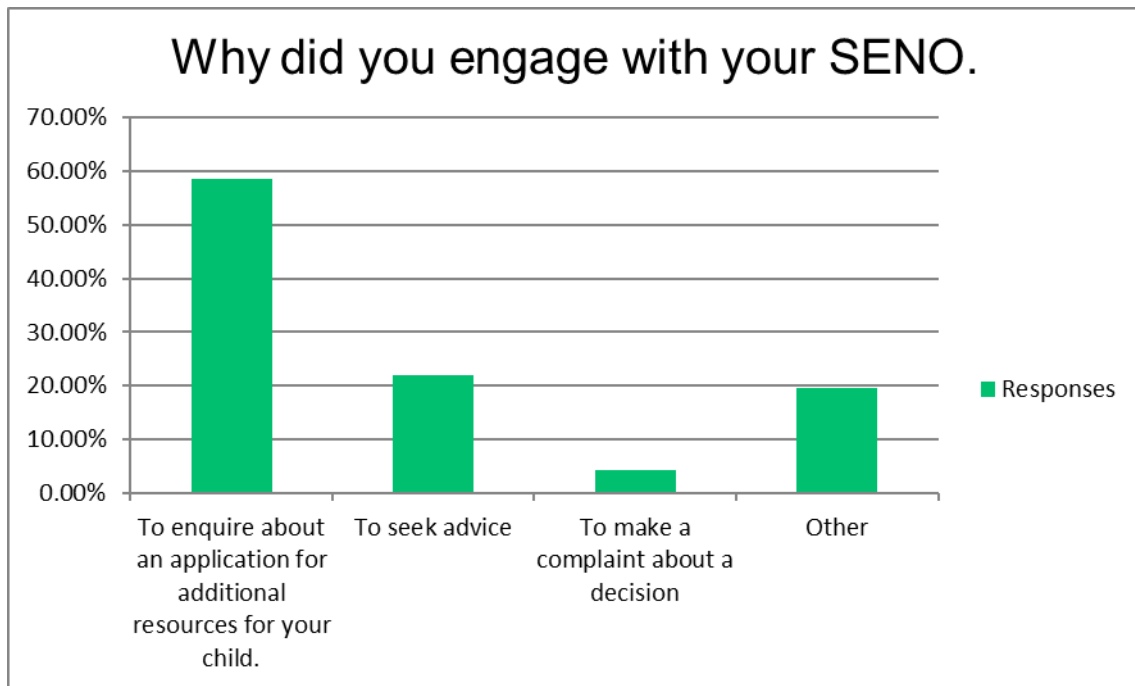Name in Block Capitals:

Witness:

Date:

Appendix 4a Parental Survey Question 1

Which school setting does your child attend?

When did you first engage with the SENO in your area.

Appendix 4c Parental Survey Question 3

Why did you engage with your SENO.

How would you describe your engagement with the SENO from your first encounter until no?

Do you think the role of the SENO has changed since you first engaged with him/her.
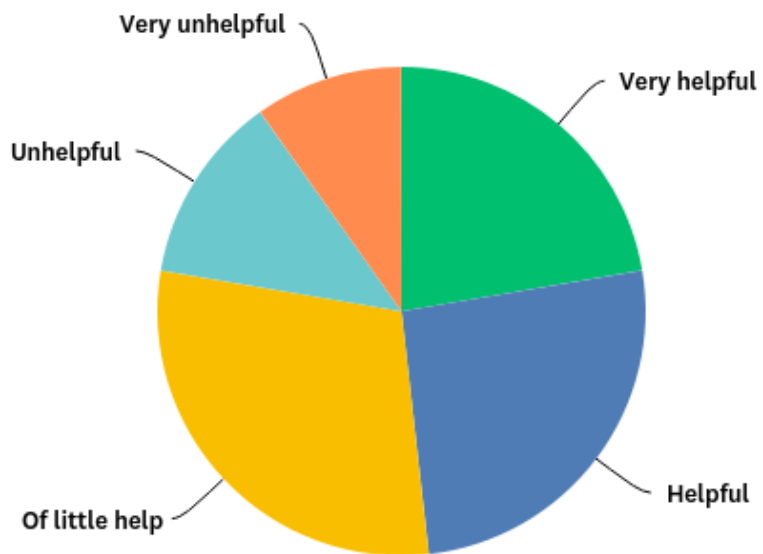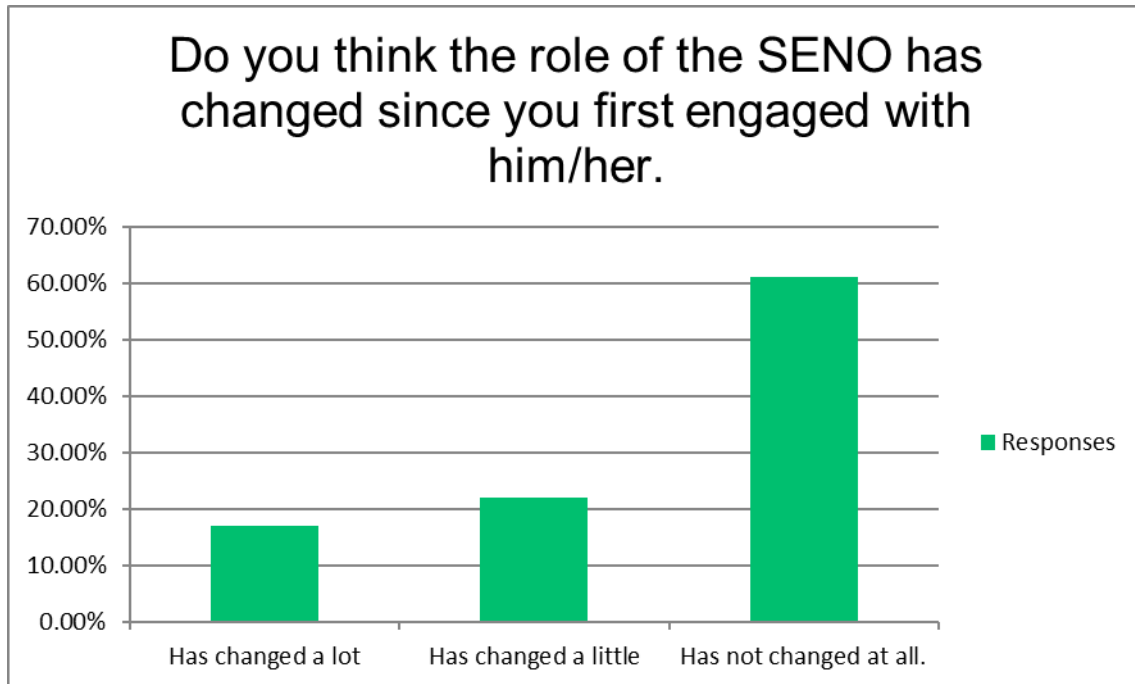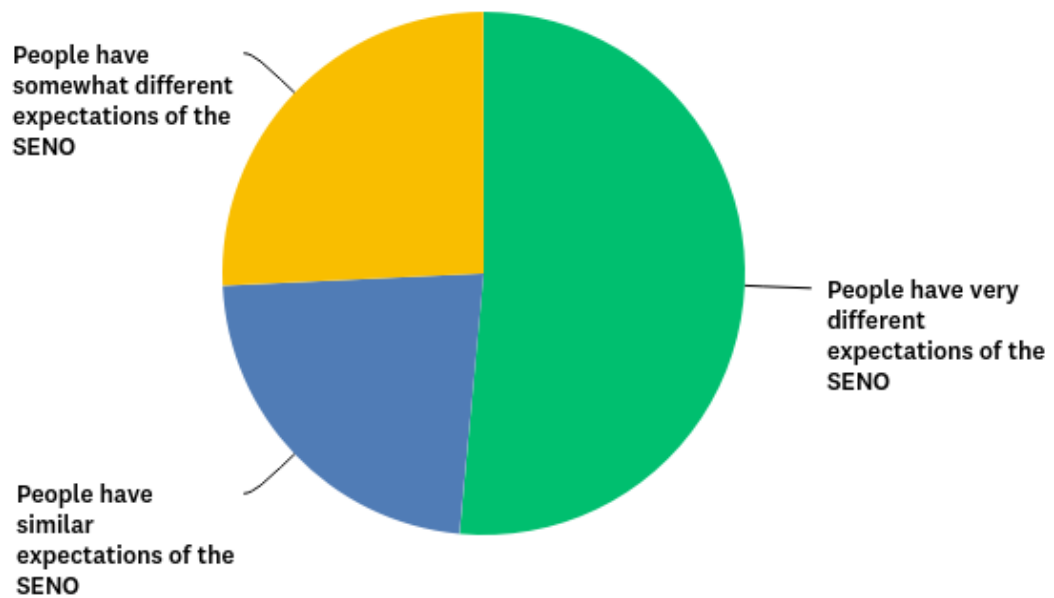
Appendix 4f Parental Survey Question 6

Do you think the SENO role has enhanced the inclusion of students with special educational needs in Ireland.
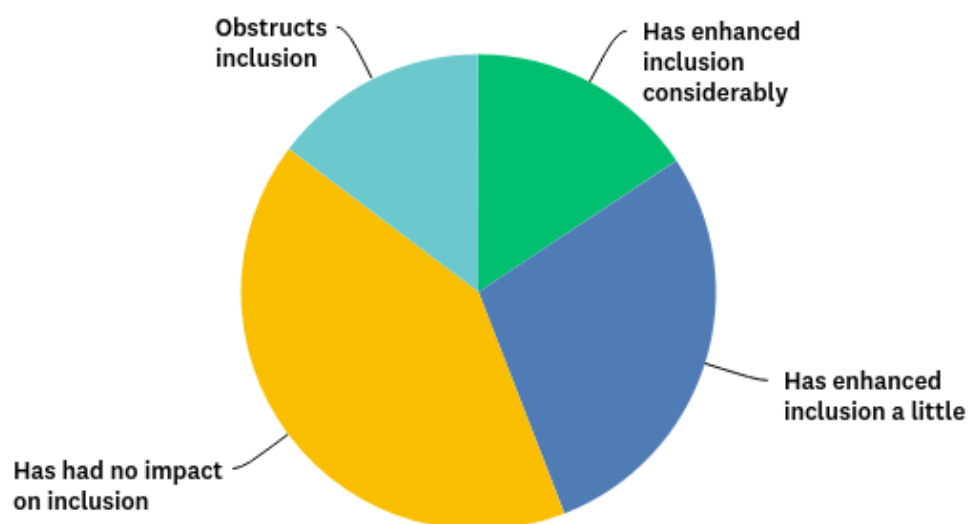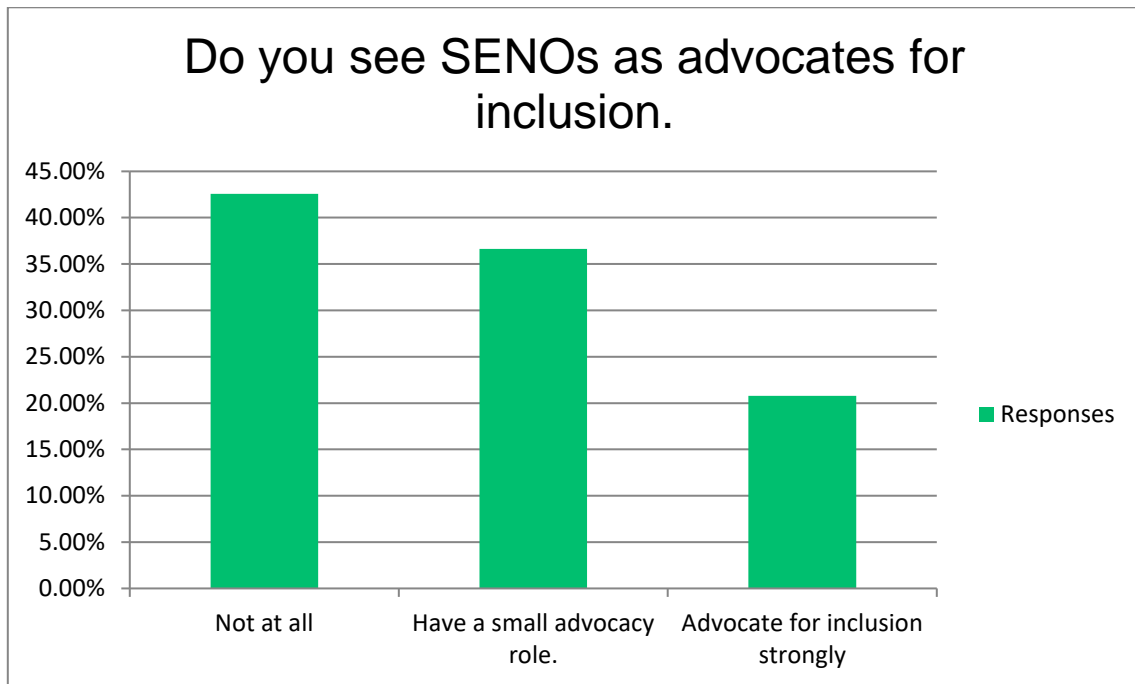
Do you think different people have different expectations of the SENO?

People have somewhat different expectations of the SENO

People have very different expectations of the SENO

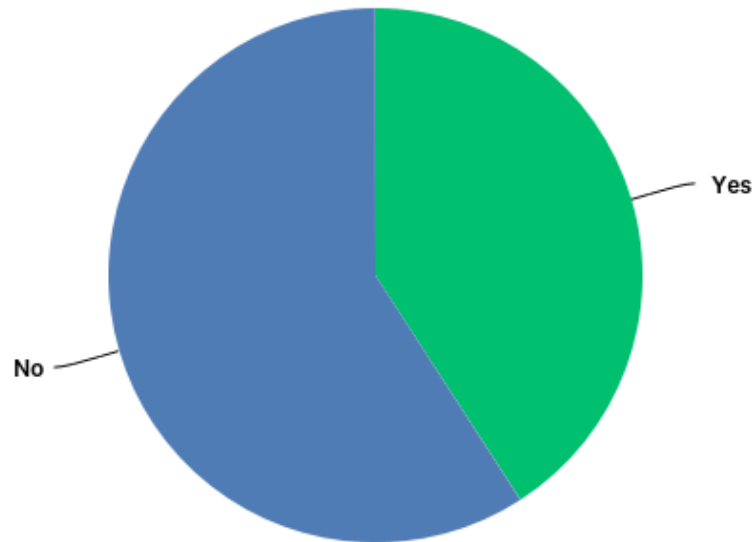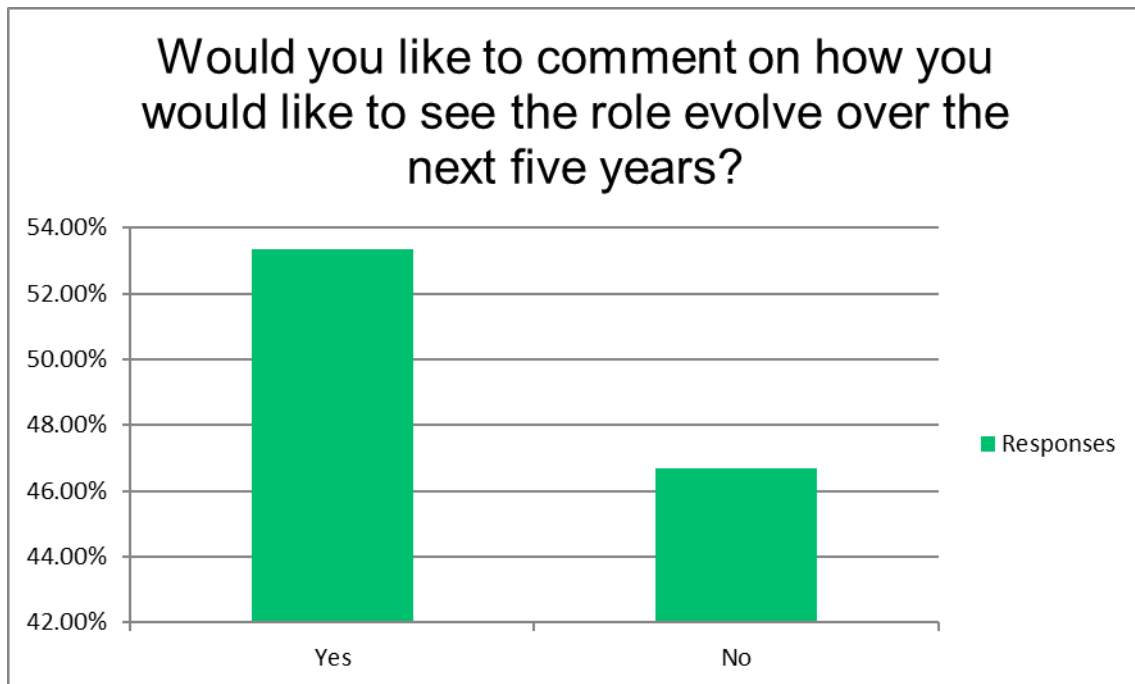People have similar expectations of the SENO

Do you see SENOs as advocates for inclusion.

Appendix 4i Parental Survey Question 9

Would you be willing to participate in a small telephone survey on the SENO role?

Would you like to comment on how you would like to see the role evolve over the next five years?

Appendix 5a: Topic Guide & Interview Schedule: SENOs

Introduction:

Welcome and invitation to relax.

Present general outline of the objectives of the interview.

Indicate the opportunity to contribute to an understanding of the role, to policy and to SENO practice.

Reiterate facts concerning the length of the interview, the taping of it and the assurance of confidentiality.

Offer an opportunity for the participant to review the interview when the tape is analysed.

Stimulus questions:

How long have you been working as a SENO?

What attracted you to the position at that time?

Main questions:

How do you think the role was understood when it was first established?

What expectations do you have of the SENO position?

Has the role changed or evolved since its inception a decade ago?

What would you identify as your most significant engagements in your role as SENO?

How would you characterize your engagement with ....Parents....Principals...Teachers, Health Professionals... other educational professionals?

What are the key foci which SENOs are presently required to address in your opinion?

Would you identify deficiencies in the SENO role in practice?

Given that the role was birthed in the legislation establishing inclusive education as the policy of the state, do you think SENOs enhance or obstruct the inclusion of SEN students in Irish schools?

Do you think SENOs contribute to changing a) the culture and b) attitudes in the Irish educational landscape?

Have SENOs contributed to building the necessary capacity within the educational landscape to make an inclusive model of education a reality in Ireland?

Do you identify conflicting conceptualisations within the role?

<u>Conclusion:</u>

Briefly summarize main issues that arose in the interview.

Provide opportunity for any additional comments.

Acknowledge the time and generosity of the participant.

Identify what will happen after the interview: analysis, opportunity for review and finally the writing up of the research for submission as part of my dissertation.

Appendix 5b: Topic Guide & Interview Schedule: Educational and Health Professionals

Introduction:

Welcome and invitation to relax.

Present general outline of the objectives of the interview.

Indicate the opportunity to contribute to an understanding of the role, to policy and to SENO practice.

Reiterate facts concerning the length of the interview, the taping of it and the assurance of confidentiality.

Offer an opportunity for the participant to review the interview when the tape is analysed.

Stimulus questions:

When did you first engage with SENOs professionally?

What position did you hold at that time which led to this engagement?

Main questions:

How would you describe the SENO role as you perceive it in your present position as a.......?

Do you think the role has changed or evolved since its inception a decade ago?

What would you identify as the primary purpose of your engagements with SENOs?

Do you think different people have different expectations of the SENO?

How would you characterize your engagement with SENOs? Can you describe an image or picture that captures the role for you?

Do you think there are issues that produce conflict between schools and SENOs?

Would you identify deficiencies in the SENO role in practice?

Given that the role was birthed in the legislation establishing inclusive education as the policy of the state, do you think SENOs enhance or obstruct the inclusion of SEN students in Irish schools?

The Customer Charter published by the NCSE in 2013 identifies advice and support to parents and schools as key composites of the SENO role. Do you think you have accessed advice and support from SENOs?

Do you think SENOs contribute in a positive or negative way to changing a) the culture and b) attitudes towards an inclusive model in the Irish educational landscape?

Have SENOs contributed to building the necessary capacity within the educational landscape to make an inclusive model of education a reality in Ireland?

Do you see SENOs as advocates for inclusion?

Has the role of the SENO accomplished what it was established for?

How would you like to see the role of the SENO in practice in 5 years' time

What steps would you identify need to be followed to make that a reality?

Any questions?

Conclusion:

      Briefly summarize main issues that arose in the interview.

      Provide opportunity for any additional comments.

      Acknowledge the time and generosity of the participant.

      Identify what will happen after the interview: analysis, opportunity for review and finally the writing up of the research for submission as part of my dissertation.

Appendix 5c: Topic Guide and Interview Schedule: Parents

Introduction:

Welcome and invitation to relax.

Present general outline of the objectives of the interview.

Indicate the opportunity to contribute to an understanding of the role, to policy and to SENO practice.

Reiterate facts concerning the length of the interview, the taping of it and the assurance of confidentiality.

Offer an opportunity for the participant to review the interview when the tape is analysed.

Stimulus questions:

When did you first engage with SENOs?

Can you remember what your initial feelings were after that meeting?

Main questions:

How would you describe the SENO role as you perceive it today?

What would you identify as the primary purpose of your engagements with SENOs?

How would you characterize your engagement with SENOs now?

How do you think the role was understood when it was first established in 2004?

Do you think the role has changed or evolved since its inception a decade ago?

What are the key foci which SENOs are presently required to address in your opinion?

Would you identify deficiencies in the SENO role in practice?

Given that the role was birthed in the legislation establishing inclusive education as the policy of the state, do you think SENOs enhance or obstruct the inclusion of SEN students in Irish schools?

Do you think SENOs contribute in a positive or negative way to changing a) the culture and b) attitudes towards an inclusive model in the Irish educational landscape?

Have SENOs contributed to building the necessary capacity within the educational landscape to make an inclusive model of education a reality in Ireland?

Do you identify any conflicts within the role?

Do you see SENOs as advocates for inclusion?

Do you think the role of the SENO has accomplished what it was established for?

How would you like to see the role of the SENO in practice in 5 years' time?

What steps would you identify need to be followed to make that a reality?

<u>Conclusion:</u>

      Briefly summarize main issues that arose in the interview.

      Provide opportunity for any additional comments.

      Acknowledge the time and generosity of the participant.

      Identify what will happen after the interview: analysis, opportunity for review and finally the writing up of the research for submission as part of my dissertation.

Appendix 6: Initial Codes

NAME	SOURCES	REFERENCES
Inclusion	17	126
Systems and processes	18	122
Advice and support	16	78
Deficiencies	14	73
Expertise	15	62
Administrative dominance	16	56
Conflict	14	51
Capacity building	15	47
Relationship	10	45
Attitudes and attitudinal change	14	38
Clout or power	12	37
Image	12	33
Advocacy	15	31
Local	9	28
Workload	9	23
Clarity of role	9	23
Networking	7	22
Culture	11	21
Communication	8	18
Socio economic influences	7	17
Reflective practice	5	16
Link	5	14
Facilitator	5	12
Fear	5	12
Empowering	3	10
Dichotomies	6	9
Future practice	6	9
Problem solving	2	7
Independence	3	6
Listening	3	5
Sensitivities	3	5
Empathy	3	4

Appendix 7: Sample Coding

ADMINISTRATIVE DOMINANCE

<Internals\\Interview Trancripts\\Clin Educ Prof\\CE1> - § 6 references coded [2.46% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.38% Coverage

In my head I suppose I see the council and the SENO together. I think of SENOS as being part of them. And that your remit comes from them

Reference 2 - 0.17% Coverage

my mind immediately sets into your work in resource allocation

res. alloc.

Reference 3 - 0.35% Coverage

. So certainly my mind would go to that straightaway, your determination of the allocation of resources hours and Sna provision .

Reference 4 - 0.51% Coverage

You know it is a difficult job and you were often out in the schools talking to principles about allocating resources but it is also about restricting resources or removing resources.

Reference 5 - 0.14% Coverage

Your role in this establishing specialist classes,

sp cl^s

Reference 6 - 0.90% Coverage

I don't know if you had anticipated that you would be overburdened with data, I know how hard that has been and how heavy a task that has been. 11. At the key points of the year, paperwork and the data gathering, but just need the paperwork around resource allocation has been huge for you to try and make your way through that.

paperwork load.

<Internals\\Interview Trancripts\\Clin Educ Prof\\CE2> - § 3 references coded [1.38% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.93% Coverage

Would you agree that it was in envisaged in the SERC that additional resources were going to have to be given and that these new resources were going to the demand considerable administration?

Reference 3 - 0.59% Coverage

so there is the whole reasonable managing of expectations versus what he child actually genuinely needs even though resources are restricted.

Reference 4 - 1.33% Coverage

The other thing I think is to maintain a positive relationship probably within the school and th family who are going to be on their caseloads for a number of years, so trying to manage the expectations, trying to manage the big picture, within that the fact that you probably have co if it doesn't go their way,

Reference 5 - 1.19% Coverage

those pieces all come under the reality of finite resources, and there must be children out the who could do with more resources than they are getting and at the same time, families for m will never be enough.   So you will have conflicts which are coming from an unreasonable bas

Reference 6 - 0.43% Coverage

the whole thing of over-theraping their child, this will make it go away now if we get enough this.

<Internals\\Interview Trancripts\\Principals\\Pr 1> - § 3 references coded [1.67% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.58% Coverage

my feeling would be that they had a very negative approach to the SENO. They always felt th their work wasn't valued.

Reference 2 - 0.52% Coverage

you see the main one would be the view that the SENO is coming all the time to reduce the staffing levels.

Communication is a huge piece, that you make that **engagement** with them, and that is <u>challenging, takes a lot of time</u>

Reference 10 - 0.36% Coverage

<u>Schools are more likely to engage in inclusion when they have that relationship, that relationship is formed over time and is local</u>

Incl.

NB Q.

Reference 11 - 0.10% Coverage

<u>you are part of the school community</u>

Reference 12 - 0.58% Coverage

<u>You have much more creditability than when you walked in on day one, you have much more influence.</u> You do have an influence. I definitely think you do have an influence. It is your relationship that does it.

Credibility Q.

Influence

- § 6 references coded [4.80% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.11% Coverage *CE 2*   *Notes*

<u>able to pick up the phone</u> *Q.*

Acces.

Reference 2 - 0.22% Coverage

<u>frank, maybe with different opinions, discussions</u>

Honesty

Reference 3 - 1.64% Coverage

<u>it is those local relationships that actually build and we used the relationship we have with the SENO</u> as an example in terms of the understanding of what we do, the children we support, they know the children we support, the schools are local to that area, with that local knowledge there can become a greater shared understanding. ***<u>That local piece is really critical.</u>***

Local.

Reference 4 - 1.23% Coverage

<u>I think it should be replicated many times</u>. I think <u>if it was a more resourced, more localised, very localised thing for a set number of schools in a geographical area, smaller than is now, I think we would be building towards a better future in terms of inclusive education</u>.

Reference 5 - 0.40% Coverage

CONFLICT

Reference 3 - 0.59% Coverage

 so there is the whole reasonable managing of expectations versus what he child actually genuinely needs even though resources are restricted.

Reference 4 - 1.33% Coverage

The other thing I think is to maintain a positive relationship probably within the school and th family who are going to be on their caseloads for a number of years, so trying to manage the expectations, trying to manage the big picture, within that the fact that you probably have co if it doesn't go their way,

Reference 5 - 1.19% Coverage

those pieces all come under the reality of finite resources, and there must be children out the who could do with more resources than they are getting and at the same time, families for m will never be enough.   So you will have conflicts which are coming from an unreasonable bas

Reference 6 - 0.43% Coverage

the whole thing of over-theraping their child, this will make it go away now if we get enough this.

<Internals\\Interview Trancripts\\Principals\\Pr 1> - § 3 references coded [1.67% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.58% Coverage

my feeling would be that they had a very negative approach to the SENO. They always felt th their work wasn't valued.

Reference 2 - 0.52% Coverage

you see the main one would be the view that the SENO is coming all the time to reduce the staffing levels.