



Supporting pupils with special educational needs: issues and dilemmas for special needs coordinators in English primary schools

DEANNE CROWTHER, ALAN DYSON AND ALAN MILWARD

Department of Education, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Address for correspondence:

*Deanne Crowther, Special Needs Research Centre, Department of Education,
University of Newcastle upon Tyne, St Thomas Street, Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 7RU, UK*

ABSTRACT

This paper reports the responses of Special Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) in primary schools to a survey undertaken in three local education authorities in the north-east of England. The role of the SENCO has been subject to increasing prescription and guidance. Although policy-makers would like SENCOs to take a more proactive role in the process of curriculum and school development, it has become clear that in making this transformation many are experiencing a number of difficulties. In comparing these difficulties to ones reported in a previous study the existence of a number of problems are highlighted which apparently remain stubbornly resistant to current advice and guidance.

KEYWORDS

SENCO, primary, time, effectiveness impact

INTRODUCTION

The coordination of provision and support for pupils with special educational needs in mainstream schools has been an issue in England and Wales at least since Tansley and Gulliford (1960) argued the case for special classes in mainstream schools and the need for them to be staffed by specialist teachers. Since that time there have been a number of changes, both in the way that support for pupils with special educational needs has been organized and in the role of the 'specialist' teacher. Increasingly, specialist teachers have been encouraged to move away from a narrowly conceived role

as 'remedial' teachers to one which has encompassed a much wider 'management' brief, coordinating the overall response of the school to those pupils experiencing barriers to learning. (For a comprehensive account of these changes see Clark *et al.*, 1995; Crowther *et al.*, 1997.) This paper examines some of the issues and dilemmas that face these teachers as they take on this role.

BACKGROUND

It is now over a quarter of a century since Galletley (1976) urged 'remedial' teachers to 'do away with themselves' as an essential prerequisite to developing a more responsive and effective overall provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in mainstream schools. This selfless act of *hara-kiri* never occurred to any significant degree and the role of the specialist teacher in mainstream schools has expanded to the extent that it has now become a focus of regulation and guidance from policy-makers. This is, in part, because although the role of the specialist teacher has evolved, doubts have nevertheless persisted about its effectiveness – indeed, even in the light of increasing regulation, concerns continue to be raised about whether such a role is tenable in the current educational context.

Since 1994 and the introduction of the Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Pupils with Special Educational Needs (the Code), every school has been responsible for identifying from its staff an individual responsible for coordinating the response of the school to pupils with SEN (GB. DFE, 1994). Although the role of the Special Needs Coordinator (SENCO) has its origins in the 'specialist teacher' advocated by Tansley and Gulliford (1960), it has gradually metamorphosed into its current form. Many of these changes can be attributed to a natural process of evolution (see e.g. Dessent, 1997; Roaf and Bines, 1989) but there has also been a concerted effort by government to provide an increasing definition of the role through the production of guidance and advice. Undoubtedly, contributing to this trend was a growing concern over the quality and consistency of provision for pupils with SEN manifest in a series of reports (GB. DES. HMI, 1990, 1991; Audit Commission and HMI, 1992a, 1992b). These concerns also coincided with the introduction of the now well-documented reforms to the education system introduced over the course of the past decade. The implementation of the 1988 Education Reform Act, for example, with its focus on raising standards for all pupils, highlighted a number of questions about the efficacy of many of the procedures and practices that traditionally had been used for pupils with SEN. In the same vein, the introduction of the National Curriculum as entitlement for all pupils and the advocacy of a more 'inclusive' system of education increased the pressure on schools to demonstrate that they could respond effectively to pupil diversity. In many schools, the responsibility for addressing these issues was given wholly or in part to the SENCO.

Although some SENCOs rose to the challenge of dealing with these changes (Clark *et al.*, 1995), others were clearly experiencing difficulties. This period of turbulence encouraged a now-established trend of regulation and guidance embodied by the Code. Crucially, the Code sought to delineate both a key role for the SENCO and set out some seven key areas of responsibility in an attempt to ensure a greater consistency in the way that support was delivered for pupils with SEN; the areas were:

1. the day-to-day operation of the school's SEN policy;
2. liaising with and advising fellow teachers;
3. coordinating provision for children with special educational needs;

4. maintaining the school's SEN register and overseeing the records on all pupils with special educational needs;
5. liaising with parents;
6. contributing to in-service training of staff;
7. liaising with external agencies.

Individual SENCOs will, of course, interpret their role in accordance with the context in which they find themselves; however, the areas of responsibility outlined above serve to define the tasks that most SENCOs could be expected to perform. As we pointed out in our earlier report (Crowther *et al.*, 1997):

SENCOs work in a very wide range of contexts. Some have no dedicated time for their work and manage few resources; others are 'full-time' SENCOs managing large teams of teachers and assistants and have a responsibility for a significant budget. (p. 1)

The Role of the SENCO

In 1997 the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) commissioned the Special Needs Research Centre (SNRC), at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne, to investigate the role of the SENCO in the light of the implementation of the Code of Practice. The findings from this report (Crowther *et al.*, 1997) were incorporated by the DfEE into *The SENCO Guide* (GB. DfEE, 1997), distributed to every school in England and Wales. This represented yet a further attempt to structure the role of the SENCO. Subsequently, additional guidance has been offered in the form of the SENCO Standards (TTA, 1998) and most recently in the Draft Revised Code of Practice (GB. DfEE, 2000).

In our report to the DfEE, we noted how in the period following the implementation of the Code a number of factors were causing SENCOs considerable concern; these included:

- variations in the amount of dedicated time allocated to SENCOs between schools, which were by no means clearly attributable to factors such as the size of school or numbers of pupils on the SEN Register;
- differences between schools in the extent to which SENCOs enjoyed the tangible support of their headteachers and governors;
- limited understanding of and involvement in decisions regarding the resourcing of their work on the part of many SENCOs;
- lack of opportunities, particularly in primary schools, for most SENCOs to follow up the basic training they had received relating to the implementation of the Code;
- a tendency on the part of many local education authorities (LEAs) to impose heavily bureaucratic interpretations of the Code increasing the workload of many SENCOs.

In total, these factors contributed to a number of particular difficulties and challenges for SENCOs that included:

- the management of time;
- maintaining the SEN register;
- liaison with colleagues, parents, external agencies and governors;
- developing the in-service training role recommended by the Code.

Although SENCOs in all phases faced these difficulties, we did note that in primary schools there were particular factors which made the realization of the SENCO role particularly problematic. Perhaps not altogether surprisingly, these factors included: identifying an appropriate SENCO from within the staff; providing appropriate training opportunities; and creating sufficient non-contact time to enable the bureaucratic functions to be undertaken successfully. It was with these factors in mind that we undertook a second study.

METHOD

Primary SENCOs: Some Issues and Dilemmas

Although not of the same scale as the original study, some 141 SENCOs from three LEAs in the north-east of England completed a postal questionnaire based on the instrument used in the original study. This represents a response rate of some 30 per cent, which is disappointingly low despite a follow-up request, and may well reflect the considerable pressures currently experienced in many schools. Responses were received from schools that had pupil roles that ranged from 20 to 480 and staffing complements from between 2 and 21. This suggests that although the survey had not elicited responses from SENCOs in either the very smallest or very largest primary schools in England, it was broadly representative of the contexts in which most SENCOs operated. In the remainder of this paper, we will explore their responses and consider their implications in relation to a number of concerns about how the SENCO's role is being undertaken.

RESULTS

Time

For many SENCOs the amount of time available to undertake the role remains as the most pressing problem that they face, and establishing the appropriate amount of time available to undertake the role of the SENCO has proved problematic for policy-makers, headteachers and practitioners. Currently, there is no stipulated time for the SENCO role. However, in the Draft Revised Code of Practice (GB, DfEE, 2000), headteachers and governors are asked to review the amount of time available in the light of the context of their schools, and in the Thresholds Document accompanying the Draft Code suggestions are made as to how an appropriate amount of time might be determined.

In the previous survey, we reported that over 40 per cent of SENCOs in primary schools indicated that they had no timetabled time allocated for SEN work and a further 27 per cent that they had a half-day or less. This amounts to almost 70 per cent of primary SENCOs who reported that they had a half-day or less for their SEN role. What is significant in the current survey is the extent to which this position has apparently deteriorated. Some 65 per cent of SENCOs reported that they had no timetabled time for their role and a further 17.7 per cent that they had a half-day or less for their role.

Only 6.4 per cent reported that they had more than half a week for their role compared to 11 per cent in the previous study. The results from this question and the equivalent question in the previous study are displayed in Table 1. Even allowing for the limited nature of the survey, these data highlight what appears to be an alarming

Table 1: Allocation of weekly time for SENCOs to complete their role in primary schools

Allocation of weekly time	Percentage 1999/2000	Percentage 1996/97
No timetabled time	65.2	42.5
Up to 10% (half a day or less)	17.7	27.0
11–20% (between half a day and one day)	5.0	9.0
21–50% (between one day and half a week)	5.7	10.0
51–100% (between half a week and a full week)	6.4	10.5

trend. Although the number of pupils on the SEN register has increased, as has the number of pupils in primary schools with statements, the time made available to SENCOs to carry out their role has apparently declined. It is possible to suggest at least two reasons for why this might be the case. First, school budgets have until recently been subject to cuts, thus reducing the capacity of headteachers to provide cover for SENCOs many of whom are full-time class teachers. Secondly, many primary schools may, in the light of the national debate about standards, have decided to concentrate all available staffing on implementing the Literacy and Numeracy Hour and other initiatives to raise standards at the expense of time available for the SENCO role.

Interestingly, another formula suggested to determine an allocation of time for the role has been to relate time to the school roll. This is like many other potential indicators, a relatively blunt instrument and, in Table 2, we investigate the relationship between the size of school and the amount of time that SENCOs currently have to undertake their role. There is, of course, a certain arbitrariness in deciding what is or is not a 'small' or a 'large' school. However, for the purposes of analysing the data we have allocated schools on the basis of their pupil roll using an interval scale of 100. From the data in Table 2, we can see that in the very largest schools there are fewer SENCOs who have no timetabled time for their role. However, the schools

Table 2: Size of school as a percentage of the allocation of SENCOs weekly time

Time	Pupil roll									
	<100		>100 and <200		>200 and <300		>300 and <400		>400	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
No time	16	17.4	27	29.3	26	28.3	12	13.0	8	8.7
Up to 10%	2	8.0	10	40.0	1	4.0	6	24.0	5	20.0
11–20%	0	0.0	3	42.9	2	28.6	2	28.6	0	0.0
21–50%	0	0.0	3	42.9	1	14.3	2	28.6	1	14.3
51–100%	0	0.0	2	22.2	3	33.3	4	44.4	0	0.0

where the highest percentage of SENCOs reported they had no timetabled time were not the very smallest, but those with rolls of between 100 and 300. Although generally supportive of time being related to size of school, the data do suggest that picture is more complex than might be assumed and that, as indicated in the Thresholds document, the time available is more appropriately related to the numbers on the SEN register.

Although there is a continued need for caution in making comparisons on the basis of data from these two studies, the rise in the number of SENCOs reporting no dedicated time is clearly a matter of concern. Not least, it raises a number of questions over their ability to realize the coordinating and strategic role envisaged for them in current guidance.

Turning to the reasons why more SENCOs have no dedicated time for their role, it is possible at this point to offer a number of explanations. First, it would not be unreasonable to assume that in many of the smaller primary schools the SENCO is a full-time class teacher and has other coordinating responsibilities. In these cases, issues of teaching and learning may be discussed between the entire staff and their implementation being a matter for curriculum coordinators or the headteacher. Where these circumstances prevail, the SENCO's role may necessarily become restricted to a more pragmatic one of managing the SEN register and performing other administrative tasks, most noticeably perhaps, liaising with LEA services who take responsibility for providing actual support for pupils. Support for this view emerged in the data when we analysed the information provided by SENCOs on the other roles they undertook. Almost half of the SENCOs commented that they were also class teachers and some 40 per cent reported they were either the headteacher or a curriculum area coordinator.

A second possible explanation might well be that at the time we conducted our initial survey schools and SENCOs were still coming to terms with the Code and were finding it necessary to devote time to establishing the necessary procedures and systems that it demanded. In the intervening period these systems and procedures may have become more routinized and less demanding of time. As a consequence, schools, under pressure to raise standards and to respond to other resource-intensive initiatives such as the Numeracy and Literacy Hour, may have redirected time previously preserved for the SENCOs' role into these areas.

A third explanation may relate to designation of the SENCO within schools. It is clear from the data that SENCOs with no timetabled time were either full-time class teachers or headteachers. Where the headteacher is also the SENCO, then it may well be the case that there is no designated time as such for the role. Where the headteacher takes on the additional responsibility of SENCO, a number of potential problems are raised. On the one hand, the position of headteacher does provide an impetus for managing change and also for being able to develop an overview of any potential barriers to learning within a school. On the other hand, given the increasing demands on headteachers, there is a real danger that other priorities take precedence and the strategic role is lost alongside the monitoring of provision for individual needs. Significantly, the Draft Revised Code makes it clear that only in exceptional circumstances should headteachers also take on the role of SENCO.

There may, of course, be other factors that have reduced the time available for many SENCOs in primary schools to undertake their role. However, what is clear from this and other sources is that, alongside the reduction in the time available, there has been an increase in the number of pupils being identified as having special educational needs. In conjunction, these two findings suggest that many SENCOs will experience considerable difficulty in managing the various dimensions of their role.

Table 3: Students on each stage of the SEN register

Stages of assessment	N	Range	No. of pupils as a percentage of pupil roll
Stage 1	129	0–96	6.6
Stage 2	139	1–64	8.4
Stage 3	136	0–75	4.6
Stage 4	85	0–5	0.4
Stage 5	129	0–39	2.0

Note: Some schools did not complete this question.

N = Number of respondents identifying pupils.

Numbers on the SEN Register

As maintaining a register of pupils was identified as an issue in the original survey, we asked respondents to provide a breakdown of the special needs population in their school, including the number of:

- (i) pupils at each stage of the SEN register;
- (ii) pupils with statements;
- (iii) the number of pupils with statements within the conventionally accepted types of SEN (e.g. MLD, EBD, autism, etc.).

The results are displayed in Tables 3 and 4 respectively.

The data suggest that some 22 per cent of pupils in the primary schools are currently recorded on the SEN register. This is some 8 per cent higher than the comparable figure (14 per cent) from the previous study but almost the same as the current estimates (21 per cent) available from the DfEE. It is a significant increase and reflects, to some extent, a number of concerns expressed about the rise in the number of pupils being identified as having special educational needs and the implications this has for the overall deployment of resources within schools and LEAs (e.g. Marks, 2000).

Another way of looking at the data suggests that over two-thirds of pupils on the SEN register are either at stage 1 or 2 of the Code of Practice and a further 21 per cent are at stage 3 and 9 per cent have statements. With the suggestion in the Draft Revised Code that stage 1 be removed, it will be interesting to monitor how these proportions change after the new Code has been implemented.

Turning now to the population of pupils with statements, we found in the previous study that the percentage of pupils with statements in primary schools ranged from 1.1 to 1.4 per cent, with a mean of 1.2 per cent. The current data again confirm the national trend of increasing numbers of pupils in primary schools with statements of special educational needs, although our figure of 2 per cent is somewhat higher than the 1.6 per cent suggested by the data made available by central government. This slight discrepancy may well reflect regional differences in rates in the level of statements made by LEAs. In Table 4 a further level of analysis has been employed to show the distribution of the population of pupils with statements across the different types of special educational need. When considered in this way, we can see that over one-third of pupils in the primary schools in this survey had a statement of special educational needs because of their mild and moderate learning difficulties (36 per cent). This is

Table 4: Number of students with statements of SEN

Types of SEN	Range	No. of pupils as percentage of number statemented
Mild and moderate learning difficulties	0-31	36.0
Severe learning difficulties	0-4	2.7
Emotional and behavioural difficulties	0-22	11.3
Sensory impairments	0-3	3.0
Specific learning difficulties	0-9	7.6
Speech and language difficulties	0-25	18.7
Autistic spectrum disorders	0-2	3.3
Physical disabilities	0-3	4.8

Note: Some schools did not complete this question.

almost twice the number of pupils in the second highest group (those with statements for speech and language difficulties) and over three times higher than those with emotional and behavioural difficulties.

Such a distribution is not altogether unexpected. As pupils enter the education system those with the highest level and most observable needs may well have been identified and already received a statement of special educational needs and perhaps even been placed in special provision. It is only when there is an interaction with the curriculum and the other demands of schools that teachers begin to identify and have concerns about other types of special educational need. Unsurprisingly, teachers in primary schools are concerned and seek additional support for those pupils who have difficulties in learning, problems in adjustment and mild and moderate difficulties with the development of language. Pupils with these difficulties become the basis of the register of special educational needs and the responsibility of SENCOs. However, it is also not altogether surprising, given the emphasis on inclusion, that our survey identified that some 9 per cent of pupils on those registers have statements of special educational need.

As part of the trend towards inclusion, schools are also being asked to address the needs of pupils with a wider range of needs. In an attempt to establish the extent of this, SENCOs were asked to identify other groups of pupils who they were required to monitor in the course of their role. The results are displayed in Table 5. A number

Table 5: Pupils requiring additional attention or monitoring for various reasons

Reason	No. of pupils as a percentage of pupil roll
Medical conditions	2.2
English as an additional language (EAL)	1.1
In receipt of free school meals	14.4
More able learners	0.7
Other (e.g. travellers)	0.3

of points emerge from these data. First, it appears that SENCOs are being asked to take responsibility for pupils who fall outside the conventional notion of special educational needs. Monitoring more able learners, children from traveller families and those with medical conditions is increasingly becoming part of the responsibility of SENCOs, thus further increasing demands on their time and potentially compromising the time they have available to support the development of provision for pupils with special educational needs.

Staff and Staffing for Special Educational Needs

Over two-thirds of the schools reported that there were no additional teaching staff with any timetabled time for special needs work. The remaining one-third reported that they did indeed have some staff with timetabled time to spend exclusively on special needs. The amount of time available, as might be anticipated, varied considerably between schools. There are a number of reasons for this that will be briefly explained. First, support for pupils with special educational needs in many primary schools is often enhanced through the deployment of teams of peripatetic support teachers employed centrally by LEAs. These teachers are deployed in a number of ways. Some will be used to provide significant levels of support for pupils with statements of special educational need, others to provide less sustained levels of support for those pupils at the lower stages of the Code. In some schools there may be a number of such staff in the school at any one time, explaining perhaps why some schools reported they had up to eight staff with time exclusively for special needs. Secondly, some schools may use part of their delegated budgets to 'buy in' additional staff to work with special needs pupils. The amount of additional staff time this buys may not be excessive, explaining perhaps why the majority of schools reported they only had one additional member of staff undertaking special needs work.

A significant number of schools (84 per cent) reported that they had Learning Support Assistants (LSAs). The number of LSAs present in these schools ranged from one to six, reflecting the number of pupils with SEN in the school and, in particular, the number of pupils with statements of special educational need. In the schools with LSAs some 75 per cent worked exclusively or primarily with pupils who had statements of special educational need. Unsurprisingly, the number of hours of LSA time available for SEN varied enormously between the schools. At one end of the continuum was a school that reported having 100 hours, while at the other end of the continuum a

Table 6: Number of hours per week learning support assistants with time designated for SEN work spend on different provisions

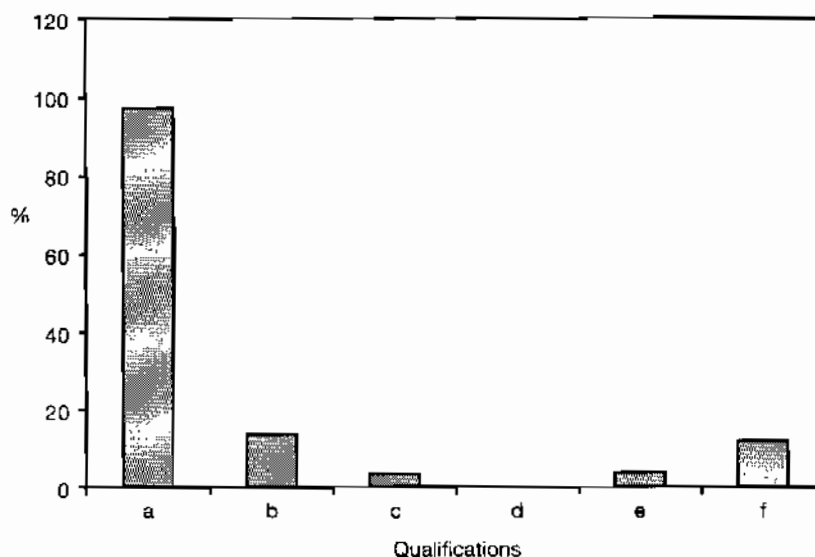
LSA provision	Range of hours (per week)	Modal no. of hours (per week)
Work exclusively or primarily with statemented pupils	1–100	20
Work exclusively or primarily with SEN pupils in small group setting	1.5–120	15
Provide more general SEN support	1–100	15
Prepare curriculum materials for class or subject teachers	0.5–15	1

school reported having only one hour. A further breakdown of this data is available in Table 6. It is interesting to note that in the Draft Revised Code one specific addition to the role of the SENCO is the 'management of Learning Support Assistants'. It was clear from the survey that schools used LSAs in numerous roles and, in many cases, there was often an overlap in the ways they were used further increasing the demands on SENCOs

Training and Qualifications

Traditionally, SENCOs have been expected to demonstrate knowledge in a number of areas such as assessment and diagnosis. However, as we have seen, these are not the only skills required in the current policy guidance. To investigate this issue we asked SENCOs to indicate the level of further professional training they had received. It is clear from Figure 1 that almost all SENCOs have received some form of training, most frequently occasional training events such as professional development days. While some SENCOs have completed other training in addition to these events, some 72 per cent reported that this was their only form of SEN training. None of the SENCOs questioned had completed an MEd with a route in SEN, but 13 per cent had certificates in special educational needs.

Although it is dangerous to generalize about the content of courses, the emphasis in the training profile of the SENCOs who responded suggests that the courses they



Key:

- a, Occasional training events.
- b, Certificate in Special Educational Needs.
- c, Diploma in Special Educational Needs.
- d, MEd with a route in Special Educational Needs.
- e, MEd with units in Special Educational Needs.
- f, Other.

Figure 1: Specific training courses that SENCOs have undertaken with respect to children with special educational needs

have attended would have been predominantly of a practical nature. This is not meant to devalue those courses that would have provided useful information on new techniques or administrative procedures. Such courses, however, would confirm a somewhat traditional view of special needs education and of the role of the SENCO. Of the very small percentage that had completed Master's degrees, the majority had completed courses with a specialization in a specific type of SEN such as autism, language, dyslexia, etc. There does, however, remain a concern that such an emphasis undermines the potential for SENCOs to develop more generic 'management' skills to enable them to operate in the more strategic way envisaged by policy-makers.

DISCUSSION

Plus ça Change, Plus la Môme Chose?

In the course of the above, we have suggested that there remains a considerable gulf between the ways in which SENCOs operate and the role envisaged by policy-makers. A number of possibilities might account for this. For example, it might be argued that there is an inevitable gap between the introduction of guidance and its implementation. The notion of an inevitable 'time-lag' although superficially appealing cannot disguise the fact that our evidence suggests that major obstacles still prevent the SENCOs' role from operating in the way that is intended. These obstacles can be understood in a number of ways. On the one hand, they can be seen as structural impediments arising from resourcing issues. The lack of time and the absence of qualifications and appropriate resources can be seen as the consequence of a failure of public finances to resource schools adequately to enable SENCOs to undertake their role. Although we have some sympathy with this view, and it would be churlish not to acknowledge that an inevitable outcome of the imposition of neo-liberal economic policies is a limitation in the level of resources available for public services, there is, we would suggest, a need to look beyond simple economic explanations.

An alternative perspective might, for example, see the current difficulties in realizing the SENCO role as a result of a gap between the expectation of policy-makers and the capacity of individual practitioners. It might not be unreasonable to assume that for some SENCOs whose interest in this field arises from a genuine desire to work 'face-to-face' with pupils there is a reluctance to abandon ways of working which minimize the 'humanistic' dimension of their work. As we have highlighted, the lack of 'generic' training opportunities for many SENCOs might well have contributed to this 'resistance' to change and thereby halted the adoption of the envisaged role. We do not deny that there is evidence of considerable difficulty in bringing about change within professional groups. Seeking to 'blame' individuals, though, for their failure to change is an all too easy ploy and may avoid confronting more complex issues. There may well be evidence of the 'forces of conservatism' at work within the cohort of SENCOs but we subscribe to the view that these are very much in the minority and that the reasons for the difficulties they experience lie elsewhere.

In considering this possibility, we approach Skrtic's (1991) notion of the need to look 'behind special education' and to find other, perhaps more plausible, accounts for this situation. We have elsewhere (Clark *et al.*, 1998; Dyson and Millward, 2000) identified serious concerns about Skrtic's account of the limitations of special education arising from the failure of schools to develop 'ad hoc' organizational structures. It is our contention that the persistence of the difficulties experienced by SENCOs is more indicative of a fundamental dilemma at the heart of special education. That dilemma exists because of the inherently unstable nature of special education – an

instability that arises at a number of levels. It can be seen to exist in a potential conflict over competing policy goals with schools being asked, at one and the same time, to raise standards and become more 'inclusive'. Secondly, it occurs at what we would describe as the professional level (Dyson and Millward, 2000), in so far as there is an inherent difficulty in reconciling the multiplicity of understandings of special education that exist between individuals. Such diversity is unlikely ever to be evened out either through legislation or guidance and remains as a potential source of conflict and resistance within schools. Finally, the instability arises because of the very nature of special education as a social phenomenon in its own right. Its artefactual existence, a composite of numerous forces and processes – human, material and ideological – cannot be regarded as stable, but are inevitably in flux. On occasions, they will come together and produce a temporary equilibrium and apparent stability in the field. Such stability has all too often proved to be merely an intermediary stage before the inherent instability creates a new period of turbulence. We have suggested in the course of this paper that increasingly policy-makers have sought to suppress this turbulence through increased regulation. As we have also pointed out, although such action may produce equilibrium in one part of the field it also creates tensions elsewhere, which ultimately lead to the resurfacing of turbulence.

It is from this perspective, we suggest, that the persistence of certain problems in finding ways to 'support' and coordinate provision for pupils with SEN have to be understood. The perseverance of these problems does not arise *per se* from different policy prerogatives. Nor can guidance or advice eradicate such problems. The problems are inherent and part of the fundamental dilemma that is special education. What we may observe over time is that the incidence and form of the difficulties may change, but there will always remain a series of problems and dilemmas for those responsible for coordinating the support for pupils with SEN.

CONCLUSION: THE CHALLENGE FOR SENCOs

Confronted with such a dilemma, SENCOs may legitimately ask what possible course of action is open to them. Our response is to invoke, in a slightly modified form, Galletley's (1976) earlier advice. Instead of seeking to 'do away with themselves', our advice is that they should take a more proactive course of action. As there is little prospect of legislation or guidance creating the circumstances in which their anticipated role can be realized, SENCOs have to consider taking action at a local level.

We have previously (Clark *et al.*, 1997) indicated how it is possible for SENCOs to circumvent some of the inherent dilemmas they face. In 'The case of Downland' (*ibid.*), we highlighted how one SENCO had begun to reconstruct his role. There were a number of key dimensions to this process. First, as SENCO, he had been instrumental in articulating a clear and forceful values position for the school, based on a commitment to inclusion and entitlement. As part of this, the language of special education was reconstructed to emphasize success, potential and achievement, rather than the traditional notions of failure, limited ability and underachievement. Secondly, he had focused on a role that stressed review and development of the processes of teaching and learning, rather than support for individual pupils. This involved using the 'resources' of special education in a direct way to develop pedagogy, rather than to spread them ever more thinly across increasing numbers of pupils experiencing difficulties.

We do not pretend that such a transformation is easy. Indeed, in 'The case of Downland', we highlighted how the then newly introduced Code compromised many of the developments, or in our terms revived the dilemmas, and created new challenges

by, for example, increasing the bureaucratic demands on the SENCO. The proposed revisions to the Code will, however, go some way to reducing those demands. The challenge for SENCOs will be to use that window of opportunity to begin a process of reconstruction by not allowing themselves to be overwhelmed by the issues that will inevitably emerge from this further attempt to resolve what is the dilemma that is special needs education. They will have, in a very literal sense, to 'seize the time' that becomes available to them or risk having their role further undermined.

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