Chapter 3: Leading Learning: the role of the SENCO
Fiona and Graham Hallett

Introduction

The creation of the SENCo role was undoubtedly viewed by many as an imaginative

and progressive move. To nominate an agent who would coordinate provision for

learners with all forms of special educational need and/or disability appears to have

been seen as a means for school practices, parental views and government policy to

come together to ensure that children experiencing these difficulties would be given

equal opportunities for educational success. The original SEN Code of practice (DfE,

1994) and subsequent revision (DfES, 2001) define the role largely within a

description of areas of responsibility; these were predominantly phrased in terms of

'maintaining' records, 'liaising' with stakeholders and 'contributing' to staff

development. In the 2001 SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) mention is made of

the SENCo, in collaboration with the head teacher and governing body of the setting,

playing a key role in the strategic development of policy and provision (section 5.30,

page 50, for example), rather than in terms of strategic leadership. However, it is

also suggested that where the SENCo is a member of the Senior Leadership Team

(SLT) [section 5.34 and section 6.37] or the Senior Management Team (SMT)

[section 4.17] 'many schools find (this) effective' (ibid)

Following the changes made by the *Children and Families Act* (DfE, 2014), a new

Code became necessary, resulting in the SEND Code of Practice 0 – 25 years

(DfE/DoH, 2015). This deals much more robustly with the role of the SENCo; no

doubt in part due to the introduction, and continued implementation, of the National

Award for SEN Coordination, now increasingly abbreviated as NASENCo. A number

of points are made about the role that suggest the importance attached to it within government policy. It is clear that the responsibilities and duties of the role are seen as requiring the appointment of a post-holder with the qualifications, resources and authority to carry out the role effectively and with a suitable degree of independence. Firstly, the SENCo must be a qualified teacher, working at the school for which they fulfil the role [section 6.84/5], with one exception to be discussed later, where a collaborative appointment is arranged between small schools. The SENCo must, on first appointment to the role, achieve the National Award within three years of appointment [section 6.85], where the award is accredited through a recognised Higher Education provider and where the award is at least equivalent to 60 credits of postgraduate study [6.86]

The SENCo is seen as having an important role in the strategic development of SEN policy and practice within the school, and it is stated much more strongly than previously that the post-holder will be most effective "if they are part of the school leadership team" (DfE/DoH 2015, 6.87). The description of the key responsibilities that follows offers a view of the strategic nature of the work to be carried out; all of the eleven specified roles can be best described as strategic, rather than process roles. For example, four of the roles are qualified by the word liaising, two with the word advising, one with overseeing, and so on. There can be little doubt that it is envisaged that the role requires a considerable degree of strategic vision and leadership in bringing the best out of the varying stakeholders within a school setting to produce the best outcomes for pupils designated as having a special educational need or disability. To allow this to happen, schools are expected to ensure that the SENCo will be provided with both the time and resources needed to properly fulfil the

role requirements, including 'sufficient administrative support and time away from teaching' [6.91] and notably, in a way similar 'to other strategic roles within a school' [6.91].

As mentioned previously, small schools can appoint a shared SENCo, providing that sufficient time and resources are provided for the post-holder to carry out the role in an effective way for all pupils with special needs across the sharing schools [6.92]; to reinforce the importance of the role, it is then stated that the SENCo in such a circumstance 'should not normally have a significant teaching commitment' and, perhaps most interestingly in leadership terms, this shared role should not be carried out by the head teacher at any of the schools.

Reviews of practice conducted over the last ten years or so have, somewhat unsurprisingly, reported that the reality of the role is clearly varied (Kearns, 2005; Layton, 2005; McKenzie, 2007;Fisher, 2012; Griffiths & Dubsky, 2012; Robertson, 2012; Pearson, Mitchell & Rapti, 2015) and very much dependent upon context and interpretation of sometimes contradictory legislation. These findings are largely replicated in the material gathered for this book, which form the substance of the material covered in the next three chapters on the learning outcomes for the National Award. It is certainly the case that the status and significance of the role has developed and strengthened, both in practice and within the new regulatory framework described above, with no current evidence of the discharge of the role being placed in the hands of anybody other than a qualified teacher, suggesting that the advocacy of the *House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee*

report on SEN (HMSO, 2006) in urging the government to address the unanticipated appointment of TAs as SENCOs has been successful.

That the status, significance and intent of the role is being seen differently is strengthened when the most recent iteration of the learning outcomes (DfE/DoH, 2015) are considered, that providers of the National Award are expected to deliver and which participants are expected to meet. When preparing bids for inclusion in the first group of providers for the Award, in 2009, providers were expected to deliver programmes congruent with a set of 55 learning outcomes. In many ways these were both instrumental and reductionist, inviting a competence/compliance response that demonstrated personal attributes. One section of the outcomes, out of five, focussed on leadership, in what might be seen as a process orientation; for example, under a general heading of providing professional direction, the SENCo is seen as promoting improvements in teaching and learning, or leading the development of a whole school culture of best practice; under the heading of leadership and development of staff, there is an expectation to provide support and feedback to colleagues on effective practice. In both of these cases, the responsibility of the SENCo can be interpreted as a monitoring or accountability function of leadership, rather than one of setting an expectation that the leadership element of the role is one of promoting change, and challenging practice within existing structures.

The learning outcomes that are currently expected (NCTL, 2014) appear to be directed much more at a conception of the SENCo acting as an agent of change. There are fewer outcomes, divided into only three categories, dealing with Professional Knowledge and Understanding, Leading and Coordinating Provision,

and Personal and Professional Qualities. Whilst it is certainly the case that some of the 2014 learning outcomes can be mapped directly on to the learning outcomes set out previously, it is equally clear that a change of emphasis has occurred. This is exemplified in the introduction to the outcomes, where it is made clear that these are not standards. It is stated that those undertaking further, specialist training

> 'will already be skilled teachers who have demonstrated the professional attributes, professional knowledge and understanding, and professional skills set out in the Qualified Teacher Status and Teachers' Standards as a minimum" (NCTL, 2014: 4)

This would appear to align with a view that the acquisition of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), by whatever route, should prepare all teachers to meet the challenges offered by all pupils echoing the aspiration included in the SEN/D Codes of Practice (DfES,2001; DfES, 2014) that 'all teachers are teachers of children with SEN/D'. It goes on to say that meeting 'these learning outcomes should enable new SENCos to fulfil the leadership role set out in the SEND Code of Practice' (DfE/DoH, 2015: 4), firmly aligning the National Award with the precepts contained in the Code, suggesting a thought-through application of common principles guiding the legislative framework and the role most associated with their implementation.

The learning outcomes go on to explore the way that leadership is conceptualised in some detail, using language that locates expectations firmly within a strategic and challenging view of what is entailed in leadership. Part B, Leading and Coordinating Provision, following a general strapline about completing the Award, contains five subsections containing a total of 24 statements outlining specific functions relating to the broad pattern set by the introduction to each of the subsections. It is noticeable that these sections are hierarchical in moving from what might be characterised as

strategic leadership or change management in the first two subsections to a much more process view of leadership in the latter subsections. The first section refers to the ability to: 'Work strategically with senior colleagues and governors to', the second refers to the ability to: 'Lead, develop, and, where necessary, challenge senior leaders, colleagues and governors to', suggesting a proactive stance in relation to change. By contrast, the fourth subsection refers to the ability to: 'Draw on external sources of support and expertise to', and the fifth to: Develop, implement, monitor and evaluate systems to', suggesting a more bureaucratic, and perhaps more familiar, stance in relation to the work involved in the role of the SENCo.

It is perhaps worth considering some of the statements contained within these subsections in more detail, particularly given the perceived shift in policy direction in the Green Paper, Support and Aspiration, where the stated aim, although quietly and quickly removed from further documentation, suggested an end to the 'bias towards inclusive education' (DfE, 2011). For example, it is suggested in the first subsection that the SENCo should: 'advise on and influence the strategic development of a person-centred and inclusive ethos, policies, priorities and practices' whilst the last point in this subsection requires the SENCo to: 'Commission, secure and deploy appropriate resources…and evaluate and report upon their impact on progress, outcomes and cost-effectiveness.' In the second subsection, two statements are of particular interest in relation to the scope and focus of the role; the first, within the general expectation to lead, develop and challenge senior leaders, is to: model effective practice, coach and mentor colleagues', and this is immediately followed by: 'lead the professional development of staff so that all staff improve their practice and take responsibility for removing barriers to participation and learning'. It can, of

course, be argued that these statements contain a great many words that are conceptually ambiguous or are poorly defined, but there would seem to be both an opportunity and an expectation here that, in completing the National Award, participants will become skilled in the language, structure and theory of leadership but will also be confronted with the implications of carrying out a role enhanced by this knowledge within their settings.

By contrast, the language used in the latter subsections of Section B outcomes seems much more familiar in relation to those provided in previous published learning outcomes (for example, from 2009). The last section, on systems, requires a newly qualified SENCo to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate systems to: identify pupils who may have SEN and/or disabilities; record and review the progress of children and young people with SEN and/or disabilities; and ensure appropriate arrangements are put in place…(for)… national tests and examinations or undertaking other forms of accreditation.'

It is also worth noting that in addition to Section B, there is also a leadership outcome within Section A, Professional Knowledge and Understanding. The second subsection, on: 'the principles and practices of leadership in different contexts' is clearly intended to provide detailed expectations of what can be seen as the theoretical basis for leadership within a school setting, as the precursor for the enactment and implementation of these principles within the learning outcomes outlined in Section B. This means that of the nine subsections in Parts A and B of the Learning Outcomes, six deal specifically with elements of leadership. Section C, dealing with Personal and Professional Qualities, whilst not having any bulleted

points relating to the subject, does mention 'the personal; and professional qualities and *leadership*' that are needed in the role.

The remainder of this chapter will explore what this might, and should, mean in terms of 'leadership for learning', described by John MacBeath as 'the capacity for leadership to arise out of powerful learning experiences and opportunities to exercise leadership to enhance learning' (MacBeath, 2009: 83). There can be little doubt that 'leadership for learning' can be seen to inform the practice of most, if not all, SENCos, if a narrow interpretation of the phrase is used; that is, where this leadership is exercised in the context of support, rather than in developing whole school policies. However, applying this in a broader sense, where an enhanced learning environment meeting the needs of all pupils is seen as what is meant by the term, it is suggested that leadership for learning only occurs when an existing school culture and the core beliefs of the SENCo align.

That is, it happens in spite of current legislation and initiatives, rather than as a result of them, suggesting that where practices embodying a narrowly prescriptive view of learning are embedded in the culture and ethos of a setting, simply requiring a SENCo to adopt a leadership role may do little to enable them to exercise that leadership, to enhance learning. Further, there is little evidence to support the notion that this sort of leadership is, of itself, an artefact of membership of the Senior Leadership Team in a school; rather the positioning that facilitates this sort of alignment seems to be much more related to the personal qualities of the SENCo, and to a large degree, those of the head teacher or pedagogical lead in the setting, than to role occupancy.

Kearns suggested the following five metaphors for ways in which the SENCo role was practiced: 'auditor', 'rescue', 'expert', 'collaborator' and 'arbiter', any of which can dominate, overlap and co-exist (Kearns, 2005). Given the legislative structure in which the 'first' SEN Code of Practice (DfE, 1994) operated, it is perhaps not surprising that a typology such as this could be identified. The Code offered non-statutory guidance; that is, a school had to pay regard to the Code without necessarily adopting all of the processes that it advocated. The 'auditor' role, identified by Kearns, stressed the bureaucratic and procedural management that dominated the lives of many SENCos at the time, often leading to role anxiety and overload (McKenzie, 2007) due to the time demands associated with these procedures. The 'auditor' SENCo focussed on legalities and administration, asserting that a critical phase of their personal growth towards this type of working was 'the introduction in the school of the official Code of Practice' (Kearns, 2005: 141); it might well be that neither the 'second' SEN Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) or the 2009 Learning Outcomes for the National Award (TDA, 2009) did little to change this view.

Here, the leadership implications had the tendency to lead to 'single loop learning' (Argyris & Schon, 1978), caught up in a self-perpetuating loop of targets, strategies, implementation and evaluation; in effect a means by which to 'tame the wild' (Perkins, 2003) but one which also serves to reduce individual autonomy. Therefore, whilst only offering guidance, SENCos were seen to view the Code as a 'rule book', becoming overwhelmed by procedural processes. In this situation, it might be seen as justifiable for a newly appointed SENCo to adopt the behaviours expected by their

colleagues particularly where, as Fullan, (2003: 51) notes, 'relational trust atrophies when individuals perceive that others are not acting in ways that are consistent with their understanding of the others' role obligation'.

A second metaphor suggested by Kearns was that of the SENCo as 'rescue'. Here, there is an acknowledgement that at any one time in the complex narrative that accompanies the development of policy and practice in education, a number of competing agendas are likely to exist. The disparity within an agenda privileging attainment over achievement is one such example; a still more recent example might contrast the elitism that is seemingly inseparable from any increase in selective education with initiatives designed to reduce social inequality. Not all agendas might seem as polarised, of course; a perfectly well-intentioned practice introduced in a setting might be seen as failing to provide necessary support in meeting the learning needs of an individual child, creating a situation where 'rescue' might be required.

In these circumstances, the potential of a well-intentioned 'rescue' SENCo as a leader could create a situation where staff align themselves with an agenda that might be seen as oppositional to prevailing orthodoxies. Such demarcation lines have been termed 'Balkanisation' (Hargreaves, 1994) and serve to obscure the moral purpose of education which is grounded in equity, justice and the desire to enable all individuals to achieve their full potential. If SENCos, in response to beneficent, but vaguely articulated, guidance develop localised practices determined by particular policy initiatives, of which there are many, the result can often be seen as being what Lipsky (1980) termed 'street-level bureaucracy'. The notion of 'street-level bureaucracy' reflects a belief that policy implementation in the end comes down

to the people who implement it, in managing complex demands, such as the need to negotiate targets and build relationships with a variety of 'clients', and pressures, such as working within limited resources. In terms of the SENCo role it is clear to see how such pressures, set within an environment allowing scope for the individual interpretation of policy, can produce an instrumental approach predicated on one, or more, policy initiatives. In the past, research on the role of the SENCo (Layton, 2005), mirrors Lipsky, describing practice in terms of powerlessness and a need to develop practice from conflicting, or unclear, policy guidance.

Kearns (op cit) reported three further roles identified by the SENCos. The 'arbiter' SENCO prioritises 'negotiating, rationalising and monitoring the use of SEN resources in their schools', with a particular focus on the 'effective use and development of human resources'. This can certainly be configured as a management role, although the degree to which this incorporates the wider accountability and responsibility that stems from full knowledge of resources available within delegated budgets is debatable. At the same time, the configuration described seems to be limited; there seems to be little focus on extending the expertise of classroom practitioners to meet identified needs, as mention is made of using external expertise for this purpose, and this suggests a process conceptualisation of the role rather than a strategic one.

The 'collaborator' SENCo is perhaps the most readily identifiable metaphor, if not the most commonly found in respondents to Kearns' research. This approach involved groups of teachers engaging in collaborative processes to 'review, plan and evaluate activities' to meet the learning needs of identified pupils. This is seen as 'more

democratic' than other metaphors and, interestingly, encompasses 'staff and curriculum development for diverse pupils in mainstream classes'. The 'expert' SENCo was the least identified metaphor; the main focus of work was with individual pupils where personal expertise, gained through both experience and further study, was seen to be of use in meeting the very specific or specialised requirements of 'high-need' pupils. This 'expert' role, which might be seen as consultative, suggests an externalisation of the role of the SENCo, rather than one that sits at the centre of school processes connected to meeting special needs.

In retrospect, and perhaps because of gathering data through reflection on critical incidents, the impression is given that these roles are largely separate and distinct, even though co-existence is mentioned. This is understandable; even in our recent conversations (see Chapters 4, 5 and 6) it was possible to identify respondents who closely fitted one of the metaphors. This was particularly the case with the arbiter and auditor roles, although there were also a number of occasions when a desire to 'rescue' was implicit in a desired response to the needs of an individual student.

It is undoubtedly the case that this demarcation of roles was more evident during the early development of the role of the SENCo, often as a response to role descriptions implemented within management structures offering centralised control; that is, where there was a reluctance to accord status to the role of the SENCo in a landscape that rarely placed marginalised children at the forefront of school development. It would seem that, in order to avoid SENCos identifying solely, or predominantly, with only one of these roles, there must be a recognition and development of an alternative view of teaching, learning and assessment that

extends what is available for all learners, including those with special educational needs.

As argued earlier, the policy agenda has now shifted much more explicitly towards an expectation of the SENCo to 'lead, develop, and, where necessary, challenge' <mark>(NCTL, 2014)</mark> progress towards meeting the learning needs of pupils within their setting, and there is evidence to suggest that this agenda is being embraced by practitioners in the development of best practice. A number of examples from our conversations support this assessment. It could be that this is being shaped by the National Award for SEN Coordination, based on the most recent learning outcomes; it could also be that the principles contained within the most recent Code of Practice are having an effect.

This leads to the suggestion that the model suggested by Kearns can be extended. In a situation where whole school developments are being designed to benefit the whole community of learners, and where the central vison that underpins these developments is shared by key staff, it can be argued that the role of the SENCo encompasses all of these metaphors. In this sense, it can be argued that the metaphors can be characterised as a nested hierarchy, rather than as a series of positions. The implementation of this hierarchy, and the positions occupied by an individual SENCo, would be determined by the permitting circumstances that obtain in the setting. These circumstances are likely to derive from the educational stance adopted within the setting, rather than through any particular skills or interests of the post-holder.

The early development of the role for many was focussed on the desire to improve teaching and learning for pupils who stood on the outside of prevailing practice; the 'rescue' role would seem to fit this desire clearly. It seems very unlikely that there are any SENCos who now discharge their role wholly within this role type, if only because of the growth in number of support staff more likely to work directly with pupils. This does not mean that 'rescue' is no longer important; our conversations revealed SENCos who still wished that they could be more directly involved in everyday work with children and young people.

The increased adoption of the complex assessment, monitoring and reassessment bureaucratic procedures set out in the first and second Codes of Practice would seem to have shifted the focus of many SENCos away from the 'rescue' role to one more focussed on that of 'auditor'. This change seems to be in part predicated on an assumption in schools that work related to pupils who are special or different, rather than being something that was a necessary part of the work of all teachers, fell firmly within the remit of the SENCo; again, this view does not seem to have entirely disappeared, with termly reviews of pupils with EHCPs being seen, in one of our conversations, as the responsibility of the SENCo rather than a class teacher. It also seems to be the case that, where internal changes allowed, an increased focus on the management of resources for special educational needs further diversified the role. Here, the actions of the post-holder might combine the obvious elements of auditor and arbiter without becoming overwhelmed by either. The discharge of the rescue role also sits comfortably within this model, if at second hand.

The next stage in this hierarchical argument would seem to be dependent on two particular permitting circumstances. The first is the degree to which key staff in a school or setting view special educational needs as additional to that which is normally available or as integral to all teaching and learning that occurs in the setting. The second follows from this; where there is alignment with the first position, it would seem likely that the role will be discharged in the style of 'arbiter' or 'auditor' or a combination of these. Where the alignment is with the second position, the possibility opens up that the SENCo as 'collaborator' can move forward in a much more collegiate and distributive way, with a focus on leadership for learning, embracing all pupils. Of course, in the absence of alignment, it is likely that role dissonance will occur, with either the SENCo, or the setting, becoming frustrated with progress.

Arguably, the systemic changes contained within the SEND Code of Practice (DfE/DoH, 2015), have served to reduce the bureaucracy involved in processes connected to special educational needs, and where collaborative working is possible, it seems quite possible for a 'collaborator' SENCo to be able to subsume the roles of rescue, auditor and arbiter within a key developmental role in the school or setting.

Given the requirement for a SENCo to attain a Post Graduate Certificate (PGC), equivalent to 60 level 7 (Masters level) credits, it is also likely that many SENCos will be increasingly seen as expert, particularly where this equates to a knowledge of the full field of SEND, without necessarily being expert in any one specific condition or special educational need; or at least, being able to use this knowledge to identify specific expertise in others, where needed. If the possession of a PGC leads an

increasing number of SENCos to go on and complete a Masters Degree, within the field, this expertise is likely to be further enhanced.

There is nothing in this configuration of the role that requires the SENCo to be a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) within a school or setting. However, this has been one of the long term presumptions of the documentation that surrounds the role of the SENCo, including all of the Codes of Practice. Whilst we recognise the value of this as a potential 'stepping stone' that could move practice forward, it could also result in surface level change where 'what is being proposed sounds good and contains all the right concepts, where leaders can talk a good game and even mean it, but where…ideas never get implemented with consistency or integrity' Fullan (2003: 31). However, it is possible to argue for an alternative model, which we have termed a 'distributive model for SEN coordination'. This nomenclature reflects a redrawing of the role of SEN coordination as one that harnesses the moral imperative of leadership for learning as a way of mobilising the knowledge, skills and commitment of all staff, in pursuit of the goal of transforming the learning experience of all students, to close the achievement gap that too frequently occurs for pupils at the margins.

The SENCo as a member of the Senior Leadership Team: A flawed model?
By describing the SENCo being a member of the Senior Leadership Team as a flawed model, we are aware that this runs contrary to the policy direction found in recent documentation. We argue this, despite the potential that might offered for widening the narrow focus on resource limitation and targets described in the arbiter role above or to reduce the temptation to micro-manage the administration of SEN

coordination as a rescuer, to a much more expansive view of teaching and learning across a setting. This stems from a need for caution; if schools are to avoid the limited role constructs highlighted in the first section of this chapter, it is argued that the purpose of the SENCo role, whether central to the SLT or not, requires thought.

Firstly, as Gunter (2007), Stevenson (2007) and MacBeath (2010) have argued, new divisions of labour have served to create a divorce between those who plan and those who execute; for example, between teaching and pastoral care. Some consideration of why the SENCo should be a member of the Senior Leadership Team is necessary if we are to address this concern. If the purpose of SLT membership for the SENCo is merely to plan necessary responses to policy initiatives and legislation, without also promoting a cohesive and collaborative acceptance of these changes, it would seem probable that teachers and support staff will adopt, at a class or individual level, the sort of street-level bureaucracy described above, as they attempt to navigate targets, negotiate the demands of 'clients' and compete for funding. Without considering how the interplay between leadership and learning can be examined and explored, increasing the likelihood of 'leadership for learning' (MacBeath, 2006, 2009), simply promoting the SENCo to the leadership team might do little to address the concern that 'most systems have enacted accountability policies in the absence of conceptualising and investing in policies that will increase the capacity of educators to perform in new ways' (Fullan, 2003: 25).

Alternatively, if the SENCo is appointed to the Senior Leadership Team in order to influence teaching and learning across a school the role of the Deputy Head-teacher

in many primary schools, or Curriculum Leaders in Secondary Schools, may need to be reviewed. This raises fundamental questions about responsibility for the planning and execution of strategies to meet the needs of all learners, including those with SEN and/or disabilities. If the SENCo, as a senior leader, moves away from a circumscribed role planning interventions and executing individualised learning programmes for learners with Special Educational Needs and moves towards a wider brief charged with planning and executing strategies that enable class communities to assume ownership of teaching and learning, it could be argued that the conflation of responsibilities shared with other senior leaders renders the need for a SENCo debateable.

Each of these alternatives highlights the importance, and potential impact, of role definition upon 'social capital' (the connections within and between social networks). Putnam (1999), Szreter (2000) and MacBeath (2009) discuss the difference between three forms of social capital: bonding social capital, bridging social capital and linking social capital. 'Bonding' social capital relates to relatively few strong connections between people creating a small number of strong groupings which can lead to insularity. In terms of educational settings, these groups might be the SLT, teaching staff or support staff. Bonding social capital of this nature would be evident in schools adopting hierarchical approaches to leadership where, for example, the SLT meet to decide policy, the teachers meet to discuss the curriculum and the support staff meet to discuss individual learners. If bonding social capital dominates an educational setting, simply relocating the SENCo to the Senior Leadership team may do nothing to break down existing structures or increase opportunities for the implementation of leadership for learning.

The example of provision mapping could illustrate this difficulty; a SENCo, appointed to the SLT could retain ownership of provision mapping across the setting in order to lead the creation of something akin to Group Education Plans (Frankl, 2005) for an identified body of learners. Whilst this might have the potential to reduce the bureaucratic workload of the SENCo and increase the likelihood of the devolution of planning responsibility to class teams, this is, once again, little more than a much needed response to a flawed system, where the danger is that such systems can often become a new form of bureaucracy in a situation with little bonding social capital. It is certainly the case that such initiatives are unlikely to be a driver for collaboration unless they can be embedded in a culture that embodies collective responsibility. As such, the narrowed SENCo role discussed both in our conversations and by those not appointed to senior leadership teams (Layton, 2005) could simply be reproduced within the leadership team, rather than outside of it. That this is likely to strengthen 'bonding' social capital rather than enabling a loosening to structures encouraging more collegial forms of leadership for learning to develop has to be acknowledged.

In contrast to 'bonding' social capital, 'linking' social capital operates vertically, making connections between people with differing degrees of power and authority. Such social links are evident in educational settings that seek to create connections between groups that possess bonding social capital, for example between teachers and the Senior Leadership Team or between subject coordinators and support staff, rather than to redistribute autonomy across a setting. Whilst membership of the SLT might enable a SENCo to enact a deeply held desire to promote the extension of

'linking' social capital in a setting, it might be useful to question the moral purpose of such a move.

In this context, it is of interest that Layton (2005: 59) reported that 'the greatest barrier to achieving their moral purpose as SENCos was identified as not being a member of the senior leadership team'. Whilst it is clear, from Layton's study, that SENCos believe membership of the Senior Leadership Team to be an essential precursor to the discharge of a morally focussed role, we would caution against viewing such membership as a panacea. In fact, we would question any differentiation between the moral purpose of SENCos, articulated as a 'deeply held commitment to serve the best interests of all their pupils' (Layton, 2005: 58), and that of any member of the teaching profession. Indeed, we would argue that moral purpose can, and should, reside in the actions of all those involved in the education of children and young people; on the contrary, any assertion or feeling that is present only in those who have a declared affinity with pupils with special educational needs seems to be an example of an undesirable moral relativism that needs to be challenged.

Five major virtues central to the moral character of teaching professionalism were defined by Sockett (1993, 2006) as: honesty, courage, care, fairness, and practical wisdom. As these virtues are arguably no more, or less, central to the role of the SENCo than to any other teacher, to argue for membership of the Senior Leadership team for one member of staff on the basis of enabling them to achieve their moral purpose would seem to ignore both the collective moral purpose of the school and the moral responsibility of all staff for all learners.

Indeed, simply promoting the SENCo to the Senior Leadership Team may do little more than redistribute accountability without embedding a philosophy that encourages what Eisner (1991) termed 'connoisseurship' which MacBeath (2009: 74) describes as knowing 'how to suspend preconception and judgement; to know what they see rather than seeing what they already know'. Whilst connoisseurship may lend itself to the development of a collective moral purpose, the ability to suspend preconception requires a culture that moves beyond performativity in order to develop genuine dialogue around the intention, purpose and impact of education for all of our learners; in essence a culture that embraces distributive and reciprocal practices that are driven by a core moral purpose.

A distributive model of SEN Coordination: leadership for learning?

The third type of social capital cited by Putnam (1999), Szreter (2000) and MacBeath (2009) is described as 'bridging' social capital which occurs when social links are relatively weak but more numerous and are 'outward looking connecting people with others beyond their immediate reference group, opening up new ways of seeing, relating and learning' (Swaffield & MacBeath, 2009: 45).

Crucially, settings in which 'bridging' social capital is enabled move the conceptualisation of leadership away from process led accountability towards 'leadership for learning'. This is concerned, above all, with keeping alive bridging social capital in the belief that 'it is the many and weak links that provide the scope and space for the exercise of agency in respect of both leadership and learning' (Swaffield & MacBeath, 2009: 46). The notion of agency (people being able to make

choices and make a difference) is central to this approach. The degree to which learners, parents and educators can each express their agency will clearly inform the moral purpose of the school and the extent to which accountability for learning is shared and valued. That a collaborative approach such as this was included in the first and second SEN Code of Practice is unquestionable; it is also the case that the demonstration of agency features much more strongly in the SEND Code of Practice that frames current practice (DfE/DoH, 2015). It is a source of some disquiet, therefore, that the conversations with stakeholders already mentioned in this book do not always evidence any significant increase in the sort of collaborative activities that might mark a shared moral purpose, or that demonstrate the sort of bridging social capital suggested here.

By advocating a distributive model of SEN coordination we are arguing that we should view an educational setting as 'community of practice' (Lave & Wenger, 1991) focussing on the processes and activities of learning, rather than places containing hierarchical structures focussed on the products of learning and on the attendant but separate processes of SEN coordination. Central to the 'communities of practice' approach is an acceptance of what has been termed 'legitimate peripheral participation', where novices become experienced members of a community of practice or collaborative project (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). In this way, novices are valued for their contribution, rather than viewed as individuals whose practice requires correction, recognising that participation is an 'encompassing process of being active participants in the *practices* of social communities and constructing *identities* in relation to these communities' (Wenger, 1999:04). This notion operates on two

levels. Firstly, in terms of staff participation, the approach does not validate harmful or neglectful practice; rather, the need to embrace legitimate peripheral participation recognises that practice varies in levels of expertise, and that expertise is not the only measure of value. In particular, this philosophy recognises the moral imperative of all practitioners above the particular expertise of some.

Secondly, this perspective persuades us to view learning as participation, enabling us to move beyond the 'competency traps' (Cousins, 1996: 79) of a standards driven curriculum that necessarily marginalises and labels those deemed to be failing. By reconceptualising learning in terms of participation, rather than in attainment within a narrow curricular specification, the ethos shifts to one which encompasses a belief that "teaching a child to read is an important contribution, but inspiring him or her to be an enthusiastic, life-long reader is another matter" (Fullan, 2003: 29). This encourages learning communities to unleash the potential contained within a moral imperative, and increase autonomy and agency in order to enable 'double loop learning' (Argyris & Schon, 1978). In contrast to 'single-loop learning', which adopts an approach where plans are created in response to targets that are rarely questioned, 'double-loop learning' requires a much deeper critique of the purpose of targets and the underlying assumptions of action. 'Double-loop learning' is intolerant of routine and simplistic answers to complex issues in the belief that 'the valuing of consistency leads to competency; the valuing of inconsistency leads to learning' (Argyris & Schon, 1996).

It is here that the National Award for SEN Coordination is seen to be influential. The way that the Award is structured requires participants to prepare a portfolio of

evidence supportive of the learning outcomes, and this is generally seen to be reflective. Although reflection is not as clearly foregrounded in Initial Teacher Education as it used to be, it is clear that teaching is a reflective profession, one that should encourage practitioners to consider, in depth, how teaching and learning can be. It is therefore not surprising that some SENCos, having gained the National Award, are now seeking to position themselves at the centre of school developments promoting equity and equality.

We recognise that for many SENCos this will be a challenging approach to take. Nevertheless, until we recognise, and give permission for, legitimate peripheral participation, it is unlikely that the role of all SENCos will move beyond the seemingly limited, and limiting, metaphors of rescue, auditor or arbiter.

This recognition can move schools away from process management aimed at certain groups of learners towards leadership for leaning and learning for leadership where any member of a school society can learn to effect change and the 'head teacher becomes the head learner' (MacGilchrist, Myers & Reed, 1997). Aside from the fact that the National College for School Leadership recognises that the potential "influence from distributive leadership is up to three times higher than that reported for an individual leader" (NCSL, 2006: 12) this change in focus enables anyone to 'take on leadership as a right and responsibility rather than it being bestowed as a gift or burden' (Swaffield & MacBeath, 2009: 44). In this way learning becomes conceptualised as 'participation in social practice', something that can serve to challenge the prevailing staff and learner hierarchies, and encourage all members of

a school community to explore the relationship between learning and the social situations in which it occurs (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

This ideal has real implications for transforming the role of the SENCo beyond that of a powerless negotiator of policy and practice; the street-level bureaucrat (Lipsky, 1980). It also demands some recognition of the fact that membership of the Senior Leadership Team, in itself, might do little to empower all staff to take responsibility for diverse groups of learners. A distributive model of SEN coordination requires a radical re-think of practice.

Fullan (2003) discusses 'complexity theory' in this regard arguing that transformation cannot be effected in a top-down or linear fashion. In developing this argument he makes reference to the many disruptions that can occur within the most meticulously planned strategies when individuals within the system choose to exert their autonomy. This raises a crucial point; in a hierarchical system, individual autonomy or agency, whether in the form of street-level bureaucracy or in the individual expression of one's moral purpose, can be viewed as dissent or unprofessional practice. This can even be the case when the expression of individual autonomy, when viewed beyond the hierarchical system, exhibits those dispositions described by Sockett (2006), earlier in this chapter, as representative of teacher professionalism.

In essence, a distributive model of SEN coordination requires three conditions. Firstly, it requires a commitment to ensure that every member of the educational community is given the space to learn to lead and to lead to learn. This is not to

argue that a school does not need a head teacher but it does require some consideration of additional roles in schools such as a Deputy Head-teacher, SENCo and the myriad leadership roles that exist in many settings. Indeed, the desire to become an 'intelligent school' where 'change comes from within, from the staff and pupils, rather than imposed from above' (MacGilchrist, Myers & Reed, 1997: 108) requires school leaders to consider whether the ever increasing hierarchical layers of executive head teachers, CEOs, Multi Academy Trust chief executives serve any legitimate educational purpose or created to merely sustain bureaucracy.

The second condition for a distributive model of SEN coordination relates to the balance between internal and external accountability (MacBeath, 2010), a review of which is necessary before an educational environment can begin to develop communities of mutually accountable practitioners. This is not to profess a naive ignorance of external accountability; rather, we would suggest that a much needed reconsideration of the forms of accountability that drive practice is called for, recognising that 'what is worth fighting for is more of an internal battle than an external one' (Fullan, 2003: 19) and that moral accountability to all members of the school community may serve a higher purpose than presumed bureaucratic accountability to national directives.

The final condition that we feel to be central to a distributive model of SEN coordination is some recognition of the de-professionalisation that occurs, as evidenced in Kearns' (2005) study, when we create structures that serve to atomise the SENCo role. These structures can occur whether or not the SENCo is appointed to the Senior Leadership Team. In fact, if we return to the dispositions that Sockett

(2006) describes as the moral purpose of teaching, a distributive model of SEN coordination is likely to emerge from the sort of negotiation, collaboration and commitment to shared accountability that the continued development of these dispositions is likely to bring.

The demands and implications of the three conditions described here are considerable. However, for those settings with the drive and vision to review leadership structures, the role of the SENCo could be situated within an ethos where 'learning and leadership are conceived of 'activities' linked by the centrality of human agency within a framework of moral purpose' (Swaffield & MacBeath, 2009: 42). The National Award for SEN Coordination has the power to support visionary SENCos to increasingly become the catalyst for a reinvigoration of the moral purpose of education and to review potential for leadership for learning across settings. The resulting climate could be one which extols 'deliberately shared leadership of vision building, people development, organisational structuring and teaching and learning management' (Dempster, 2009: 29). The continued development of the SENCo role, supported by National Award for SEN Coordination, is seen increasingly as a vehicle for change, in those schools and for those SENCos with the imagination and foresight to maximise this unique opportunity.

References

Argyris, C., & Schön, D. (1978) *Organizational learning: A Theory of Action Perspective.* Reading, Mass: Addison Wesley.

Argyris, C. and Schön, D. (1996) *Organizational learning II: Theory, Method and Practice.* Reading, Mass: Addison Wesley

Cousins, B. (1996) 'Understanding organised learning for leadership and school improvement' in K. Leithwood, J. Chapman, D Corson, P. Hallinger & A. Hart (eds)

International Handbook of Educational Leadership and Administration. Dordrecht: Methuen.

Dempster, N. (2009) 'What do we know about Leadership?' in J MacBeath & N. Dempster (eds) *Connecting Leadership and Learning: Principles for Practice.* London: Routledge.

DfE (1994) *Code of Practice on the identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs.* London: DfE.

DfE (2011) *Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability - a consultation.* London: TSO

DfE (2014) *Children and Families Act 2014.* London: TSO

DfE/DoH (2015) *Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 – 25 years.* London: TSO

DfES (2001) *SEN Code of Practice.* Nottingham: DfES.

Eisner, E. (1991) *The Enlightened Eye.* New York: Macmillan

Fisher, H. (2012) Progressing towards a model of intrinsic inclusion in a mainstream primary school: a SENCo's experience, *International Journal of Inclusive Education,* 16(2), 1273-1293

Frankl, C. (2005) Managing individual educational plans: reducing the workload of the SEN coordinator. *Support for learning*, 20(2), 77-82

Fullan, M. (2003) *The Moral Imperative of School Leadership.* London: Sage

Griffiths, D. & Dubsky, R. (2012) Evaluating the impact of the new National Award for SENCos: transforming landscapes of gardening in a gale? *British Journal of Special Education*, 39, 4, 164-172

Gunter, H. (2007) 'Remodelling the School Workforce in England: A Study in Tyranny', *Journal for Critical Education Policy Studies* 5(1), 1–11

Hargreaves, A. (1994) *Changing Teachers, Changing Times: Teachers' Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age.* London: Continuum.

HMSO (2006) *House of Commons Education and Skills Select Committee Report on Special Educational Needs.* London: TSO

Kearns, H. (2005) Exploring the experiential learning of special educational needs coordinators, *Journal of In-Service Education*, 31(1), 131-150.

Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991) *Situated Learning: Legitimate Peripheral Participation.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Layton,L (2005) Special educational needs coordinators and leadership: a role too far? *Support for Learning* 20(2), 53-60.

Lipsky, M. (1980) *Street-level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services.* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

MacBeath, J. (2006) *Leadership as a Subversive Activity.* Monograph, University of Melbourne: ACEL/ASPA

MacBeath, J. (2009) A focus on learning, in J MacBeath & N. Dempster (eds) *Connecting Leadership and Learning*: *Principles for Practice*. London: Routledge

MacBeath. J. (2010) Stories of compliance and subversion in a prescriptive policy environment. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership,* 36(1), 123–148

MacGilchrist, B., Myers, K. & Reed, J. (1997) *The Intelligent School.* London: Paul Chapman

McKenzie, S. (2007) A review of recent developments in the role of the SENCo in the UK, *Support for Learning*, 34(4), 212-218

National College for School Leadership [NCSL] (2006) *Impact and Evaluation Report 2004/05*. NCSL: Nottingham

National College for Teaching and Leadership [NCTL] (2014) *National Award for SEN Co-ordination: Learning Outcomes.* London: DfE

Pearson, S., Mitchell, R. & Rapti, M. (2015) 'I will be 'fighting' even more for pupils with SEN': SENCOs' role predictions in the changing English policy context *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs,* 15, 1, 48 - 56

Perkins, D. (2003) *King Arthur's Round Table: How Collaboration Creates Smart Organisations.* Hoboken, N.J: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd.

Putnam, R. (1999) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* New York: Touchstone

Robertson, C. (2012) Special educational needs and disability coordination in a changing policy landscape: making sense of policy from a SENCO's perspective. *Support for Learning*, 27, 2, 77-83

Sockett, H. (1993) *The Moral Base for Teacher Professionalism.* NY: Teachers College Press.

Sockett, H. (Ed.). (2006). *Teacher Dispositions: Building a Teacher Education Framework of Moral Standards.* Washington, DC: American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education

Stevenson, H. (2007) 'Restructuring teachers; work and trades union responses in England: Bargaining for Change?' *American Educational Research Journal,* 44(2), 224–51.

Swaffield,S & MacBeath, J. (2009) Leadership for learning, in J MacBeath & N. Dempster (eds) *Connecting Leadership and Learning*: *Principles for Practice*. London: Routledge.

Szreter, S. (2000) Social capital, the economy and education in historical perspective, in S. Baron, J. Field, &T. Schuller (eds) *Social Capital: Critical perspectives*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

TDA (2009) *Standards for National Award for SEN Coordination*. London: TDA.

Wenger, E. (1999) *Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning and Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University

Wenger, E., McDermott, R. & Snyder, W. (2002) C*ultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press