An investigation into Special Educational Needs training and the SENCO's role in practice change

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Master of Philosophy in the Faculty of Humanities

October 2017

Catherine Elizabeth Sarginson

School of Education
Abstract

This thesis submission consists of three research papers completed as part of the Doctorate of Education programme at the University of Manchester, focussing on my research interest of Special Educational Needs training. I sought to gain a greater understanding of new qualified teacher’s views of the quality and usefulness of the SEN element of their initial training, and that of experienced teachers. One of the tasks that Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) are charged with is influencing the practice of their colleagues; yet many barriers exist. I sought to assimilate my understandings of SEN input during ITT with the expectation of the training role that SENCOs have to devise a programme that addresses attitudinal issues, knowledge and pedagogical skills.

For research paper one I completed a literature review on Special Educational Needs input during Initial Teacher Training (ITT) which identified that newly qualified teachers (NQTs) lacked knowledge and skills with regards to SEN. The literatures supported the view that SEN was not adequately covered during training, leaving teachers entering the profession lacking confidence to respond to the challenges of today’s inclusive classrooms. This had implications primarily for the children and young people who have SEN, and for those in the role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). Part of the SENCO’s wide remit is to ensure teachers know their pupils, understand the strengths and needs they have, and possess the knowledge to respond positively to the learning difficulties presented. There remains a question of whose responsibility SEN is, that could originate from insufficient coverage during the training stage as the first introduction to the profession giving a confusing message about the importance and value of SEN in education. In research paper two I conducted a small scale research project which explored three teacher’s perspectives as they reflected back on the SEN element of their initial training and/or their continual professional development (CPD), and enquired into how useful and relevant this had been to their current practice, and identify where gaps in knowledge remained.

My study was conducted in an independent school, where, although many teachers do, there is no requirement to hold a formal teaching qualification. The project reinforced concerns about the quality of teacher’s SEN knowledge in the absence of teacher training and the content during training, and highlighted the importance of the SENCO regularly delivering advice, support and guidance as part of ongoing input. Paper three was a research proposal that was the foundation of a doctoral thesis. It consisted of a pilot study trialling the use of pupil voice in generating discussion amongst four teachers about responses to SEN and exploring the use of empathy as a tool for practice change. The proposal also outlined a piece of action research, delivering a training programme that aimed to address the shortfalls highlighted in the previous two papers – lack of understanding, relationships, knowledge and skills in teachers, those new to the profession, and more experienced practitioners. It aimed to move the focus away from the SENCO and onto teachers by providing opportunities to develop relationships with students and partner with them in planning, delivering and evaluating practice change.
COPYRIGHT STATEMENT

The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the “Copyright”) and s/he has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.

ii. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made only in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.

iii. The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trade marks and other intellectual property (the “Intellectual Property”) and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables (“Reproductions”), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.

iv. Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property University IP Policy.

(See http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=24420), in any relevant Thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, the University Library’s regulations (see http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/about/regulations/) and in The University’s policy on Presentation of Theses.

Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.
Contents

1. Introduction, context and rationale

2. A review of the literature regarding the format, content and relevance of Special Educational Needs input during Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and the confidence of Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs).

3. A case study of staff perceptions of the usefulness of SEN input during training and the role of the SENCO in ongoing continual professional development to influence classroom practice.

4. A thesis proposal with pilot study work on the use of pupil voice as a tool SENCOs can use to influence practice change, as part of a year-long training programme.

5. Conclusion

Appendix: Supervisor feedback

Word count: 42,936
Chapter 1: Introduction, context and rationale

Introduction

This thesis contains three research papers completed as part of the EdD Education programme in the School of Education at the University of Manchester. The papers passed the criteria and have been verified by the External Examiner and the School of Education Professional Doctorates Examinations Boards. I intended to make a contribution to knowledge in the field of Special Educational Needs training, the role of the SENCO as a trainer and advisor, and the use of pupil voice to develop empathy and action practice change. The feedback on the three papers is located in the appendix, and I have aimed to apply the advice I received to present an overview of the body of work, and suggest how my research findings may be further developed.

It is important to acknowledge that this thesis was written over a period of 6 years and a number of policy changes have occurred, some the literature reviewed and referred to is now dated. As such, this deems some of the conclusions drawn as obsolete in light of current literature, however, at the time of the original submissions, it was appropriate. From September 2014, the revised Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Code of Practice took effect (DfE and DoH, 2014) where the focus was narrowed on what was considered to be a pupil with a special educational need through the removal of categories of ‘School Action’ and ‘School Action Plus’, and the responsibility of the class teacher being reemphasised. Alongside the Teachers’ Standards and OFSTED, the requirement remains for teachers to take responsibility for understanding the needs of the pupils they teach and providing for them. Lawson (2015) considered how teacher training could be impacted by this changing policy landscape by highlighting the possibility of either dilution or concentration of SEN focus and the existence of ‘general-specialist’ teaching positions, as shown in figure 1, which has implications for Initial Teacher Training and the SENCO.

![Diagram](image)

Figure 1 - Influences of aspects of education policy landscape on general-specialist positions
Research paper one is a literature review exploring the variety of approaches taken to cover SEN during Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and established how confident Newly Qualified Teachers felt in their ability to understand and support students with special educational needs on completion of their training. In paper two I developed my ideas further by completing a case study interviewing three teachers of varying years of experience in an independent school, as they reflected on their current competencies with regards to SEN and charted their understandings back to ITT and/or ongoing CPD. Research paper three proposes a training programme aimed at addressing the shortfalls and building on the strengths identified in the preceding two papers, and also explores the possibility of using pupil voice as a tool for practice change.
Rationale

Although each of the three research papers had their own individual rationale, they all had the consistent aim of identifying, understanding and structuring a response to the challenges SENCOs face in influencing the practice of teachers with regards to students with special educational needs.

I wanted to explore and understand the potential origins of these challenges by tracing the training process back and identifying the factors that contribute to teachers viewing themselves as unconfident and being uncertain of their responsibility when it came to the SEN element of their teaching role. The overarching rationale was to use these understandings to devise a creative training programme that intentionally partnered students with SEN with their teachers, to investigate whether this relationship might instigate more sustained and meaningful practice change, which was increasingly independent from the SENCO. This was intended to orchestrate a situation where teachers were required to take responsibility as ‘All teachers are teachers of Special Educational Needs.’

In paper one I sought to gain an understanding of the quality of SEN input during initial teacher training since it became a requirement in 1992 to provide beginning teachers with basic introduction to SEN knowledge and skills (OFSTED, 2009; Winter, 2006). Input varies widely between Higher Education Institutions as no specific guidance is in place which stipulates the content, amount of coverage and nature of delivery (Winter, 2006). Research literatures focussing on trainee and newly qualified teacher’s perspectives by Brownlee and Carrington (2000), Lawson and Nash (2008), Dew-Hughes and Brayton (1997) and Winter (2006) found that teachers identified shortfalls regarding SEN and welcomed improved input. A variety of stakeholders identified problems with SEN input during ITT; Mittler (1992), Garner (1996; 2001) Hodkinson (2009), school inspectorate report findings and recommendations by OFSTED (2006; 2009) and parliament (House of Commons, 2010) all acknowledged fundamental flaws in the teacher training system regarding SEN, and repeatedly called for improvements. I concluded from the literature review that SEN input during initial teacher training was widely understood to be inadequate, but bizarrely that no alternative strategy was in place to specifically address this, other than the expectation that the SENCO could, and should, advise and train their colleagues.
The concerns about the quality of initial teacher training could be seen to fuel further explanations as to why SENCOs might encounter barriers to practice change – attitudes to inclusion and teachers simply not recognising that they have a responsibility for students with SEN can be sourced back to having a poor introduction to this aspect of teaching during the initial training phase. Lack of opportunity to discuss the theoretical underpinnings of inclusive education either in training or when in post could lead onto the development of negative or uninformed attitudes towards inclusion. Newly qualified teachers appear to enter the profession with only a scant knowledge of SEN is immediately problematic for the most vulnerable students and the SENCO.

In research paper two I used the understandings gained from the literature review to conduct a case study in an Independent School in the North West where I interviewed three teachers (one trainee teacher, one with over 9 years’ teaching experience but untrained, and one with over 30 years’ experience, trained) to understand their perspectives on their SEN knowledge and skills, where those competencies had come from and identify both positives and shortfalls in their practice. As ITT was already viewed as being insufficient in preparing teachers for the challenges of inclusive classrooms, I was interested in establishing whether the teachers in the case study felt differently on account of having had formal teacher training or not, and whether any consensus could be reached about the role the SENCO has in leading continual professional development in school. I devised a set of interview questions which required the participants to site the sources of their SEN knowledge. The data provided identified four sources in addition to ITT; INSET, specialist courses, input from the SENCO and learning from pupils. The participants provided examples of what they considered to be good and poor practice from their own professional experiences which highlighted a range of difficulties including Dyslexia, Visual Impairment, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Asperger’s Syndrome.

Research paper two concluded that in the case of the three participants, they showed self-awareness in their need for further training, and valued and desired ongoing input from the SENCO, but also found it beneficial to learn directly from working with the students with SEN. This final finding helped to shape my thesis proposal to devise SEN training that included the perspectives of students and not solely lead by the SENCO.

Research paper three was a plan for a doctoral thesis which proposed a year-long SEN training programme which incorporated ideas trialled in a pilot study about the use of pupil voice to motivate and trigger practice change, through development of empathy and consequent relationship building. Using extracts from the work of Riddick (2010) the four participants in the pilot study discussed the views expressed by students with Dyslexia about their classroom experiences, and were asked to consider whether they could identify with the kinds of difficulties described, and how they could/ have addressed the matter at hand. The pilot work found the focus group responded positively to hearing the voice of pupils, and reinforced the importance of including this approach in future training.
The paper also outlines in detail the obligations of the SENCO role to influence the practice of their colleagues and the inherit challenges, and raises concerns about matters of accountability and obligation having an SEN ‘expert’ on hand to unintentionally negate mainstream classroom teacher’s responsibility. In addition to the pilot work, the programme that is being proposed is designed to create opportunities for a closer working relationship between student and teacher, as teachers enquire and devise their own strategies to improve the experiences of students with Dyslexia. The SENCO is intentionally a secondary source of information and influence.

Setting up a programme in this was would allow the SENCO to achieve more than advocating on behalf of the pupil or passing on technical knowledge as an interaction of expertise and relationship is facilitated that is independent.
Due to the inclusive notion of the mainstream classroom, teachers will increasingly encounter children categorised as having special educational needs and disabilities. This changing classroom composition has been acknowledged in the competencies that are demonstrated by those who work towards qualified teacher status (QTS). All newly qualified teachers are supposed to understand their responsibilities under the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice. At the time of writing, of the 33 Qualified Teacher standards, 3 relate specifically to Special Educational Needs (Q18, Q19 and Q20). Each of these elements does not have a prescriptive format, but it is expected to take place. Entry routes into teaching have increasingly relaxed through the creation of Free Schools and Academies, who join Independent schools in having the freedom to employ people to teaching roles without them possessing QTS.

The increase in numbers has also been mirrored in the substantial increase in the responsibilities that SENCOs have (Mackenzie, 2007). With such a low starting point, working with teaching staff to raise awareness of pupil’s strengths and needs and impacting practice is a constant challenge for those in this role. This view has been underpinned by my reflections on my professional experiences in the role as a SENCO for over a decade. Since the introduction of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice in 1994, the SENCO has had a training element specified as part of their role in whole-school strategy development and management (TTA, 1998; Layton, 2005, p54; Rosen-Webb, 2011, p160) which can be summarised as shown;

The SENCO should:

- work with senior colleagues and governors to advise on and influence the strategic development of an inclusive ethos, policies, priorities and practices … [and] take a leadership role in promoting a whole school culture of best practice in teaching and learning in relation to pupils with SEN and/or disabilities

(TDA, 2009, p. 2–4).

The Code of practice has been revised and updated throughout the years but has always continued to refer specifically to their ‘pivotal’ role in training, advising and leading colleagues to improve the quality of teaching for children and young people with SEN(DfES, 2001, section 4:15; DfES, 2004, p58; DoE, 2013, p75; DoE, 2013, p79; DoE, 2013, p80).

However, similarly to ITT, policy makers did not specify how SENCOs would ensure they had the opportunity, time, resources and support from colleagues and senior management to train their colleagues. It seemed to be implied that there would be no opposition or challenges to overcome.
Summary of contribution and justification of study

The entire study is concerned with the impact on professional practice and how this can be developed with regards to teaching pupils with special educational needs and disabilities. The literatures reviewed presented concerns about the standard of Special Educational Needs input during Initial Teacher Training (ITT) that had been repeatedly raised, by different stakeholders, over a 20 year period. I contributed to the discourse regarding the quality of SEND content during initial teacher training period by completing a literature review in paper one that concluded that such training did not fully prepare NQTs for inclusive classrooms. I began to highlight a number of disparities between policy and practice. Within policy the needs and rights of pupils with SEND were stated and protected in legislation such as the SEND Code of Practice, and the award of qualified teacher status also had Q standards that specifically referred to SEND which trainees had to demonstrate competency in in order to successfully pass the course and qualify as teachers. However, there was considerable variance in practice and in particular the approaches that organisations responsible for delivering training, and individual trainees within organisations, could take such as optional lectures and workshops and type of teaching placement which meant that input was inconsistent. I was unable to locate any findings in the literature that could demonstrate anything more than highlights of good practice resulting in trainees professing confidence. However, I did raise the point that on being newly qualified it would be unlikely for teachers to feel thoroughly prepared for all, or any, of the aspects of their role. Therefore my conclusion that newly qualified teachers did not feel confident about teaching pupils with special educational needs might be viewed in a context of a general lack of confidence in the role in its entirety. Although my conclusions are not unlike those drawn in the literatures I reviewed (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Dew-Hughes and Brayton, 1997; Garner, 1996; Hodkinson, 2009; TDA 2007b; cited in Moran, 2007; Winter; 2006). I assimilated a number of research projects conducted over time, and summarised my findings into what I perceived to be training gaps relating to teacher’s knowledge and skills, and attitudes and confidence, and reflected on the possibly interplay between these areas.

Despite having completed their training, qualified teachers are engaging in daily classroom interactions with children with special educational needs without the knowledge and skills to adopt a confident approach and positive attitude to their learning needs. These are the colleagues that the SENCO is relying on to teach all pupils. They are also the colleagues the SENCO is trying to influence in terms of inclusive practice. They may not be on the same page. The SENCO has to understand the starting point and appreciate the existence of what I have termed ‘barriers to practice change’. Most crucially, there are serious implications for the pupils with special educational needs whose needs were expected to be understood and met by their teachers, in accordance with the Code, when the process for training them was widely and repeatedly acknowledged unfit for this purpose.
In paper one, the literatures reviewed indicated that initial teacher training was inadequate preparation for teaching pupils with special educational needs. I responded to this problem by extending the timeframe from paper one’s focus of newly qualified teachers, reflecting on their very recent experience of training. Research paper two explored practising teacher’s perceptions of their SEN knowledge and skills, by conducting semi-structured interviews. The participants were asked to identify the source of their SEN knowledge and skills in order for them to consider the influence their initial training had had on their practice, in comparison to other sources. The participants had the opportunity to describe an instance of positive and negative actions when teaching pupils with SEN. Those interviewed were required to demonstrate judgement of what they considered to be SEN and good practice in SEN teaching rather than be given scenario type situations to ‘test’ and then judge their responses as correct or incorrect. I specifically selected a small sample of 3 teachers with varying levels of experience; 1 trainee, 1 with 9 years’ experience and unqualified and the final participant with 30 years’ experience, who was qualified. This was a very small study, based in an independent school, which had scope to widen to a whole school project where a range of lengths of time and training backgrounds could be considered and compared to establish whether the respondents saw a correlation between initial training and confidence to teach pupils with special educational needs.

In addition, as QTS is not required to teach in an Independent School there is a question to ask regarding how these teachers understand the range of pupil needs and respond to it inclusively. Although it was small scale, a case study approach enabled me to research three individuals in detail in a complex, real life situation. It was a useful exercise to draw out wider considerations that built on my understandings from paper one and could be developed in the subsequent papers.

The three participants professed an awareness of issues relating to teaching pupils with special educational needs and could give examples from their practice of how they had taken differentiated approaches, as well as occasions when they felt they had not coped well. They could name the sources of influence over their practice that could not be charted back to initial teacher training, identifying 4 – specialist courses, input from the SENCO, INSET and getting to know and working with individual pupils over time. I was unable to establish whether ITT did better prepare teachers to work with pupils with SEND than those who went into classrooms with a teacher’s title but without qualified teacher status, but could highlight a core theme that the 3 participants shared, regardless of their amount of experience; all recognised their shortfalls, wanted to improve in this area of their knowledge and skills, which also implied that their attitude to inclusion was at its heart positive. The findings mirrored those of the newly qualified teachers that I had analysed in paper one, who also expressed a desire to learn more about how to best teach and support pupils with SEND. Given that my sample was only three teachers, a thematic analysis to the data would not be the most powerful or pertinent approach. Instead, a focus on the individual cases might suggest an intersectionality of issues pertaining to their perceptions and practice.
Lloyd (2002) considers this to be crucial in light of the pace and scope of the changes to SEN policy and the resistance it has been met with; “...the need for teachers and educational professionals to feel empowered to change and develop themselves and their daily practice in order for policy to be implemented is clear” (p113).

RP1 highlighted a whole number of challenges and deficiencies in the practice of delivering effective ITT training for mainstream staff to meet the challenges of developing more inclusive practice. RP2 highlighted the lack of skills and knowledge in engaging with SEND in schools and also a lack of belief that it was mainstream teachers core responsibility to develop pedagogies that were more inclusive. However, there was an identified willingness to address this shortfall, and the respondents looked to the SENCO and to the children themselves to develop awareness of need and improve their response to it. In addition, there was evidence from literatures about the SENCO role and from professional practice that suggested the difficulties of conveying the centrality of this role for mainstream teachers and also for sustaining an interest in delivering inclusive practices, despite teachers citing INSET as an effective tool for change. Based on professional reflections with regards to importance of pupil voice in bringing about changed perceptions and practice in teacher’s work, RP3 was about developing a research proposal to explore how pupil voice in mainstream classes might be used as a vehicle for improving teacher’s engagement with inclusive practice.

SENCOs have a training and advisory role stated in their job description (DfES, 2001, section 4:15; DfES, 2004, p58; DoE, 2013, p75; DoE, 2013, p79; DoE, 2013, p80). As someone who has held this position for over a decade, the process of influencing the practice of colleagues to be more inclusive was something of great interest to me as a researcher, and challenge as a practitioner. RP1 highlighted the starting point of people entering the teaching profession having little by way of knowledge and skills regarding SEND. RP2 found that teachers of varying years of experience all looked to the SENCO for help with strategies for teaching pupils with SEND. In paper three I considered this aspect of the SENCO role in the context of inadequate coverage of SEND during initial teacher training, which seems to have resulted in confusion about the matter of responsibility for developing inclusive pedagogies. I identified other barriers relating to skills – teachers lacked confidence knowing what approaches to take, and attitudes – teachers have not had input on the philosophical underpinnings of inclusion, and time and other pressures resulted in SEND not necessarily taking priority.

Although the SENCO was cited in paper two as a source of information that helped inform practice by teacher’s improving knowledge and skills, I wanted to devise an approach that did not rely on the person in this role, but on the other key source cited in paper two – learning from pupils directly. Reflection on the findings from my research and my practice featured a strong emphasis on teacher-pupil relationships. In my experience, the SENCO role provides frequent opportunities to work closely with pupils and their families, and get to know them as individuals.
This provoked me to be more understanding, and improve in my response to their needs and motivated to convey the importance of this to my colleagues. I became interested in the topic of ‘pupil voice’ and the potential power it could have to overcome the barriers to practice change. I set about designing a training format that orchestrated a dialogue and partnership between teacher and pupil in order to trigger more ‘authentic’ and sustainable inclusive approaches based on personal investment and the development of empathy. To my knowledge, although seeking pupil's views about their experiences in the classroom was not a new method, using this feedback directly as a training tool was not an approach that had been adopted before.

In paper three I also decided to concentrate on one Specific learning difficulty (SpLD) of Dyslexia rather than the broad title of Special Educational Needs. This was in order to narrow the focus of the study, and I selected Dyslexia due to its probable occurrence in mainstream classrooms. Dyslexia is estimated to affect 10% of the population (BDA). It may be commonly encountered, yet many teachers have little or no understanding of Dyslexia’s underlying difficulties (Bell, 2013).

Papers one, two and three document my discovery of, and response to, a scenario of an inadequate system for training teachers to meet children’s special educational needs. Teachers have professed to want to improve in their knowledge and skills, and SENCOs have training their colleagues in their job description - my thesis proposal was one suggestion for how to go about this task, whilst operating in awareness of the existence of barriers to practice change.
Catherine Elizabeth Sarginson

Supervisor – Professor Alan Dyson

Theme 1 – Reading Research

Willing or Able?

A review of the literature concerned with trainee and newly qualified teacher’s perceptions of their ability to meet Special Educational Needs

EdD Education

School of Education, University of Manchester

14th May 2012
Abstract

This paper’s purpose is to investigate the perceptions and attitudes of newly qualified teachers with regard to their ability to meet Special Educational Needs following their training. It will briefly trace policy developments, describe how competence is assessed and the variety of routes into teaching, and compare the experiences of beginning teachers in the UK, to training for, and attitudes towards, SEN internationally. Are newly qualified teachers willing, or able, to meet the needs of every child in their classroom? The literature reviewed documented a consistently fearful outlook held by newly qualified teachers about their ability to meet pupil’s special educational needs. This review identifies three persistent origins of trainee’s uncertainties - perceived lack of confidence, lack of knowledge and lack of experience, and charts the repeated call from trainees, researchers and professionals alike, to provide improved content in initial teacher training, and through continual professional development, to counteract those deficits. With both the problems and the solutions persistently identified in the literature, it would follow that a way forward is obvious. Yet the issues within and surrounding this crucial element of teacher training have continued to be debated since the days of Warnock. The paper examines the influential factors that emerge from the literature including teacher attitudes and the role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO). This paper also raises questions of whether an authoritative position on the issue of confidence at the commencement of a teaching career is legitimate to take, queries the merits of research findings that assert, often from small scale studies, that training is inadequate and considers the very existence of the specialist knowledge required to meet SEN that is so urgently, and somewhat automatically, called for.
Introduction

As a Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in a mainstream secondary school I frequently work alongside colleagues to provide help, advice and support for pupils with a range of learning, communicative, behavioural, sensory and physical difficulties. Fresh from a successful 6-year teaching role in a specialist school, and inspired by the philosophy of my lecturers in Inclusive Education, I tackled my role with fervour and confidence. Perhaps at times naïve, I remained steadfast in my goal of wanting to make a difference, which Cole (2005) deems typical:

SENCOs are a group of educational professionals who are completely committed to children with special educational needs who work tirelessly to promote their learning and inclusion (p304).

It became quickly apparent in my particular context (an Ofsted rated outstanding Church of England High School), that my colleagues had varied levels of experience with pupils with special educational needs. During the past five years, I have been surprised, and even shocked, by the absence of what I would consider to be a basic knowledge of SEN. I have at times been saddened by a lack of positivity towards the pupils I had responsibility for overseeing and/or an active response to the strategies I was proposing. I have worked hard to establish positive relationships with my colleagues, raise awareness and help explain how we can support pupils to learn and achieve. Although the situation has improved, I do still have the sense that SEN is a low priority in school and that many teachers are unaware of the needs pupils have, how to respond to them, and perhaps, even why they should.

I entered a mainstream setting from the Specialist Further Education sector, and recognise that the experience I have amassed is atypical from the situation in which my colleagues find themselves. I completed a 1 year P.G.C.E (Post Graduate Certificate in Education) in Post Compulsory Education, with teaching practice working with adults with learning difficulties in the community. I then taught for 6 years in a specialist residential further education college. Pupils with difficulties of this severity do not access my current school (despite the expectation that some, if not all, pupils with difficulties of this nature could, and should access mainstream education, if they so wished) and therefore a lot of my knowledge and skills are simply not required. My colleagues have been subject to similar restrictions, in that a comparatively low percentage of children with statements of SEN attend the school, and therefore could be seen as unnecessary to have a plethora of knowledge and arsenal of skills when there is no one in your class with a specified SEN.

If all teachers are trained to meet the same core standards, of which competence in SEN is measured, then it should follow that all will exhibit consistency in their understanding and approach to SEN. Trainees would not qualify as teachers nor would newly qualified teachers (NQTs) successfully complete their induction period without repeatedly and consistently proving proficiency in the area of SEN.
The changes to legislation as outlined in the Education (Special Educational Needs Coordinators England) Regulations 2008 required that all SENCOs had to be either a qualified teacher or the Head teacher. I chose to complete an ‘assessment only’ route that resulted in my gaining of Qualified Teacher Status without any retraining, additional teaching placement or instruction. I followed that I found the SEN element of the ‘Q standards’ (the 33 standards that must be met by all trainee teachers) the easiest to evidence. I understood, however, that this would not be the case for my colleagues, and caused me to question the value of the training teachers receive, and to consider whether both trainees and researchers view it to be sufficient to meet the needs of the pupils in today’s classrooms.

I sought to gain a deeper understanding of the source of the lack of awareness and confidence I felt my colleagues exhibited, and if my concerns mirrored those expressed in the literature. My questions prompted an exploration the literature concerned with SEN training and trainee’s attitudes, to establish the views trainees had of their abilities to meet SEN in their classrooms, compared to research examining preparedness and the resulting recommendations. I have sought to find answers to the following research questions:

- What does the literature say about trainee teacher’s confidence to meet special educational needs on completion of their training?
- What factors are the most important influences on how trainee teachers feel about SEND?
- What is needed to develop newly qualified teacher’s capabilities?

I conducted searches using the John Rylands Library electronic journals list, Google Scholar and Department for Education (DfE), Ofsted and the TES (Times Educational Supplement) and for international sources I accessed ERIC. I accessed the majority of sources without charge through the institutional log in. I made use of bibliographies from papers that were concerned with the issue of training and trainee attitudes about the SEN input – Hodkinson’s literature review of the history of SEN input in ITT (2009) made reference to a number of sources/research that seemed relevant to my area of interest. Names did appear in a number of different sources repetitively – for example Garner (1995; 2000) Mittler (1992) their interests were concerned about the training of teachers to meet SEND and the perspectives of the trainees. Norwich (2005) and Davis and Florian (2004) were cited when responding to the question of what training is required to meet SEN, and the concept of specialist knowledge.
**Historical overview**

During the past 40 years, the education of children with disabilities has been subject to rapid change (Hodkinson, 2009). 1978 saw the publication of The Warnock Report (DES 1978), which provided a blueprint for a change in culture, and in practice (Bishop and Jones, 2002). The findings of the report aimed to shift focus away from a medical model of disability, to reflect the educational and social needs of children. The report challenged the long held assumption that segregated settings were necessary for disabled pupils to learn. Over the last decade, English classrooms have become increasingly heterogeneous (Hodkinson, 2009) as they ever more included those who would have previously been educated in specialist schools (Hastings et al, 1996; Forlin and Hopewell, 2006; Mittler, 1996). In a 4-year period from 1992, 71 from 107 Local Education Authorities in England decreased the percentage of pupils placed in special schools (Marshall, Ralph and Palmer 2002).

It is the case that there have long been children with special educational needs in mainstream schools. Boundaries have widened as mainstream schools became more diverse and eroded ideas away of what the ‘normal’ classroom looks like, and consequently, how to prepare (Golder, Jones and Eaton Quinn, 2009; Hodkinson, 2009; Winter 2006). Since 1984, accreditation into the teaching profession has depended on training institutions being able to demonstrate a special educational needs element in the initial training of all teachers (Mittler, 1992). Successive government’s inclusive education policies required commitment to developing the knowledge and skills of teachers in the area of SEND, which has a direct bearing on the preparation of those entering the profession (Robertson, 1999). The previous Labour government coined the phrase that ‘every teacher is to be a teacher of children with SEN’, and recognized that trainees had be equipped with the skills to do so effectively (Lambe 2007, 361, cited in Hodkinson, 2009). In 1994, the then Conservative Government established the SEN Code of Practice, which required teachers to become ‘early diagnosticians’ (Dew-Hughes and Brayton, 1997), as the teacher’s role expanded to include identifying pupil need and responding to and meeting that need (Barber and Turner, 2007; Ellins and Porter, 2005). Teachers today are expected to understand and meet the needs of every child in their classroom, and it is assumed that they possess the adequate knowledge and skills to do so. Teachers have to take responsibility and ownership of their practice, in order to ensure full access and participation (Hallett and Hallett, 2010; Mittler 1992). It has perhaps never been so critical that:

> All teachers need to be confident they can teach all children


This movement towards educating students with disabilities within mainstream classrooms has also taken place worldwide. The situation in England is replicated internationally and forms part of a broader human rights agenda including the Salamanca Statement of the United Nations (UNESCO, 1994, from Avramidis and Kalyva, 2007).
In the United States, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 prompted the granting of access to general education for students with learning disabilities, and was further developed and renamed fifteen years later as The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) (Snyder, 1999). Greece follows a ‘one track’ approach that promotes the right of every child to be educated in regular educational settings (European Agency for the development in special needs education, 2003; from Agaliotis and Kalyva, 2011). In the United Arab Emirates (UAE) greater inclusion has resulted in teachers facing new challenges, assuming new roles and accepting new responsibilities (Alghazo and Naggar Gaad, 2004).

The issue of training teachers to cope with the varied needs of children has been raised since the days of Warnock. Almost 40 years ago she identified the need to specifically address special educational needs when training teachers (Dfes 1978 para 12.7). Increasing the knowledge base of teachers was deemed to be ‘of the utmost importance’ in order to respond to the ‘extensive demands’ placed on teachers by the integration of pupils with more complex needs (Dfes 1978, p121). Warnock was under no illusion of the immensity of the task - she estimated that it would take 4 decades until all teachers have undertaken a special education element in their course (Dfes, 1978, p244). As we head towards the conclusion of that timeline, this paper will aim to establish if the literature depicts a situation of competent practitioners in the field of SEN as envisaged by the early proponents of inclusive education.
How competence in SEN is assessed during initial teacher training in England

This section will summarise the range of routes into teaching, identify the competences trainees are required to demonstrate and comment briefly on an international context.

The Department for Employment and Education claimed in their paper entitled Meeting Special Educational Needs: a programme for action (DfEE, 1998) that the Q standards would ensure that all newly qualified teachers would understand their responsibilities under the special educational needs Code of Practice (revised as DfES, 2001) and would be capable of identifying and, when appropriate, supporting pupils with special educational needs. In England, the Education Act 2002 (sections 132, 145 and 210) requires that the Secretary of State's standards must be met by trainee teachers before they can be awarded Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). There are 33 standards for QTS, of which 3 relate directly to SEN (Q18, Q19 and Q20). Trainees have to demonstrate that they:

Q18 - Understand how children and young people develop and that the progress and well-being of learners are affected by a range of developmental, social, religious, ethnic, cultural and linguistic influences.

Q19 - Know how to make effective personalised provision for those they teach, including those for whom English is an additional language or who have special educational needs or disabilities, and how to take practical account of diversity and promote equality and inclusion in their teaching.

Q20 - Know and understand the roles of colleagues with specific responsibilities, including those with responsibility for learners with special educational needs and disabilities and other individual learning needs.

(TDA 2007a, 2).

Despite these standards being universal, access into the teaching profession has expanded to encompass a variety of guises. In 2006, the Training and Development Agency created new routes including school centred training for postgraduates, an assessment only route and employment based options such as the graduate teacher programme (Barber and Turner, 2007), in addition to the more traditional 3 or 4 year bachelor of education (BEd) Degree pathways. More recently, initiatives such as the School-centred initial teacher training (SCITT) and Teach First present potential teachers with a plethora of paths to take. The Department for Education proclaims on their website that “Through ITT you’ll receive rigorous training, with new teachers rating their training as a very good preparation for the classroom”. This paper will compare this pledge with what is documented in the literature I have reviewed.
Although SEN is not considered to be a specialist subject within ITT, providers are required to ensure trainees are equipped with basic knowledge and skills (Winter 2006). The expectation to meet the standards required for qualified teacher status are not modified to reflect the amount of time any given route had, the age of the pupils, or the subject taught, as they are deemed to be prescriptive: “The standards have been written to be specific, explicit and assessable and are designed to provide a clear basis for the reliable and consistent award of Qualified Teacher Status, regardless of training route or type of training leading to QTS” (TTA, 1998, Annexe A, paragraph D). There are no set requirements or guidance for students, higher education institutions or school placement providers as to how SEN knowledge and skills are addressed and delivered during training. The decision of how much time, resources and attention are given over to SEN input during training lies with individual institutions. There are no established criteria that acknowledges how the ability to meet the standards and the expectations of the teaching role vary according to educational stage e.g. Primary and Secondary level. The issue of early identification of need could be seen to have more of an implication for practitioners at Key Stage 1 and 2. Barber and Turner recognize the existence of different systems for SEN provision in Primary and Secondary schools and therefore how this made comparing the experiences of NQT’s difficult (2007).

(It could also be worth noting that the present coalition government have created initiatives for free schools and academies though its programme of educational reform, that allow the employment of teaching staff who do not have QTS. There are, however, conditions in place relating to special educational needs in that a SENCO (and designated teacher for children in care) will still require QTS. These new changes may bring into question the entire system of training for teachers and the worth qualifications have).

Internationally, countries differ in the extent of national control over initial teacher training. Sharma, Forlin and Loreman’s (2008) compared education and training for SEN in Australia, Hong Kong and Canada, document that important developments in policy have taken place. Norway has a curriculum for teacher education (Golder, Norwich and Bayliss, 2005). In the USA, some states follow advisory national standards, but there is wide variation between different states (Golder, Norwich and Bayliss, 2005). Most general education preservice teachers are reported to receive only minimal training in special education (Garriott, Miller and Snyder, 2003). In Australia, Forlin and Hopewell (2006) comment on the need for teacher training institutions to do more than provide a ‘tokenistic approach’ to SEN (p59). Although inclusion has a prominent place in Greek education policy, it does not have equal treatment in daily school practice (Zoniou-Sideri and Viachou, 2006, from Agaliotis and Kalyva, 2011).

The following section will consider the importance of SEN input during training and how its quality is judged in the literature I have reviewed.
An evaluation of SEN input during training

There has long been general agreement on the importance of providing a clear and coherent special needs element in initial teacher training (Abbott, 2007; Hodkinson, 2009; Mittler 1992). This section will identify the judgments made about training in SEN and explore the reasons for those views. The literature suggests that clarity and consistency is lacking. Garner (1996) identified concerns about quality control, and interviewed students who regarded SEN provision within their own college to be ‘something of a lottery,' with some researchers viewing training programmes to have developed in an ‘ad hoc manner’ (Garner 1996; Moran 2007; Robertson, 1999).

In a speech given by Lord Adonis, at the launch of the Inclusion Development Programme in 2007, the Q standards were deemed to be an important vehicle for developing trainee’s knowledge of SEN (Adonis, 2007). However, researchers in this field repeatedly express concerns about the limited scope of the current model of assessment of SEN understanding during training and have repeatedly criticised the strong focus on auditable, procedural knowledge and compliance (Golder, Norwich and Bayliss, 2005; Hodkinson, 2009; Mittler, 2008; Robertson, 1999) that promote a ‘technicist approach’ (Pearson, 2007a). Reynolds (2001) comments that the standards send powerful signals to beginning teachers that their professional life is grounded in demonstration of explicit outcomes (p469).

Robertson (1999) deems the standards ‘too simple’ and ‘slight’. Measuring competency against the Q standards is viewed to be at the expense of gaining knowledge and exploring conceptual and pedagogical principles that underpin effective practice with pupils with SEN (Bishop and Jones, 2002; Garner 1996; Golder, Norwich and Bayliss, 2005; Hodkinson, 2009); Reynolds (2001) and Robertson (1999) comment that the starting point of SEN practice using the standards is unlikely to further development of inclusive education long term. Reynolds (2001) terms it lacking emphasis on the evaluation of the ‘how’ rather than the ‘what’ (p469). Training is described using terms including minimalist, inadequate, waning and frugal (Barber and Turner, 2007; Garner 1996; Jordan and Powell, 1995; MacBeath et al 2005; Mittler, 1992; Robertson, 1999).

SEN is one of a number of stated priority areas for teacher training, yet has been seen to have to compete for coverage time with the other vital elements of the role. Tensions exist between training courses and the demands made by the National Curriculum and the Q standards (Golder, Norwich and Bayliss, 2005). The literature describes a concerning state of less and less focus being given over to matter relating to SEN. In a report to the DfEE, it was stated that time allocated to SEN training was ‘minimal’ (SENTC, 1996, p19 cited in Garner, 1996). Winter (2006) found that trainees received up to 10 hours of training on SEN issues. Garner (1996) found that 36% of trainees had no more than 2 lectures on topics relevant to SEN.
Hodkinson (2009) attributes the reduction in the time allocated to SEN within ITT to the Government’s drive for higher National standards for Literacy and Numeracy. The ITT curriculum, particularly the P.G.C.E route, is described as already ‘overcrowded’ with its quality undermined by time constraints, (Hodkinson, 2009; Robertson, 1999). Such concerns are not limited to the shorter training routes however, as Winter’s research found that the trainee’s negative views of their SEN input during training did not alter whether on a one or four year training programme (2006).

Writers have expressed concern about the issues of inclusion becoming increasingly marginalized during training (Davies and Garner, 1997; Hodkinson, 2009). Various approaches are adopted to deliver teacher training in SEN by Higher Education Institutions. Some ITT providers have imbedded special educational needs issues into subject teaching, while others offer a menu of elective special needs lectures and seminars (Robertson, 1999). The literature describes 3 approaches to gaining skills and knowledge of SEN during teacher training – permeation, focussed elements or the selection of optional modules (Golder, Norwich and Bayliss, 2005; Mittler, 1992). Permeation is commented to be the main method of instruction (Golder, Norwich and Bayliss, 2005) which is concerning as this approach is difficult to monitor, as it varies from tutor to tutor (Mittler, 1992). Teachers are reported to receive direct input on practical matters such as identification, legislation, assessment and behaviour management in SEN (Garner 1996). 73% of NQTs in Garner’s study had not been required to submit an assessed written assignment on a special needs-related topic (1996). In having elective units, trainees are free to pursue the areas of education that are of particular interest to them. On completion of their training however, the diversity within their classes will not be so selective. Concerns have also been raised about the grouping of all SEN children together as a single entity. Bishop and Jones (2002) are of the view that pupils with complex and profound learning difficulties for example, are ‘sadly forgotten’ by the standards (p62).

The question of whether it is the responsibility of the university or the teaching practice placements to provide trainees with the knowledge and skills they need to meet pupils’ SEN has been documented. There is widespread acceptance that training institutions must ensure that new teachers are trained to teach effectively (Sharma, Forlin and Loreman, 2008). Hodkinson advocates that ITT programmes need to train students to be competent and confident in their abilities to work with children with special educational needs (2009). Hodkinson (2009). found that Head Teachers had negative perceptions of the skill base of the trainees they received, deeming them ill-prepared to deal with the issues of SEN and disability within mainstream classrooms. The lack of SEN input prior to commencing teaching placement was acknowledged as concerning by Ofsted, as those Higher Education Institutions who placed too much emphasis on schools to provide the majority of their SEN training were criticised (2008).
Garner’s research in 2006 found evidence of discontinuity both between, and within, institutions,

The two other NQTs in my school seem to know far more than me about what's going on, they seem to be in tune with the language

My girlfriend had a good grounding in special needs . . . she was at the same college, but doing a different course (p 159)

Trainee teachers will spend substantial amounts of time at school placements participating in what Pearson terms ‘professional experimentation’ (2007, p126). Barber and Turner’s research found that day to day experience and advice from experienced colleagues the most effective influences on NQT confidence (2007). Avramidis and Norwich’s review of the literature on inclusion highlights the impact the school’s ethos can have on teacher’s attitudes and practice (2002).

Some writers, however, report that good practice does exist, with some providers of ITT making innovative provision with SEN and subject teaching being addressed together (Dodds, Taylor and Thorogood, 1997; Robertson, 1999). Although they admit that much still needs to be done, Thomas and Vaughan (2004) are of the view that mainstream classroom teachers are increasingly better trained to deal with individual differences. Robertson (1999) praises the abilities of teachers who are able to achieve a great deal, with only a small amount of guidance and support thereby indicating that although perhaps not able, newly qualified teachers are at least willing.
The following section will provide a historical context for training and chart the initial, and continued, calls to address SEN more effectively over a 30 year period. The effectiveness of ITT with regard to Special educational needs has been the subject of much debate (Barber and Turner 2007). The expectations on teachers have changed as the mainstream setting has evolved to commonly include children with a variety of learning difficulties and disabilities, yet the literature suggests that little has changed in how trainee teachers are prepared (Barber and Turner, 2007; Forlin and Hopewell, 2006; Golder, Jones and Eaton Quinn, 2009; Hodkinson, 2009; Moran, 2007; Winter, 2006). As long ago as Warnock, there have been calls for a strategy to address the resulting training needs that arise from greater integration. Hodkinson (2009) perceives there to have been a lack of commitment from successive governments since the publication of the report, which he felt ‘conspired’ to stall the development of effective training for over 30 years. SEN input during ITT is described as ‘a peculiar ambivalence’ ‘lightweight and largely inconsequential’ (Garner, 1996) and subject to ‘almost eloquent negligence’ by policy makers (Robertson, 1999). Patterns of neglect have become apparent, as repeated pleas for improvements in the area of SEN coverage in ITT have been made by various training providers, inspection and action groups and documented in the literature.

Recommendations by the Advisory Committee on the Supply and Education of Teachers (ACSET) in 1984 stated that:

If the education service is to do the best for pupils with SEN, there now must be structured progress towards improving the preparation of teachers.

(ASCET 1984, cited in Golder, Jones and Eaton Quinn, 2009).

Twelve years later, the Special Needs Training Consortium (1996) highlighted what they felt to be major shortfalls in training and a lack of a coherent pro-active approach (cited in Robertson, 1999). Nine years from then in 2004, the government highlighted the importance of ITT in its strategy paper Removing Barriers to Achievement (DfES, 2004). The repeated concerns about training were acknowledged in their pledge to:

work with the Teacher Training Agency and higher education institutions to ensure that initial teacher training and programmes for continuous professional development provide a good grounding in core skills and knowledge of SEN.

(DfES, 2004, p.51).

Three years later the message remained the same; The Government appreciates the need for this focus on special educational needs and inclusion within ITE, as it is an essential element in promoting its commitment to move towards more inclusive education (DfEE, 1997).
Researchers have repeatedly found evidence to suggest that SEN coverage in ITT continues to be lacking and the call to demonstrate progress in SEN training remains strong and resolute (Ellins and Porter 2005; Forlin and Hopewell, 2006). The Salt Review admits that that:

In recent years, there have been attempts to improve the provision of SEN training, but almost all of it remains too general


The literature reviewed seems to support a case of déjà vu (termed a ‘groundhog day’ by Hodkinson, 2009), as the cycle of calling for action and seemingly little changing, is repeated decade, after decade.
What does the literature say about trainee teacher’s confidence to meet special educational needs on completion of their training?

In this section I will address the first of my three research questions by considering what the literature tells us about the confidence newly qualified teachers have in their ability to meet the needs of pupils with SEN and how their feelings and attitudes have, or have not been, influenced by the training they have received.

Feeling ill prepared is a recurring theme in the literature from the UK (Barber and Turner, 2007; Golder, Norwich and Bayliss, 2005; Hodkinson, 2009; Winter 2006), and internationally in the US (Brown et al, 2008; Jordan et al, 2009; Sadler, 2005), Australia, (Brownlee and Carrington, 2000) and in Norway (Mintz, 2007).

Research has taken place that has sought to establish what views are held by trainee and newly qualified teachers, and have adopted various approaches to ascertain their perspectives. Surveys have been a commonly used method to question trainees about their experiences. One conducted by Ofsted in 1993 found that many Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) did not feel adequately prepared to teach underachieving pupils or those with emotional or behavioural difficulties (Garner, 1996). As either of these classifications of pupils could fall within and outside the SEN remit, the findings fifteen years later Ofsted specified that trainees felt ill-prepared to teach children with SEN and/or disabilities, a term used in the Code of Practice (Ofsted 2008). A survey of NQTs conducted in 2007 by the TDA (2007b) found that 48% of trainees do not feel prepared to teach pupils with SEN (cited in Moran, 2007) with Winter (2006) and Hodkinson (2009) both stating a higher figure of up to 89% of trainees feeling that they did not have the confidence to teach children with SEN and/or disabilities. Over half the teachers interviewed by Dew-Hughes and Brayton (1997) believed their college training had not prepared them for meeting special needs in the classroom.

However, in establishing the views of trainee teachers, some researchers argue that there has been a limited focus on the sufficiency of training in general terms (Barber and Turner, 2007; Kirby et al, 2005) or for specific difficulties, for example, speech and language (Marshall, Ralph and Palmer 2002). Although opinions have been sought through the TTA surveys, Barber and Turner (2007) claim that they do not provide detailed enough information about attitudes and confidence about SEN, and in fact had no specific mention of this. Robertson (1999) describes the existence of little evidence to suggest that Ofsted has looked closely at SEN practice within ITT.
What factors are the most important influences on how trainee teacher’s feel about SEN?

The literature reviewed in this paper identified a number of influences on the lack of preparedness and confidence felt by trainee teachers.

The literature reviewed attributed the following three causes for a lack of confidence: inadequate input (either in terms of time allocation and specific SEN content during training), little or no experience/exposure to pupils with SEN and negative attitudes and limited understanding of the ethos and aims of inclusion. Therefore three antidotes were identified to address these weaknesses: more training both at the stage of ITT and later into the career, for example CPD (continued professional development) and additional input and guidance from experienced colleagues such as the SENCO. More experience working with pupils with SEN should be facilitated during training, and specific teaching on ethos and aims of inclusion also be provided which is designed to foster positivity from the outset. The following section will take each of these three problems and proposed solutions to newly qualified teachers lack of confidence and discuss them in greater detail and address the final research question to identify what is needed to develop newly qualified teachers capabilities.

1. **A simple equation? Time + training = greater knowledge = increased confidence**

In addition to the consideration of the emotions of trainee and newly qualified teachers, the question is often asked about what knowledge and skills are required to teach children with SEN, and whether they are in possession of such expertise. This section will consider if confidence deficits can be met by making improvements to training and ponders when such training, if it exists, should take place. It concludes by raising the question of the role of the SENCO in developing new and experienced teachers. Lack of knowledge, ability and confidence in trainees has wider implications for inclusion (Abbott, 2007). Ellins and Porter (2005) found that teachers with no training in special educational needs had the least positive attitude to special educational needs and those with the most training were more positive. A year later, Winter (2006) findings were in agreement - the most frequently cited reason for resistance to inclusion was the lack of skills necessary to teach pupils with SEN. The belief that SEN exists as a topic and skills base that should be taught explicitly is an interesting one that is explored in the literature and will be discussed briefly in this section.

There is an assumption expressed in the literature that trainees believe that teaching pupils with special educational needs is something that necessitates additional training. In the United States, Boling (2007), Garriott, Miller and Snyder (2003), Jordan et al’s (2009) and Olson’s (1997) studies found that pre-service teachers feared they did not have the specialised knowledge and skills to work with students with special education needs. Sadler’s research into perceived knowledge of speech and language difficulties (2005) found that none of the participants in the study rated themselves as having sufficient knowledge to teach pupils diagnosed with such difficulties.
Brown et al’s (2008) research findings showed a link between training and confidence; embedded SEN instruction was found to increase teacher confidence levels by 60%. Boling’s study (2007) found that an intern became more open to teaching students with disabilities as she received more knowledge.

As reported by Italian writers Zambelli and Bonni (2004) two factors, in particular are important in the formation of positive attitudes towards inclusion: increased knowledge, and information about school inclusion and disabilities (p353).

The literature also draws attention to the risk to the success of inclusion resulting from negative training experiences. In Nigeria, Fakolade and Adeniyi (2009) found that much of the negativity teachers have towards pupils with special needs results from lack of knowledge. In Greece, teacher’s lack of specialised knowledge is cited as one of the main reasons for resistance to inclusion (Agaliotis and Kalyva, 2011). Avramidis and Norwich (2002) and Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) both found a positive correlation between specialised training and attitudes towards inclusion through their research. de Boer et al (2011) also found that teachers in Norway who had received training in special needs education held more positive attitudes compared to those who had not.

The view of a House of Commons committee in 2006 mirrors that held by many trainees and researchers, stating that the ability to operate effectively within inclusive settings required focused training to perfect: “It is unrealistic to expect teachers and other members of the workforce to be able to meet the needs of children with SEN, if they have not received the appropriate training” (House of commons 2006, 77). The increased diversity of SEN in mainstream settings was viewed by teachers to call for levels of skill, which trainee teachers believed had not been delivered by their initial training (Dew-Hughes and Brayton, 1997).

Teachers will not be able to recognise or accommodate the child with learning difficulties in class if their knowledge is limited

Kirby, Davies and Bryant (2005).

Robertson (1999) also expresses concern for pupils who will find themselves being taught by staff without advanced training. 42% of those questioned in Garner’s research felt that the SEN focus in general education lectures was insufficient (1996). The literature reports that trainee teachers feel they not only need, but want, specific SEN input during their initial training (Garner, 1996; Pearson 2007; Winter 1996). One of the participants in Garner’s study supported the idea singling out of SEN during training to make it a special course on its own due to its complexity (Garner, 1996). In Winter’s study in the same year, trainees were asked to identify what they felt should be included in training, with again a standalone SEN course being deemed as essential (1996).
However, more training has not always been found to be effective. Hasting et al’s study in 1996 analysed questionnaire responses of 100 primary trainees following the completion of a nine-week compulsory SEN course and found that it had little impact on student teachers’ perceptions of children with severe learning difficulties (SLD).

Initial training could be seen as the first step to becoming an effective teacher of all pupils. Induction, continuing professional development and in-service programmes also play a significant role (Winter, 1996). Could the use of the term Initial Teacher Training, mean that the pre service input is only ever meant to serve as an initial introduction to the skills involved in teaching and learning, that it is about preparation to enter into the teaching profession, and never meant to be all encompassing? This raises the question of whether it is more appropriate to gain expertise in aspects of teaching children with special needs after a suitable induction period of teaching (MacBeath et al 2005). As a starting point, the use of the 3 Q standards could be seen as an important acknowledgment of SEN issues right from the ‘get go’, with the view that with the completion of the induction year and continual professional development, a teacher is always evaluating and learning, and, hopefully, improving. Garner’s research would agree, as he found that over 55% of student teachers indicated that they intended to maintain a professional interest, and a commitment to, SEN. The literature suggests that there has been a gradual move to reallocate the majority of SEN input away from ITT and place it in the realms of continuing professional development courses. SEN has faced considerable competition from other sectors of compulsory education in claiming the money available for CPD (Garner, 1996). The success of the government’s inclusion policies has been viewed to depend on continual professional development (MacBeath et al 2005). In 2007, SEN and disability was declared as a national priority for the professional development of teachers (Adonis, 2007), echoing the promises made three years earlier by the DfES to work with higher education institutions to develop specialist qualifications in SEN (DfES,2004, p18, cited in Golder, Jones and Eaton Quinn, 2009). More recently in 2010, recommendations arose from the Salt Review for consistently high quality CPD in SEN (DCSF, 2010, page 5). In a recent study, however, (Male and Rayner; 2009 cited in Male, 2011) it was found that few teachers appear to be accessing CPD relating to the education of children and young people with SEN. There also appears to be a legacy of a lack of courses for those who express an interest in the field of SEN prior to teacher training. Since 1989 it is reported that there have been no undergraduate courses for those wishing to specialise in special educational needs (Male, 2011).

Continual professional development in SEN is viewed as having wider benefits. Avramidis and Norwich found that resistance to inclusion is less when practitioners have acquired special education qualifications (2002). In Male’s 2011 study forty-eight teachers who were enrolled either on a full- or part-time basis on a Master’s programme in special and inclusive education were surveyed at the beginning and end of a ten-week module on concepts and contexts of special and inclusive education. There have been recent developments in qualifications for SENCOs. From June 2009, regulations were amended to require specific training for those new to the post, and highly recommended it for experienced SENCOs.
In addition to QTS, newly appointed SENCOs now need to hold the National Award for SEN Coordination. The need to hold a specific qualification in order to fulfil the role of SENCO highlights the area of SEN as being something distinct, but, again, does not extend to the role of classroom teacher.

The stance reportedly taken in the literature reviewed in this paper appears to support the view that specialised knowledge and skills are there to be taught to trainees. Increasing the amount of training is viewed as a positive intervention that provides the solution to the lack of knowledge and skills newly qualified teachers possess (Garner 1996; Hodkinson, 2009). Some writers have challenged this supposition and question whether specialist training even exists (Davis and Florian, 2004; Lewis and Norwich et al 2005; Mittler 1992; Robertson, 1999). Sharma, Forlin and Loreman (2008) research questions what content and pedagogy best prepares teachers for inclusive classrooms. Other writers term the issue of a separate pedagogy as ‘controversial’ and that the supposed existence of such approaches could be seen to further marginalize and exclude children with difficulties (Lewis and Norwich et al 2005) It is claimed that there are few, if any, approaches that are proven to be more effective for children with special educational needs (Davis and Florian, 2004; Lewis and Norwich et al 2005). Davis and Florian’s literature review found relatively little research that focused specifically on teaching strategies and approaches for children with special educational needs (2004).

American writers Jordan et al argue that effective teaching skills are effective for all students, both with and without special education needs (Jordan et al 2009) and echo Robertson’s view from a decade earlier that training should reflect the best of mainstream teaching (1999). Teachers who are effective overall with their students are also more likely to be skilled in inclusive practices (Stanovich and Jordan, 1999, 2000, 2002 cited in Jordan et al 2009).

It may not be that an entirely discrete SEN pedagogy is needed by teachers entering the profession, but what is required is careful practice and application of teaching underpinned by a rich psychology of learning

(Robertson, 1999, p171).
The SENCO to the rescue?

As someone who is currently in the role of SENCO, I found it particularly interesting to identify what the literature said about if and how those in my role could address the issue of lack of confidence and adequate training in their school settings. This section will discuss the role of the SENCO in relation to newly qualified teachers and if there is an expectation on SENCOs to be the ones to resolve these issues. Hodkinson (2009) claims the failure of training in SEN is a common feeling amongst professionals, perhaps noticed, and implications felt, more acutely by those in the role of SENCO. Abbott’s research in 2007 found that SENCOs felt that teachers were unprepared for inclusion, had insufficient knowledge of the Code of Practice, and had difficulty identifying and coping with special needs. The revised Code of Practice states that the SENCO should ‘work closely’ with fellow teachers, as well as the head teacher and senior management (section 1.39) (from Cole 2005). Leading, developing and supporting colleagues and providing professional direction is an expected, and stated, aspect of the SENCO role. The literature describes the SENCO as an advisor and consultant, involved in delivering continual professional development, in one way or another, as often as a daily basis. Abbott (2007) describes SENCOs as being involved in training both beginning and practising teachers. Barber and Turner’s research found that all 59 NQTs in their study identified day-to-day experience as the most effective influence on improving their skills and confidence, with 55 having accessed the SENCO for advice (2007).

The literature describes the SENCO role as a demanding one that is ‘difficult, if not impossible’ (Dyson and Gains, 1995) with considerable time pressures. The creation and implementation of the Code of Practice, although welcome, has resulted in an ever-growing workload which has lead writers to repeatedly express concern over the practicality of SENCOs having formal mentoring roles to trainee teachers and NQT’s (Garner, 1996; Lewis 1995; Robertson, 1999).

Standard Q20 provides a clear link to the SENCO;

Know and understand the roles of colleagues with specific responsibilities, including those with responsibility for learners with special educational needs and disabilities and other individual learning needs (TDA 2007a, 2).

The move towards school-based training implies a more direct involvement from school staff to provide instruction and guidance. Barber and Turner (2007) acknowledge the SENCO within a culture of collaboration and point to the importance of experienced teachers providing support to newly qualified teachers in order to share and learn from one another. This stronger emphasis on teaching practice could result in the role of the SENCOs having greater prominence (Dew-Hughes and Brayton, 1997) being recognised as a specialist (Garner 1996) and possibly force more schools to acknowledge their importance (Robertson, 1999).
However, referring back to the SENCO could also re-emphasise SEN as an expert's job and not that of the class or subject teacher. School management and ethos should enable and empower teachers to take ownership of their practice (Hallett and Hallett, 2010). Dew-Hughes and Brayton (1997) recommend that SEN must be embedded in training for Head Teachers, as it is a whole school issue. In Greece, (Emanuelsson 2001, cited in Agaliotis and Kalyva, 2011) express concern for those in the SENCO role, and point to the risk of SENCOs and their work becoming marginalized if teachers do not regard their obligations as a shared responsibility.

2. Getting to know you – facilitating increased experience working with pupils with SEN

Trainee’s lack of confidence could also be charted in the literature reviewed to the question of experience. One possible solution suggested in the literature is to provide trainees with opportunities to work with, and learn from, people with disabilities (Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden, 2000; Bishop and Jones, 2002; Golder, Jones and Eaton Quinn, 2009; Hastings et al, 1996; Hodkinson, 2009). Hodkinson views it as imperative to ensure trainees gain experience of a diverse range of pupils that society has traditionally excluded (2009). Avramidis, Bayliss and Burden (2000) identified the importance of increased experience and social contact with children with SEN for trainees, and suggested this results in the formation of favourable attitudes towards inclusion.

Research has been conducted that has provided opportunities in initial teacher training to build relationships through gaining practical experience with those considered to have special educational needs. Bishop and Jones’ research (2002) provided primary school trainees with workshops consisting of children with complex and profound learning difficulties, and highlighted the importance of allowing beginning teachers to reflect on their feelings, as prior to this experience, the trainees were reported to have held fundamentally negative attitudes. Golder, Jones and Eaton Quinn (2009) researched the responses of secondary trainees (physical education) following a 14-day placement in a special school and again found it to be beneficial. Person’s research in 2007 asked what proportions of PGCE students had contact with people with SEN prior to commencing to train as a teacher, and what the nature of that contact was. Providing SEN experience on teaching practice is viewed to allay fears and minimise the ‘culture shock’ beginning teachers are said to encounter (Abbott, 2007).

Prior contact with disabled people also seems related to trainee teacher’s attitudes internationally, however, it is important to recognize, that experiences are not automatically positive (Avramidis and Norwich, 2002, cited in Pearson, 2007b).

In a study conducted in Brunei, Bradshaw and Mundia (2005) reported that having a family member with a disability did not facilitate positive attitudes towards inclusion among trainee teachers (from Sharma, Forlin and Loreman (2008). Fear of the unknown is a concern expressed in the literature (Forlin and Hopewell, 2006).
In Australia, Brownlee and Carrington (2000) found that trainee teachers thought that their training course needed to offer more practical experience of inclusive schooling. Teachers in India who were acquainted with a disabled person held more positive attitudes towards inclusion than without (Parasuram, 2006, cited in de Boer et al 2011). Avramidis and Kalyva’s (2007) study of Greek schools found that teachers with experience of teaching children with SEN held significantly more positive attitudes towards inclusive education than those without. In the United States, Jordan et al (2009) call for teachers to have increased practical experiences was a reiteration of the findings from Australia nine years previously, where students commented that training courses should involve some form of direct practical experience relating to teaching students who have disabilities (Brownlee and Carrington, 2000).

When the attention is focused on students’ disabilities rather than who they are as people, the focus is usually on their deficits, not on their strengths. (Dixon, 2005, p37).

The nature of the practical experience can vary, and has been explored through various mechanisms, not limited to placements that involved working with children with SEN. Forlin and Hopewell (2006) investigated the responses to hearing a parent’s story of their life and perspective on caring for their disabled child. The reflective piece written following the 30 minute narrative described the effects on trainees as ‘profound’ (p59). Brownlee and Carrington’s study investigated attitudes by providing an opportunity for early years and primary trainees to work with a Teaching Assistant who had Cerebral Palsy (2000). Both studies found that trainees’ beliefs about the nature of disability were influenced positively through their experience and therefore are seen to support the view that one solution expressed in the literature to the lack of confidence is to provide opportunities for trainees to have experiences with those with, or who know someone, with special educational needs.

3. Start as we mean to go on - understand values, foster positivity.

Some literature combined the issue of greater confidence and competency with an exploration of attitudes towards disability and inclusion during training, and beyond. Dyson and Gains (1995) comment that the SENCO’s role begins by addressing questions of philosophy and values, rather than practicalities of special needs provision, and this could be the same for trainee teachers. Researchers have found that where trainees lack positive attitudes towards, and an understanding of, the ethos and aims of inclusion, their confidence and ability to meet SEN are negatively affected (Male, 2011). The movement towards inclusive schooling has created a need for trainee teachers to reflect on their personal beliefs and attitudes to people with disabilities (Golder, Norwich and Bayliss, 2005). By linking theory and practice, some researches believed that they had been able to identify and therefore ‘cure’ the shortfalls in knowledge and resulting lack of confidence with encouraging trainees to consider a deeper understanding of ethos.
If we are to change attitudes and move towards inclusive education for all students, we have much to do at the level of teacher training.


The importance of developing teacher’s positive attitudes towards SEN from the beginning of their careers is expressed in the literature (Bishop and Jones, 2002, Hastings et al, 1996; Male, 2011; Mittler, 2000; Winter, 2006). Links have been made between knowledge and attitudes, and recommend that training should allow trainees to focus on attitudes towards SEN and inclusion (Golder, Jones and Eaton Quinn, 2009; Pearson, 2007). Golder, Norwich and Bayliss (2005) found trainee teachers both want, and need, to know more about unpинning principles. Trainees are reported to have a desire to acquire knowledge and skills, but writers are keen to stress that knowledge and skills are insufficient in isolation (Marshall, Ralph and Palmer, 2002; Pearson, 2007). Initial teacher training has been criticised for containing little room for the serious consideration of such ethical and moral matters or acknowledging the complexity of inclusive education and attitudes towards it (Abbott, 2007; Pearson, 2007; Robertson, 1999).

Despite positive attitudes and understanding being acknowledged to be key to the success of inclusion, teacher training courses tend to emphasize procedural knowledge (Hastings et el, 1996; Jordan and Powell, 1995; Mittler, 2000; Reynolds, 2001; Robertson, 1999). Trainees are not provided with teaching and learning activities designed to engender positive attitudes (Golder, Norwich and Bayliss, 2005). Marshall, Ralph and Palmer (2002) conclude their study by calling for 2-pronged action - additional knowledge and resources, and a greater focus on the inclusion debate. ITT students are reported to need a safe, yet challenging, context within which to explore their own attitudes towards and beliefs (Pearson, 2007a). Bishop and Jones’ research (2002) concludes with a call to engage trainee teachers in ‘inclusive discourse’ at a theoretical and pragmatic level. Mittler (2000) writes of the importance of this;

Ensuring that newly qualified teachers have a basic understanding of inclusive teaching is the best investment that can be made (p137).

If inclusive practices are to be fostered and embedded, the issues need to be first addressed during training (Moran, 2007).

As I have looked at the difficulties with attitudes in the UK, I sought to establish if this was replicated international. This section discusses the attitudes held by trainee teachers from research conducted in the USA, Australia, Greece, Norway and UAE. In the United States, limited research appears in the literature that investigates the beliefs of preservice teachers toward inclusive education (Garriott, Miller and Snyder 2003). Despite this limitation, the literature studied in this paper identified that teacher’s beliefs about disability and their responsibilities for meeting SEN may be part of a broader set of attitudes and beliefs (Jordan et al 2009).
Most studies indicate that teachers, like the general public, have a negative view of both students with disabilities and the inclusion of students (D’Alonzo et al, 1996, p305).

Booth et al (2003) report that many students enter teaching with little understanding of inclusive values and what these mean for teaching and learning. One study conducted (Brantlinger, 1996, cited in Garriott, Miller and Snyder 2003) analyzed the responses of 182 trainee teachers at varying stages of their teacher preparation programme and found numerous instances of beliefs considered detrimental to effective inclusive education. Research suggests that teacher’s beliefs are important determinants and predictors of teaching practices (Brownell and Pajares, 1999, cited in Winter 2006).

Jordan et al call for trainees to be provided with opportunities to examine and foster their beliefs and learn how to address the needs of diversity in the classroom (2009). In Australia, it is reported that pre-service teachers need to be enabled to grow professionally by being challenged on their beliefs (Brownlee and Carrington, 2000). Similarly in Greece, educators are reported to hold many restricted and restrictive beliefs, which hinder the development of inclusive practices (Zoniou-Sideri and Viachou, 2006, cited in Agaliotis and Kalyva, 2011).

In Norway, de Boer et al’s literature review into attitudes towards inclusion, found teachers did not hold positive attitudes towards pupils with special educational needs (2011). Mintz (2007) explored how trainee teachers were disadvantaged by not being able to discuss the issue of inclusion prior to starting work, and expressed concern by the possibility that latent, negative attitudes only being activated once in the classroom. Sharma, Forlin and Loreman’s (2008) work examining and comparing teacher’s responses to inclusion in Australia, Hong Kong and Canada, comment however, that although policies have developed, it has not necessarily resulted in positive attitudes and practice (2008). Alghazo and Naggar Gaad’s (2004) study of teacher attitudes in the United Arab Emirates found that acceptance of including students with disabilities increased as experience (twelve years or more) was gained, with the less experienced teachers demonstrating relatively lower levels of acceptance for inclusion. This contradicts with de Boer et al’s (2011) findings in Norway and Male’s study in the UK where teachers with fewer years’ experience had more positive attitudes towards inclusion (2011).
Conclusion

My aim has been to identify the key influences on trainee’s perceptions of their abilities to meet special educational needs. The findings in the literature describe a somewhat bleak scenario of fear filled graduates approaching their inclusive classrooms with trepidation. The language used to describe how teachers feel about the prospect of working with pupils with SEN is not only negative, but seems to reinforce the idea that their apprehensions are justified, as specialised skills, experience and knowledge are essential to teach such children. Are researchers and trainers guilty of scare mongering, as thousands of trainee and newly qualified teachers qualify every year holding firm to the belief that working with pupils with SEN is altogether a different matter than teaching pupils without SEN? That in stating, and supporting their view, that different, or additional, courses are required, that the views of ‘experts’ such as SENCOs are needed in order to become specialised assents to the notion that the needs and natures of some children are so different that what is learnt in training does not apply to them. Supporting the call for better/more/different training than is otherwise provided through ITT could verify the philosophies that installed a segregated position in the first place and be seen to grant permission to trainees to accept their anxiety and not their responsibility. According to much of the literature reviewed in this paper, trainees and newly qualified teachers are correct to fear.

Trainees are reported to have negative attitudes towards pupils with learning difficulties, but this is akin with attitudes towards disability in our society in general, where despite vast improvement, much still needs to be done to address inequality and foster positivity. Confidence has been seen to relate to attitude, and some teachers, both beginning to experienced, in the UK and worldwide, are simply unwilling to accept their responsibility to teach all children. These findings would call for the direct addressing of the issue of attitudes and input on the aims and ethos of inclusive education as a matter of urgency.

This literature review has highlighted methodological considerations. Research that highlights a specific area of training can perhaps be argued as self-fulfilling, as leading questions are asked that assume that trainees have received inadequate SEN input. Furthermore, the question of feeling confident to do a job after as little as one year of training, combined with a matter of months in the classroom is perhaps an unreasonable expectation. Confidence results from a number of factors, and so it could be naive to even ask the question of whether a trainee or newly qualified teacher ‘feels confident’ about anything when so much is, at that point in time, unknown. That perhaps we already know that the answer to ‘Do you feel confident?’ is no, and not expect it to be anything else and therefore acknowledge that research that is founded on these responses is unsound. Could the converse not be argued, that initial teacher training, leading to the completion of the Q standards, is adequate, as it provides principles and assesses the initial skills of teaching and learning that can be applied to all children of all stages and abilities? Perhaps the aim of initial teacher training is just that, the laying of foundations, an introduction into the profession.
ITT is unashamedly brief, and the difficulties associated with preparation to meet special educational needs could also be replicated in other areas of the teaching role. The reasons for this lack of certainty of what to do in every circumstance with every possible learning or behavioural difficulty a pupil can experience during the course of their education are not simply down to a lack of appropriate initial training. A teacher should learn and develop over time. Perhaps it would be more illuminating to always research this issue of confidence in measured stages and track over time how confidence grows. Some researchers have highlighted the importance of establishing views from the outset of training and revisiting the respondents. In Australia, Brownlee and Carrington (2000) and American writers Jordan et al (2009) comment on a lack of research which addresses the question of how positive attitudes and inclusive teaching skills develop and change over time. Barber and Turner (2007) took this approach in their study, as they researched the issue of confidence in identifying and teaching pupils with SEN during the induction period. They identified a clear positive trend towards higher levels of confidence.

Writers comment frequently on the inadequacies they believe exist within the ITT programme regarding SEN – but are other issues referred to in other studies that ask whether ITT is insufficient in general. Being able to evidence the achievement of any of the 33 Q standards for the purposes of assessment and successful completion of a course (where it is in the best interests of all concerned that the candidate passes) are very different to the daily outworking and confirmation of these skills, and more, when in the classroom.

Data has also been presented in such a way as to promote and legitimise a culture of concern, take Garner’s study for example - if 42% of those surveyed felt that training on SEN was insufficient, then it follows that a higher figure of 58% found the input to be sufficient, yet this was not the figure that was given, as it did not support the claims of the researcher. Yet the reader is lead to accept that the interpretation of the findings, despite clearly being a lesser figure, is that training is insufficient.

The literature reviewed in this paper perhaps has not been successful in providing a clear picture as it could be seen that the situation of ITT and SEN has been completely misunderstood. Confidence to meet SEN is low, understanding, skills and experience are missing and attitudes are poor.
References


Avramidis, E, Bayliss, P and Burden, R. (1999).‘Student teacher’s attitudes towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the ordinary school’. *Teacher and teacher education, pp 277 – 293.*


Barber, A and Turner, M (2007). ‘Even while they teach, newly qualified teachers learn’, *British Journal of Special Education, 4*,(1) , NASEN pp 33 – 39,


Hallett, F. and Hallett, G. eds (2010). Transforming the role of the SENCO – Achieving the National Award for SEN Coordination. Open University Press


OFSTED (2008). *How well new teachers are prepared to teach pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities* HMSO, London.


Warnock Report (1978) DES


Abstract

The aim of this paper is to evaluate the role of Initial Teacher Training (ITT) specifically in relation to Special Educational Needs in a school which does not insist upon post holders being in possession of Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). Recent educational policy changes from June 2012 have resulted in an increasing number of state schools being able to employ people in teaching roles who do not possess formal teaching qualifications. Interestingly, literatures on this topic express concern about the quality of input beginning teachers receive on SEN.

As QTS is not required to hold a teaching position in the Independent Sector, this paper asks how unqualified teachers acquire the skills and knowledge they need to meet the learning needs of the pupils in their classrooms. For those who in are possession of QTS, what evidence links SEN input during ITT to effective classroom practice and feelings of confidence?

This paper focusses on the experiences and perspectives of three teachers in an independent school who are at varying stages in their teaching careers. Data from interviews conducted in the school where I am employed as the Head of Learning Support, was used to identify the sources of SEN knowledge and skills, and highlight areas of need that the teachers perceived they had. This paper found that the role of specialist colleagues and responding to pupils as individuals are vital to the development of teacher’s confidence to meet SEN. It also highlights a potential area of concern in the need to equip teachers through training to deal effectively with bullying of pupils who have SEN.
Introduction

From the outset my teaching placement during my PGCE all my experience has been with pupils with Special Educational Needs. I began my career teaching in Specialist Further Education, a post I held for 6 years, and after 5 years in a SENCO role in a Mainstream High School, I commenced my current position of the Head of Learning Support in an Independent Senior School.

I am passionate about Special Educational Needs and have sought to develop my practice and academic understanding. My position as head of department involves advising and mentoring my colleagues, which has influenced my selection of the topic of training for this research. Research undertaken by teachers should be focused on an area to which they are committed (Hopkins; 2002, Woods; 1996).

In 11 years’ experience in the classroom I have always been motivated to seek a greater understanding of the principles that underpin and influence my practice. In some senses I view myself as a ‘rescuer’ (Kearns, 2005) and am determined to pursue the aims, and advocate the ethos, of quality, inclusive education and inform and empower others to do the same. As a number of my new colleagues do not possess teaching qualifications, I am interested in the perceptions of the importance of ITT, with particular emphasis on providing the skills and knowledge to teach pupils with special educational needs. This paper considers if completing Initial Teacher Training does lead to confidence meeting the needs of all pupils and builds further on the work of RP1, a literature review on the views of NQTs (Newly Qualified Teachers) about SEN input during their training. I am in my second role as the lead practitioner for SEN in a mainstream school and part of my responsibilities involve advising colleagues of best practice, consulting about individual pupils and leading INSET training sessions. This paper aims to explore further about what is already known and the source of that knowledge.
Learning from the literatures

Consulting the literature provides both a commentary on and a stimulus to study (Woods, 1996). This section will briefly outline the findings from the literatures that focus on the effectiveness of Initial Teacher Training from a Special Educational Needs perspective.

Since 1984, training providers have been required to include a Special Educational Needs element in their ITT programs (Mittler, 1992) but has not been specifically addressed in initial teacher training since 1992 (OFSTED, 2009). Beginning teachers are to be provided with basic knowledge and skills regarding SEN (Winter 2006). As there is no explicit guidance on delivery and content, input varies between Higher Education Institutions (Winter, 2006). The decision of how much time, resources and attention are given over to SEN input during training lies with individual institutions, but the competence model of QTS remains a constant (Mroz, 2012).

ITT has been a key issue in government educational policy since the late 1980’s (Haggarty and Postlethwaite, 2012) and a location for an ideological struggle between the government and those have an interest teacher’s professional formation (Furlong et al, 2000). Perceiving teaching as a science, rather than an art (Woods, 1996) observes the process of becoming a teacher as the result of demonstrating set competences, rather than recognising the complexity of the teaching situation;

at best [it] represents a severely limited vision of teaching, and at worst actually contradicts much of what is, potentially at least, valuable in the experience of teaching and learning

(Stevens, 2010, cited in Mroz; 2012, p311).

I established in my literature review (Sarginson, 2012) that coverage of special educational needs content during initial teacher training has been consistently regarded as inadequate by a range of stakeholders. Researchers (Mittler, 1992; Garner, 2001) school inspectorate (OFSTED, 2006; OFSTED 2009) parliament (House of Commons, 2010) and trainee and newly qualified teachers themselves (Brownlee and Carrington, 2000; Lawson and Nash, 2008; Winter, 2006) reinforce the recurrent theme of fundamental flaws in the system of teacher training, which effected all pupils, not only those with identified learning needs. RP1 also established that despite the identification of significant weaknesses, the repeated calls for change from OFSTED and NQTs alike continued to be disregarded by policy makers - something which Hodkinson (2009) terms ‘a Groundhog Day’.

The literatures reviewed in RP1 asked persistent questions of the effectiveness of ITT with regards to special educational needs.
In 1996 a report to the DfEE found that time allocated to SEN training was ‘minimal’ (SENTC, 1996, p19 cited in Garner, 1996) 10 years later Winter calculated that trainees received up to 10 hours of training on SEN issues (Winter; 2006). Most NQTs feel they do not have the skills required to teach pupils with special educational needs (Garner, 1996; Hodkinson (2009); TDA 2007b; cited in Moran, 2007; Winter; 2006). The newly qualified teachers interviewed by Garner (1996) described the SEN input during their training as ‘something of a lottery’, while over 50% of those interviewed by Dew-Hughes and Brayton (1997) believed their training had not prepared them for meeting special needs in the classroom. The prevailing view of beginning teachers featured in the research cited in RP 1 was that source of their lack of confidence was inadequate training.

The review of the literature in RP1 also linked with the question of what training is effective to prepare teachers to meet pupil's special educational needs. In 2010, recommendations made in the Salt Review called for higher quality CPD in SEN (DCSF, 2010, page 5). Sankey (2001) feels that the idea that it is even possible for teachers to be properly prepared for the teaching role has been ‘naively assumed’ (from Brookes, 2005, p48). The question of the existence of specialist pedagogic knowledge specific to teaching pupils with SEN was acknowledged by Norwich (2005) and Davis and Florian (2004).

There are other factors that may influence a beginning teacher's perception of their ability to teach pupils with special educational needs. The amount of experience working with pupils with SEN and the personal viewpoint of the teacher was considered to be important contributors. Attitudes towards the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs in mainstream educational settings were interwoven with the value of and perceived need for specific training. Some researchers felt that teachers should be provided the opportunity to explore conceptual and pedagogical principles that underpin effective practice with pupils with SEN (Bishop and Jones, 2002; Garner 1996; Golder, Norwich and Bayliss, 2005; Hodkinson, 2009); Reynolds, 2001 and Robertson, 1999).

The literatures reviewed for my first paper focussed on the area of ITT and QTS and did not consider the perceptions of those who were in a teaching role but not trained. For the purpose of this paper, I will include the views of an experienced, practising teacher who does not have QTS and compare his comments with the literatures on the role of training.
Policy context

Policy changes have continued to impact upon the way, and more recently if, teachers are trained. The previous labour government used the phrase that ‘Every teacher is to be a teacher of children with SEN’, and recognized that teachers had to be equipped with the skills to achieve this aim (Lamb; 2007, 361, cited in Hodkinson, 2009). A report written in 2007 expressed an intention to make teaching a Master’s level profession (DCSF 2007, from Haggarty and Postlethwaite, 2012, p243). Training was expected to improve the quality of teachers, and consequently raise the profession’s status (DfE, 2010, p20, from Clarke and Pye (2012, p3).

The professional standards for Qualified Teacher Status (QTS) delivered through Initial Teacher Training (ITT) and are described as ‘a formal set of skills and qualities required to be an effective teacher’ (online source). Of the 33 standards, 3 relate specifically to Special Educational Needs (Q18, Q19 and Q20 – see appendix) which are designed to ensure that all newly qualified teachers understand their responsibilities under the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (revised as DfES, 2001).

However, the criterion for entry into teaching has been increasingly relaxed by a range of Government educational initiatives such as the creation of Free Schools and Academies.

June 2012 marked a significant shift in the approach to the training of teachers, when Secretary of State, Michael Gove, announced that any level of qualification, or none, could provide admittance into a teaching role in a Free School or Academy. The move was made sharply away from QTS being a prerequisite to teach, to a position where the possession of a degree and/or teachable experiences and knowledge were sufficient to be appointed as a teacher. An unqualified teacher in a teaching role is not an unfamiliar, or indeed an alarming, occurrence in many schools across the UK. Free Schools and Academies are now coming in line with Independent Schools, who have always refuted the requirement of QTS to be able to teach. Independent schools have centuries of experience providing education for children, delivered by a varied staff base of those with and without QTS, and being paid often substantial sums in tuition fees by parents for that education. Gove’s move away from the requirement of QTS parallels the stance taken by Independent schools that teaching proficiency results from a range of sources. Autonomy to select the skills and qualities deemed important by the school, rather than being governed by the insistence upon having QTS, can now being realised in non-fee paying establishments. Independent schools may remain impervious to the Government’s shift in policy, whilst increasing numbers of schools who have opted for academy or free school status find themselves free to employ people who have not completed any form of teacher training.
METHODOLOGY

As it is now the case that increasing number of people can be teachers without achieving QTS, I wanted to understand more about where teacher’s knowledge and understanding of special educational needs comes from, and consider whether the possession of QTS automatically ensures that teachers are equipped to meet the needs of all the pupils in their classes.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, the following research questions where developed:

1. How do those in a teaching role gain and use the information they need to understand and meet the special educational needs of the pupils in their classes?

2. For those teachers who have, or are working towards, QTS, how has the training they have received informed their practice regarding special educational needs? What training have those without any ITT had on this matter and how effective has it been?

3. What help and support do teachers feel they need to better meet the special educational needs of the pupils in their classes?

Approach

There are a number of approaches one could take to explore and measure the effectiveness of teachers and the training they have received. This study's focus is to gauge an understanding of teacher’s experience of training, to identify any other sources of input regarding special educational needs and to relate this to their perceptions of their practice.

This study looks at 3 teacher’s attitudes and beliefs, their “world of human experience” (Cohen and Manion, 1994, p 36), with the primary aim of developing themes from the data they provide (Creswell, 2003, page 18). A constructivist case study approach allows participants to tell their stories and share their perspectives as distinct individuals.

Design

Research design is governed by the notion of ‘fitness for purpose’ (Cohen and Manion; 1994, page 78). In order to gain insight into individual perspectives, individual consultations must occur. As I am focussing on the role and importance of training for teachers to meet pupils’ special educational needs, I have to identify a site and cases where people who have not been formally trained are permitted to teach alongside those who have QTS. Therefore I have located my research in the independent school where I am currently employed.
This is an interesting site in which I expect to find a range of views and experiences on the importance of training and its applicability to teaching pupils with SEN. The pupil population in the senior school are aged from 13 – 19 and offers boarding and day places (the majority of pupils board). 13% of the pupil population in the senior school has an identified special educational need which requires them to have concessions provided in exams, with the most common type of SEN experienced by the pupils being SpLD (Dyslexia). There are single figures of pupils with Asperger's Syndrome and Sensory impairment (hearing). There are currently no statemented pupils (although there have been until recently; 2 pupils left last year, 1 with a statement of SEN for physical disabilities, 1 for SpLD). The matter of funding provided by local education authorities for private education, in conjunction with the level of need this selective school can accommodate may be a factor.

There is a preparatory department in the same town which acts as the main feeder for the senior school and is run by a separate Head Teacher. There are 2 separate Heads of Learning Support. In their interview, 1 of the participants refers to mostly to pupils in the junior school, where the diagnosed condition of ADHD is mentioned.

Sample

I identified 3 colleagues who were each at distinct points in their careers - a trainee, Zoe, an unqualified teacher Ciaran and a qualified teacher Susan. They were all employed as full time teachers primarily in the senior school. I approached these 3 colleagues separately and invited them to participate in the study. Zoe was the only trainee teacher on the staff team, and I thought it was crucial to gain an insight into training as it was taking place in real time. I thought it was particularly interesting that Ciaran had completed Doctoral studies but not ITT, and felt this was worth further investigation. As well as the stage they were at professionally, I chose each of these colleagues because of the positive working relationship that existed with each of the participants and I, which provided a foundation of trust that Cohen and Manion (1994) recommend (page 69). Ciaran was newly appointed, as was I, which caused us to form a relationship quickly, and his interest in academic research caused him to be a willing participant in my study. Susan was allocated to me as my mentor in my first year at the school and was someone who was supporting me in my role as Head of Learning Support, and as my line manager encouraging my continued professional development through my work on the Doctorate in Education.

Data generation

A range of methods are available to those carrying out qualitative work. I opted for a single set of individual interviews, which I conducted with each of the participants. Interviews are described as a "key technique" in qualitative work (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989, p79) and widely used as a method of data collection particularly in educational research (Anderson, 1990, p22).
I deemed that talking to teachers about their training and practice was an individual matter. I felt that the exploration of issues surrounding their perceptions of successful and unsuccessful practice with pupils with SEN was a particularly private subject – admitting to 1 person in an interview setting about a negative experience may be difficult, especially when the interviewer is the lead professional for SEN and as such may form a judgement. I aimed to offer limited comment about both the negative and positive examples from the classroom when they were being given.

Observations were also considered as a method of data collection for the questions about practice, but as the focus was on teacher's perceptions I felt this could not be established by my watching, recording and assessing what I believed to be their competency in the classroom. For similar reasons I also decided against providing the participants with scenario based questions, where the pursuit of a correct answer may prevent a truthful response from being given. The purpose of the interviews was to enable the participants to share their perceptions as honestly and openly as possible.

Speaking to my colleagues on a 1:1 basis was favoured, rather than together in a focus group, or group interview, to explore individual perceptions and allow interviewees to converse freely without being influenced by other colleagues. There is generally not a custom of openly sharing our failures, or indeed our successes in the classroom, with one another. Colleagues at different stages of their careers gathered together may cause individuals to feel intimidated as different issues emerge at different times, with different meaning and value attached – it is likely that what the beginning teacher Zoe may struggle with or feel proud of at this stage, may be overlooked or dismissed by more experienced colleagues such as Ciaran and Susan. Individual interviews could have been followed up with a group session to explore themes together and identify if a consensus can be reached that identifies what teachers feel they need to better understand and meet SEN. It may be an area for further development if groups could be identified to participate together, rather than 3 individuals who were selected on account of their differences. Increasing the sample to have more than 1 beginning, 1 unqualified and 1 qualified teacher to further explore the ideas raised could help to establish whether needs change as experience grows and if having QTS or not results in similar outcomes that are consistent across a larger number of people in the same category.

Different roles carry different levels of authority and the ‘voice’ of the beginning teacher in particular is not heard as much (or at all) in group settings with the other members of the teaching staff in comparison to head of department Ciaran or the head of 3 year groups, Susan.

Data collection consisted of 3 individual semi structured interviews which took place in December 2012 and January 2013. A formal interview schedule is included in the Appendix.
Data analysis

Hitchcock and Hughes (1996) comment that the process of initial analysis begins during data collection (page 73). As the interviews took place, I was engaged in the discussion and found comments made interesting. Adopting a semi structured approach meant that I could ask for further clarification or development of points where I felt they would benefit the research.

I began by firstly analysing each individual interview during the transcription process. I identified emerging themes as Schutt (2012) describes as “a process of discovery” (page 322). From the review of the literatures, I was aware that a number of themes already existed in the field, namely, a widely held view of the inadequacy of ITT to meet SEN, the positive influence of colleagues such as the SENCO and the importance of gaining increasing amounts of experience working with pupils who have SEN to cause feelings of confidence to grow. I was interested to observe if other ideas such as the role of CPD and the effect of personal experience of SEN emerged. Although the interview questions did not address this directly, I also wanted to investigate if the participants had awareness of wider issues concerning the ethical and moral matter of inclusion that they referred to explicitly, or I deemed they alluded to in their comments.

The research relies on the participants' views of the situation being studied (Creswell, 2003, page 8), rather than mine, yet I am required to use my skills of interpretation and analysis to couple their thoughts to the literatures. Schutt (2012) deems that “good qualitative data analyses are distinguished by their focus on the interrelated aspects of the case” (p322). I discovered a number of key differences and similarities between the 3 participants which I will explore in my findings chapter.

The interviews were written up as case studies. I identified any common areas of good practice that the participants referred to and what, if any, specific special educational needs were stated as either being confidently taught or that present a challenge.

Ethics

I have a responsibility to my colleagues and the research community (Cohen and Manion; 1994, page 74) and took steps to ensure that this research was conducted ethically.

Informed consent

I followed the guidance of Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) by explaining the aims and objectives of the research (p201) in a document provided in advance, which is included in the Appendix. This ensured that there was also a clear understanding of how the data generated from our discussions would be used (Anderson, 1990 p24).
Respect for the individual

Teaching is described as “a highly personal process, were feelings enter strongly into the teacher’s repertoire” (Nias, 1989, from Woods, 1996, p55). Therefore any work which questions and potentially challenges someone’s level of skill and knowledge carries risk. Using interviews relies heavily on the ability of the interviewer to communicate effectively and build a relationship of trust with their subjects. This relationship carries certain rights, obligations, and responsibilities (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1989, p200). It was made clear that participants were free to choose whether or not to respond to the interview questions and could stop or pause the interview at any time should they feel uncomfortable. I have an obligation to my colleagues to provide a safe environment and ensure their well-being, reputation and allow for further research to be conducted, behave ethically, adhere to procedures, protect anonymity (Cohen and Manion; 1994, page 75). When asking participants to share from their personal experiences in the classroom, or as an individual, there may be difficult memories or circumstances that come to mind that need to be acknowledged.

My role in school – positioning

It is important to note that research is always a construction as researchers must put their own selves into the research and interpret the data (Woods, 1996, p54). As an insider, investigating matters directly linked to my professional role, it is important to acknowledge the impact of personal view and opinion. Realities are constructed by interpretations of the text and are individual to that researcher (Schutt 2012, page 321). I recognise the possible impact of my background and experiences, and my current role, on the research. From my reading of the literatures and my experience of ITT (particularly as someone who completed a PGCE in post compulsory education, who gained QTS by an assessment only route 9 years into my teaching career) I hold assumptions about the quality of training that I expect to find when speaking to colleagues.

In addition, as the lead practioner for SEN in school, my commitmment to pupils and my personal standpoint on the importance of good teaching for pupils with SEN is well known. Advocating this view is part of my role and therefore I am unable, if I wanted to, to conceal my views on an issue I am passionate about. This may influence the levels of honesty expressed, if a participant feels negatively about pupils with SEN, or does not want to admit to what they don’t know or skills they don’t have.

My role in school – practising

As a middle manager, I have departmental responsibilities whilst also coming under the management of senior leaders. At the time of conducting this research I had recently lead a school INSET training session on the topic of Dyslexia for over 45 teachers. It is expected that I have an understanding of best practice for pupils with SEN in order to hold a position to influence and educate my colleagues.
Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) comment that “Teacher researchers ….have values, attitudes…and often firmly held opinions on what constitutes ‘good teaching’ (p89). My role requires me to be confident in this matter. It is important to plan my questions and approach to minimise the opportunity for my colleagues to tailor their answers to what they may think I want to hear as the Head of Learning Support, and a researcher. This could be particularly important in the case of the beginning teacher Zoe. One section of the interview required the participants recall positive and negative instances relating to pupils with Special Educational Needs in their own teaching. Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) point out that participants may want to present a positive self-image which will influence their replies and accounts (p103). I opted for this approach, rather than scenario-based questioning, as I felt this would imply that there was a ‘correct’ way to respond that I would judge. It may still present difficulties for teachers to admit to being unsuccessful in their role.

This is also a consideration in terms of my position in relation to Susan, as she is my line manager. She has a very good understanding of my areas of responsibility. I meet with Susan regularly, where she directs elements of my role and suggests specific areas of focus to meet the school’s priorities. Some of the questions may provoke a response which points to my duties as Head of Learning Support, which I may or may not be fulfilling adequately. This again has potential for the lines of practitioner and researcher to become blurred as it could impact on my analysis of the data and the implications of the findings for me as a practitioner, particularly anything that relates directly to what the research participants consider to be my role.

To mitigate these problems, I aimed to create an environment where a frank sharing of views was possible so honest feedback was given, and to prepare myself to tailor my reaction to anything that may be said that I could perceive as being critical. As someone who takes great pride in their work I acknowledge that this may be difficult. The role and value of the person in a lead position for SEN has been a reoccurring and interesting theme in the literatures, as the reliance on such colleagues may be understood as facilitating dependence on an other, rather than taking responsibility for all the pupils in an individual teacher’s class. How much colleagues expect from such people could vary and indicate something of that individual’s perception of their duty to pupils with special educational needs.

Hitchcock and Hughes (1989) also comment that the age of the teacher researcher will influence the nature of the interactions (p89). I am younger than Susan and Ciaran, and older than Zoe. I felt that this was not a factor in my interactions due to the positive relationships I had with each of the participants, but could have been had I selected participants randomly, from those who volunteered, or approached those above me in the school hierarchy.
Confidentiality

It is recommended that information could lead others to identify the subject or subjects involved is eliminated (Cohen and Manion; 1994, p75; Hitchcock and Hughes; 1989, p201). Some of the interview questions resulted in responses being given that referred to specific pupils and colleagues of the school or previous schools the participants have taught in. In addition to the participant’s names being changed, any past or present pupils or colleagues had their identities protected. Recordings from the interviews were held on a digital device that was accessed only by me and would be deleted following the writing up and acceptance of this paper by the university.

The issue of anonymity takes on an additional significance when the findings of this research could influence the way the school is perceived in the marketplace. In order to ensure anonymity, no further information regarding the location of the school in the UK, tuition fees or the gender of senior leaders will be provided.

Findings

In this section I will present my findings participant-by-participant in a case report which begins with a brief pen picture. This will be followed by comments relating to the format and perceived value of training received. Each participant has provided examples of positive and negative experiences teaching pupils with SEN. The findings will close with the participant’s views on what further help and support they feel they need to meet pupils’ special educational needs.

I will provide direct quotes from the interview questions and responses, and describe the context for comments where necessary. There are variations in terms of the participant’s perspectives, but wherever possible I will present the issues covered in the same order to provide consistency, and aid with forming an understanding of areas of similarity and variance.

1. The beginning teacher - Zoe - “Oh God, I hope I’m doing it right’

Zoe* is 22 and a former pupil of the school. She is a beginning teacher, currently enrolled on a distance learning Post Graduate Certificate in Education where she attends University for 3 days every half term. She specialises in Geography and Physical Education, which she teaches in both the preparatory department and senior school. Zoe is in her first year as a teacher in this school, after a gap year gaining teaching experience as a volunteer in another Independent boarding school in the county.
I was interested in understanding her perspective on the training she was currently receiving and that linked to her practice with pupils with special educational needs. The decision made by the school to allow Zoe to take full responsibility for classes from September meant that she had limited opportunities to learn about SEN prior to the start of term. Zoe had been teaching classes independently for 2 months before she received any input, which she acknowledged as problematic.

I think I could have done with more in September as soon as I started or going to Nottingham before the summer maybe even if just for a week and be told the basics – how to plan a lesson, how to sort of teach this, how to you know put it across to the pupils to cater for everybody’s needs instead of me trying to think ‘right ok, I think this is right’.

Zoe made reference to staff INSET training that took place in October, and the input from her distance learning course on the topic of SEN provided in November.

The only sort of lessons or things I’ve had on Special Educational Needs was the staff INSET that we had at school which was based on Dyslexia, …which was really useful for me because I’ve never had guidance or anything really. Most of my knowledge has come from the couple of days’ worth of lectures at Nottingham, that definitely helped me to understand pupils with special educational needs and gave me more of an insight into how they learn and how they find it difficult to learn, compared to some of the other pupils.

Me: How useful do you feel that was?

Really useful, because it covered everything, every aspect that you needed to know… and they gave us loads of really useful worksheets we could actually do ourselves. ……That was really useful because we got told about that in the INSET and then repeated at Nottingham, so I’m like ‘I’ve heard that before’. I didn’t have a clue until I started.

Zoe felt that regular opportunities to learn were important, and she focussed on the practical aspects of teaching, rather than theoretical or attitudinal:

I think we should have more INSETS…..frequently, to refresh your mind, because the one you did on Dyslexia I found really useful especially obviously I’d never heard of anything like that before, but I think if we have them every half term or so, just on something different – I think that would be really useful for me, I think other teachers would find that useful as well."

Zoe also alluded to the negativity surrounding INSET. At this school, INSET sessions take place 7.30pm – 9pm, which may account for some of the perceived lack of enthusiasm and not be specific to the subject of SEN:

….if it’s an INSET that’s compulsory to attend, people , if even people think ‘oh great’ then actually they’ll think ‘oh yeah that’s actually really useful’ and they will take note.

Understanding the perspective of the pupil was something that Zoe commented on as being particularly useful.

It was useful the way they (Nottingham) gave us all stuff to keep as well and how we can take part in the activities, to put ourselves in their shoes really. From what I learnt from the couple of days I had in some special educational needs pupils could feel left out or they might try and seclude themselves...
…certain pupils if you put them on the spot they might become uncomfortable which is when they might panic and think ‘oh God!’

Zoe referred to accessing support from more experienced colleagues and expressed how she saw her responsibility to seek out help when feeling unconfident, particularly when she first started:

I’d done pretty much 6 weeks teaching when I was thinking ‘oh I hope I’m doing this right’ - I had a couple of brief chats with you….but I could have probably done with more, but maybe that’s for me to go and find someone and say ‘look, is this right?’ whereas I probably only half-heartedly did that.

As she also teaches in the prep school, Zoe also made reference to a new appointment and the expectation of advice from her:

…with the new head of learning support in the junior school coming as well I think she’d be able to help me quite a lot.

Although she was someone pursuing a professional qualification, there was not an assumption that this was necessary. Zoe changed her mind during the process of the interview about the value that being a qualified teacher had:

…if you have the qualifications it’s there to back you up I suppose, but I don’t think it’s massively important.

Less than 1 minute later, she added:

Being at Uni and gaining the qualification they broke everything down for you so it was like this is how you plan a lesson, this is how you cater for everybody, whereas if I had just come in without any sort of qualification I’m not sure how you would know how to do all of that, so yeah actually I think I’ll change my mind and agree that you do need a qualification (Laughing).

It was interesting that Zoe said that she would ‘agree’, which seemed to imply her opinion was that I was in support of ITT. I had not given her any information about my teacher training and qualifications.

Zoe made reference to personal circumstances that influenced her approach to pupils with SEN that was not part of a taught course:

…when my brother was little he had Epilepsy quite bad so I think I understand because he struggled a lot when he was at school. He had to have a lot of extra lessons and so I think I understand more how people do struggle, whereas if you’ve never really had or seen or know someone close to you like that, then you might not understand it as much maybe. I think I have the patience for those children that perhaps don’t pick it up just like that.

Zoe described an example of her teaching that she perceived to demonstrate her good practice with pupils with SEN. She referred to a year 8 pupil with a diagnosis of ADHD, who she was initially bemused by;
I probably wasn’t entirely sure what to do or how to react when someone does a roly poly into the middle of the lesson you think ‘oh my goodness’ (laughing)

She described the steps she took to manage the classroom situation, whilst not singling out this individual:

By just doing a permanent seating plan for everybody he didn’t feel like he was being treated differently to anybody else.

Zoe described how she used positive reinforcement;

Using a lot of praise and rewards where he does something well - if he contributes a lot to the lesson I will praise him.

and connecting with him on an individual level;

I’ve took time getting to know him and what he’s interested in.

Zoe acknowledged that her decision to give this pupil responsibility when off site was not without its risks, but she was pleased with the outcome:

We went on a year 8 field trip.. I made Oliver the team leader.. It could have gone either way.. but he was really good at that.

Zoe’s example of a situation where she didn’t feel confident that she’d understood and met a pupil’s special educational needs was in relation to a year 7 boy with Dyslexia who had been subject to peer group bullying:

Some of the other boys do try and torment him just to get a reaction, because they know how he will react. He came up to me at the end of the lesson and he said ‘Can I talk to you’ and I said ‘Of course you can’ and he said that the 2 boys behind him had been throwing things at him, which I hadn’t seen because he was sat towards the back of the classroom.

Zoe made the link between the example she gave when she did not feel confident about meeting the special educational needs of a pupil in her class, with the need to seek further help and support;

It’s dealing with those that pick on him before they have chance to, that’s one thing to be discussed with my mentor.

Zoe described how the same pupil was inclined to isolate himself, and the steps she has taken to address it:

He still goes and sits on his own…so, but then I said ‘Callum, come and join us’ and he comes over, it’s like he likes to be asked to be part of the group.

For Zoe, the link between training and classroom practice was clear. On a distance learning ITT course, 2 days on the residential weekend sessions were given over to the topic of SEN. Zoe reflected that this showed the value of this matter to the trainers.
We had a whole 2 day period which was just on Special Educational Needs so they clearly know that it’s really important.

Throughout her interview, Zoe referred frequently to technical knowledge which she attributes to her university course and INSET session, but she makes other comments that signify a deeper understanding of emotional factors connected to teaching pupils with SEN that have not been explicitly taught. Having a sibling who experienced difficulties learning may have resulted in the empathy demonstrated by the steps Zoe took to include particularly vulnerable pupils. Zoe seemed to have some awareness of this being a source of her perspective but she did not seem to credit it as knowledge.

1. The unqualified teacher – Ciaran – “It wasn’t that I didn’t need training, it was just a pragmatic way to begin a new career.”

Ciaran* has a Doctorate in English Literature and lectured at University for both under and post graduate students. Ciaran has been employed as a school teacher for 9 years and is the Head of English. He does not have Qualified Teacher Status. Ciaran originally intended to remain in Higher Education as a lecturer and continue researching and publishing. Financial factors caused him to pursue positions in independent schools:

I knew that you didn’t necessarily have to have a teaching qualification to go and teach in the independent sector.

He also applied for ITT programmes

….as it turned out, my application to the school was the one that came back quickest.

Ciaran was prepared to complete further study, despite the time and cost implications:

I would have gone off and done a PGCE, it was the prospect of another year of study and another year of debt essentially and I’d spent 8 years already in Higher Education.

Ciaran held his previous teaching post in an independent boarding school for 9 years, during which he was not required to complete any formal teacher training. Ciaran was aware, however, that many independent schools were supportive of teachers becoming qualified, including his current school:

I think it is more likely that if you come into teaching from a non-traditional background without a formal qualification that they do mentor you through the graduate teacher programme as they do here, and that’s regardless of whether or not you’ve come out of industry or come out of university with a PhD.
Ciaran’s reflections on the issue of ITT were based on what he observed from colleagues on a training programme, rather than his own direct experience. In his previous school he had worked closely with beginning teachers. By supporting trainees fulfil the criteria for Qualified Teacher Status, Ciaran increased his understanding of the process of ITT:

*Ironically, having not studied for a formal teaching qualification, I have been involved in the mentoring capacity for those who are moving towards Qualified Teacher Status and spent 2 years as the subject mentor for somebody doing a GTP in English. A lot of what I have gained is effectively from the other side, and whilst mentoring younger colleagues into teaching I have learned vicariously many of the things that they have, but obviously that isn’t the same as having done it oneself.*

Holding line management for the SENCO resulted in Ciaran gaining an insight into SEN that he may not have otherwise had:

*I was line manager to the SENCO in my previous place, so we did work very closely within the department. A lot of whatever understanding, however imperfect that it may be that I have received, has been received vicariously from colleagues - it is imperfect and incomplete, but that doesn’t necessarily cause me anxiety because that’s the nature of knowledge and understanding anyway.*

Ciaran expressed value in ITT and considered it to be an introduction to the profession:

*I’m very conscious of the fact that I don’t have a formal teaching qualification. They’re there for reason. Everything that you’d conceivably do as part of a PGCE is there to enable you to teach, they are a starting position from where awareness and understanding can truly grow. By virtue of not being formally and professionally delivered in terms of training it is always going to be amateur to a degree and I would say that I have awareness, rather than true understanding.*

Ciaran referred to opportunities to learn from specialist colleague. Ciaran mentioned a SENCO in his previous school who was involved in academic writing:

*Graham was the first SENCO I worked with who has published in the field, working with somebody who was actively researching and publishing in the field and cascading in small, but significant, ways was of great benefit.*

Ciaran described an example of his teaching that he perceived to demonstrate his good practice with pupils with SEN. He referred to teaching pupils with Visual Impairments and how he differentiated his approaches:

*I was very conscious of what was being written on the board and delivered in terms of size of font. With my resources I had to blow everything up significantly larger....just making it bigger, clear, simpler in terms of whatever the instruction were, and hoping that that would generate some positive outcomes.*

Ciaran’s example of a situation where he didn’t feel confident that he’d understood and met a pupil’s special educational needs was in relation to a pupil who was diagnosed with Asperger’s Syndrome and Dyslexia.
I never really felt like I remotely understood what he was going through.

Ciaran described an example of sensory overload, a lack of support from school and peer group bullying:

…it was my first term in teaching - whatever it was I tried or intended on doing in that lesson was just gone because there was thunder and lightning outside, and it obviously caused him an enormous amount of distress. There wasn’t anybody in the corridors either side of me to get some help - … it took 5 or 10 minutes to get the deputy head - the unfriendly colleagues in his class decided to bait him – when I got back to the classroom he was like a jellyfish..just shaking - it caused him profound distress.

The same pupil often exhibited non-compliant behaviours, which Ciaran felt he was unable to address:

On certain days he would just fold his arms, he wouldn’t pick up the pen and wouldn’t write his name – how do you overcome where someone is not willing to write their name? You can’t teach because somebody won’t play ball – to be honest if it happened now I wouldn’t know what to do..

Ciaran questioned the placement of the school for this pupil:

I didn’t necessarily think that the last school was the right place for him..

Me: What help and support do you think could help you understand and meet pupil’s special educational needs?

Ciaran was keen for the chance to receive specific training on SEN:

I have never been on any INSET outside of school on special educational needs. It would be good to have clinics or workshops as part of termly INSET but I’m previously used to INSET being a day of bang, bang, bang, a day’s programme and it’s just there and you sit there, but periodic and timely specific INSET would be useful. I’m not sure of you could call it a tool box, but like the leaflet that you gave everybody after the INSET which unfortunately I wasn’t here for – short documents like that have effectively have educational special needs ‘first aid’ thing that you can pick up and absorb and then take into the learning environment with a relative degree of ease.

However, Ciaran felt that adopting strategies was affected by time and was cynical about their use:

Whilst we’re all conscious of the need to differentiate, given workloads, it’s often the 1 thing that you don’t do as perhaps as studiously as you should or meant to - unless you’re being inspected.

Ciaran acknowledged the importance of getting to know pupils, as well as receiving information about special educational needs:

There’s one thing knowing on paper what a specific learning issues is and then actually seeing someone with it and talking to them about the fact that the words don’t stay still…
2. The qualified teacher – Susan – “I still think I’ve learnt the most from working with fantastic colleagues.”

Susan* is an English graduate, who has been second in Department (English), and a SENCO in a previous school (state). Susan is the Director of Middle School Studies, the Head of English as an additional language, and the line manager for Special Educational Needs. She has been teaching for 30 years. She has a degree, QTS and a Post Graduate certificate. I asked Susan for her views on the ITT that she received:

_In my PGCE the most useful bit was the bit in schools._

Susan found teaching placements gaining experience in school to be valuable, but she did not cite anything specific to the matter of SEN during ITT in her interview. She admitted some initial feelings of negativity towards theoretical input and spoke about general techniques in terms of being a reflective practitioner, a skill that she utilises over 3 decades on:

_Looking back I’m glad I did it, because some of the theory that you were taught at the time seemed like it was a little bit of a waste of time, but probably I’ve pulled on some of that recently._

Susan viewed ITT as an introduction to the profession, and referred to the processes of reflection and evaluation, which she accredits to ITT:

_I think because it gave you the basis you know, what are you trying to achieve in the classroom, that you actually think about that, I think that’s quite a good thing._

Susan draws a distinction between those who have and have not been trained:

_I think I notice a difference with people who haven’t been through something which has made them reflect on what they’re doing in the classroom. I think what it has done is to give me the opportunity to reflect on what you’re doing in the classroom and a means of doing that so that even now 30 years on, I get to the end of the lesson and if it was a good lesson or a bad lesson the tools of analysis that I learnt on the PGCE I am still able to apply._

Susan described how she used the knowledge gained on ITT to advise others in her role as a senior leader:

_When they come to me and say as someone in a management position, ‘This was a disaster, I’m really struggling with this class’ some of the things I’ve learnt through my Initial Teacher Training I still use alongside a great deal of experience (laughing)._

Me: _How important do you feel that having a formal teaching qualification is?_

_I think personally and professionally it’s not important at all._

Susan described the continual professional development she had completed:
I did an Advanced Diploma in Special Education further on in my career when I was thinking of making a sideways step into special needs. I then went onto become the head of special needs, with the vain attempt that I might do a Masters. The advanced diploma I did I thought was excellent... because it...gave me a lot of background into an area that I was by then very interested in, and going on to be a SENCO it helped me enormously in dealing with parents and understanding where they were coming from for example, and why processes that were in place, were in place.

Susan made reference to the day to day practice of internal and external SEN specialists, which she rated highly:

*I still think I’ve learnt the most from working with fantastic colleagues who know their stuff - you watch them in operation with a child, or the way they talk and explain things about the needs of that child you learn a whole new thing every time you meet them. If you get a really good occupational therapist or a really good doctor or a really good language therapist, you can learn something new every time. Every time I meet a new professional, I learn something new about ways forward.*

Despite being the most qualified and experienced teacher from the 3 participants interviewed, Susan’s view of her knowledge was surprising to me:

*Me:* How would you describe your knowledge of special educational needs?

*Patchy!*

*Really?*

*Because I think that I’ve got obviously the qualifications and they were good and they looked at it from the parent’s point of view, and how the history of special needs has developed. But every time I meet a new child with a new set of needs I learn something new...every time you meet an individual there’s something more to learn.*

Susan made reference to working with people with disabilities from an early age that influenced her approach to pupils with SEN that was not part of a taught course:

*I taught adult literacy when I was a student, and I worked with handicapped children as a teenager so I’ve always had on going, but it really helped crystallise some of my desire to go down a special needs route eventually...*

Susan described an example of her teaching that she perceived to demonstrate her good practice with pupils with SEN. She referred to teaching a pupil with Dyslexia how to use punctuation:

*I taught Jack English last year and he managed to construct an essay that had full stops in it, having written for 2 years without full stops (laughing) he finally read it allowed and put the full stops in without me saying anything. It was great when he finally started doing that for himself ...*

Susan’s example of a situation where she didn’t feel confident that she’d understood and met a pupil’s special educational needs was in relation to another pupil with Dyslexia.

*In the same class, a boy who just never quite went along with it - he was the only one that failed in my English language class last year.*

Susan described a lack of response to the differentiated teaching strategies she tried.
So you would say to him ‘we’re going to do this’ and you’d explain it and you’d give him a structure, he would then either do something completely different, or not to do it at all, or write something very poor because he’d done it in about 2 minutes flat – he never got the idea that this was designed to help him and support him…..despite trying everything – cajoling, threatening, (laughing ) nothing made any difference to this boy…I tried getting him to write, I tried getting him to type, getting him to speak, nothing I tried made any difference to his output. He had some sort of Dyslexic assessment but that really wasn’t a major part, he was just very uninterested – he wanted every short cut…. – he would just stare into space given the choice…the rest would be beavering away happily, he would sit and stare into space.

Susan valued the importance of concise information and seeing each pupil as an individual:

Me: What other help and support do you think could help you understand and meet pupil’s special educational needs?

I think teachers need to know what the difficulties are because I think a lot of teachers, it’s very easy to fall into the trap, even for me who has had a lot of training, to see them as a class and forgetting that they are individuals with individual needs within that class ….they need advice on different strategies they can try to help a child overcome those. …the more information you have on a child, without it being so much that it’s unwieldy..

Susan developed the idea of strategies further to suggest that teachers may experience an element of conflict when wanting to differentiate their approaches to pupils with special educational needs:

I think we all need to have the confidence to say to a child, ‘if you only write 2 paragraphs but you put full stops all the way through, despite the fact that I’m telling everyone else that they’ve got the write 2 sides, that’s fine’.

Themes

In this section I will highlight the themes I have identified as arising from the case studies, and link with some of the findings in the literature. I will begin with identifying the sources of special needs knowledge other than ITT cited by the participants – CPD, Specialist SEN input and experience with pupils. This will be followed by a summary of the themes arising from the examples of classroom practice and what help and support the participants requested.

Sources of SEN knowledge
Continual Professional Development

- **Specialised Courses**

There has been a gradual move to reallocate the majority of SEN input away from ITT, and place it in the realms of Continuing Professional Development courses. Few teachers appear to be accessing CPD relating to the education of children with SEN (Male and Rayner; 2009 cited in Male, 2011), which makes Susan’s experience more interesting, as she had actively pursued a distinct path towards specialist skills and knowledge in the field of SEN. The 2 other participants did not make reference to specific courses they were aware of or had participated in.

- **INSET**

INSET training provides teachers with opportunities to develop their practice through internal meetings and activities, lead from within the existing team, or by outside agencies coming in to deliver on a variety of topics pertinent to the needs and priorities of the school. INSET was seen as a particularly valuable learning tool for SEN by Zoe and Ciaran. Frequent and regular coverage of special educational needs issues should occur during the academic year, as it cannot be guaranteed that all staff will be able to attend. A theatre trip took place on the same evening of the Dyslexia INSET, and Ciaran and Susan were out supervising pupils from the English department. It is impossible to know the impact this training session would have had on these 2 teachers had they attended. Ciaran made reference to missing this event in his interview. The most experienced teacher Susan did not refer to INSET training at all. This may indicate that more experienced colleagues perceive they need less specific training input, as many of them are involved in leading such sessions and providing advice to colleagues regularly in their practice as line managers and mentors.

**Specialist SEN input**

All 3 of the participants referred to learning from more experienced and specialised colleagues, Zoe and Ciaran made specific reference to those in the SENCO role. Abbott (2007) describes SENCOs as being involved in training both beginning and practising teachers, so their comments are consistent with the literature.

Susan particularly valued the input of specialists and although did not cite the SENCO, made reference to Occupational Therapists, specialist teachers and doctors. Susan was very clear in citing the specialist colleagues as being the main source of support for knowledge for SEN. This highlights the importance of this role.
Experience with pupils

All 3 participants referred to learning from pupils and the value of gaining experience in the classroom. Zoe and Susan made reference to different kinds of learning in their interviews. Susan’s opinion that every time she met a new child she learnt something new demonstrates the importance of the individual. Training and guidance could be seen to aim to provide a generic foundation for understanding and meeting pupils special educational needs, which develops and modifies in response to individuals. This practice itself could be taught to beginning teachers.

Examples of classroom practice

Lack of knowledge of what to do for the needs of a pupil with Dyslexia by the beginning teacher Zoe, and Asperger’s Syndrome was cited by Ciaran, whereas a lack of response to strategies adopted was the difficulty stated by Susan, the more experienced and qualified teacher from the 3 participants. The sources of Zoe’s example of strategies she used was not provided, so I cannot establish whether her approaches resulted from what she had been taught, something instinctual, or explorative.

Areas of need identified by the participants

The 3 participants saw the value in receiving timely, and concise, information and instructions, delivered through INSET and on paper.

Conclusions

Many of the literatures on SEN and ITT describe the special educational needs input during initial teacher training as insufficient and direct us to the role of other sources of input and influence to provide skills and understanding, in addition to, in spite, or instead of teacher training. This is the case in this study, where specialist colleagues and the pupils themselves were cited as a key source of information. This is perhaps not a surprising outcome given that the research has taken place in an Independent school where training is not a requirement for teachers.

A matter that I found concerning was that 2 out of 3 participants referred to instances where pupils with SEN were experiencing what the participants perceived as bullying. It would be beneficial to explore this issue to establish if this is typical. I feel there is scope for future work and whether teacher’s inadequate knowledge and skills contribute to the way in which pupils’ special educational needs are perceived by their peers and how inadequate teaching may be a causal factor in instances of distress or unusual behaviours that highlight a pupil’s differences to their peers that could have been avoided. In addition to providing more information and guidance to teachers on SEN, it may be worth investigating if and how special educational needs are explained to peers.
The aim would be to foster greater understanding, but other outcomes may result. There are also issues of confidentiality and autonomy for the individual.

In his interview, Ciaran questioned the placement of the school for a pupil who became very distressed, rather than being open to the idea that it was possible to develop the skills required to support this individual. This thought process may have been an accurate one, but he may have inadvertently expressed rejection of inclusive ideals on account of his shortcomings.

**Reflections**

Having reflected on the formulation of and responses to the research questions, I have identified a number of areas for development in my approach to data collection. The first research question may have been better addressed if split into 2 separate issues, as gaining the information teachers need and how they use it are 2 different considerations. What are the processes that are involved in selecting teaching methods and how is the success of their deployment measured by teachers? How might information about SEN be understood and formulated?

In relation to research question 2, Ciaran knew about the process of ITT through his role as a mentor and about special educational needs as line manager to the SENCO, but this was not something that I was aware of prior to the interview. It is important to devise research questions that can be further developed in the interviews with all participants.

By asking teachers to describe examples of when they felt they understood and met, and not understood and not met, pupil’s special educational needs it assumes that their training has and does link with their classroom practice.

The participants were not asked to demonstrate the link and therefore the source of the good practice could have been anything previously mentioned such as a colleague, the pupil, a specialist, INSET, ITT or other. In asking for negative examples, a development of that question could have been to state what help and support was needed to address the situation, so there was a more specific link to training needs that better addresses research question 3.

All 3 participants made reference to general techniques and principles of training and I had to continually encourage them to refer back to the issue of Special Educational Needs. This was more prevalent with the more experienced teachers, Ciaran and Susan. This could illustrate how little coverage there is on the topic of SEN that there was not more to refer to. The format and style of ITT has also changed, meaning that Susan’s experience in the 1980’s will be very different to Zoe’s in 2013.
3 is also a small sample and further work is required to establish whether the perceptions provided in this study are consistent within the school, compared to other schools with a similar profile, and to those who are not.
References


DIES (2004) Removing barriers to achievement the government’s strategy for SEN


Hallett, F. and Hallett, G. eds. (2010). Transforming the role of the SENCO – Achieving the National Award for SEN Coordination, Open University Press


www.education.gov.uk/get-into-teaching/faqs/becoming-a-teacher/qualified-teacher-status.aspx viewed online 10/11/12

www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-19017544 viewed online 10/11/12
Investigating teacher’s pedagogical responses to pupil voice – professional understandings of the classroom experiences of children with Dyslexia

Supervisor – Professor Alan Dyson

Theme 3 – Research Methods in Action

EdD Education

School of Education, University of Manchester

29/01/14
Abstract

Initial teacher training has been criticised for its inadequacy in preparing teachers for inclusive classrooms, and teachers enter the profession lacking in knowledge, skills and confidence to meet pupil’s special educational needs. SENCOs hold a multi-faceted role that has an expectation of their ability to impact the practice of their teaching colleagues. This is a challenging position as a number of barriers to practice change exist that need to be understood and overcome by the SENCO in order to better target their colleagues’ training needs and improve the classroom experiences of pupils with SEND. This paper suggests an approach to practice change that is based on pupil voice, where teacher volunteers form partnerships with individual pupils with Dyslexia where strategies are agreed upon and evaluated. A year long programme of action research is proposed where teachers discuss and review the strategies they have used in a focus group and engage in peer observation, with the SENCO deliberately distancing themselves from the training process in order to facilitate improved pupil teacher relationships and to foster a greater sense of professional responsibility for pupils with SEND. A pilot study was conducted to trial the use of pupil voice in developing understanding, empathy and triggering a pedagogical response.

Introduction

This paper is divided into two sections; the first considers the role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) in training and advising colleagues and the barriers to practice change that SENCO’s have to overcome in order to impact practice. I provide an outline of a research proposal to devise, implement and evaluate a training programme aimed at improving the knowledge, skills and confidence of teachers when working with pupils, centred on developing empathy in teachers through an enactment of voice for those students with Dyslexia. The second section details a pilot study which trials the use of a focus group technique to explore the perspectives of teacher professionals regarding Dyslexia. The pilot work findings and reflections were intended to inform my research proposal.

Part 1 – The Research Proposal

The proposed title of my work is “Exploring a SENCO’s use of pupil voice to inform and impact teacher’s pedagogical responses to pupils with Dyslexia”.

Key terms: SENCO; Dyslexia; Pupil Voice

For over 2 decades schools have been required to have a named person, known as the Special Educational Needs Coordinator, as a leading teacher and advocate for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Since the introduction of the Special Educational Needs Code of Practice in 1994, the responsibilities of the SENCO have increased substantially (Mackenzie, 2007).
In 1998, the National Standards stated that SENCOs should take an active part in leading and managing staff (TTA, 1998). The role has evolved to include aspects of whole-school strategy development and management (Rosen-Webb, 2011, p160). The Code referred specifically to their role in training, advising and leading colleagues, as well as working closely with the head teacher and senior management;

The SENCO should have responsibility for advising and supporting other practitioners in the setting.

(DfES, 2001, section 4:15).

The SENCO has a pivotal role, coordinating provision across the school and linking class and subject teachers with SEN specialists to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

(DfES, 2004, p58).

Despite a number of redrafts, the Special Educational Needs Code of practice retained the requirement for SENCOs to be responsibility for advising their colleagues and ensuring practice change;

The SENCO should support the class or subject teacher.

(DoE, 2013, p75)

The SENCO provides professional guidance to colleagues….

(DoE, 2013, p79).

The SENCO can play an important role in advising and contributing to the broader support engaged by schools and the professional development of other teachers and staff.

(DoE, 2013,p80).

From the outset, policy makers assumed that the SENCO could promote inclusion in their role as the agent for achieving a whole-school approach (Layton, 2005, p54). It was assumed SENCOs had the opportunity, time, resources and support from colleagues and senior management to bring about such wholesale change.

It was also assumed that SENCOs could improve teacher’s skills and knowledge of SEND, but little was given by way of guidance of how this could be achieved, or any potential barriers that could exist. There was also no instruction on the role that pupils could, and should, have in this process.

As I commence my 10th year as a SENCO I have experienced first-hand the challenges of initiating practice change to improve colleague’s skills and knowledge of SEND. My extensive experience working with teachers suggest that colleagues can at times avoid, oppose or simply forget to adapt their teaching to accommodate pupils inclusively. Despite being arguably the most important aspect of their role because of its scope, influencing the practice of their colleagues could be seen to be where SENCOs are most challenged as teachers enter the profession without an adequate SEND knowledge base. This is because so many teachers complete their training and induction with inadequate knowledge and skills to meet the learning needs of children with SEND.
From my professional experience it is clear that SENCOs tend to work closely with pupils with SEND, but this is a relationship that is not easily replicated in mainstream classrooms. This led me to consider the extent to which changes in classroom practice could be influenced by an increased understanding of individual pupil’s perspectives, and whether there was scope to influence colleagues through the use of pupil voice. By engaging directly with pupils, rather than through the SENCO as intermediary, teachers could gain a greater understanding of the individual perspectives of the pupils they taught, and change their practice as a direct response. Pupil voice could be promoted by SENCOs for teachers to use as a tool to a deeper level of understanding, relationship and empathy with SEN students.

**Rationale**

The mainstay of SENCOs role has consisted of sharing information about known needs by stating any diagnosis usually by producing a list or ‘special needs register’ and making recommendations of strategies for inclusive classroom practice. The SENCO has the responsibility for stating who the pupils are, and advising what the teacher should do in order to help them.

From Layton’s 2005 study, she found that teachers deferred to the SENCO as the SEND expert, but that their expectations were to ‘achieve pragmatic ends rather than moral purpose’ (2005, p58). Whilst it is hoped that instructions are followed, the teacher can choose to apply or discard this advice.

A possibly unexplored catalyst for practice change could be through SENCOs deploying the use of pupil voice to enhance the ‘dry’ information they provide by evoking empathy among their colleagues, and embedding an understanding of the why, to accompany the what. This approach has been used effectively when exploring attitudes to race and the impact on teacher perceptions and practice (Warren, 2014) and in schools with pupils without SEND (Brag, 2007; Nelson, 2015; McIntyre, Pedder and Rudduck, 2007).

However, there is little research into teacher empathy towards pupils with SEND (Barr, 2013, p87). Inclusion is a concept that is believed to require teachers to have both practical competencies and hold certain beliefs (Englebrecht, 2013, p115).

..teachers need to have developed positive values, supportive ideals, high moral principles and strong ethical understandings regarding accepting responsibility for the education of all children regardless of the diversity of their needs.

Forlin (2010), p649

It could therefore be argued that pupil voice is one of the potentially most effective methods by which teacher attitudes can be informed. Hearing directly from the pupils in their classrooms could have more impact than a ‘second hand’ experience such as anecdotal sources or instructions alone.
Teachers could cease to be passive recipients of special needs information but become facilitated to develop a more emotional understanding of why it is crucial to adapt practice.

Aims

The aims of the study are as follows:

1. To identify the main difficulties SENCOs experience when trying to influence practice change and suggest strategies.

   Literatures on initial teacher training, and teacher perspectives on SEND will be used to identify the possible barriers to inclusive teaching, and understand the starting point of SENCOs tasked with the role of influencing practice.

2. To establish an understanding of teacher’s perceptions of their skills and knowledge regarding teaching pupils with special educational needs, focusing primarily on pupils with Dyslexia.

   The pilot study within this paper researches the perspectives of teachers of their competence levels with regards to teaching pupils with Dyslexia, and makes recommendations for how SENCOs can better understand their colleagues’ position as ‘non specialists’.

   As the concept of special educational needs is complex and extensive, one specific learning difficulty has been selected as the focus for the study. However, literatures that address the matter of practice change in response to a variety of special educational needs will be used.

   By gaining a greater understanding of the wider issues that underpin approaches to SEND in schools and perceptions of the SENCO role, SENCOs may be able to account for the difficulties in their attempts to influence practice and make adjustments.

3. To explore how the voices of pupils with special educational needs (with a particular focus on pupils with Dyslexia) has been acquired and used in order to influence practice change.

   Pupil voice has become an increasingly utilised source of information and feedback for schools. This research will investigate if the insights of pupils have could be increasingly used by SENCOs to influence practice change.

4. To develop and evaluate a piece of action research which trials a tailored approach to practice change using pupil voice.
The findings from aims 1 to 3 will be used to inform the design of a piece of action research. The study will consider whether the advisory role of the SENCO would be strengthened if SENCOs had a better understanding of their colleagues’ perceptions and uncertainties, and if teachers took more opportunities to listen to the voice of pupils with SEN.
Research questions

In addressing the aims of the study I will focus on the following research questions:

1. What are the possibilities and challenges to SENCOs for bringing about practice change that is based on empathic understanding and relationship building in the teaching of Dyslexic pupils by mainstream school teachers?

2. In what ways can a pupil voice intervention support SENCOs in facilitating practice change with regards to improved empathy and relationship building by mainstream teachers for pupils with Dyslexia?

Literatures

In order to gain an understanding of the existing research in the field and locate my study, the literatures I will review in the proposed study include:

1. The creation of barriers to adapting teaching practice in response to pupils with Special Educational Needs.

2. The use of pupil voice in school and its viability as a potential catalyst for practice change.

1. An overview of the research literatures on the creation of barriers to adapting teaching practice in response to pupils with Special Educational Needs.

Research into the SENCO role and SEND in schools identify a number of core themes that account for the difficulties in influencing practice change. The most significant challenge could be seen to result from inadequate teacher training coverage of SEND (Brownlee and Carrington, 2000; Dyslexia-SpLD Trust; 2013, Kelly 2015, p18, Mittler, 1992; Garner, 2001; Lawson and Nash, 2008; OFSTED, 2006; OFSTED 2009; Winter, 2006). Teachers can be seen to enter the profession without a secure knowledge of the range of learning difficulties pupils can experience, or the confidence to know how to adapt their practice. This leads onto a lack of teacher responsibility (Frankl, 2005; Kearns, 2005; Layton, 2005,, Hargreaves et al. 2007 cited in Lindqvist et al, 2011., McLeskey and Waldron, 2007; Slee, 2012,) as teachers are unclear about their role with regards to pupils with special educational needs. Practical restrictions of time and opportunity impede attempts for more strategic work (Cole, 2005.; Mackenzie, 2007; ; Frankl, 2005.). SENCOs could be tasked with the challenge of trying to influence practice with colleagues who do not recognise their authority to do so.
SENCOs have a ‘lowly’ status among their colleagues (Davies, 1998, cited in Cole, 2005,) which contradicts how SENCOs see their role as a consultant as central (Cowne, 2005, ). Furthermore, SENCOs have to operate in a contradictory atmosphere which is co-constructed by their own existence in an institution (Bines, 1992,; Cole, 2005,; Dyson, 1990,; MacKenzie, 2007,). Models of SEND provision in schools can therefore be seen to reinforce the very preconceptions that SENCOs are required to challenge, and ultimately, change (Bines 1992, ).

2. An overview of research literature on SEN pupil voice in school and its viability as a potential catalyst for mainstream teacher practice change.

Issues of power are in play in the marginalisation and subjection of certain groups of learners such as those categorised using the label of Special Educational Needs. For over a decade, the need to seek and respond to the opinions and perspectives of pupils with SEN has been specifically endorsed in policy. The SEN Code of Practice (DfES 2001a) requires teachers to consult with pupils in order to determine the most effective interventions and provision (Coates and Vickerman, 2013, ). Domination can serve to curtail the voices of some individuals (Robinson and Taylor, 2013, ). Interest has increased in conducting research which elicits the views and experiences of those who are viewed as having Special Educational Needs (Edmonds, 2013, ). Therefore educational policy has repeatedly cited the necessity of involving pupils more explicitly in their own lives and education (Backhouse and Morris, 2005,; Thompson and Gunter, 2006,). However, in general terms consultation of pupil views by teachers is not found to be part of normal practice in British schools (McIntyre et al, 2005,; Quicke, 2003,). There are additional practical and ethical considerations when identifying research approaches that are inclusive of pupils with SEND that have delayed inquiry into pupil voice. With regards to collaborations with pupils with disabilities, Lewis and Porter (2006) speak of ‘research with, rather than research on’ pupils with SEND. Obtaining the views of pupils with SEND is:

becoming a ubiquitous imperative


There is an assumption that acquiring pupil voice will result in change (Lewis and Porter, 2007, p230). The literature in this area covers a number of issues. One is pupil’s analytic skills that are often undervalued and under-used in the process of changing teaching and learning in schools (McIntyre et al, 2005). McIntyre et al (2005) believed that pupils’ ideas can significantly enhance the quality of teaching ). This is one area of research literature that the research proposal will explore in some depth.

Research into pupil voice does not necessarily result in action being taken as part of the same research project. For example, Riddick’s work in 2010 investigated the viewpoints of children with Dyslexia and illuminated the social and emotional effects of the difficulties they experienced.
One example of research into pupil voice in the case of children with Dyslexia is Riddick (2010). As I shall show, the methodology for my pilot study has been influenced by the approach taken by Riddick and my findings will add to, and shed further light on, those of Riddick. In particular, I shall explore ways of applying and evaluating interventions that result from the feedback gathered from teachers, parents and pupils.

There are studies that deploy pupil voice as a way of developing empathy, relationship building and changing practice (Brag, S, 2007; McIntyre, Pedder and Rudduck, 2007; Nelson, E, 2015; Warren, C, 2014). I also seek to use pupil voice to attempt to directly inform practice, by focussing on the perspectives of pupils with Dyslexia.
Research Design

My study will be a piece of qualitative inquiry-based action research where a Dyslexia training programme will be devised, delivered and evaluated in the school where I am in post as SENCO. The year-long study will monitor the experiences of a small sample of 5 – 8 teacher volunteers as they form a working party that engages in a training programme informed by pupil voice and recommended ‘Dyslexia friendly’ classroom strategies. Participants will trial strategies and feedback will be provided by them as practitioners and the pupils specifically impacted by the adopted practice.

Action research is an approach that has often been used to give practitioners a voice (Carr and Kemmis, 1989, and Grundy, 1987, quoted in Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). In addition, Huang (2010) highlights the scope for action research to empower those with little voice, such as pupils. The training programme will seek and use the voices of both practitioners and pupils from within the same school and aim to connect these understandings.

\[\text{It is not enough to collect facts and feelings – the researcher must come to see these through the eyes, and from standing in the shoes, of the subjects.} \quad (\text{McKernan, 2013, p7}).\]

This study is a piece of action research as it will measure the qualitative output by comparing, teacher, pupil and SENCO perspectives after one academic year.

Action research is carried out by practitioners seeking to improve their understanding of events, situations and problems so as to increase the effectiveness of their practice. \( (\text{McKernan, 2013, p4}). \)

The nature of the training programme and the action research study.

The programme is initially delivered by the SENCO, but progresses over time to consist of the teachers engaging in peer observation and feedback, and direct communication with pupils. At the commencement and completion of the programme the teachers will be asked to evaluate their knowledge, understanding and teaching skills with regards to Dyslexia, and pupil’s opinions will be sought to establish whether they feel their strengths and needs are understood and considered by those teachers.

There is little research on staff perspectives of Dyslexia (Webster, 2016). This study will firstly identify the perceptions of a small group of teachers regarding their knowledge, understanding and teaching skills in relation to Dyslexia. The first stage consists of gaining a greater awareness of these teachers’ perspectives of their knowledge and skills regarding Dyslexia through a self-evaluation exercise. Preliminary findings will be used to inform the next stages, what McKernan (2013) terms ‘reflective-deliberate action’ (p22). \( \text{Action research aims to explore effective practices to better understand, and perfect, them through multiple cycles (Riel, 2010).} \)
In a separate exercise, the views of a sample of Dyslexic pupils from the same school will be sought by and shared with the SENCO, who will then use this information to directly inform the teacher volunteers about their practice with those specific pupils. The resulting training sessions aim to bring the 2 perspectives together, as teachers also combine these viewpoints with established ‘Dyslexia friendly’ classroom strategies, from British Dyslexia Association (BDA). Referring to this national guidance will ensure the methods recommended by the SENCO are consistent with the practice the BDA advises and not based on personal opinion that could be more open to dispute. The training period will last for an academic year, consisting of 6 half termly taught sessions and regular planned opportunities for teacher reflection and pupil feedback. A final evaluation will take place at the end of the training period to consider the effectiveness of using a pupil voice approach, and establish how successful the teacher volunteers, pupils and the SENCO feel programme was.

I have chosen to focus on one specific learning difficulty, Dyslexia, for two reasons. Firstly, the term ‘special educational needs’ is too broad and impossible to adequately address, although understandings will be drawn from relevant literatures that refer to a range of learning needs, as well as Dyslexia specifically.

Secondly, it is very likely that teachers in mainstream state education will encounter children categorised in this way, as the British Dyslexia Association suggest that approx. 10% of the population are believed to have Dyslexia (BDA). There is scope for the methods used to apply to more children with different difficulties, and in different settings, which would require further consideration and development.

I aim to test the principles of an approach to initiating practice change that involves SENCOs engaging with their colleagues and facilitating more direct relationships with pupils. In response to research findings that suggest that barriers to practice change amongst mainstream teachers relate to not taking or understanding their responsibility for pupils with SEND, the interventions will attempt to integrate dialogue between pupils, SENCo and mainstream teachers. The impact of the intervention will be monitored throughout the duration, and must be reflexive about how change efforts are unfolding (Bradbury Huang; 2010, p98).

The objectivity-subjectivity issue is a major consideration (McKernan, 2013). By seeking understandings of the same event from multiple perspectives, researchers can develop their views (Riel, 2010). This could be particularly useful regarding SENCO as researcher, as they will be influenced by their personal motivations and hold preconceived ideas of how inclusive colleague’s practice is which could make them approach the subject from a negative standpoint.
SENCOs can be knowledgeable, passionate advocates, which can also bring an additional level of consideration and difficulty when embarking on research into how pupils with SEND feel about their learning, and what teachers know and the actions they may or may not take. Agryis et al (1985) advise researchers to combine advocacy with inquiry (CITED in Stern et al 2014).

Perhaps contrary to common sense, the more skilful we become, the more the insider practitioners may be invited to control the action research

(Bradbury Huang; 2010, p105)

The research sample

Volunteers will be sought from teachers who identify that they would like to improve their skills working with pupils with Dyslexia and as this is a small scale research project, the number will be limited to no more than 8 where 2 groups of 4 can be formed if deemed necessary.

Pupil volunteers will have a diagnosis of Dyslexia from a recognised professional such as an Educational Psychologist or specialist teacher. They may also have co-occurring difficulties/additional diagnosis that may have other implications for practice. The SENCO has access to the documentation that details this information, and is responsible for distributing elements of this to their colleagues. All pupils with a diagnosis will be asked if they would be willing to participate in staff training activities and have their views shared with the teaching team. When teacher volunteers are confirmed, the pupils they teach can then be identified and matched with them. (In the event of consent not being given, or the teacher volunteer not having any pupils with Dyslexia in their class a pupil will be allocated from a different class). Each teacher volunteer should have at least 1 pupil who is linked to their practice.

Methods

The research proposal consists of 7 stages. It will involve the completion of teacher and pupil questionnaires, interviews, focus group work and peer observations. The research will be conducted by the SENCO, working alongside their teacher colleagues. This approach, although not without difficulty, is a preferred one. As Wong (1995) believes that teaching cannot be fully understood from the perspective of an outsider.

The programme is designed to become increasingly self-autonomous for the teacher volunteers, and facilitate a collaborative relationship between teacher and pupil with limited involvement from the SENCO. It follows as sequence of evaluation, implementation and review, by both pupil and teacher participants over a period of an academic year.
Stage 1 – Teacher evaluation of their knowledge, skills and confidence regarding teaching pupils with Dyslexia

Teacher volunteers complete an evaluation of their perception of their knowledge, skills and confidence regarding teaching pupils with Dyslexia. Feedback will be collated in order to identify the teacher’s perceived shortfalls and strengths, and compared to the findings in the literature that refer to barriers to practice change. The data will also be used to form topics for discussion in the focus group and the specific areas that training will address, if any are in addition to the feedback received from pupil volunteers.

The teacher’s evaluations will be assessed to gauge their perceptions of the quality of their initial teacher training, if completed, rank the sources of Dyslexia information and barriers to practice change, and give examples of good practice they engage in. Encouraging teachers to evaluate their own practice places the onus onto them. It is more unusual for teachers to identify ways in which they can change to best meet the needs of pupils (Ryan et al, 2016) This will address research questions 1 and 2.

Stage 2 - Pupil feedback

Stage 2 focuses on pupil voice. All pupil volunteers will be asked to identify factors that make learning challenging, give examples of what teachers have done to help and ideas of what could help. The questions will be delivered by the SENCO, as someone who should ensure the pupils feel at ease and provide honest answers. McIntyre at al’s research found that the children in their study valued the opportunity to reflect and to talk about what helped them to learn (2005). It may be more challenging to extract feedback where the pupil perspectives of teacher practice are negative, particularly when there is the possibility that the pupil will later be paired with the same teacher. The questions will be carefully planned to minimise this risk.

The feedback will be collated and analysed separately and then comparatively to identify any common themes among the pupil group, which correlate with the teacher’s feedback. The questionnaires will have a combination of closed and open questions, so that both quantitative and qualitative data will result.

Stage 3 – Teacher, pupil and SENCO meeting

Once the pairings are made, the teacher, pupil and SENCO meet. McIntyre et al’s work found that pupils were courteous and constructive in the presentation of their views (McIntyre et al, 2005) and had insightful things to say about their lessons. (McIntyre et al, 2005), however, this may be more problematic if there are negative comments made by the pupil, or other relational difficulties.
It is assumed that the pupils involved in the study will be capable of demonstrating enough understanding, self-awareness and realism to not respond to the request for their voice with irresponsible notions of what constitutes good teaching. A situation can be created where the pupils feel able to answer honestly without feeling inhibited by the situation. Research that focuses on pupil voice that when asked about possible changes to teaching and learning activities found the suggestions made were sensible (Cooper and McIntyre, 1996; McIntyre et al, 2005). There is always the possibility that humorous or unrealistic answers could be provided.

From the difficulties identified by the pupil, a discussion takes place facilitated by the SENCO, as a familiar person to both parties. The teacher and the pupil agree which priorities they will work on together. The timescale of 1 area for improvement is selected per half term, and the teacher and pupil decide the order. The pupil’s suggestions for improvement are discussed if any are deemed relevant to the issues and in line with the British Dyslexia Association’s Dyslexia friendly classroom guidance. McIntyre et al’s work (2005) found that teachers’ responses to pupil suggestions for change were selective and favoured ideas that were already in their repertoires (p159). A learning contract for the half term will be drawn up which states the area of practice/problem experienced by the pupil that the teacher has committed to address.

Stage 4 – Focus group meeting

The teachers will form a focus group, facilitated by the SENCO. Action research develops a closer relationship between colleagues that foster mutual learning (Ryan et al, 2016). Findings from the teacher self-evaluation will be collated by the SENCO. In the first meeting, the SENCO will present a summary of any consistent themes, examples of good practice the teacher volunteers have identified, and areas where teachers want to improve. The teachers will feedback to one another and discuss the pupil they are working with and the half termly priority they are going to address. The SENCO will facilitate the teachers exploring how they could adapt their practice to the issues raised by the pupil they are paired with and any similar areas of need that have arisen within the focus group. This meeting provides a forum for the teachers to discuss their viewpoints and seek input from the SENCO who will provide guidance in accordance with the BDA’s agreed Dyslexia friendly strategies for secondary classrooms. The SENCO will generate a discussion between the teacher volunteers about strategies that they have used before or would consider would be effective, which will be observed by the SENCO and recorded. The teachers will agree how they will address the difficulty.

Stage 5 – Implementation

During the half term, the teachers will focus on the issue, using the agreed strategies. Both parties will record the occasions when the strategy has been employed, and the pupil will evaluate how effective they feel it was.
Stage 6 – Observation

The teachers from the focus group observe each other. 1 observation takes place per half term during the half term, focussing on the issue they have selected to address. The teacher completes an evaluation of how effectively they think their colleague addressed the issue. Brief feedback is provided, a fuller discussion takes place in the focus group meeting. The SENCO will not conduct any observations.

Stage 7 - Review and Evaluate

(a) Pupil and SENCO meeting

The pupil and SENCO meet to discuss the perceived impact the teacher’s change in practice has been. A summary of the half term is produced from the pupil's perspective.

(b) Focus group meeting

The focus group meets to discuss the observations in more detail and how the half term has gone. The group discusses what they feel are successes and areas for further improvement, in line with the pupil feedback which the SENCO provides on behalf of the pupil. The meetings will be observed by the SENCO and recorded.

The cycle is repeated so that by the end of an academic year 6 specific difficulties have been selected and addressed. Each classroom strategy will be added to the previous one so practice is changed, embedded and extended.
Data Analysis

At the end of the seven stages described in the previous section, the following data will be available for analysis:

- Questionnaires – pupils and teacher volunteers
- Observation notes from focus groups meetings
- Observation notes from classroom observations
- Half termly feedback from pupil and teacher

Data will be produced that can be analysed in order to identify any recurring themes. The research gathers the perspectives of 3 key stakeholders and aims to gain a greater understanding of the level of confidence of practical teaching skills, the awareness of pupils and the communication between them. The data can be understood separately such as issues relating to teaching and learning, the relationship between teacher and pupil and the matter of empathy. As the research takes place over a period of an academic year it will be possible to identify any changes taking place within the participants and in practice.

By analysing data from 2 sources, in combination with a third aspect - the understanding and starting point of the SENCO, triangulation can take place. The same matter of inclusive classroom practice for pupils with Dyslexia is identified and addressed from the perspective of pupil, teacher and SENCO.

The data from stages 1-4 will then inform stage 5 as the outcome of collaborative working. In stage 1, teachers evaluate their knowledge, skills and confidence through the completion of a questionnaire. Their responses will be collated and compared with the participants to identify any common themes or patterns in the feedback given, which will then inform the discussion topics for the focus group in stage 4. The teacher questionnaire uses a ranking system which will produce numerical data for each individual that can be compared to the others in the sample. These will be presented as pie charts to aid analysis.

Responses from pupils (stage 2) will be analysed in a similar way, quantified as a group. The opportunity for answers to open questions to be provided will result in data that is not from a prescribed list. This will be analysed thematically and used as ‘sound bites’ to prompt further discussion in the focus group. The feedback from the teachers and pupils (stages 1 and 2) will then be compared in order to identify areas of commonality and/or difference. The specific difficulties of each pupil volunteer will be transferred into stage 3, where the priorities in each individual case are agreed by both parties.
Stage 3 pairs pupils and teachers together, and the SENCO facilitates a meeting where the pupil shares their difficulties with a teacher that is agreeing to address them. A learning contract is written and forms the basis of the future data analysis as this states the difficulty experienced and the strategy that is going to be deployed.

The focus group meeting (stage 4) brings the findings from stage 1, 2 and 3 together as the SENCO presents a summary of any consistent themes, examples of good practice the teacher volunteers have identified, and the areas where teachers want to improve. Notes of this meeting will be taken and reflected on if any new insights are shared or areas of difference arise in the future meetings. These notes will form part of the overall evaluation of the project. They will record the areas for improvement agreed by volunteers and will be used for reference at stage 6, where they provide the observation foci. During the implementation stage (stage 5), both teachers and pupils will record their perceptions of the success of the strategy over a half term period. It will include a count of how many times the strategy was implemented, including an observation of whether the total number was agreed between the 2 parties. This process will mainly produce rich qualitative data, as it will rely on the perception of the pupil reflecting on their own learning, although should the teacher deem it appropriate to use a quantitative measure such as a test to judge the effectiveness of an intervention this will also be included. The pupil is the key source of data regarding the success, and there could be important, albeit difficult, findings if a teacher holds the opinion that something they did worked well, but the pupil disagrees. Spoken feedback from the pupils will be recorded and transcribed, and shared with the teacher. The data gathered from peer observation in stage 6 will use a lesson observation proforma reflecting the specific areas that each teacher has agreed to address. The observer will make notes throughout the lesson of the Dyslexia friendly strategies they observe and what they identify from the pupil’s response. This will be shared with the SENCO and used in conjunction with pupil feedback, as they will not enter any classroom to watch and feedback on the teacher participants.

In stage 7 the SENCO produces a summary every half term of the pupil’s perspective of the addressing and impact of practice change. The focus group also meets to discuss the observations in more detail with their comments recorded and transcribed.

This process will produce a coherent set of findings, which can be used to draw conclusions and make recommendations for future practice.
**Trustworthiness of the research design**

Any approach requires researchers to evaluate the reliability of their instruments and findings. Examining trustworthiness is crucial in order to ensure reliability (Golafshani, 2003). Lincoln and Guba (1985) assess the rigour of qualitative research using the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (cited in Yilmaz, 2013). The research approach is based on those involved being ‘honest’, a difficult concept in itself, throughout the process and aims to bring together the perspectives of 3 different stakeholders when the likelihood of difference is high.

One of the most common tests of validity is the ability to generalise findings to wider groups and circumstances (Paton, 2001, cited in Golafshani, 2003). Although the research is specific in terms of both a particular special educational need (Dyslexia) and an educational context (independent school), I argue that the findings are replicable in other contexts.

Issues related to quality and credibility correspond to the audience and intended inquiry purposes (Yilmaz, 2013). As the researcher is a SENCO, it is recognised that one audience for this research are fellow SENCOs, or those with an interest and insight into Special Educational Needs. However, as I have made clear, the findings of this study are of significance to all teachers who have responsibility for the learning of pupils with SEND including Issues related to quality and credibility correspond to the audience and intended inquiry purposes (Yilmaz, 2013). The purpose is to identify a possible way to involve pupils with Dyslexia more directly in the process of practice change, and it may prompt a response from those involved in research into the training of teachers, and those who question the authority of the SENCO to advise colleagues on how best to support learning.

If this research proposal is designed to unearth, understand and tackle the barriers to practice change by posing questions that need to be asked of all teachers, it may appear to be limited in its scope by only engaging with those who have volunteered to learn more about Dyslexia, the pupils they teach and are subsequently willing to change. Nevertheless, it illuminates a more comprehensive picture which is intended as a contribution to the development of all teachers.

**Ethical Issues**

An application for ethical approval will be made in line with the requirements of the University of Manchester. Ethical issues can become more pronounced in research projects that are aimed at improving the lives of the research participants (Birch, Millar, Mauther and Jessop, 2002, cited in Olitsky and Weathers, 2005) As pupil voice is an essential element of the research – and pupils with SEND could be considered particularly vulnerable - , this will have to be approved by both the school and the University. The researcher-teacher role is not one without difficulty. Researchers using qualitative approaches ‘come to embrace their involvement and role within the research’. (Golafshani, 2003).
Striving to be both researcher and teacher presents ‘unique and serious challenges’ (Wong, 1995). The relationship between the knower and the known are inextricably connected (Yilmaz, 2013). The focus on improving the learning experiences of pupils with Dyslexia, by improving the skills of the teacher and relationship between them, is designed to be ‘empowering rather than exploitative’ and ‘meet the needs of the researched rather than the interests of the researcher’ empowering rather than exploitative and meets the needs of the researched rather than the interests of the researcher (Olitsky and Weathers, 2005).

As I am interested in engaging in communication about potentially negative experiences in class, there may be the risk of causing upset to pupils when investigating their perceptions of their difficulties and their teacher’s actions. It may be viewed as a miss-use of the trust placed in the SENCO as researcher. I shall mitigate this risk by ensuring informed consent and cease or pause the interaction if pupil volunteers are showing signs of emotional distress. This data could be considered most valuable and potentially impacting from an empathy perspective. Furthermore, the SENCO may already suspect that Dyslexia-friendly approaches are not being used and may feel tempted to prompt pupils to give examples of ‘bad’ practice that they themselves may not have identified. I shall mitigate this risk by not asking leading questions and approaching the discussion as neutrally as possible.

One of the key aspects of the study involves evoking the views of pupils about teacher’s practice. As a result, they may be reluctant to be subjected to the criticisms of their pupils (Olitsky and Weathers, 2005). Teachers may feel under threat if pupil feedback and self-evaluation shows gaps in knowledge and practice that they were perhaps unaware of. Malin (2003) warns that researchers must ensure teachers are protected from harm, and manage the risk of undermining self-esteem I shall mitigate this risk by providing regular feedback, focusing on the positive aspects of practice and remind participants that they are part of the research as they have expressed a desire to improve their practice, it is anticipated that they are already keen to remedy any skill shortfalls.

Involving pupils in research can be problematic in terms of power dynamics. Olitsky and Weathers (2005), warn that pupils may ‘feel compelled to participate’. It may be that the pupil may have never spoken directly to their teacher about their difficulties, except for in times of ‘crisis’ where help with a specific task has been requested. It is assumed that those pupils who volunteer are already confident enough to at least imagine themselves speaking to a teacher on this kind of level. In a boarding school environment as learning, living and socialising take place together, pupils are often involved in dialogue with adults and the relationships tend to be enhanced as a result of the amount of time spent together. However, there is the possibility of personality differences between pupil and teacher that may require intervention in order for the relationship to develop and be maintained.
McIntyre et al (2005) acknowledges that some settings will require careful planning to support the development of high-quality collaboration between teacher and pupils. The SENCO and the pupils involved can be viewed as critiquing the practice of adults who have completed a ratified training process that has confirmed them as a professional which brings challenge. Robinson and Taylor (2013) questioned whether teachers and pupils can meet as genuine partners with a shared undertaking of making meaning of their work together.

It may be that the teacher does not adapt their practice, despite agreeing in principle. In McIntyre et al’s research, they found that 2 of the teachers were keen to use pupil ideas to make their teaching more effective and interesting, but did not find it realistic to do in practice (2005).

Part 2 – The Pilot Study

Rationale

Very few studies have been published on teacher knowledge and/or perceptions of Dyslexia and/or individuals with Dyslexia (Washburn et al; 2013). What has been done has not filtered through into practice. Bell (2013) found that many of the participants in her study had little or no knowledge of recent research on Dyslexia. This study uses qualitative methods to gain an understanding of teacher’s views in response to views expressed by pupils with Dyslexia. As SENCOs attempt to provide information and engage colleagues in activities which are intended to affect practice, how informed are they of the perspectives of those they are trying to influence?

Aim of the study

In order to effectively meet training needs, it is important to first understand more about how teachers conceptualise their own knowledge and competences in relation to Dyslexia (Bell, McPhillips and Doveston, 2011) by gauging what a sample of teachers consider to be some of the key areas of their practice that they would like to develop. A focus group method was intended to test the use of pupil voice data in my research, using comments derived from Riddick’s 2010 research with Dyslexic pupils, rather than pupils at the school. A further aim of the pilot study was to trial the use of a focus group technique to discover the perceived competencies and needs of 4 teachers in an Independent School, as focus groups are deemed to be an appropriate method of connecting with and ascertaining the perceptions of key stakeholders (Vaughn, Shay Shumm and Sinagub; 1996).

The focus group

My pilot work took place at the school where I am employed, and took for the format of a focus group with 4 colleagues. Permission was granted by the Head teacher following a brief explanation of the aims and format of the research.
I also submitted my plans to my supervisor who ensured I followed the University of Manchester's ethical procedures. Participants were assured of anonymity and the focus group was conducted on the school site during usual working hours, but during their free time. Participants received a copy of the information and consent forms were completed and signed before the group met. The meeting was audio recorded on a mobile phone, and later transcribed. Quotes from each participant were applied to the research questions.

**Introducing the school**

The setting is a Co-Educational Independent Boarding School in England, for pupils aged 13 – 19. The tuition fees for full boarders are in excess of £28,000 per year, and therefore the majority of the school population come from affluent families from the UK, Europe and Asia. The school is academically selective, and therefore places are not offered to pupils whose needs are considered to be beyond the ability of the school to accommodate. This reduces the scope of the study as the identified Special Educational Needs are currently limited pupils to with Dyslexia, ADHD and Asperger’s Syndrome. Where deemed appropriate, pupils have the opportunity to not take one subject less, and have input from the learning support department as a timetabled lesson instead, where an additional charge is incurred. The department consists of a Head of Department and 1 teacher.

The focus group meeting took place at break time on the final day of National Dyslexia Awareness Week, an annual initiative of the British Dyslexia Association (BDA). The week had been supported by the senior management team and promoted as an opportunity to renew specific focus on the needs of pupils with Dyslexia. In my role as Head of Learning Support, I set a daily challenge for colleagues to use a different ‘Dyslexia friendly’ classroom strategy each day for 5 days, with a rationale provided for each. This information was taken from a list of 24 teaching practices that the BDA consider to be appropriate for supporting the needs of Dyslexic pupils alongside their peers (the 5 strategies I selected are provided in the Appendix). The focus group consisted of 4 colleagues who had communicated with me during the week and chosen to inform me of their participation in the daily challenge. The participants make reference to the week’s foci a number of times during the meeting. For the purposes of piloting a method, I deemed it appropriate to recruit focus group participants who were already known to be supportive of and enthusiastic about adapting practice to meet the needs of pupils with Dyslexia. Individual teachers need to be committed to innovations (McIntyre et al, 2005 p167). The participants’ teaching experience ranged from 7 – 19 years and included 1 Head of Department and 1 former Head of Department, Science and Humanities subject areas were represented.
The focus group tasks were centred on the following research questions:

1. What understanding do teachers have about the experiences of children with Dyslexia?
2. What skills do teachers use when teaching pupils with Dyslexia?
3. What help and support do teachers consider is required in order to develop skills teaching pupils with Dyslexia?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Department and role</th>
<th>Number of years teaching experience</th>
<th>How would you describe your knowledge of Dyslexia?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rachel</td>
<td>Subject Teacher (Physics)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>“Limited.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lydia</td>
<td>Head of Department (MFL)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>“Sketchy but improving.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>Subject Teacher (Geography)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>“Reasonable – recently informed more so.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peter</td>
<td>Subject Teacher (Religious Studies) And School Chaplain</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>“Modest Increasing.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings

This section describes the activities of the focus group and considers some of the responses the participants gave to quotations from pupils, and to questions about perceived areas of need as a prerequisite to practice change.

All 4 participants showed appreciation of many of the difficulties described in the quotations, as each that was read prompted discussion between the group members. The group expressed confidence at their awareness of difficulties such as reading, writing and spelling. It was not surprising that each participant made comments about their own supportive approaches to pupils, as their selection as a focus group member was as a result of their active engagement with the activities of National Dyslexia Awareness Week.

Comments were made which related to a perceived lack of training and experience, and how engaging in differentiated practice can result in conflict with matters such as consistency with other pupils, practicality and preparing for external examination. The timing and style of information about pupil need distributed to colleagues generated some interesting discussion. In addition, a number of comments made related directly to the use of pupil voice to inform practice and reflected a desire to have a growing understanding of the perspectives of pupils from the pupils themselves.
Format of the focus group

1. Participants describe their knowledge of Dyslexia

I began the focus group with a brief introduction of the aims of the meeting. Blank stickers were provided for the participants on which they wrote their answer to the question: How would you describe your knowledge of Dyslexia? Although I had not planned to do this, when I saw the responses, I was interested to learn more about the reasons for the terms the participants had used, and therefore asked them to elaborate the reasons for their response. The 4 participants all considered themselves to have some knowledge of Dyslexia, but alluded to their perception of the need for more learning to take place.

Peter; “I wrote ‘increasing’. Over the last week it has showed me the breadth of what Dyslexia represents which is really interesting and really helpful.”

Heather; “With the prompters this week on a daily basis has reminded me, it’s not something I hadn’t heard before, it just reminded me of and made me realise that I should build it into planning more.”

Lydia; “I put ‘sketchy but improving’. I think I have a reasonable awareness of things that you can do in the classroom but I don’t have a very great understanding of what actually it means for the child. I mean I understand that they have difficulties with reading or processing or whatever it might be, I don’t actually understand that much about Dyslexia itself.”

Rachel; “I put ‘limited’, I obviously know a little bit about Dyslexia but it’s how to treat it in the classroom, what I’d thought about previously is that I have got these children who are Dyslexic, what can I do just for them’. Now this week your things each day have made me realise that actually its things….that are relevant to the whole class and not just my 1 child that needs that help, I think my mind set’s sort of changed with this week as to that’s it’s not just the one person, it helps the whole class.”

2. Discussion and sorting activity

Stimulus for discussion was provided from the work of Riddick (2010). 25 typed and printed statements made by Dyslexic pupils in her research were provided for the participants. The participants were to read out loud consider their experience and knowledge, and achieve a group consensus on whether they were familiar or unfamiliar with the difficulty or viewpoint being described. The participants engaged with the stimulus material and discussion began immediately as the group worked together to come to an agreement on how the statements should be categorised.
3 of the participants spoke about their responses to difficulties with spelling presented by pupils:

Rachel; “Spelling is not that important in my subject, so I don’t mark the spelling”.

Peter; “In RS I do but it’s not my main interest so I don’t make a big thing of it, I just put the correct spelling in the margin and move on.”

Lydia; “This is where Dyslexic children find languages difficult because it’s all about getting the details right.”

One participant mentioned a strategy they used to lessen the requirement for pupils to copy from the board;

Lydia; “I’ve definitely heard that they do find it difficult to copy from the board…like if you want to copy down a verb table, don’t expect them to copy it down correctly because then they’ll learn the wrong thing, I like providing ready-made notes.”

With regards to techniques such as dictation, Heather questioned its use in school;

Heather; “I’m not sure how much dictation goes on anymore?”

Rachel “I used to a lot, but I don’t anymore”

Peter “I mix it up - I do some, not much”

Lydia “We do a little bit”

When discussing the fear of reading out loud, Heather described her strategy to avoid contributing to this anxiety;

Heather “Normally I’d just ask for a volunteer rather than making someone do it.”

Peter “I can imagine them being frightened, especially when they are younger.”

The participants reflected on their general approaches to pupil’s difficulties, which they perceived as mostly positive, when they read the quotations - “Mrs M, She knew I was intelligent. She used to encourage me and she used to help me with my work.” (Riddick, 2010, p 127) “She makes allowances for me and doesn’t show me up. She praises me and gives me gold stars” (Riddick, 2010, p128) “She’s understanding. She encourages you and always smiles at you. She’s nice even when you get something wrong” (Riddick, 2010, p129). Rachel and Lydia were not able to express with certainty that pupils with Dyslexia were praised and encouraged, and admitted that responses could vary;

Rachel; “I do think there’s a lot of that here, I think we are reasonably good with the children and do allow them to make mistakes without feeling stupid most of the time.”

Lydia; “I think that depends on context – day, time, because I can imagine some people not being very patient. I’d like to think we do this, not all the time but sometimes.”
Without explicitly stating it, one of the participants alluded twice during the discussion to a need to develop techniques for providing feedback to pupils with Dyslexia;

Lydia “…and even constructive criticism, even what we perceive as being constructive…to them, depending on their character, that could still be really crushing to somebody else that could feel like.”

“I can also imagine lots of people really trying very hard to find something (positive), I do try very hard to find something, sometimes it’s really difficult.”

A conversation developed about the potential conflict between differentiating whilst still ensuring the pupil has completed the syllabus;

Peter “the problem comes when you are preparing a pupil for an exam…you know you’ll be doing them a disservice if you’re kind of just dealing with that side of things without also having a view to ‘you’re going to walk into that exam and I know you’re going to be able to use your laptop or whatever, but you’ve got to be able to cope as best you can.’”

An area for further development of teacher practice could be to be able to distinguish key information and refine lesson content, and address the perceptual issues of differentiated practice being seen as a conflicting idea to good teaching.

The role of the SENCO as an advocate for pupils was referred to when the participants considered the quotation; ‘She says there’s no such thing as Dyslexia’ (Riddick, 2010, p199).

All laughing, Lydia; “Definitely not”

Peter; “Mrs Sarginson bearing down the corridor”

Lydia; “We’d be far too scared to say that! All laughing.

This indicates the importance of the SENCO building positive relationships with their colleagues, and having a clear message.

The following comments reinforce the importance of the SENCO in seeking and revealing the views of pupils. Even from this small group discussion, it was evident that pupils and teachers did not have the kind of direct, collaborative relationship where discussions take place about teaching and learning.

When considering the quotation; I’ve told him the way I liked it to be (helped) but he says ‘you can’t have it that way, it’s impossible’ (Riddick, 2010, p177) the participants considered if they had even been in a situation where a pupil had addressed them directly about their learning needs;

Rachel “I don’t think I’ve ever been asked.”

Heather “I haven’t.”
Only Peter, in 11 years of teaching stated that he’d experienced this scenario;

Peter “I have had 1 or 2 conversations along that line.”

The participants expressed interest in knowing more about how pupils feel following changes in practice;

Lydia “Also what is good is if you do manage to these things..you do want to know if pupils find it hard but you also want to know if you did something in your lesson that really worked well for that pupil and they realised that it worked you kind of want to know that too, then you know to do it again..you want to know ‘so and so does this for me, and that’s really helpful.’

Peter “Actually at a deeper level how we can actually see the world as a Dyslexic pupil sees it, in that classroom, for example I’ve got Amy in my class and she’s doing these notes, she’s drawing pictures in the margin and it’s not like I would have looked at that before and thought ‘what are you doing that for’, but my reaction, she can see it in my face ‘that’s brilliant, keep doing that, that’s clearly working for you’ so someone like Amy whose confidence is a real issue, hopefully that will be just another little win in her life and I think helping us to see things from their point of view is really so helpful.”

Peter raised the issue of pupil perspective of teacher’s actions;

Peter “There is a terrible danger too about how we perceive how we’re being and how the pupils experience what we’re doing and that’s not the same thing”

Peter referred to an INSET training session that I had lead over a year ago on the topic of Dyslexia. I made a short video of some year 11 pupils speaking about their experiences.

Peter; “Those videos, you need to come back to them at some point, you could ask for a 10 minute inset slot in an INSET.” (Me; “I’m up next actually.”)

Peter; “I just thought it was very moving and at these things I like to sit where I can see people’s faces and you could see people’s reactions, James, Lewis – these are our guys(pupils), it was lovely.”

**Considerations**

As the focus group was intended to gather data but also pilot a method, this section will consider the effectiveness of the approach and any limitations of my research design.

The focus group yielded some interesting findings, and it was beneficial to me as a practioner to observe an enthusiastic discussion taking place about Dyslexia. Vaughn, Shay Shumm and Sinagub (1996) advocate that focus groups are best used when conducting ‘exploratory research’ (p6). In my role as a researcher, there were some issues with my questions and the stimulus data which affected the findings.
There was an extract taken from every quote that appeared in Riddick’s research, which ensured I did not preselect particular viewpoints, but did also result in some opinions being duplicated as the same difficulty or point was expressed by more than individual in her study. This affects the results, as numerically the total in each column is not representative of the number of different experiences that the participants evaluated their knowledge of.

The participants were asked to sort the quotations into those that they agreed they were familiar with and those they were unfamiliar with. During the task it became apparent that my instruction lacked clarity. My intention was that the participants could consider whether they were familiar with the issue being described, therefore demonstrating their awareness of the kinds of experiences that pupils with Dyslexia could have. What took place began as addressing that question, but gradually became the categorising of the statements into whether the participants felt that that viewpoint had been experienced in their specific setting. Therefore the participants were acting as judges for the school’s practices, rather than acknowledging their awareness of the existence of a viewpoint. I chose not to correct their actions, as the discussion generated some interesting comments, I also knew that I would be able to focus on the feedback from the quotations, rather than the way the quotations were sorted. This could have actually made the sorting element of the task redundant.

The original research plan intended that participants would select 1 statement of their choice which referred to a matter that they have experienced before and share how they responded in their practice. However, this naturally occurred during the course of the first task. It may have also been advisable to add to research question 1 - What understanding do teachers perceive they have about the experiences of children with Dyslexia?

In relation to research question 3, rather than identifying areas of need from the stimulus material, the participants spoke about practice and referred to their responses to approaches taken by the SENCO to raise awareness and change practice, particularly with regard to the recent Dyslexia Awareness Week foci. The participants appeared eager to change elements of their practice, and were definite in their preference for small amounts of information, frequently distributed by the SENCO. This could be another approach that SENCOs could more consciously take throughout the academic year, although there is a risk that the ‘novelty’ could wear off.

Rachel; “This week, just having 1 thing to concentrate on each day, that was very simple.”

Peter; “Definitely- I was able to do that.”

Heather; “There could be more weeks with a different focus.”

Peter; “I think its digestible chunks.”

Rachel; “Just giving something to focus on for that week isn’t it, it’s a bit of a novelty, I can do that.”
Lydia alluded to how practice change can become embedded;

“If, say you do something like writing your lesson objectives and your plan for the lesson on the board and letting them tick it off… by the time we’ve done it for a fortnight it’s become so ingrained in your practice that it’s not a problem to remember it anymore.”

It was particularly interesting how Rachel interpreted her role as a teacher with her response to the information about pupil need in her classes that is provided at the start of term. This indicates the need for the SENCO to give consideration of the amount and frequency of information that they provide, in order for strategies to be willingly adopted, not rejected as being too cumbersome. There is a need to further explore why some teachers may deem it acceptable to reject information and why they may see it as being opposed to what they consider ‘teaching’ is, as Rachel and Peter expressed;

Rachel; “I get quite overwhelmed at the beginning of term with all this information, we get very good information from you with what we do with ADHD, and this and that, and I don’t know where to start to do it, I just look at the whole lot and think ‘I can’t do anything’ I’m just going to teach.”

Peter; “I think it’s really helpful and I think the timing, I agree about the start of term, you need to get your hat into the ring and it does need to be there, but when it comes to changing practice and helping I think also, it’s just kind of signalling something week in week out that’s just kind of there - I’ve found it really helpful.”

Another area of concern from the participants was the impact Dyslexia has on pupil behaviour;

Lydia; “the thing that I find difficult is the interplay between how these difficulties can cause, or they’re part and parcel of unfocussed behaviour, obviously I’ve been to see you quite recently about how I can make this a positive experience, whilst also still getting what I want from them and the rest of the class…it’s heart-breaking to read about people getting demotivated because they can’t do that, and how we can be sympathetic and be supportive but also where you still have high standards of behaviour and expectations.”

Furthermore, the need for a clearer understanding of how consistency and differentiation can be achieved;

Lydia; “I find that because if I know that a child’s got learning difficulties, whether it’s Dyslexia or whatever it is, I feel like I actually let them get away with stuff that I wouldn’t accept from another child because I’m trying to compensate, I feel like I over compensate sometimes that equally is not good for them or for anybody else, so that’s the thing I find really hard. I really totally buy into and like doing all these kind of strategies and stuff but also I get a little bit anxious that if I do say, tell off a child who has learning difficulties that I am somehow being really really mean.”
Peter raised the practical implications of differentiated practice;

Peter “It’s been very enriching to have all this kind of stuff going on in the classroom,...one of the challenges for the teacher on the ground is that as you diversify it can become more difficult to manage, for example in my year 11 RS set, I have quite a few pupils working on laptops and that’s great, but the whole process of going through marking and assessing work, it’s not that it’s impossible but it actually becomes more challenging organisationally.”

The SENCO should recognise and seek to address the considerable barriers to teaching that behaviour and practicalities can present to colleagues.

Lydia referred to her initial teacher training and her inability to recall specific input on Dyslexia. This reinforces my earlier work looking at ITT.

Her practical experience in school caused her to have to learn;

Lydia; “I don’t think, thinking back to when I did my training 7 or 8 years ago, that we had anything on how to deal with Dyslexia....we may have had a little tokenistic 1 hour lecture on it, but nothing on specific strategies dealing with Dyslexia. It wasn’t really until I went to my last school that I really had to deal with it, and then coming here even more so. I don’t know if that’s improved now but it’s was definitely something that you were very unprepared for.”

Lydia also cited an idea for a reason as to why understanding the perspectives of pupils might not easy for teachers;

Lydia; “As because many of us who have gone into teaching will probably have come from.. who may have been well motivated and have been in top sets, my personal experience I never had children in my class at school who were Dyslexic because I was in the top set for everything.”

This further confirms the need for the SENCO to incorporate elements in their approaches that are designed to develop empathy, as experiencing difficulties learning is unlikely for professionals who have been successful in the educational system. If Lydia’s comment is typical, there is also work to be done on separating the idea of Dyslexia being associated with low ability.
Conclusions

The aim of the pilot study was to establish an initial understanding of the perspectives of experienced teachers regarding their knowledge and skills teaching pupils with Dyslexia, and to introduce engagement with pupil voice material. The pilot study was useful for a number of reasons, time constraints were apparent, and in a busy boarding school this is a feature of practice daily. This may mean that even the most committed research participants may struggle to find the time to regularly meet with the SENCO, pupil and working party.

A further outcome of the pilot was how the views of the focus group participants challenged my assumptions as a somewhat weary SENCO who has been continually confronted with barriers to practice change I approach the training element of my role with caution. It was clear that the participants in the focus group were enthusiastic about practice change and interested in knowing more about, and from, the pupils they taught. This is certainly more of a hopeful scenario than the bleak picture that I assumed. This may have been due to the sample of colleagues who were already known to be interested in developing their practice, so it would be beneficial to conduct a larger scale audit of the perceptions of teachers in my school have of their knowledge and skills.

The SENCO may often be depicted, and feel, like a lone combatant, but working with colleagues more regularly could derive important perspectives that will provide a further influence the success of the SENCO’s attempts to bring about practice change. It may be argued that this is a veiled way in which teachers retain their power by stating that practice change will only occur on their terms.

However, it seems unreasonable for a SENCO to advocate for greater collaboration between pupil and teacher, when they are inflexible in the approaches that they take with their colleagues. This work using pupil voice could in turn be an account of ‘teacher voice’. If interventions designed to improve the learning experiences of pupils with Dyslexia, are crafted by the SENCO using their colleagues’ contributions, then there should be a clear starting point from which to move forwards.

Piloting an aspect of my work has reinforced the validity of a piece of action research that is based on using pupil voice and deliberately targets the need for stronger relationships between pupils with Dyslexia and their teachers. In order to make my findings more transferable to different educational settings and/or learning needs that pupils experience

Writing a research proposal has been a difficult process and I acknowledge that there are unexplored areas in the literatures which may prove useful in my work – I have not studied how teachers learn and develop, or the literatures concerning the notion of specialist knowledge. I also acknowledge that I will be examining literatures which address the matter of Special Educational Needs in the broad sense, and which are also likely to refer to the mainstream, state provision for education.
There may also be work that I consider to be relevant, which refers to a different age group to the one in my study. Although the systems are different (for example, there is no obligation for Independent Schools to adhere to the SEN Code of Practice, or to employ qualified teachers) I will evaluate the literatures in terms of their applicability to both the Independent Senior School setting and 1 specific difficulty of Dyslexia.

The barriers that hinder the SENCO’s ability to influence practice change are numerous and long standing. Perhaps it is a naïve view that all it will take to transform this situation is the formation of a relationship between pupil and teacher and consultation with the SENCO about teaching methods and strategies. The compelling evidence from the body of work on the voices of pupils with Dyslexia provides motive enough to at least attempt an alternative approach to the likes of INSET sessions and emails. The well-being of children is an area that cannot be overlooked.

With initial teacher training under question and beginning teachers increasingly commencing their careers learning directly from the classroom rather than lecture theatre, it is going to be ever more the responsibility of existing practitioners to inform and instruct. This has implications for SENCOs, who may find they face greater barriers as they compete for a route to influence best practice.
Research plan

Outline:

In this study, I will use a focus group to explore teacher’s responses to stimuli from the work of Riddick (2010). I will present some of the data gathered in her fieldwork to my colleagues and encourage discussion about the content. I will conduct a focus group with 5 teachers in an Independent School, where I am the Head of Learning Support.

Research questions:

What understanding do teachers have about the experiences of children with Dyslexia?

What skills do teachers use when teaching pupils with Dyslexia?

What help and support do teachers consider is required in order to develop skills teaching pupils with Dyslexia?

Schedule:

Participants to arrive – refreshments provided. Brief introduction of the aims of the meeting. The meeting will be audio recorded.

1. Blank stickers provided for the participants – write on their name and the answer to the question: How would you describe your knowledge of Dyslexia?

2. Stimuli provided – printed statements made by Dyslexic pupils from the work of Riddick (2010) – participants to each read aloud for all to hear.

3. Group the statements into 2 (group consensus). Which are the statements that are familiar to the participants and which are not. Which group has more and why do the participants think this is the case?

4. Each participant to take 1 statement of their choice that they have experienced before and share how they responded in their practice.

5. In pairs/threes – chose 2/3 statements and discuss the actions that a teacher can take in order to address the issue raised by the pupil (either from experience, or hypothetically)

6. As a group – chose any statements where the participants identify that they would like to develop their skills and knowledge in order to address the issue raised.
Investigating teacher’s pedagogical responses to pupil voice – professional understandings of the classroom experiences of children with Dyslexia

Participant Information Sheet

You are being invited to take part in a study focusing on the professional knowledge teachers have and would like to develop when teaching pupils with Dyslexia. It forms part of my work towards a Professional Doctorate in Education. Please take time to read the following information carefully and ask if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information. Thank you in advance for your help.

Who will conduct the study?

Mrs Catherine Sarginson studying with the University of Manchester.

Title of the study

Investigating teacher’s pedagogical responses to pupil voice – understanding more about the classroom experiences of children with Dyslexia.

What is the aim of the study?

The study intends to provide an insight into the Dyslexic child’s experience in the classroom and how professionals might respond. It aims to learn more about the skills teachers already have and identify those they perceive they need with regards to teaching pupils with Dyslexia.

Why have I been chosen?

I am using teaching staff from Sedbergh School who are interested in developing their practice and are willing to be part of a research study.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?

My research consists of a focus group that will meet together to discuss their responses to statements made by children collected in a published research study by Riddick (2010). The statements will be used as stimuli for teachers to see the perspective of the child and think about their professional practice.
What happens to the data collected?

The discussion will be recorded and transcribed and will form the pilot study element of the research proposal for my Doctoral Thesis. It will then be used to inform my work on developing a training intervention which addresses the issues raised.

How is confidentiality maintained?

The written report will not use the name of the school or teachers. The teachers who participate in the focus group will be given pseudonyms so as not to reveal their identities. Notes will be shredded and the recording deleted one year after gaining my qualification.

What happens if I do not want wish to take part or if I change my mind?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you change your mind it would be preferably to inform me before the focus group has started.

Will I be paid for participating in the study?

Unfortunately I am unable to pay you for taking part in the study, but hopefully it will be an enjoyable experience that you find interesting.

What is the duration of the study?

The deadline for this paper is 28th November 2013. The focus group will meet once, duration of approx. 25 minutes.

Where will the study be conducted?

The focus group will meet in a location in school at a time that is mutually convenient. I will complete the analysis of the data and the writing up at home.

Will the outcomes of the study be published?

Details from the study may be included in my final Doctoral thesis which I anticipate to be completed by 2018.

Criminal Records Check (if applicable)

As a current teacher I have undergone a satisfactory criminal records check.
Contact for further information

If you wish to discuss the details of the research then please do not hesitate to contact either myself (ces@sedberghschool.org) or my supervisor Professor Alan Dyson (D.A.Dyson@manchester.ac.uk)

What if something goes wrong?

If you require any help or advice then please contact myself or my supervisor above.

If you wish to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the study then you should contact the Head of the Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Department and role</th>
<th>Number of years teaching experience</th>
<th>How would you describe your knowledge of Dyslexia?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teacher self-evaluation

Thank you for agreeing to be part of my action research into changing classroom practice through the use of pupil voice. Please can you complete the following questionnaire. Your answers will be anonymous and used to inform the initial stages of the training programme you will be participating in.

Number of years teaching experience: ______  Number of years in current school: ______

Initial Teacher Training completed

Yes ☐  No ☐

If yes, do you think your training adequately covered Dyslexia?

Yes ☐  No ☐

How would you describe your knowledge of Dyslexia?

__________________________________________________________________________________

Where has your knowledge of Dyslexia come from? Please rank in order of most input/influence:

ITT ☐  Further study e.g. post graduate ☐  The SENCO ☐  Your own research ☐

Increased classroom experience ☐  The media e.g. documentaries, magazine articles, social media

Other colleagues e.g. Teaching Assistants ☐  Getting to know pupils ☐

Getting to know parents/carers ☐  Other __________________________

How confident do you feel about meeting the needs of pupils with Dyslexia in your class?

Very confident ☐  Confident ☐  Quite Confident ☐  Not very confident ☐

Please explain your answer

__________________________________________________________________________________

What are the main challenges you experience with regards to your teaching of pupils with Dyslexia? Please rank in order, or write N/A:

Differentiation ☐  Always remembering who has Dyslexia ☐  Time ☐

Understanding the different levels of severity ☐  Remembering access arrangements ☐

Other class/school priorities ☐  e.g. __________________________ Being seen to be fair ☐

Marking work ☐  Missing difficulties that may not be obvious ☐  Too much work to change ☐

Inflexible course content/requirements ☐  Concerns that pupils use Dyslexia as an excuse ☐
Don’t always know what to do ☐ The importance of the class as a whole ☐

What my role is when a Teaching Assistant is present ☐

Other ☐ ____________________

What do you do to make your teaching/classroom Dyslexia friendly?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

How would you describe your relationship with the Dyslexic pupils that you teach?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

What do you think would be most useful to you?
Pupil feedback

Thank you for agreeing to be part of my research project. Please can you complete the following questionnaire. Your answers will be used to help plan the programme you will be participating in with your teachers this year.

What is positive about having Dyslexia?

Please give some example of things that you find difficult:

Do you think that your teachers understand how Dyslexia impacts you?

Please give some examples of helpful things that your teachers do in class:

Can you give any examples of things teachers do that makes things difficult for you?

What 3 things would make the most difference to you in class?
# Teaching and Learning Contract

**Teacher:**

**Subject:**

**Pupil:**

**Numbers of lessons per week:**

**Time frame:**

*September to October half term*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyslexic difficulty 1</th>
<th>Classroom Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*November to Christmas*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyslexic difficulty 1</th>
<th>Classroom Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexic difficulty 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*January to February half term*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyslexic difficulty 1</th>
<th>Classroom Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexic difficulty 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexic difficulty 3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### March to Easter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyslexic difficulty 1</th>
<th>Classroom Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyslexic difficulty 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyslexic difficulty 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyslexic difficulty 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### April to May half term

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyslexic difficulty 1</th>
<th>Classroom Strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyslexic difficulty 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyslexic difficulty 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyslexic difficulty 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dyslexic difficulty 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexic difficulty 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexic difficulty 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexic difficulty 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexic difficulty 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexic difficulty 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dyslexic difficulty 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Half termly evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom Strategy</th>
<th>Used in class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Review of helpfulness (pupil):

Teacher evaluation:
References


Bradbury Huang, H. (2010). ‘What is good action research?: Why the resurgent interest?’ Action Research; 8; (1), pp 93 – 109. Sage Publications,


Department of Education and the Department of Health (2013)
Draft Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice: for 0 to 25 years
Statutory guidance for organisations who work with and support children and young people with SEN
Accessed Online 12/10/13

DfES November (2001a)
The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (Ref: DfES/581/2001)
Accessed Online 10th October 2013


Dyslexia-SpLD Trust (2013)
Dyslexia and Literacy Difficulties: Policy and Practice Review. A consensus call for action: why, what and how?


Edmonds, C. (2013). ‘Why teachers need to hear the voice and experience of the child with Dyspraxia,’ Research In Teacher Education, 3, (1) pp 5–10


DfES research report RR831 B.


OFSTED (2010) The special educational needs and disability review - a statement is not enough


OFSTED (2004) Special educational needs and disability: towards inclusive schools


(http://dera.ioe.ac.uk/14790/1/00659-2009DOM-EN.pdf)


Direct Instruction Mathematics, 2nd edition
Columbus OH: Merrill


TTA (1998) Using the National Standards for Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators


Yilmaz, K. (2013)


Chapter 5: Conclusion

In this section I will consider the impact this project has had on my professional practice and summarise my project’s contribution to knowledge. Further to this I will reflect upon the feedback given to me by my research supervisor following each paper’s submission, and consider how I have developed as a researcher through the completion of the MPhil writing process.

Contribution to theory and knowledge

The discussions in the previous chapters offer three distinct contributions to knowledge:

1. A critical review of the literatures examining and reviewing Special Educational Needs content during Initial Teacher Training (ITT).
2. An examination of a small sample of teacher’s perceptions of their knowledge, skills and confidence teaching pupils with special educational needs and an identification of the sources of that insight in an independent school.
3. A proposal for thesis at doctoral level that consisted of a training programme which was designed to use pupil voice as a catalyst for practice change by reframing aspects of the SENCo’s expected training and advisory role.

Through much of what I document in the three research papers, it is clear that since its incarnation in 1994, the SENCO role has been subject to considerable change, leading to confusion and conflict as competing discourse such as (Oldham and Radford, 2011; Morewood, 2012; Tissot 2013). What seems to emerge through much of my analysis and reflections is a clashing of operational and strategic enactments of the role, fuelled by the repetition of policy stipulations of leading and directing others. My research suggests that SENCOs are faced with many barriers as they aim to fulfil the very broad requirements of the position they hold.

I used the termed ‘barriers to practice change’ to refer to the difficulties that teachers can have in working with pupils with special educational needs as a development of the term ‘barriers to learning’ which is commonly used in this context but usually applied to children with SEND. I wanted to move away from a deficit/medical model of disability which places the ‘blame’ onto the child, to shift the focus establishing why the teacher is experiencing challenge. The main barrier to practice change that this series of papers identified through a review of the literature and my research was that inadequate initial teacher training resulted in a lack of knowledge and skills with regards to teaching pupils with special educational needs. This could then be seen to foster evasive attitudes towards inclusion and the subsequent misunderstanding of the responsibility teachers have for the progress of all the children in their classes. Poor initial training could be argued as the source of many, if not all, of the difficulties encountered by teachers in inclusive classrooms.
This process has led me to also consider the existence of other barriers that SENCOs are likely to encounter when attempting to change practice. Firstly, the very existence of the SENCO role and SENCO departments could contribute to the view that teaching children with special educational needs is a specialist, separate job and therefore requiring little attention from mainstream teachers. The creation of learning support departments, and the presence of other adults in the classroom such as Teaching Assistants, whose job it is to work specifically with individual children with SEND, could be seen to further de-skill mainstream classroom teachers (Hallett and Hallett, 2010) and cause confusion about the nature of their teaching role and relationship with that child. This could be further compounded by the common strategy of withdrawing pupils with special needs from some of their lessons to be taught by someone else. These common models of SEND provision unintentionally reinforce such misunderstandings about mainstream teacher’s responsibility (Bines, 1992; Cole, 2005; Dyson, 1990; Lloyd, 2002; MacKenzie, 2007).

Secondly, differences in how SENCOs are perceived will influence how effective they can be in their role as a leader of change. Questions continue to be asked regarding the authority SENCOs have to influence whole school practice, which lead into the matter of professional identity of SENCOs. If SENCOs are not recognised by their colleagues as having the authority to influence their teaching, then their ability to enact policy expectations are thwarted from the outset. There is no debate that SENCOs are charged with the task of changing practice as it is explicitly stated in policy, but they might not possess the authority to do so in their individual school settings. The shift in policy away from the SENCO being a separate specialist, to holding a more managerial, strategic role of whole school influence may be of note in the academic world (Norwich, 2012; Tissot, 2013) but it may not have been a communicated to the wider audience of practising teachers. Therefore, it is unclear whether all teachers in schools know how important the SENCO role is supposed to be. At what point, if ever, are teachers informed that the SENCO is legally required to ensure all practitioners in the setting understand their responsibilities to children with SEND (DoE, 2013, p70)? Oldham and Radford’s 2011 study found that the SENCo role as a leader was not understood in secondary schools. SENCOs may be trying to exert their policy-awarded ‘powers’ to influence whole school practice but face considerable opposition.

Influencing practice change can also be affected by SENCO’s perception of their role and position in relation to their colleagues. There may be challenges if SENCO’s self-views are inconsistent with policy expectations which seem to assume SENCOs have the authority to lead and train others. Kearns’ 2005 study of eighteen SENCOs was based on narrative accounts which facilitated the participants to articulate how they saw themselves. From these accounts, Kearns developed a model of four distinct types of SENCO, where only one was focussed on strategic thinking and delivery, known as ‘collaborator’. The other styles of ‘arbitrator’, ‘rescuer’ and ‘auditor’ concentrated on the more day-to-day groundwork of the role. 75% of Kearn’s SENCO types identified themselves as non-strategic, and essentially, non-leadership. More recently, Tissot’s 2013 study of 146 SENCOs found that 48% do not have the formal authority to lead (p37).
It is unsurprising that lack of status is cited as one of the key inhibitors to SENCOs’ performance (Pearson, 2008). They may be trying to communicate with people who simply aren't listening. Therefore, if SENCOs do not feel they have the standing to insist upon practice changes and/or their colleagues don’t recognise their authority to give instructions or make demands then another barrier to practice change has been created.

Even if one were to assume that schools and mainstream teachers might be positive to developing more inclusive practice (and the evidence, as has been reviewed here is questionable at best) there also appears to be a dearth of materials (a) to support inclusive pedagogies and (b) to support the way practice change might be orchestrated by SENCOs.

‘The SENCO and class teacher, together with specialists, and involving the pupil’s parents, should consider a range of evidence based and effective teaching approaches, appropriate equipment, strategies and interventions in order to support the child’s progress.

(DfE/DoH, 2014, p. 103, My emphasis)

Since the introduction of the 1994 Code, responsibilities attached to the role of the SENCo have progressively shifted towards a more prescribed and less clear one as SENCo job descriptors have shifted further towards the direction of management and away from the specialist teaching role (Mackenzie, 2007). I aimed to What are these effective teaching approaches, strategies and interventions? Differentiation for example, is a recommended approach, yet there is a lack of clarity about what that involves and seems to assume that somehow teachers will know what to change in the task they have planned to make it accessible to all. I aimed to begin to address this matter in my doctoral thesis proposal by devising a training programme which utilised pupil voice where pupils engaged in thinking and dialogue about their own learning, which relied on a certain level of self-awareness, maturity and articulation. I envisaged teachers being facilitated to respond by the pupil’s interaction with them being the catalyst for them exploring teaching approaches and trialling activities and tasks in partnership. I purposely wanted to reduce the dependency on the SENCO, in order to bring about more favourable working relationships between teacher and child that functioned independently from the SENCO.
Impact on professional practice

By undertaking this research I have further developed my knowledge of the expectations and reality of the professional role I hold. Since the introduction of the 1994 Code, SENCOs responsibilities have progressively become less clear, despite being more prescriptive (Mackenzie, 2007; Rosen-Webb, 2011; Tissot, 2013). I have also become aware of a repeated lack of correlation between policy and practice. Primarily with regards to the fulfilment of the standards for QTS, a certain degree of competency in teaching pupils with SEND is specified, yet newly qualified teachers do not feel confident in this aspect of their role. There have been repeated calls for SEND input during ITT to be improved (Brownlee and Carrington, 2000; 1992; Garner, 2001; House of Commons, 2010; Lawson and Nash, 2008; Mittler, 1992; OFSTED, 2006; OFSTED 2009; Winter, 2006) yet no significant changes have been implemented - a scenario which Hodkinson (2009) likens to a ‘Groundhog Day’ I now have a much greater understanding of the source of the difficulties that I experienced with colleagues whose first instinct was often to come to me with problems relating to pupils with SEND, rather than use their own initiative, or refer to the guidance I had given. It was not uncommon for me to judge mainstream teachers’ actions in the classroom or their responses to my directions and encouragements towards inclusive practice to be obstructive, indifferent or languid. Particularly in relation to practice change, in exploring this it has become apparent that the research that I read, and conducted myself, suggested that the issues were not as clear cut as I had assumed. My supposition was that most, if not all, teachers held negative views about teaching pupils with special educational needs. I had formed this opinion both from the literature which referred to school and teachers real, but often unspoken, opposition to inclusive initiatives and practice (Cole, 2005; Lloyd, 2002) from the indifference and opposition I had perceived in my practice, and from countless examples of informal pupil feedback about their lessons. I was able to consider that although the amount and sustainability of practice change that I wanted to occur was less than I had set out to establish, the reasons for this was not solely poor attitudes but other factors. Positive attitudes towards inclusive pedagogy had not been fostered from the outset of the initial training process, and issues of indifference remain unchallenged. I felt that one of the comments made in the pilot study was very telling.

Made by experienced teacher of 11 years, referred to as Rachel;

“I get quite overwhelmed at the beginning of term with all this information and I don’t know where to start… I just look at the whole lot and think…I’m just going to teach.”

There was a clear disconnect in this teacher’s mind between the special educational needs information provided at the start of the academic year with a reminder of suggestions for techniques and strategies, and the ability to teach – here it was viewed as something separate, in fact, in direct opposition and therefore unhelpful to the job of effective teaching, rather than being essential for its success.

The matter of status, self-identification and the influence that SENCOs have to impact practice compared to that which is stated in the Code has been the subject of research (Rosen-Webb, 2011).
Questions have repeatedly been asked about the reality of this legally required role, and significant tensions have been identified. Suggested by Dyson and Gains as a ‘poison chalice’ (1995), the SENCO role was then described as “difficult, if not impossible” (p51). In the years that followed, the SENCOs remit increased as policy acknowledged more than the day-to-day operations of the role were needed (DfES, 2001, DfES, 2004). This could be argued to have been an unrealistic from the outset and required considerable flexibility on the part of the post-holder in order to keep abreast of changing policy amendments, legal requirements and the associated bureaucratic burdens, as well as attempting to lead others. Although policy intended that the SENCO position was that of a whole school inclusive leader who operated with the support of those above them, and their colleagues, the reality is often single practitioner, with sole responsibility, working in isolation (Hallett and Hallett, 2010; Layton, 2005; Morewood, 2012; NUT, 2004, Pearson, 2008; Szwed, 2007). It is therefore not a surprise to find that strategic developments are often at the expense of the operational aspects – the dilemma of ‘function versus role’ (Norwich, 2012). This is the reality that I experience daily, and have understood from the literatures that I am by no means alone in facing the dilemma of competing, equally valid, priorities. It is also reassuring that although in practice it seems common to be undervalued and unappreciated, that researchers recognise the challenges of the role, as Morewood puts;

an effective SENCo is a fluid, organic and constantly evolving professional, situated within an ever-changing position in a complex mesh of specific legislation, educational structures and expectations

(Morewood, 2012, page 74).

Repeated reviews of the Code of Practice have increasingly emphasised the role SENCOs have in

ensuring pupils with special educational needs have access to high-quality provision which meets their needs and opportunities to engage in activities alongside children who are not SEN-designated


My professional practice remains committed to this aim, by fighting the barriers to practice change that impact on the quality of the provision that pupils with SEND receive from their teachers.
Further research

This series of 3 research papers touches upon a succession of key issues for schools to consider regarding teacher’s knowledge, skills and confidence teaching pupils with special educational needs. Although the routes into teaching are now more varied than ever, what is not changing is the prevalence of children with special educational needs being taught in mainstream classrooms by often ill-equipped mainstream teachers, supported in an almost impossible task by the SENCO. The SEN Code of practice was informed by the general principle that schools should and could meet the needs of children, yet the training provision does not seem to have kept pace. I feel there is justification for further research into the matter of initial teacher training and follow on from the work of Hodkinson (2009) whose review concluded that although policy had changed considerably; SEND content in training had changed very little in the last 35 years. This might become increasingly crucial if the role of training teachers is increasingly devolved to educational settings as a replacement for traditional Higher Education routes. What potential role could and should SENCOs have in this process?

Early on in the research process I saw the difference that routes into teaching and subsequent experience of working with pupils can make to one’s knowledge, skills and confidence. For example, my own experiences of becoming a SENCO emerge through the completion of a Post Graduate Teaching Qualification in Post Compulsory Education (PGCE) that included an Inclusive Education pathway after becoming interested in this field from a module in my degree. My teaching qualification did not provide me with QTS (I later went on to complete this when I secured my first SENCO role in a mainstream secondary school) so was unaware of the Q standards. The PGCE required me to complete my teaching practice working with adults with learning difficulties and tailor my written assignments. My first teaching appointment was in a Specialist Residential College for young adults where the environment, curriculum, staffing infrastructure and ethos were aligned to meeting individual needs in learners with significant cognitive, behavioural and sensory impairments. I appreciated that this approach was ‘the norm’ to me.

Although I recognised that I had worked in a specialist setting with students whose disabilities were deemed to be too severe to be taught in a mainstream establishment I did, however, assume that all teachers would be provided with a strong foundational knowledge of SEND during their training. I had chosen a distinct path from the outset and started my career with an atypical exposure to a wide range of diagnosed conditions in a specialist setting designed to meet learner’s specific needs. My training in Higher Education and teaching placement paled in comparison with the amount I learnt from working with pupils in this setting. When I entered a mainstream school 6 years later, my frame of reference was hugely different to that of my colleagues – where differentiation and individual need was the norm to me, it was now a different model of pupils taught in large groups on mass.
I appreciate that this is the experience of the majority of teachers in mainstream settings, and therefore the shock that I experienced at what I felt was a lack of a basic knowledge would be the exception, rather than the rule, for most SENCOs.

My anecdotal evidence might be a little self-indulgent, but in summarising my pathway to becoming a SENCO it raises further questions. The SENCO is envisioned as a knowledgeable guide, who advises others on how to develop effective inclusive practice (Winwood, 2012) but what factors ensure this level of expertise?. To be a SENCO, one must first hold qualified teacher status (statutory instruments, 2008). The Initial Teacher Training with the award of QTS is the chief training route for teachers and as I have previously concluded, ITT is deemed inadequate for preparing teachers to meet pupil’s special educational needs. It is illogical that, unless they have decided from the outset to specialise, those who are tasked with the role of advising others on inclusive practice have been trained in exactly the same way. It is imperative that the SENCO can model good teaching practices and evidence high quality provision if they are asking their colleagues to do the same (Done, Murphy and Bedford, 2016). I can see scope to build on the work of researchers such as Rosen-Webb (2011) and conduct a large scale study into who the SENCOs in our schools are, and chart their career journey to this role. Where has their knowledge and skills come from? What personal characteristics do they have? Do they have the opportunity and authority to instruct their colleagues? There is a clear gap in knowledge around these questions.

Furthermore, the development of SENCO’s knowledge and skills has been brought into greater focus by the creation of specific CPD for the role. Since 2009 it has been a requirement for every new SENCO in a mainstream school to gain a Master’s level qualification called the National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination within 3 years of their appointment (DCSF, 2008). Once again, influencing practice is specified in the form of 5 outcomes, mainly 2 ‘Strategic Development’ and ‘Leading, developing and supporting colleagues’ (TDA, 2009; The SENCO Learning Outcomes, revised in 2014 (NCTL, 2014d),

, and by including these aspects as assessable outcomes, the Award reemphasises the leadership elements, and reaffirms the significance of the SENCO in maintaining quality education for all (Oldham and Radford, 2011; Rosen-Webb, 2011). Strategic change management ‘figures prominently’ in the Award (Done, Murphy and Bedford, 2016, p13) and a research task is required to be completed as part of the assessment, which provides an opportunity for SENCOs to engage in research. As the National Award is a relatively new condition of the role, there has been limited research into its content and effectiveness. In Griffiths and Dubsky’s 2012 study, they concluded that the Award had had a ‘notable impact’ on practice (p171). Pearson, Mitchell and Rapti’s study 2 years later acknowledged that they were unable to address the potential influence of National Award (2015). A longitudinal study would be a suitable and interesting means to analyse the appropriateness of the Award’s aims concerning influencing inclusive practice.
As I have previously discussed, policy expectations assume a leadership role and a rank which ensures compliance, and as such it was suggested that due to the level of responsibility and scope, the SENCO role should be recognised as a senior one (Cole, 2005; Layton 2005; Oldham and Radford, 2011; House of Commons, Education and Skills Select Committee, 2006). However, initial findings show that this recommendation has not been taken up. In a NASEN study of SENCOs, only 33% of secondary school respondents were on the SLT (Pearson, 2008). However, the situation may be more positive with the percentage of secondary SENCOs on the SLT almost doubling from 2007-2012 (Mitchell, 2014). If a SENCO is not on the senior leadership team, what guarantees are there that colleagues will respond positively to the advice, instruction and feedback they are given, and what follow up procedures are in place to ensure accountability? Tissot (2013) argues that the literature suggests that if SENCOs are not on the SLT the challenges of the role will interfere with the government guidance. Conversely, Done, Murphy and Bedford (2016) argue that seniority may create an additional challenge for SENCOs to achieve an analytic and strategic focus because they are aware of and involved in a number of school-wide initiatives. It would be interesting to establish through future research whether there is greater recognition of SENCOs having a strategic role regarding teaching and learning by membership in the SLT. How can the tensions be resolved when SENCOs have senior leadership role when they are not given a senior leaders title?
Doing professional research

I have become increasingly aware of my particular positioning as a passionate practitioner in the field of SEND, and I have learnt throughout the process the importance of exercising restraint. It was a consistent area of development for me as a researcher throughout the MPhil process to increasingly recognise when I made statements of fact that were mainly based on my own professional practice, background and personal interpretation of the research or literature and then either remove or reconsider my words to be more analytical or objective. It was challenging at times to separate myself from the research process and look objectively at the matters at hand, and this was commented on in my examiners’ feedback. I also understood that this issue was not uncommon for teachers acting as researchers in their own schools as I have had the opportunity to reflect on the difficulties and benefits of being a researcher insider.

I acknowledge that there are limitations of my samples in paper two and three, as I could have engaged in a more methodical approach to their selection. In paper two, I considered the career stages of my colleagues and opted for three different timeframes, utilising there being one trainee teacher in post at that time. I was responsive to the options I identified in the context of my school, rather than in response to the literature or a planned approach. I did not have any justification for the selection of a sample of three, or consider if the gender, age or nationality of the participants would play a part. The main criteria I had for selection for the others was my existing professional relationships with the two participants – one was my line manager and mentor, who I met with weekly, and another was a colleague who I started with and a fellow Head of Department who I knew from Middle Leadership meetings and liaison with me regarding his subject (English) and support for pupils with Dyslexia. I only included a positive viewpoint on this, referring to the benefit of trusting working relationship to aid research (Cohen and Manion, 1994) and did not consider any potential negatives, of which there could be many. As a consequence, the generalizability of any of the conclusions I have drawn are limited.

I did not spend time carefully considering the most appropriate research methodology to adopt and as my work was mainly qualitative I selected approaches including questionnaires, interviews and focus group work, but without adequate investigation into why. I had limited experience using such research methods and felt in the context of my school at that time it could be a practical and appropriate, and therefore realistic to propose and complete. In paper two, I conducted a single interview with each of the three participants. I naively relied upon my relationships with the sample to ensure each felt at ease and neglected to purposely plan how to achieve this through the use of specific techniques and deployment of skills. I aimed to cover classroom practice by constructing questions that required the participants to recall instances and examples, as an alternative to conducting teaching observations. I justified this decision by referring to the main emphasis of the research into teacher’s perceptions of their skills and knowledge regarding special educational needs, about what the teachers thought. The existing relationship with my sample also influenced this decision.
I did not adequately justify my decision to solely use an interview method, and although I made the suggestion that there could be worth in bringing the three participants together to engage in discussion together, I did not support this with evidence from the literature about the effectiveness and challenges of conducting focus group. In paper three, I held a focus group as part of my pilot study work, and neglected to provide any reasoning for this decision, and again, inadequate explanation of the planned process by which the participants were selected. Their selection of four teaching colleagues was the result of them exhibiting, in my opinion, positive engagement with the activities I was running in school as part of the British Dyslexia Association’s annual awareness week, thereby inadvertently causing a bias. I generated a wealth of dialogue between the four participants, with considerable quotes being selected for inclusion in the paper, with limited analysis. The paper mainly presented the focus group comments in response to the discussion points, and a lack of effective thematic analysis does not utilise what could be some useful findings. Had I scrutinised the data I may have been able to suggest a model that could have been applied to other settings.

As a systematic review of the literature was not undertaken in paper one the potential for bias exists. As the approach I took could not be exactly replicated, the literatures that I selected could be interpreted in other ways by a different researcher, and it is impossible to establish how much of a factor my own professional experience and perspective played in how I selected, read, understood, interpreted, summarised and assimilated the literatures.

In paper three I repeated the approach of using interviews, and extended it to pupils in addition to teachers. The pupil data I used in the focus group in paper two was a secondary source, whereas paper three sought the direct views and feedback of pupils of their experiences in the classroom.

My initial 6 years in teaching were based in a Specialist Residential Further Education College, followed by 5 years in a Mainstream Secondary School (for pupils in years 7 – 11) as SENCO before a move in 2012 to an Independent Boarding School (for pupils in years 9 – 13) as Head of Learning Support. Paper one was completed when I was employed in my second post; two and three in the Independent setting. At each school, the ‘level’ of Special Educational needs that were accepted decreased and therefore the findings from my research could be limited to similar settings. Furthermore, there could be seen to be limited transferability of my review of the literature pertaining to Initial Teacher Training from paper one to an Independent School setting when there is no requirement for subject teachers to have Qualified Teacher Status (QTS). My literature review repeatedly identified ITT as inadequate with regards to preparation to meet the special educational needs of pupils, and it might have been interesting to further compare the views of those who had received training with those who had not. It could be argued that, even if accurate, there is a limited evidence that for teachers either with or without training I was confident the SENCO always had a part to play in improving understanding, increasing empathy and developing inclusive pedagogy.
Issues of policy and practice remain of interest to researchers seeking to understand the continued impact inclusion to have on teacher professionals and those appointed to guide them. As an experienced and qualified SENCO I have held the responsibility for leading special educational needs for over a decade and although was conscious of the inherent practical and attitudinal challenges to my role, I was not able to explore the underlying issues and literatures unless I engaged in a research process. In researching the role of the SENCO I have broadened my understanding of a job that I already felt knowledgeable about, through viewing it from a researcher’s perspective, rather than solely as a practitioner. Reviewing the literature and developing an understanding of the research context can support and challenge what practitioners think they know and could be seen to both help and hinder the professional role. For example, whilst I found it enlightening and reassuring to be aware of the views in literature that sympathise with the difficult jobs SENCOs have and acknowledge the many tensions between policy and practice, this knowledge does not negate the daily responsibilities, nor is generally available to colleagues, and school leaders to read and digest. Furthermore, it is additionally challenging when a researcher is essentially investigating the impact of their own professional practice. In data collection activities such as conducting face to face interviews I was conscious that the role I held could influence the contributions of the respondents as this is always there to a lesser or greater extent depending on the identity of the interviewer. Objectivity is not possible to achieve when investigating something so close to a researcher’s practice, and heart. There is a risk that beginning an investigation may uncover uncomfortable truths, for example, I certainly did not want to conclude that I had failed in my government appointed role to lead and guide my peers, even if the literature suggests that this is highly likely. Furthermore, in researching the views about pupils with special educational needs in the school where I was the Head of Learning Support I only lightly addressed the potential ethical issues of power with regards to how my role impacted on the pupil and colleague research participants.

The following examples acknowledge the considerations I had which could become pitfalls when professionals engage in research, as it is only natural to lead with a practitioner perspective and miss opportunities.

In conducting research into my professional context, my job title was often the initial point of my thinking and writing, with my response to the literatures secondary. Feedback from my examiners highlighted where I was not fully aware of the research base for 2 topics that I acknowledged in my study - pupil voice and specialist knowledge. My ideas therefore originated from reflections on my practice and could be seen as underdeveloped and lacking the depth of understanding until I engaged with the literature. The idea to use the perspectives of pupils to replace the instructions from a SENCO was conceived somewhat naively.

I decided upon the use of pupil voice as a technique to train teachers as a result of some of my own practice leading INSET training, and from using the work of Riddick (2010) which I referred to in my
pilot study in paper 3, but was unaware of the literature base of this approach and that engaging in pupil voice work is an approach that has been increasingly used in educational research (Backhouse and Morris, 2005; Thompson and Gunter, 2006). Pupil voice could have had received greater focus in this study, as it could be argued that it would have benefitted from wider coverage in order to fully justify selecting this approach for my thesis proposal.

Similarly in my assumption that pupil voice would be an appropriate tool for practice change, without detailed reading, this could also be the case for assumptions made about the role that SENCOs have in leading teaching and learning. It was easy to assume that if SENCOs had this role, that there was something additional and specific in the skills that they possessed, that other teachers did not, that they were expected to impart. When I considered this more depth, I realised that this is a somewhat puzzling concept for a number of reasons, primarily given that teachers, including SENCOs, have all had to meet the same competency standards when training so aside from a job title, there is no discernible difference in their formal qualifications on commencement of the role. The National Award for SEN Coordination comes after one is a SENCO, not prior, and has a theoretical, rather than practical, focus. There is not some kind of special course that justifies an assumption of a specialism. Furthermore, this raised the question of the existence of specialist knowledge. Are there any fundamental differences in teaching pupils with special educational needs, to teaching those without? This notion could have been explored in much more depth and even go so far as to challenge the justification of the SENCO role entirely, which I feel would have been a more dynamic project albeit difficult to investigate. However, in devising a training course that mainly relies on developing a relationship between mainstream teacher and pupil, and not the SENCO, it hints at the possibility of teachers having the capability within them to organically create and develop inclusive pedagogy.
References


# EXAMINERS’ COURSEWORK REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Name of First Examiner:</strong></th>
<th>Professor Alan Dyson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name of Second Examiner:</strong></td>
<td>Dr Carlo Raffo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student Name:</strong></td>
<td>Catherine Sarginson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student ID:</strong></td>
<td>8344007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programme:</strong></td>
<td>(EdD, DCouns, Ed Psy, Child Ed Psy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title of Research Paper:</strong></td>
<td>A review of the literature concerned with trainee and newly qualified teacher’s perceptions of their ability to meet Special Educational Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Paper 1, 2, 3 – please indicate:</strong></td>
<td>EDUCM1045 EdD Research Paper 1 Submission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Submission Date:</strong></td>
<td>11 May 2012</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
First Examiner Feedback:

This paper has a number of strengths. It has a clear introduction which offers a rationale for the review in terms of a persistent problem in the school system and of the writer’s professional concerns. The methodology for the review is explained (though a few more technical details, perhaps in an appendix, would have been helpful). The review has located a wide range of appropriate literature and this has been organised within a clear framework. Towards the end of the paper, the writer begins to question some of the assumptions behind the literature in a thoughtful way, and possibilities for further research are discussed.

The paper has developed considerably from the early drafts and the writer is to be congratulated on bringing order to a wide range of material. Some of the original issues still remain – though in a much reduced form. For instance, there is some uncertainty over how to handle the international dimensions of the review. Some sections are UK-focused, whereas others have extensive international references. To complicate matters, there is a section that deals explicitly with international perspectives. Similarly, some of the more fundamental issues in this field are addressed but they are not really dealt with in depth. For instance, the nature of specialist knowledge in the SEN field is, as the review points out, highly contested, and a more in-depth discussion of this issue would have been illuminating.

Overall, however, this is a useful review which achieves what it sets out to do. It should pass, but before it can do so, a rather large number of presentational errors need to be put right. Although presentation is less important than content, at doctoral level work should be of publishable quality and therefore should be presented professionally. Some of the issues are listed below, though a through check of the paper is needed:

- Teacher’s should be teachers’ and plural possessives need attention throughout
- p. 6 DfES is now DfE
- p. 7. Children with disabilities and children with SEN are not synonymous. Which is this paper about? The term ‘learning disabilities’ is used later (p.9)
- p.9 Warnock is DES 1978, not DfES
- p.10 Is the first line a heading? If so, it needs to be formatted as such. Throughout, headings need to be formatted consistently
- p.11 DfE website needs referencing properly
- p.12 Quotes only need one method of identification (indented and new line but not quotation marks)
- p.18 Page reference missing after quote
- p.19 Is ‘special educational needs’ capitalised or not? Consistency needed
- p.20 Second quote is not indented
- Quote from Hodkinson needs a page reference
- p.23 ‘infact’ should be ‘in fact’
- p.25 ‘Winter findings were in agreement…’ Should this be ‘Winter’s’?
- p.27 Introduction to first quote doesn’t make sense. Citation of Kirby et al is free-floating.
- p.33 ‘NQT’s’ – apostrophe not needed
Second Examiner Feedback:

I would recommend an A(ii) for this research paper.

The focus of the research paper is on SEN and trainee’s attitudes to preparedness in undertaking SEN teaching in mainstream classrooms. Professional context for the study was provided and this focused on concerns that you have, with so many professional colleagues lack of confidence in dealing with SEN. You document a number of appropriate, well focused and inter-related questions. The paper starts with a useful historical context that sets the scene for SEN nationally and internationally – particular the movement for inclusive practices and the need for all teachers to be SEN teachers. It also sets the challenges for ITE and the development of Q standards related to SEN. However the international evidence points to a very inconsistent approach as to how much time should be devoted and what specialist skills need demonstrating in relation to ITE programmes. The paper then moves onto an evaluation of SEN input during training. Although much of the research suggests the limited nature of this provision, there are some examples of good practice. A chronology is then included to examining reoccurring themes in SEN training. All of this is as a prelude to the main research questions. I might suggest that this might have been condensed somewhat so that substantive focus remains on the lit review. The section of literatures associated with trainee confidence and factors associated with trainee confidence are well documented, although perhaps at times a little repetitive of arguments developed in the prelude. The focus then moves onto the role of the SENCO and the challenges of the role in supporting teachers. The review is then developed by examining the importance of attitudes to SEN and the of relationship building. Again literatures from around the world are examined and précised. What I find interesting about the conclusion is the critique about much of the literature that looks at attitudes and in particular the issue of fear and lack of confidence. You suggest that such research is unlikely to find anything else, given the complexity of the field and that trainees have concerns about all sorts of other professional issues moving into teaching roles. What this does is get the reader to think about the nature of the ‘SEN industry’ and the way it has proliferated with time and is therefore generating impossible asks of mainstream trainee teachers. It’s an industry, however, that has its critics, eg Tomlinson’s current work on the irresistible rise of the SEN industry.
RECOMMENDATION:

(First Examiner to make recommendation, Second Examiner to contact First Examiner if they do not agree, or sign below to confirm the recommendation. Second Examiner to return the work and feedback sheets to First Examiner.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Pass</th>
<th>Please mark with an X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) With no corrections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Subject to corrections being made to the satisfaction of the first Examiner (work to be achievable within one week for full-time students and two weeks for part-time students).</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B. Refer for Major Revisions</th>
<th>Please mark with an X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permitting submission of a revised research paper to be seen by both Examiners (work to be achievable within one month for full-time students and two months for part-time students).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>C. Deferred pending viva</th>
<th>Please mark with an X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The research paper needs exploration of some issue that cannot be ascertained from the text alone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>D. Fail</th>
<th>Please mark with an X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not permitting resubmission.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Signed First Examiner:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Date:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Signed Second Examiner:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Date:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Yes/No</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you wish the School Office to send the Research Paper to the External Examiner?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**First Examiner Feedback:**

This research paper explores teachers’ views of their knowledge of SEN and the role of initial training in forming that knowledge. Most of the required elements in a research report are present – an account of the background to the study and its rationale; a set of research questions; a review of relevant literature; a clear account and justification of research methods; a clear presentation of findings with ample citation from the data; and a reflection on what has been learned from the study. The paper is written clearly and
Alongside these strengths, there are some limitations:

1. The study lacks an analytical framework at an appropriately theoretical level. Issues of the inadequacy of ITT, of teachers' learning on the job, of the relationship between 'formal' and 'informal' knowledge, and of the nature of 'SEN knowledge' are all raised to some extent, but these could have been developed more fully. Such a framework would have provided a rationale for the development of research methods, and would have enabled a more searching analysis of the data to be undertaken. In its absence, the paper remains at a somewhat descriptive level.

2. Interviewing is an appropriate method to use for this study, but it tends to assume that the teachers know what knowledge they need, what knowledge they have, and how they acquired it. These are not unproblematic assumptions, and a discussion of what teachers understand about their own knowledge and how therefore those understandings might be accessed would have strengthened the assignment.

3. More could have been said about how the interviews were constructed. What kinds of questions were asked and why? Again the issue of how to access teachers' understandings of their own knowledge could have been discussed.

4. It seems likely that, even staying within the bounds of semi-structured interviews, some more probing questions and other techniques could have been used. The idea of asking teachers to relate a time where they did not feel confident about their SEN knowledge is a good one. Could they also have been asked to talk about times when they felt they had learned about SEN? Or to set out the knowledge they felt they had about a particular pupil and talk about where that knowledge came from?

5. The analysis is clear and competent, but is not very searching. It would have been good to explore further the different types of knowledge the teachers talk about and the different forms of learning they report. There are hints of these but no rigorous examination of them.

6. There could have been a more explicit attempt to articulate the answers to the research questions that were posed and to relate these answers to the literature that was reviewed. Even a small scale study such as this should be making a contribution to knowledge, and it should be clearer what that contribution is.

7. The place of publication needs to be given for books in the reference list and appendices need to be numbers and referred to in the main text.

Overall, this is a very competent piece of work which clearly meets the requirements of this RP. What the researcher could usefully think about for the future, however, is making a step up in the levels of conceptualisation and analysis in her work. Work at doctoral level needs to get beyond the descriptive level and to start working with more fundamental concepts and more searching analyses. It would be useful to think what the 'big' issues are in the field of teacher knowledge of and training for SEN. It would be useful to discuss this in the next supervision.
Second Examiner Feedback:

This was an effective research paper that examined the perceptions of 3 professionals about their understanding of SEN and how ITT provision prepares teachers in this area. The rationale for the study is appropriately communicated and builds on professional reflections and previous work in RP1. Explicit research questions are documented and a methodology is documented that provides very clear discussion about the ethical dimensions of the study. Case profiles are documented and then there is an attempt to also generate some thematic themes. All of this is well done. However to improve your future work you may wish to reflect on the following:

- What are the theoretically lens that might be used to make sense of the data – eg communities of practice or activity theory, ideas about the nature of professional identity vis-a-vis SEN etc. Your work was quite descriptive, and given the small sample needs to say something about how your data help develop different conceptualisations about this area

- Detailing of your semi-structured interview schedule in the appendix with appropriate justification of questions based on your focused lit review.
RECOMMENDATION:

(First Examiner to make recommendation, Second Examiner to contact First Examiner if they do not agree, or sign below to confirm the recommendation. Second Examiner to return the work and feedback sheets to First Examiner.)

A. Pass

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Please mark with an X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) With no corrections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Subject to corrections being made to the satisfaction of the first Examiner (work to be achievable within one week for full-time students and two weeks for part-time students).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Signed First Examiner: Alan Dyson  Date: 31st March 2013

Signed Second Examiner: Carlo Raffo  Date: 2nd April 2013

Yes/No
| Do you wish the School Office to send the Research Paper to the External Examiner? | No |
EXAMINERS’ COURSEWORK REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of First Examiner:</th>
<th>Professor Alan Dyson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Second Examiner:</td>
<td>Professor Carlo Raffo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Name:</td>
<td>Elizabeth Sarginson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student ID:</td>
<td>8344007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme: (EdD, D Couns, Ed Psy, Child Ed Psy)</td>
<td>(EdD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper 1, 2, 3 – please indicate:</td>
<td>EDUCM3041 EdD Research Paper 3 (Minor Corrections)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission Date:</td>
<td>28th February 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First Examiner Feedback:

This research paper presents a potentially interesting proposal for a study of the use of pupil voice to promote change in teachers’ practice.

There is a clear rationale for the study and its significance for the researcher is made clear.
Some aims are articulated and these are developed into research questions.

The stated aims, however, tend to be a mix of study aims and foci for the literature review, and they might have been better articulated in general terms, leaving the research questions to do the detailed work. The case for focusing on pupil voice is also not fully made. RQ2 could perhaps be articulated more clearly (what kinds of ‘barriers to teaching’ are intended, and are these barriers to teaching or barriers to change?).

There is a clear and useful literature review, though literature from different eras and different countries is used without adequate acknowledgement of the difficulties this creates. There is a good account of the literature on pupil voice, though the issue of how and why pupil voice might lead to change in teacher practice is not adequately addressed.

The research design remains innovative and is now better justified from the methodological literature. Information about the design does tend to emerge piecemeal, however, and a clearer statement of the overall design early in the methodology section might have helped readers unfamiliar with the proposed study.

It is not clear how the volunteer teachers will be recruited, nor why a sample of 5 is intended. We are not told how or how many pupils will be recruited.

Information about data generation methods is provided, though the term ‘methodology’ is used when ‘methods’ is what is meant. The information on methods is also presented a little haphazardly and the use of the present tense is inappropriate for a research proposal.

No information is provided on data analysis or how the data will be used to answer the research questions. Issues of ethics are discussed but something also needs to be said about the problems of keeping teachers on board with this initiative and the threats to them. As in the first submission, we know more about how the intervention will be conducted than about how it will be researched. For instance, we do not know what data will be collected at the various stages of the intervention, nor is there any discussion of how the researcher will manage the researcher-teacher role.

There is no statement of contribution to knowledge, no discussion of trustworthiness, and no timetable. It is not clear how the pilot study has informed the development of the proposal.

The pilot study report has many interesting aspects and there is now some reference to the methodological literature. However, as in the original submission, there is no information on data analysis.

The reference list remains haphazardly presented and there are no appendices presenting, for instance, research instruments or examples of analysis.

Overall, this research paper is an improvement on the original submission but remains marginal and would need considerable further development to produce a satisfactory panel paper.
What is particularly concerning is that many of the faults of the original that were highlighted in feedback remain. I am aware that the student has had difficulties in managing her study commitments alongside work commitments and I suggest this needs to be discussed with her before a final decision is made about next steps.

Second Examiner Feedback:

There are clear developments in the re-submitted RP and there appears a much clearer rationale for the work, particular in relation to examining research in and around SEN policy and teacher enactments that then may influence an action research project. However I think there is still a lack of clarity between the various components of the research and how they relate to the research questions and how these research questions focus the action research project. In addition I would have thought that the research literatures examined would have been more clearly aligned to parts 1-4 of the research that will act as the foundations for the action research programme. The methodology also again lacks detail about samples to be used and there is very little on data analysis. Also I’m still not exactly sure how it all relates to the action research methodology being advocated.

So although there are improvements to the RP I don’t think it fully responds to the initial feedback provided.

I recommend that we need to explore verbally with Kate of some issue highlighted in this feedback that cannot be ascertained from the text alone.

RECOMMENDATION:

(First Examiner to make recommendation, Second Examiner to contact First Examiner if they do not agree, or sign below to confirm the recommendation. Second Examiner to return the work and feedback sheets to First Examiner.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A. Pass</th>
<th>Please mark with an X</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) With no corrections</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Subject to corrections being made to the satisfaction of the first Examiner (work to be achievable within one week for full-time students and two weeks for part-time students).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Refer for Major Revisions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Please mark with an X</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permitting submission of a revised research paper to be seen by both Examiners (work to be achievable within one month for full-time students and two months for part-time students).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>C. Deferred pending viva</strong></th>
<th><strong>Please mark with an X</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The research paper needs exploration of some issue that cannot be ascertained from the text alone.</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>D. Fail</strong></th>
<th><strong>Please mark with an X</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not permitting resubmission.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Signed First Examiner:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Date:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alan Dyson</td>
<td>20th March 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Signed Second Examiner:</strong></th>
<th><strong>Date:</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Carlo Raffo</td>
<td>20th March 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Yes/No</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you wish the School Office to send the Research Paper to the External Examiner?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
EXAMINERS’ COURSEWORK REPORT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of First Examiner:</th>
<th>Professor Alan Dyson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Second Examiner:</td>
<td>Professor Carlo Raffo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Name:</td>
<td>Elizabeth Sarginson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student ID:</td>
<td>8344007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme: (EdD, DCouns, Ed Psy, Child Ed Psy)</td>
<td>(EdD)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Paper 1, 2, 3 – please indicate:</td>
<td>EDUCM3041 EdD Research Paper 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission Date:</td>
<td>28th February 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First Examiner Feedback:

A viva has been held with the students. It is clear that, following a change of employment, there have been issues for her in finding time to commit to her EdD work. This situation has now been resolved by the employer clarifying what time is available.

While the research paper remains marginal, the work that it needs is the same as the work that will need to be done to produce a panel paper.
In the circumstances, it seems sensible to focus on the latter task, though the student should be aware that success at panel is unlikely without considerable development of the proposal contained in RP£.

Second Examiner Feedback

**RECOMMENDATION:**

*(First Examiner to make recommendation, Second Examiner to contact First Examiner if they do not agree, or sign below to confirm the recommendation. Second Examiner to return the work and feedback sheets to First Examiner.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>A. Pass</strong></th>
<th><strong>Please mark with an X</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(i) With no corrections</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Subject to corrections being made to the satisfaction of the first Examiner (work to be achievable within one week for full-time students and two weeks for part-time students).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>B. Refer for Major Revisions</strong></th>
<th><strong>Please mark with an X</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permitting submission of a revised research paper to be seen by both Examiners (work to be achievable within one month for full-time students and two months for part-time students).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>C. Deferred pending viva</strong></th>
<th><strong>Please mark with an X</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The research paper needs exploration of some issue that cannot be ascertained from the text alone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Fail</td>
<td>Please mark with an X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not permitting resubmission.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Signed First Examiner:</th>
<th>Alan Dyson</th>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>May 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Signed Second Examiner:</td>
<td>Carlo Raffo</td>
<td>Date:</td>
<td>May 2014</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>