The Special Education Needs Coordinator in New Zealand Schools

----- SENCO -----

Who is this person and what’s involved?

A one paper research project TL802 – part requirement of the MTchLn

Giselle J Storer – 2002
Acknowledgements

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Sincere thanks to all.
Giselle J Storer
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Abstract - Recent changes to special education in New Zealand schools have required schools to make adjustments to the ways in which they manage and provide special education programmes and services (Quinn & Ryba, 2000). In response to these changes, the role of the Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO) has developed in many schools. This study focuses on the SENCO’s role and provides a profile of the key tasks and people who work as SENCOs in New Zealand schools.

Schools throughout New Zealand were randomly selected to respond to a nation-wide study of the role of the SENCO. A written questionnaire was used to ascertain the parameters and responsibilities of the position. Both quantitative and qualitative data were analysed to identify and illustrate the underpinning issues of the SENCOs role.

It was evident that SENCOs are apparent across all school types and settings. The majority of SENCOs in the study combine their role with a number of other roles and responsibilities, and consider the time allocated to perform the SENCO’s duties as insufficient. Overall, the general tenor of feeling toward the role of SENCO tends to be negative. However, a significant number find specific aspects of the role satisfying and pleasurable. Most SENCOs are employed as permanent, fulltime teachers, however few are fulltime SENCOs. Few are members of the senior management team or hold a management unit. Most are female, have had more than 10 years teaching experience, and have undertaken the role of SENCO in the last 10 years. A considerable number of SENCOs consider more time, funding, and resources are the significant factors that would assist them in their role. To this end many SENCOs have personally committed time and resources to further their knowledge, skills and efficiency.
Introduction - A new role has recently developed in New Zealand schools, that of the Special Education Needs Coordinator (SENCO). The role has become more apparent in schools since the introduction of the New Zealand Government’s policy for special education - Special Education 2000 - (SE 2000). The policy aims to improve educational outcomes, and provide an equitable and efficient service to all students with special education needs (Ministry of Education, 1996). It is underpinned by legislation such as the New Zealand Education Act (1989), the Human Rights Act (1993) and the recent changes in cultural values and attitudes towards those with disability. It reflects worldwide trends towards equity and equality for all learners, and suggests considerable changes to the way schools organise and address special education (Moore, Brown, Thomson, Glynn, Macfarlane, Timperley & Anderson, 1999a). The change of philosophy is embedded in a backdrop of the social justice issues, and a new paradigm that emphasises an inclusive, collaborative approach to special education (Mitchell, 2000). It necessitates increased collaboration and cooperation between schools, regular and special class teachers, parents and specialist agencies, to develop appropriate programmes and school systems that support the learner within an inclusive environment (Moore, Macfarlane, Anderson, Brown, Timperley, Thompson & Glynn, 1999b). As a result most schools have developed some form of the SENCO’s role to manage special education in the school.

For over fifteen years, many Western countries have recognised the role of the SENCO as a key support to students with special education needs, (Bines, 1986 cited in Dyson, 1990). Known as the special education needs coordinator (Dyson, 1990); special services coordinator (Imants, Van der Aalsvoort, De Brabander, Ruijssenaars (2001); support coordinator (Emaneulsson, 2001); special education administrator (Villa & Thousand, 1992); and the inclusive support facilitator (Schaffner & Buswell, 1996),¹ these people all fill a similar support role in their schools. In addition to a support role, the role is regarded as pivotal to the development of policy and school systems (Ruttiman & Forest, 1986), and as a resource for regular staff to gain teaching strategies in order to meet the diverse needs of all students (Rea and Corbett, 1992). Foreman (1996) believes, a co-ordinated approach with emphasis on staff development, knowledge and skills, teaching strategies, instructional methods, team building and sharing of information is required. Furthermore, he recommends the responsibility for ensuring the provision of this type of support rests with a designated, school-based person whose role is to co-ordinate services, support staff

¹ For ease of understanding the term SENCO will be used to describe the position in all settings.
development and network systems, communicate with other professionals, and arrange meetings. To facilitate this support Rea and Corbett (1992) suggest SENCOs are required to have:

- Credibility – with presence, clear thinking, and organisation to deliver the strategies.
- Knowledge - of national and school policy, of the provision of special education, and of resources.
- Understanding - of the national curriculum and initiatives, the school, and the student.
- Dynamism – to act as an agent of change. To know what needs to be changed and how to change it, and have a vision, a goal, and a developmental plan to get there.

The complex and extensive nature of the work of the SENCO is acknowledged by Dyson (1990). He suggests, guidelines are required to overcome the difficulties, problems and the lack of status afforded to the role. He believes problems stem from the low, marginal status of special education in schools, compared to the dominant positions held by academic subject and curriculum areas. Similarly, Bines (1986), (cited in Dyson, 1990) suggests problems are grounded in the views that traditional remedial education serves to provide a legitimate structure for the continued perpetuation of educational inequalities and social relationships. Thus, the reorganisation of schools to accommodate the full range of individual needs and differences gives challenge to the underpinning social mores and structure of schools (Dyson, 1990). In addition, Butt (1991) believes regular class teachers are reluctant to support the structural and systemic reorganisation of schools, due to their perceived lack of skill to address the diverse needs of students with special education needs. Similarly, Dyson (1990) suggests another difficulty that challenges the role is scepticism that the required levels of support will be available from school management and support personnel such as SENCOs.

**International models** – Most international examples the SENCO role (or similar) are supported by national regulations that outline the parameters of the role, and emphasise the need for a coordinated, collaborative approach (Emanuullsson, 2001). However, Imants, et al, (2001) also believe that differing views and interpretations of inclusive education at a local level, and the resources available for support, influence the way the SENCO’s role develops. Therefore despite national mandate, the culture and beliefs of the school are significant factors in determining the operating parameters and philosophy of the role (Imants, et al, 2001). Furthermore, if an
inclusive, collaborative culture is to develop, it is evident that a clear mandate and understanding of inclusive practice is required to ensure traditional perspectives and views are not perpetuated through the operational practices of the SENCO and school culture (Imants, et al, 2001).

The SENCO’s role in practice— With recent legislative changes, it is apparent that the role of the class teacher to accommodate the needs of all students has increased. Therefore, the support of a SENCO is an important link to establish informal and formal networks for teachers, parents, professionals and school systems (Quinn & Ryba, 2000). Essentially, the SENCO’s role appears to be that of an in-school special education resource teacher who is responsible for providing the class teacher with support, and the management of special education matters. The main goals include identification, programming and the coordination of services to address the learning needs of all children in the school (West and Idol, 1990). Spedding (2001) defines the tasks of the SENCO’s role as:

- identification
- planning
- delivery and evaluation of the IEP\(^2\) or special programme
- preparing referrals for additional funding
- liaising with other professionals and specialists
- developing special programmes and resources
- providing release

She suggests the practice is underpinned by a commitment to collaborative consultative approach where individuals with diverse knowledge, expertise and experience, work together to create solutions. Similarly, Rea and Corbett (1992) believe the ideal situation lies in a partnership where the SENCO supports the regular teacher in a shared, planned process. Furthermore, they believe that while specialised subject teachers with subject specific knowledge are in the best position to address the diverse needs of students within their subject areas, the guidance from a teacher in a ‘SENCO type role’ is an essential support.

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\(^2\) Individual Education Programme - IEP – is a documented plan that consists of a complete cycle of assessment, planning, provision and evaluation of an education programme for an individual student. (Ministry of Education, 1998b).
The model proposed by Malone (1991), endorses a similar approach with three main areas of responsibility:

- the provision of specialised help in basic skills;
- support and guidance in dealing with learning difficulties in the classroom alongside the teacher, and;
- acting as a consultant for whole school special education policy development.

The model involves professional expertise in assessment and analysis of learning situations and strategies, knowledge and management of resources and policy direction. In addition, the SENCO’s role requires a teacher with personal qualities to be open, flexible, willing to take risks and accept failure (Stainback, Stainback & Forest, 1989). They regard well-developed listening skills, and an ability to identify and find the appropriate support for students and teachers to be crucial.

The three main aspects of the role of SENCO are summarised as:

- collaboration with teachers, students and parents;
- the identification of support options; and
- the organisation and implementation of support and programming (Stainback & Stainback, 1990a)

Furthermore Stainback, et al (1989) consider professional skills including a background in classroom teaching, a working knowledge of the curriculum, teaching methodology and programming are required to overcome issues of status and credibility.

**Systems of support to the SENCO role** - Organisational structures of schools do not always permit students to realise the potential benefits of being in the mainstream (Stainback & Stainback, 1996). The challenge lies in establishing methods and systems to overcome these problems, “There is a need to interweave a network of varying supports into a comprehensive and co-ordinated system” (Stainback & Stainback, 1990b, p.27). This, according to Mitchell, Lowden & Crouse (1991), should occur through the provision of support networks, systemic procedures and co-ordinating personnel. Such a model involves a significant commitment of time, and implies major changes to current school systems and traditional structures (Quinn & Ryba, 2000). It is, therefore, necessary to have a committed Principal to lead the restructuring and re-organisation of the school’s systems, allocate time and resources, allow teams to develop and to provide ongoing support and vision (Mitchell, 2000). International models, which provide
an outline of practice, national mandate, funding mechanisms and the status attributed to these positions, give a basis for consideration to the developing model of the SENCO in the New Zealand situation.

The New Zealand SENCO’s role - In her review of the impact of the SE 2000 policy in NZ schools, Wylie (2000) endorses the international view that a coordinated approach is a key factor to the effective provision of special education in schools. The review ‘Picking Up the Pieces’ (Wylie, 2000) provides an analysis of the impact of the introduction of the SE 2000 policy, and makes strong recommendations for staffing allocations to develop a SENCO in all schools. As with international educational reform, the introduction of the SE 2000 policy in New Zealand has had a major impact on the resources and systems within schools (Bourke, 2000). The primary goal of inclusion is for regular classroom teachers to better meet the needs of all students through improved instruction, a child centred curriculum, and increased collaboration between teachers (McLeskey and Waldron, 1998). Wylie (2000) believes an increase in expectation of regular classroom teachers to provide for students with increasingly diverse educational needs has arisen. Therefore, in line with overseas models, Wylie (2000) proposes the development of an official SENCO role to manage and support special education services in the school.

Personal and professional skills – From their work with special education in New Zealand schools, Quinn and Ryba (2000) have also identified the need for a SENCO to coordinate the special education services in the school. As with the other models, they consider the role should support regular teachers to:

- recognise and respond to the diversity of students in their classrooms
- accommodate students’ different learning styles and rates of learning by employing a range of teaching methods including cooperative learning, peer tutoring, team teaching and individualised instruction
- be aware of the rights of students with education support needs
- locate appropriate material, equipment or specialists
- identify and overcome barriers to learning
- consult with and develop partnership with parents/caregivers and colleagues
- use appropriate forms of assessment
• adapt their instruction to the prior knowledge and beliefs of the students
• create an inclusive community that extends beyond the walls of the school
• seek to enhance the self-esteem of all students (Quinn & Ryba, 2000, p.61).

They suggest the SENCO needs to be able to establish effective teamwork and collaborate with others to facilitate effective intervention programmes (Stainback & Stainback, 1990a). Therefore, interpersonal skills such as listening, receiving and giving feedback, offering leadership and developing respectful, co-equal relationships are important elements of the role.

In addition to highly developed inter-personal skills, SENCOs need well-developed creative problem solving skills and a sense of humour (Schaffner & Buswell, 1996). Thus, Fox (1998) suggests a job description that details the purpose of their work with students, teachers and the school community is essential. The job description would ensure they are:

• clear about roles and responsibilities
• valued as part of the learning support team
• given regular opportunity for planning with teacher colleagues
• clear about learning objectives and the implications of the child’s special needs
• deployed efficiently, effectively and flexibly
• given opportunities for training and development.

Resource factors and the role of the SENCO – In congruence with international writers, Wylie (2000) proposes the SENCO would liaise with school staff, and appropriate professionals in order to identify, assess, plan, programme, support and guide those working with students with special education needs. She has identified additional administrative work, and a greater need for time to collaborate and plan programmes as evidence for the need of the development of the SENCO’s role. In recognition she has suggested to the New Zealand Government, that all schools receive a staffing allocation to facilitate the development of the SENCO’s role and further support the implementation of SE 2000. Her report advises the New Zealand Ministry of Education to acknowledge the enormity and extent of the role through a national staffing allowance of 0.2 in primary schools and 0.4 in secondary and area schools. Wylie (2000) suggests the establishment of a tagged staffing allocation would provide school staff with on-going professional development, support, information, and a central in-school base for resources and programmes. In addition she believes, over time, it would boost the capacity of schools to cater for students with special education needs, whatever the setting (Wylie, 2000).
Recognition of the SENCO in New Zealand schools – Despite the Wylie report, a staffing allocation to support the SE coordination role has not yet eventuated. This may be due to the paucity of information directly relating to the role of SENCO in New Zealand. Increasingly, however, reference is made to the role of the SENCO in various publications and official documentation. An example is evident in the new operational protocol between the Ministry of Education and the Accident Compensation Commission (ACC). In this recently drafted document, reference is made to the SENCO’s role as the key to collaborative partnerships and as an interface between the school and the ACC (Ministry of Education, 2000b). Similarly in the handbook ‘Managing the Special Education Grant’, reference to the SENCO is made in case study examples (Ministry of Education, 1998a). These case studies clearly illustrate examples of best practice, and show the importance of the SENCO’s role in the management of special education systems in the school. The role is described as a necessity to ensure the implementation of programming, and for the co-ordination of services across agencies and settings. Further emphasis on the role of the SENCO and its responsibilities are made in the IEP handbook, ‘The IEP Guidelines’ (Ministry of Education, 1998b). The IEP Guidelines (Ministry of Education, 1998b) recommend that a co-ordinator or facilitator serve as the key-worker to direct, initiate and implement the IEP process and provide the continuity between IEP meetings. Similarly, the Ministry of Education’s training programme and resource for teacher aides - ‘Kia Tutangata ai – Supporting learning’ (Ministry of Education 2002), refers to the role of the SENCO as being necessary in order to ensure the ongoing support for teacher aide professional development in schools. Thus, the role is acknowledged by the Ministry of Education as a key to the provision of special education, but as yet it remains totally unrecognised in management structures, staffing, and funding allocations.

Conclusion –While there is little specific research to validate the role of the SENCO in New Zealand, it is evident that international educators working towards the inclusive paradigm have identified that progress is grounded in a collaborative consultative model (Forest 1987; Spinning, 2001; Stainback & Stainback, 1990a; Villa & Thousand, 1990). They have recognised that success is determined through a co-ordinated approach of support and professional

3 Special Education Grant – (SEG) is a bulk funded grant made to schools for the provision of special education. It is based on roll number and decile ranking and is allocated to assist students with learning and behaviour difficulties. (Davis and Prangell, 1999).
development, and have suggested that a school-based SENCO is a crucial link. In New Zealand SENCOs are recognised as pivotal to further develop skills and systems of support for students with special education needs and the continued implementation of various initiatives in the SE 2000 policy (Wylie, 2000).

The purpose of this study is determine ‘who’ and ‘what’ is a SENCO in New Zealand schools. Essentially, the study aims to profile and investigate the role of the SENCO in the provision of special education support. It aims to identify the gender, roles, background, experience, and length of service of these teachers and ascertain some of the responsibilities and expectations of the position. Furthermore, the study explores the qualifications of the SENCOs and their training in special education. The implied significance and status of the role, and the reward and recognition of the SENCO in the management structures of the school is also investigated. In addition the provisions that the school makes to support the SENCO, and how the SENCOs support themselves is discussed. Finally, an insight into the attitudes and feelings of those in the role and the factors that might assist to improve its effectiveness are investigated.

Method

Introduction - During 1999 a small-scale investigation of the role of the Special Education Needs Coordinator by the author revealed many aspects that required further investigation and clarification. As a result of this study a nation-wide survey was undertaken during 2001 to address the task.

Participants – Schools were sampled nation-wide to provide data for a study into the roles and responsibilities of the SENCO in New Zealand schools. The SENCOs were chosen at random from all state and state integrated schools, and included primary, intermediate, secondary and area school settings throughout New Zealand (n = 2500). The size of the sample group (n = 400), was determined as a 10% - 30% sample of the total population (Neuman, 1997). A response rate of 10% - 50% (n = 40 – 200) from the SENCOs was anticipated (Neuman, 1997), and a follow-
up phone call or fax was planned to encourage participation should an insufficient number (n <80) of respondents participate in the study.

**Group stratification** – When the total population of target schools (n = 2030) was examined an abundance of small, rural primary schools (U1 &U2)\(^4\) with low staffing numbers were apparent. To continue with a random sample of the total population would have resulted in an over-representation of these smaller schools. It was considered that a more balanced sample based on size differential would provide more interesting and relevant data. Therefore the group was stratified\(^4\) to ensure a proportionally, balanced representation of larger urban primary and secondary schools. The two groups comprised primary (n=200), and intermediate / secondary and area schools (n=200). The schools in the sample group were considered to provide a representative sample of type, level, size, decile ranking and location across the country.

**Design of the questionnaire** - A questionnaire (see appendix - 3) was designed to provide details and information of those undertaking the SENCO role in each school. The questions were intended to ascertain the key features of the SENCOs role, and the factors that impact on the position. The questionnaire included the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, and was developed with reference and guidance from practitioners familiar with the role of a SENCO. A variety of questions were used in the questionnaire to determine the characteristics and diversity of the role. The first section used closed questions and sought demographic data regarding the type of school, the size, and the decile ranking. It also requested personal information concerning gender, training, and teaching experience. Further questions investigated the hours of employment, the management units held, and the involvement in the senior management team. Open questions were used to ascertain data on qualifications and the training of SENCOs. Data were also sought on the roles, responsibilities, duties and the self-perceived skills required by the SENCO. Open questions investigated the provisions that the school, and the SENCOs had made to support and maintain their role. In addition factors that would further assist the SENCO in their role and professional development options were explored. Finally, the

\(^4\) Grading of schools is categorised into U1 – U10. The grades are determined by the number of students at the school. E.g. U1 = 1-50 / U2 = 51-100 etc.

\(^5\) A stratified group is a random selection of people from a predetermined group. (Neuman, 1997).
SENCOs were asked to express their feelings about their work, and an invitation to comment on any aspect of their role concluded the questionnaire. (see appendix - 3).

**Piloting** - Prior to circulation, a draft questionnaire was piloted. Eight representative SENCOs from various settings volunteered to participate in a meeting to trial the questionnaire and offer feedback. No two SENCO were from the same situation or setting, they represented primary, secondary, intermediate and area schools. The pilot group of SENCOs held positions of principal, guidance counsellor, senior teacher, regular classroom teacher, specialist subject teacher, special education unit teacher and part-time teacher. During the meeting the questionnaire was trialled, questions were addressed and issues recorded on a form specifically developed for the task. (see appendix - 4.) In addition, the content and the relevance of the questions to the study were analysed. Following the meeting adjustments to eliminate any difficulties, anomalies and misunderstandings were made to the questionnaire based on the outcomes of the meeting and the written records. In addition, two SENCOs independent from the initial pilot group scrutinised the final copy of the questionnaire prior to mail distribution.

**Distribution method** - The questionnaires were forwarded directly to the ‘Special Education Coordinator / HoD or IC Special Education. They were circulated via mail and coded for identification. Each was accompanied with a covering letter (see appendix - 1), detailing the nature of the study, confidentiality and anonymity and included information to address ethical issues of informed consent (see appendix - 2). For ease of response and for encouragement, a postage-paid, return addressed envelope was provided.

**Identifying the SENCO** - To ensure the target group was reached a description of the SENCO was provided. The role was described as the person assigned to, or having responsibility for the daily management of special education in the school. It could include a Head of Department - (HoD) of Special Education or Learning Support; the Teacher In-Charge - (IC) of Special Education; a unit holder for special education; an ongoing reviewable resource (ORRs) funded special education teacher, or part-time teacher of special education etc. It was assumed that each
school would have a nominated staff member to undertake the role and responsibility for special education in the school and therefore schools would all be able to make a response.

**Analysis and presentation of data** - Questions were designed to provide information of both a quantitative and qualitative nature. A database was developed to record each of the 40 items in the questionnaire. Each individual response from the SENCO was processed and entered into the database. A spreadsheet provided a collective overview of the response to every question from each SENCO. Quantitative data were entered as raw figures and analysed to show percentages or cumulative totals. Qualitative data were analysed using key words and themes, with some data processed into tables and graphs to show differences, similarities and patterns, and to illustrate comparisons. For ease of understanding and reference, data were processed and presented with regard to existing categories and classifications used by the Ministry of Education. E.g. Decile ranking, School grading – U1, U2 etc. The graphic representation of the data were analysed to identify and discuss ideas, common themes and the issues that affect the role of the SENCO. Data generated from the comparative analysis were also presented to illustrate factors and issues associated to the role.

**Results**

**Definition** - Reference is made within the results to different groups within the survey. The national population refers to the nation-wide number of schools available for the study (n = 2031). The survey group includes the schools selected for sampling (n = 400), and the sample group refers to the SENCOs that responded to the survey (n = 160). All tables and graphs represent a percentage of the total sample group unless otherwise stated.

**Stratification of the sample group** – Due to the stratification process and the responses received, a disproportionately high number of secondary and area schools were represented in the returns. (see Table 1a.) However, this bias is not considered to pose insurmountable problems in the identification of the main aspects of the SENCO’s role. Thus where appropriate,
generalised statements illustrating these features have been made. A more balanced group would be required to compare and contrast the SENCO’s role in the different settings.

**The impact of legislative changes on the SENCO’s role** – SENCOs suggested that recent changes to legislation and policy have had an impact on their role. Since the introduction of the Education Act (1989) and the SE 2000 policy they consider addition pressures have extended the parameters of the role. Comments reflect the feelings SENCO have and their perception of added demands on time and resources. SENCOs state:

> “Lately there has been an increased need to balance the needs of the SE students, staff, administration and caregivers while facilitating best practice in relation to SE and the principles of inclusion.”

(The job) “has become too demanding for one person. I now need management skills, skills to liase with parents and outside agencies and an understanding of SE 2000 and its policies.”

> “The scope of the role has exploded since the introduction of SE 2000. Ability to meet all expectations is sometimes not possible within time/resources. Stress on teaching staff is high.”

> “SE 2000 requires a belief in inclusion and gives more responsibility to the schools to provide for the individual needs of the student.”

**The feelings SENCOs have towards their work in the school** – SENCOs were invited to select from a range of descriptors about their feelings about their role. Many SENCOs selected a number of positive aspects with ‘satisfaction’ being the most frequent response. Other frequently chosen options included ‘pleased’, ‘content’ and ‘happy’. (see Fig. 1a). The negative response that was most often selected was ‘frustrated’. As SENCOs were able to make multiple choices many expressed a mixture of feelings and data were therefore categorised. Each SENCO’s response was analysed into either solely positive or solely negative, and those with combinations were regarded as mixed. When the responses were classified to give a single response from SENCOs, a less optimistic impression becomes evident. (see Fig. 1b). From this perspective,
over a third of SENCOs expressed mixed feelings which endorse that some aspects of the position gave them satisfaction, while others contributed to anxiety, frustration, dissatisfaction etc.

Fig. 1a. - The feelings expressed by SENCOs about their role. (Question 40.)

Fig. 1b. - The general tenor of feelings expressed by SENCOs about their role. (Question 40.)

Addition comments made by SENCOs about their role - Twenty percent of the SENCOs took the opportunity to make additional comments about their role. The comments are categorised to give an expression of the feeling that these SENCOs have towards their role. When the comments are regarded in terms of the overall tenor it is apparent that the comments are of a negative vein (see Fig. 2). Examples of the comments are used to illustrate the feelings that SENCOs expressed. Like the previous data it is evident that issues of insufficient time, resources
and funding frustrate the SENCO’s, while in comparison specific aspects within the role give
pleasure and reward. (see below). From a positive perspective SENCOs commented:

“As SENCO and support teacher it is a rewarding role when students respond
enthusiastically to any assistance given. Then the position is worthwhile.”

“I would encourage anyone wanting to further their professional development to
undertake this challenging, rewarding, and important role. ”

“Overall satisfaction with what is achieved, with available time and resources.”

“I enjoy aspects of the job very much - like working with the students.”

In contrast:

“I feel I have too many responsibilities and not enough time! I’d like some release time to
assess, support others and write IEPs.”

(I) “worked five, eleven hour days and still could not fit everything in.”

(I am) “frustrated and dissatisfied. Not enough funding, too many needs, so many
problems etc, etc, etc!”

“Frustrated that there is not enough time to do the job properly.”

Single comments summarised the feelings “exhausted”, “incompetent”, “stressed”, “stretched”,
“unqualified” and “overloaded.”

Fig. 2. - A summary of the general tenor of comments made by the SENCO’s about their
role. (Question 40.)
**Allocation of hours to the SENCO role** - Most SENCOs were employed fulltime, however the majority receive a restricted time allocation of less than 0.2 of a fulltime teaching load to address the specifics of the role. The allocation of hours to the SENCOs to perform the role varied between no specific allocation, to twenty five hours. Almost a fifth of all SENCOs were granted no specific time to undertake the role, as it was incorporated into other aspects of their job. (see Table. 1a). Over half the SENCOs considered the time allocation was insufficient to perform the role. (see Table. 1b). This closely reflects the number of SENCO who were allocated 4 or less hours per week in which to address the role. (see Table. 1a). In addition, the similar figures in the non-response category in both tables may indicate SENCO’s uncertainty of their specific allocation of hours to the role.

**Table. 1a. –The hours are specifically allocated to the role of SENCO. (Question 12.**)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allocation of hours per week to the SENCO’s role</th>
<th>% of SENCOs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time (25 hours)</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 – 24</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 – 19</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 – 14</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 - 9</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 - 4</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1- 2.4</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varies / non specific</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table. 1b. –SENCOs response to the allocation of hours. (Question 13.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Allocation of hours</th>
<th>Percentage of SENCOs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient allocation</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sufficient allocation</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Units of management/reward – Over 63% of SENCOs held units of responsibility and/or management. (see Table 2a). However, the majority reported that the units were not specifically related to their role but as a result of other positions they held in the school. In addition some of these were part units and some SENCOs expressed that they were for a fixed term only. A small proportion of SENCOs were uncertain or unsure of the reasoning behind the allocation of their unit/s. (see Table 2b). Less than half of SENCO’s reported themselves as members of the senior management team as part of the SENCO’s role in the school. (see Table 3).

Table 2a. –Management/reward/retention units held by SENCOs. (Question 14.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SENCOs with units</th>
<th>SENCOs with no units</th>
<th>No response</th>
<th>Total response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>63%</td>
<td>35.75%</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2b. – Management/reward/retention units specifically related to the role of SENCO. (Question 15.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of units specifically related to the SENCO role.</th>
<th>Percentage of SENCOs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. –The SENCOs involved in the senior management team as part of the SENCO role. (Question 16.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SENCOs who are part of senior management team</th>
<th>% of SENCOs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Employment status** - The majority of SENCOs who responded to the survey indicated that they were in full-time teaching positions. Those in other than permanent positions were in contract and non-permanent positions, long-term relieving positions, or they were funded through ORRS resourcing\(^6\). Although the number of SENCOs in full-time positions and those that indicated permanence are closely matched, any relationship between these figures is not evident within the presentation of these data. In addition, any relationship between the similarity of SENCOs in non permanent positions and those who work in specified hour allocations has not been investigated. (see Tables. 4 & 5).

**Table 4. –The fulltime SENCOs, and the hours worked by SENCOs per week.** (Question 8 & 9.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hours employed per week.</th>
<th>% of SENCOs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 - 24</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 - 19</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 - 14</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1- 9</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Varies</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 5. – The employment status of SENCOs.** (Question 10.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment status</th>
<th>% of teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permanent</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non permanent / Contract (ORRS)</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relieving</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^6\) ORRS funding – funding and staffing for extra teaching, specialist programmes, therapy, consumables and education support. Students verified for support under ORRS are funded at two levels high and very high needs. (Ministry of Education, 2002a).
The roles / responsibilities held by SENCOs – The majority of SENCOs held many different roles and responsibilities as part of their positions in the school. These include management, head of department, guidance and welfare, curriculum leadership and teaching. The occurrence of positions such as specialist learning support teachers and coordinators, career coordinators, school Chaplin, director of religious instruction are included in the ‘other’ category, and are predominately of a social science, humanistic form. SENCO were able to make more than one response to this question. (see Fig. 3.)

![Chart showing roles/ responsibilities held by SENCOs](chart.png)

**Fig. 3. – The roles / responsibilities held by SENCO. (Question 20.)**

The experiences SENCOs have had in special education - In all school settings the majority of SENCOs have had a variety of experiences in special education. The classification of ‘other’ in the table included working as an RTLB, responsibility for the RTLB cluster, managing a SES centre, involvement as a SPELD teacher, responsibilities for school-wide professional development etc. Multiple responses were acceptable to this question. (see Table. 6).
Table. 6. –The experiences SENCOs have had in special education. (Question 19.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experiences of the SENCOs</th>
<th>Percentage of SENCOs who report experience in the task.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taught SE classes / groups / 1-1</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HOD Learning Support / SE</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID and assessed students</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed programmes / IEPs</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liaised with parents / teachers / professionals</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Referred to other agencies / professionals</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE Committee /meetings</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervised timetable and appraise TAs</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budgeted and prioritised SEG</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended in-service training courses</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialist teachers ESOL / RR</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Roles and responsibilities held by SENCO within role of SENCO - The range of roles and responsibilities that SENCO report they perform as part of their current role is extensive. Evidently there is considerable diversity, including administration, management, liaison, assessment, planning, programming, teaching, monitoring and evaluation. Considerable responsibility is noted in a wide area across school systems. Multiple responses were received in this question. (see Table. 7).
Table 7. The roles and responsibilities held by SENCO within the SENCO role. (Question 21.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Roles / responsibilities of SENCOs</th>
<th>Percentage of SENCOs who have role / responsibility within SENCO’s role.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teach SE class</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach SE groups</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teach 1-1</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID students with SE needs</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess students</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apply for external assessment</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop &amp; write IEPs</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Co-coordinate IEPs</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developed SE programmes</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write policy</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liase with professionals</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refer to agencies</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chair SE committee</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend SE committee meets</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend district SE meetings</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervise TA</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appraise TAs</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plan Tch/TA timetables</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manage SEG budget</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prioritise SEG</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend SE in-service courses</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liase with parents</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mediate between tchs/parents/students</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep records</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counselling</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader/writer</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESOL</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Teaching qualifications held by SENCOs** – Overall, a variety of qualifications were held by SENCOs. However few SENCO held high level or multiple qualifications. Furthermore, few held a basic degree level qualification, and many omitted to indicate that they held a teaching diploma or certificate. The data infers that, few SENCOs have undertaken additional qualifications over and above their initial teaching diploma or certificate. (see Fig. 4). Special education papers are held by a third of the SENCOs as part of their qualifications (see Table. 8) and specific special education training in the form of the Diploma of Special Teaching Needs.
(STN) or Diploma in Education of the Handicapped (EOH) has been undertaken by very few. Greater interest has been shown in other diplomas than in the area of special education. (see Fig. 4).

**Fig. 4. –The qualifications held by SENCos.** (Question 17.)

![Bar chart showing qualifications held by SENCos](chart)

**Table. 8. –The SENCos holding unspecified levels of special education papers.** (Question 18.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SENCos who hold Special Education papers</th>
<th>% of SENCos</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hold SE papers</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No SE papers</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The skills required by the SENCos** – The responses to the question regarding the skills SENCos considered most necessary to perform their role were categorised into professional skills and personal qualities. Professional skills include key areas such as administration, management, leadership, personnel and communication (see Fig. 5a), while personal qualities include the SENCO’s comments on a need for empathy, humour, patience, and a belief in inclusive practice. (see Fig. 5b). Overall the skills most frequently noted by SENCos were those of the professional nature including administration, leadership, organisational and communication, these featured more strongly than teaching, professional knowledge, specialist teaching skills or resource knowledge. (see Fig. 5a). SENCos did not identify personal qualities as frequently as the more technical type skills, of most frequent choice were the personal qualities of practicality, well balanced, even temperament and patience.
Fig. 5a – The skills SENCos considered most necessary to perform the Senco role. (Question 23.)

Fig. 5b. – The personal qualities SENCos suggested as most necessary to perform the role. (Question 23.)

Provision to support the Senco role – Professional development was the most frequently noted provision that Senco had personally provided to support the SENO’s role. Other factors such as the development of network systems, personal time and resources were also identified. (see Fig. 6a). Similarly, provisions that the schools had made showed parallels and also included time, resources, funding and space. Furthermore, these same aspects featured in the factors identified by the SENCO as those that support them in their role. (see Fig. 7 below).
In a few cases however, SENCOs reported that the school had directed no provisions towards supporting their role. (see Fig. 6b.)

**Fig. 6a. - The provision made by SENCOs to support the role.** (Question 38.)

![Bar chart showing personal provisions](chart1)

**Fig. 6b. - Provisions made by the school to support the SENCO's role.** (Question 37.)

![Bar chart showing provisions made by schools](chart2)

**The factors that would assist SENCOs in their role** - The most significant factors that SENCOs considered would assist them in their role were more time and increased time for non-contact periods. In addition, SENCOs identified increased funding, a salary or unit increase, a place on the senior management team and the allocation of fewer roles and responsibilities as factors that would make a difference to their efficiency. (see Fig. 7). There are similarities in
these factors to the reasons SENCOS nominated for their discontinuation in the role. (see Fig. 8b). Of note is that SENCOS viewed the need for more support from colleagues and senior staff, and a need for improved systems, policies and procedures in schools, but did not suggest being part of the senior management team, despite only 43% claiming a position on this team. (see Table. 3 above). Similarly, although SENCOS suggested more time was an influencing factor, a reduction in the number of roles and responsibilities they held did not feature highly. However, an increase in the number of teacher aides to support their work was another assistance factor that they frequently noted.

**Fig. 7. - The factors that would assist SENCOS in their role.** (Question 39.)

Continuation in the role of SSENCO - The majority of SENCOS were prepared to continue in their roles should they be given the choice. (see Table. 9). Most SENCOS offered more than one reason for their choice. The comments have been summarised into key areas for continuation (see Fig. 8a), and discontinuation in the role. (see Fig. 8b). SENCOS were free to offer multiple reasons for their responses. Overall SENCOS indicated that enjoyment and satisfaction in the role were important reasons for continuing in the role, a few viewed the role as a positive career move. Some SENCOS however suggested that they had to continue in the role as no one else
would or could take over. On a negative note, excessive demands, poor pay, stress and time were reasons that would cause them to consider discontinuing in the role.

**Table. 9. SENCOs who are prepared to continue working in the role if offered / possible.** (Question 24.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SENCOs who would continue in the role</th>
<th>% of SENCOs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes - would continue in the role</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No - would not continue</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grand Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 8a. –The reasons why SENCOs wish to continue working in the role.** (Question 25.)

**Fig. 8b. –The reasons why SENCOs wish to discontinue working in the role.** (Question 25.)
The job description – The majority of SENCOs indicated that they had a specific job description for the role of SENCO. A few suggested it was incorporated into a description from another role. Some SENCOs have no form of job description to direct their work, it forms an ‘above load’ responsibility. (see Table 10).

Table. 10. – Question 22. SENCOs with a job description specific to the role.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SENCO’s with a job description</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job description</td>
<td>61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No job description</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No response</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teaching experience of SENCOs and involvement with special education - The majority of SENCOs have been involved with special education for 15 years or fewer. (see Fig. 9a). However, a small number of SENCO reported over 36 years of experience in special education. (see Fig. 9b). In comparison, the bulk of teachers have been teaching for 10 years or more.

When these results are compared it is evident that most SENCOs have been involved with other areas of education prior to their involvement in special education. In addition, when the data on the years of involvement are considered, they would indicate that most SENCO are from an older age group. (see Fig. 9a).

Fig. 9a. – The length of time SENCOs have been involved in the teaching profession.

(Question 6.)
Fig. 9b. –The years of experience in special education of the SENCOs. (Question 11.)

Returns – One hundred and sixty returns were made from a possible 400. The returns represented a 40% return rate, which according to Neuman, (1997) provides a rate adequate to validate a survey. Therefore, a meaningful insight into aspects of the SENCO’s role in New Zealand schools can be gained. The 160 returns provided a sample of schools from each setting, (see Table. 11a), and type (see Table. 11b). Returns were consistent with the nation-wide composition of state and integrated schools. Data on the schools with a non-response are not available within the scope of this study.

Table. 11a. –The composition of school types within each group. (Question 3.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School setting</th>
<th>National population</th>
<th>Stratified group</th>
<th>Sample group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Area / Composite</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table. 11b. –The schools settings represented in the study. (Question 1.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School type</th>
<th>National population</th>
<th>Stratified group</th>
<th>Sample group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrated</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Gender of the SENCO** – The majority of SENCO were female with a ratio of 3.6 female SENCOs to 1 male apparent within the survey group. (see Table. 12). This closely reflects the national figures in state and integrated sectors of the teaching profession, where 72% are female (Ministry of Education, 2002b).

**Table. 12. - The gender balance of the SENCOs in the sample group.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>No response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of respondents</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Essentially, the role of the SENCO is multifaceted and complex. These results provide a profile of the role, they raise issues and illustrate the extensive work undertaken by SENCO in New Zealand schools.

**Discussion**

The SENCO is a new position that has evolved as a result of the increased need to coordinate special education provision in most New Zealand schools. From the comments made by SENCOs it is apparent that since the revision of the National Administration Guidelines (1999) (Ministry of Education, 1999) an added demand for a coordinated approach to the management of special education services has arisen within schools. The revised National Administration Guidelines (1999) have increased the focus on student achievement, the needs of individual students and groups of students with special education needs, and have required greater accountability from schools (Ministry of Education, 2000e). In their comments, SENCOs indicate that the legislations, and the expectations brought about by the inclusive paradigm of the SE 2000 policy have placed additional demands and responsibilities on the regular teacher for the education of all students in their classrooms and programmes. Hence, SENCOs believe their role has evolved to address the additional requirements of special education brought about by increased demands from a changed paradigm and legislative mandates. Thus, it seems, many schools have recognised their responsibilities and have developed a SENCO’s role to oversee the provision of special education in the school.
In New Zealand schools, it is obvious that there are many different interpretations of the role, and allocations of provision. As the results of the study indicate, many of the differences are grounded in the perceived value and interpretation the school places on the role, the school’s philosophy of inclusive practice, the physical restraints, staffing, time allocation, school setting, size and the number of students. Since the changes in the National Administration Guidelines late in 1999, however, there has been increased emphasis for all schools to identify and address the needs of students who:

a) are at risk of not achieving,

b) are not achieving and

c) have special education needs - NAG 1 (iii) (Ministry of Education, 2001).

As a result, schools have had to become more accountable. This has placed greater focus on having a SENCO to oversee and coordinate the provisions of programmes and school-wide practices to address the needs of all students.

Like the New Zealand situation, the international reports suggest when a more inclusive approach is adopted there is an increase in the regular class teacher’s workload (Rea & Corbett, 1992). The new paradigm not only creates extra pressures on the class teacher, but also demands a new focus for the traditional special education teacher. Within this paradigm the special education teacher takes on a new role. They are required to advise, support, liase, co-ordinate and provide resources to assist and support the regular classroom teacher to adapt to the new paradigm (Imants, et al, 2001; Rea & Corbett, 1992). The results of this study suggest that a similar situation is apparent in New Zealand, and the extra challenges facing schools to accommodate the changes of working within the new paradigm have led to the development of the SENCOs role.

Unlike many Western countries (Emanuelsson, 2001), there is no official recognition or statement of practice to guide development of the SENCO’s role in New Zealand (Wylie, 2000). Consequently the New Zealand model has developed in an inconsistent and unsystematic fashion to suit the needs of each individual school. While this haphazard development may reflect the specific nature of special education in each school and reflect the philosophy behind the self-managing model of ‘Tomorrow’s Schools’ (Mitchell, McGee, Moltzen & Oliver 1993), it has
also had significant impact on the SENCO’s role. Schools have been able to make their own
decision on its development, and differences in the range of resources, time allocations,
responsibilities, duties and expectations attributed to the position are apparent in the varied
nature of response from the SENCOs participating in the study.

In the development of inclusive practices in schools, it is suggested that the SENCO is a key
player (Quinn & Ryba, 2000). However, Dyson (1990) considers SENCOs have marginal status
in schools, due to the dominance of academic subject areas and the external political and social
pressures schools are expected to meet. He suggests the function of the role is insignificant when
compared to traditional structures of management and the status curriculum areas hold within
schools. This is apparent in the New Zealand situation, SENCOs believe schools have had to
balance decisions about initiating and funding the SENCO’s role against other pressures and
factors. The outcomes of these decisions have influenced the status attributed to the role.
Furthermore, the lack of recognition the Ministry of Education affords the role contributes to its
lack of status. As was encapsulated by one SENCO:

(I am) “frustrated with the lack of appropriate pay, space, resources, and recognition for
such an important role.”

Should the New Zealand Ministry of Education adopt a national staffing allocation to
acknowledge the intricacies of the role, as in overseas models, more recognition and standing in
the school may result.

The provisions that schools have made to support the SENCO’s role also give an indication of
the degree of commitment from the school. A marked variation occurs between schools, and the
accompanying comments made by SENCOs, reveal some of the feelings they have of the status
and value afforded by their school. The SENCOs comment:

“I feel that I am lucky as I am able to make decisions and be really flexible in my job.”

“Because special education is running well within the college, teacher aides, students
and staff are held in high regard.”

“Although I have been at this school for 12 years my position (as SENCO) is not
permanent apparently due to varying numbers.”
In addition, the fact that many SENCOs have personally committed resources and time, and undertaken considerable professional development at their own expense, also implies the lack of value and status the school has attributed to the position.

Despite the apparent changes and increased demands however, not all SENCOs in New Zealand schools are employed as permanent members of their school staff, and many are working in a part-time capacity. Considerable variance of hours specifically allocated to the position exists between schools and settings, and the role is frequently incorporated into other roles within the school. It seems that the role of the SENCO in New Zealand schools is commonly assigned as an 'above-load' requirement to the regular teaching position. This is similarly reflected in international models, as Emanuelsson (2001) states "many teachers take on the position of SENCO as a 'left-over' a 'side-ordered' role to their regular school work" (Emanuelsson, 2001, p138). Furthermore, the 'above-load' allocation of time to address the role, was considered insufficient by the majority of SENCOs. The SENCOs comments and results of this study reinforce the suggestions of Wylie (2000). She identified the pressures of insufficient time to focus on the SENCO’s role, and proposed that all schools receive a staffing allocation. She suggested a fulltime-staffing component of .2 in primary, and .4 in secondary to oversee special education in schools and facilitate the development and maintenance of a SENCO’s role (Wylie, 2000). Should the role receive this form of staffing, it could also serve to raise the perception of the position and give it some recognition and status within the school.

The role of the SENCO is a complex and multi-faceted position that requires an experienced and well-practised teacher (Spedding, 2001). This is illustrated in the considerable list of roles and responsibilities the New Zealand SENCOs identify as part of their role. The SENCOs suggest they have had responsibility for identification of student need, planning and teaching, collaborating and supporting others, identification of resources, management, administration and policy development. The dimensions of the role include a need to be an administrator, to be able to teach, support colleagues, act as an agent of change and have organisational and personnel management skills. These features of the position complement, Stainback, et al, (1989) suggestions, that the SENCO requires a background in classroom teaching, a working knowledge of the curriculum, teaching methodology and programming. They believe these elements serve to
provide credibility and status to the issue of remaining ‘in touch’ with the realities of classroom teaching (Rea and Corbett, 1992). In the New Zealand situation most SENCOs were actively involved as classroom practitioners, and had been engaged in a range of areas, roles and responsibilities. This should imply that they are current and up-to-date with the curriculum, classroom practice and the realities and pressures of being in the classroom. However, Conway, (2001) suggests that to address the extent of the role, SENCOs need significantly more skills than that of the regular class teacher. He believes that while the regular classroom teacher could address many of these aspects, knowledge and experience of special education is an added advantage. This is not particularly apparent in the New Zealand situation with few SENCO having special education experience.

While a variety of qualifications are held by New Zealand SENCOs, as a group they do not appear to be highly qualified or have a special education background. In addition, it is of concern that the results indicate that not all SENCOs have a Teaching Certificate or Diploma. However an oversight in the questionnaire to specifically request this information was apparent and it is likely that this has contributed to this outcome. Nevertheless, it is most likely that the majority of SENCOs would be qualified teachers as they have been involved in many aspects of teaching for lengthy periods of time. The lack of response to this item could be based on the assumption that a teaching qualification is a foregone pre-requisite to the role. As this anomaly reflects an inaccuracy in the data on the teaching qualifications that SENCOs held, further clarification of this particular aspect would be necessary to obtain more accurate information on the qualifications held by SENCOs.

Stainback and Stainback (1990a) suggest part of the SENCO’s role is to improve systems and procedures, and upskill classroom teachers in order to better cater for all learning needs within the classroom environment. Thus, the skills and abilities required of SENCOs to perform these tasks reflect expertise in general and specialist teaching, leadership, educational and personnel management (Quinn & Ryba, 2000; Rea & Corbet, 1992; Stainback & Stainback, 1990a). While the study shows the personal experiences of the SENCOs are extensive, the level and extent of qualifications, training and professional development to support the role do not reflect the same depth. Furthermore, Conway, 2001; Spedding, 2001; Stainback, et al, 1989, suggests that
specialist training and understanding of special education teaching and learning is desirable to assist and support regular classroom teachers. However, it is apparent that few of the SENCOs in the study have this additional specialised knowledge. Despite having qualifications additional to the basic teaching qualification, these did not generally relate directly to special education, personnel or education management.

Despite overseas models identifying the need for special education experience (Conway, 2001), the apparent lack of a special education qualification indicates that this was not a pre-requisite for the position of SENCO in New Zealand schools. Only a little over a third of the SENCOs had a special education paper or qualification as part of their degree, and even fewer indicated a Diploma in Special Teaching Needs (STN) or equivalent. In the past, the STN qualification has been held in high regard by schools and teachers, and teachers with this qualification were sought after to manage special education in schools. However, with the introduction of the new paradigm and the evidence that regular class teachers are increasingly being required to manage this area, it is of concern that more SENCOs do not have special education knowledge and training. SENCOs expressed concern:

"My students' needs are so varied; I have to be an expert in every area. An impossible task!"

"I am not trained for the job. We are decile 10, staff are under huge pressure and unrealistic expectations by parents."

Furthermore, it is endorsed by the belief of Idol-Maestas (1983), that without adequate training few teachers are capable of undertaking the complexities of the role. In addition, the lack of qualifications may have impact on the perceived regard and status of the SENCO's role in the schools. Therefore, a training package specific to SENCOs at certificate or diploma level, or papers as part of a degree could be attractive to SENCOs and may increase the status and perception of the role.

While the majority of SENCOs in the study considered specialist and general teaching skills were essential to perform their role, they also recognised a need for professional knowledge, and an understanding of specialist resources and teaching strategies. In addition, they considered administration, leadership, organisation, management and communication skills as fundamental to their role. SENCOs in the study identified a need to be well organised, to have patience and
empathy, to have a sense of humour and be practical, which Spedding (2001) suggests are the skills that underpin the role of a collaborative support teacher. In the role of support teacher, Quinn & Ryba (2000) regard, highly developed inter-personal skills, well-developed creative problem solving skills, and knowledge and application of a range of technical skills as essential. This endorses the findings of the study, as the SENCOs identified communication, personnel management and administrative skills as key attributes to their support their role.

Furthermore, SENCOs in the study expressed a multitude of factors that impeded and frustrated their practice. They state a lack of time as a major barrier to effectiveness, and a need for non-contact time to address administrative demand. One SENCO commented.

"(I am) frustrated that there is not enough time to do the job properly. Not enough financial resources to meet the needs of students - pressured by trying to live within resources and budget."

However, it is not clear from the study whether the factors that SENCOs have identified are those that would promote an inclusive model or would continue to perpetuate the traditional exclusive system of special education. Emanuelsson, (2001) expresses a similar concern, he suggests schools perpetuate the traditional functional limitations paradigm in preference to reforming organisational factors, by manipulating existing practices within an existing framework. The degree to which the SENCO is able to affect inclusive practice is difficult to gauge from this study. While Sage (1996) proposes that SENCOs are considered crucial in addressing the learning needs of students within an inclusive environment, it is dependent on many factors. It is evident from the comments of SENCOs, and the results of the study, that the views and philosophy of senior management have significant influence on the practices within individual schools.

Many of the SENCOs in the study commented on the difficulties working within systems that do not support students with special education needs. They suggested through skilful interaction with staff they were better able to gain support for students, and also able to influence some fundamental changes to schools systems. Their comments are supported by Emanuelsson, (2001) who suggests, the actual influence that SENCOs have on effecting change is congruent with the status they hold within the school’s system, and the support they receive from senior
management. However, despite the frustrations and the negative feelings towards the role, the majority of SENCOs indicated that they would continue in the SENCO’s role given the opportunity:

“Although frustrated with the lack of appropriate pay, space and resources I enjoy aspects of the job very much - like working with the students.”

However, a few felt the challenges were not worth continuing to work with. The statement from a SENCO reflects this attitude:

“Frustrated and dissatisfied. Not enough funding, too many needs, no acknowledgement, so many problems etc, etc, etc!”

When the feelings and comments that New Zealand SENCOs have made are compared and categorised into a single response, a tenor of negativity is obvious. On reflection, it is apparent that a number of these frustrations are underpinned by what Emanuelsson (2001) refers to as the lack of:

- vision,
- leadership to support the role
- clarity of the role and responsibilities
- support from colleagues
- resources
- time
- professional knowledge
- understanding of the process of change.

Furthermore, he suggests the responsibilities and expectations placed upon SENCOs to implement the new paradigm create difficulty and dissatisfaction in the role. This then generates further frustration and confusion in defining the parameters of the position (Emanuelsson, 2001). Similarly, in the New Zealand setting, SENCOs suggest a lack of support and understanding from management and staff, and the realities of implementing inclusive practices in the classroom and school structures is a difficult and challenging task.

In her review of the New Zealand situation, Wylie suggested too many demands are placed on a position as yet unofficially recognised by the Ministry of Education (Wylie 2000). She considers,
there is a need in all schools for a SENCO to provide on-site support, resources, professional development and coordination of special education services. The results of the study showed, that some schools provide staffing, funding, time, space, resources and professional development, while others provide nothing, not even a room or an office. Dyson (1990) suggested, a lack of provision and support could indicate that the SENCO has been so effective in the move towards inclusive practice, that the role has become redundant and it does not require specific provision. However, this is not illustrated from the results of the New Zealand study. Some SENCOs suggest that the lack of support from the school indicates the value it places on the role, and resources are allocated accordingly.

"Not enough time, money, resources and support."

"I have been at the school for 3 terms and am appalled at the total lack of planning, provision for special needs / learning needs students. As a decile 1 school there are many children needing extra help and yet the school makes NO provision or commitment."

"Frustrated that there is not enough time to do the job properly. Not enough financial resources to meet the needs of students- pressured by trying to live within budget."

In most international models of Britain, USA, Spain, the UK and the Netherlands, guidelines for the SENCO’s role are apparent. The converse is apparent in the New Zealand situation where no guidelines or mandate for practice are available. Furthermore, while most SENCOs have a specific job description relevant to their role, some have no guidelines and the role has been incorporated within another position. Without a job description, it could be assumed that the SENCOs position is not a significant or key role in the school. It reinforces the perception that the role is just an ‘add on’, with little regard or acknowledgement of the extensive nature of the position. To compound the problem, even the SENCOs are not sure of their role:

"I’d really like my role clarified – for my benefit and other staff member’s benefit."

Furthermore, many SENCOs suggest their positions have evolved over time as the needs have changed in the school, or have developed as part of other duties and positions of responsibility.

In comparison, in many European settings the SENCOs have a specific, mandated, position within the school. Despite national mandates however, Imants, et al (2001) suggest local factors
still influence the degree to which the inclusive paradigm is exercised. Thus, in New Zealand where schools are self-managing and reflect local decision-making processes the functional deficit model may still feature regardless of national guidelines for practice. This is supported by the belief of Emanuelsson (2001), who suggests, that it is the ‘school-code’ (school philosophy and practice) that determines both how special education is understood and practised in each school, not national mandate. Within the new paradigm, problems and difficulties are ‘owned’ by every one responsible for teaching and learning at the school. Thus, the ‘school-code’ is a key factor that impacts on the development and operation of the SENCO’s role, and influences the inclusiveness of the system (Emanuelsson, 2001). The New Zealand situation reflects the perspective of ‘school-code’ in the variance of the role and responsibilities of SENCOs, and their apparent non-existence in some schools.

The majority of SENCOs in the study held permanent positions, and had been involved with teaching for ten to thirty years. However, few had similar extensive involvement or experience with special education. Furthermore, although experienced teachers, the majority had only undertaken the SENCO’s role in the last five years. This timeframe relates to the introduction of the SE 2000 policy, and the change of paradigm for special education. It also indicates that schools have had to recently develop the SENCO’s role in order to accommodate the changes inherent in the policy. International reports make no mention to the permanent status of the role, but it is suspected that as the SENCO position is mandated, prescribed by guidelines and has extensive responsibility, it would require an experienced teacher in a full-time permanent position.

A further group of SENCOs in the New Zealand study have had longer involvement in the role, between 6-15 years. This timeframe indicates a possible link to the amendments to the Education Act (1989), and reflects the change in outlook towards cultural values and attitudes towards those with disability within most Western countries. Since the changes within the Education Act (1989), schools have had to be more accountable, and make adjustments to the ways in which they manage and provide special education programmes and services to cater for the needs of all students (Quinn & Ryba, 2000). Therefore, in accordance with the Education Act (1989) it could
be assumed that a number of schools have found the need to develop the role of the SENCO in order to manage and coordinate the special education provision within the school.

Yet another group of SENCOs in the study are those teachers who have held the role fifteen years and longer. These SENCOs are believed to have been specialist special education teachers prior to the changes brought about by the SE 2000 policy and the Education Act (1989). Personal comments suggest this evolution:

"I used to be a senior teacher in charge of a special needs unit but the job disappeared with SE 2000. I believe there are many like me and we now have no form of job security or status. It would be good to see this issue addressed!"

"It is basically what I have been doing for the last 11 years, although the job has changed considerably."

It seems this group of SENCOs have been the most likely personnel to assume the SENCO’s role as it has evolved and changed within the school. This supports the beliefs of Imants, et al, (2001); Rea & Corbett (1992), who suggest the role of the special education teacher has evolved over time to accommodate the changes brought about by the introduction of the inclusive paradigm.

Finally, another concern is apparent in the fact that some SENCOs had not chosen to take on the role. Comments regarding continuation in the SENCO’s role indicate that they had no option, had assumed the role by default or as part of another role such as guidance counsellor,

“In a small to middle sized school there is not always a staff member with interest in special education to desire to be the SENCO."

(The job is) “too time consuming as an ‘add on’ to my other major roles in the school.” or as in the case of sole charge principals, when:

“No one else was available” and “no one else will.”

While most have expressed genuine interest in the SENCO’s role, it was of concern that in some cases the role was filled reluctantly. Furthermore, the lack of regard for the position serves to perpetuate the lack of status the role appears to command.
Limitations – It is evident that a number of areas have been overlooked within this study and with further investigation and clarification a more thorough understanding of the SENCO’s role could be gained. It was also evident that some of the items in the questionnaire had proven ambiguous or difficult to answer. Questions that identified the SENCO’s views on inclusive practice and the changes brought about by national legislation would have added greater depth to the study. A more direct investigation of the impact of the SE 2000 policy and the effect of the inclusive paradigm on the role of the SENCO’S, and the provision of special education services in schools could be of particular interest.

Furthermore, it is unknown why some schools made no response to the survey. Possibly they had not established a SENCO’s position, or the SENCOs were too busy. Unfortunately, the survey design did not request a return from schools without SENCOs. This oversight may well have restricted the overall number of returns received, and has highlighted an omission in the development of questionnaire. As a result, only speculation can be made regarding the reasons for non-participation in the study. However, all school types, sizes and settings were represented in the survey returns. The use of a stratification process had caused a bias towards secondary schools, this was further emphasised through the participation of secondary schools in the survey. While the overrepresentation may indicate that secondary schools and also area schools have a greater need and use of a SENCO, it would be necessary to undertake further investigation into the prevalence of SENCOs across all settings in order to identify the actual distribution nation-wide.

Recommendations – Throughout the study as the role of the SENCO is investigated there are implications to policy, practice and research. There are many factors influencing the development of the SENCO role, and there is a need to establish more clarity through research in order to inform practice and policy. While the models and experiences from overseas are of value, it is essential that the SENCO role is developed to address the needs of New Zealand schools. For example, while it is apparent that the models discussed by many overseas writers (Rea & Corbett, 1992; Sage, 1996; Stainback and Stainback, 1990) have similarities to the model that is currently developing in New Zealand schools, aspects of the international role reflect
similarities to the New Zealand, Resource Teacher Learning and Behaviour (RTLB), not the SENCO. However, other aspects of the role such as time allocation, placement, responsibilities, and funding can inform the New Zealand situation, but would need to account for the self-managing aspect of schools in New Zealand.

The comments made by SENCO, and the overall profile of the role, has indicated that a subsequent study into the impact of the school’s philosophy, and thus management practices in relation to the SENCO’s role, is necessary. Gauging from the comments of SENCOs the fundamental element in the development of the SENCO’s role, and resource allocation, hinges on the philosophy and influence of the school’s management and leaders. This current study has identified the influence of these aspects and can make assumptions about effects, however sufficient information to thoroughly investigate the situation is unavailable.

Another area for further research is the understanding of inclusion and its implications to school practice. While Stainback and Stainback (1990, p3) offer their definition;

"a place where everyone belongs, is accepted, supports and is supported by his or her peers and other members of the school community in the course of having his or her educational needs met"

the actual interpretation and impact on how schools manage and address special education within an inclusive environment is obscure. In addition, further research to identify aspects of best practice for the SENCO’s role within an inclusive environment would inform the development of national guidelines and support the development of training programmes specific to the role. This would ensure a more uniform approach, and would assist to overcome the disparities that are currently evident.

The question of management and the support systems that schools have in place to assist the SENCO’s role is an additional area for study. Many SENCOs have indicated that they are

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7 RTLB – Specially trained teachers who support and work in schools, assisting staff, parents and community members to meet the needs of students with moderate learning and/or behavioural difficulties. (Ministry of Education, 2002).
involved with Special Education committees, who assist and support their work, and provide some element of accountability and transparency. Where the SENCO alone makes decisions about allocation of funding, issues of equity can be apparent. Thus, to support the SENCO and facilitate transparent decision making, the formation of a Special Education committee is advisable. This team could comprise school management, parents, interested staff and teacher aides. Furthermore, the development of a Special Education committee could also be regarded as an example of inclusive practice as it indicates shared decision-making and responsibility, and can facilitate the representation of a variety of skills and different perspectives. With guidelines for the committee based on research, a model of best practice could then be developed for schools to follow.

The need for specific professional development for SENCOs to equip them for the enormity of their task is identified in the study. As mentioned, professional training and ongoing support is evidently required to address the underpinning philosophy of inclusion and teaching methodology, and also administrative and organisational management, personnel management, and legislative information. Ideally, this type of professional development would contribute towards some higher qualification and salary increase for SENCO. Thus, specific professional development designed to equip teachers for the SENCO’s role could facilitate a more proactive, planned approach than the current haphazard development evident within this study.

The establishment of a cluster network of SENCOs is another strategy to ensure that inclusive practice is being implemented at a school management and organisational level. Regular meetings of the group could facilitate greater sharing and collaborative problem solving of the challenges facing special education. In addition, it could also serve to identify effective practice and the training requirements of the SENCOs for future development of training courses and papers.

In recognition of the multifaceted and demanding nature of the role, a management unit attached to the SENCO’s position could provide greater incentive for those considering the role. Similarly, it could give the role increased status and standing in the management and
organisational structures of the school. Furthermore, the recommendations of Wylie (2000), that suggest the Ministry of Education should allocate a staffing component to the SENCO’s role could be further investigated. Wylie (2000) recommended, that an official funded SENCO’s position in each school would allow the school to enhance special education provisions, and could facilitate liaison between staff, RTLB and other service providers. In addition, the SENCO could provide on-going support, information and professional development, and provide a central, in-school base for resources and programmes to support special education.

**Conclusion** – The ad-hoc development of the New Zealand SENCO’s role has arisen through an increased pressure on school systems and teachers. Unfortunately in New Zealand, the role is not resourced and recognised as it is in countries such as Britain, USA, Spain, the UK and the Netherlands. Generally, the current system in New Zealand expects a teacher to adopt the complex role of SENCO over-and-above that of their regular teaching position. Therefore, paramount to the development of the role is the need for a clear mandate for practice. The mandate would provide a framework for schools to develop the SENCO’s role based on aspects of best practice. In addition to the development of national guidelines, a training programme specific to the role is suggested. This would help to ensure a more uniform approach is adopted and would assist to overcome the many disparities and frustrations that are currently evident.

While distinct similarities of the role are evident, it is also apparent that the differences between schools reflect the particular philosophy and demands of each individual school. From a self-management perspective this is a positive aspect, however the outcomes may not always reflect the Government’s overall aim for an inclusive education system. Furthermore, the results of the study suggest that while there is no mandate for the establishment of a SENCO in New Zealand schools, SENCOs lack status and power in school decision-making procedures. Few SENCOs are awarded units of remuneration specific to their role, and their lack of involvement on the senior management team of the school is apparent. Heavy workloads and additional duties are reported and excessive and extensive demands from management and colleagues are commonplace. Consequently, there is widespread confusion in the requirements, expectations and responsibilities of the SENCO’s role.
Despite all, the majority of SENCOs are dedicated to their role and have made personal commitment to ensure its success. The obvious passion for working with learners with special education needs can be noted in comments throughout the study. Many SENCOs express job satisfaction, however the expression of mixed emotions and negativity towards the position is apparent. These comments are grounded by-and-large in expressions regarding funding, policy, and systemic frustration. It is not surprising that most report a lack of time and resources as major factors that influence their effectiveness.

Finally, with a clear mandate, specific funding, training and recognition of the importance of the role from the leader and management of the school, the SENCO could provide the key to realise the government’s special education aim to:

“achieve over the next decade a world class inclusive education system that provides learning opportunities of equal quality to all students.” (Ministry of Education, 1996, p5).
Personal reflections of the study

The questionnaire – It is unfortunate that the questionnaire failed to address all the issues of the SENCO role as conclusively as it could. Once the data was gathered and processed it became apparent that some items of the questionnaire had not acquired the information that had been anticipated and some questions had resulted in redundant data. In retrospect and with more experience, it is evident that the questionnaire items with a focus on alternative factors may have achieved better and more useful data. For example it would have been useful to have gathered data from SENCO in regards to their thoughts on the status they hold in schools, the main duties and tasks of their positions or their thoughts on inclusive practice. However as some factors have been overlooked it has highlighted aspects that need further clarification and could become focus areas for subsequent study.

It also became apparent that some questions proved too complex and obscure to complete. For example, item 26 received a number of negative comments, many did not complete it, and those that did, have reported different information. It has demonstrated how the development of the questionnaire items requires careful consideration, and despite the trial run with the pilot group difficulties can still arise. It was disappointing to have caused frustration to those willingly participating in the study. In addition, it has illustrated how precise and focused the question items are required to be to avoid ambiguity. This fact was apparent in question 17 which omitted to question basic teaching qualifications, and thus it must be assumed that the lack of SENCO responding with a teaching qualification implies they regarded a teaching qualification as a foregone conclusion. However it brings into question the accuracy of the data on qualifications. Similarly the lack of specific definition of what constitutes a special education paper in question 18 also has led to some confusion and thus some subjective analysis of some responses.

Another aspect that became evident is the need to ensure the questions related directly to the key issues as discussed in the literature. This would allow the design of questions to extract the precise information and facilitate a more straightforward comparison between the New Zealand and overseas models. Some of the items used in the study, although of interest and useful to profile the New Zealand SENCO, did not illustrate as clearly as required to compare and contrast the models. The data has had to be further analysed to determine some of the meanings. For
example when the New Zealand SENCO itemise the tasks and duties of their role it is not immediately clear if they are working in an inclusive paradigm and therefore other aspects of the data had to be considered. Data such as the in-class support, class and 1-1 teaching, the hours available and the general comments were investigated. It would have proven much more straightforward to explore this aspect directly in any subsequent study.

**Processing the data** - The analysis of data is another factor that would have been easier had due consideration been given to how the data might be recorded and analysed prior to the study. This would have aided the development of the questionnaire and would have ensured the most efficient procedure was used to process the data. The fact that the multiple-choice items were not numbered made the initial recording difficult and frustrating. A good deal of pre-data processing was required that could have otherwise been avoided. Each questionnaire took approximately 30 minutes to enter and although it was a valuable exercise being exposed to each entry, better data entry processes would have ameliorate this arduous task. In addition, greater understanding and practice with the database ‘Excel’ would have been an advantage.

**Personal thoughts** – The study has occurred over an 18-month period and has taken a significant number of hours, far exceeding the course requirements. To this end I have learned that a study should be kept small and focused, and specifically identify a particular aspect or area to be investigated without getting too expansive. Similarly, I have found that recording and analysis of data needs careful thought at the time of compiling the questionnaire, and the questionnaire must concentrate on the information it intended to address to avoid ambiguity. In addition I have discovered it is necessary to restrict the amount of literature that is read after the questionnaire has been developed and circulated, as the focus area can become distorted and considerably more extensive. I understand how easy it is to make assumptions based on the initial feelings of entering the data and how it can change when the data is analysed and presented in table and graph form. Furthermore, I have discovered how it is necessary to continually correlate the analysis of the data to ensure contradictory statements are not being made. Likewise, I have learned how frustrating it is to present tables and figures using different scales and measures and how infuriating it is to go back and change them. Therefore, in future,
greater thought and planning into the development of the questionnaire and the analysis and presentation of data would have been advantageous.

In summary, this project has been a huge learning experience, one that I would not undertake in haste in the future without due consideration to the scope of the task. The frustrations of being unable to pursue other aspects and ideas that have arisen during the literature search, the review and the study has been limiting. I now eagerly anticipate following some of these initiatives for my own personal interest and development having gained a much deeper understanding of the process of developing a study such as this. All in all it has been an extensive and challenging learning experience.
References


Appendixes

Appendix - 1 Letter of introduction and explanation

Appendix - 2 Ethical assurance

Appendix - 3 Questionnaire

Appendix - 4 SENCO questionnaire - Pilot survey activity

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Research project title
The Special Education Coordinator in New Zealand Schools
What are the factors of the role, how do these factors impact on the role of the special education coordinator in New Zealand schools?

Dear Special Education Coordinator, HOD / IC Special Education

My name is Giselle J Storer, and I'm working under the supervision of Dr Vince Ham (Research Coordinator) and Bonny Le Grice (Senior Lecturer) in the Master of Teaching and Learning programme. I am undertaking this research component as part of my study towards a Master of Teaching and Learning degree at the Christchurch College of Education.

The general aim of the research is to investigate the role, and responsibilities of the Special Education Coordinators in New Zealand schools as part of the introduction of Special Education 2000 policy. This investigation aims to provide knowledge of the ways in which schools are addressing the coordination and management of Special Education. It is hoped to identify the skills, knowledge and requirements of the position and highlight the need for schools to recognise and acknowledge the significance of the role. The study seeks to clarify and identify elements that contribute to the differences between schools in order to ascertain how the role can be further developed.

I appreciate you giving your time to participate in this survey. The questionnaire should take between 10 – 15 minutes to complete. All responses are confidential and anonymity is assured. The questionnaires will be coded to identify the schools to which they are sent but no personal identification will be sought. Participation is voluntary and no penalty or loss of benefit will occur should you choose not to participate. You are also able to withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the researcher and quoting the school code. The information gathered from the survey questionnaire will be stored in a secure location, available only to my College supervisors and me, and will be used for statistical or illustrative purposes only.

It is a requirement of the College that all participants are informed of complaint procedures. Should there be any concerns or complaints concerning the manner in which this research project is conducted, please direct to the researcher, or if an independent person is preferred please forward to:

The Chair - Ethical Clearance Committee
Christchurch College of Education
PO Box 31-065
CHCH
Phone: (03) 348-2059

I thank you for participating in this survey, a self-addressed envelope is provided to encourage your involvement. I need your help!! Without it I would be unable to complete my project. Your support is truly appreciated. Please return by 16/11/01. Thank you.

Yours faithfully

Giselle J Storer

Christchurch College of Education
PO Box 16-128
CHCH
Support Services - Hornby Campus
Clocktower Building, Cnr Main South Road and Bryneley Street
PO Box 16-128, Christchurch 8030, New Zealand
Telephone (03) 349 1350, Facsimile (03) 349 1351

Phone (03) 349-0175
Fax (03) 349-1351
Email – giselle.storer@ccce.ac.nz

Affiliated with
GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY
AUSTRALIA
Consent Agreement

Research project - MTL–802
The Special Education Coordinator in New Zealand Schools
What are the factors of the role, how do these factors impact on the role of the special education coordinator in New Zealand schools?

A Christchurch College of Education Masters research study under the supervision of Dr Vince Ham (Research Coordinator) and Bonny Le Grice (Senior Lecturer) in the Master of Teaching and Learning programme. This investigation aims to provide knowledge of the ways in which schools are addressing the coordination and management of Special Education. Through the use of the questionnaire it is hoped to identify the skills, responsibilities and requirements of the position and highlight the need for schools to recognise and acknowledge the significance of the role.

Informed Consent Agreement

I have read the enclosed letter explaining the nature and purpose of the research and understand that participation in this study is voluntary, I am in no way bound to participate in the research survey and no penalty or loss of benefit will occur should I choose not to participate. I understand that I can withdraw from the study at any time by contacting the researcher and quoting the school code. I have also been informed of complaint procedures and I understand that the data obtained from the survey will remain anonymous at all times and will be used for statistical or illustrative purposes only. Copies of the research project will be made available to me if required. In addition I agree that under the terms of this study the data may be used in any subsequent research publications that the researcher may undertake.

I agree to participate in the research of:

The Special Education Coordinator in New Zealand Schools.
What are the factors of the role, how do these factors impact on the role of the special education coordinator in New Zealand schools?

Signed: ___________________________ Date: ____________

Researcher - Giselle J Storer
Christchurch College of Education
PO Box 16-128
CHCH

Phone (03) 349-0175
Fax (03) 349-1351
Email – giselle.storer@cce.ac.nz
Survey of the role, and responsibilities of special education coordinators in New Zealand schools.
What are the factors of the role, how do these factors impact on the role of the special education coordinator in New Zealand schools?
Please complete and return in the stamped self-addressed envelope by 16/11/01 to: Giselle J Storer,
Teacher Support Services
PO Box 16 128
CHCH 8030.

Information will remain anonymous at all times. Data will be used for the purpose of gaining information of the role of the Special Education Coordinator and will be presented as a requirement for a CHCH College of Education Masters paper. In anticipation, thank you for your time.

NB. Definition: The Special Education Coordinator (SECO) is the person who is assigned or has the responsibility for the daily management of Special Education (SE) in the school. The role can include a Head of Department - (HoD) - Special Education / Learning Support, Teacher In Charge - (IC) - Special Education, Unit holder - SE, ORRs funded SE teacher, part-time teacher SE, etc.

1. School:    □ State    □ Integrated

2. School decile ranking: _______

3. School type:    □ Primary    □ Secondary    □ Intermediate    □ Area / Composite

4. School staffing - Full-time teaching equivalents (FTTE): No. = __________

5. Number of students at the school: No. = __________

6. Number of years you have been teaching:
□ 0-5 yrs □ 6-10 yrs □ 11-15 yrs □ 16-20 yrs □ 21-25 yrs □ 26-30 yrs □ 31-35 yrs □ 36+ yrs.

7. Gender:    □ Male    □ Female

8. Are you employed full-time in the school?    □ Yes    □ No

9. If 'no' what are your total hours of employment in the school?    __________ hours per week.

10. Are you?
□ Permanent    □ Non permanent    □ Contract    □ Short term    □ Relieving    □ ORRS funded

11. How long have you been involved with SE? Eg. teacher specifically for students with SE needs, committee member, IC / HOD SE, Learning Support or SECO?
□ 0-5 yrs □ 6-10 yrs □ 11-15 yrs □ 16-20 yrs □ 21-25 yrs □ 26-30 yrs □ 31-35 yrs □ 36+ yrs.

12. If employed for other roles as well as SE coordinator, what hours are specifically allocated to the role of SE coordinator? E.g. release or non-contact for administration planning, management etc.    __________ hours per week.

13. In your opinion is this allocation sufficient?    □ Yes    □ No

14. Do you hold any PR-units / M-units / R-units / Fixed Term?    □ Yes    □ No

15. If 'yes' how many are specifically related to the role of SE coordinator?
□ ½ □ 1 □ 2 □ 3 □ 4+

16. As part of your role as the SECO are you part of the senior management team?
□ Yes    □ No

17. What formal qualifications do you hold: (e.g. Dip STN, BA, MSc etc.)

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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18. Please list any papers related to special education within your degree/s.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

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19. What experience have you had in special education? (please tick)

- Taught SE class
- Taught SE groups
- SE coordinator in school
- Developed and written IEPs
- Co-ordinated IEPs
- Attend SE committee meetings
- Chaired SE committee
- Identified students with SE needs
- Assessed students with SE needs
- Managed SEG with others
- Prioritised use of SEG with others
- Supervised TA
- Appraised TAs
- Reading recovery
- ESOL

20. What roles/responsibilities do you hold in the school? Tick role/s from each box if necessary.

- Principal
- Deputy principal
- Assistant / Associate principal
- Dean
- Head of department
- Senior Teacher
- Guidance counsellor
- Senior Teacher – special duties
- Form teacher
- Curriculum coordinator
- Special Education Coordinator
- Full-time class teacher
- Part-time class teacher
- Special Education/Learning Support teacher
- Reading recovery teacher
- ESOL
- Other

21. Indicate all the roles/responsibilities you have in the school within your role as SE coordinator.

- Teach regular class/es
- Teach special education class
- Teach SE groups
- Teach SE students 1-1
- Identify students with SE needs
- Assess students
- Apply for external assessment
- Develop and write IEPs
- Co-ordinate IEPs
- Develop SE programmes for students
- Writing policy for SE procedures in school
- Develop/maintain SE committee
- Attend school SE committee meetings
- Attend district SE committee meetings
- Chair SE committee
- Organise SE committee meetings
- Keep minutes of meetings
- Manage SEG budget
- Manage SEG budget with others
- Prioritise use of SEG
- Prioritise use of SEG with others
- Mediate between teachers/students/parents etc
- Liaise with parents
- Liaise with teachers
- Liaise with other professionals
- Attend in-service courses
- Keep records
- Negotiate timetables
- Counsel students
- Apply for and organise reader-writers
- ESOL
- Other (name)

22. Do you have a job description or employment contract for your role as SE coordinator / HOD SE/ Learning Support IC SE?

- Yes
- No

23. List the skills that you consider are the most necessary in your role as SECO?

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24. If offered / possible will you continue with the role?

- Yes
- No

25. Why?
26. Cross out those items that are not part of your role/responsibilities, for the remaining items approximately proportion your role/responsibilities as a percentage.

- Teach regular classes
- Teach special education class
- Teach SE groups
- Teach SE students 1-1
- Identify students with SE needs
- Assess students
- Apply for external assessment
- Develop and write IEPs
- Co-ordinate IEPs
- Develop SE programmes for students
- Writing/reviewing policy for SE procedures etc in school
- Develop/maintain SE committee
- Attend school SE committee meetings
- Attend district SE committee meetings
- Chair SE committee
- Organise SE committee meetings
- Keep minutes of meetings
- Manage SEG budget
- Manage SEG budget with others
- Prioritise use of SEG
- Prioritise use of SEG with others
- Liaise with teachers
- Mediate with teachers/students/parents etc
- Liaise with parents
- Supervise TAs
- Plan teacher/TA timetables
- Appraise TAs
- Refer students to other agencies
- Liaise with other professionals
- Attend in-service courses
- Continue with study/professional development
- Keep records
- Negotiate timetables
- Counsel students
- Apply for and organise reader-writers
- ESOL
- Other

TOTAL 100%

27. Do you currently teach a regular class either full or part-time?
☐ Yes  ☐ No

28. If 'yes' indicate which year levels you are currently teaching.

| Year 0 | ☐ | Year 4 | ☐ | Year 8 | ☐ | Year 12 | ☐ |
| Year 1 | ☐ | Year 5 | ☐ | Year 9 | ☐ | Year 13 | ☐ |
| Year 2 | ☐ | Year 6 | ☐ | Year 10 | ☐ |
| Year 3 | ☐ | Year 7 | ☐ | Year 11 | ☐ |

29. What levels have you previously taught as a regular class teacher?

| Year 0 | ☐ | Year 4 | ☐ | Year 8 | ☐ | Year 12 | ☐ |
| Year 1 | ☐ | Year 5 | ☐ | Year 9 | ☐ | Year 13 | ☐ |
| Year 2 | ☐ | Year 6 | ☐ | Year 10 | ☐ |
| Year 3 | ☐ | Year 7 | ☐ | Year 11 | ☐ |

30. If a subject teacher (secondary/intermediate), what subjects do you currently teach?

- English ☐ Economics ☐ Music ☐ Languages ☐
- Maths ☐ Geography ☐ Classical studies ☐ Other(name) ☐
- Science/s ☐ Social Studies ☐ Physical Educ ☐ Other(name) ☐

31. Do you teach a special education class or group? Eg. remedial groups, ORRS funded students, attached unit. ☐ Yes ☐ No

32. If 'yes' indicate which year levels you are currently teaching.

| Year 0 | ☐ | Year 4 | ☐ | Year 8 | ☐ | Year 12 | ☐ |
| Year 1 | ☐ | Year 5 | ☐ | Year 9 | ☐ | Year 13 | ☐ |
| Year 2 | ☐ | Year 6 | ☐ | Year 10 | ☐ |
| Year 3 | ☐ | Year 7 | ☐ | Year 11 | ☐ |
33. What levels have you previously taught as a special education teacher?
Not applicable  ☐  Year 3  ☐  Year 7  ☐  Year 11  ☐
Year 0  ☐  Year 4  ☐  Year 8  ☐  Year 12  ☐
Year 1  ☐  Year 5  ☐  Year 9  ☐  Year 13  ☐
Year 2  ☐  Year 6  ☐  Year 10  ☐

34. Have you been offered any professional development related to your role as SE coordinator?  ☐ Yes  ☐ No
35. If 'yes' what have you done?
SE 2000 contract  ☐  Full-time courses  ☐  Part-time courses
Inclusive schools contract  ☐  AST  ☐  Other
Whole school development / focus  ☐  Degree papers  ☐  None
Short courses (less than 1 week)  ☐  Diploma courses  ☐

36. What professional development would you like?
SE 2000 contract  ☐  Full-time courses  ☐  Part-time courses
Inclusive schools contract  ☐  AST  ☐  Other
Whole school development / focus  ☐  Degree papers  ☐  None
Short courses (less than 1 week)  ☐  Diploma courses  ☐

37. What provisions has the school made to support you in the role as SE coordinator? Eg. time, space, resources etc. Please specify.
__________________________________________
__________________________________________
__________________________________________

38. What provisions have you made to support yourself in the role of SE coordinator? Eg. training, resources, time. Please specify.
__________________________________________
__________________________________________
__________________________________________

39. What factors would assist you in your role as the SECO?
More time  ☐  Greater work space  ☐
More resources  ☐  Personal office space  ☐
Specific funding  ☐  Storage space  ☐
Increase of non-contact / release time  ☐  Fewer referred students  ☐
Training / professional development  ☐  More referred students  ☐
Salary increase (M/R - units)  ☐  Systems of support - e.g. policy, procedures  ☐
Place on the senior management team  ☐  Support from senior management  ☐
More collegial support  ☐  Support from other staff members  ☐
A Special Education Committee in school  ☐  Fewer roles / responsibilities in school  ☐
Responsibility for Special Education budget  ☐  Increased roles / responsibilities in school  ☐
Organisational factors e.g. timetabling  ☐  Greater understanding of the inclusive model  ☐
More teacher aides  ☐  Greater knowledge of available resources  ☐
Trained teacher aides  ☐  Networking and liaising with other SECO  ☐
A computer  ☐  More acceptance from staff for students with special education needs  ☐
Computer networked throughout school  ☐
Designated work space  ☐

40. How do you feel about your work as the special education coordinator? You may tick more than one.
☐ delighted  ☐ satisfied  ☐ dissatisfied  ☐ other (name)
☐ pleased  ☐ anxious  ☐ discouraged  ☐ other
☐ happy  ☐ uncertain  ☐ frustrated  ☐ other
☐ contented  ☐ unhappy  ☐ angry

41. Do you have any other comments?
__________________________________________

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire – Glorle J Storer
## SE Coordinator’s questionnaire

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