"Working together...it doesn't go far enough actually for what the relationship becomes" - An IPA study exploring the experiences of primary school SENCOs working with parents/carers through the EHCP process

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Abstract

September 2015 marked the start of a system-wide change to the SEND system. The Children and Families Act 2014 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years (CoP) (2015) have given greater emphasis to parental involvement in the decisions that involve their children and on the expectations of schools. Government research has predominately focussed on the experiences of parents, but the experiences of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) in the new process has not yet been greatly explored. Therefore my research has aimed to explore the experiences of primary school SENCOs working with parents/carers through the new Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) process. The purpose of this research was to provide knowledge of the SENCO experience to a relatively new research area in order to increase the awareness and understanding of those who work with and support SENCOs. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with five, purposefully selected, primary SENCOs. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used to analyse the data. Superordinate themes for each of the five SENCOs emerged from the interpretative analysis which led to four overarching themes across the whole sample. Three overarching themes were shared by all five SENCOs: 'Inner turmoil of the SENCO', 'Feeling adrift, in need for an anchor', and 'Differing roles, intimacy and professionalism', and the fourth over-arching theme was shared by three of the SENCOs: 'Varying expectations of the SENCO role'. Potential implications of these findings for professionals working with SENCOs, such as Educational Psychologists (EPs) could be: offering supervision for SENCOs: personal and/or peer to provide support and guidance for SENCOs, psychological training to provide SENCOs with

greater understanding of the reasons behind parents actions/behaviours and their own emotional responses, and EPs approach towards working with SENCOs on a day-to-day basis to reduce SENCOs' feelings of isolation.

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Glossary of Terms

CoP: Code of Practice

DfE: Department for Education

DfES: Department for Education and Schools

EHCP: Educational, Health and Care Plan

ELT: Emotional Labour Theory

EP: Educational Psychologist

IASS: Information, Advice and Support Services

LA: Local Authority

LAC: Looked After Child

LSA: Learning Support Assistant

NASEN: National Association for Special Educational Needs

NQT: Newly Qualified Teacher

SEN: Special Educational Needs

SSEN: Statement of Special Educational Needs

SENCO: Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator

SEND: Special Educational Needs and Disability

TA: Teaching Assistant

TEP: Trainee Educational Psychologist

1. Introduction

Parents are an essential part in any child's education and research has shown the positive educational outcomes that can occur when school and home work effectively together (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002, Jeynes, 2005, Harris and Goddall, 2008). However, the Lamb inquiry (2009) indicated that parental engagement and communication between home and school in regard to children with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) needed to be improved to ensure the best possible outcomes for children with SEND. The Children and Families Act 2014 and the Special Educational Needs and Disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years (CoP) (2015) have given greater emphasis to parental involvement in the decisions that involve their children, and on the expectations of schools, and indirectly, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators' (SENCOs). Although, the CoP (2015) is system-wide and extends beyond the implications for SENCOs, the implementation of the CoP (2015) entails significant changes to the expectations, practices and experiences of those acting in the SENCO role (Pearson, Mitchell, and Rapti, 2015).

The focus of this proposed piece of research is the experiences of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators' (SENCOs') working with parents/carers through the new Education, Health, Care, Plan (EHCP) process. Through exploring SENCOs' experiences it is hoped that the information gained could be used to support, train, and guide SENCOs, and inform the current EHCP process.

1.1 Background to the Proposed Research

My personal interest in home-school communication stems from my previous role as a Primary School Teacher. Through my Masters in Teaching and

Learning dissertation I investigated how a primary school could best support reading at home. Research had shown the positive impact that school and home working together can have on pupils' learning (Wood, Vardy, and Tarczynski-Bowles, 2015). An interesting finding of my own research was the desire of both home and school to work together to build a positive learning environment but both sides feeling this was not being achieved. My master's research fostered my interest in the relationship between school and home and how integral the involvement of parents is to the success of any intervention.

Now, as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), my interest has moved to Special Educational Needs, and those who are responsible for ensuring the needs of pupils with SEND are met in schools: SENCOs. With the change in SEND legislation recently coming into effect (September 2015), it was a crucial time to understand how the new legislation was impacting on SENCOs experiences of working with parents through the new EHCP process. Therefore, this research aims to explore SENCOs' experiences in working with parents/carers in the EHCP process.

1.2 National Context of this Study

The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) system has received many reviews over the years which have proposed changes to the SEND system (Department for Education and Schools (DfES), 2007, Education Select Committee, 2006; The Bercow Report, 2008; Rose, 2009; The Lamb Report, 2009). The 2006 report of the Education and skills Select Committee called for the government to develop an approach to SEND that was based on pupil centred provision,

personalisation of the system, early intervention, key transition phases, and collaborative work, to name a few. Further to this, the Lamb report (2009) emphasised the need for parents to be listened to and involved in the decisions that affect their children's education, and more accountability of the system.

In 2011 the coalition government released 'Support and Aspiration: A new approach to special educational needs and disability – a consultation' proposing changes to the SEND system. The proposed 'wide-ranging' changes were met with uncertainty from professionals who would be affected by the changes, such as SENCOs (Pearson, Mitchell, and Rapti, 2014). In the CoP (1994), Tissot (2013) identified seven priority areas for the SENCO;

- The day to day operation of the school's SEN policy.

- Liaising with and advising fellow teachers.

- Co-ordinating provision for children with SEN.

- Maintaining the school's SEN register and overseeing the records on all pupils with SEN.

- Liaising with parents of children with SEN.

- Contributing to the in-service training to staff.

- Liaising with external agencies including the educational psychology service and other support agencies, medical and social services and voluntary bodies.

The revised code in 2001 (Department for Education (DfE), 2001) added the management of support assistants to the priority areas for SENCO's. According to

the National Association for Special Educational Needs (NASEN) (2015), the main areas of change in the New CoP (2015) are;

- 0 to 25 age range

- Clearer focus on the views of children and young people and their parents, and on their role in decision making

- Joint planning and commissioning of services

- EHCP for children and young people with more complex needs.

These main areas of change may affect the SENCO role due to the added emphasis on including parents, and where possible, children and young people in decision making. Identification and implementing support is not a new responsibility for SENCOs as it has always been highlighted as a priority of the SENCO role since the first code of practice in 1994. However, the new CoP emphasised the accountability of schools in the graduated approach to SEN, and their working closely with parents.

As highlighted by Tissot (2013) and NASEN (2015) there are many aspects to the SENCO role and working with parents through the EHCP process is one part of the role. This research does not intend to reduce the SENCO role to only one facet. It aims to provide information on how the recent legislative changes and new LA processes are being experienced by professionals who are navigating their way through the new system in order to further understanding of a complex role.

1.2.1 National Award for Special Educational Needs Co-ordination

The SENCO role is not carried out in isolation nor are individuals expected to undertake the role without training. From 2009 all schools were required to employ

a qualified teacher as a SENCO. All SENCOs (unless they had three or more years' experience in the SENCO role prior to 2009) are required to undertake mandatory training; The National Award for Special Educational Needs Coordination (NASENCo) within three years of appointment to the post (Nasen, .n.d.). The NASENCo award prior to 2014 was funded centrally but now it is the responsibility of schools/individuals.

Within the National college for teaching and leadership's (NCTL) (2014) '*National award for SEN co-ordination learning outcomes*', the NCTL (2014) highlights that schools need to satisfy themselves that their SENCO is equipped for the role by identifying training that addresses the national aspects of the SENCO role whilst also taking in to account the needs of the local context. The NASENCo award's learning outcomes cover three areas: Professional Knowledge and Understanding, Leading and Coordinating Provision, and Personal and Professional Conduct.

The NCTL (2014 p.4) states that "Achieving the learning outcomes should enable new SENCOs to fulfil the leadership role set out in the Code of Practice".

As Pearson *et al.* (2015, p.8) concluded, from their research into SENCOs' perceptions of changes in their role, in light of new legislation, that there were "significant uncertainties over fundamental issues" and "existing regional and between school variations that already exist are being overlaid by practitioners' uncertainties about future policy".

Due to the potential local variation within the interpretation of the new SEND changes and also within the NASENCO award it is beyond the scope of this research to provide a critique or evaluation of the award and its ability to meet the needs of SENCOs undertaking the award. However, it is worth bearing in mind that the

SENCOs that participated in this research all worked within the same region of the country and that their shared experiences may reflect their local context and local need. Their experiences may potentially highlight the continuing need for evaluation of training that is available to SENCOs within the region in which they work especially as the EHCP process is developed and the skills or support that SENCOs feel they need becomes clearer.

1.2.2 Pathfinder Programme

The lack of clarity about how the changes would look in practice were, in part, addressed through the Pathfinder programme. The Pathfinder programme consisted of 31 Local Authorities (LAs) that were commissioned to trial the proposed changes to the SEND approach and to feedback their experiences. Evaluation of the SEND pathfinder program by Craston, Thom and Spivack (2014), in regard to EHC Planning, reported that the EHC planning pathfinder authorities had a slight variation in their approach but generally the approaches consisted of five stages. These stages were 'referral', 'consideration of whether an assessment was necessary', 'co-ordinated assessment', 'planning', and 'sign off'. Some adopted a top down approach, some a middle ground approach, and others a bottom up process (Craston, *et al.,* 2014). With different LAs interpreting the proposed legislation in different ways it could be argued that the lack of clarity of the proposed changes and the impact they would have on the professionals involved in the SEN system, such as SENCO's, remained unclear. Hill, Thom, Carr and Agur (2014a) highlighted, in their 'Engagement of schools research report', that the role of the SENCO differed from LA to LA with some LAs expecting schools to co-ordinate multiagency meetings whilst in others the SENCO was just expected to attend these meetings. Pearson *et*

al.'s (2015 p. 8) criticism of the Green paper continued to be relevant to the current guidance; that there is variation between LAs as to how the new legislation has been implemented.

The Department of Education published the final report from the evaluation of the SEND pathfinder programme in June 2015 (Thom *et al.*, 2015). The report considered "families' experiences of the new system" (Thom *et al.* 2015 p. 14) but did not consider the experiences of the professionals working with these families through the EHCP process. However, follow up interviews with pathfinder families provided a slight insight into some professionals experiences as they reported that the 'key worker' role was "being undertaken by school staff" Thom *et al*. (2015 p. 50). The 'key working' models were described by Hill, Craston, Daff and Thom (2014a) as being either;

- A single person model: a single person, typically who sits within the LA, who is assigned to oversee the whole twenty week planning process
- or a multi-person model: key working functions are undertaken by two or more professionals from the LA, but the family would have a single point of contact.

As Thom *et al*. (2015 p. 50) highlighted the keyworker role had not necessarily been described as a school staff role. Pathfinder families reported that the "competency, consistency, and knowledge of a 'keyworker' were seen as critical to the process feeling family and child-centred" (Thom *et al.* 2015 p. 15). Additionally, Hill, *et al.* (2014b p.4) highlighted that the key working needed to cover four "functional areas: coordination; planning and assessment; information and signposting; and emotional

and practical support" and individuals undertaking this role needing a broad range of skills. However, families were reporting that school staff had "inadequate skills, capacity" to undertake this role (Thom *et al.* 2015, p.51).

The Hill *et al.* (2014a) report further emphasised that in practice schools were being asked to undertake more of a role in the EHCP process, such as writing parts of the draft EHCP, which had previously been undertaken by the LA. As Hill *et al.* (2014a) highlighted, this could be a significant undertaking with SENCOs expected to play a key role in the process. Government reports indicated a potential additional role that SENCOs may be taking on in light of the new SEND changes: 'keyworker'. Due to the lack of the SENCO voice in Thom *et al.* (2015), it is unclear how SENCOs are experiencing working with the new reforms with parents. How the changes are being experienced by SENCOs remains unclear.

What is clear from the government evaluations of the pathfinder programme is that it is an ongoing job that "LAs and others have in taking the reforms forward and further refining and improving local delivery" (Thom *et al.*, 2015 p. 15). A part of this will be expanding the understanding of the experiences of those on the front line, such as SENCOs. Finding out such information would allow for feedback to inform the LA and other professionals working with SENCOs and schools to understand the role of the SENCO in the process. This could lead to improvements both in support and training for SENCOs, and ultimately, outcomes for children and young people.

1.3 Local Context of this Study

The LA in which this research took place is a large authority with a population of approximately 1.4 million (Council, 2015). The area in which I was placed serves one of the largest districts in the county, with approximately 136,000 residents (Council Report, 2010). Within such a large area, the distribution of wealth varies, with pockets of deprivation as well as areas of prosperity. The ethnicity of the districts is predominately White, approximately 96.5%, and 3.5% Black and Minority Ethic (BME) (Council Report, 2010). The LA was one of the government's pathfinder authorities. The pathfinders were not given a 'blueprint' of how the reforms would look so it was up to the LA to design new arrangements and test them with a small number of children. An element of the pathfinder role was to implement the EHCP process.

The first step in the EHCP process, in the LA in which the research took place, was the decision on whether an EHC assessment is needed. The LA outlines that the request for an assessment could come from the school/education setting, parents or the professionals working with the child/young person. Step one of the guidance outlines that "before a request is made, children/young people will normally have in place support plans that show how agencies have worked together to identify and support the child/young person's needs". This infers that assessment and support has already taken place for the child/young person. During step two, the planning stage of the EHC process, the LA outlines that a meeting will be held and the school/setting should attend or provide 'prompt' clarification of any issues to help inform the draft plan. Like the government guidance of the new SEN code, the

researcher's LA's guidance to the EHCP process is not clear on how schools will make the decisions on whether to request an EHCP assessment or what issues are pertinent to the drafting of an EHCP.

What was clear from the LA guidance was that schools, and those responsible for SEN provision i.e. SENCOs, would be involved in the EHCP process. However, how this involvement was experienced by SENCOs in schools in light of these changes was not known due to the newness of the legislation. For professionals working with and supporting SENCOs in their role, understanding the impact of the new legislation for those on the front line is valuable for knowing how to support, train, guide, or potentially adapt the process.

With Government and LA guidance not providing specific detail on how SENCOs should manage the changes in the legislation, the "degree of interpretation at school level" (Rosen – Webb, 2011 p159), which was true of the previous codes, appears to still be relevant to the new SEN code: 0 to 25. How SENCOs are experiencing the new legislation and potential changes in their role is unknown.

1.4 The Research Aims

The aim of this proposed piece of research is to explore the experiences of SENCOs' working with parents/carers through the new EHCP process. It is hoped that the information gained from this research will provide a more accurate picture of the current SENCO role in light of the new CoP (2015) and its implementation in the LA area in which this research took place and prove valuable to:

- SENCOs, in terms of highlighting additional areas of development for SENCOs and potentially adapting the EHCP process, or support in place for SENCOs.

- Educational Psychologists, as the research could raise awareness of the difficulties and challenges that SENCOs may face when implementing the new EHCP guidance, and allow for EPs to adapt their practice when supporting schools to implement and maintain the new CoP.

1.5 The Research Question

The chosen methodology is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and this methodology is concerned with the detailed examination of lived experience. Therefore one should not expect one's research question to be on too grand a scale or too ambitious in its reach (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Therefore the research question for this piece of research is:

What are the experiences of Special Education Needs Co-ordinators' working with parents/carers through the Education, Health, Care, Plan process?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of a literature review is, according to Ridley (2012), to gain a thorough understanding of current work and perspectives so that the researcher can identify gaps in previous research that need to be filled. Due to the methodology implemented in this research, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the literature review was conducted post data collection in order to facilitate an uninfluenced interview process. Smith *et al.* (2009 pg. 55) describes the qualities of an IPA researcher as "open-mindedness; flexibility; patience; empathy; and the willingness to enter into, and respond to, the participant's world". I felt that completing the literature review after data collection would reduce the impact of any acquired bias, gained through the acquisition of additional knowledge from the literature review, on the interviews and facilitate the qualities highlighted by Smith *et al.* (2009).

The relationship between home and school has been consistently promoted and legislated over a number of years in the United Kingdom (Epstein and Sheldon, 2002; Jeynes, 2005; Harris and Goddall, 2008; DfES, 2007; Education Select Committee, 2006; The Bercow Report, 2008; Rose, 2009; The Lamb Report, 2009) and most recently in the new Special Educational Needs and Disability Code: 0 to 25 years (2015) and the Children and families Act (2014). 'Working together' is highlighted as central to the Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) process and improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND. With this research focusing on the experience of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) working with

parents through the EHCP process, the aim of the literature review was to review relevant literature surrounding the area of the experiences of primary school SENCOs working with parents through the EHCP process.

However, the initial tentative database searches that were carried out to develop the search terms to be used in the systematic literature search, as suggested by Dundar and Fleeman (2013), revealed that searching for SENCO and Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) resulted in zero results, please see appendix LR1 for evidence. Therefore, alternative search criteria were adopted in order to provide literature sources that would illuminate understanding of the focus of the research. The themes of support for SENCOs and SENCOs relationships with parents, were isolated and explored in the academic literature as these topics appeared to be poignant points from the interviews prior to in-depth analysis.

2.2 Defining terminology

2.2.1 Support

The term 'support' is a broad term which encompasses many different things. The SEN Code of Practice (CoP) (2015) defines practical methods of support as:

The school should ensure that the SENCO has sufficient time and resources to carry out these functions. This should include providing the SENCO with sufficient administrative support and time away from teaching to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities in a similar way to other important strategic roles within a school. (SEN CoP, 2015, p.109 subsection 6.91)

The DfE (2014) in the 'National award for SEN co-ordinator' (NASENCO) paper highlight one of the outcomes of the NASENCO is for the SENCO to be able to "draw on external sources of support and expertise" (p. 8). External sources of support and

expertise are described as the local offer, multi-agency working, and interpreting specialist information. This type of support is focused on a SENCO's skill to draw upon the more formalised avenues of knowledge and expertise of others (individuals and documentation) to support their ability to understand SEND and support that agencies and schools need to provide to pupils with SEND.

An additional type of support that is not mentioned in government legislation or award requirement for NASENCO is emotional support. The SENCO role can be isolating, as they often are the only individual within a setting carrying out the role (Lewis and Ogilvie, 2003) and they can often be in "'survival mode', thinking on their feet" (Evans, 2013, p.298). Emotional support can counter isolation and empower individuals to be able to carry out their role (Lewis and Ogilvie, 2003). Emotional support can come in many forms such as, informal conversations with another knowledgeable colleague, face to face contact or via email (Lewis and Ogilvie, 2003), or more formalised conversations, such as supervision (Evans, 2013).

For the purposes of this research the term 'support' encompasses:

- School based practical methods of support, such as; time allocated for duties, flexible working, administrative support..

- Formalised support outside of school, such as; documentation, training, liaising with professionals from other services.

- Emotional support inside/outside of school, such as; informal conversations, email, telephone conversations, reflective practice.

2.2.2 Relationships with parents

The CoP (2015) emphasises that "children and young people and their parents or carers will be fully involved in decisions about their support…" (p. 11). At school level the code states that schools should "ensure decisions are informed by the insights of parents…" (p.25), "…talk to parents regularly… discuss activities and support…and identify the responsibilities of the parent" (6.65, p.104), as "discussion can build confidence in the actions being taken by the school…" (6.66, p.104). The CoP (2015) goes on to state that a high level of skill is needed by teachers in order to conduct these conversations effectively as well as being able to explore parents' views. Specifically in relation to EHCPs the CoP (2015) outlines that the EHCP assessment "is not the first step in the process, it follows on from the planning already undertaken with parents…in conjunction with…school." (9.3, p 142-143). Indicating that discussions between school and parents should have already taken place prior to the EHCP application.

The NASENCO learning outcomes (DfE, 2014) highlight that SENCOs should develop and demonstrate personal and professional qualities such as 'family leadership' where "parents and carers are equal partners in securing their child's achievement, progress and well-being." (p. 9).

Therefore, for this piece of research, the term 'relationship with parents' means any way in which SENCOs interact with parents to communicate about a pupil with SEND.

2.3 Aims of the Literature Review

The aim of this literature review was to review research that had been carried out in the area of SENCOs and support and SENCOs and relationships with parents in order to further understanding of research that has been carried out in these areas in order to provide answers to the following questions:

1. What studies have been carried out on SENCOs and relationships with parents and support SENCOs draw upon?

2. What are the experiences of SENCOs working with parents in a primary school setting?

3. What kinds of support do SENCOs make use of?

4. What conclusions can be drawn from these studies and what are the potential implications for SENCOs and working with parents through the EHCP process?

5. What are the implications for this research?

2.4 Review methods and search strategies

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were identified prior to searching (see appendix LR 2 for inclusion/exclusion criteria and appendix LR3 for the order in which criteria were applied). Inclusion criteria included publication in the English language and publication after 1994 as the original SEN code of practice (DfEE, 1994) was introduced in 1994, which formalised the SENCO role. Further to this, due to this research being linked to legislation in the United Kingdom (UK) any studies that included SENCOs from outside of the UK were excluded.

To identify relevant research, the databases ERIC (Institute of Educational Sciences), and PsycINFO were searched for articles between the dates of January 1994 and September 2015. This time period was chosen as earlier articles were thought to have limited relevance to current experience. Articles were screened for terms for SENCO and support, and for terms SENCO and relationships and parents (see appendix LR4 for the differing terms). Table LR1 shows the results for each search term group. Please see appendix LR5 for screenshots evidencing the records returned from the PsycINFO and ERIC databases).

Table 1: Table to show the search terms and number of records retrieved from different databases/websites.

	SENCO	SENCO + Search Terms (1)	SENCO + Search Terms (2)	SENCO +Search Terms (3)
Database	SENCO OR special educational needs coordinator OR special educational needs co-ordinator	Support OR help OR aid OR assist* OR guid* OR advi* OR comfort	Parent*OR mother* OR mum* OR father* OR dad* OR care-giv* OR care giv*	Relation* OR associat* OR alliance OR contact OR exchange OR liaison OR link
PsycINFO	97	64	0	28
ERIC	84	45	10	21
DfE website	1	0	0	0
After duplicates removed total	--	90	10	44
Number of records after exclusion criteria applied	--	**23**	**4**	**12**

- For the search terms for SENCO and support a total of sixty-four records were identified on PsycINFO and forty-five records were identified on ERIC. A number of records were retrieved by both databases. When these multiples

were removed the total number of records retrieved from the databases was ninety.

- For the search terms for SENCO and parents a total of zero records were identified on PsycINFO and ten on ERIC.

- For the search terms SENCO and relationships twenty-eight records were identified on PsycINFO and twenty-one records on ERIC. When multiple records were removed the total number of records retrieved from the databases was forty-four.

Due to the difficulties with the databases limiters excluding records that could have proved relevant (for example, wanting to limit the records to SENCOs working within the primary age-range and the limiter including participants of primary age and excluding adults working within the primary age-range), I read the titles and abstracts of all records for each of the search term groups.

Please see appendices LR6 for Tables providing reasons for the exclusion of records. Articles were most commonly excluded due to SENCOs not being the focus of the research or for not containing any research data (record being a book, a book review, or an editorial).

From the remaining thirty-nine records remaining, duplicates across the categories were removed which left twenty-seven records that were sourced in full. Initially four studies were deemed to meet the inclusion criteria. However, upon closer scrutiny, two of these studies only had findings that related to SENCOs and support and/or relationships with parents. It was therefore decided to return to the twenty-seven records to re-read and include any that had findings that were related to

SENCOs and support and/or relationships with parents. A total of ten studies were identified as meeting the criteria and as relevant to the purpose and scope of this review. The seventeen excluded studies are listed in appendix LR7 with the reasons for their exclusion.

2.5 Review and Critique of identified studies

Of the ten studies meeting the inclusion criteria, two studies explored support; email and psychoanalytic supervision, and none exclusively focused on SENCOs relationships with parents. The remaining eight studies were included in the review as they had findings that related to SENCOs and support and/or relationships with parents and provided additional insight into these areas. Data was extracted from each article regarding the study design, the participants, the data collection method and the outcomes. Please see appendix LR 8 for a table containing this information.

I will present the studies that explored SENCOs and support and then the one study which was deemed the most pertinent to SENCOs and relationships with parents. I will then use all of the studies that were identified to have relevant findings to answer the literature review questions identified at the start of the chapter.

2.5.1 SENCOs and support

Two studies explored SENCOs and support; the SENCO-forum email group (Lewis and Ogilvie, 2003) and psychoanalytic consultation (Evans, 2013). Additionally, Kearns (2005) study highlighted the need for reflection in supporting SENCO learning. All these studies used qualitative approaches: focus groups,

interviews, consultation, or questionnaires with open ended questions. Therefore when thinking about the reliability and validity of the papers, I applied Yardley's (2000) principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research. (See 'validity issues' section in the methodology chapter for more details on Yardley's (2000) principles).

Evans (2013) aimed to examine the interactions that arose during consultations between a psychoanalytic child psychotherapist and SENCOs. Evans (2013) used a psychoanalytically adapted version of grounded theory to analyse the data. Evans (2013 p. 296) described this methodology as bringing "to the data a theoretical frame of a definite kind and then make connections between these 'background' ideas and the phenomena they help to explain". Evans (2013) used the theoretical ideas of transference, counter-transference, projection, projective identification and containment to form this 'background'. Although Evans does not state her epistemological position, the methodology employed would complement a constructivist position as individual experiences are explored and reported.

Evans (2013) chose three primary school SENCOs. However, Evans does not describe their position in schools, i.e. members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), or how often they are classroom based if they are class-teachers. Due to the lack of context, and only three participants, generalisation of findings is difficult. However, Evans (2013) findings provide additional information that adds to the current body of knowledge (Yardley's fourth principle). Evans (2013) found that SENCOs felt on the edge of school life, were subject to powerful projections from the pupils they

worked with, and had feelings of vulnerability and not being 'good enough'. The vignettes shared allow for the reader to see the evidence of the claims being made. However, the vignettes were from Evans (2013) consultation notes and, as the theory of counter-transference explains, these themselves could be subject to feelings that could be influenced by the interactions between the consulter and the subject. Further to this, using consultation notes as the source of data could have led to novel data to be discarded due to the researchers consciously or unconsciously choosing what aspects of a session to include.

To strengthen the reliability of their findings Evans (2013) used supervision to talk through the experiences of the consultation sessions and to validate the connections made with existing theory. However, Evans's (2013) reporting lacked transparency on the analysis of the data so it is difficult to know whether any novel data arose. Evans' (2013) study highlighted the potential for SENCOs to feel isolated and perceiving themselves to be not very good at their jobs. By identifying the potentially valuable support that SENCOs could benefit from (consultation) Evans (2013) emphasised the need of support for SENCOs. As Evans (2013 p. 298) states "reflective practice is essential in schools in order to help staff maintain their thinking capacity when working with such complexity".

Lewis and Ogilvie (2003) conducted a funded piece of research to make comparisons to earlier studies on the perceived impact of the SENCO-forum and to explore the applicability of the forum's approach to other contexts. The survey consisted of foci in six broad areas including; biographical information on respondents, usage, access

to other forms of support, and perceived personal and social benefits of the forum. However, an example of the survey was not provided so it was not possible to comment on the phrasing of questions posed or the responses permitted. 140 members of the forum completed the survey, a response rate of 17%. Lewis and Ogilvie (2003) acknowledge that the method of targeting participants, and the subject matter itself, the SENCO-forum, may have resulted in a sample that reflected a comparatively e-aware group, and frequent SENCO-forum users who may have been supportive of the forum. Lewis and Ogilvie (2003) were not consistently transparent about their method of analysis of the data. Verbatim quotes were provided but it was not always clear how much of their sample shared the opinions of the ones included. The epistemological position of the research was not stated but the grouped nature of the reported findings suggested a constructionist position. Nevertheless, their findings were reflective of some SENCO-forum users and provided additional information into the area of SENCO and support, Yardley's (2000) fourth principle, '*Impact and importance*'.

Lewis and Ogilvie (2003) reported that their participants utilised other sources of support such as colleagues in school or other colleagues in work. However, no more information was provided on the type of support these other sources provided. In relation to personal support Lewis and Ogilvie (2003) concluded that the SENCO-forum was perceived by its users as countering isolation and boosting confidence. They found that SENCOs would use the forum to "know that others are struggling to do the job in the same way and can offer advice, wisdom…" (Lewis and Ogilvie, 2003 p. 47). The SENCO-forum may be, in part, providing an avenue of reflective practice

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which Evans (2013) highlighted as essential for school staff to help maintain their thinking capacity.

Kearns (2005) research aimed to assist SENCOs to identify learning at work and assess the possibilities for accredited learning projects at Masters Level. This piece of research did not directly investigate SENCOs and support, but it in-directly highlighted the need for SENCOs and support by emphasising the need for reflective support in order for professional development to occur. In order to identify potential learning opportunities SENCOs needed support from other professionals. Kearns did not state their epistemological position but the utilised methodologies fit with a constructivist position due to the individual interviews and exploration of individuals' learning opportunities.

From twenty-three SENCO narratives on work-place learning, Kearns (2005) identified that that reactions to pressure, demands, and role difficulties in interactions with others accounted for over half of the identified learning sequences. Kearns (2005) reported that the majority of the learning processes identified involved extended dialogue with others to establish the validity and nature of change. A limitation of this method of data collection is that some potential work-based learning may not have been brought as SENCOs may not have deemed some events to be learning experiences, for example; events that were deemed to be too difficult, or situations unlikely to be changed. This may have skewed the types of work-place learning examples brought as all examples involved a completed learning which could have resulted in other sources of support being overlooked.

Nevertheless, the use of a reflective space was crucial for SENCOs to be able to think about their experiences and identify areas for development.

2.5.2 SENCOs and relationships with parents

None of the other studies focused explicitly on SENCOs' relationships with parents. However, research findings into other areas revealed some insight into SENCOs' experiences and views on working with parents and their relationships with them. Pearson *et al.* (2015) was critiqued as it was the most recent study to be published and most relevant to this piece of research.

Pearson *et al.* (2015) aimed to gather SENCOs insights into their changing role in light of the Department for Education (2011) 'Green paper'. This research did not directly study SENCOs and relationships with parents although some findings provided further information on how SENCOs perceived their role would be in regards to working with parents and EHCPs in light of the proposed new legislation.

Pearson *et al.* (2015) reused a data collection method from a previous survey (Pearson, 2008) and drew upon the responses of 227 SENCOs to the open ended question 'Thinking about the role of the SENCO in your school, how do you foresee it changing in the short (1-5 years) term?' However, Pearson *et al.* (2015) used the statistics and descriptive data from the whole survey, 326 respondents, to describe the survey as a national one. It is unclear how nation-wide the 227 SENCOs who answered the question were. Therefore, the conclusions drawn have to be treated with caution.

Pearson *et al.* (2015) reported that respondents perceived that EHCPs would require knowledge and skills beyond SENCOs current levels. However, the method of data collection prevented more in-depth questioning about the knowledge and skills that SENCOs perceived themselves to be lacking. Further to this, they reported that SENCOs perceived that working with parents would require an investment of time and demand a greater role in advising parents. Due to the data collection method (an open ended question in a survey), Pearson *et al.* (2015) were unable to acquire further information on the perceived advisory role or what 'investment of time' would mean for the future role of the SENCO. Pearson *et al.* (2015) reported SENCOs perceiving potential difficulties in accommodating parental expectations with funding issues. This may have been indicative of SENCOs feeling unskilled or untrained in having difficult conversations with parents.

2.6 Conclusion section

1. ***What studies have been carried out on SENCOs and relationships with parents and support SENCOs draw upon?***

There is an apparent lack of direct research into both of these areas. The literature review only found two studies which directly explored SENCOs and support: the SENCO-forum email group (Lewis and Ogilvie, 2003) and psychoanalytic supervision (Evans, 2013). The literature review search found no research that directly explored SENCOs and relationships with parents. However, other studies that aimed to explore other areas of SENCO research were found to provide insight into both these areas in their findings. These additional eight studies focused on; SENCOs' experiential learning (Kearns, 2005), SENCOs views around versions of the

Code of practice, (Lewis Neill and Campbell, 1997; Cole, 2005; and Pearson *et al.,* 2015), SENCOs' views on organisational context and an outreach course*,* (Cowne*,* 2005), and the SENCO role and/or leadership (Layton, 2005; Mackenzie, 2013; and Szwed, 2007).

From the ten studies, nine were found to have findings that provided additional insight in to SENCOs and support (Evans, 2013; Lewis and Ogilvie, 2003; Kearns, 2005; Cole, 2005; Cowne, 2005; Layton, 2005; Lewis, Neill and Campbell, 1997; Szwed, 2007; and Pearson *et al.,* 2015), and seven were found to have findings that provided additional insight in to SENCOs and their relationships with parents, (Cole, 2005; Cowne, 2005; Pearson *et al.,* 2015; Kearns, 2005; Mackenzie, 2013; Layton, 2005; and Szwed, 2007). Appendix LR8 lists the poignant findings in the studies that related to SENCOs and support and SENCOs relationships with parents.

All of the studies had a qualitative element, with six of the ten studies implementing only qualitative data collection methods such as, focus groups, interviews, open-ended questionnaires, or observations. All studies implemented purposeful sampling to recruit their participants in order to have a sample that satisfied the research aim (Robson, 2011). Gaining SENCOs perceptions and experiences appeared to be the preferred method of gaining insight and knowledge in this research area.

2. ***What are the experiences of SENCOs' relationships with parents in a primary school setting?***

The literature review revealed three studies that explored SENCOs' perceptions around the codes of practice; Lewis, Neill and Campbell (1997), Cole

(2005), and Pearson *et al.,* (2015). Lewis, Neill and Campbell (1997) did not report any findings that related to SENCOs and their relationships with parents. However, Cole (2005) reported that SENCOs cited a possible increase in the involvement of parents in decision making. A verbatim quote shared, "more time spent with parents who know their rights but can't get what they want. More counselling of children/parents" (Cole, 2005, p. 298) potentially could have alluded to the changes being difficult and SENCOs needing to draw on wider skills in order to be able to take on this predicted aspect of the role. Additionally, Cole (2005) reported SENCOs were unsure possible contention with parents would be reduced in light of revised code of practice (2001). Cole's (2005) study provided percentages of SENCO responses to the questionnaire questions and provided some verbatim extracts from the 'free-text' questions. However, it was not always clear whether the verbatim extracts came from the questionnaire or the interviews. Caution needed to be taken when considering Cole's (2005) findings in regards to the qualitative data gathered from the interviews due to the lack of transparency. Cole (2005) provided some verbatim extracts of SENCO responses but did not provide a summary of the topics/themes covered during the 'SENCO-led' interviews, making it difficult to ascertain whether there were other areas of concern that were poignant to the SENCO sample.

In the same year, Kearns (2005) described a role that SENCOs identified using the metaphor of 'arbiter'. This role included working with parents by clarifying concerns, making their demands realistic, and helping parents to maintain positivity. Further to this, the role was considered to be related to the anxieties and demands of parents and maintaining parental confidence in the school. Further to the 'arbiter'

role, Kearns (2005) identified the role of 'rescue' for SENCOs: working with parents and pupils to plan interventions and evaluating interventions.

More recent evidence by Pearson *et al.,* (2015) reported some similar SENCO role predictions ten years after Cole's (2005) findings. Pearson *et al.* (2015 p.53) reported that SENCOs perceived they would need to have "excellent relationships with parents" which would "require an investment of time" as these partnerships would need to be developed. Pearson *et al.* (2015 p. 53) reported that SENCOs perceived their relationship with parents to become more of a facilitator/advisor role: "support [ing and] empowering parents - giving them the opportunity to take a more informed role".

However, Mackenzie (2013) reported findings that appeared to be at odds with the 'working with/alongside parents' reported by other research (Cole, 2005; Kearns, 2005; and Pearson *et al.,* 2015) as Mackenzie (2013) reported SENCOs perceiving themselves as advocates for children and parents, with a verbatim quote explaining "parents either can't do that for themselves, or they won't do" Mackenzie (2013, p. 443). Mackenzie (2013) reported that SENCOs perceived advocacy as 'fighting' against the LA or within the school in order to support pupils with SEN. This could be suggestive of SENCOs perceiving their relationship with parents as less of a collaboration and more of an expert one: a professional who had skills and expertise that enabled them to carry out tasks that parents were unable to. A possible explanation for these opposing views could be explained by Layton's (2005) findings. Layton (2005) reported that SENCOs perceived parents as seeing the SENCO as a

repository of all knowledge, resources and contacts. If parents view this advocacy as part of the SENCO role it could explain SENCOs feelings of needing to take up this role. However, caution needs to be taken in regards to the generalisability of Layton's findings as the sample was 27 SENCOs from the West Midlands. There is difficulty in assessing the validity of Layton's research as no example questionnaire is provided only a brief description of the style of questions posed. Nevertheless, the information Layton gathered does provide further insight in to the experiences of SENCOs and allows for theoretical transferability:"…where the reader of the report is able to access the evidence in relation to their existing professional and experiential knowledge." (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, pg. 4).

Mackenzie (2013) went on to describe that the majority of staff described their interactions with parents as mostly positive. However, they were perceived to be this way when staff perceived communication with parents to be good. Mackenzie (2013) did not explore what SENCOs perceived to be good communication and whose responsibility it was to maintain 'good communication'.

3. *What kinds of support do SENCOs make use of*?

After the introduction of the SEN code in 1991, Lewis, Neill, and Campbell (1997) identified that school support, in terms of practical methods (time allocation, flexible working, administrative support) was hampered if SENCOs were not part of the schools Senior Leadership Team (SLT). Lewis, Neill and Campbell (1997) highlighted that an advantage of a SENCO being a deputy head-teacher or a head-teacher was that SEN concerns would likely filter into whole school policy. This could

foster a whole-school approach to SEN rather than it being solely the responsibility of the SENCO. This view was supported by Layton (2005) who concluded that non-SLT SENCOs felt limited in their authority in relation to school policies and isolated because their purpose was misunderstood. Kearns (2005) also reported that SENCOs found it difficult to manage the SEN responsibilities of others due to their lack of management authority.

Even ten years after Lewis, Neill and Campbell's (1997) research, Szwed (2007), reached similar conclusions. Szwed (2007) reported that fewer difficulties in managing SENCO responsibilities were described when SENCOs were non-class based and usually part of the SLT. One SENCO, who was also the head-teacher, was able to deploy resources to increase the support available for the role, whole school practice, routine tasks to administrative assistants, and 'senior integration assistants' (Szwed, 2007). Higher status enabled school based support to be influenced. However, Szwed's (2007) sample was small, with only three SENCOs, so generalisation may not be possible. In the same vein, Cole (2005) reported that SENCOs felt they were perceived as the teacher with lead responsibility for SEN but that they needed more time and status to make their role effective.

Dissatisfaction over the inadequacy of school based practical support (time allocation, space, administration) has been repeatedly reported (Kearns, 2005; Cole, 2005; Cowne, 2005; Layton, 2005; Szwed, 2007; and Lewis *et al.*, 1997), and demonstrates the persistence of the lack of school based practical support that SENCOs experience. Cowne (2005) research explored 66 SENCOs' perceptions of

enhancing or constraining features in their work, with the largest number of SENCOs, twenty-two, reporting lack of time as a constraint. Further to time; amount of paperwork; teaching classes; staff; lack of physical space were all reported, although the numbers of SENCOs reporting these constraints were not shared. However, Cowne's paper did not share an example of the questionnaire so it is not possible to see the style of question used, whether it provided examples, was clear, or was leading.

The literature review research also revealed the use of alternative methods of SENCO support. Research by Kearns (2005) highlighted the importance of SENCOs being able to reflect on their experiences in order to learn and develop skills. Through sharing experiences, Kearns (2005) described SENCOs as gaining detachment which enabled them to think more freely. The research by Kearns (2005) emphasised the need, initially, for the involvement of professionals to help SENCOs develop the skills needed to identify work-based learning opportunities as well as other professionals to enable sharing of experiences.

Evans (2013) championed consultation as a method for maintaining thinking capacity rather than an avenue for developing skills. I would argue supervision could provide SENCOs with the opportunity to do both, although this would need to be with an appropriately trained supervisor.

Links with other agencies and the LA were also highlighted as other methods of support utilised by SENCOs (Pearson *et al.,* 2015; Cowne, 2005; Kearns, 2005; and

Lewis and Ogilvie, 2003). Further to this, Lewis and Ogilvie, (2003), identified that the most usual source of professional help their sample drew upon was other colleagues in school and at work, although the nature and outcomes of the support sought and received was not given.

Lewis and Ogilvie (2003) highlighted the perceived benefits reported by the users of the SENCO-forum. Lewis and Ogilvie (2003) likened the forum to a virtual mentoring system which had a variety of professional users dispensing advice. Lewis and Ogilvie's (2003) study draws attention to the perceived benefits that the SENCO-forum is providing for its users and emphasises the need for the type of support it is perceived to be fulfilling. However, as Lewis and Ogilvie (2003) point out, there is a danger that unmonitored and unregulated sources of support could provide misleading advice and guidance.

4. *What conclusions can be drawn from these studies and what are the potential implications for SENCOs and working with parents through the EHCP process?*

Some of the research samples were small, ranging from three to eighteen participants (Evans, 2013; Kearns, 2003;, and Szwed, 2007), demonstrating that small samples are accepted in the SENCO research field. However, small samples make generalisation difficult (Willig, 2008). Yet when these studies findings are combined with the findings from the research with larger samples twenty-seven – 2000 (Layton, 2005; Cole, 2005; Lewis and Ogilvie, 2003; Cowne, 2005; Lewis *et al.*, 1997; Pearson *et al.*, 2015; and MacKenzie, 2013), similar themes emerged over time and samples. This could be indicative of more over-arching themes for SENCOs (Willig, 2008).

Szwed (2007, p. 157) succinctly described the difficulty of generalising conclusions made in the field of SENCO research "The role of the SENCO cannot be generalised. SENCOs work in a wide variety of situations within the primary school where there is considerable diversity in time allocated for their role, status of the role, and human and financial resources available". Szwed (2007) demonstrated the argument for qualitative, individualist approaches to SENCO research due to the large variations found in SENCO contexts. As Bell (2005) highlights, if by the publication of findings the boundaries of existing knowledge are extended, then it is a valid form of research. I would argue that it is down to the reader to make their own connections with reported findings and their own circumstances.

Lewis and Ogilvie (2003) concluded that the SENCO-forum provided informal support for its users which enabled them to counter isolation and boost their confidence in interventions, understanding of legislation, or paperwork. Further to this, the forum was being used to gain up to date information about SEN and curriculum advice.

SENCOs in this study could experience isolation and lack of confidence in their understanding of the new legislation and SEN system (the EHCP application process) and may turn to support forums like the SENCO-forum for support if there is no other appropriate or accessible support available. However, Lewis and Ogilvie (2003) highlighted that there was a risk that the advice received, through mediums such as

the SENCO-forum, could be misleading/inaccurate due to content being unmonitored and unregulated.

The importance of reflection as a method of support for thinking and development was emphasised by Evans (2013) and Kearns (2005). Evans (2013) promoted consultation as a modality to provide a containing space for SENCOs to maintain their thinking capacity and to gain an 'outsiders' perspective whereas Kearns (2005) utilised a reflective space with other professionals to identify opportunities for learning and development in relation to skills for the SENCOs or the setting they were in. Links with other professionals, within and outside of their setting, were also identified (Pearson *et al.,* 2015; Cowne, 2005; and Lewis and Ogilvie, 2003). Whether this was providing a reflective space, a supportive space, or an opportunity for release of tensions was not explored.

What is important to note is that the Evans (2013) and Kearns (2005) studies introduced consultation and reflective spaces as part of their investigations. The literature search did not reveal any studies that found consultation or reflective spaces with outside professionals being part of everyday practice. In relation to this piece of research, the availability of, or need for, consultation/reflective spaces, in order to maintain thinking or identify potential learning opportunities around working with parents through the EHCP process, may become apparent from the SENCOs who participate in this piece of research.

A re-occurring finding from the literature was the position of SENCOs within their setting: whether they were on the SLT or not. When SENCOs are supported by the SLT, they have sufficient time to undertake SENCO duties, have administrative support, and there is whole school approaches to SEN (Lewis, Neill and Campbell, 1997, and Layton, 2005). Szwed (2007) reported that when SENCOs are on the SLT, SEN concerns are more likely to filter into school policies. With the research from the literature review concluding that fewer difficulties are experienced when SENCOs are on the SLT, the position of SENCOs within the school was considered during the recruitment process of my research. SENCOs who were on the SLT were recruited as long as they were not the deputy-head teacher or head-teacher. Nevertheless, I still had to bear in mind SENCOs' positions within their setting and the potential impact this could have had on the experiences of SENCOs working with parents through the new EHCP process.

None of the literature investigated the relationship between SENCOs and parents directly. However, some conclusions can be drawn from findings that relate to the relationship between SENCO and parents. Since the introduction of the SEN code of practice in 1991, research has reported SENCOs predictions and experiences of an increase in working with parents (Cole, 2005, and Pearson *et al.,* 2015). The research also demonstrates that SENCOs are experiencing changes in their role in relation to their relationships with parents "The role of SENCO is complex" (Szwed, 2005 p. 159), they are potentially a counsellor (Cole, 2005), a facilitator/advisor (Pearson *et al.,* 2015), an arbitrator (Kearns, 2005), and an advocate (Mackenzie, 2013).

These reported multiple roles may continue to be experienced by SENCOs working with parents through the EHCP process. Each of the identified roles would require differing skills and talents in order for the SENCO role to be carried out. Furthermore, SENCOs would need an understanding of the different circumstances in which different roles would need to be implemented. This could have implications for existing training courses for SENCOs, such as the NASENCO award, as well as new training. Further to this, different forms of support may be needed for SENCOs to draw upon to fulfil these roles such as, practical form of support: more time allocation for carrying out their role, a designated space, formalised support: detailed information to provide advice to parents, or emotional support: such as, access to other professionals in order to professionally and emotionally support to undertake a counselling role.

5.   *What are the aims for this research?*

At the time of the literature review there was no published research on SENCOs and EHCPs, nor was there any direct research on SENCOs and their relationships with parents. A replication search was run in April prior to submission of the thesis which revealed one study that focused on the experiences of professionals working with deaf young people through transition (O'Brien, 2015). This study was not conducted with SENCOs therefore was not included in this research. The large gap in knowledge when exploring the experiences of SENCOs working with parents and in particular in relation to the EHCP process is still apparent. Although there has been some research into the support SENCOs receive/draw upon, this has been limited. It should be noted that even these studies

provide a limited understanding of the support SENCOs use or need or their experiences of working with parents through the EHCP process.

I would argue that professionals and researchers need to gain in-depth information of the experiences of SENCOs working with parents/carers through the new EHCP process in order to better understand the experiences of SENCOs. Through this increased understanding professionals can gain some insight into how to best support and strengthen the SENCO role in order to promote successful working relationships with parents/carers and outcomes for pupils with SEN.

Not only is this research relevant to SENCOs, in terms of highlighting experiences, and areas of development for SENCOs or other professionals, it appears particularly relevant to the role of the Educational Psychologist (EP). EPs are well positioned to provide support, share psychological knowledge, and potentially provide training to meet the needs of SENCOs.

The aim of this research is to gain an insight in to SENCOs experiences of working with parents/carers through the EHCP process. This is to increase awareness, knowledge, and understanding of their experience. To achieve this, the research will be driven by one broad research question:

What are the experiences of primary school SENCOs working with parents/carers through the EHCP process?

__Reflections on Literature review__

I was not completely surprised when my searches revealed that no research had been carried out on Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) as the legislation only came into effect in September 2015. I was, however, shocked at the lack of research in to SENCOs' perceptions of working with parents, considering 'liaising with parents of children with SEN' has been highlighted as a priority area since the first Code of practice in 1991 and continues to be emphasised in the new code of practice 2015. Not only this, but other areas of research, such as home-school communication, have received much exploration and investigation around teachers and parents working together. I struggled to understand why the relationships between SENCOs and parents of children with SEN was not receiving the same amount of attention.

The government has explored the parental experience of the EHCP process extensively. However, I felt that it was important for the SENCO experience to be present so that it can aid others to understand the SENCO experience and inform their opinions on the EHCP process.

I think it is important for me to acknowledge that I perceive the SENCO role as an integral role in the EHCP process and that, in order for the best outcomes to happen for pupils with SEN and their families, SENCOs and parents need to be able to work together effectively. I did not want to approach this from a pragmatic or critical stance and therefore I was conscious of focusing on SENCOs experience rather than their practice.

3. Methodology and Data Collection

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I aim to address a number of methodological principles. I will begin by presenting the research design, discussing the underlying epistemological stance and ontological position. I will then discuss possible approaches before presenting the chosen methodology, taking into account the theoretical underpinnings, rational for selecting the approach and the limitations associated with the approach. The procedures that were followed for analysis will be shared, issues of validity and quality in qualitative research discussed and, finally, ethical considerations will be discussed.

3.2 Research Design

The aim of this piece of research was to '*explore the experiences of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators' (SENCOs) working with parents/carers through the new Education, Health, Care, Plan (EHCP) process'*. This will involve exploring the thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and reflections in order to gain insight into how SENCOs made sense of their experiences. I would argue that the most appropriate way to capture this information in order to address the research topic is to gain in-depth, detailed, personal accounts. Therefore this research is qualitative in nature. I did not approach this research with predetermined hypotheses to test but, instead, with one broad research question that formed a platform for exploration. Therefore, the analysis process is an inductive approach, driven by the data, rather than a deductive approach, driven by existing literature and theory (Trochim and Donnelly, 2008).

3.3 The Research Paradigm (beliefs), Epistemology (how you come to know), Methodology (methods used to try and understand)

Our understanding of the world is based on principles which arise from a set of basic beliefs: a paradigm, or ontology. Paradigms lead to particular epistemological positions: our position in regard to what we can say we know about something (Langdridge, 2007). Research paradigms about the nature of reality influence the type of research undertaken (Creswell, 2014). When thinking ontologically, researchers should attempt to answer questions such as, 'what is there to know?' or 'what is the nature of reality?' (Willig, 2008). Ontological perspectives can be broadly divided in to three views of the world: objective, socially constructed, and individually constructed (Fox, Martin and Green, 2007).

A positivist paradigm is the belief that there is an objective, real world which is observable and measurable and research can be used to verify the existence of something. This is due to the belief that the world exists independent of human belief, perception, culture, and language that we use to describe it. An objective world view traditionally takes a positivism methodology where experiments are used to collect quantitative data to critically test hypotheses (Robson, 2011). A post-positivist paradigm still assumes a real world but that knowledge about it is critical, i.e. sceptical and therefore never complete and can only be an approximation (Langdridge, 2007). A post-positivism paradigm holds the principles that one can make reasonable inferences about phenomena based upon theoretical reasoning combined with experience-based evidence (Trochim and Donnelly, 2008). The socially constructed view of the world is made up of shared meanings constructed

by groups of people. There is not one objective or true reality but a shared social reality constructed through language (Burr, 1995). The focus on this world view is how groups of people construct a social reality. Knowledge about the socially constructed world is usually obtained from observation and open interviews.

The individually constructed world is focused on how an individual constructs their own world. Even within small communities there is no shared construction and understanding of a past event; individuals develop subjective meanings of their experiences (Creswell, 2014). The focus of this world view is on how the individual experiences their own world (Trochim and Donnelly, 2008). Knowledge about the individually constructed world is usually obtained from individual interviews.

Through this research, I am not proposing that I can produce an objective 'true' account of SENCOs' experiences of working with parents/carers through the EHCP process, which is what a realist position would advocate (Willig, 2008). Rather, I am adopting a relativist position which holds the belief that I can gain an understanding of how individuals perceive and interpret their experience of this phenomenon from a subjective standpoint: 'reality' is relative instead of 'out-there' (Willig, 2008).

I believe that knowledge about the world is gained through understanding of others' views of their world in order to gain insight into the meanings they attach to people and events. For me, the world is constructed and interpreted by individuals each with their own views, shaped by their own experiences and perceptions of others around them: a constructivist epistemology.

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3.4 Potential Methodologies

After establishing my own view of the world, the nature of 'knowledge' and what I hoped to gain from my research, the choice of methodology most suited to my research area needed to be explored. My constructivist position loaned itself to methodologies that attempt to understand phenomena through the meanings that individuals assign to them. The options at this stage included all methodologies that seek to collect rich and in-depth data, such as Descriptive Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, and Interpretative phenomenological analysis. Descriptive Phenomenology (DP), Giorgi's method (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008), is based on descriptive analysis of the life world. However, DP is not concerned with explaining or the interpretation of phenomena but rather with revealing the 'essence' or 'essential structure' of the phenomena under investigation (Morrow, Rodriguez and King, 2015). There is no attempt to find the underlying causes of some psychological phenomena; it is enough to simply describe the 'things in their appearance' (Langdridge, 2007). This approach relies heavily on Husserl's key ideas, such as 'epoche' (the process which we attempt to abstain from our presuppositions), and 'essences' (the universal structure(s) underlying the experience), and less so on Heidegger's developments in the field (all people are inseparable from the world they inhabit) (Landgridge, 2007).

I felt that DP would not be complementary to my research approach as I wanted the opportunity to look for underlying psychological phenomena. I also felt that Heidegger's argument of it not being possible to bracket off one's own way of seeing

the world was correct. I wanted an approach that would fully acknowledge my role

in the process, which DP does not do.

Another approach that was considered for this research was Grounded Theory (GT).

GT is an approach, with many versions, which aims to develop a theoretical account

of a particular phenomenon (Charmaz, 2008). GT has strong links to symbolic

interactionism: the symbolic meaning that people develop and rely upon in the

process of social interaction and contains both positivistic and interpretive elements

(Charmaz, 2008). Investigating social processes appears to emphasis understanding

at a group level and not at an individual level, which did not fit with my

epistemological position of constructivist.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is the examination of how individuals

make sense of experiences (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin, 2009) and is interested in

"what happens when the everyday flow of lived experiences takes on a particular

significance for people" (Smith *et al.* 2009 p.1). It does not privilege any one

phenomenological theoretical position but draws on the range of phenomenological

thinking (Smith, 2015). IPA allows for the individual experience to be explored as it

aims to engage in the reflections of the individuals when they are engaged with an

experience of something in their lives (Smith, 2004). IPA is a dynamic process of

research. It recognises that a researcher is engaged in a double hermeneutic

because the researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make

sense of what is happening to them (Smith and Osborn, 2008). Due to my

epistemological stance and the type of information sought, IPA was decided as the most suitable methodology for this research.

3.5 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

IPA is a phenomenological approach in that it is concerned with exploring experience in its own terms and how people perceive, ascribe meaning to and make sense of their experiences (Smith, 2011). The assumption behind IPA is that when people are engaged with an 'experience' they begin to reflect on the significance of what is happening in order to understand their experience and IPA aims to engage with these reflections. Researchers employing IPA as an approach have two main aims: to listen attentively to the experience shared by a participant in order to obtain an insider's perspective of the chosen phenomenon and to attempt to interpret the shared experiences in order to achieve an understanding of what it means to the individual to have that experience in that context (Reid, Flowers, and Larkin, 2005).

Phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography are the philosophical foundations of IPA (Smith *et al.*, 2009). In order to fully understand the focus and aims of IPA it is important to explore these three philosophical areas. This will enable the understanding of how IPA can be used to enhance understanding of SENCOs' experiences.

3.5.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to the study of experience with many different emphases within the field that have been influenced by ideas

contributed by individuals like Husserl and Heidegger (Smith *et al.*, 2009). However, phenomenologists have tended to come together in their thinking about what the experience of being human is like especially in terms of the lived experienced (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

For Husserl, one of the major phenomenological philosophers in the field, phenomenological inquiry focuses on that which is experienced in the consciousness of the individual as it is only direct and subjective human experience – that is 'knowable' (Brooks, 2015). Husserl used the term *intentionality,* to describe the relationship between the process occurring in consciousness and the object of attention for the process. This means that consciousness is always directed at an object in our world and therefore people are intrinsically related to objects they perceive in the lived world (Smith *et al.,* 2009). This belief contradicted previously accepted understanding that people and objects were independent and could exist in isolation (Landridge, 2007). The concept of *intentionality* leads to phenomenology having a central concern with understanding experience and the way in which a person perceives the world that they inhabit (Landridge, 2007).

Husserl argued that we should "go back to the 'things themselves'" (Smith *et al.,* 2009, p. 12). This statement alluded to the various obstacles that get in the way of the experiential content of consciousness, our *natural attitude*. We do not focus on each and every particular thing; we tend to quickly categorise 'things' into our pre-existing expectations (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Husserl argued that this prevents objects from showing themselves fully and suggests the need to 'bracket', put to one side,

our assumptions and preconceptions, (also referred to as '*epoche'*) in order to concentrate on our perception of the world (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008). Husserl believed that it was possible to identify universal structures (essence(s)) underlying experience in order to identify its essential qualities and structural features and therefore the underlying meaning (Landridge, 2007). Husserl reasoned that these essential features of an experience would transcend the particular circumstance of their appearance and therefore tell us something about the fundamental or universal meaning of a given phenomenon (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

However, Heidegger questioned the possibility of any knowledge outside of an interpretative stance, whilst grounding this stance in the lived world – the world of things, people, relationships, and language (Smith *et al.,* 2009). Heidegger used the term 'Dasein' to describe how our 'being-in-the-world' is always in relation to other people, situations and perspectives (Heidegger, 1926/1978). For Heidegger, all people are inseparable from the world they inhabit and therefore it is not possible to 'bracket off' one's way of seeing and identify the essence of phenomena. It is for these reasons that individuals are unable to completely suspend or 'bracket' their preconceptions and achieve 'epoche' (Landridge, 2007). However, this can be aimed for through reflexive and reflective awareness (Smith *et al.,* 2009).

Husserl and Heidegger's work highlighted that the understanding of 'experience' invokes a lived process, an unfolding of perspectives and meanings, which are unique to the person's embodied and situated relationship to the world (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Smith *et al.* (2009) highlight that attempts to understand other people's

relationship to the world are necessarily interpretative and will focus upon their attempts to make meanings out of their activities and to the things happening to them. Like Heidegger, I believe that we are unable to completely 'bracket off' our prior-assumptions, knowledge, and experience. Only attempts can be made to achieve this. However, I was not interested in gaining the universal 'essence' of the experiences of SENCOs, as Husserl aimed to, but rather to "capture as closely as possible the way in which a phenomena is experienced within the context in which the experience takes place" (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008, p28).

As Heidegger argued the importance of locating people within context, this research focussed on what it was like to experience working with parents/carers through the EHCP process in a particular context. Different levels of contextual information were considered: government legislation, government guidance for professionals, the LA in which the research was completed, the school context in which the SENCOs worked and the SENCOs' personal characteristics.

3.5.2 Hermeneutics

As previously discussed, attempts to understand 'experience' involves a lived process: understanding of meanings which are unique to an individual's situated relationship to the world (Smith *et al.* 2009). Within IPA, attempts to understand 'experience' are interpretative and focus on an individual's attempts to make meanings out of their actions and experiences. It is for this reason that hermeneutics, a theory of interpretation, needs to be discussed (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Key contributors to hermeneutics include Heidegger, Gadamer, Schleiermacher and Ricoeur.

Heidegger's (1926/2001) aim was to express a case for a hermeneutic phenomenology, as he felt that his concept of 'Dasein' could only be accessed through interpretation. Heidegger argued that interpretation unavoidably involves our prior experiences and preconceptions. However, Heidegger highlights the danger of prior experience/presumptions as being obstacles to interpretation. Priority should be given to the new object rather than prior experience/presumptions (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Gadamer shared Heidegger's belief that preconceptions cannot be 'bracketed' off and that preconceptions can only be known once the interpretation is underway (Smith *et al.* 2009). Smith *et al.* (2009 p.26) explained this as "…understanding are forms of engagement in a dialogue between something that is old (a fore-understanding) and something which is new (the text itself)".

IPA invokes a double hermeneutic where "the research is trying to make sense of the participants trying to make sense of their world" (Smith and Osborn, 2008 p. 53). This is a complex endeavour and involves a high level of interpretation by the researcher (Smith, *et al.*, 2009). Gadamer emphasises the importance, "to keep one's gaze fixed on the thing throughout all the constant distractions that originate in the interpreter" (Gadamer, 1975/2004 p.269). Gadamer's emphasis of researcher 'openness', reflection and reflexive thinking throughout interpretation and the research process, so that the weight of the text can be known, has implications for this research. Engaging in reflective and reflexive thinking was an on-going process demonstrated through this research.

Schleiermacher proposed that interpretation involved two levels: *grammatical;* concerned with the exact and objective textual meaning, and *psychological;* referring to the individuality of the person (as cited by Smith, 2007). For Schleiermacher, interpretation was not about a methodical sequence of steps or rules but the aim, in part, was to understand the participant and their experience (Smith, 2007). To do this we assume that what the participant says is a reflection of what they think about their experience (Smith, 2007). Schleiermacher believed that if a researcher had engaged in a detailed and holistic analysis, the researcher can end up with an understanding of the participant better than the participant understands themselves (Schleiermacher, 1998). This bold claim was contextualised by Smith *et al.* (2009) who argues that Schleiermacher's belief is not to claim that researcher's analyses are more 'true' than the claims of the participant but, rather, to allow analyses to be seen to offer meaningful insights which go beyond the explicit claims of participants. Gadamer (1975/2004) held a different belief of interpretation to Schleiermacher emphasising history and the effect of tradition on the interpretative process rather than understanding the participant (Smith, 2007). IPA has the potential to focus on both understanding the shared experience (the text) and making sense of the participant (Smith *et al.,* 2009).

Ricoeur proposed two types of approach to interpretation: *hermeneutics of empathy (demythologising);* to grasp the understanding of the participant; *and hermeneutics of suspicion (demystifying); a mode of interpretation used by psychoanalysis* to 'peel back' layers of meaning to find what is hidden (Langdridge, 2007). A suspicious

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interpretation is explanatory and seeks to identify hidden meaning (Langdridge, 2007). To do this, pre-existing theoretical concepts are applied to the data and used to guide interpretations (Willig, 2008). This deductive approach is not compatible with the approach for this research whereas an empathic interpretation seeks to get as close to the research participant's experience as possible and try to understand it from within (Willig, 2008). This is achieved by meaning being identified through researcher engagement with the text and by the researcher bringing their own assumptions to engage with the text (Langdridge, 2007). Empathic interpretations focus on what is there, rather than what might be concealed (Willig, 2008). This inductive approach is more compatible with the approach for this research. Theoretical concepts were considered after the analysis so that the findings were data-driven.

IPA employs an empathic hermeneutics but also a questioning hermeneutics so that experiences can be understood from a participant's point of view whilst at the same time critical questions of the text can be asked (Smith, 2004). The hermeneutic circle is a resonant idea in hermeneutic theory which is concerned with the dynamic relationship between the part and the whole (Smith *et al.* 2009). In order "to understand any given part, you have to look at the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the parts" (Smith *et al.*, 2009 p. 28). The concept of the hermeneutic circle operates on a number of different levels, for example, single word versus sentence, extract versus entire text, the entire text versus the research project. The hermeneutic circle highlights the circular nature of IPA, the repeated engagement with the text at its many levels.

3.5.3 Idiography

Finally, IPA is idiographic (concerned with the particular, the individual level) which is in contrast to most psychology which is 'nomothetic' (making claims at the group or population level) (Larkin, Watts, and Clifton, 2006). Nomothetic inquiry typically transforms data into a form that prevents the retrieval or analysis of the individual and produces probabilistic results due to working with group averages (Smith et al., 2009). Yin (1989) highlighted that individual cases demonstrate existence or show us how something is in an insightful manner. By using single cases, IPA makes valuable contributions to the research field (Smith *et al.,* 2009). Idiography can also refer to a process which moves from the single case to more general claims so does not avoid generalisations but locates them in the particular (Smith *et al.*, 2009). By using IPA, the idiographic element can be achieved by first focussing on the individuals before moving on to search for convergence and divergence across the participants (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

Although generalisability is not the aim of IPA, the inductive approach allows for 'theoretical transferability' where the researcher links between existing psychological theory/literature and helps the reader to see how the case can shed light on existing nomothetic research (Smith *et al.*, 2009). For this research, it is recognised that the experiences presented are specifically applicable to the SENCOs in the research. These experiences can increase understanding and add to the existing knowledge.

3.6 Rationale for selecting IPA

IPA was chosen as a suitable methodology for this research project for a number of reasons. I was interested in an approach that would allow me not only to focus on individual experience but also one that would allow me to explore the potential underlying psychological phenomena. This allowed me to discount other approach such as Descriptive Phenomenology and Grounded Theory. IPA allows researchers' to gain an understanding of the experiences of the participant, which naturally fit with the aim of this research to explore the experiences of SENCOs working with parents/carers through the EHCP process. Reid *et al.* (2005 p 23) highlighted that IPA is "particularly suited to researching in 'unexplored territory'" which fitted with the research topic as this area was relatively unexplored. Further to this, the lack of published literature in this area meant that the inductive approach of IPA was suited to this research as I did not have to rely on existing literature to drive the analysis, allowing the data to reveal itself. The 'theoretical transferability' (Smith *et al.*, 2009) of IPA would allow me to make links with existing psychological theory and demonstrate the contribution of this research to the field.

IPA's epistemological stance is not as clear as alternative qualitative approaches (Larkin *et al.,* 2006). I would argue that IPA is complementary to a constructivist epistemology as it focuses on the individual experience (Smith and Osborn, 2008). Further to this, IPA acknowledges that, like Heidegger, experiences are influenced by context (Smith *et al.,* 2009*)*. The aim of IPA is to "capture as closely as possible the way in which a phenomena is experienced within the context in which the experience takes place" (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008, p28). In regard to this area of

research, in order to better understand the whole EHCP process, the parts of the process needed to be looked at: a hermeneutic circle. This piece of research aimed to explore the experiences of SENCOs in order to better understand the EHCP process in regards to SENCOs and parents working together. In this research, key contextual factors that influence the context appeared to include government legislation, government guidance for professionals, the LA in which the research was completed, the school context in which the SENCOs worked and the SENCOs personal characteristics.

IPA acknowledges the active role of the researcher in interpretation, the double hermeneutic (Smith, 2007). It is an approach that allows the influence of a researcher's experience on interpretation, as long as there is researcher 'openness'. 'Openness' is achieved by reflection, and reflexive thinking throughout interpretation and the research process so that the weight of the text can be known which has implications for this research.

IPA offered a comprehensive guide of the stages of analysis (Smith *et al.,* 2009) which provided me with reassurance to complete the analysis. However, the flexibility of the approach also attracted me to IPA as I could adhere to the general principles but not be constrained by thoughts of having to do it the 'right way'.

3.7 Limitations of IPA

Willig (2008) highlights that the use of language in phenomenological research could be a limitation of IPA as this method relies upon the representational

validity of language. Willig (2008) argues that language constructs a particular version of an event rather than describes the event itself; language can never give expression to experience. Smith and Osborn (2008) outline that the assumption of IPA is that there is a connection between a person's thinking/emotional state and their talk. Smith *et al.* (2009 p.194) highlighted that "interpretations of experience are always shaped, limited and enabled by, language" whilst Larkin *et al.* (2006) argued that an account can be used to reveal something about a person. I acknowledged Willig's (2008) criticism of language but I agreed with Smith and Osborn (2008) and Larkin *et al.* (2006) that through using language in the way outlined by IPA, new knowledge and valuable contributions to this particular area could be generated.

Another criticism of IPA is that it aims to capture a person's experience and meanings associated with a phenomenon by collecting participant's descriptions of their experiences (Willig, 2008). Willig (2008) questioned the extent to which participants would be able to communicate the rich texture of their experience to the researcher especially when individuals are not used to expressing these things. Smith and Osborn (2008) acknowledge the potential difficulties that individuals may have in expressing themselves and highlighted that part of the role of the researcher is to interpret individual's mental and emotional state from what they say.

IPA has also been criticised for its focus on perceptions, its describing of lived experience rather than trying to explain the cause or origin (Willig, 2008). Willig (2008) argues that this could limit understanding of phenomenon. However, I would

argue that there is value in exploring perceptions and lived experience of SENCOs working with parents/carers through the EHCP process as this is 'unexplored territory' and will contribute valuable information to the field.

Brocki and Wearden (2006) highlighted the active role of a researcher and how the ability of the researcher to interpret, reflect, and be reflexive can impact on the interpretation carried out. Brocki and Wearden (2006) called the reflections of researchers to be more obvious to readers so that readers have the relevant information to judge the strength/merits of interpretations. For this research, I have endeavoured to share my own thinking and reflections throughout by sharing extracts from my research diary throughout the chapters of this thesis. Fox *et al* (2007) highlighted that a research diary not only allows for the researcher to return to the diary to re-contextualise decisions made about the study but also forms part of the audit trail so that the reasons for decisions at each stage of the process can be raised. I also drew on supervision with my research supervisor to strengthen the interpretations that I made.

3.8 Participants

IPA is an idiographic approach which is concerned with understanding a particular experience in a particular context: in the case of this piece of research, the experience of SENCOs' working with parents through the EHCP process. This piece of research is following the Smith *et al.* (2009) approach to IPA research. The primary concern of IPA is with a detailed account of individual experience. IPA studies benefit from a concentrated focus on a small number of cases (Smith and Osborn,

2008) and Smith *et al.* (2009) recommend a sample size of between three and six, as this would provide sufficient cases for the development of meaningful points of convergence and divergence between participants. For this research the sample was made up of five participants so that sufficient meaningful points of similarity and difference could be obtained.

3.8.1 Selection of Participants

Smith *et al.* (2009) describe how participants in IPA research are purposively selected due to the participants needing to be able to offer insight into a particular experience. To enable detailed examination for psychological variability within the group, by analysing the convergence and divergence that arise, the participant sample needed to be as homogenous as possible (Smith *et al.,* 2009). In order to gain a homogenous sample there were practical constraints as well as interpretive constraints that needed to be considered. These were addressed by the following inclusion/exclusion criteria:

- The first inclusion criterion was that the SENCO must work in a mainstream primary setting. There are qualitative differences between the interactions and relationships that SENCOs who work in secondary schools have with parents/carers compared to SENCOs in primary school settings. These differences in interactions and relationships could extend to SENCOs working in different provisions, such as Special Provisions. Additionally, there were more primary SENCOs than secondary SENCOs in the EPS area which increased the chance of gaining enough participants who met all the inclusion criteria.

- Another inclusion criterion was that the SENCO had been working as a SENCO since September 2013 as this allowed for the participant to have prior experience of the process for a Statement of Special Educational Needs (SSEN) and for them to be able to think about the differences or similarities in the processes.

- SENCOs had to have experienced the EHCP process for a new plan, not a conversion, as a conversion would have involved pressures of existing outcomes from the SSEN and experiences of being involved with parents of pupils with SEN for the SSEN process. Further to this, the SENCOs had to have experienced at least two EHCP processes, in order for them to be able to compare these experiences and reflect on the differences between the experiences.

- As point 6.2 in the SEN CoP (2014) specified that schools must designate a teacher to be responsible for co-ordinating SEN provision, SENCOs were likely to have a duel role. SENCOs who were also head-teachers or deputy-head teachers have additional demands, a position of authority within the setting, as well as other interactions with parent/carers that could influence the experience they may have had of going through the EHCP process. Therefore, SENCOs who were also deputy-heads or head-teachers were excluded from the sample. For this piece of research the participating SENCOs were teachers, who were or were not on the Senior Leadership Team, in order to gain a homogenous sample as possible.

3.8.2 Participant recruitment

SENCOs were initially contacted via an email inviting them to participate in the research as this was the most time-efficient method of recruitment and the most predominant form of contact between SENCOs and the EPS. In order to reduce the risk of over-recruitment of participants, as highlighted as a potential risk by the Tavistock Research Ethical Committee (TREC), emails were sent in phases until enough participants were recruited. The SEN team's records of EHCP applications were used to initially target Primary School SENCOs who had gone through the EHCP processes three or more times inviting them to participate in the research. Emails were then sent to Primary SENCOs who had completed two EHCP processes as not enough SENCOs were recruited from the first phase. Recruitment resulted in five SENCOs being recruited. Information about the SENCOs can be found in table 2.

Table 2: Information regarding the SENCOs

	SENCO 1	**SENCO 2**	**SENCO 3**	**SENCO 4**	**SENCO 5**
Category of school	Primary/ Academy	Primary	Primary/ infants	Primary/Volu ntary Aided	Primary
Number of pupils on roll	approx. 460	Approx. 380	Approx. 317	Approx. 180	Approx. 476
Number of EHCP completed	Three	Two	Four	Two	Two
Time in SENCO role	Four years	Two years	Two years	Two years	Three years
Additional roles	None – full time SENCO	None – 4 days SENCO	None – 4 days SENCO	Teaching – 3 days SENCO	None –3 days SENCO
Sex	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
Ethnicity	White British	White British	White British	White British	White British

Data Collection

3.9 Rationale behind semi-structured interviews

Reid *et al.* (2005) highlighted that the chosen method for much qualitative research is semi-structured interviews as one to one interviews aid collaboration, are easily managed, allow rapport to be developed, allow participants to speak, be heard, and facilitate in-depth and personal discussion. A semi-structured interview is guided, rather than fixed like a structured interview or questionnaire, by a set of questions and the researcher is free to pursue interesting areas that arise during the interview (Smith *et al.*, 2009). This method of data collection fits with the basic concerns of IPA, as I, the researcher, had knowledge and some expertise of the research area and had some areas I wanted to pursue. However, I was also open to new data being presented by participants and semi-structured interviews allowed me to be able to pursue unexpected data brought up during the interview. I felt that semi-structured interviews offered the idiographic element that I wanted but also a scaffold for myself, as opposed to un-structured interviews, so this method of data collection was used for this research.

Semi-structured interviews are often described as 'conversations with a purpose' (Smith *et al.*, 2009) although I do agree with Smith *et al.* (2009) when they highlight that the 'conversation' is artificial as the purpose of the interview is to get the participant to share their experience in their own words. I feel that my personal views were not shared openly during the interviews, as I did not want to influence the views expressed by the SENCOs, but I do acknowledge my role in shaping the conversation through the questions asked.

3.10 Development of interview questions

The interview questions were devised as a flexible tool to help guide the discussions during the interviews. Please see appendix M1 for the interview schedule. The schedule was created with the range of topics which might be pertinent to the experience of the EHCP process. The wording of the questions and the sequence in which they were asked were all considered thoroughly. Smith *et al.* (2009) highlighted that questions should be open and expansive so that the participant is encouraged to talk at length, questions should move between broad and focused discussion, and interviews should start with a question that allows the participant to recount a fairly descriptive episode/experience so the participant becomes comfortable talking.

The interview schedule was revised, developed, and updated through reflecting with my supervisor, peers, and through a pilot study. The schedule underwent considerable change. At first the questions composed were heavily influenced by my Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) role and were consultative, leading, and even idealist in nature. Through supervision, I was able to remove the leading and emotive language and construct more open questions. The order of the questions was developed with Smith *et al.* (2009) guidance in mind, and the schedule started with a scene setting question and moved on to more emotive ones. A pilot study was then conducted with the revised interview schedule to allow for discussion of the appropriateness of the questions to the participant and any unforeseen problems with the question wording. The pilot study participant raised a few potential changes for the questions (see appendix M2 for suggested changes to the

interview schedule). However, through discussion with my supervisor, it was felt that these changes reflected more the individual participant's experience and could be leading if the suggested adaptations were added to the schedule. Further to this, the pilot SENCO was known to me, a distant family relative, and upon reflection the power dynamics between us impacted on the interview. This was something I felt I needed to bear in mind during recruitment of SENCOs for the research as previous knowledge of working together may have influenced the interview. However, none of the participants recruited for this research were previously known to me.

My aim during the interviews was not to stick to the schedule rigidly, questions were asked out of sequence as well as additional questions being asked depending on where the participants took the interview. This was due to allowing the participants to guide the discussion and to pursue areas that were important to them. The length of the interviews ranged from 40 to 76 minutes. After each interview I reflected on my own feelings about the interview (my performance, the rapport between myself and the participant, the poignant points I walked away with), to help contextualise the analysis and develop my interviewing skills. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for analysis.

3.11 Data analysis

Analysis of the data was carried out by the approach described by Smith *et al.* (2009). This method allowed for a thorough examination of the data generated in the interviews. Smith (2007) described analysis as an iterative and inductive cycle which is undertaken by involvement of the following strategies as outlined in figure

1. Audio interviews were transcribed by a professional transcribing service to allow for the following stages to be completed.

Figure 1: Stages of IPA process (based on Smith *et al.,* 2009)

Stage 1
- **Transcription and initial listening and reading.**
- The first audi-recorded interview was played, the transciption read and checked for accuracy and then the audio-recording listened to at the same time as a second reading of the transcript.

Stage 2
- **Initial Notes**
- Initial notes of descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual comments were then added to the data as it was read, heard, re-read, and re-heard, several times.

Stage 3
- **Emergent themes**
- Alongside further re-readings, comments were made with the intention of identifying emergent themes.

Stage 4
- **Repeat of stages 1 - 3 for remaining participant interviews**
- Stages 1 through 3 were then repeated with the second, third, fourth and fifth audio-recorded interviews.

Stage 5
- **Subordinate themes**
- Connections across emergent themes were made in order to develop subordinate themes on further reviewing of the data.
- **Subsumption** - during this stage some subordinate themes may acquire superordinate status, due to a series of related themes.

Stage 6
- **Superodinate themes**
- Superordinate themes were then identified for each of the five interviews.

Stage 7
- **Overarching themes**
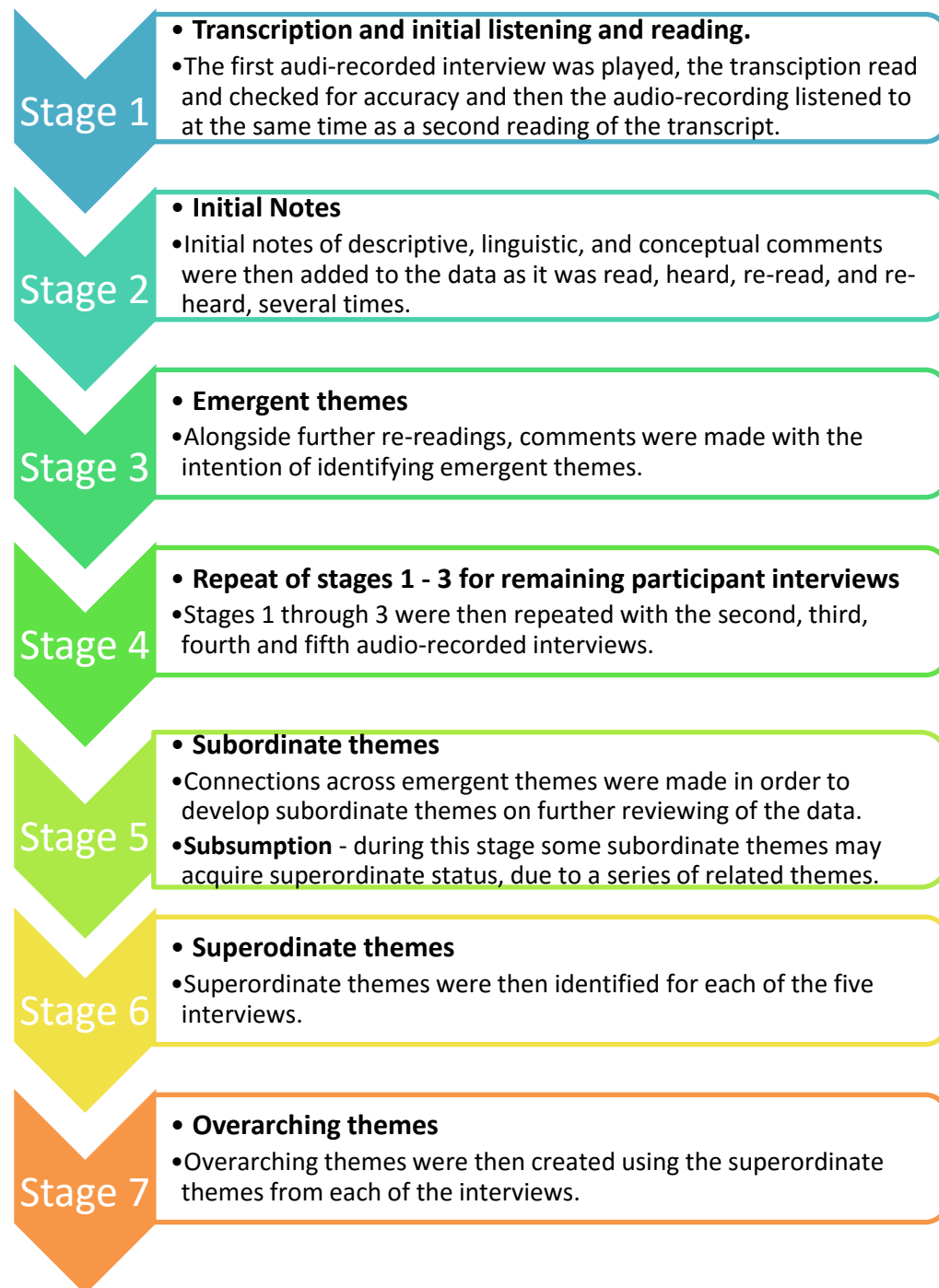- Overarching themes were then created using the superordinate themes from each of the interviews.

Table 3: Descriptions of the analysis process and decisions made in identifying the different levels of themes.

Stage	Description
1.Transcription and initial listening and reading	*The analysis process started with listening to the audio alongside proof-reading the professionally transcribed transcripts in order to check for accuracy and to familiarise myself with the interview. This enabled me to really hear the experiences being shared without the distraction of being the interviewer.*
2.Initial notes	*This stage involved making notes on an exploratory level; identifying topics of apparent importance and attempting to capture the meaning of these for the SENCO. These exploratory comments were spilt into three areas; descriptive comments, linguistic comments, and conceptual comments.* *Descriptive – focused on content and describing objects of concern.* *Linguistic – reflecting on the specific use of language.* *Conceptual – asking questions of the data and moving towards a more conceptual understanding of what it means to have these concerns in this context.*
3.Emergent themes	*This stage focussed on discrete chunks of text in order to recall what was learned through exploratory commenting. Concise statements (emergent themes) were developed to capture and reflect understanding. Appendix F1 is a 'rich data' extract from SENCO 1's transcript which provides an example of the commentary and emergent themes for SENCO 1.*
4.Repeating of stages 1 -3 for remaining participant interviews	*The remaining transcripts were then analysed using stages 1-3. The decision to get all transcripts to the emergent theme stage was to support me in remaining 'open' to each case and new emergent themes arising from each SENCO's transcript.*
5.Identifying subordinate themes	*This stage introduced structure into the analysis. Emergent themes were drawn together by identifying common links between them using the concepts of abstraction (similar themes brought together), numeration (frequency in which theme is supported signifies importance) and function (what function it serves). This stage produced a number of subordinate themes with related emergent themes for each of the SENCOs. Examples of subordinate themes and related emergent themes for each of*

	the SENCOs can be found in appendix F2.
6.Identifying superordinate themes	*This stage involved identifying the superordinate themes for each of the SENCOs. Subordinate themes were drawn together by identifying links between them similar to the previous stage; abstraction. In this stage numeration and subsumption (subordinate theme becomes superordinate theme) were also used to identify the themes that most strongly represent the SENCO's experience. Superordinate themes were given names that aimed to capture the experience they represented.*
7.Identifying overarching themes	*This stage involved searching for connections across cases. Through this process the SENCOs superordinate themes were drawn together by identifying links between them. Superordinate themes that were not recurrent in at least half of the SENCOs (three or more) were discarded. The superordinate themes that were drawn together resulted in a four overarching themes for the whole SENCO sample Please see Figure 2: Visual representation of the overarching themes in the findings chapter for details of the overarching themes and the related superordinate themes.*

Reflections about the data analysis

During my analysis of the first interview I found myself facing a dilemma when I reached the stage of identifying subordinate themes. My previous reading from Smith *et al.* (2009) and Smith and Osborn (2008) resonated with me. Smith *et al.* (2009) emphasised the need to treat each case on its own terms and to, as far as possible, bracket off the ideas emerging from previous cases. I felt that in order to keep myself as open as possible to new themes emerging from subsequent interviews, I needed to get all five interviews to the emergent theme stage before looking for connections between emergent themes within each interview to develop the subordinate themes. Therefore I switched stages four and five to their current positions in figure 1.

Further to this, Smith and Osborn (2008) and Smith *et al.* (2009 p. 96) emphasise that they provide 'guidelines' of IPA analysis, and they encourage the analyst to 'explore and innovate in terms of organising the analysis'. Therefore, I reverted back to my worldview, constructivism, in order to help clarify the analysis steps. Due to my constructivist epistemological position I felt that it was necessary to identify the superordinate themes for each participant to understand how their lived experiences had shaped each individuals' interpretations of their experience prior to looking across all five interviews to compare divergences and convergences of experiences.

3.12 Validity issues

Within the field of qualitative research there is dissatisfaction with qualitative research being evaluated by the criteria for validity of quantitative research (Willig, 2008), for example the quantitative criteria's of; large sample sizes, reliability and replicability, 'inter-rater reliability' (Yardley, 2000). Therefore, Yardley (2000) presented four broad principles for assessing the quality of qualitative research: sensitivity to context, commitment to rigour, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. These principles are broad ranging and offer a variety of ways to establish quality as well as being able to be applied to research of any theoretical orientation.

To demonstrate how this research addressed Yardley's (2000) four principles for quality of qualitative research, I have addressed each one in turn.

3.12.1 Sensitivity to context

Yardley (2000) outlines that this principle has many facets. Firstly, there is the context of the study, the understanding created by previous research, as well as the underlying philosophical underpinnings of the approach adopted. I have attempted to meet sensitivity of context by carrying out a literature review of previous studies in this area as well as exploring government legislation surrounding SEN and EHCPs. Furthermore, I have discussed the philosophy of IPA in this methodology chapter. IPA was adopted as the methodology for this study due to it being able to engage with the idiographic and the detail of the experience, highlighting further the sensitivity to the data that underpins this research. Smith *et al.* (2009) argue that it is also important to present this data to the reader to allow

them to reflect on its sensitivity. For this reason, verbatim extracts and quotations were included in the analysis section.

Another sensitivity to context that arose, and I feel, was appropriate to reflect upon was the context of the semi-structured interviews. Before each interview I spent time explaining to the participants about the methodology of IPA and building rapport to aid the SENCOs to feel comfortable. I was also aware of the potential power imbalance between us and addressed this by emphasising the nature of semi-structured interviews and how there were no right or wrong answers, just their experience. I aimed, throughout the interview, to listen, be empathetic, and be sensitive to what the participants said and did, monitoring any difficulties or discomfort they may have experienced in order to desist any lines of enquiry that were uncomfortable. I also spent time at the end of each interview asking participants whether there was anything they wished to discuss further, such as unexpected emotions that the interview may have brought to the surface.

3.12.2 Commitment to rigour

Smith *et al.* (2009) argued that commitment can be viewed as the degree of attentiveness given to the participant during the interview and the care given during analysis. To support this, I read literature regarding interviewing techniques to aid my interviewing skills before carrying out the pilot interview and interviews. And in addition, the depth and time needed to carry out data analysis using IPA demonstrates attentiveness to the participant. Yardley (2000) states that rigour refers to the completeness of the data and analysis which depends on the adequacy of the sample in terms of its ability to supply all the information needed for analysis.

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The homogeneity of the sample was in keeping with that expected in IPA research (Smith *et al.,* 2009) see table 2 for the information regarding the SENCO participants.

3.12.3 Transparency and Coherence

Yardley's third principle was transparency and coherence. I hope that through the discussions in this chapter that the reader is able to see the appropriateness of the selected methodology for the research question. I have endeavoured to be transparent by providing information on how participants were selected, the interview schedule constructed, and how the data was analysed. Further to this, extracts from the transcripts have been included in the findings section to allow the reader to reflect on the interpretations made.

Another method implemented to aid transparency, as suggested by Yin (2009), was an 'independent audit'. Yin describes this hypothetical audit as a way the researcher can file all the data in such a way that somebody could follow the chain of evidence that leads from the initial documentation through to the final report. The aim of the 'audit' is not to produce a single report which claims to represent the 'truth', nor a consensus. The audit allows for the possibility of a number of legitimate accounts, reflexivity, and reflectivity and the concern, therefore, is how systematically and transparently this particular account has been produced. In this piece of research this 'audit' was achieved by the sharing of thinking with my supervisor at key points during the research process, such as question formulation, piloting, and themes arising from transcripts.

3.12.4 Impact and importance

This research does not set out to be generalisable, as Morgan (1983) argues that generalisation should not be the objective of all research projects. Smith *et al.* (2009 p.51) explain that rather than thinking about empirical generalisability, thinking should be in terms of theoretical transferability: it is up to the reader 'to make links between the analysis in an IPA study, their own personal and professional experience'. As Bell (2005) highlights, if by the publication of findings the boundaries of existing knowledge are extended, then it is a valid form of research. Yardley (2000 p. 223) argues that "the decisive criterion by which any piece of research must be judged is, arguably, its impact". Yardley recommends prior to embarking on any research journey to think about the 'so what?' question. I would argue that the implementation of the EHCP process highlights its importance nationally; anything that could increase understanding of the experience of professionals involved in the process and support them to improve outcomes is worthy for practitioners and policy makers. I hope that this research will give voice to a previously quiet area of research and encourage others, such as EPs, to reflect on possible implications for their own practice.

This research will be disseminated to the LA in which the research has taken place, and the Educational Psychology service which serves the LA, to inform them of the experience of SENCOs working with parents/carers through the EHCP process. Summative findings were shared with those participants who expressed this wish during the interview process. This research will also be shared with the Tavistock and Portman Foundation Trust as well as the University of Essex.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

This research was conducted with regard to the Tavistock Research Ethics Committee [TREC], (2014) and to the Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2010) and was granted approval by the Tavistock Research Ethical Committee (see appendix M2). It was of upmost importance that this research was carried out in a respectful manner. Particular attention was paid to consent, confidentiality, and reduction of the potential of harm for participants.

All of the SENCOs included in the sample had the necessary competence to provide consent to participate and they were fully informed of the research through the use of the information sheet and consent form (see appendix M3). Potential SENCOs received this information via email so were able to read and consider the information before agreeing to participate. Participants were also given the opportunity to ask additional questions before agreeing to take part. Written consent was obtained prior to the interview beginning; part of this process was to confirm that participants had read the information sheet. Participants were informed about their right to withdraw on the information sheet and were reminded again at the beginning of the interview.

As I personally carried out the interviews with the participants, complete anonymity could not be given, as their identity was known to me. However, the names of participants, the LA, and schools were changed to minimise the chance that participants would be identifiable to anybody other than me. The participants were

also informed of the possibility of inclusion of verbatim extracts in the published Thesis, in order for them to make an informed decision of participation.

Participants were informed that guidance received from TREC highlighted the need to protect, and maintain confidentiality of any data collected (TREC guidance, 2014). All data gathered during this research period was kept securely: any electronic data, such as transcribed interviews, were anonymised and stored on a password protected computer. Participants were also informed that the interviews would be audio-recorded and that the recordings would be kept on a secured laptop, transcribed and analysed, and deleted after the thesis VIVA.

There was no obvious risk from the research to the participants. However, as the interviews explored the participant's experiences, there was a chance that this could have caused some unforeseen distress to them. In order to reduce any stress, participants were informed approximately how long the interviews would take, given the option of when the interview would take place, conducted at a time when participants did not have to rush to another task, and assured that the research was aiming to increase understanding of their experience. I ensured that I had time after the interviews to debrief and ensure the well-being of the participants (to the best of my ability). I had planned to carry out a follow-up phone calls if it was deemed necessary, and signpost to further support, such as Educational Psychology support or School support. However, none of this was required by the participants.

There were possible effects that I, the researcher, may have had on participants, as well as the effects participants may have on me. Alvesson (2011) highlights that the multiple intentions and desires of the researcher, conscious and unconscious, may lead the researcher to influence the interviewee to respond in a certain way. To overcome this, questions for the interviews were discussed with my research supervisor to minimise leading/bias language.

Another ethical consideration was how to inform potential participants that they had not been selected to participate in the research. Feedback from TREC identified the possibility of over-recruitment. Therefore the method of recruitment was altered to minimise this. It was made clear in the email that was sent out to primary SENCOs that selection would be made on a first response basis, i.e. volunteers will be screened for their eligibility against the inclusion criteria in the order of their response. In other words, a first come first served basis. However, there was not an over-recruitment of participants. In summary, I believe that the methodology chosen and data collection process described in this chapter would provide a sound basis for producing valid and robust data to examine the research question.

4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide a full comprehensive account of the findings of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the five SENCO interviews, which sought to answer the broad research question of:

What are the experiences of primary school SENCOs working with parents/carers through the EHCP process?

In keeping with the hermeneutic cycle, I will present contextual information about each of the individual SENCOs so that the reader is aware of potential influences on the SENCO or researcher that may have arisen during the interview process which may have influenced the interview or the in-depth analysis, to provide an understanding of the parts. I will then present the over-arching themes that emerged from the analysis.

Quotations from each SENCO's transcript will be shared in order to maintain the phenomenological core from which my interpretations have been developed. With each quotation shared I have endeavoured to reflect the feelings and thoughts as authentically as possible. A rich data extract can be found in appendix F1 and further quotations for the superordinate themes for each SENCO can be found in appendix F2.

4.2 Contextual information about each SENCO

SENCO 1

SENCO 1 was one of the first SENCOs to contact me to indicate her interest in taking part in the research. She has been in her current school for one year as the SENCO and previously spent three years in another setting in the SENCO role. SENCO 1 worked five days as a full time SENCO and did not have any additional responsibilities. At the time of recruitment SENCO 1 had completed three EHCP applications. I spent some time building a rapport prior to turning the audio-recorder on as I felt this was important for SENCO 1 to feel at ease, as she initially appeared nervous. I shared with her my reasons behind my chosen research area as well as my own journey to the trainee educational psychologist role. The interview followed the semi-structured interview schedule and I needed to use several prompt questions to explore SENCO 1's feelings about her experiences. I began to feel conscious of my repetitive 'feeling questions' and wondered whether I was allowing SENCO 1 to lead the interview or whether I was becoming pre-occupied in her sharing her emotions. As this was my first interview, I wondered whether sharing feelings/emotions about their role would be difficult for all the SENCOs. I couldn't help but wonder how often, if at all, SENCO 1 spent thinking about how her experiences affected her emotions. It was in response to a question about support that SENCO 1 shared that she was leaving her post at the end of the year, in part, due to the time and emotional energy that her role required from her. Towards the end of the interview with SENCO 1, I felt moved to re-ask a version of the first question I asked, "How do you feel about the SENCO role in the EHC process?" which elicited a more emotive response compared to an initial procedural response. I felt

like this demonstrated that SENCO 1 had engaged with her experiences during the interview and was reflective of her willingness to share her experiences with me. This encouraged me to ask my first question at the end of each of the subsequent interviews with SENCOs as a way of bringing the interview together through reflection on the initial answer and the interview process.

SENCO 2

SENCO 2 was recruited during the second wave of emails, where SENCOs who had applied for two EHCP during the academic year 2014-2015 were targeted. SENCO 2 had been in a SENCO role for three years and had applied for four EHCPs since the LA began trailing them as part of the pathfinder process. SENCO 2 worked four days a week as a SENCO with no additional responsibilities. When SENCO 2 greeted me in the reception area she engaged me straight away in conversation about my studies, summer holidays, and pointing out the different areas of the school as we made our way to her office. SENCO 2 appeared to be comfortable and appeared keen to start; she had even printed off and signed her own copies of the informed consent sheet. Whether this was a reflection of her organised nature, or efficiency due to work demands was unclear, but it was something that stuck with me. I felt that I was able to follow SENCO 2's lead more readily than I had previously even though her sentences were at times incomplete, as if she was engaging with her thinking as she was speaking. I felt that SENCO 2 was able to share her experiences freely including those that had evoked difficult feelings for her. I found myself sharing in her guilt and sadness as she shared an experience of working with a parent of a terminally-ill pupil. However, I was conscious that I did

not want my reactions to influence her so I tried to remain neutral throughout the interview.

SENCO 3

SENCO 3 was the first SENCO to respond to the opportunity to take part in doctoral research, replying on the same day as the first email. SENCO 3 had been a SENCO for two years and at the time of recruitment had completed the most EHCP applications of all the SENCOs in the sample, four. SENCO 3 worked 3 days a week as a SENCO with no teaching responsibilities. SENCO 3 greeted me in reception and started telling me about how long she had been at the school and how she had waited a year before doing her NASENCO. I felt that SENCO 3 was providing me with her qualification background, somehow validating her inclusion in the research. When we arrived in her office, her SEN teaching assistant (TA) was in the room and I felt moved to clarify that I was there for an interview with the SENCO and not a planning meeting, as I was confused by the presence of a TA. However, SENCO 3 explained that she spent most of her time completing paperwork and without her TA, who worked with the children and assisted with the parents, that she would be unable to carry out her role. Due to her explanation of her perception that she could not fulfil her SENCO role without her TA the interview was conducted with them both. I was concerned about the added dynamic of a third person in the interview, but SENCO 3 shared her thoughts, expanded on her TA's comments and was comfortable enough in the interview, and with her TA, to disagree with or to voice a different opinion. Therefore, I felt, that the interview was reflective of SENCO 3's experiences of working with parents through the EHCP process. Due to the collaborative nature of SENCO 3 and her TA's relationship, as explicitly stated by the

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SENCO and interpreted by myself during the interview, it was decided to keep SENCO 3 and her TA's voice as a group rather than separate them, as to separate them felt like part of SENCO 3's experience would be lost.

SENCO 4

SENCO 4 was the last SENCO to contact me and was recruited during the second wave of recruitment emails. SENCO 4 was a SENCO two days a week and a class-teacher two days a week. She was the only SENCO in the sample to have class-teacher responsibilities. When SENCO 4 greeted me in the reception area, she quickly began talking about her role, the school, and her experiences of the EHCP process. I began to worry that she would not share all of this after the audio-recorder was switched on. However, SENCO 4 readily began speaking about her experiences in response to my questions. I felt, unlike the other interviews, that I had not consciously needed to build rapport with SENCO 4 she was comfortable sharing her thoughts and experiences with me. I felt SENCO 4 was very open in her talking, appeared insightful, reflective, speaking at length and I enjoyed listening to her experiences. The interview felt led by SENCO 4, with my questions asking for more elaboration on her experiences as well as linking in the questions on the schedule when they aligned with the flow of the interview. I was concerned, at first, with how quickly SENCO 4 spoke and I worried that I would miss information that I wanted to follow up as active listening whilst remembering the interview schedule was a skill I was still developing and I think I struggled to do both during this interview. However, upon detailed reading of the transcript the richness of the data provided by SENCO 4 was apparent.
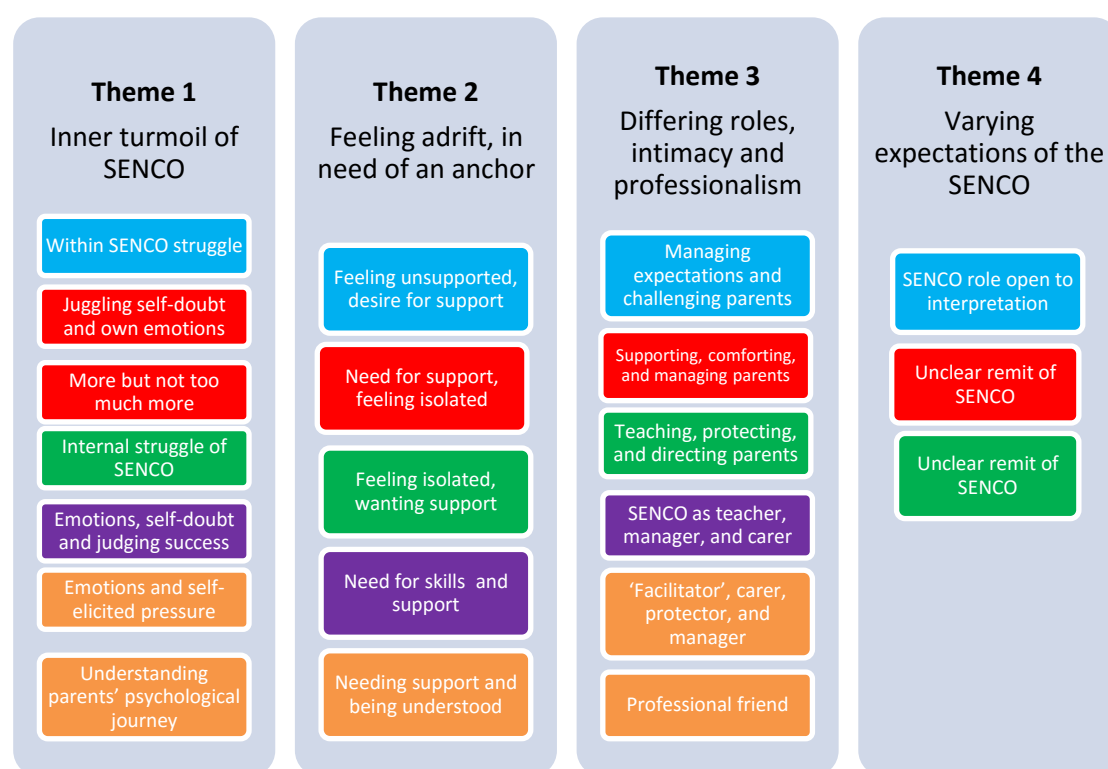
SENCO 5

SENCO 5 contacted me on the same day that the third wave of emails was sent out to SENCOs who had completed two or more EHCP applications during the academic year 2014 -2015. SENCO 5 worked three days a week as a SENCO with no teaching responsibilities and had completed two EHCP applications in the academic year 2014- 2015 at the time of recruitment. I spent a little time with SENCO 5 building a rapport, talking about my background and reasons for undertaking the research. SENCO 5 appeared to be at ease with me and was open in her answers. Her response to the first question demonstrated her consideration of the circumstances and experiences of the parents she was working with as well as her awareness of her own emotions. It was clear from SENCO 5's responses that she held parents, and the children, centrally in her role, and that she was conscious of the emotional nature of her role, and the contexts she worked within. The interview with SENCO 5 felt the polar opposite to the first interview I held, where SENCO 1 needed several prompts to think about her emotions whereas SENCO 5 appeared to offer this information more freely with less prompting questions being used.

4.3 Overarching themes

In this section I present a picture that I felt represented the SENCOs experiences as a whole. The over-arching themes were found by looking across the five SENCOs' superordinate themes and identifying recurrent themes. For this research any themes that recurred in more than half the sample, three or more, was deemed to be an overarching theme. Reoccurrence was decided at three or more SENCOs so that homogeneity could be claimed as well as strengthening conclusions and implications for practice. From the analysis of the data, four overarching

themes emerged. Three were present in all five SENCOs' experiences; *inner turmoil of the SENCO, feeling adrift in need of an anchor*, and *differing roles, intimacy and professionalism*. The fourth overarching theme was present in three of the SENCOs' experiences; *varying expectations of the SENCO role*. Figure 2 provides a visual representation of the overarching themes and SENCO superordinate themes that fed into them. Superordinate themes that did not fit within the overarching themes can be found in appendix F4.

Figure 2: Visual representation of the overarching themes

Theme 1	Theme 2	Theme 3	Theme 4
Inner turmoil of SENCO	Feeling adrift, in need of an anchor	Differing roles, intimacy and professionalism	Varying expectations of the SENCO
Within SENCO struggle	Feeling unsupported, desire for support	Managing expectations and challenging parents	SENCO role open to interpretation
Juggling self-doubt and own emotions	Need for support, feeling isolated	Supporting, comforting, and managing parents	Unclear remit of SENCO
More but not too much more	Feeling isolated, wanting support	Teaching, protecting, and directing parents	Unclear remit of SENCO
Internal struggle of SENCO	Need for skills and support	SENCO as teacher, manager, and carer	
Emotions, self-doubt and judging success	Needing support and being understood	'Facilitator', carer, protector, and manager	
Emotions and self-elicited pressure		Professional friend	
Understanding parents' psychological journey			

Each SENCO was assigned a colour to allow for the spread of superordinate themes that made up the overarching theme to be more easily seen; SENCO 1: blue, SENCO2: red, SENCO 3: green, SENCO 4: purple, and SENCO 5: orange.

Please note that verbatim quotes have been used throughout this chapter and a key to the notations used and what they represent can be found in appendix F3.

4.3.1 Theme 1: Inner turmoil of the SENCO

This overarching theme reflected all five SENCOs emotional experience when working with parents through the EHCP process. It seemed that the SENCOs experienced complex emotions that were provoked by working with parents through the EHCP process. Strong feelings of anger, frustration, and resentment towards parents were experienced by several of the SENCOs;

"…the parent should be also actively helping us and that would make such a difference." (SENCO 2, line 458 -459)
"…taking our sort of professional insight into account…" (SENCO 3, line 625-626)
"…… it's rude, you've not even consulted us." (SENCO 4, line 587-588)

For SENCO 2 there was a desire for parents to be more involved in the process. However, this appeared to be accompanied by a fear of them being too involved in the process;

"…I don't want them to be coming in and saying right I feel my child should be doing this, this, this every day and at this time you should be teaching them this." (SENCO 2, line 97 -100)

This fear of over-involvement of parents appeared to explain her acceptance of parents being reluctant to engage in the process. Sympathy, empathy, and pity were also strongly experienced by SENCOs when they worked with parents;

"…they were told she would never walk, she wouldn't make it to her first birthday…" (SENCO 5, line 252-253)
"…They've mentioned things that I had no idea of before…" (SENCO 1, line 331-332)
"…I feel sorry for them because they get really frustrated with the whole system." (SENCO 2, line 298 -299)

Their feelings of sympathy, empathy and pity appeared to support the SENCOs in being able to identify with parents' journeys and helped the SENCOs to justify the EHCP process. Further to this, the SENCOs understandings of the parents' journey was perceived by SENCO 5 as essential in being able to communicate it as part of the EHCP process;

"…trying to take what they wanted to say, trying to put it so that the, the panel would actually understand…" (Line 558-559)

However, the experienced feelings of sympathy and empathy also provoked feelings of guilt for SENCOs;

"…I took over from someone else I felt there was quite a few children in the school that actually probably did need that and hadn't had that already." (SENCO 2, line 190 -192)
"…best part of a year if not longer to get these children the right support that they need…" (SENCO 3, line 47-48)
"…I feel incredibly sorry for them sometimes when I'm saying no…" (SENCO 5, line 199-200)

The SENCOs did not share experiences of expressing their 'negative' emotions, such as frustration, anger, resentment, with parents, which one could interpret as the SENCOs having to manage, suppress, or deal with their emotions in some way so they could act in a manner they had constructed as appropriate towards parents. SENCO 1 shared her perception that there was a 'professional' way in which SENCOs should act, which could be indicative of this emotional management;

"…it's quite an emotional role anyway and you do, although obviously you have to be professional…" (SENCO 1, line 129 -130)

On the other hand, SENCO 3, who experienced feelings of frustration towards parents, due to their lack of understanding of the process and felt that parents needed be aware of the reality of situations, also demonstrated her awareness of the emotional repercussions for parents that sharing of sensitive information could have;

"…you don't want to upset the parents do you? I mean sometimes you do have to just be brutal." (SENCO 3, line 179)

In other words, SENCO 3 may have been managing her own emotions in order to fulfil a constructed professional role or to maintain the relationship with parents.

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Whereas SENCO 5 experienced contrasting internal emotions to outwardly expressed emotions towards parents when she perceived them to be telling her how to do her role;

"…the professional in me would like say, "absolutely", serene and calm and fine, the person in me erm kind of thinks well okay I know my job." (SENCO 2, line 279-281)

Another important experience, as expressed by SENCO 5, was the responsibility felt in communicating the parent's journey as part of the child's journey and needs. For SENCO 5, the SENCO role was to understand the detail of the family's story and to translate it into something that the panel would understand;

"…for me to kind of take their everyday and weave it into the way that I knew that it should be read." (Line 113-114)

The importance of the SENCO role in gaining an EHCP was expressed by several SENCOs;

"…the SENCOs role in writing that education section is crucial to whether something will be approved or not…" (SENCO 4, line 441-442)

"…why I'm going to get as much information from you as possible because we want to make sure it's all there so that they can't say no…" SENCO 2, line 316-317)

It appeared that the weight of responsibility of the SENCO role in the EHCP process influenced how SENCOs evaluated themselves. The SENCOs appeared to place responsibility for 'success' (gaining an EHCP) was reflective of being a capable SENCO;

"…I've got a good success rate so far but… I don't know." (SENCO 2, line 182 -183)

"…the SENCO is pivotal I think to the success or failure really…" (SENCO 4, line 687-688)

"…it might not get through but if it doesn't get through I'm going to keep going…" (SENCO 5, line 341-343)

For the SENCOs, struggling to achieve an EHCP, or feeling overwhelmed by their emotions elicited by the EHCP process, led to SENCOs questioning their understanding of the requirements of the application process;

"…and I thought I have no… I don't know what that is, I don't understand what they need from me…" (SENCO 1, line 200 – 202)

Their own ability and skills in completing the assessment and application form;

"…is this something I've done wrong? Am I not writing it properly?" (SENCO 4, line 477-478)

As well as their general approach towards working with parents: the support they gave to parents and the work they took on;

"…So I…And then you wonder well actually are all SENCOs doing that as well?" (SENCO 2, line 505 – 506)

Further to this, SENCO 1 experienced low self-confidence in her abilities and skills when faced with an unexpected and new situation a tribunal, a situation that none of the other SENCOs shared as part of their experiences;

"…we had a tribunal date, we were heading towards it, and nobody had given me any information. It was only at the last minute that it was approved and we didn't have to go to tribunal. And… thank god because I wouldn't have known what to expect or what I was doing." (SENCO 1, line 495 -500)

The emotional turmoil that the SENCOs experienced when working with parents through the EHCP process was demanding. SENCO 3 described her experiences of working with parents as;

"…nearly killed us last year didn't they?" (SENCO 3, line 256)

For some of the SENCOs, they experienced needing to be seen by parents in certain ways: as knowledgeable individuals, and as professionals;

"…I'm the one who's supposed to show parents that I know what I'm doing." (SENCO 5, line 433-434)

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"I felt like a complete idiot but I think… it was fine but it just doesn't look very professional does it?" (SENCO 3, line 341- 342)

"…they didn't perceive that we knew what we were doing…" (SENCO 4, line 619)

Whilst for SENCO 2, she did not want to appear as too intrusive or prying by parents;

"…you don't want to pry too much into things…" (SENCO 2, line 123 -124)

For the SENCOs these feelings of needing to be seen by parents in a certain way appeared to influence how they interacted with parents. For SENCO 5 she had a need to be transparent with parents so that they could not doubt her actions or intentions;

"…they have to read everything because I want them to know what's sent." (SENCO 5, 384-385)

Whilst for SENCO 4 this resulted in her being suspicious of parents, thinking that they were trying to prove her wrong or trying to show her up;

"…the parents are trying to trip you up because 'you don't know what you're doing and we're going to teach you'…" (SENCO 4, line 589-591)

For the SENCOs, it appeared that the strong emotions they experienced also tied with the perception that parents held of them. The SENCOs appeared to use observable behaviours to judge parent's perceptions of them. For instance, being listened to by parents, parents supporting their children, and parents respecting the role of the SENCO, all appeared important to the SENCOs' sense of professional identity;

"…you're so drained, speaking to the same people and you know I've spoken to them over and over and over and over again and they're very volatile, they're very emotional, and it's been very draining." (SENCO 1, line 355 – 357)

"Like actually what are you [the parents] going to contribute to it? What could you do at home?" (SENCO 2, line 453 -454)

[A letter arrived at school] "… Mr and Mrs X have requested an assessment for an EHCP and I was like, 'hello? No one's told me'…" (SENCO 4, line 567-568)

Ultimately, for SENCO 1, the emotional aspect of working with parents through the EHCP process was extremely draining. For her the best way of coping with it was to leave her job;

"…In terms of the emotional side I have to be honest I'm leaving my job at the end of this year…" (SENCO 1, line 374 -376)

However, through all of these complex emotions, for the SENCOs, it was the thought of the child, and their needs, that drove them to continue down the EHCP route;

"…at the end of the day that's a child's future." (SENCO 4, line 566-567)

For the SENCOs, working with parents through the EHCP process elicited complex emotions. These emotions potentially fed into the SENCOs perception of their practice and abilities, the way they interacted with parents, the way they perceived parent's views of the SENCO role, and also the way they judged their professional performance i.e. through successful EHCP applications.

4.3.2 Theme 2: Feeling adrift in need of an anchor

Elements of this theme overlap with '*inner turmoil of the SENCO*' although the sense of isolation and desire for support the SENCOs experienced held an importance that was separate from the emotional turmoil they experienced. This theme encapsulates the SENCOs sense of difference, isolation and need for support, whether this was desired or fulfilled. All the SENCOs experienced feeling alone during the EHCP process and for several SENCOs there was a perception of being different to other members of staff in school, in regards to her accessibility by parents;

"I seem to be one of the only members of staff that has direct email contact with parents" (SENCO 1, line 276-278)

"…some parents who probably wouldn't really have much to do with coming into school now see me a bit more and are happier to come and see me about issues…" (SENCO 2, line402 -404)

"…I'm doing a lot more on email than I used to…" (SENCO 3, line 373)

Or in regards to priorities of roles;

"…in school everyone else has got their own jobs to do…" (SENCO 2, line 258 -259)

Or needing different types of support than other school staff;

"…again the support from the SLT, the support from school to give me the time to do that…" (SENCO 5, line 561-562)

This sense of difference added to my interpretation of the SENCOs being alone in dealing with the emotional demands of the EHCP process. This was most pronounced in an experienced shared by SENCO 1 when she was faced with a new and daunting prospect of going to a tribunal;

"…on my own, my senior leaders hadn't done one they couldn't advise me…" (SENCO 1, line 392-393)

And in the wider system;

"…I was just sent a little piece of paper about what it was and I'd never done one before…" (SENCO 1, line 391-392)

For SENCO 1, her worry, fear, and insecurity, were unable to be addressed by her fellow teaching staff as they had not experienced a tribunal themselves and the response of the LA failed to emotionally support. For SENCO 1, she perceived others, outside of school, to not understand or appreciate the demands or how 'stressful' the SENCO role was;

"…I'm not sure whether they're even aware… they must be aware of how stressful dealing with the parents day to day in this situation must be…" (SENCO 1, line 398 - 400)

Other SENCOs also held a perception of being abandoned by the LA or other professionals;

"…Not one single health professional had started a Care Plan." (SENCO 3, line 101-102) (SENCO 3 referred to the EHCP plan as a care plan)
"…I wasn't fully informed but you… this is going to sound awful but you come to expect that [from the LA]…" (SENCO 5, line 463-464)

The despondence that SENCO 5 expressed about the support from the LA was echoed by other SENCOs in their feelings towards the support received from the LA and from other professionals;

"…you kind of begrudge calling them in." (SENCO 3, line 225-226) (In reference to the little support the SENCO perceived to receive from some LA services)
"…I phoned up County and I was just like I just don't get… what do you want? What is an aim and out… I was like are they not the same? It wasn't that helpful, I got sent this thing that didn't really explain it anyway…" (SENCO 2, line 521 -524)

For some of the SENCOs their sense of isolation was heightened due to their perception of being the driving force behind the EHCP application. This was apparent when they spoke about beginning the EHCP process with parents;

"…Like it is more me driving things and really trying to badger them to do things, erm…like meet with me …" (SENCO 2, line 342 -343)
"…why if all these professionals are on board why hasn't anyone started a Care Plan?"(SENCO 3, line 455-456)

Further to this, SENCO 3 felt anger towards previous settings which she perceived had not only failed to appropriately support the pupil but who had also brushed off any responsibility in providing evidence of need;

"…When there isn't anything in place when they arrive even, even just evidence that you can use …" (SENCO 3, line 528 -529)

For the SENCOs, their sense of difference to other staff in school and their perceived abandonment, in terms of some support from the LA appeared to fuel the SENCOs perceptions of being alone in the process and being solely responsible in taking up the task of applying for an EHCP.

A predominant shared experience across the SENCO sample was the SENCOs seeking help and being appreciative of someone, predominately SEN Officers, being available;

"…she [the SEN Officer] is contactable by email and phone…" (SENCO 3, line 779-780)

"…plus having the contact with the SEN officer I think meant that I felt confident enough to get things going and also knew that I had someone to talk to if something came up…" (SENCO 1, line198-200)

"…we had good communication from County; we had an experienced SEN officer helping…" (SENCO 5, line 440 – 441)

However, the SENCOs desired further support from the LA to provide confirmation of their understanding of the procedural aspects of the EHCP process, to enable them to have confidence in their understanding of the process, and their role within it;

"…to have more input when… for schools and for SENCOs when it's the tricky bits, the mediation, the tribunal side of things." (SENCO 1, line 488-489)

"…I would have found really helpful as a SENCO if I'd been given an example plan…" (SENCO 2, line 525-526)

The SENCOs also expressed a desire for their conclusions to be backed up by other professionals;

"…as many professionals as possible saying the same thing…" (SENCO 3, line151-152)

"…that I recommended and that the EP agreed with…" (SENCO 4, line 96)

It seemed that the SENCOs sought other professionals input to help support and build their self-confidence or self-esteem;

"…that's where having the professional support saying, yes they have done a really good job actually…" (SENCO 4, line 85-86)

"…You have got like a shotgun effect of issues going on, having someone come along and go, 'oh yes this is really complex'…" (SENCO 5, line 472-473)

Further to seeking support to provide them with professional self-confidence and self-esteem, the SENCOs also sought or craved the empathy of others. One way a few of the SENCOs achieved this was by making links with other SENCOs in the area;

"…I met a group of local SENCOs who have become good friends and we are constantly emailing…" (SENCO 3, line 791-792)

The connections with other SENCOs appeared to be used to gain support in understanding the procedures and content of an EHCP application as well as building SENCOs' self-confidence in their own abilities to complete the process, and go on to support other SENCOs;

"…it's only actually networking with the other SENCOs that you go, 'okay I need to do this, can you help me?'" (SENCO 5, line 483-484)
"…what have you done for this and what have you done for that? That's a good idea let me take that and oh you've written that…" (SENCO 3, line 794-796)
"……the first time I did an EHC plan I said to them [other SENCOs], has anyone done one of these? And one of them sent me back her application with like the name and stuff blocked out just so I had an idea, so that support has been massive and I've then done the same for some other people…" (SENCO 2, line 253-257)

However, for other SENCOs in the sample, there was no mention of having these SENCO to SENCO connections and, although expressed jokingly, there was a sense of seriousness about needing more than procedural support;

"…I don't know. Ha-ha, providing counselling? Ha-ha, erm, yeah…" (SENCO 1, line 401)

A contrasting position to seeking out others to gain confidence in their own skills, understanding, and abilities was expressed by SENCO 4. SENCO 4's previous experiences before becoming a SENCO were perceived by her as a strength for the SENCO role;

"…I've been a teacher, and I've done other things. So I've got different experiences to add to that role…" (SENCO 4, line 648-649)

SENCO 4 drew confidence from her additional skills as she felt that these supported her in the many different aspects of the SENCO role that were brought about by the EHCP process. For SENCO 4 being able to draw on skills developed in other roles was important to being able to fulfil the SENCO role. For her, the additional skills that she had needed to be available for all SENCOs;

"…you can learn that and you can be… so I think that should be on every SEN award training…" (SENCO 4, line 703-704)

For SENCO 4 developing connections in her work, through training, skills as well as being supported by other professionals were all important elements in her having confidence in herself to undertake the SENCO role.

As previously mentioned in the overarching theme '*internal turmoil of the SENCO'*, the SENCOs lack of feedback in the EHCP process led them to question their abilities and practice, lowering their self-confidence. In this theme '*feeling adrift in need of an anchor'* SENCOs longed for or sought out other professionals to confirm their interpretations and bolster their self-confidence. Furthermore, having empathetic connections to other SENCOs or professionals reduced feelings of isolation and provided the longed for support for the EHCP process.

4.3.3 Theme 3: Differing roles, intimacy and professionalism

For all the SENCOs there were different roles that they perceived themselves to take up when working with parents through the EHCP process. This overarching theme encompassed two superordinate themes from SENCO 5, as the overarching theme moved to a higher level of interpretation which covered both '*facilitator', carer, protector and manager* and *professional friend. 'Differing roles, intimacy and*

professionalism' reflected the variety of roles the SENCOs perceived themselves to have, the depth of the relationship that the SENCOs had with parents, as well as the challenges that this intimacy entailed.

For the SENCOs there was a need to manage parents' expectations from the beginning of the EHCP process in regards to the realities of the process and the responsibilities and capabilities of the school;

"… trying to keep balance to their expectations and trying to keep things realistic for them…" (SENCO 1, line 232-233)
"…I say to them that it's not a magic cure to anything, it's not really going to make a huge… nothing's going to come with it…" (SENCO 2, line 201-203)

For the SENCOs, part of managing parents' expectations was educating parents about the EHCP process and their child's needs;

"…things like aims and outcomes and your short-term goals, how does a parent know what their child should be doing?" (SENCO 2, line 366-368)
"…A lot of the parents I speak to do not really understand the system erm…and there's so many parts to it that it's ever so hard to explain it all at once." (SENCO 3, line 655-657)
"…when they're not in school they don't know, they can't see what they're like in school…" (SENCO 4, line 310-311)
"…no understanding of actually whether it's appropriate for that child…" (SENCO 5, line 232-233)

It appeared to be important for the SENCOs that the parents could put their child's needs in to context and understand the difficulties that the school and the SENCO faced. Without parents' understanding of the context, SENCOs experienced more difficult conversations about why children were not getting the support parents thought they needed;

"…That they'd get this EHCP and this just meant wonderful things for the future of their children." (SENCO 1, line 216–218)
"…I can say what I want my child to have and it was like, yes you can but it's not always feasible and you've got to be realistic…" (SENCO 2, line 106-108)
"…parents want all this support but they don't get that this isn't going to happen because there isn't money…" (SENCO 3, line 292-293)

"…they get hung up on, well I want them to have one to one support and I want them to have this." (SENCO 4, line 776-777)

SENCO 4 described her experience of these roles as;

"…I feel like I'm the educator of them…" (SENCO 4, line 496)

For the SENCOs, the relationship felt like an uneven one, with them having more knowledge and understanding than parents about the EHCP process, children's needs, and school capabilities. However, with the EHCP process placing parents in the centre, parents' lack of understanding made working together challenging. With the SENCOs feeling that they had to educate and manage parents' expectations, this gave rise to some SENCOs feeling like they were having to direct unaware parents through the process, rather than it being a joint effort;

"…you're telling them, you've got to do this, you've got to do that." (SENCO 3, line 281-282)
"…the parents aren't really driving it and it still is really the school but with them kind of on side." (SENCO 2, line 78-79)

The SENCOs experience also involved an awareness of the emotional side of the process for parents. For SENCO 4, her role stretched beyond adjusting parents' expectations and teaching them about the process - it also held an element of emotionally supporting parents through the process.

"…Working together to support them about the realistic outcomes as well so for example in the other case working together, almost becoming like a counsellor. …" (Line 635-637)

The SENCOs' sympathy for parents heightened their awareness of their influence on the experience of parents through the process;

"…he was a bit like how can I even answer that? I just want her to live and it's really sad to get that… to put someone in that situation where they're having to think like that." (SENCO 2, line 153-155)
"…you don't want to beat the parent… you want them to have those dreams for their children." (SENCO 3, line 594-595)

Their awareness of their actions on parents influenced them to take on other roles, such as protecting parents and sheltering them;

"…we don't tell them everything they get up to in school because it would just be soul destroying…" (SENCO 3, line 187-188)

"…She'd told that enough so at one point I said, right that's the last time you're going to say that, I'll say it for you." (SENCO 5, line 75-76)

As well as responding to parents' emotional states;

"…you pull down the blind, you grab them their tissues and you sit and you talk…" (SENCO 5, line 307-308)

The emotional experience of parents also motivated the SENCOs to guide and support parents through the application process due to the empathy they experienced for the position of parents due to their own experiences of the process;

"…It was really confusing and I didn't understand what they wanted so I was like how are these parents going to understand it?" (SENCO 2, line 74-75)

This ability to be able to understand how parents were feeling drove the SENCOs to support and explain the process to parents as best they could;

"…they really struggle with those forms. So they've…they have…so I tend to sit down with them and I just talk through…" (SENCO 2, line 25-27)

However, for some SENCOs there was a perception that parents would not be able to understand, no matter how they explained it, or how often they tried to explain it, which led to a despondent attitude towards parents;

"However much you explain to them they don't really understand…" (SENCO 3, line 475-476)

The SENCOs' ability to manage parents was also influenced by the emotional nature of parents' concerns and desires for their child. This was depicted by SENCO 1 when

the emotional nature of the EHCP process resulted in situations that felt quite volatile;

"…you're dealing with emotional people about emotional situations and it can be quite volatile…" (SENCO 1, line 131-132)

These highly emotional situations made working with parents more difficult for SENCO 1 as she experienced parents becoming more challenging and aggressive, which, for her, prevented collaborative working;

"…more challenging because they've been so aggressive with it it's changed… its felt far less collaborative." (SENCO 1, line 101 -102)

The aggression in the above extract refers to the parents chasing the LA and involving solicitors, the local Member of Parliament and telling SENCO 1 what to do;

"…they were requesting that I basically applied to every external agency we have access to…" (SENCO 1, line 118 -120)

Without parental understanding of the context and their child's needs parents were perceived to be challenging the SENCOs;

"…the kind of aggressive, challenging, phoning everybody they could think of because it sort of meant that they didn't trust the process anymore." (SENCO 1, line 462 -464)
"…I have had her shouting at me…" (SENCO 3, line 708)
"…it's almost trying to make you think that the parents are trying to trip you up because you don't know what you're doing…" (SENCO 4, line 589-591)

The power that parents had in the process, and the knowledge of their rights and their willingness to employ legal representation, was in the minds of the SENCOs and appeared to be intimidating to them;

"…that's their right and that's their role to…to… get what's best for their child…" (SENCO 4, line 494-495)
"…some of our families are incredibly erm well versed in the rights of children with special needs…" (SENCO 5, line 227-228)

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"…they have experience of education, they're far more informed about their rights and the rights of their child and they also are very determined…" (SENCO 1, line 74-76)

The importance of managing parents' expectations and emotions, in order to maintain the relationship with them and work with them through the process, was important to the SENCOs as without it parents may resort to legal representation. For SENCO 1, the delicate nature of the relationship was expressed;

"…once it's reached point it's very hard to bring it back down. So even if…things straighten out and sort out the parents have… they've definitely lost faith…" (SENCO 1, line 455-457)

The SENCO-parent relationship appeared to permanently tarnish if parents questioned the abilities or aims of the SENCO or LA. Parental understanding of the EHCP process and their child's needs appeared to support SENCOs and parents working together, which may be why the SENCOs placed emphasis on educating parents and managing their expectations. Further to this, the already existing SENCO-parent relationship had supported the SENCOs in gaining an intimate understanding of the difficulties of the child, and the emotional journey that parents were on or had experienced;

"…we already have that relationship." (SENCO 5, line 34)
"…I taught in Year 1 and I taught in Year 5 and I was also the SENCO…" (SENCO 4, line 186-187)

This shared journey also increased the SENCOs' empathy for parents and motivated them to comfort and console parents;

"…it is a big ask and they've… it's quite an emotional thing for them to be doing…" (SENCO 1, line 227-228)
"…Knowing how much his mum has suffered and knowing err… how her she's an always upbeat person…" (SENCO 5, line 300-302)

> "…they were scared. So that's what I mean, they almost needed their hand holding…" (SENCO 4, line 363-364)

Further to this, the intimate relationship the SENCOs already had with parents fostered a feeling of loyalty;

> "…I couldn't have passed her off onto the County facilitator because how would they have taken her through that process knowing kind of what she'd been through?" (SENCO 5, line 71-74)

This loyalty was particularly strong for SENCO 5 who noted that her relationship with parents could continue after the EHCP process;

> "…the EHC process it doesn't stop, it carries on because you're constantly monitoring, you've got the annual reviews, you've got perhaps specialist provision…" (SENCO 5, line 588-560)

This dedication to parents and families manifested in one way for SENCO 5 as;

> "…I give my home number because actually for them I know they're not going to abuse it and I know that, that school hours or my working hours don't necessarily fit…" (SENCO 5, line 310-312)

The trust in the relationships between SENCO and parent needed to come from both sides in order for the intimacy to be sustained. With this level of intimacy there came unspoken boundaries, demonstrated by SENCO 5's phrase 'abuse it' but it was not clear at what point this contact became 'abuse'. The emotional understanding also took its own toll on SENCOs, as can be seen in theme 1: *Inner turmoil of the SENCO*: where the SENCOs experienced complex emotions. The intimacy of the SENCO-parent relationship also made it difficult for SENCOs to manage challenges that arose and for SENCOs not to take parents actions personally;

> "**…**Their actions, it made it very stressful …" (SENCO 1, line 133)
> "Angry. I was really… you haven't listened to everything we've told you…" (SENCO 4, line 586)

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For the SENCOs, balancing the intimacy of the SENCO-parent relationship and maintaining their professional role was challenging. SENCOs were empathetic of parents' journeys and situations due to their history with parents and intimate knowledge about the parent/child/family, which also fuelled the SENCOs' desire to help support parents as much as they could through the process. However, at the same time the SENCOs had to fulfil their SENCO role in the EHCP process. Support for parents and fulfilling the SENCO role in the EHCP process manifested as SENCOs undertaking different roles when working with parents in order to progress through the EHCP process. These differing roles served to educate parents, console parents, and manage parents' expectations of the process/outcomes and their child's needs. The mixture of personal support roles and professional roles made it challenging for the SENCOs not to take parents actions personally. '*Differing roles, intimacy, and professionalism'* captures what SENCO 5 summed up when sharing her experience of the SENCO role in working with parents through the EHCP process;

> "…working together is not, it doesn't go far enough actually for what the relationship becomes…" (SENCO 5, line 355-356)

4.3.4 Theme 4: Varying expectations of the SENCO role

For three of the SENCOs, the perceptions of the responsibilities of the SENCO role during the EHCP process caused frustration, uncertainty, and perceived additional responsibilities and work. Even though for SENCO 4 '*lack of understanding of the SENCO* role' did not emerge as a superordinate theme as it was not as predominant or frequent as other themes for SENCO 4, and so has been touched upon within this theme.

The SENCOs constructed their own understanding of what their role entailed from initiating the EHCP process;

> "…I have found that it's always me suggesting to the parent about going for it and then me getting the ball rolling and everything going." (SENCO 2, line 210 -212)

To facilitating communication between LA and parent;

> "…I'm sort of the middle person, not the mediator but you know…" (SENCO 1, line 52-53)

And supporting parents through the process;

> "…The EHCP now isn't you're doing a Statement for the parent. It is now that the parent is requesting an EHCP and you are supporting the process." (SENCO 4, line 827-829)
>
> "…very much about guiding them through the process and supporting them with their decisions. So helping them with the paperwork, and providing the evidence that is needed in order to supplement the application…" (SENCO 1, line 265-268)

The SENCOs understanding of their role appeared to be informed by parental need. For example, parents needing the SENCO to contact other professionals, explain paperwork, and explain the different provisions available;

> "…parents came to me and said we're not… we want to have this in there but we can't get in touch with anyone…" (SENCO 1, line 287-289)
>
> "…when they get the letter they bring in the letter going, what's this? What does this mean?... So it does seem… it's always kind of… they'll come in and see me…" (SENCO 2, line 212-215)
>
> "…nobodies bothered to tell them." (SENCO 3, line 428)

SENCOs also perceived parents to hold their own perceptions of what the SENCO should be doing;

> "…they've kind of looked to me to tell them what to do and we've done the forms together…" (SENCO 1, line 66-67)
>
> "…they don't want to have to do all that work towards getting it…" (SENCO 2, line 67)

Or were told what to do by parents;

> *"…meetings where they were requesting that I basically applied to every external agency…"* (SENCO 1, line 118– 119)

Further to this, the SENCOs appeared to infer the LA's or other professional's constructions of the SENCO role due to the responsibilities the SENCO had to pick up;

> *"…we didn't have facilitators involved…erm… apart from me being it…"* (SENCO 2, line 496 -497)
> *"…now I'm doing a lot more of the things that the SEN officer would have done on my behalf."* (SENCO 3, line 763-764)

Or from how SENCOs were recruited, or individuals given the responsibility of the SENCO role;

> *"…some SENCOs that have just been given it, 'oh, can you do that?' And they're also class teacher…"* (SENCO 4, line 671-672)

This led to the SENCOs being left with an unclear understanding of what their role entailed. For SENCO 3, this gave rise to a feeling of injustice due to additional work load and a minimising of the efforts of others;

> *"…we're pretty much writing the Care Plan…"* (SENCO 3, line 64)

Further to this, SENCO 3 experienced feelings of anger towards other professionals due to her awareness of the importance of having a relationship with parents when engaging in conversations about their children's difficulties. For SENCO 3, the lack of clarity around the responsibilities of the SENCO and the roles of other professionals in the process resulted in conversations not being broached with parents before the pupils came to her school, which made already sensitive conversations with parents more difficult due to a lack of relationship with them;

> *"…we don't have any relationship with them and then we're saying to them, right your child's got a need."* (SENCO 3, line155-156)

This left SENCO 3 feeling burdened with a responsibility she perceived not to be hers. There also appeared to be confusion amongst the SENCOs around a 'facilitator' role that they perceived somebody else could or should take up but they ended up undertaking the role;

"…when we started out that there was these 'facilitators' who worked for County…" (SENCO 2, line 491-492)

"They're happy to assess a child and write a report but nobody wants to take that role on." (SENCO 3, line 356-357)

The SENCOs appeared to understand that the placement of the SENCO, in the child's school, was a natural placement for this 'facilitator' role;

"…when they get the letter they bring in the letter going, what's this? What does this mean?... So it does seem… it's always kind of… they'll come in and see me…" (SENCO 2, line 212-215)

The lack of clarity around the SENCO role added to the SENCOs' confusion around their role and responsibilities. This led to SENCOs, parents, and other professionals being unclear with who was meant to be doing what;

"…there's lack of clarity in terms of who needs to be doing what and when…" (SENCO 1, line 444-445)

The lack of clarity around the SENCO role meant that SENCOs needed to create their own understanding of the role. They did this by, in part, their own understanding of the EHCP process and their role in it and by assessing what support parents needed during the EHCP process. However, alongside this, parents and other professionals were also constructing their own understanding of the scope and responsibilities of the SENCO which were not always congruent with the SENCOs constructed understanding. These discrepancies in the constructed roles of the SENCO role led to the SENCOs in this research perceiving themselves to be taking on the work and

responsibilities of other professionals, which resulted in negative feelings towards other professionals.

4.4 Additional poignant experience

During the review of my findings chapter after the first draft of the thesis I noticed a connection between two SENCOs superordinate themes that had not been included in the four overarching themes. As there are only two SENCOs and not three (as noted as being the requirement for this study for superordinate themes to be classified as reoccurring), the shared experience has not gained overarching theme status but I felt they were poignant experiences that needed to be shared.

4.4.1 Power in the EHCP process

For SENCO 1 and 4 their subordinate themes that related to power and control in the EHCP process gained superordinate theme status due to the reoccurrence and potency of power in their shared experiences. For both SENCOs there was a sense of information/knowledge being related to power and control in the EHCP process.

Parents sharing information with the SENCOs, and keeping them informed, allowed the SENCOs to feel part of the process and able to engage with it;

> **"…**facilitated communication so them coming in talking about their concerns, me contributing, school's concerns… when I'm asked questions from the SEN Officer about the child and about the application I feel I'm in a really good position…"
> (SENCO 1, line 83-89)
> "…That was really good because all the information was easily accessible…" (SENCO 4, line 713-714)

For both SENCOs information/knowledge, who had it, or who was holding on it, equated to control and power over the EHCP process. Parents' actions were

perceived by the SENCOs to limit the control that the SENCOs had as well as fostering a feeling of the SENCOs being reliant on parents to share information;

"…things have happened, conversations have been had, paperwork has been filled in where I haven't necessarily been kept in the loop…" (SENCO 1, line 92-94)
"…more so now parents erm need to share any private consultations…" (SENCO 4, line 719-720)

Further to feeling reliant on parents to share information, SENCO 1 perceived that parents were becoming more knowledgeable in relation to their rights, the hierarchy of local government, and legal representation. Parents being more informed, seeking information for themselves, and employing more knowledgeable others e.g. legal representation, led to SENCO 1 feeling overpowered and being replaced by parents;

"…they're far more informed about their rights and the rights of their child and they also are very determined so they have been the driving force and they have, fought…" (SENCO 1, line 74-77)

For parents there was a clear route to escalate their power over the EHCP process; contact the LA directly, write to their local MP, and hire legal representation. For SENCO 4, parents had the most control over the EHCP process but this was at the expense of the SENCO. For SENCO 4 parents were able to bypass her entirely as;

"…I was just confined to the education section." (SENCO 4, line 21-22)

SENCO 4 interpreted parents' action of not liaising with either the school or herself as disrespectful and desired consultation of the school to be built into the application procedure to maintain some power in the process;

"…parents need to have shown due consideration of the school's perception…" (SENCO 4, line 750-751)

Further to this, SENCO 4 felt disempowered by the process as she perceived parents EHCP applications being accepted without LAs consulting with schools;

"That's where I think there was the lack of… there's lack of clout." (SENCO 4, line 156-157)

For SENCO 1 and 4, there was a realisation that 'power' in the SENCO-parent relationship lay with the parents in regards to the EHCP process. Both SENCOs were reliant on parents sharing information and wanting the SENCO to be involved for them to undertake their role. This knowledge appeared to be ever present in their minds. For both SENCOs the current system perpetuated their provoked feelings of powerlessness.

4.5 Summary of findings

This chapter aimed to answer the over-arching research question of;

What are the experiences of primary school SENCOs working with parents/carers through the EHCP process?

Four overarching themes emerged across the five SENCOs' experiences.   The '*inner turmoil of the SENCO'* was apparent throughout all the SENCOs' experiences, from questioning their abilities or practice, feeling guilty about saying no, to empathising with parents. The SENCOs' competing emotions made working with parents through the EHCP process emotionally draining. However, it was the needs of the child that ultimately drove them to persevere through the challenging situations. The emotional demand of the role also influenced the SENCOs' need for reassurance and support from other professionals to help build and maintain their self-confidence as well as empowering them to work through difficult situations: '*feeling adrift in need of an anchor'*. SENCOs in this piece of research felt more confident when they had

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made connections with other SENCOs, with other professionals (such as Educational Psychologists), or had their SMT's understanding of the demands of the role. The duration of the SENCO-parent relationship allowed for the SENCOs to understand, in detail, the journey that parents had been on with their children which nurtured the SENCOs' feelings of empathy and a shared journey. In parallel to this, SENCOs felt themselves to be taking on many different roles when working with parents, from developing parents' understanding of their child's needs, to understanding the capabilities of the school. The '*differing roles, intimacy and professionalism'* in the relationship made it difficult for the SENCOs not to take parents' reactions to the process personally. The '*varying expectations of the SENCO role'* of SENCOs, parents, and other professionals led to a discrepancy of the expectations of SENCOs remits. This led to SENCOS perceiving themselves to be taking on the work of others and being burdened with additional responsibilities. And although it did not emerge as an overarching theme, for two of the SENCOs in the sample, '*power in the EHCP process*' was a predominate experience, with the two SENCOs feeling powerless in the current system.

Reflections about the findings

       At first I felt quite daunted by the prospect of writing up my findings. I felt like I had separated all the different threads in a piece of rope and that I needed somehow to put them all back together again to represent their experiences. During the analysis I had felt like I was moving further away from the individual SENCO but writing up the findings reassured me that I was presenting the SENCOs' individual experiences, staying true to their shared experience, and representing their voices.

There were a several drafts of the findings chapter done which, I feel now, reflected my struggle to present my findings in a way that maintained the individual experience of each SENCO. Initially I presented the superordinate themes from each SENCO followed by the overarching themes but through discussion with my supervisor, I concluded that this left the reader wondering how the individual experiences came together. When swapped around so that the overarching themes were presented before the individual SENCO superordinate themes this allowed for the linkage between the SENCO experiences to be seen but felt repetitive when reading the individual SENCO experience. Therefore, I decided to merge the individual SENCO voices in to the overarching themes, which I feel allows for the commonality of the SENCO experiences to be seen whilst still maintaining the individual SENCO experience. During the writing of the findings section I realised that my analysis was not completely over as I made more interpretations and made more links across

each participant, for example '*professional friend'* was not included in the

'differing roles, intimacy and professionalism' over-arching theme prior to

writing. However, it was during the writing process that I realised that it was part

of this theme and needed to be included.

I feel that my analysis and findings have provided a previously unheard voice for

the SENCOs and a depth and richness of their experience has been shared.

5. Additional Literature Review

5.1 Introduction

As highlighted in the literature review, research into SENCOs and the EHCP process produced no results therefore alternative search criteria were adopted in order to provide literature sources that could provide previous pieces of research that were relevant to the focus of the research. However, after conducting in-depth analysis of the SENCO interviews, it became apparent that additional literature was needed to aid understanding of the overarching themes that emerged from the data.

When moving from the write up of the findings chapter to planning the discussion chapter, an article in the March 2016 addition of Educational Psychology in Practice struck me as pertinent. '*Looking after the teachers: exploring the emotional labour experience by teachers of looked after children'* Edwards (2016). When reading the article a connection between Emotional Labour (EL) Theory (Hochschild, 1979, 1983) and some of the overarching themes from my research became apparent.

A quick literature search using the terms 'emotional labour/labor' and 'teacher' on the PsycINFO database during March 2016 returned 37 results published in academic journals in the English language. An eyeballing of the titles, abstracts, then full paper reading revealed three additional British studies into EL and the teaching profession all published in the last eleven years, which could be suggestive of an emerging area of research in the UK. UK studies were selected due to the teachers being subject to the same policies and legislation as the teachers in this piece of

research. Due to the time-frame of writing this doctoral thesis and word limits, a brief exploration of Hochschild's Emotional Labour Theory and a critique of Edwards (2016) paper will be presented in order to provide the reader with an understanding of research in EL Theory in order to feed in to the discussion of this study's findings. Data that was extracted from the additional studies regarding the study design, participants, data collection methods, and the outcomes can be found in a table in appendix ALR1.

5.2 Emotional Labour Theory

In order to provide the reader with an understanding of EL theory, I will present a brief summary of the main ideas of Hochschild's theory. Hochschild, (1983 p.7) described that emotional labour arises when individuals "induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others". Hochschild (1983) described the concept of 'feeling rules' which are socially shared expectations of how an individual should feel in certain situations. Feeling rules can be formal rules; explicit rules, or informal rules; implicit assumptions (Hochschild, 1983). Hochschild (1983) notes that religion, culture, gender, age, previous experience and social status can all influence an individual's construction of feeling rules. In order to adhere to feeling rules, individuals may deny or portray feeling, to display the acceptable emotion (Hochschild, 1983). Hochschild (1979) refers to participants and their use of active verbs as evidence of the manipulation of the outward display of emotions in order to fit with an expected emotional display; '*I tried hard not to feel disappointed*' '*psyched myself up*', '*I made myself have a good time'.* Emotion work differs from emotional 'control' or

'suppression' as Hochschild (1979) perceives these terms suggesting an effort to stifle or prevent feeling. Emotion work refers to the "act of evoking or shaping, as well as suppressing, feeling in oneself." (Hochschild, 1979 p. 561). Hochschild (1979) describes two broad types of emotion work: evocation, the cognitive focus on a desired feeling which is initially absent, and suppression, the cognitive focus on an undesired feeling which is initially present. In order to manage emotions EL theory proposes three methods: surface acting, deep acting, and suppression (Hochschild, 1979). Surface acting is when an individual changes their outward emotional display to represent the emotion that they perceive is demanded by the organisation in spite of their inner feelings being different. Deep acting is when an individual attempts to arouse the required emotion in themselves. Suppression refers to the hiding of felt emotions.

5.3 Emotional Labour in the teaching profession

Edwards (2016) aimed to provide an exploration of Key Stage Two (KS2) teachers' experiences of supporting looked after children (LAC) by using EL Theory to provide a psychological understanding of their experiences. Edwards' (2016) approach was deductive as she used EL Theory to explore her findings. She used semi-structured interviews - questions from the EL scale (developed by Lee and Brotheridge, 2011) were incorporated to gain an understanding of the extent and manner of EL that was utilised by the participants. Fourteen KS2 teachers who had a LAC in their class were interviewed and thematic analysis was utilised to identify common themes between the participants. Edwards (2016) does not provide detail on the context of each of the participants, for example, the year groups the teachers

worked in, the geographical locations of the schools, the size of the schools, or how long they had been teaching, apart from highlighting one participant was a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT). Therefore, caution needed to be taken in regards to the generalisation of the findings and conclusions drawn. However, to strengthen the validity of her findings, Edwards (2016) used verbatim quotes from the interviews to support her themes and maintained some transparency of the analysis by providing a thematic map, allowing for theoretical transferability (Smith *et al,* 2009). Consequently, Edwards' (2016) findings provide additional information to the current body of knowledge of EL in UK teachers.

Edwards (2016) study found that surface acting, deep acting and suppression were all experienced by the sample and were distinct constructs of EL. Notably, all of Edwards' participants reported incidents where expressed emotions differed to their actual feelings (surface acting) in order to maintain control, benefit the pupil, as well as to fulfil a professional role. Suppression was also reported to be prominent in Edwards' sample, with twelve of the teachers sharing examples of suppressing feelings. Deep acting was reported less, with only six of the teachers sharing experiences of utilising deep acting techniques. This was opposing to research in other caring professions, which Edwards (2016) suggested could be a reflection of teachers experiencing EL differently to other professions.

Edwards (2016) found that the teachers in her sample held a desire to promote positive consequences for LAC and that teachers reported a need to maintain focus on children's needs rather than their own needs. However, teachers also reported

construction of detachment to ensure their feelings were not affecting teaching. Further to this, teachers reported that emotional management helped to facilitate their communication with the child. Edwards (2016) concluded that the teachers' role constructions may have influenced the way the sample engaged with LAC. Edwards' participant sample reported a need to increase their understanding of, and ensure a bond with, the pupil. These 'feeling rules' of professional duty to be positive and committed, Edwards (2016) suggested, could have influenced the teachers to engage in EL in order to manage their emotions to fulfil these role expectations. Further to this, Edwards (2016) reported that support from school colleagues or LA professionals was cited positively in relations to reassuring teachers, sharing advice, joint working during difficult interactions with LAC and reducing sense of isolation.

Thinking about Edwards' (2016) research and EL theory in relation to this piece of research, it could be suggested that SENCO interactions with parents/carers may also involve emotion work due to parents' own emotions, SENCO's emotions, and the need for the SENCO to work with parents/carers through the EHCP process. Furthermore, SENCOs' role constructions, like teachers of LAC, could influence the use of EL in their interactions with parents to help them fulfil their role expectations.

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this discussion chapter is to consider the overarching themes of this research in relation to psychological theory and previous literature in the area. I will discuss how the findings can provide further insight to previous research and how already existing literature can support the exploration of these findings. Due to the lack of research in the area of SENCOs and EHCP/support/relationships with parents, I will draw on literature from the additional literature review that appeared relevant and facilitated my understanding of the psychological underpinnings of the findings.

This research aimed to answer the broad research question;

What are the experiences of primary school SENCOs working with parents/carers

through the EHCP process?

Four overarching themes emerged from the chosen analysis method, IPA, which helped to facilitate understanding in relation to this question. The overarching themes that arose from the data were: *'Inner turmoil of the SENCO'*, *'Feeling adrift, in need of an anchor'*, *'Differing roles, intimacy and professionalism'*, and *'Varying expectations of the SENCO role'*. Each of the overarching themes will be presented in turn and considered in relation to the previous literature found during the literature reviews.

6.2 Inner turmoil of the SENCO

The introduction of the new SEND CoP (2015) re-emphasised the need for involving parents and children in the decision making processes and in the EHCP process. The accountability of schools, and ultimately those in school responsible for

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implementing support for children with SEND, SENCOs, was also re-emphasised. How the new legislation would impact on those in the SENCO role was unclear. The theme of *Inner turmoil of the SENCO* emerged from the data as a result of the emotional impact that working more closely with parents was having on the SENCOs. As highlighted in the literature review Evans (2013) reported that the SENCO role was subject to powerful projections from the pupils that they worked with and this research appears to extend these emotions to the parents that SENCOs work with too. Further to this, Evans (2013) also reported SENCOs questioning their abilities to undertake their role which was also found to occur in my research. The SENCOs in this research were subject to powerful negative feelings towards the parents that they were working with, feelings such as resentment, anger, and frustration. However, the SENCOs still needed to work with parents in order to progress through the EHCP process. In order to do this, the SENCOs needed to manage their own emotions in order to maintain the working relationship with parents. Emotional Labour theory could be used to explain this process. The SENCOs were managing their own emotions in order to "induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others" (Hochschild, 1983 p. 7). In other words, the SENCOs controlled their own feelings in order to express feelings that would promote parents to continue to work with them: "…the professional in me would like say, "absolutely", serene and calm and fine, the person in me erm kind of thinks well okay I know my job." (SENCO 2, line 279-281). This would concur with Kinman, Wray, and Strange (2011) who also found that teachers managed their emotions in order to engender the desired emotional state in others.

An individual's construction of their role, and 'feeling rules' (both explicit and implicit), can influence the utilisation of emotional labour (Edwards, 2016). The SENCOs in my research had their own constructs of the SENCO role and 'feeling rules' that dictated what emotions they should feel and display when interacting with parents. As SENCO 1 described how "…it's quite an emotional role anyway and you do, although obviously you have to be professional…" (SENCO 1, line 129 -130). Edwards (2016) described this, for the teachers of LAC, as constructing their role as providing pastoral support for pupils and would manage their emotions to present a stable and calm persona to the pupil, with stable and calm persona being a 'feeling rule' for when teachers were working with LAC. The SENCOs in this study were managing their own emotions in order to comply to 'feeling rules' that they perceived needed to be obeyed in different situations as part of their SENCO role, with the 'feeling rule' being one around presenting a calm and steady persona to parents. Another role construct that was part of the *Inner turmoil of the SENCO* was the pupil's needs being at the centre of the SENCOs role, "…at the end of the day that's a child's future." (SENCO 4, line 566-567). For the SENCOs in this research this part of their role construct encouraged them to continue with the emotional demands of working with parents in order to meet the needs of the child, "… they're the parents, that's how they're going to approach it, there's nothing I can do about that but that as well when you're working closely with a child and you can see that it's affecting him." (SENCO 1, line 150-153). For SENCO 2, the needs of the child and ensuring the support they needed with an EHCP was more important than anything else; "…the child ended up moving school actually and thankfully because I'd started it I was able to pass it onto the new school…" (SENCO 2, line 431- 433).

For the SENCOs, managing their emotions was felt as being demanding with SENCO 3 stating, "…nearly killed us last year didn't they?" (Line 256). The emotional aspect of the SENCOs work impacted on the SENCOs own emotional well-being, led them to question their own abilities and question their own understanding of processes. Edwards (2016) outlined the potential negative effects that utilising EL strategies could have, highlighting; that challenges to a person's sense of self could result in burnout or depersonalising pupils. Kinman *et al.* (2010) highlighted the connection between EL and the impairment of psychological well-being, due to the effort that that is required to repeatedly 'regulate' emotions. Teachers may become more cynical and less sympathetic towards their pupils in order to protect themselves from further emotional demands Kinman *et al.* (2010). In contrast to Kinman *et al.* (2010) and Edwards (2016), depersonalisation of parents did not emerge as a prominent theme for the SENCOs. However, it is clear from the SENCOs that the emotional aspect of their role was demanding and that there was a very real risk of burnout. This was demonstrated by SENCO 1 whose experience of going to a potential tribunal heightened her sense of isolation: "…on my own, my senior leaders hadn't done one they couldn't advise me…" (SENCO 1, line 392-393) and emphasised her perception of the lack of support from the LA: "…I was just sent a little piece of paper about what it was and I'd never done one before…" (SENCO 1, line 391-392). This experience also increased her sense of other professionals not understanding or appreciating the emotional demands of the role; **"…**I'm not sure whether they're even aware… they must be aware of how stressful dealing with the parents day to day in this situation must be…" (Line 398-400). Ultimately, the

emotional demands of the role were too much for SENCO 1 and she chose to remove herself from the system by leaving her role.

The SENCOs judged their role on the success of EHCP applications. Being a good SENCO was being successful in an application and gaining an EHCP for a pupil, "…it might not get through but if it doesn't get through I'm going to keep going…", (SENCO 5 line 341-343). The SENCOs questioned their methods and abilities when faced with 'unsuccessful' applications or challenging situations with parents, "…is this something I've done wrong? Am I not writing it properly?" (SENCO 5, line 477-478), and "…you wonder well actually are all SENCOs doing that as well?" (SENCO 2, line 505–506). An explanation for this might be that the SENCOs were psychologically bound to their role through identification with it, which led to their well-being being associated with the successes and failures of the role (Edwards, 2016). The SENCOs associated gaining an EHCP plan as evidence of their ability and skills, and failure to gain an EHCP as evidence of their lack of ability and skills which lead to them questioning their expertise and abilities as a SENCO.

The SENCOs also experienced feelings of sympathy, empathy, and pity, evoked by identifying with parents' journeys and the situations they found themselves in during the EHCP process. For the SENCOs, these emotions appeared to be motivational for them to: complete the EHCP process, support parents and work through difficult situations. However, as previously mentioned, these feelings also evoked feelings of guilt and questioning of their abilities when SENCOs had to tell parents 'no', or EHCP applications were not successful, or parents' challenged

SENCOs decisions or opinions. Edwards (2016) described the effortless expression of required emotions as emotional consonance but explained that it is unclear if this is an aspect of emotional labour due to it involving genuine, rather than laborious, expression of emotion. Emotional Labour theory does not describe the role that felt emotions and their expression have on an individual's overall experience of emotional labour. For example, does the harmony of felt emotions and 'feeling rules' act as reparation for previous experiences of emotional labour, does it reinforce individuals' role constructs, or does it influence 'feeling rules'? For the SENCOs in this research, the role of felt emotions appeared complex. Sympathy, empathy and pity were felt and expressed and appeared, on the one hand, to have a motivational role for the SENCOs to work through challenging situations. However, these felt emotions also appeared to have the potential to encourage self-criticism for instances when the SENCOs had to say 'no' or when EHCP applications were not 'successful'.

6.3 Feeling adrift in need of an anchor

All the SENCOs experienced feeling alone during the EHCP process either by a sense of being different from other teachers in their schools or perceiving to have been abandoned by the local authority. The SENCOs in this research appeared to seek out connections with others for professional support both for confirmation of their understanding of processes and affirmations of their conclusions to build their self-confidence, as well as for emotional support, empathy from others, and to reduce feelings of isolation.

A prominent experience for the SENCOs was their need for support from professionals in other areas. This came across as a sense of abandonment by the LA, "…nobody had given me any information." (SENCO 1, line 496-497), in regards to procedural advice and understanding process, and a desire for professionals to confirm SENCOs judgements, "…as many professionals as possible saying the same thing…" (SENCO 3, line151-152). As previously discussed in the literature review research has reported SENCOs feeling isolated (Evans, 2013; Lewis and Ogilvie, 2003) but none have reported SENCOs feeling abandoned by the LA. A possible explanation for this sense of abandonment could be due to the demanding nature of the SENCO role on time, resources, and emotions. SENCOs do not always have the time to reflect on their situations and circumstances of others. The importance of reflectivity in supporting thinking and gaining detachment from a situation was emphasised by Kearns (2003). Further to this, Kearns (2003) reported that identifying learning process involved extended dialogue with others. Even though Kearns (2003) research was on SENCOs identifying learning at work, the conclusions made in regards to an individual's ability to think are relevant here. With the SENCOs in this research reporting feeling isolated engaging in extended dialogue in order to reflect and think is unlikely to have been occurring. For the SENCOs, being unable to reflect on the complexity of their experiences may have prevented them from engagement with their emotions, the reasons for those emotions arising, and thinking around the actions of parents, and potential explanations for parents actions. As Evans (2013 p.298) explained, "reflective practice is essential in schools in order to help staff maintain their thinking capacity when working with such complexity". Without the time to be able to think reflectively about the situations

SENCOs find themselves in, the SENCOs may have been making emotive conclusions as their capacity to reflect was hindered by their experience of isolation.

The SENCOs desire for support from other professionals appeared to be symptomatic of their own self-doubt, "…having the professional support saying, yes they have done a really good job actually…" (SENCO 4, line 85-86). The SENCOs self-doubt is consistent with Evans (2013) findings of SENCOs having the potential to perceive themselves to be not very good at their jobs. As highlighted in the literature review Lewis and Ogilvie (2003, p.47) found that SENCOs would use connections with other SENCOs in order to find support for their thinking and to "know that others are struggling to do the job in the same way and can offer advice, wisdom…". This is consistent with some of the SENCOs in this research, "…I met a group of local SENCOs who have become good friends and we are constantly emailing…" (SENCO 3, line 791-792). The SENCOs used connections with other SENCOs to reduce their feelings of isolation. However, the SENCOs did not share experiences of using online support in the form of a national online forum, which Lewis and Ogilvie (2003) reported. Instead the SENCOs spoke of their own personal forged connections. Lewis and Ogilvie (2003) did also report that SENCO-forum users utilised other sources of support as well as the SENCO-forum, such as colleagues in school or other colleagues in work. The SENCOs reported seeking out more personal connections outside of their school environment which could be reflective of wanting a more personal and meaningful connection with others who understood the role and challenges it could present. The SENCOs who had made these connections with other SENCOs shared how they sought professional advice, "…it's only actually

networking with the other SENCOs that you go, 'okay I need to do this, can you help

me?'" (SENCO 5, line 483-484). It seems that for the SENCOs, connections with other

SENCOs provided informal support, empathetic connections, and enabled them to

counter isolation and increase their confidence; they appeared to be using real

connections instead of the virtual ones that Lewis and Ogilvie (2003) reported.

Additional information would be needed to understand further the factors

influencing this but I would speculate that the timing of SENCOs completing their

NASENCO award, the proximity of their work places, and SENCO meetings in the LA,

increased the frequency of SENCO to SENCO contact, all of which could facilitate

these real, rather than virtual, connections.

For the SENCOs in this research, their desire for support from other professionals

could be indicative of them trying to reduce the emotional demands of their role by

looking for confirmation of their actions or affirmation of their responses. Kinman *et

al*. (2011) concluded that enhancing social support from various sources could help

teachers manage the emotional labour of the job more effectively, protect them

from burnout, and stimulate job satisfaction. In regards to emotional labour theory,

Kinman *et al.* (2011) described how employees who experience more supportive

interpersonal relationships at work may find undertaking the emotional demands of

their role to be less burdensome. Further to this, individuals who feel more

supported may report lower levels of emotional labour as the 'appropriate'

emotional response may arise more spontaneously (Kinman *et al.*, 2011). The links

with other SENCOs which were shared by some of the SENCOs may have been

experienced as having "massive" (SENCO 2, line 256) value as it may have allowed

them to disclose true feelings and develop their coping strategies to protect them against the demands of emotional labour. Being able to disclose personal emotional events, and 'true' feelings in a supportive environment, may help individuals to develop more successful coping strategies to protect them against the negative consequences of emotional labour, such as stress, burnout, and low job satisfaction (Kinman *et al.*, 2010).

In the literature reviewed, there was a lot of emphasis on SENCOs and being part of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and the amount of school support they would receive (Lewis, Neill, and Campbell, 1997; Layton, 2005; and Kearns, 2005). However, this was not described by the SENCOs in this research. However, for one SENCO the importance of support from the SLT and their understanding of the nature of the SENCO role was reflected in the time she was allocated to undertake her SENCO responsibilities, "…gave me more time actually than was advertised because we needed to build that relationship with people…" (SENCO 5, line 368-370). SLT understanding of the importance of building the SENCO-parent relationship, and the time needed to do this, provided SENCO 5 with a perception of in-school support. However, for the other SENCOs, the influence of the SLT did not emerge as an important aspect in their experience of working with parents through the EHCP process.

6.4 Differing roles, intimacy, and professionalism

The Lamb report (2009) emphasised the need for parents to be listened to and involved in the decisions that affected their children's education and this was

reflected in the Special Educational Needs and Disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years (CoP) (2015) which gave greater emphasis to parental involvement and the expectations of schools and, indirectly, the SENCO. Prior studies noted that SENCOs perceived these changes to require a greater investment of time, a greater role in advising parents, being a facilitator for parents, counselling parents, increased contention with parents, being an advocate for children and/or parents (Pearson *et al.,* 2015; Cole, 2005; Kearns, 2005; Mackenzie, 2013). The findings from this research are consistent with previous research's projections of experience and reported experience.

Pearson *et al.,* (2015) reported that SENCOs perceived that they would need to have excellent relationships with parents and that in order to develop these relationships an investment of time would be needed. This echoed earlier findings from Cole (2005) who reported that SENCOs were spending more time working with parents who knew their rights but could not get what they wanted. Previous research also reported that SENCOs perceived that they would have a greater role in advising parents and supporting parents (Pearson *et al.,* 2015). The findings from my research support these findings as spending a lot of time talking to parents, supporting them to fill out paperwork, advising and reassuring parents of the process, and supporting them by answering their questions were all important aspects of the SENCOs experiences of working with parents through the EHCP process.

Difficulties in the relationships with parents noted in previous research were supported by the experiences of the SENCOs in this research. Difficulties included, accommodating parental expectations with funding issues (Pearson *et al.,* (2015), "…parents want all this support but they don't get that this isn't going to happen because there isn't money…" (SENCO 3, line 292-293), and counselling of parents (Cole, 2005), "…almost becoming like a counsellor. …" (SENCO 4, line 635-637). The intimate knowledge of parents and children that was experienced by the SENCOs in this research had not been explored in the research that was found in the literature review. The SENCOs had shared a journey with parents and knew about the difficulties they were facing, or had faced, which evoked feelings of sympathy, empathy, and a desire to protect parents, as SENCO 5 (line 355-356) expressed, "…working together is not, it doesn't go far enough actually for what the relationship becomes…". This intimacy with parents made it difficult for the SENCOs to separate criticism of the role from themselves. The SENCOs took parents' upset and anger personally, "…I have had her shouting at me…" (SENCO 3, line 708), "…you think that the parents are trying to trip you up because you don't know what you're doing…" (SENCO 4, line 590-591). Edwards (2016) suggested that teachers utilise surface acting to maintain control in order to fulfil their professional role. This would fit the SENCOs' experiences of attempting to fulfil their professional responsibilities whilst working with parents through the EHCP process. A possible explanation for the SENCOs difficulty in separating themselves from the SENCO role might be provided by Emotional Labour theory in regards to role constructs. Hochschild, (1983) noted that identification with one's role may help to ease the need to use EL strategies as individuals who identify strongly with their role may be

more able to express genuine emotions, or use deep acting, to express the appropriate 'feeling rule'. However, with identification there is a risk of an individual becoming psychologically bound to a role and their well-being to be linked to the successes and failures in the role (Hochschild, 1983). For the SENCOs, they may have been over-identifying with their role and the difficulties experienced in the relationship were taken to be a reflection of their abilities in the SENCO role rather than attributed to other factors such as frustration with the process or incorrect information from another professional. Emotional labour theory does not go far enough to provide detail on how an individual develops their role constructs or identification with a role, which could help to provide a more detailed explanation for the many facets of the SENCO role that were experienced and their struggle with maintaining a professional role and not taking difficulties personally.

The SENCOs in this research reported having to take on many different roles when working with parents through the EHCP process: teaching, managing, comforting, facilitating, supporting, protecting, and counselling. These different roles were meeting different needs of the parents and responsibilities of the SENCO, in order to complete the task of submitting an EHCP application. A SENCO's many roles within their SENCO role was reported by Kearns (2005) who, as detailed in the literature review and in appendix LR8, described five roles that SENCOs undertook: arbiter, rescue, auditor, collaborator, and expert. Kearns (2005) arbiter role (clarifying concerns, making demands realistic, helping parents feel positive) has similarities to the roles of management and facilitator, which the SENCOs in this sample reported. The SENCOs also reported needing to manage the expectations of parents, clarify

parent's concerns and trying to keep parents positive through supporting and comforting them. Kearns (2005) noted that the arbiter role was concerned with the anxieties and demands of the parents, which appears to fit with the SENCOs experiences; "…parents came to me and said we're not… we want to have this in there but we can't get in touch with anyone…" (SENCO 1, line 287-289), "…when they get the letter they bring in the letter going, what's this? What does this mean?... So it does seem… it's always kind of… they'll come in and see me…" (SENCO 2, line 212-215). Further to this, Mackenzie (2013) reported that SENCOs perceived themselves to be an advocate/champion/fighter for children whose parents could not be. Detailing further that SENCOs often perceived themselves to be fighting against the LA. However, this did not emerge as a strong theme for the SENCOs in this research.

A possible explanation for the different role the SENCOs experienced might be provided by Reed (2001) who outlines that common uses of the term 'role' are prescriptive, static, and separate 'role' from 'person'. Reed (2001 p. 2) argues that the common uses of the term 'role' do not go far enough to explain how individuals "…formulate or discover, however intuitively, a regulating principle inside oneself which enables one…to manage what one does in relations to the requirements of the situation…". The SENCOs in this research, as previously discussed, prevented themselves, at times, from showing parents their true feelings, depending on the situations they were in; "…you don't want to upset the parents do you? I mean sometimes you do have to just be brutal." (SENCO 3, line 179). Reed (2001) speaks of a 'person-in-role' which incorporates a regulating principle inside an individual

that is truer to peoples' real experiences in working in the systems they belong to. A role is fashioned by the individual identifying the aims of the system, taking ownership of that aim; and choosing the actions and personal behaviour which from their position best contributes to achieving the aim (Reed, 2001). Due to the changing nature of circumstances (legislative changes, policy changes, new wider-system processes) a role is never static (Reed, 2001). The current wider system which the SENCOs in this research were working in had undergone vast legislative changes and part of the impact of these changes was the focus of this research: working with parents through the EHCP process. Reed (2001) uses the analogy of a yachtsman who knows the general direction in which they are heading but continually adjusting the sails to best advantage the conditions to achieve their goal. The SENCOs had an idea of the wider-systems aim (to provide the best education possible for children), or their schools aim when working with parents through the EHCP process (to gain an EHCP), and they draw upon the skills they have in order to get there.

Reed (2001) notes that an individual may have many roles within the same group that are all interlinked but different. A job description may provide some insight in to what is required to take a role but an individual also needs the necessary knowledge and skills to do the work and an understanding of the systems. The SENCOs reported undertaking lots of different roles (teaching parents; supporting parents; managing parents' expectations) in order to achieve the overall aim of meeting pupils need by gaining an EHCP. However, the SENCOs also experienced *'varying expectations of the SENCO role'*, which will be discussed in more detail later

in the chapter. This knowledge is then assimilated and used to find a way of working that will best achieve the goal (Reed, 2001). In other words, an individual is mentally constructing " a set of behavioural patterns so that they can act in the situation to achieve the desired goal…Role is the patterning of ideas by which a person organises their behaviour in relation to a specific situation" (Reed, 2001, p3). These sets of behavioural patterns have parallels to Hochschild's (1983, p. 7) constructionist concept of 'feelings rules' which outline how an individual should be feeling in a given situation in order to "produces the proper state of mind in others" in order to achieve a goal. For the SENCOs, different situations needed them to utilise a varied set of behavioural patterns, a different role, so they could act in situations to achieve their ultimate goal. Whether that was to maintain their relationship with parents by offering a comforting shoulder or protecting them from additional negative news; or managing parents' expectations by teaching them about schools capabilities, outcomes of the process, or their child's needs, in order to get through the EHCP process to support the outcomes for children.

6.5 Varying expectations of the SENCO role

The Code of practice (2015) added to the existing priority areas for the SENCO (Tissot, 2013, NASEN, 2015) although how these areas would translate in to the everyday SENCO role was unclear. The literature reviewed demonstrated that SENCOs experienced multiple roles within their SENCO role (Cole, 2005, Pearson *et al.*, 2015, Kearns, 2005, and MacKenzie, 2013) as well as there being variation between LAs and the expectations of the SENCO role being reported by the evaluation of the pathfinder programme (Hill, *et al.*2014a). The experiences and

situations of the SENCOs in this study are consistent with the view that the role of the SENCO differs from SENCO to SENCO in response to the needs of the parents. Layton (2005) and Cole (2005) report SENCOs experiencing others, such as parents, perceiving SENCOs to be a repository of all knowledge, resources, contacts, the lead responsibility for SEN, while Hill *et al.* (2014b) describe the potentially of taking on a 'keyworker' role in light of the new legislation. Some of the SENCOs in this research referred to a 'facilitator' role, which had similarities to the keyworker role: being a point of contact for parents and answering the queries about the process. The SENCOs experiences in this research are in accord with previous research in respect to experiencing other individuals such as parents and LA professionals, as having their own understanding of the SENCO role and responsibilities. The SENCOs in this research appeared to construct their own understanding of the SENCO role in the EHCP process from the information they gathered about the process but also from the needs of the parents; "…when they get the letter they bring in the letter going, what's this? What does this mean?... So it does seem… it's always kind of… they'll come in and see me…" (SENCO 2, line 212-215). However, the SENCOs perceived parents' understanding of the SENCO role to be different to their own through the actions of parents; "…they've kind of looked to me to tell them what to do …" (SENCO 1, line 66-67). Further to this, it appeared that the SENCOs also held a perception that other LA professionals held a different understanding of the responsibilities of the SENCO due to the perceived work that the SENCO did that they felt was the responsibility of other professionals; "…we didn't have facilitators involved…erm… apart from me being it…"(SENCO 2, line 496-497) and "…now I'm doing a lot more of the things that the SEN officer would have done on my behalf."

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(SENCO 3, line 763-764). The SENCOs in this research experienced varying expectations of the SENCO role from different individuals which caused some SENCOs to perceive they were taking on the responsibilities of other professionals or having to undertake a variety of roles to meet the needs or expectations of parents, as highlighted in *'differing roles, intimacy and professionalism'*.

Emotional Labour theory (Hochschild, 1983) focuses on 'feeling rules' that are overtly expressed, or covertly used, to inform an individual of how they should feel or be perceived to feel in situations and the effort they experience in complying with these rules. Differences in status or responsibilities and the uses of EL was highlighted by Robson and Bailey (2009) who noted that learning support assistants (LSAs) were perceived to be in a position to achieve a more natural relationship with students. However, EL theory does not go far enough to explain how an individual constructs their understanding of a role and the associated responsibilities and actions of the role, or how the role construct of others is experienced or impacts on display/feeling rules associated with the situations individuals find themselves in.

Reed's (2001) 'exploration of role' provides a possible explanation for the SENCOs' experiences of the variation in expectations of the SENCO role. Individuals mentally construct their role and how they act when undertaking their role; Reed (2001) described this as the 'psychological role'. Reed (2001) also described a 'sociological role': the expectations and intentions of other people in the system. A person-in-role manages themselves in relation to their current context (internal structures, social, political conditions) which are constantly changing, as well as the feelings,

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expectations, and attitudes of others in the system imposing their sociological roles on to the person. For the SENCOs, their context was changing; the new CoP legislation and the new EHCP processes. The SENCOs were having to manage their own understanding of what these changes meant to their psychological role as well as having to understand the sociological role others held, and tried to impose on them, covertly or overtly. As Reed (2001 p.4) outlines, "These complex circumstances and people holding sociological roles will influence the person-in-role but cannot define it. Only the person-in-role does this…".

Reed (2001) goes further to describe how an individual must find and make a role, in order to take a role. An individual must find a role by identifying the system boundaries they are working in, i.e. the classroom, the school, the LA. This is usually aided by the position they have been offered, e.g. a teacher, a SENCO, or an LSA. A role is then made by an individual examining the conditions of the system, its purpose, resources, constraints, an individual's own aspirations and feelings, and the attitude of others. This information helps them to construct their mental behavioural patterns to take the role - in other words, how to behave in order to achieve the task of the system. The SENCOs did this by identifying the system they were working in (the school and EHCP process) and used the guidance given to them through training, their experiences, and the perceived needs of their parents, to make their role. However, Reed (2001 p. 5) highlights that "the sociological role pressure from others' expectations may make the person-in-role question whether the purpose of taking the role in his/her mind is really for the benefit of the system or not". The discrepancy between the SENCOs' psychological role and the

sociological role of others was experienced by the SENCOs as taking on the work and responsibilities of others. The lack of clarity over the purpose of the SENCO role in the EHCP process could be perpetuating the discrepancy between those in the role of SENCO and those working with those in the role of SENCO. To reduce this gap, clearer guidance on the responsibilities and expectations of the SENCO role may facilitate a shared understanding of the SENCO role and reduce the experience of SENCOs feeling like they are undertaking the responsibilities of others.

Further to this, how the relationships between individuals in a working situation are viewed is useful in thinking about some of the variations in expectations of the SENCO role that the SENCOs experienced. Reed (2001) proposed two ways of seeing working relationships: personal: how an individual relates to and feels about another; or relatedness: being part of the same organisation and achieving the same task. The first way of viewing the relationship (personal) places prominence on getting to know people, being friendly, and judging the quality of the relations by liking or disliking, getting on with or not getting on with them. The second way of viewing relationships (relatedness) focuses on the tasks being worked on together, allowing for disagreement and challenge, without the fear of damaging the personal relationship. Reed's (2001) explanation of the types of relationships appears to fit with the experiences of the SENCOs and their experiences of the different role expectations from parents and other professionals.

The SENCOs described the personal elements of their relationships with parents and the *differing roles, intimacy and professionalism* they experienced when working

with parents that would fit with a relationship that is viewed as a personal one. The SENCOs placed importance on getting to know the parents/families of the child, being friendly; which also required emotional labour of supressing their own emotions and adhering to 'feeling rules' (Hochschild, 1983), whilst offering parents comfort and support, and getting on with them in order to move towards the overall aim: completing the EHCP process and ultimately meeting the child's needs. Conversely, the relationship the SENCO had with other professionals, who were brought together to achieve a shared aim (in the scope of this research: the EHCP process/meeting the child's needs) could be described as a relatedness relationship. The emphasis was on the task, not on liking or getting on with each other. There was not a need to understand or feel about the other person.

The differences in the two types of relationship could provide an explanation of the sociological role that the parents and other professionals held. Due to the personal relationship SENCOs had with them, parents may have felt more comfortable asking the SENCOs questions about the process (going to them with their difficulties about the process, or asking them for support and the SENCOs) which could be considered aspects of the 'keyworker role'. In order to maintain the relationship and getting on with parents, and meet the 'feeling rules' of the situations e.g. comforting someone who is upset, the SENCOs would fulfil these roles rather than re-directing them to another professional. The relatedness relationship the SENCO had with other professionals removed the 'feeling rules' so neither side were motivated to understand the emotional experience of the other. This could raise the question of whether other professionals are aware of the emotional demands on the SENCO. A

question that SENCO 1 expressed; "…I'm not sure whether they're even aware…
they must aware of how stressful dealing with the parents day to day in this
situation must be…" (line 398-400). For the SENCOs the lack of understanding of
other professionals, may have fed into their perception of being isolated/abandoned
and experienced this as potentially undertaking work that was not part of their
psychological role, due to meeting the display/feeling rules experienced with
parents.

6.5.1 Wider systems influencing the SENCO role

As highlighted in the introduction chapter working with parents through the
EHCP process is only one small part of the SENCO role. It is also important to note
that the SENCO role is not carried out in isolation. The SENCO is part of a system (the
school), within a system (the LA), within a system (the government). Although this
research is concerned with the individual experiences and perceptions of SENCOs
working with parents through the EHCP process it is important to highlight the
potential interactions that the wider system(s) may have on the SENCO role.

Open systems theory provides a framework to help facilitate thinking around the
SENCO role and the impact of the systems the SENCO role lies within.

Open systems theory's concept of open and closed systems can be applied to
schools. An open system is one which interacts with its environment in order to
survive whereas a closed system does not interact with its environment and
eventually will die (Roberts, 1994). An organisation as an open system can be
represented by a figure as seen in figure 3.

Figure 3: Figure to represent an organisation as an open system (taken from Roberts, 1994)
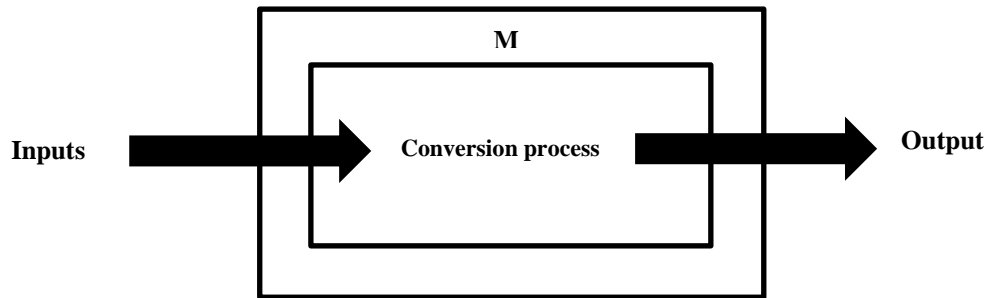
The box in the centre represents the system of activities required to perform a task of converting inputs into outputs, the outer box represents the boundary that separates the system from its environment and across which the systems exchanges with the environment take place (Roberts, 1994). For example, schools take in pupils; the conversion process could be described as teaching or educating them and outputs educated pupils. However, this is an overly simplified example. Schools are social systems in which people interact with one another in a co-ordinated way to achieve a shared goal. This highlights several important aspects of schools: "(1) they consist, ultimately of people; (2) they are goal-directed in nature; (3) they attain their goals through some form of coordinated effort; and (4) they interact with their external environment." (Lunenberg, 2010, pg. 1).

Schools are complex systems. There are a number of systems operating concurrently, each with its own particular function or task. The functions or tasks of all the 'subsystems' within an organisation need to be co-ordinated in order "to serve the needs of the organism as a whole" (Roberts, 1994 pg. 28). Occasionally the functions/tasks of the subsystems may be competing or at conflict with each other due to the resources needed, such as staffing, finance, or priorities. These conflicts may arise due to different systems having different interpretations of the *primary*

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task of the organisation. Hirschhorn (1990) as cited by Atkins, Kellner and Linklater (1997p. 142) describes how "organisations are driven by a primary task, which is their main purpose or goal of being". For example, the primary task of a school may be to educate pupils, that is how classroom teachers may define it, members of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) may define it as educating pupils to reach a certain academic level/target to meet government standards, SENCOs may define it as providing education that is inclusive for all pupils. Therefore decisions made, such as the introduction of the new CoP (2015) will be experienced by the different subsystems of the system in different ways. For the classroom teachers they may perceive this as having more challenging pupils in their class and making it more difficult to carry out the *primary task* of educating pupils, SLT may see this as adding additional complexities for pupils reaching a certain level, whilst SENCOs may feel this supports their *primary task* of schools providing inclusive education.

As outlined by open systems theory the subsystem that the SENCO works within is one of many subsystems within a complex system, a school. The school system in turn is one subsystem within a Local Authority, which in turn is one subsystem within the country. All of these systems have the potential to affect the SENCO role. The environment surrounding schools/LA includes the social, political, and economic forces that impinge on the school. The environment in the open systems model takes on added significance in this piece of research due to the impact that wider systems may have on the experiences that were shared by the SENCOs. The social, political, and economic contexts in which schools work are marked by pressures at the local and national level. Hence, schools need to manage and develop 'internal'

operations whilst concurrently monitoring the environment and anticipating and responding to external demands.

It could be argued that government legislation or guidance (in the area of education) has the potential to impact of the system that the SENCO works within in additional to the CoP, 2015, government guidance that may have affected the SENCO role could include; Keeping children safe in education (DfE, 2015), Educational Excellence Everywhere (DfE, 2015) Ensuring a good education for children who cannot attend school because of health needs (DfE 2013), The Equality Act 2010 and schools (DfE, 2014), Understanding and dealing with issues relating to parental responsibility (DfE, 2016), The Prevent duty (DfE, 2015).

Within the LA system there are systems which would influence SENCOs working with parents through the EHCP process, when thinking about the additional aspects of the SENCO role to the EHCP process. Relationships with parents of pupils with suspected additional needs are likely to have been forged prior to the decision to go through the EHCP process (assess, plan, do review cycle as outlined in the CoP, 2015). Additionally to this, as highlighted in the Department for Education (2015) paper 'Special educational needs and disability: supporting local and national accountability' parents can access local information, advice and support services (IASS) for information and support in arranging meetings and attending meetings. This is another system which could impact on the SENCO and the reported experiences of the SENCOs in this piece of research.

When thinking about the wider system and the findings of this research the complex system which the SENCOs worked may have contributed their experiences. The SENCOs' emotional *inner turmoil* may have been contributed to by their perceived

primary task of the system, the need to meet this task and the challenges they experienced due to other systems competing for resources. E.g. the SENCOs time, additional responsibilities (such as teaching) and what to prioritise. The SENCOs also may have the demands of developing their own 'internal' operations to meet new aspects of their role (in light of the new CoP, 2015 in particular the EHCP process) whilst concurrently monitoring the wider system to anticipate external demands. These additional pressures could have heightened SENCOs' *feeling adrift and in need of an anchor,* as adapting their own process and monitoring other systems could have been highly demanding tasks. As highlighted by Reed (2001) a person-in-role many need to take on many different roles in order to meet the overall goal. When thinking about this in conjunction with open systems theory the SENCOs may have experienced *differing roles* in order to work within their complex system of the school. Open systems theory also provides additional insight into the fourth theme: *varying expectations of the SENCO role*. The complex system which the SENCO is placed is within a larger system, the LA, as well as the environment, where parents and children are located. Each of these systems have their own *primary task* which, in the case of navigating the EHCP process, need to work in collaboration with each other to navigate through the EHCP process. Each of these systems' *primary tasks* could explain the varying expectations of the SENCO from different individuals.

6.6 Limitations of the research

The limitations of IPA and issues ensuring the quality of qualitative research were discussed in the Methodology chapter but will be briefly discussed here in

order to highlight the potential limitations that were relevant to this piece of research.

The use of individual's perceptions of their experiences could be considered a limitation. Willig (2008) questioned the extent to which participants are able to communicate the rich texture of their experience to a researcher when individuals were not used to expressing these things. IPA acknowledges this difficulty (Smith and Osborn, 2008) but highlights the role of the researcher in interpreting the individual's mental and emotional state from what they say. Further to this, the interviews required participants to disclose potentially personal information about their emotional experiences which ultimately a participant can chose not to disclose. The willingness of a participant to disclose such information could be considered a limitation. To minimise this, attempts were made by myself to make the participants feel comfortable and at ease during the interview process, such as reminding them of the purpose of the research, my motivations for the research area, anonymity, and the ordering of the interview questions. IPA's focus on perceptions, describing the lived experience rather than trying to explain the cause or origin (Willig, 2008) has been considered a limitation of the approach. However, due to the 'unexplored territory' of SENCOs working with parents/carers through the EHCP process, I would argue that there was great value in exploring the perceptions and lived experience of SENCOs as it will contribute valuable and detailed information to the field.

The active role of the researcher within the analysis impacts on the interpretation carried out (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). I recognised that my preconceptions could

not be 'bracketed off' and attempts were made, through adjustments to the analysis process, to minimise the influence of my preconception on the data. However, due to the active role of the IPA researcher claims with regard to the significance of any findings can be doubted. Therefore, it was important for me to follow guidelines for the assessment of validity and quality of qualitative research which have been previously outlined (Yardley, 2000, Yin, 2009) and discussed during the methodology chapter. By following the quality criteria (Yardley, 2000) and providing data to allow for an 'independent audit' to be carried out, an independent auditor can "ensure that the account produced is a credible one, not that it is the only credible one." (Smith, *et al.*, 2009). It is hoped that the transparency of the methodology, the selection of participants, data collection, data analysis, and researcher reflection and reflexivity demonstrates that this particular account has been produced systematically.

This research consisted of a small sample size of five primary SENCOs and therefore the findings are not readily generalisable to the wider SENCO population. Morgan (1983) argues that generalisation should not be the objective of all research projects and thinking should be in terms of theoretical transferability: it is up to the reader 'to make links between the analysis in an IPA study, their own personal and professional experience'. In order to support 'theoretical transferability', I have provided information about the LA in which the research took place and information about the SENCOs who participated.

The self-selecting nature of the sample should be considered when thinking about potential limitations of the research. Even though the method ensured that a homogenous sample was obtained, it is possible that the SENCOs who volunteered to participate had their own motives for doing so e.g. wanting to air their grievances about the EHCP process, or complain about particular difficulties experienced with parents. This is something that readers would need to be mindful of when thinking about the transferability of these findings. Despite this potential limitation, the convergence of experiences through the overarching themes demonstrated shared experiences between the SENCOs.

It is also important to recognise the tension between idiographic research and the applicability of the findings to SENCOs outside of this research and outside of the locality in which this research took place. As highlighted by (Marecek, 2003) qualitative research tends to be locally focussed and can suffer with criticisms to how generalizable it is. However as Marecek (2003) states "For some researchers, the goal is to provide local knowledge—that is, to address a specific problem or question." This research's aim was to provide a more accurate picture of the current SENCO role in light of the new CoP (2015) and its implementation in the LA in which the research took place. Therefore it is acknowledged that the findings from this research and the suggested implications may only be appropriate for the SENCOs in this research, or the area in which this research took place.

Yardley (2000 p. 223) argues that "the decisive criterion by which any piece of research must be judged is, arguably, its impact". I would argue that the

implementation of the EHCP process highlights its importance nationally; anything that could increase understanding of the experience of the professionals involved in the process and support them to improve outcomes is worthy for practitioners and policy makers. I feel that this research has given a voice to a previously quiet area of research and will encourage others, such as EPs, to reflect on possible implications for their own practice.

6.7 Implications of the findings

The overarching themes demonstrated experiences that the SENCOs in the sample shared. When considering these shared themes in relation to previous literature and psychological theory, a number of implications for practice can be suggested in relation to the role of the SENCO and other local authority professionals, in particular Educational Psychologists. These implications are suggested due to the experiences of the SENCOs in this piece of research and it is acknowledged that the experiences shared by the SENCOs in the sample may only represent the SENCOs themselves or those who share their local context.

It is thought that, through supporting SENCOs and increasing the understanding of the demands on the SENCO role (for both SENCOs and other professionals), SENCOs will be better equipped at working with parents and carers through the EHCP process and ultimately the outcomes for pupils will be improved.

The SENCOs in this research were subject to powerful internal emotions that they needed to manage in order to continue working with parents through the EHCP

process. The effort in controlling these emotions, and coping with the emotions of the parents, was high and potentially stressful. The ability to deal with highly emotional situations and powerful emotions in oneself may be personal qualities that school head-teachers should be mindful of when appointing individuals to the role of the SENCO. It is not enough to "…just been given it, 'oh, can you do that?' And they're also class teacher…" (SENCO 4, line 671-672). Further to this, schools need to be made aware and understand the demands of the SENCO role, the importance and necessity of the relationships they build with parents/carers and therefore the essentialness of SENCOs being provided with the time and resources to be able to undertake their role effectively. Educational Psychologists are well placed within the school systems to become champions of the SENCO role. Through Educational Psychologists increasing their own understanding of the emotional turmoil of SENCOs, they could support the awareness of the importance of the SENCO role in schools to head-teachers and schools. The SENCO role requires additional skills, knowledge, and status to ensure that the individual in the role can work effectively with parents through the EHCP process; and can undertake the other responsibilities of the role to ultimately ensure the right outcomes for children with SEND are achieved.

Training for individuals who take on the role of SENCO could be provided to support their understanding of the emotional demands of the SENCO role. This training could provide SENCOs with a psychological understanding of working with parents in challenging situations and could draw on theories such as Emotional Labour theory (Horchschild, 1983) and the construct of role (Reed, 2001). This could support

SENCOs to develop their awareness of the potential negative effects of working with stresses, conflict, and emotions, in order for them to be able to identify when they need to seek additional support. Additionally, training or dissemination of updated information about the EHCP process could provide support to SENCOs. The SENCOs shared their experiences of valuing 'formalised' support (documentation, liaising with SEN officers), which increased their confidence in undertaking their responsibilities. However, when the SENCOs were unsure who to contact or to where to find information from they felt increasingly isolated and unsupported, for example, tribunal information or tribunal support. Clarity of the available support for SENCOs would enable SENCOs to know who to contact or would reveal support that needs to be put in place.

Some of the SENCOs overcame the lack of formalised support by contacting other SENCOs that they had forged connections with. These connections were experienced as invaluable and reduced the isolation that the SENCOs felt. I believe that this informal support needs to be formalised in order for every SENCO to have access to, and benefit from, the support that peers can provide. As Kinman *et al.* (2010) concluded, connections with other professionals allow for 'true' experiences to be shared and thus help individuals cope with the emotional demand of controlling their emotions which could help reduce the negative effects of invoking emotional labour techniques such as burnout. In the LA which the research took place there are already existing meetings that SENCOs in a designated area attend. These meetings already have a designated purpose but demonstrate already existing groups of SENCOs which could be utilised for peer support. Educational

Psychologists could play a crucial role in the development of these peer support groups as they could contribute their psychological understanding of peer support, models of peer supervision, and they could facilitate the implementation of the peer support groups. This could be done through training, supporting the set up and running of peer supervision groups, eventually leading to SENCOs running the groups independently with Educational Psychologist monitoring the use and fidelity of the groups to peer supervision practices.

Another possible way of offering SENCOs support could be through individual supervision. As Evans (2013, p. 298) highlighted "reflective practice is essential in schools in order to help staff maintain their thinking capacity when working with such complexity". For the SENCOs in this research the demands of their role (paperwork; meetings; and applications), left little, if any time, for them to engage in reflective practice. Further to this, the sole nature of the SENCO role left the SENCOs feeling isolated and alone. Supervision could provide a safe, confidential space for SENCOs to maintain their thinking capacity, reflect on their experiences, share their true emotions, and gain an 'outsiders' perspective, as well as a supportive connection with another professional, in order for them to reflect, learn, and move forward in their work. Supervision for SENCOs could be provided by Educational Psychologists due to their psychological knowledge, their experience of working with schools, their existing presence in the school system, their understanding of the dynamics within schools, their understanding of the other systems that SENCOs work in, i.e. the EHCP process, as well as EPs knowledge of power dynamics and the

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challenge of managing power/control in relationships, a poignant experience that two SENCOs experienced.

Finally, the discrepancy the SENCOs experienced between their own role expectations in the EHCP process and the expectations of parents and other professionals could be addressed through clearer definitions of the roles and responsibilities of all professionals involved in the EHCP process. I am not suggesting prescriptive and restrictive job descriptions as the SENCO role needs to be flexible in order to allow adaptation in response to the needs of parents/carers and children. Rather, clarity of the responsibilities of professionals so that the SENCO and other professional fully understand their roles so that the varying expectations of the SENCO role are reduced. This could support SENCOs construction of their role and potentially reduce their experiences or perceptions of carrying out other professionals responsibilities. Clarity around the SENCO role would also enable SENCOs to be clear about what their role is in meetings, for example what they are able to offer the pupil and parent in terms of their role remit. Many professionals are able to work in this way including Educational Psychologists. Educational Psychologists could support SENCOs working in this way through modelling their practice to SENCOs. Further to this, the clarity of professionals' roles in the EHCP process could ensure that parents/carers are not left without the information that they need or an EHCP application not being made. Example of this are, parents not being informed of specialist provision in the area, parents not being made aware of the difficulties their child may be experiencing, parents not aware of the support available to them i.e. parent partnership groups, EHCP applications being left for the

next provision to complete, and whether the role of a 'keyworker' or 'facilitator' exists in the LA, and if so, who undertakes this role.

The findings and implications of this research are due to be disseminated to the Educational Psychology Service in which the research took place in June 2016 during a Continuous Professional Development day. A summary sheet of the overarching themes and the proposed implications of the findings (see appendix D1) were disseminated via email to the SENCOs who participated in the research and indicated their interest in receiving a summary.

6.8 Potential areas for further research

This research aimed to gain insight into SENCOs experiences of working with parents/carers through the EHCP process in order to increase awareness, knowledge, and understanding of the SENCO experience. I feel that this research has demonstrated the importance of in-depth research with SENCOs and future research in this area is needed in order to support understanding of the SENCO role in order to strengthen it. Now that this research has provided knowledge of the experiences of SENCOs working with parents through the EHCP process, future research could focus on particular aspects of SENCOs experiences, for example, the skills SENCOs perceive they need in working with parents/carers through the EHCP process. This information could inform SENCO training award programs, or training that LAs could offer to support the effectiveness of those in the SENCO role.

The generalisability of the findings of this research to SENCOs in other areas of this LA and LAs from other areas of the country would be interesting. This would allow an understanding of whether the experiences of the SENCOs in this research are shared by SENCOs in other areas and whether the different contexts that SENCOs are in (socio-economic status of the catchment of the school, urban or rural locality, model of EHCP application applied by the LA) affects SENCOs experiences. This information could provide insight into where fewer challenges are experienced and how this could be adapted to support SENCOs who experience more challenges.

Additionally, research into the experiences of parents/carers working with SENCOs through the EHCP process (as government research focused more broadly on the experiences of families on the whole EHCP process) could provide insight into how others perceive the role of the SENCO. This could inform SENCOs and other professionals of the characteristics that parents/carers find supportive, helpful and useful, or what else they would like from SENCOs in ordered to be supported through the process.

Further research in to Emotional Labour Theory (Hochschild, 1983) and SENCOs could provide evidence of the use of emotional labour strategies in SENCOs working with parents, as previous research has investigated emotional labour in teachers in their interactions with students. Additionally, research into emotional consonance and its affects, possibly restorative, could provide informative information for the area of emotional labour. This research has suggested that SENCOs are managing

their emotions and could be utilising emotional labour techniques. However, more explicit research would provide stronger evidence.

Research in to the use of peer supervision/supervision for supporting SENCOs in their work could be useful to add to the evidence-base of such systematic interventions and the use of them with SENCOs to support their emotional well-being and indirectly supporting individual pupils and their families.

7. Conclusion

The aim of this piece of research was to *'explore the experiences of Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators' (SENCOs) working with parents/carers through the new Education, Health, Care, Plan (EHCP) process'* in order to provide a more accurate picture of the current SENCO experience in light of the new SEND CoP and inform professionals, such as Educational Psychologists. This research was undertaken due to the recent introduction of a new SEND Code of Practice and the emphasis of accountability on schools, and therefore SENCOs, in involving parents/families in decisions which affect them. The importance of this research was apparent due to the lack of research in this area and government evaluative studies focussing on parents' experiences of the EHCP process (Thom *et al.*, 2015, Craston, *et al.*, 2014, Hill, *et al.*, 2014a, and Hill, *et al.*, 2014b).

The SENCOs experiences of working with parents through the EHCP process was complex. However, four overarching themes arose from the Interpretative analysis: *Inner turmoil of SENCO, feeling adrift in need of an anchor, Differing roles, intimacy and professionalism,* and *Varying expectations of the SENCO role.* Emotional Labour theory (Hochschild, 1983) and the exploration of role (Reed, 2001) helped to understand the experiences of the SENCOs in this research. Emotional labour theory provided an understanding of the *Inner turmoil of SENCO* in regards to the controlling and managing of their emotions that the SENCOs were experiencing when working with parents. The SENCOs may have controlled their own feelings (through suppression, surface acting or deep acting) in order to express feelings that would promote parents to continue to work with them (adhering to 'feeling rules').

The SENCOs' experiences of *feeling adrift in need of an anchor* reflected their desire

for support from other professionals. This could have been indicative of them trying

to reduce the emotional demands of their role as it may have allowed them to

disclose true feelings and develop their coping strategies to protect themselves

against the negative effects of emotional labour: stress and burn out. The *intimacy*

that the SENCOs shared with parents could have facilitated the SENCOs

identification with the SENCO role, as this may have helped ease the need to invoke

emotional labour strategies due to being able to express genuine emotions that

were in accordance to the 'feeling rules'. However, over-identification carried a risk

of becoming psychologically bound to a role and for their own well-being to be

linked to the successes and failures in the role. For the SENCOs, they may have been

over identifying with their role as the difficulties they experienced in their

relationships, and fantasy or real failure to gain an EHCP, were taken to be a

reflection of their abilities in the SENCO role. The 'psychological role' (Reed, 2001)

provided an understanding of the *differing roles* that the SENCOs experienced whilst

the 'sociological role' provided an understanding of the impact of *varying*

expectations of the SENCO role. The SENCOs had to manage their own

understanding of what these changes meant to their psychological role as well as

having to understand the sociological role others held and tried to impose on them,

covertly or overtly. Further to this, the different types of relationships the SENCO

had with parents (personal), and with other professionals (relatedness), provided an

explanation of the different expectations of others. Furthermore, the lack of

understanding from other professionals, potentially due to the absence of an

emotional relationship, may have fed in to the SENCOs perceptions of being

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isolated/abandoned by the LA and undertaking work that was not part of their psychological role, due to meeting the display/feeling rules experienced with parents.

Limitations of the chosen methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, and the steps taken to minimise and make clear these limitations to the reader were discussed. Limitations of the participant size and the self-selecting nature of the sample were highlighted as well as issues with qualitative research. Nevertheless, I believe that this research has provided in-depth knowledge to a previously un-researched area and as such is a valid piece of research (Yardley, 2000). The implications of this research were highlighted as:

- increased awareness of the role of the SENCO to schools to ensure suitability and capability of the individual appointed and for the resources to be provided

- training to increase SENCOs' understanding of the potential impact of emotions involved in their work

- formalised support for SENCOs in the form of supervision and peer supervision

- and clarity of roles of professionals involved in the EHCP processes to ensure a shared understanding of responsibilities to ensure the best outcomes for children and their families.

The role of Educational Psychologists in supporting these implications was noted. Further research to continue expanding knowledge in the area of SENCOs working with parents/carers in the EHCP process was highlighted.

Reflections about the research journey

When I first began this piece of research I was surprised at the lack of research in to SENCOs' perceptions or experiences of working with parents despite the 'liaising with parents of children with SEN' having been highlighted in the Code of Practice since 1991 and the wealth of research in other areas where teachers and parents work together. This fuelled me down my research path. As I have already acknowledged, I believe that the SENCO role is an integral role, not only in the EHCP process, but in ensuring that the best outcomes for children with SEND are achieved.

This research has expanded my knowledge and skills in carrying out research. It has been a perplexing journey at times, a testing time at others (especially during analysis), but ultimately a privilege in being trusted by my participants to hear their experiences, to analyse them and to have the responsibility of sharing their experiences with others to promote the suggested adaptations to practice in order to support SENCOs and ultimately support children and their families.

I feel that my understanding of the role of the SENCO and the demands of their work has been greatly increased by my research and I feel that this knowledge will shape the way I work with SENCOs as an Educational Psychologist.

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*Reference has been edited to maintain anonymity of the LA in which this piece of

research took place.

Appendix LR1: Search terms employed to identify sources of information

Appendix LR2: Inclusion/exclusion criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Published in the English Language	Unpublished work
Focus of research is SENCOs	Participants working in settings outside of the United Kingdom
SENCOs working in a primary setting in England.	Published prior to 1994
Published after 1994 (original code of practice was published in 1994)	
Research outcomes relate to SENCOs and parents and/or SENCOs and support.	

Appendix LR3: reasons for exclusion of records

Criteria were applied sequentially in the order below

	SENCO + Support	SENCO + relationships	SENCO + Parent
Reason for exclusion	**Number of records excluded**	**Number of records excluded**	**Number of records excluded**
1. Study is unpublished	0	0	0
2. Study is not published in the English Language.	0	0	0
3. Book or book review or editorial	32	12	2
4. Published prior to 1994.	0	0	0
5. Not focused on SENCOs.	21	12	3

6. SENCOs not working in Primary age range	7	2	1
7. Investigating SENCOs working outside of England, UK.	7	7	2
Total number of excluded records	67	33	8

Appendix LR4: Expanded search terms

	Additional Search terms used
SENCO	Special educational needs co-ordinator OR special educational needs coordinator
Support	Help OR aid OR assist* OR guid* OR advi* OR comfort
Parent	Parent*OR mother* OR mum* OR father* OR dad* OR care-giv* OR care giv*,
Relationship	Relation* OR associat* OR alliance OR contact OR exchange OR liaison OR link

Appendix LR5: screen shots evidencing records returned from databases

Screen shot evidencing records returned from PsycINFO database

Screen shot evidencing records returned from ERIC database for SENCO + search terms (1)

Screen shot evidencing records returned from ERIC database for SENCO + search terms (2)

Screen shot evidencing records returned from ERIC database for SENCO + search terms (3)

Appendix LR6: Tables to show excluded records for search terms SENCO and support and the reason why.

Record	Reason for exclusion
Abbott, L. (2007). Northern Ireland Special Educational Needs Coordinators creating inclusive environments: An epic struggle. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 22*(4), 391-407.	SENCOs working outside of England, UK.
Abbott, L., McConkey, R., & Dobbins, M. (2011). Key players in inclusion: Are we meeting the professional needs of learning support assistants for pupils with complex needs? *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 26*(2), 215-231. doi:10.1080/08856257.2011.563608	Not focused on SENCOs.
Bray, A. (2009). Review of Learning from behaviour: How to understand and help 'challenging' children in school. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 25*(2), 189-189	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Burton, D., & Goodman, R. (2011). Perspectives of SENCos and Support Staff in England on Their Roles, Relationships and Capacity to Support Inclusive Practice for Students with Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties. *Pastoral Care in Education, 29*(2), 133 - 149.	SENCOs not working in primary age range.
Carabine, B., & Downton, R. (2000). Specific learning difficulties and peer support. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 16*(4), 487-494. doi:10.1080/713666111	Not focused on SENCOs.
Chamarette, M. (2006). Review of Dyslexia. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 22*(1), 87-88.	Not focused on SENCOs.
Chapman, S. (2003). Copying letters can help avoid communications nightmare. *BMJ: British Medical Journal, 326*(7386), 449-449.	Not focused on SENCOs.
Cowne, E., & Robertson, C. (2005). Editorial. *Support for Learning, 20*(2), 50-52.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Cross, J. (2008). Review of Coordinating special education needs: A guide for the early years. *Support for Learning, 23*(4), 213-214.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Dennis, R. (2004). Delivering educational psychology services to non-maintained early years settings: Inclusion ABC. *Educational and Child Psychology, 21*(2), 26-38.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Derrington, C., & Groom, B. (2004). *A Team Approach to Behaviour Management: A Training Guide for SENCOs working with Teacher Assistants.* California, USA: SAGE Publications.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.

Devecchi, C., & Rouse, M. (2010). An exploration of the features of effective collaboration between teachers and teaching assistants in secondary schools. *Support for Learning, 25*(2), 91-99.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Dockrell, J. E., & Lindsay, G. (2007). Identifying the educational and social needs of children with specific speech and language difficulties on entry to secondary school. *Educational and Child Psychology, 24*(4), 101-115.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Ekins, A. (2011). *The Changing Face of Special Educational Needs: Impact and Implications for SENCOs and Their Schools.* Florence, USA: Routledge.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Ellis, S., & Tod, J. (2005). Including SENCOs in Behaviour Improvement: An Exploration of the Behaviour and Attendance of Strand of the National Strategies. *Support for Learning, 20*(2), 83 - 89.	SENCOs not working in primary age range.
Emam, M. M., & Farrell, P. (2009). Tensions experienced by teachers and their views of support for pupils with autism spectrum disorders in mainstream schools. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 24*(4), 407-422.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Evans, J., & Benefield, P. (2001). Systematic reviews of education research: Does the medical model fit? *British Educational Research Journal, 27*(5), 527-541. doi:10.1080/01411920120095717	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Gaile, J. (2009). Review of Supporting speech, language and communication needs: Working with students aged 11 to 19. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 24*(2), 224-226.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Garner, P. (2014). Editorial. *Support for Learning, 29*(1), 2-6.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Gathercole, S., & Alloway, T. (2008). *Working Memory and Learning: A Practical Guide for Teachers*. California, USA: SAGE Publications.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Glazzard, J. (2013). Resourced Provision: The impact of Inclusive Practices on a Mainstream Primary School. *Support for Learning, 28*(3), 92 - 96.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Golder, G., Norwich, B., & Bayliss, P. (2005). Preparing Teachers to Teach Pupils with Special Educational Needs in More Inclusive Schools: Evaluating a PGCE Development. *British Journal of Special Education, 32*(2), p92-99.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Goodwin, J. (2011). Review of The SENCO survival guide. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties, 16*(4), 442-444.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Göransson, K., Lindqvist, G., & Nilholm, C. (2015). Voices of special educators in Sweden: A total-population study. *Educational Research, 57*(3), 287-304.	SENCOs working outside of England, UK.
Hartas, D. (2008). Review of Working memory and learning: A practical guide for teachers. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 23*(3), 282-283.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Hartshorne, M. (2009). Review of Supporting speech, language and communication needs. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 25*(2), 276-277.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Harvey, W. (2006). Review of Guidelines for a speech and language friendly school. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 22*(1), 126-128.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Hastings, C. (2013). Review of Building resilience: A skills-based programme to support achievement in young people. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 29*(2), 215-216.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Hatcher, P. J. (2004). Review of Early Reading Development and Dyslexia. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 9*(4), 196-196.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Hawking, L. (2012). Review of Street Wise: A programme for educating young people about citizenship, rights, responsibilities and the law. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 28*(1), 111-112.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Hayes, J. (2010). Review of Pupil-friendly IEPs and target sheets. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 26*(3), 308-308.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Hills, G. (2011). *The Equality Act for Educational Professionals: A Simple*	Book or book review or editorial or

Guide to Disability Inclusion in Schools. Florence, USA: Routledge.	commentary.
Hodge, N. (2007). Review of Key issues in special education. Raising standards of pupils' attainment and achievement. *Disability & Society, 22*(1), 109-110.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Jeffes, B. (2014). Review of Word journeys: Assessment-guided phonics, spelling and vocabulary instruction (2nd edition). *Educational Psychology in Practice, 30*(3), 327-328.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Jones, C. (2004). *Supporting Inclusion in the Early Years. Supporting Early Learning.* Columbus, Ohio, USA: Open University Press	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Kaehne, A., & Beyer, S. (2009). Transition Partnerships: The Views of Education Professionals and Staff in Support Services for Young People with Learning Disabilities. *British Journal of Special Education, 36*(2), p112-119.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Kingston, D. (2004). Starting with inclusion: The East Sussex inclusion strategy and training for early years and childcare. *Educational and Child Psychology, 21*(2), 80-95.	SENCOs not working in primary age range.
Lauchlan, F., & Greig, S. (2015). Educational Inclusion in England: Origins, Perspective and Current Directions. *Support for Learning, 30*(1), 69 - 82.	Not focussed on SENCOs
Lewis, A., & Neill, S. (2001). Portable computers for teachers and support services working with pupils with Special Educational Needs: An evaluation of the 1999 United Kingdom Department for Education and Employment scheme. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 32*(3), 301-315.	Not focussed on SENCOs
Lindqvist, G. (2013). SENCOs: Vanguards or in vain? *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 13*(3), 198-207.	SENCOs working outside of England, UK
Lindqvist, G., & Nilholm, C. (2013). Making Schools Inclusive? Educational Leaders' Views on How to work with Children in Needs of Special Support. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 17*(1), 95 - 110.	SENCOs working outside of England, UK.
Lindqvist, G., & Nilholm, C. (2014). Promoting inclusion? 'Inclusive' and effective head teachers' descriptions of their work. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 29*(1), 74-90.	SENCOs working outside of England, UK.
Lindqvist, G., Nilholm, C., Almqvist, L., & Wetso, G. M. (2011). Different agendas? The views of different occupational groups on special needs education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 26*(2), 143-157.	SENCOs working outside of England, UK
Lingard, T. (2001). Does the Code of Practice Help Secondary School SENCos To Improve Learning? *British Journal of Special Education, 28*(4), 187 - 190.	SENCOs not working in primary age range.
Maher, A. (2013). Statements of special educational needs and mainstream secondary physical education in north-west England. *British Journal of Special Education, 40*(3), 130-136.	SENCOs not working in primary age range.
Maher, A., & MacBeth, J. (2014). Physical Education, Resources and Training: The Perspective of Special Educational Needs Coordinators Working in Secondary Schools in North-West England. *European Physical Education Review, 20*(1), 90 - 103.	SENCOs not working in Primary age range
Martin, J. (2006). Review of Ready to learn: How to help your pre-schooler succeed. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 22*(1), 90-91.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Moyse, R., & Porter, J. (2015). The experience of the hidden curriculum for autistic girls at mainstream primary schools. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 30*(2), 187-201.	Not focussed on SENCOs
Pawley, H., & Tennant, G. (2008). Student Perceptions of Their IEP Targets. *Support for Learning, 23*(4), 183 - 186.	Not focussed on SENCOs
Pearson, S. (2005). Review of A team approach to behaviour management: A training guide for SENCOs working with Teaching Assistants. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 20*(1), 121-122.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Pickering, S., & Thompson, D. (1996). Individual education plans - process or product? *Educational and Child Psychology, 13*(3),	Not focussed on SENCOs.

86-93.	
Poon-McBrayer, K. F. (2007). Implementing the SENCo System in Hong Kong: An Initial Investigation. *Educational Review, 59*(2), p147-160	SENCOs working outside of England, UK.
Rayner, S. (2006). Review of Key issues in special education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 21*(3), 351-353.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Rayner, S. (2007). *Managing Special and Inclusive Education*. California, USA: SAGE Publications.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Rees, A. (2006). Review of Dyslexia? Assessing and reporting. The Patoss guide. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 22*(1), 85-86.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Roaf, C. (2005). Editorial -- and farewell. *Support for Learning, 20*(4), 154-154	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Sibanda, P. P. (2008). Review of Supporting inclusive practice. *Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties, 13*(1), 73-73.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Sinclair, L. (1997). Researching classroom practice in order to accommodate more able children. *Support for Learning, 12*(2), 81-82.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
St John, P. (2010). Review of Working memory and learning: A practical guide for teachers. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 26*(2), 199-200.	Book or book review or editorial
Taylor, M. (2005). The Development of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator Role in a Higher Education Setting. *Support for Learning, 20*(1), p22-27.	SENCOs not working in primary age range.
Tennant, G. (2007). IEPs in Mainstream Secondary Schools: An Agenda for Research. *Support for Learning, 22*(4), 204 - 208.	Not focussed on SENCOs
Vardill, R. (1996). Imbalance in the numbers of boys and girls identified for referral to educational psycholgists: Some issues. *Support for Learning, 11*(3), 123-129.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
White, G. (2010). Balancing Acts in the Half-Way Houses: The Role of Resources Provisions in Mainstream Schools. *British Journal of Special Education, 37*(4), 175 - 179.	Not focussed on SENCOs
Whitfield, S. (2013). Review of AD/HD success! Solutions for boosting self-esteem: The diary method for ages 7–17. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 29*(3), 330-331.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Wilson, J. (2006). Review of Inclusion Strategies: Supporting Effective Inclusion and Attainment. *Deafness & Education International, 8*(2), 101-103.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Wolfendale, S. (2005a). Review of Supporting inclusion in the early years. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 75*(1), 146-146.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Wolfendale, S. (2005b). The RoutledgeFalmer Reader in Inclusive Education. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 21*(4), 349-350.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.

Table to show excluded records for search terms SENCO and relationship and the reason why.

Record	Reason for exclusion
Bray, A. (2009). Review of Learning from behaviour: How to understand and help 'challenging' children in school. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 25*(2), 189-189.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Burton, D., & Goodman, R. (2011). Perspectives of SENCos and Support Staff in England on Their Roles, Relationships and Capacity to Support Inclusive Practice for Students with Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties. *Pastoral Care in Education, 29*(2), 133 - 149.	SENCOs not working in primary age range.
Chapman, S. (2003). Copying letters can help avoid communications nightmare. *BMJ: British Medical Journal, 326*(7386), 449-449.	Not focussed on SENCOs
Dockrell, J. E., & Lindsay, G. (2007). Identifying the educational and social needs of children with specific speech and language difficulties on entry to secondary school. *Educational and Child Psychology, 24*(4), 101-115.	Not focussed on SENCOs
Doran, A. (2012). Meeting with teachers and other school staff. In L. French & R.	Book or book review or

Klein (Eds.), *Therapeutic practice in schools: Working with the child within: A clinical workbook for counsellors, psychotherapists and arts therapists.* (pp. 124-130). New York, NY, US: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.	editorial or commentary.
Ekins, A. (2011). *The Changing Face of Special Educational Needs: Impact and Implications for SENCOs and Their Schools.* Florence, USA: Routledge.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Emam, M. M., & Farrell, P. (2009). Tensions experienced by teachers and their views of support for pupils with autism spectrum disorders in mainstream schools. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 24*(4), 407-422.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Gaile, J. (2009). Review of Supporting speech, language and communication needs: Working with students aged 11 to 19. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 24*(2), 224-226.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Gathercole, S., & Alloway, T. (2008). *Working Memory and Learning: A Practical Guide for Teachers*. California, USA: SAGE Publications.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Glazzard, J. (2013). Resourced Provision: The impact of Inclusive Practices on a Mainstream Primary School. *Support for Learning, 28*(3), 92 - 96.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Golder, G., Norwich, B., & Bayliss, P. (2005). Preparing Teachers to Teach Pupils with Special Educational Needs in More Inclusive Schools: Evaluating a PGCE Development. *British Journal of Special Education, 32*(2), p92-99.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Göransson, K., Lindqvist, G., & Nilholm, C. (2015). Voices of special educators in Sweden: A total-population study. *Educational Research, 57*(3), 287-304.	Investigating SENCOs working outside of England, UK.
Gray, C. (2009). A qualitatively different experience: Mainstreaming pupils with a visual impairment in northern Ireland. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 24*(2), 169-182.	Investigating SENCOs working outside of England, UK.
Gray, C. (2009). A Qualitatively Different Experience: Mainstreaming Pupils with a Visual Impairment in Northern Ireland. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 24*(2), 169 - 182.	Investigating SENCOs working outside of England, UK.
Hartshorne, M. (2009). Review of Supporting speech, language and communication needs. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 25*(2), 276-277.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Hastings, C. (2013). Review of Building resilience: A skills-based programme to support achievement in young people. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 29*(2), 215-216.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Hills, G. (2011). *The Equality Act for Educational Professionals: A Simple Guide to Disability Inclusion in Schools.* Florence, USA: Routledge.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Humphrey, N., & Symes, W. (2013). Inclusive Education for Pupils with Autistic Spectrum Disorders in Secondary Mainstream Schools: Teacher Attitudes, Experience and Knowledge. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 17*(1), 32 – 46	SENCOs not working in primary age range.
Lewis, A., & Neill, S. (2001). Portable computers for teachers and support services working with pupils with Special Educational Needs: An evaluation of the 1999 United Kingdom Department for Education and Employment scheme. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 32*(3), 301-315.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Lindqvist, G., & Nilholm, C. (2013). Making Schools Inclusive? Educational Leaders' Views on How to work with Children in Needs of Special Support. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 17*(1), 95 - 110.	Investigating SENCOs working outside of England, UK.
Lindqvist, G., & Nilholm, C. (2014). Promoting inclusion? 'Inclusive' and effective head teachers' descriptions of their work. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 29*(1), 74-90.	Investigating SENCOs working outside of England, UK.
Lindqvist, G., Nilholm, C., Almqvist, L., & Wetso, G. M. (2011). Different agendas? The views of different occupational groups on special needs education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 26*(2), 143-157.	Investigating SENCOs working outside of England, UK.
Moyse, R., & Porter, J. (2015). The experience of the hidden curriculum for autistic girls at mainstream primary schools. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 30*(2), 187-201.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Pearson, S. (2011). Narrowing the Gap between "Intention and Reality": The case of Special Educational Needs Governors in English Schools. *Educational*	Not focussed on SENCOs.

Management Administration & Leadership, 39(6), 695 - 711.	
Poon-McBrayer, K. F. (2007). Implementing the SENCo System in Hong Kong: An Initial Investigation. *Educational Review, 59*(2), p147-160.	Investigating SENCOs working outside of England, UK.
Rayner, S. (2007). *Managing Special and Inclusive Education*. California, USA: SAGE Publications.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Roaf, C. (2005). Editorial -- and farewell. *Support for Learning, 20*(4), 154-154.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Rose, R. (2014). Inclusion and the standards agenda: A reflective commentary. *Support for Learning, 29*(1), 54-56.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Sanagi, T. (2009). Teachers' attitudes towards the roles of special educational needs coordinators (SENCO) in mainstream schools: Views of colleague teachers at primary and secondary schools in Greater Manchester. *Japanese Journal of Special Education, 46*(6), 503-514	Not focussed on SENCOs.
St John, P. (2010). Review of Working memory and learning: A practical guide for teachers. *Child Language Teaching and Therapy, 26*(2), 199-200.	Book or book review or editorial
Wearmouth, J., Smith, A. P., & Soler, J. (2004). Computer conferencing with access to a 'guest expert' in the professional development of special educational needs coordinators. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 35*(1), 81-93.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Wedell, K. (2005). Dilemmas in the Quest for Inclusion. *British Journal of Special Education, 32*(1), 3 - 11.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Whitfield, S. (2013). Review of AD/HD success! Solutions for boosting self-esteem: The diary method for ages 7–17. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 29*(3), 330-331.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Woods, K., Stothard, J., Lydon, J., & Reason, R. (2013). Developing policy and practice for dyslexia across a local authority: A case study of educational psychology practice at organisational level. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 29*(2), 180-196	Not focussed on SENCOs.

Table to show records excluded from the search terms SENCO and parent

Record	Reason for exclusion
Abbott, L., McConkey, R., & Dobbins, M. (2011). Key players in inclusion: Are we meeting the professional needs of learning support assistants for pupils with complex needs? *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 26*(2), 215-231.	Investigating SENCOs working outside of England, UK.
Agaliotis, I., & Kalyva, E. (2011). A Survey of Greek General and Special Education Teachers' Perceptions regarding the Role of the Special Needs Coordinator: Implications for Educational Policy on Inclusion and Teacher Education. *Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies, 27*(3), 543 - 551.	Investigating SENCOs working outside of England, UK.
Burton, D., & Goodman, R. (2011). Perspectives of SENCos and Support Staff in England on Their Roles, Relationships and Capacity to Support Inclusive Practice for Students with Behavioural Emotional and Social Difficulties. *Pastoral Care in Education, 29*(2), 133 - 149.	SENCOs not working in primary age range.
Emam, M. M., & Farrell, P. (2009). Tensions experienced by teachers and their views of support for pupils with autism spectrum disorders in mainstream schools. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 24*(4), 407-422.	Not focussed on SENCOs.
Hills, G. (2011). *The Equality Act for Educational Professionals: A Simple Guide to Disability Inclusion in Schools.* Florence, USA: Routledge.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Jones, C. (2004). *Supporting Inclusion in the Early Years. Supporting Early Learning.* Columbus, Ohio, USA: Open University Press.	Book or book review or editorial or commentary.
Lauchlan, F., & Greig, S. (2015). Educational Inclusion in England: Origins, Perspective and Current Directions. *Support for Learning, 30*(1), 69 - 82.	Not focussed on SENCOs
Moyse, R., & Porter, J. (2015). The experience of the hidden curriculum for autistic	Not focussed on SENCOs

girls at mainstream primary schools. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 30*(2), 187-201.

Appendix LR7: Table to show fully extracted articles and reason for exclusion

Article	Reason for Exclusion
Barnes, P. (2008). Multi-agency working: What are the perspectives of SENCos and Parents regarding its Development and Implementation? *British Journal of Special Education, 35*(4), 230 - 240.	Excluded – no reference to SENCO and support/parents
Ellis, S., & Tod, J. (2005). Including SENCOs in behaviour improvement: An exploration of the Behaviour and Attendance strands of the National Strategies. *Support for Learning, 20*(2), 83-89.	Excluded – not primary age range
Evans, C. A., & Docking, J. (1996). Improving the quality of supportive measures for children with learning difficulties. *Early Child Development and Care, 121*, 107-118.	Excluded – no reference to SENCO and support/parents
Frankl, C. (2005). Managing Individual Education Plans: Reducing the load of the special educational needs coordinator. *Support for Learning, 20*(2), 77-82	Excluded – no reference to SENCO and support/parents
Gerschel, L. (2005). The special educational needs coordinator's role in managing teaching assistants: The Greenwich perspective. *Support for Learning, 20*(2), 69-76	Excluded – no reference to SENCO and support/parents
Glazzard, J. (2014). The Standards Agenda: Reflections of a Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator. *Support for learning, 29*(1), 39 - 53.	Excluded – no reference to SENCO and support/parents
Morewood, G. (2012). Is the "Inclusive SENCo" Still a Possibility? A Personal Perspective. *Support for Learning, 27*(2), 73 - 76.	Excluded – book, book review or editorial.
Pearson, S. (2008). Deafened by silence or by the sound of footsteps? An investigation of the recruitment, induction and retention of special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) in England. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 8*(2), 96-110.	Excluded – no reference to SENCO and support/parents
Pearson, S., & Ralph, S. (2007). The identity of SENCos: Insights through images. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 7*(1), 36-45.	Excluded – no reference to SENCO and support/parents
Pearson, S., Scott, P., & Sugden, D. (2011). Applying metaphors for learning to continuing professional development (CPD), in the context of a course for special educational needs coordinators (SENCOS). *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 11*(1), 42-54.	Excluded – no reference to SENCO and support/parents
Qureshi, S. (2014). Herding cats or getting heard: The SENCo–teacher dynamic and its impact on teachers' classroom practice. *Support for Learning, 29*(3), 217-229	Excluded – no reference to SENCO and support/parents
Robertson, C. (2012). Special educational needs and disability co-ordination in a changing policy landscape: Making sense of policy from a SENCo's perspective. *Support for Learning, 27*(2), 77-83.	Excluded – book, book review or editorial.
Rosen-Webb, S. (2011). Nobody Tells You How To Be a SENCo. *British Journal of Special Education, 38*(4), 159 - 168.	Excluded – not primary age range
Tissot, C. (2013). The Role of SENCOS as Leaders. *British Journal of Special Education, 40*(1), 33 - 40.	Excluded – no reference to SENCO and support/parents
Wedell, K. (2012). SENCos supporting each other: The SENCo forum. *Support for Learning, 27*(2), 67-72.	Excluded – book, book review or editorial.
Wedell, K. (2014). Points from the SENCo-Forum: The 'best endeavours' of SENCos and their schools. *British Journal of Special Education, 41*(2), 212-214.	Excluded – book, book review or editorial.
Wedell, K., Stevens, C., Waller, T., & Matheson, L. (1997). SENCos Sharing Questions and Solutions: How to Make a More Convenient Phone Call. *British Journal of Special Education, 24*(4), 167 - 170.	Excluded – not a study.

Table to show articles include in the literature review

Article	
Cole, B. A. (2005). Mission impossible? Special educational needs, inclusion and the re-conceptualization of the role of the SENCO in England and Wales. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 20*(3), 287-307.	Included
Cowne, E. (2005). What do special educational needs coordinators think they do? *Support for Learning, 20*(2), 61-68	Included
Evans, A. (2013). From exclusion to inclusion; Supporting Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators to keep children in mainstream education: A qualitative psychoanalytic research project. *Journal of Child Psychotherapy, 39*(3), 286-302.	Included

Kearns, H. (2005). Exploring the Experiential Learning of Special Educational Needs Coordinators. *Journal of In-service Education, 31*(1), 131 - 150.	Included
Layton, L. (2005). Special Educational Needs Coordinators and Leadership: a Role Too Far. *Support for Learning, 20*(2), 53-60.	Included
Lewis, A., Neill, S., & Campbell, J. (1997). SENCOs and the Code: A national survey. *Support for Learning, 12*(1), 3-9.	Included
Lewis, A., & Ogilvie, M. (2003). Support, Knowledge and Identity: Reported Gains from Involvement in a Special Email Group - the SENCo Forum. *British Journal of Special Education, 30*(1), 44 - 50.	Included
Mackenzie, S. (2013). Achievers, Confidence-Builders, Advoctes, Relationship-Developers and System-Changers: What "Making a Difference" Means to Those Who Work With Children with Special Educational Needs - A typology of Rewards. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice, 19*(4), 433 - 448.	Included
Pearson, S., Mitchell, R., & Rapti, M. (2015). 'I will be 'fighting' even more for pupils with SEN': SENCOs' role predictions in the changing English policy context. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs, 15*(1), 48-56.	Included
Szwed, C. (2007). Remodelling Policy and Practice: The Challenge for Staff Working with Children with Special Educational Needs. *Educational Review, 59*(2), p147-160.	Included

Appendix LR8: Study Characteristics

Study Characteristics				
Study	**Design**	**Participants**	**Data collection methods**	**Outcomes – related to SENCO and support and/or working with parents**
Cole (2005) Mission impossible? Special educational needs, inclusion and the re-conceptualization of the role of the SENCO in England and Wales.	Quantitative/Qualitative exploratory design into the views of SENCOs around issues arising from the code of practice (2001).	Purposeful Sampling; 59 Primary/ Secondary SENCOs in two unitary authorities in the North of England.	Multiple choice/'free text' comments Questionnaire 12 interviews	*Senior management support of SENCO role can facilitate inclusion. *increased workload. *42% of sample felt they 'sufficiently senior' to influence policy. *Many of the sample reported needing more time, status, leadership and financial power. *66% agreed that staff were supportive of including pupils with SEN. *83% of the sample felt that liaison with parents was a high priority. *84% were unsure as to whether the revised code of practice (2001) would reduce possible contention with parents. *predicted greater involvement of parents in the decision making processes. *SENCOs viewed as advocates for children with SEND.
Cowne (2005) What do special educational needs coordinators think they do?	Quantitative/Qualitative Investigation into the organisational contexts /Evaluative outreach SENCO training	Purposeful Sampling; 20 - 205 SENCOs on three year outreach course (accredited by a London University) -Nursery -Primary -Secondary	Questionnaire (205 ps) Follow-up questionnaire (66 ps) SENCO Focus group (20 ps) LEA officers focus group (not stated)	*Importance of management support *course – enhanced confidence, skills, and knowledge. *Wide variety of roles held by SENCOs -working with pupils/parents/teaching assistants/outside agencies. *Great variation in time allocation to carry out role 0-21+ hours. *SENCOs reported lack of time, amount of paperwork, contacting help from outside agencies as being constraining features to their role. *Further training/help suggested by SENCOs included; assessing reasons for difficulties in learning, strategies to overcome these difficulties, monitoring systems, constructing effective working relationships with colleagues. *LEA support – conference days, short courses, cluster group meetings. *SENCOs viewed working with parents as an essential part of their role.
Evans (2013) From exclusion to inclusion; Supporting Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators	Qualitative Explorative study into the interactions between a consultant and SENCOs.	Purposeful Sampling; 3 SENCOs in primary school settings	Researcher's consultation notes.	*Supervision for SENCOs to provide emotional support. *Support from senior management and policy makers to place SENCOs centrally in school life. *SENCOs had a sense of being questioned and challenged on their identity from school, feeling not good enough.

to keep children in mainstream education: A qualitative psychoanalytic research project				*SENCOs trying to manage some extreme feelings, sense of isolation, and hostility from other staff. *Difficulties liaising with head teacher.
Kearns (2005) Exploring the Experiential Learning of Special Educational Needs Coordinators	Qualitative Exploratory study into SENCO experiential learning	Purposeful Sampling; 18 SENCOs working in primary school settings undertaking in-service training course.	SENCO narratives Focus groups Repertory grids Individual interviews	*experiential learning utilised support from facilitators/other SENCOs. * liaising and gathering information from external agencies, learning, managing demands. *Desire for greater line management to control the range of demand and direction they experience. *Pressure of having to undertake classroom teaching responsibilities on top of the SENCO role. *Difficulties in managing the responsibilities of others to undertake SEN responsibilities without management authority. *Extensive learning from sources within school, external to the school, from personal practice. *Five SENCO roles identified; arbiter, rescue, auditor, collaborator, and expert. - Arbiter: working with parents by; clarifying concerns, making demands realistic, helping parents feel positive. Role is concerned with anxieties and demands of parents. -Rescue – supporting pupils with SEN by planning interventions, reflecting, and working with pupils and parents in small groups. -SENCO as collaborator – meetings with teachers and pupils from other schools for professional development.
Layton (2005) Special Educational Needs Coordinators and Leadership: a Role Too Far	Qualitative Exploratory study into SENCO perspectives on their role and leadership.	Purposeful Sampling; 27 SENCOs (15 secondary, 9 primary, 1 hospital, 1 independent, 1 special)	Questionnaires	*SENCOs reported perceiving parents seeing SENCOs as a repository of all knowledge, resources and contacts. *LSA viewed by SENCOs as having a demanding role involving a considerable administrative burden. *Head teachers expect SENCOs to have a management role whilst overlooking the need for support, e.g. time allowance for managing LSA's.
Lewis & Ogilvie (2003) Support, Knowledge and Identity:	Quantitative Explorative research into email group SENCO: Forum	Purposeful Sampling; 140 Users of the SENCO: Forum in 2002	Link to downloadable questionnaire	*Forum highly valued. *1/3 use forum inside school hours, 2/3 accessed only or partly at weekends. *4/5 accessed only or mainly accessed the forum from home.

Reported Gains from Involvement in a Special Email Group - the SENCO Forum		Ranged from Teachers with SEN speciality to other professions and parents.		*1/2 respondents sent public messages, >2/5 sent one or more private messages a month. *Subgroups 'enthusiasts' and 'light users' identified, defined by their usage of the forum. Two types of users differed on frequency and posting but outcomes the same. *Users reported accessing support outside the forum from colleagues in school or other colleagues in work. Half of respondents also accessed an eclectic mix of other contacts. *2/3 of the sample also used print-based sources and internet sources of advice. *Outcomes of usage, personalised support; countering isolation, empowerment, and professional knowledge.
Lewis, Neill & Campbell (1997) SENCOs and the Code: A national survey	Quantitative/Qualitative Comparison study of SENCOs views of the Code of practice (1994). Comparing data to another similar study.	Purposeful Sampling; 1500 Primary SENCOs 500 Secondary SENCOs	Postal questionnaire	*SENCO perceived by school (Head teachers) as low status which is reflected in the time allocated to carry out SENCO duties. *Predominant problem in primary schools was that SENCO has to be added to a portfolio of responsibilities already undertaken by a class teacher. *1 in 5 schools planned to employ additional non-teaching staff for pupils with SEN. *High levels of dissatisfaction with the perceived adequacy of non-contact time available for carrying out special needs duties. *Half of the primary SENCO sample had timetabled non-contact time in order to fulfil specific SEN responsibilities.
Mackenzie (2013) Achievers, Confidence-Builders, Advoctes, Relationship-Developers and System-Changers: What "Making a Difference" Means to Those Who Work With Children with Special Educational Needs - A typology of Rewards.	Qualitative Exploration of those working with pupils with SEN of the meaning of 'making a difference'	Purposeful Sampling; 32 participants SENCOs, aspiring SENCOs and TAs.	Focus groups Individual interviews with 12 SENCOs	*SENCOs perceive themselves as being an 'advocate/champion/fighter' for children whose parents cannot be. *Advocacy was often perceived as 'fighting', sometimes with the LA, sometimes within the school. *Advocate for parents was particularly important for SENCOs who had their own children. * Interactions with parents mostly positive perhaps due to the closer working relationships. *When communication perceived as good, the interaction was perceived as a rewarding part of the role.

Pearson, Mitchell, & Rapti (2015) 'I will be 'fighting' even more for pupils with SEN': SENCOs' role predictions in the changing English policy context	Qualitative Explorative research into SENCOs insights to the changing role	Purposeful Sampling; 227 SENCOs on NASEN database (national) -Nursery -Primary -middle school -Secondary -Post 16	Online questionnaire Data drawn from one open ended question	*Predictions for SENCO role against the new code of Practice (2014) - links to other agencies *Respondents expressed the view that EHCPs will require knowledge and skills beyond the SENCOs current capacity: "*I will have to find means of accessing…information to keep me up to date…*" *Respondents expressed the view that SENCOs will make increasing use of professional networks and knowledge sharing within and between schools. *Predict a greater partnership with parents; "*need to have excellent relationships with parents*". *A need for a partnership to be developed, "*Parents should…be supported and encouraged to be involved*". *"*SENCO is becoming a facilitator role – in terms of support [ing and] empowering parents – giving them the opportunity to take a more informed role.*" *Predict a greater role in advising parents.
Szwed (2007) Remodelling Policy and Practice: The Challenge for Staff Working with Children with Special Educational Needs.	Qualitative study Explorative case study approach	Purposeful Sampling; 3 SENCOs (head teacher, assistant head- teacher, class teacher)	*Diary of time spent on SENCO tasks. *Interviews	*Variations in the support given to SENCOs by their settings. *Support for SENCO role given when SENCO is in a position of authority, such as on the SLT. *Types of support given to some of the sample; -time for SEN duties -staff deployments to support (i.e LSA/admin) (Whole school approach); - whole school SEN policy development. -All staff receiving SEN training. *One SENCO reported that being part of external networks were helpful for own development. *Parents may have difficulties liaising with SENCOs who also hold a authority role, such as head teacher or deputy head teacher.

Appendix M1: Semi-structured Interview questions

I will initially seek verbal confirmation from participants that they are freely volunteering to participate in the study and further reiterate that they can choose not to participate in the study and withdraw at any point without being penalised or disadvantaged in anyway. I will repeat that the interview will be recorded and assure participants that the recordings will be securely stored and destroyed once the data has been analysed.

As this is a semi-structured interview these questions will be used as guidance. They are intended as open and expansive questions to encourage the participant to talk at length and provide a detailed account of their experience. My verbal input will be minimal, although I will probe the participant to find out more about any interesting things they say.

1. ***Please can you start by telling me about your experience being a SENCO in the EHCP process?***
   Prompts;
   -Can you tell me a little bit more about…?
   -What do you mean by….?
   -What do you think/feel about this role?

2. ***Could you tell me about your experience of the role of parents in the EHCP process?***
   Prompts;
   -What do you expect the role of parents to be in the EHCP process?
   -How do you feel about the parent's role in the EHCP process?

3. ***Can you tell me about your experience of how the decision to go through the EHCP process comes about?***
   Prompts;
   -How did you feel about the decision to go through the EHCP process?
   -What were the reasons behind going for an EHC plan?
   -How did this make you feel/did you support this decision?

4. ***Can you tell me about your experience of starting an EHCP application?***
   Prompts;
   -How were the parents informed?
   -How did you feel about the initial conversation with parents about the EHCP application?
   - Do you experience feeling unable to discuss some things?

5. **The phrase 'working together' is used within the Code of Practice (2014). Can you tell me a bit about your understanding of the phrase 'working together' is, within the context of EHCP's and parents?**
   - Tell me more about…

6. ***Can you tell me about your experiences of working with parents through the EHCP process?***
   Prompts;
   -At what stages of the process are parents involved?
   -How are your relationships with parents affected by the process?

7. *Thinking about your experience of working with parents through the EHCP process, what do you believe to be the differences between a good EHCP process and a bad EHCP process?*

    Prompts;
    - What was difficult?
    - What was helpful?

General prompts/probes
Tell me more about…
What were you thinking when…?
What were you feeling when…?
What worked when…?
What didn't work when…?
How?
Why?

Debrief:

- Is there anything that we have discussed that you would like me to remove or discuss in further detail?

- Are there any positive or negative feelings that have surfaced during the interview?

- My direct contact details can be found on the information sheet so that you can call me confidentially at a later date if you so wish.

Appendix M2: Suggested changes to the interview schedule post pilot interview
Semi-structured Interview questions

I will initially seek verbal confirmation from participants that they are freely volunteering to participate in the study and further reiterate that they can choose not to participate in the study and withdraw at any point without being penalised or disadvantaged in anyway. I will repeat that the interview will be recorded and assure participants that the recordings will be securely stored and destroyed once the data has been analysed.

As this is a semi-structured interview these questions will be used as guidance. They are intended as open and expansive questions to encourage the participant to talk at length and provide a detailed account of their experience. My verbal input will be minimal, although I will probe the participant to find out more about any interesting things they say.

1. **Please can you start by telling me about your experience being a SENCo in the EHCP process?**
   Prompts;
   -Can you tell me a little bit more about…?
   -What do you mean by….?
   -What do you think/feel about this role?

2. ***Could you tell me about your experience of the role of parents in the EHCP process?***
   Prompts;
   -What do you expect the role of parents to be in the EHCP process?
   -How do you feel about the parent's role in the EHCP process?
   *- How does parental knowledge about the process have on their involvement?

*This prompt was considered to be added due to the pilot participant highlighting the differences between well informed parents and less informed parents and the added responsibility the SENCo felt they had to 'upskill' and inform parents. However it was decided that this additional prompt could prevent other experiences being shared.

3. ***Can you tell me about your experience of how the decision to go through the EHCP process comes about?***
   Prompts;
   -How did you feel about the decision to go through the EHCP process?
   -What were the reasons behind going for an EHC plan?
   -How did this make you feel/did you support this decision?
   *-How is the plan, do, review, process involved?

*This prompt has been added as feedback from the pilot participant described wanting to talk about;
   -previous work/interventions that had been done and parents responses to this work.
   -possible frustrations that they had about the time it takes/questioning the SENCOs professional judgement
   - parents going elsewhere for advice
And the pilot participant felt there was no opportunity to talk about this.
However, upon discussion with my supervisor it was decided that additional prompt could lead SENCOs responses and close down other experiences that they wanted to share.

4. ***Can you tell me about your experience of starting an EHCP application?***
   Prompts;
   -How were the parents informed?
   -How did you feel about the initial conversation with parents about the EHCP application?
   - Do you experience feeling unable to discuss some things?

5. *The phrase 'working together' is used within the Code of Practice (2014). Can you tell me a bit about your understanding of the phrase 'working together' is, within the context of EHCP's and parents?*

   -Tell me more about…

6. *Can you tell me about your experiences of working with parents through the EHCP process?*

   Prompts;
   -At what stages of the process are parents involved?
   -How are your relationships with parents affected by the process?

7. *Thinking about your experience of working with parents through the EHCP process, what do you believe to be the differences between a good EHCP process and a bad EHCP process?*

   Prompts;
   - What was difficult?
   - What was helpful?

General prompts/probes
Tell me more about…
What were you thinking when…?
What were you feeling when…?
What worked when…?
What didn't work when…?
How?
Why?

Debrief:
- Is there anything that we have discussed that you would like me to remove or discuss in further detail?
- Are there any positive or negative feelings that have surfaced during the interview?
- My direct contact details can be found on the information sheet so that you can call me confidentially at a later date if you so wish.

Appendix M3: Ethical approval

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**

NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2548
Fax: 020 7447 3837
www.tavi-port.org

Helen Gore

01st June 2015

Re: Research Ethics Application

Title: *"How do Special Education Needs Co-ordinators view their experiences of working with parents/carers through the new Education, Health, Care, Plan process?"*

Dear Helen,

I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Louis Taussig

Secretary to the Trust Research Ethics Committee

Cc Brian Davis

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**

NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
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NW3 5BA

Tel: +44(0)20 938 2699
Email: AcademicQuality@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk
http://tavistockandportman.uk/research-and-innovation/doing-research

06.01.2016

Helen Gore
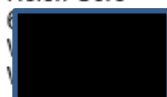
By email

Dear Ms Gore,

Re: Research Ethics Application

Title: "How do Special Education Needs Co-ordinators view their experiences of working with parents/carers through the new Education, Health, Care, Plan process?"

I am pleased to inform you that the Trust Research Ethics Committee formally approved your application on 24th November 2015.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

Please note that I am copying this communication to your supervisor for information.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Mrs Paru Jeram
Secretary to the Trust Research Ethics Committee

Cc.　　Brian Davis

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

PROJECT TITLE: How do Special Education Needs Co-ordinators' view their experiences of working with parents/carers through the new Education, Health, Care, Plan process?
INVITATION
You are being asked to take part in a piece of doctoral research exploring SENCos' experiences of working with parents/carers through the new Education, Health, Care, Plan (EHCP) process. This piece of research will be conducted by Helen Gore, a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), and will be supervised by Dr. Richard Lewis, Educational Psychologist, Thesis supervisor, Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. This piece of research has been approved by the Tavistock Research and Ethics Committee (TREC).

WHAT WILL HAPPEN
In this study, participants will be asked to participate in an interview were the researcher, Helen Gore, will ask questions about their experiences of working with parents/carers through the EHCP process. This may include participant's thoughts, perceptions, and feelings on working with parent/carers and the EHCP process.

The interviews will be audio-recorded and then later be transcribed and anonymised. As the intended sample size will be small, complete anonymity will not be possible as participant identify will be identifiable by the researcher, Helen Gore. However, all information that could be used to identify participants, such as their name and the name of their school, will be changed to maintain confidentiality.

TIME COMMITMENT
The interview will take approximately 60 minutes.

PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS
You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation.

You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn/destroyed up until the point of transcription and analysis of the interview data where names, and any other identifying information will have been changed.

You have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you.

You have the right to have your questions about the procedures answered.

Confidentiality will not be maintained if there is a disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

Confidentiality of information provided by participants is subject to legal limitations in data confidentiality (i.e. the data may be subject to a subpoena, a freedom of information request or mandated reporting by some professions).

If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you should ask the researcher, Helen Gore, before the study begins.

BENEFITS AND RISKS
There are no known benefits or risks for you in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY
If you choose to volunteer to take part in the research your name and contact details, such as your contact telephone number and email address, will be requested so that the researcher can get in contact with you. This information will not be linked to the interview and will be destroyed after the interview has taken place, unless participants express their interest to have a summary of findings shared with them upon the completion of the research. In this instance email addresses will be kept in a password protected document separate to the other research data files, in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy, and will be destroyed after sharing of the summary of findings.

Interviews will be audio-recorded so that they can be transcribed. Audio-recordings will be stored on a password protected computer, in accordance with the University's Data Protection Policy, until transcription, at which point they will then be destroyed.

Upon completion of the doctoral research a printed copy of the thesis will be shared with the Researchers training institution, The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust as well as with the Local Authority. A summary of findings will also be shared with participants if they would like them to be.

In the thesis all participant information that could be used to identify participants, such as their name and the name of their school, will be changed to maintain confidentiality.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION
Dr Richard Lewis, the research supervisor, will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time. You may contact him at;
 RLewis@tavi-port.nhs.uk
Dr Richard Lewis, M4 Research Team, Tavistock and Portman Clinic, 120 Belsize Lane, London NW3 5BA.

If participants have any concerns about the conduct of the investigator, researcher(s) or any other aspect of this research project, they should contact Louis Taussig, the Trust Quality Assurance Officer;
ltaussig@tavi-port.nhs.uk

If you want to find out about the final results of this study, you should contact the LA's Educational Psychology Service or the Tavistock and Portman clinic and request access to the final thesis.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet,
Helen Gore
Trainee Educational Psychologist
hgore@tavi-port.nhs.uk
Trainee Educational Psychologist, Tavistock and Portman Clinic, 120 Belsize Lane, London NW3 5BA

The Tavistock and Portman **NHS**
NHS Foundation Trust

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: How do Special Education Needs Co-ordinators' view their experiences of working with parents/carers through the new Education, Health, Care, Plan process?
This is a piece of doctoral research being undertaken by Helen Gore, Trainee Educational Psychologist.
- Involvement in this project is voluntary and participants are free to withdraw at any time, or to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
- Participants will take part in an interview that will audio-recorded and last approximately 60 minutes.
- Anonymised quotes from the interview may be used in the thesis.
- Due to the small sample size anonymity cannot be guaranteed, as the researcher will know the identity of the participants. Names of participants and schools will be changed so that participants are not identifiable to those who read the thesis.
- Confidentiality will not be maintained if there is a disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.
- The findings of this research will be published in a doctoral thesis, a copy will be held at the Tavistock and Portman Clinic and the LA.

By signing below, you are agreeing that;
(1) You have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet,
(2) Questions about your participation in this study have been answered satisfactorily,
(3) You are aware of the potential risks (if any),
(4) You are taking part in this research study voluntarily (without coercion).

_____
Participant's Name (Printed)*

_____   _____
Participant's signature*   Date

_____   _____
Name of person obtaining consent (Printed)   Signature of person obtaining consent

Participants wishing to preserve some degree of anonymity may use their initials (from the British Psychological Society Guidelines for Minimal Standards of Ethical Approval in Psychological Research)

Appendix F1: 'Rich data' extract from SENCO 1 interview

Please note that any reference to a specific school or potentially identifying information of the SENCO's school or Local Authority has been changed to maintain anonymity.
I.e. a named specialist provision has been referred to as 'moderate SEN provision' or 'profound and moderate SEN provision'
Or a named organisation, have been renamed to a generic equivalent i.e. parent group.

Exploratory comments and Emergent themes: SENCO 1

Exploratory comments code: blue: descriptive comments, green: linguistic comments, red: conceptual comments

Emergent themes	Line	Transcript	Exploratory comments
Unclear role. Learning process. Sense of responsibility for learning. County as an all knowing 'entity'. Need to understand whole to understand own role.	1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16	**Hopefully we can just start to forget about that. It's really weird though when I listen to myself back. So, nice easy one to start, can you tell me about your experience of being in SENCO in the EHC process.** Erm…you say that's easy, that's quite tricky. Erm, so I think because I was new to the county learning how to approach an EHCP was part of learning how the county does things which is different to my previous experiences. So, erm, I had to get to grips with the EHC process as part of getting to grips with everything else that was different to what I was used to before. Erm, I was invited all… I think all SENCOs were invited to attend the EHC panels at the County Council erm and I did that right at the beginning of this academic year. Erm…I know that this county was a trial county erm so I think they sort of had a firmer grasp of how it all worked which meant that when I went to the panel meeting in September that was a really useful way of getting an idea about how it all worked	New to county – learning approach, does this mean there is a learning process for new to county SENCos? Not easy to answer. Hesitant, - erm, pauses How county does things – is there a particular way, an ethos of this county? How does this impact on the EHCP process? Grip – firm hold/tight grasp? As opposed to?? Slippery? Un-gripped? Why is this important? System within a system (the EHCP system within School/the LA) 'I think all' – lack of clarity of experience of other SENCos/actions of the LA From the beginning – trying to understand process, SENCo initiated, prompted by need i.e. an EHCP

Shared understanding provides clarity	17 18 19 20	and how everything joined up. Because there were representatives there, educational psychologists were there, there were members from the County Council, there were other SENCOs and to hear the discussion and see how the paperwork was discussed was really	application? Part of a bigger picture Trail county – expectation of it being seamless, coherent process? What does this mean if it isn't after two trial years?
Need to be told by others what is expected. Not trusting own interpretation.	21 22 23 24	helpful to then do the applications myself because I'd been able to get an understanding of what they were looking for. I would say that the paperwork, if I hadn't had gone to that meeting, the paperwork as it… as you read it is not that clear exactly… in some	Grip, firmer, joined – sense of struggle with piecing it all together? Lacked coherence? Large professional presence = understanding of the system? On your own = unclear?
Moving of goal posts	25 26 27	areas exactly what they're asking for. So particularly in terms of when they're asking for evidence, I've had to submit a huge amount of evidence after submitting an initial application but it was	Hear discussion – not join in discussion? Learning via observing? Not interacting? SENCo choice? Hearing panel decisions aids understanding of process?
Concealed information.	28 29 30	never evident in the initial application that that amount of information or the type of quantity and detail wasn't evident in the initial paperwork, that that's what they wanted. So it was only	Repetition of not – really unclear paperwork guidance They > the LA? Separate to the SENCo? Sides? Unbalanced sides, they v's I? What does this mean for
Need for hard evidence to secure understanding.	31 32	having been to the panel that I sort of got an idea about exactly what I should be aiming for. Erm, because they didn't offer any	SENCo perception of role? More evidence after, stressing how unclear guidance was. Guidance wasn't enough to be successful? Are you successful or unsuccessful? >what further guidance is
Duration of learning. More knowledgeable other.	33 34 35	exemplars or anything like that. So it's been… this year has been… it's taken quite a while I suppose to get my head round exactly what to do and how to do it. I have a	needed? What does it mean not to have had this guidance? Never, wasn't – repetition of unclear paperwork – reliance on paperwork? What does the paperwork provide the SENCo? Doubting own ability to complete application?
Sense of disability, unsure of understanding. Repetitive contact to gain guidance. Disillusion of support.	36 37 38 39 40 41 42 43 44 45	link, a person at County, she's one of the SEN officers there, and that's been really helpful because I have just sent her email after email but obviously she knows how it all works and is able to guide me through it a bit so that's been really helpful as well. But in general it's been a bit kind of feeling my way as I go, speaking other SENCOs, bombarding her with emails. It hasn't been a very clear process or a very… not that it hasn't been easy it's just been… I think some of the questions I've asked the SEN officer she hasn't known the answers to, she's had to go and find out. We didn't have the review document so I couldn't review it when I needed to	Feedback on 'unsuccessful' application not viewed positively? Expectation from self/others that SENCo will know how to complete the form? Exemplars = clarity. Further communication needed for SENCos confidence in process/self? Pauses, several attempts to start sentence – difficult to explain learning journey? Duration of forming understanding of process. Support of SEN officer helpful to SENCo's understanding of process. SEN officer is all knowledgeable Email after email repetitive, predominant way of communicating. 'feeling my way' – blind? Other senses no use? Other professional skills not drawn upon? Unable to use? Speaking to other SENCos > trying to find out info?

SENCos Interpretation of role	46	because they didn't have one and it was things like that, it's just	Bombarding – flurry/wave/over-whelming amount? > lack of confidence in own interpretation?
	47	sort of those teething problems have made it a bit more confusing	SEN officer doesn't have all the answers > one template not provided, doubting SEN officers knowledge after one error?
	48	as well. So it's yes… does that answer?	Is that how the SENCo is judged? Unable to create one herself? Over reliance on external? Why?
	49	**Yes and how are you feeling about the SENCO role in the EHC**	'not easy…' but what? No-one has the answer?
Importance of information, power of information holder.	50	**process?**	-how does it feel to ask and ask questions and get no answers/wrong answers?
	51	Erm, I do think it's central to it because it seems like I'm sort of…	Confusing – SENCo not mediator, but middle person.
	52	one of the EHCPs I've applied for it was the parents who requested	Responsibility to make sure everyone has what they need > feels like an important/predominant role.
Sense of purpose/clear role if parents need SENCo knowledge.	53	it but in both cases I'm sort of the middle person, not the mediator	Stressing the practicalities of role - Quite a responsibility, what does this mean to the SENCo? Added pressure?
	54	but you know I've got the parents talking to me, I've got County	Hearing different sides? Does it feel like different sides? Does the SENCo identify with one side more than the other?
	55	talking to me and it's been my responsibility to make sure that	Employer v's pupil needs (purpose of job?)
	56	County have what they need, make sure the parents are kept in the	'school and my role within school' – identifying as part of the school system.
	57	loop. Sharing all the information that I'm sharing with County I'm	
	58	sharing with parents so it does seem that erm school and my role	
	59	within the school is central to how it works, definitely.	
	60	**Can you tell me about your experience of the role of parents in**	What makes these experiences different? What does different mean?
Affirmation of role due to parental need.	61	**the EHC process?**	Instigate – 'incite' – someone to do something usually bad.
	62	Erm, so both the EHCPs have been a very different experience. The	No knowledge – relied on SENCo advice > how does this affect the relationship? Unbalanced? Power dynamics? Control lie with SENCo?
	63	more recent one I did was the parents they instigated it, they asked	Parent choice to initiate EHCP application, SENCo representing parents, SENCo expert in parent's eyes?
	64	me to do it on their behalf and erm so they are the driving force I	'looked to' for guidance, SENCo needed.
Parents reliance on SENCo	65	suppose but they have no knowledge of the education system and	Relied – SENCo feels knowledgeable compared to these parents? Is expertise relative?
	66	have sort of relied on my advice, I suppose, and my guidance and	Support, 'hand held' > intimate/child like/parents are innocent or naïve?
	67	they sought that. So they've kind of looked to me to tell them what	Pair… Couple…hesitant, difficult to express
	68	to do and we've done the forms together so I think they knew that	Parents have a history of rejection – with this SENCo?
	69	it was their right to do it and they also knew that I had to support	Previous SENCo? How does this affect the relationship?
	70	them. So the information I think on the website of the County	Experience of education = more knowledgeable? What does 'experience of education' mean? Status jobs? Degrees?
Difficulty in understanding SENCo role in relation to knowledgeable parents.	71	Council was quite clear in what they should do if they wanted to	Work within the education sector?
	72	pursue it which has been good but they have needed quite a lot of	Repetition of rights – legislation, how is this perceived by the SENCo? Somebody who has knowledge of her role?
Informed parents are difficult to manage?	73	support from me. I've held their hand through each step. The other	What she should be doing? Judge her ability?
	74	parents erm, they, err, had the initial assessment request, that was	

SENCo replaced by knowledgeable parents. Parents taking role making SENCo redundant.	75 76 77 78 79 80	rejected. They're a pair, a couple. Who, they have experience of education, they're far more informed about their rights and the rights of their child and they also are very determined so they have been the driving force and they have, fought, and I've been kind of included in that but it's actually been them who's been bombarding the Council I suppose, County, to review their decision. So it's been	Determined/driving force/fought/bombarding = difficult parents – due to the knowledge they have? Their ability to navigate the system? When SENCo was needed/relied upon = better EHCP experience? Better parents? Bombarding – aggressive, constant flow of communication ot the LA. > missing the SENCo out? Bypassing? SENCo perceive parents to believe her role is inconsequential?
Parents talking to SENCo about concerns.	81 82	two different experiences really with those two sets of parents. **How did you feel about each experience?**	SENCo feels confident = positive experience? Smaller part – not in loop = difficult
	83 84	The one with the parents where we've done it together has been positive because it's facilitated communication so them coming in	'Advocate' – can do this when parents are providing information? Not kept in loop, what does this mean professionally? Not wanted? Not valued? Nothing worthwhile to contribute?
Information is powerful.	85	talking about their concerns, me contributing, school's concerns,	Parent lack of knowledge requires parents to rely on SENCo > facilitates communication.
SENCo as child advocate.	86 87	being able to do the paperwork together has been really collaborative and really positive. It's meant that when I'm asked	-opportunities to share concerns Parents to SENCo and vice-versa.
SENCo loss of power. Sense of SENCo being excluded.	89 90	questions from the SEN Officer about the child and about the application I feel I'm in a really good position to be able to advocate	Do parents have to approach SENCo for SENCo to feel needed/expert/knowledgeable? What does ownership of process by parents mean to the role of SENCo? Loss of control? Surplus to requirement?
Frustration with relationships.	91 92 93	on the behalf of the child. When it's been the parents who've been really taking ownership of it and I have a part… a smaller part of that process, things have happened, conversations have been had,	
Difficulties with parental relationship.	94 95	paperwork has been filled in where I haven't necessarily been kept in the loop, because I'm not central… as central to it. And that's	
	96 97	made it very difficult when I'm then asked to give further evidence because I'm not entirely sure of what I'm evidencing because I	'not entirely sure' – self doubt? > blame parents/county? SENCo endeavours to relay infor to parents/county but it doesn't happen the other way? Not considered by
	98	haven't been part of that conversation, so that's been quite hard.	parents/LA as centrally as SENCo perceives? SENCo perceived by parents/LA to be aligned with the other?
Side taking.	99 100	And erm, as with anything I suppose you do have different parents with different experiences, different expectations and erm, they	Challenging – repetitive, very challenging parents/situation?
Parents actions making process difficult.	101 102	have been quite challenging, it has been quite a challenging… as parents they've been quite challenging but that's also made the	
	103	process more challenging because they've been so aggressive with	'aggressive with it' – what is aggressive? Not physical aggression. Sense of side taking, aggression towards a
SENCo managing own	104	it it's changed… it's felt far less collaborative. Erm, and it's almost	side/person? The SENCo?

negative emotions.	105	felt like whereas with the other case the SEN Officer and I have	Collaboration means SENCo central?
	106	been… it's felt like we're on the same side, which is a strange thing I	'same side' change in tone > shouldn't use/take 'sides'
	107	know to say but we've sort of been working together. When these	Pauses… parents, child, and school one side v's the LA? But
	108	parents disagreed with the outcome and sort of fought it, it's felt	parents are not communicating with the SENCo. SENCo is
	109	far more divisive…its felt like… it's the parents and the child and the	isolated? What is the SENCo doing in the process now?
SENCo being ill-matched	110	school versus the County. So it's made it quite a stressful and	'thing' – situation? Process? Side taking?
against knowledgeable	111	unpleasant…err thing to have to work through.	'stressful and unpleasant' raw emotions from SENCo?
parents.	**112**	**You said they were quite assertive or aggressive, can you give me**	'fought…divisive..' – Differences are difficult to manage?
Parent's questioning of	**113**	**an example of what that looked like?**	
SENCos abilities.	114	Yes well… so, erm, because they sort of have experience within	
	115	education they're very well versed in their rights, they got the HC	Experience in education, well versed, rights, legal
	116	involved, so they got legal representation. They got the local MP	representation, local MP, letter writing, external agencies.
	117	involved and letter writing and things like that. Erm, they employed	Sense of parents 'arming' themselves/making a loud noise.
Parents trying to direct	118	external agencies to do assessments to kind of further the evidence	Is this a loss of faith in the SENCo's abilities?
SENCo.	119	base I suppose. Erm, I had many, many meetings where they were	
Loss of collaboration.	120	requesting that I basically applied to every external agency we have	SENCo being told how to do her job. How does this affect
Aligning with a side.	121	access to in order to try and get extra people in to assess this child.	the SENCo's self-esteem? Sense of autonomy? Sense of
Diffusion of responsibility.	122	And, although, I was in agreement that actually County hadn't made	being a qualified professional?
/reliant on others.	123	the right decision to assess, erm, I felt that their actions did make	
	124	the process… more aggressive, more… erm…yeah, less positive I	'their actions' – parents independent from SENCo, however
	125	suppose than it should be and they very much took control of it and	SENCo in agreement with parents about LA wrong decision,
	126	I think that was very difficult for the other professionals involved to	where does this leave the SENCo? Aligned with? Accepted
	127	kind of navigate it all.	by? Rejected by?
			'other professional couldn't regain control' > SENCo
			separate from professionals? Other professionals job to
			regain control? Battle for control/being right? SENCo feels
			impotent? Parent's actions towards SENCo paralysed
			SENCo? Doesn't feel like a collaborative process.

SENCO 1- Superordinate themes, related Subordinate themes, and related emergent themes

Superordinate theme: SENCO role open to interpretation		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
SENCO role validated by parent need for support.	Parent lack of confidence in own abilities. Lack of resilience of parents Parent's level of education Parents talking to SENCo about concerns. Validation of SENCo role SENCo affirmation of role Affirmation of role due to parental need Source of reassurance for parents Sense of purpose/clear role – when parents need SENCo Parents reliance on SENCo Lack of perceived level of support for parents, SENCo stepping in.	"…it's quite easy for parents to come up against a no or come up against a professional who doesn't have time and that be the end of it." (line 292 -294) **"…parents came to me and said we're not… we want to have this in there but we can't get in touch with anyone…" (line 287 -289)** "…her parents they… they're not massively educated, they are…um… not great at reading or writing." (line 225-226) **"…coming in talking about their concerns…" (line 83 -84)** "…they feel like they're being supported and that as parents they're being listened to…" (line 319-320) **"…talked them through the process a bit and then they came back to me and said yes they wanted to go through the process…"(line 164-165)** **"…**they asked me to do it on their behalf…" (line62-63) "…they feel reassured that at least we're pursuing it…" (line 328-329) **"…it's been my responsibility to make sure that County have what they need, make sure the parents are kept in the loop. Sharing all the information that I'm sharing with County I'm sharing with parents…" (line 54 -56)** "…they've kind of looked to me to tell them what to do and we've done the forms together…" (line 66-67) **"…if parents are having trouble pinning someone down I can pursue that as well…" (line 280 -281)**
SENCO's interpretation of role	Correct way of involving parents Expectations of role demands SENCo's interpretation of role Separation of role Awareness of boundaries of roles: SENCo/parent Need to understand whole to understand own role Expectation of role Sense of pressure/responsibility of role SENCo's Perceived role for SENCo. Clarity of SENCo role	"…Err yeah, right from the beginning. Yeah, I mean it's… the decision to pursue an EHCP isn't made until that conversation has already been had so…" (line 306-308) **"…I'm really lucky, Erm…I'm in a school where I've only had to do two. Erm…I'm very aware of schools where this is happening all the time…" (line 379 -381)** "…I'm sort of the middle person, not the mediator but you know…" (line 52-53) **"…Emotionally or professionally?" (line 364)** "…that pressure being put on that child which is… they're the parents, that's how they're going to approach it, there's nothing I can do about that…" (line149 -151) **"…really useful way of getting an idea about how it all worked and how everything joined up." (line 15 -17)** **"…**I sort of pointed them to the website and things like, talked them through the process a bit…" (line 163-164) **"It's central to it, it should be central to it. Education definitely seems to be the… the main part, everything else feeds into it…" (line 475 -477)** "…very much about guiding them through the process and supporting them with their decisions. So helping them with the paperwork, and providing the evidence that is needed in order to supplement the

	Sense of purpose	application…" (line 265-268) **"…taking it up on their behalf, ringing round, sending a couple of letters, following that through, pinpointing appointments…" (line 289 – 291)** "…taking it up on their behalf, ringing round, sending a couple of letters, following that through, pinpointing appointments…" (line 289 -291)
Parents expectations of the SENCo role.	Parents questioning of SENCos abilities. Parental expectations of SENCo role SENCo replaced knowledgeable parents Parents trying to direct SENCo SENCo redundant	"…Erm, they employed external agencies to do assessments to kind of further the evidence base I suppose." (line 116-118) **"…So her parents came to me and said we're not… we want to have this in there but we can't get in touch with anyone and so taking it up on their behalf…" (line 287-289)** "…more informed about their rights and the rights of their child … are very determined … been the driving force and they have, fought…" (line 75 -77) **"…meetings where they were requesting that I basically applied to every external agency…"(line 118 – 119)** "…I've been kind of included in that but it's actually been them who's been bombarding the Council…" (line 77-78)
Need for clarification in SENCo role	Confusion in role remit Need for understanding of role in process Unclear role Perception that clearer role definition reduces stress Difficulty in understanding SENCo role in relation to knowledgeable parents Shared understanding provides clarity Diffusion of responsibility/reliant on others.	"…there's lack of clarity in terms of who needs to be doing what and when…" (line 444-445) **"…if I hadn't been there I don't think I would have understand, understood exactly how it fitted in with everything else…" (line 192-193)** "…you say that's easy, that's quite tricky…" (line 5) **"…I won't' doing EHCPs, I won't be doing ENF applications and… it's going to be more focussed on the actual learning and development of the children…" (line 532-534)** "…they have been the driving force and they have, fought, and I've been kind of included in that but it's actually been them who's been bombarding the Council…" (line 76 -78) **"…really useful way of getting an idea about how it all worked and how everything joined up. Because there were representatives there, educational psychologists were there, there were members from the County Council, there were other SENCOs…" (line 15-19)** "…they very much took control of it and I think that was very difficult for the other professionals involved to kind of navigate it all…" (124 -126)

Superordinate theme: Knowledge is power		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
Knowledge is power (Previously named: Knowledge/informati	SENCo being ill-matched against knowledgeable parents. Importance of information, power of information holder.	"…they're very well versed in their rights; they got HC involved, so they got legal representation. They got the local MP involved…" (line 114-116) **"…Sharing all the information that I'm sharing with County I'm sharing with parents so it does seem that erm school and my role within the school is central…" (line 55-58)** "…parents they start talking to each other… and they start reading things on the internet…" (line 465 – 467)

on places individuals in positions of power.)	Gathering information as a way of gaining power. Power imbalance/control. Information is powerful. SENCo loss of power. SENCo not informed. Informed parents are difficult to manage?	**"…when one person, be it the parents, be it the school, be it County kind of takes more ownership over it than everybody else…" (line 413 – 415)** **"…**facilitated communication so them coming in talking about their concerns, me contributing, school's concerns… when I'm asked questions from the SEN Officer about the child and about the application I feel I'm in a really good position…" (line 83-89) **"…things have happened, conversations have been had, paperwork has been filled in where I haven't necessarily been kept in the loop…" (line92 -94)** "…they're far more informed about their rights and the rights of their child and they also are very determined so they have been the driving force and they have, fought…" (line 74-77)

Superordinate theme : Within SENCO struggle		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
SENCO questioning own abilities/skills.	Doubting skills SENCo self-doubt Self-doubt Not trusting own interpretation Sense of disability, unsure of understanding	"…and I thought I have no… I don't know what that is, I don't understand what they need from me…" (line 200 – 202) **"…I wouldn't have known what to expect or what I was doing…" (line 499-500)** **"…**I'm not sure at all whether or not it's going to be successful…" (line 329-330) **"…to hear the discussion and see how the paperwork was discussed was really helpful to then do the applications myself because I'd been able to get an understanding of what they were looking for…" (line 19 -22)** "…it's been a bit kind of feeling my way as I go, speaking other SENCOs, bombarding her with emails." (line 38 -40)
SENCO feeling different to others	Easily accessed High level of parent contact SENCo different to other school staff SENCo sense of difference to teachers SENCo is disparate	"…direct email contact with parents…" (line 277) **"…usually, I get an email or a phone call and sort of offer extra support…" (line 279 -280)** "…I seem to be one of the only members of staff…" (line 276-277) **"…sometimes teachers or schools can be quite dismissive of their concerns. Erm, so I think these parents have found it quite positive that they have been given time…" (line 324 – 326)** "…I know first-hand because parents do come up and complain to me all the time…" (line 321-322)
SENCO on a learning journey	Learning from experience Learning process Sense of responsibility for learning Learning opportunities Duration of learning	**"…**now I've done it. In hindsight I do think it is slightly easier to kind of navigate." (line 206-207) **"…learning how to approach an EHCP was part of learning how the county does things…" (line 6-7)** "…I had to get to grips with the EHC process as part of getting to grips with everything else…" (line8-9) **"…They've mentioned things that I had no idea of before…" (line 331-332)** "…it's taken quite a while I suppose to get my head round exactly what to do and how to do it…" (line 33-34)

SENCO managing own emotions	Frustration with other professionals. Emotions and the SENCo role Separation of role and emotions Difficulty managing own emotions Difficult to manage on a daily basis Distancing self from experience Emotionally draining Emotionally demanding SENCo managing own negative emotions Loss of control. Empathy for parents	"..huge amount of time taken up logging everything. And then got to the mediation and they said 'Well why are you pursing behaviour…" (line 428 -430) **"…it's quite an emotional role anyway and you do, although obviously you have to be professional…" (line129 -130)** "…in terms of my relationship with them I think it has strained it… and erm it's taken quite a high level of professionalism to not…" (line 352 -354) **"…Erm, but it is a very difficult, challenging one. And confusing. And…erm at times very frustrating." (line 478 -479)** "…as a professional working within a school, day to day, that does make it a difficult process to be a part of…" (line 517 -518) **"…there's nothing I can do about that but that as well when you're working closely with a child and you can see that it's affecting him. Erm…So yes, not good." (line151 -153)** "…In terms of the emotional side I have to be honest I'm leaving my job at the end of this year…" (line 374 -376) **"…they're very volatile, they're very emotional, and it's been very draining" (line 356-357)** "…quite a stressful and unpleasant…err thing to have to work through." (line 109 -110) **"…erm it's made it really, really, almost unmanageable really." (line 145-146)** **"…**so they had all of that to deal with as well…"(line 183-184)
Superordinate theme: Managing expectations and challenging parents		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
SENCo needing to manage parents' expectations.	Managing parents expectations. Failure to manage parent's expectations. Making parents expectations realistic. Managing parent expectations. Management of parent's expectations. Expectations v's reality	"…realistic in terms of whether or not they would get the EHCP at all, and also if they did get it that it wasn't an immediate solution…" (line 220 – 221) "I don't think it's exactly how they imagined it…" (line 343 – 344) **"sense of trying to keep balance to their expectations and trying to keep things realistic for them…" (line 232 -233)** "…parents want things done immediately and that's not the reality. But make sure they're aware of that because that reduces their expectations…"(line 409 -411) **"…That they'd get this EHCP and this just meant wonderful things for the future of their children." (line 216 – 218)** **"…**being realistic about the outcomes…" (Line 269-270)
SENCo needing to contain parents emotions	Parent relationship unpredictable Managing emotional situations Managing parents emotions Managing emotions	"…sort of almost starting again… they've kind of moved onto the next thing.. had a brief week maybe where it felt settled…" (line 344 -346) **"…you're dealing with emotional people about emotional situations and it can be quite volatile…" (line 131-132)** "…it is a big ask and they've… it's quite an emotional thing for them to be doing…" (line 227-228) **"…makes everything more emotional, it makes everything more stressful. Erm… so it makes the whole thing less manageable…." (line 453-455)**

| Working with challenges in the relationship with parents | Difficulties with parental relationship.
Parent's actions making process difficult.
Parent's action making progress difficult.
Frustration at repeating conversations with parents.
Sense of helplessness due to constant parent demands.
Need to restore trust to repair relationships.
Feeling the need for reparation.
Loss of control.
Frustration with relationships
Frustrated with parents. | "…because I haven't been part of that conversation, so that's been quite hard." (line 96-97)
"…more challenging because they've been so aggressive with it it's changed… it's felt far less collaborative." (line 101 -102)
"…Their actions, it made it very stressful, and it made it very…erm… it made it very difficult to feel that we were working forwards…" (line 133 – 135)
"…speaking to the same people and you know I've spoken to them over and over and over and over again…" (line 355-356)
"…the kind of aggressive, challenging, phoning everybody they could think of because it sort of meant that they didn't trust the process anymore." (line 462 -464)
"…They felt that the school hadn't done what it needed to do, a Statement should have been applied for years ago…" (line181 – 183)
"…once it's reached point it's very hard to bring it back down. So even if…things straighten out and sort out the parents have… they've definitely lost faith…" (line 455-457)
"…conversations have been had, paperwork has been filled in where I haven't necessarily been kept in the loop…" (92 -94)
"…I think they're now sort of almost starting again." (line 344-345) |

Superordinate theme: Feeling unsupported, desire for support.		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
SENCo feeling on their own/unsupported through the process.	Disillusion of support Nobody would help. Sense of abandonment Forsaken Sense of isolation Sense of SENCo being excluded. SENCo not being informed Sense of unfairness Questioning LA's empathy of others. SENCo vulnerability Loss of positivity in support from LA.	"…I couldn't review it when I needed to because they didn't have one." (line 44-45). **"…I was just sent a little piece of paper about what it was and I'd never done one before…" (line 391-392)** "…and nobody had given me any information." (line496-497) **"…on my own, my senior leaders hadn't done one they couldn't advise me…" (line392-393)** "…not easy to get them to contribute so it does seem like it's really an education plan…"(line 258-259) **"…I haven't necessarily been kept in the loop…" (line 93-94)** "…to have more input when… for schools and for SENCos when it's the tricky bits, the mediation, the tribunal side of things." (line 488-489) **"…I'd been told to evidence that… then got to the mediation and they said 'Well why are you pursing behaviour..'" (line 427-430)** "…I'm not sure whether they're even aware… they must aware of how stressful dealing with the parents day to day in this situation must be…" (line 398 -400) **"…'make sure you've done this, make sure you've done that' and then when it came to mediation she contradicted herself and said, 'Why didn't you do this?' and I said, 'Because you told me not to'…" (line 421 – 424)** "…the County has tried to make sure there's enough support in place but it hasn't…. quite… been enough… or been the right sort of support I suppose." (line 481 – 483)

| SENCo's need for support | More knowledgeable other.
Need for more knowledgeable other.
Real contact providing security.
Validation of opinion through other professionals
Need for support
Need for support in order to begin
Improbable hopes for support.
Repetitive contact to gain guidance.
Need for hard evidence to secure understanding. | "…I have just sent her email after email but obviously she knows how it all works and is able to guide me…"(line 36-37)
"…she was able to kind of clarify that and give me examples and just erm…make it a little bit more bearable…" (line 372 -373)
"…plus having the contact with the SEN officer I think meant that I felt confident enough to get things going and also knew that I had someone to talk to if something came up…" (line198-200)
"…have shared my frustration with other SENCOs it seems to be something across the area…" (line250-251)
"…Having more support at that time from… from… whoever at County…" (line 396 -397)
"…feeling like I knew what I was doing enough to get started and I knew enough in terms of who to contact if I didn't know." (line 209-210)
"…I don't know. Ha-ha, providing counselling? Ha-ha, erm, yeah…" (line 401)
"…speaking other SENCOs, bombarding her with emails. It hasn't been a very clear process…" (line 39-40)
"…because they didn't offer any exemplars or anything like that…" (line 31-32) |

Subordinate Theme	Emergent Themes	Sample of quotes
Taking sides/alignment	Divergence from school Affiliation with school Agreeing with parents. Assigning of sides Taking sides Side taking Taking sides Loss of collaboration	"…I'm not really sure why a Statement wasn't applied for sooner…" (line 178-179) **"…There's no way, even if we wanted which we wouldn't want to…" (line308-309)** "…I was in agreement that actually County hadn't made the right decision to assess…" (line121-122) **"…Their actions, it made it very stressful, and it made it very…erm… it made it very difficult to feel that we were working forwards…" (line 133 -135)** "…are we representatives of County or are we representatives of the parents?" (line 493-494) **"…the SEN Officer and I have been… it's felt like we're on the same side…" (line 104 – 105)** "…They didn't trust County, they didn't believe that County was… making decisions for the right reasons…" (line 464-465) **"…they very much took control of it and I think that was very difficult for the other professionals involved to kind of navigate it all…" (line 124-126)**
Demands of the EHC process	Weight of SENCo role Investment of time Personal commitment. Impact on other responsibilities Defending ability to perform role**.**	**"…**a huge level of obligation and responsibility…" (line 214) **"…so from September through to the end of June it's taken up a huge amount of my time…"(line142-143)** "…as a person I take my job seriously and I want to do it well and the level of stress and strain…" (line 381-382) **"…things like this have made the rest of my job…erm… impossible really to do…" (line 376-377)** "…I'm quite meticulous you know, going through, making sure I'm doing everything that was detailed on this plan…" (line 432-433)

SENCO 2- Superordinate themes, related subordinate themes, and related emergent themes

Superordinate theme: Supporting, comforting and managing parents		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
SENCo as a guide and support for parents.	SENCo perceived as approachable SENCo needing to reassure parents SENCo treating parents gently Protecting parents SENCo preparing parents SENCo's support needed by parents. Parents seek reassurance Parents requiring guidance to understand process Parents requiring a lot of support.	"…they also feel like they can come and speak to me about it." (line 400 -401) **"…I'm like, okay it's fine we'll do this together." (line 213-214)** "…I tend to drip feed things…" (line 226-227) **"…if it's scary to the parents in our school then they wouldn't engage at all…"(line 417 -418)** **"…I always have a catch up with parents before that and just go through the information with them separately…"** (line 348 -349) **"…they really struggle with those forms. So they've…they have…so I tend to sit down with them and I just talk through…" (line 25 -27)** "…they do get a bit… I do find they'll come to me and be like, well what does this part mean?" (line 407 -409) **"…when the process has been started they obviously are sent and asked for information and I'm sent an information sheet as well and I do find all the parents then bring that to me…" (line 16 -18)** **"…I just feel that the parents really struggle…" (line 37-38)**
Manage emotional situations	SENCo having to ask questions that evoke parents emotions. SENCo evoking parents emotions SENCo having to manage emotional situations Managing parents emotions	"…he was a bit like how can I even answer that? I just want her to live and it's really sad to get that… to put someone in that situation where they're having to think like that." (line 153 -155) **"…that was really upsetting for him" (line 150)** "the question that got him was the kind of what do you want… I can't remember the question now. It's the kind of future one…" (line 147-149) **"I'm just like, well no you might not that's the thing…"(line 409 -410)**
SENCo explaining, educating parents.	Parents need educational knowledge or they can't understand. Understanding of education more meaningful contribution Parents not knowledgeable about the process Unknowledgeable parents Lack of understanding. Parents needing to adopt schools thinking. SENCo struggled to understand, how will parents? Educating parents in the new process Parents need educational knowledge or they're can't understand. Parents need educational knowledge or they're	"…I think though if I was a parent and I wasn't a teacher I don't know how you're supposed to know how to…" (line 364 -365) **"…I did it first and then we can discuss it…" (line 385)** "…None of the parents have actually known about it either." (line 164-165) **"…they're not very well educated in a way…" (line 24)** "…they find it hard to understand what's actually needed.." (line 29) **"…in the end he did realise that but actually it was going to be easier from that sense…" (line 145 -146)** **"…It was really confusing and I didn't understand what they wanted so I was like how are these parents going to understand it?" (line 74 -75) "…I'm like, well it's like the new version of a Statement, it's just a bit more parent led…erm… but yeah so I think they're still thinking in Statement terms…" (line 237 -239) **"…Especially things like aims and outcomes and your short-term goals, how does a parent know what their child should be doing?" (line 366 -368)**

	can't understand.	
SENCo managing parents' expectations about the process and outcomes.	Need to manage parent expectations from the start. Managing parents expectations. Parents wants can be unrealistic Managing parental expectations from the start Balance between parental desires and understanding. Having to manage parents' expectations of their child's future. Managing parents expectations of outcomes. Reiterating purpose/aim of the EHC plan	"…say to them that it's not a magic cure to anything, it's not really going to make a huge… nothing's going to come with it…" (line 201 -203) **"…you kind of say to them but actually we're doing this application it might not even be agreed…" (line 311 -312)** "…I can say what I want my child to have and it was like, yes you can but it's not always feasible and you've got to be realistic…" (line 106 -108) **"…I do really, really enforce that it's not… you're not really going to get anything extra …" (line 242 – 243)** "…some of the parents as well are a bit like well I just want someone to be there for them, I don't know how …" (line 487 -488) **"…They use that word 'normal' and I think to them that probably is what…" (line 157 – 158)** "…I always do try to joke about it and make it as light as possible because I think if it's scary to the parents in our school then they wouldn't engage at all…" (line 416 – 418) **"…… I do really, really enforce that it's not… you're not really going to get anything extra it's just that it gives more… it opens more doors down the line…" (line 242-244)**
SENCo needing to cajole parents to participate in the process.	SENCo cajoling parents to join with school Incite parents to join in Viewing self as chasing parents SENCo needs to persuade parents to share information Persuasion of parents to engage with process SENCo persuading parents. Convincing parents of the worth of the EHC document. SENCo convincing parents of EHC process SENCo needing to 'sell' the process	"…the parents aren't really driving it and it still is really the school but with them kind of on side." (line 78 -79) **"…hopefully try to…erm… get the parents on-board." (line 358-359)** "…really trying to badger them to do things…" (line 342 -343) **"…Although it has taken a bit of persuasion sometimes…" (line 132)** "…had to really sit down with him a couple of times…" (line 45) **"…but again I was like but it will really help…" (307)** "…comes to secondary schools there might be more options and it might just… it just means that it's a legal document that is… puts everything firmly in place…" (line 205 -207) **"…It needs to then be written down and then you won't have to keep sharing…" (line 47 -48)** "…point of the EHC plan is that this is your time to say it all and that will be passed up." (line 139-140)

Superordinate theme: Juggling self-doubt and own emotions		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
SENCo managing own complex feelings evoked by working with parents.	Resentment towards parents Pitying parents position in the system Empathy for parents SENCo guilty about upsetting parents Guilt for not being able to meet all pupil's	"…the parent should be also actively helping us and that would make such a difference." (line 458 -459) **"…I feel sorry for them because they get really frustrated with the whole system." (line 298 -299)** "…I actually do feel that it's just a really hard thing to expect them to be able to do." (line 478 -479) **"…he found that really difficult and I think because a lot of what we were saying was upsetting…" (line 48 -50)** "…kids aren't really getting the support… it should be in place really now…" (line 269) **"…I took over from someone else I felt there was quite a few children in the school that actually probably did**

	needs SENCo making up for previous SENCo's failures Parents ungrateful Awareness of own judgements	**need that and hadn't had that already." (line 190 -192)** **"…**but some of the time I don't then see those parents for another year until the next review." (line 420 -421) **"…they're not very well educated in a way, I know that's an awful thing to say…" (line 23-24)**
SENCo questioning own abilities/self-doubt	Self-doubt Questioning approach Questioning ability Sense of failure Unsure of clarity of explanations Questioning implementation of role SENCo unsure of own explanation Questioning understanding of process External information to strengthen SENCos explanation of process. Prediction that parents would disagree with SENCo's opinions Successful application equals a good SENCo. Success partly down to chance Success partly down to luck, protecting self? Element of luck involved in successful application	"…So I…And then you wonder well actually are all SENCOs doing that as well?" (line 505 – 506) **"…I've got a good success rate so far but… I don't know." (line 182 -183)** "…I'm not finding them really working together…" (line 341) **"…because I'm finding that we're not really working together…" (line 355)** "…I would like to hope that the parents have found it… sort the support that I have done that with them but …yeah…I think it hasn't been an easy thing…" (line 76 -78) **"…Maybe I take on too much of that, oh I'll do it with you and I'll do… I don't know." (line 513 -514)** "…… the conversations has always been okay but I just… I'm never sure if they actually really understand what it is…" (line 234 – 235) **"…we're kind of having to almost make it up." (line 472 -473)** "…I also tend to show them an example of a blanked out one just so that they've got an idea because otherwise it's, well what is that?" (line 231 -233) **"…I haven't had any parents that are against it which is… good I suppose…" (line 199 -200)** "…Thankfully every application I've made has gone through so I've got a good success rate so far…" (line 181 - 183) **"…we're doing this application it might not even be agreed…" (line 311-312)** "…Yes, I was lucky." (line 323) **"…thankfully I managed to get it…" (line 193)**
SENCo frightened of appearing to be nosey/unprofessional?	Uncovering undesirable information Fear of finding out too much about families Unclear boundaries of information for professional use and personal information Some information is more useful than others	"…like a behaviour issue and some of it might be linked to things that are going on at home." (line 282 – 283) **"…you don't want to pry too much into things…" (line 123 -124)** "…family issues like if there's been a breakup or anything like that that's always a difficult one to broach." (line 294 – 295) **"…because I think that's more useful for professionals to know that sort of thing." (line 117 -118)**

Superordinate theme: Need for support, feeling isolated

Subordinate Theme	Emergent Themes	Sample of quotes
SENCo needs support to facilitate understanding and self-confidence.	Other SENCo support boosted confidence in own ability External support sought from other SENCos Real examples of applications valued by SENCo Desire for support Desire for support	"…that support has been massive and I've then done the same for some other people…" (line 256 -257) **"…there's about six of us…" (line 253)** "…And one of them sent me back her application with like the name and stuff blocked out just so I had an idea…" (line 254 – 255) **"…I would have found really helpful as a SENCO if I'd been given an example plan…" (line 525 -526)** "…example aims and outcomes would have been helpful…" (line 528 -529)
SENCo feeling unsupported and alone.	Nobody else to do the job Abandonment SENCo alone in application School staff have different responsibilities Sense of remoteness. SENCo separate to school SENCo (not school) led	"…I do find all the parents then bring that to me as well so I end up doing that one." (line 18 -19) **"…I've done all that as well. I haven't had anyone from County come into to do it so…" (line 469 – 470)** "…book three days out of work like where I stay at home and I actually can just do the paperwork…" (line 171 -172) **"…in school everyone else has got their own jobs to do…" (line 258 -259)** "…I phoned up County and I was just like I just don't get… what do you want? What is an aim and out… I was like are they not the same? It wasn't that helpful, I got sent this thing that didn't really explain it anyway…" (line 521 -524) **"…some parents who probably wouldn't really have much to do with coming into school now see me a bit more and are happier to come and see me…" (line 402 -404).** "…it's always me suggesting to the parent about going for it and then me getting the ball rolling and everything going…" (line 210 -212)

Superordinate theme: More but not too much more		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
Role of parents	Desperate for parents to support child at home Suspicion of being judged by parents Parent input small Parents reluctant to engage with process Process has unrealistic expectations of parents 'Ideal parent' Good process, parents who are easy and	"…if you could just read with your child." (line 462) **"…massively and I wonder if they probably are a bit like, oh god she's…" (line 502 -503)** "…our parents aren't always the most involved in their education…" (line 179-180) **"… they want the final product but they're not really wanting to, erm…not contribute…" (line 65-66)** "… unless you have even been part of the education system I don't know how you can expect someone to know how…" (line 480 -481) **"…a parent that's actually on board…" (line 425)** "…meet with her she'll be happy to kind of give me the information and… she'll be… she will be interested…" (line 445 -446)

	shoulder some responsibility	
SENCo's fantasy of the parent role.	Worry of parents telling professionals how to do their job Fear of parents taking over Parents very 'on-board' process would be difficult Realisation of parents capabilities.	"…I don't want them to be coming in and saying right I feel my child should be doing this, this, this every day and at this time you should be teaching them this." (line97 -100) **"…want them really to be involved but then there's also a certain step you don't really want…" (line 96 -97)** "…oh my god if we had that parent involved like that would be awful…" (line 104 -105) "…oh so parents are actually doing these…" (line 511)

Superordinate theme: Unclear remit of SENCo		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
SENCo having additional responsibilities due to there being nobody else **(later renamed: Unclear remit of SENCo role)**	Desire for an experienced individual to take this role. Unfilled role. Tasks left up to SENCo Forced into 'facilitator role' Responsibility falls to SENCo SENCo burdened with being sole source of support in school for parents Sense of burdened with responsibility SENCo solely responsible for application completion SENCo feeling solely responsible for application Added responsibility SENCo forced to take up. Parents want school to take responsibility. SENCo (not school) led process	"…someone who's just really experienced in getting that information from the parents." (line 129 -130) **"…when we started out that there was these 'facilitators' who worked for County…" (line 491 -492)** "…I've kind of been the one that's sat with them and got the information even for the application and then for the sort of statutory assessment…" (line 12 -14) **"…I ended up being the facilitator in all four of them." (line 5-6)** "I've done all that as well. I haven't had anyone from County come into to do it…" (line 469 -470) **"…when they get the letter they bring in the letter going, what's this? What does this mean?... So it does seem… it's always kind of… they'll come in and see me…" (line 212 -215)** "…it does tend to be mostly education like all the kind of… and sometimes it would be nice for there to be something." (line 451 -453) **"…it means it ends up me pooling it all together and typing it all up and things…" (line 262 -263)** "…have a sort of maybe two hour chat with the parent to get the information and then I type it all up and stuff." (line 176 -177) **"…we didn't have facilitators involved…erm… apart from me being it…"(line 496 -497)** "…they don't want to have to do all that work towards getting it…" (line 67) **"…I have found that it's always me suggesting to the parent about going for it and then me getting the ball rolling and everything going." (line 210 -212)**

Subordinate Theme	Emergent Themes	Sample of quotes
Demands of the EHC process	SENCo overwhelmed with responsibilities SENCo irritated by duration of process High work load EHC process all consuming Encumbering self to facilitate parental agreement. SENCo integral to process, nobody else to do it.	"…I kind of have my little list of that I need to apply for but you just know it's going to take so long…" (line 265-267) **"…But yes it's just a long process." (line 56 -57)** "…the application part that's very hands on…" (line 10) **"…it is just time consuming it is that you find difficult.." (line 264)** "…why I'm going to get as much information from you as possible because we want to make sure it's all there so that they can't say no…" (line 316-317) **"…I think it's the driving role…" (line 467)**
Power/control – who has it?	Uneven power distribution, SENCo and parents Parents having all the power Maintain control of application SENCo feeling she needs to maintain control Parents defending themselves to SENCo SENCo in a powerful position Parents could have too much power.	"…It's like actually if I did it first and then we can discuss it then." (line 385 – 386) **"…I don't want them to be coming in and saying right I feel my child should be doing this, this, this every day and at this time…" (line 97 – 99)** "…I'd rather do the original application because I think if they were doing it is difficult and I don't feel that they maybe would have got through…" (line 218 – 220) **"…just take notes while we're doing it, I type it up for them and then I get them to look through it…"(line 31 - 32)** "…some parents they almost kind of want to say but oh I tried this and I tried this…" (line 291 – 292) **"…they almost feel like it's their… they have to justify themselves…" (line 287 – 288)** "…like she had too much power then, it was like, but I can say what I want my child to have…" (line 105 -106)
Who is the SENCo working for?	Struggling with allegiances Aligning with parents Comradeship Stuck between sides Alignment with school Separate from parents Home and school separate, home should inform school.	"…but they should have got it because then you're kind of like trying to justify it but actually in your head it's like, no I really can't justify this." (line 329 – 331) **"…that's why we're doing this and that's why I'm going to get as much information from you as possible because we want to make sure it's all there so that they can't say no." (line 315 – 317)** "…I don't really get it either so we'll kind of just feel our way through…" (line 544 -555) **"…another panel and they might not agree it. But I'm always like, but I've never had anyone not agree it, I don't know why they would waste their time…" (line 413- 414)** "…IEPs in our school we don't find… even trying to get parents in to come and do that is really difficult." (line360 -361) **"…everything is supposed to be written together with the parents but our parents just don't do… they're not like that…" (line 362 -363)** "…more about marrying up the way they work at home with the way we work in school…" (line 114- 115)

SENCO 3 - Superordinate themes, related Subordinate themes, and related emergent themes

Superordinate theme: Teaching, protecting and directing parents

Subordinate Theme	Emergent Themes	Sample of quotes
SENCo managing parents' expectations of child's needs and process	Parents are bias Forcing parents to accept child's difficulties Making parents aware of need Needing to adjust parent's perceptions of their child Parents unrealistic expectations Adjusting parents perceptions Reducing support to money Families can deceive themselves Forcing parents to see reality. Limit to SENCo role Child not the sole centre of SENCo's world.	"…give a very, very one sided view of their child…" (line 555-556) **"…now grateful that she was pushed, not…guided to get that diagnosis…" (line 163 -164)** "…some will be completely oblivious to it." (line 95) **"…profound and moderate SEN provision child so it's like a significant learning delay there and his dad actually thought he was very, very bright…" (line 566-568)** **"…has he got his Care Plan yet? Not yet, give us a minute." (line413 -414)** "…they always think if they're going to speak everything will be alright." (line203-204) **"…parents want all this support but they don't get that this isn't going to happen because there isn't money…" (line 292-293)** "…She said that he said "mummy", well he can't make the "mmm" sound…" (line 724 -725) **"…you're having to knock down those… I don't know those… that perception of what they think their child is and what the reality is." (line 527 -528)** "…You don't want to take those away but hopefully in time they will modify those to realistic ones." (line595-596) **"…they are disrupting the rest of the class…" (line 319)**
SENCo leading parents	Need to coax parents SENCo burdened with dragging parents through the EHC process. SENCo leading, telling, pushing Reality SENCo leading parents SENCo leading parents SENCo guiding parents	"…they work together to sort of come round to it." (line 409-410) **"…you're dragging them to that point…" (line 528)** "…you're telling them, you've got to do this, you've got to do that." (line 281-282) **"…it's more me taking them or us taking them with us." (line 621-622)** "…you're bringing them along…" (line 482) **"…lot of the guiding because there's an awful lot of parents that don't know anything…" (line 261-262)**
Need to 'educate' parents	Futile explaining Repeatedly explaining to parents SENCo explanations fruitless Educating parents about the different system SENCo has wider experience, need to educate parents SENCo stirred to explain system	"…only take snippets of information…" (line 478) **"However much you explain to them they don't really understand…" (line 475-476)** "…you try as hard to explain it to them don't you? But they just don't get the process…" (line 36-37) **"…They thought they were the same thing, yes that's all in place so then they had…erm… we then had to explain the difference." (line 250-251)** "…quite often with parents they are… we are saying, you know, in school they're not…" (line 601-602) **"…A lot of the parents I speak to do not really understand the system erm…and there's so many parts to it that it's ever so hard to explain it all at once." (line 655-657)** "…parents coming in going, "I want them to go to special school". Okay so has anyone spoken to you about

		that? "No"…" (line 54-56) **"…it just needed a bit more explanation…" (line 687-688)**
Managing emotional situations	Difficult conversations about need Emotional conversations Difficult conversations Difficult conversations with parents Emotional situations Advocating for the child whilst being sensitive to parents emotional state SENCo needs to respond to parents emotions Need to be tough SENCo needing to be frank Strive to be honest Relationship can be volatile Risk of jeopardising relationship if read parent wrong. Fragile relationships with parents. Lasting damage to relationships.	"…difficult to take on when you're sort of giving to them the first time…" (531-532) **"…that's all they would cling onto…" (line 199-200)** "…it's going to be really hard for him to say mummy…" (line 725) **"…completely oblivious so then you have to have that whole journey with them of, I think your child might need some extra help…" (line 129-130)** "…we have to do that journey as well." (line 43) **"…you don't want to beat the parent… you want them to have those dreams for their children." (line 594-595)** "…sometimes you do have to just be brutal." (line 180) **"…had to just lay it down on a piece of paper…" (line 192)** "…they are really good and you can be honest." (line 185-186) **"…I have had her shouting at me…" (line 708)** "…I think she just misread that parent at the time and that wasn't a good relationship and that wasn't a good relationship all the way through." (line 666-668) **"…then we're saying to them, right your child's got a need." (line 156-157)** "…Got mum's back right up, really tough relationship with her wasn't it? All the way through…" (line 161-162)
Difficulties of Parents being involved in the process	Parents need to see bigger picture Parents are unknowledgeable Parents lack of knowledge about provisions Parent unaware of development milestones Parents not understanding child's needs Educated v's non-educated parents Educated parents are able to lead. Easier to fulfil role without parental involvement More parental involvement, slower process SENCo role easier when separate from parents role Parents blindly fighting the system	"…don't see the bigger picture…" (line 206) **"…they don't know what's available…" (line 490-491)** "…go and have a look at what's out there." (line 425) **"…all they were interested in was when was he going to read and write." (line 580-581)** "His mum doesn't understand that he does have this significant language difficulty…" (line 31-32) **"…some very educated parents that know what they want to get, what they want out of it, what they want it to say and that's great." (line 263-264)** "…she knows what she wants, and she knows where she needs to go, and she is telling them what needs to be done…" (line 493-494) **"…a professional saying this is what's best for your child and that seemed to make more sense than…" (line 297-299)** "…so much more talking to parents. They don't understand what they're doing…" (line 35-36) **"…I have sat down with parents and gone through the form with them before, before they've sent it off but not… mine's already gone at that point, mine's with County, finished." (line 348-350)** "…they don't understand the system…" (line 245)

| Parents need SENCo to protect them | Parents misinformed
SENCo protecting parents
SENCo needing to shield parents.
SENCo needs to understand parents | "…the doctor will put on a form they need one to one support…" (line 286-287)
"…we don't tell them everything they get up to in school because it would just be soul destroying…" (line 187-188)
"…so bombarded with by information they just get lost…" (line 653-654)
"…She has her own emotional needs…" (line 707) |

Superordinate theme: Internal struggle of SENCo		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
SENCo managing own feelings evoked by the process	SENCo drained Sense of cruel obligation Feeling sorry for parents SENCo made to feel devious Long process to endure Big accountability Worried for children Compassion for parents Empathise with parents SENCo remedying situations Angry at other professionals.	"…nearly killed us last year didn't they? Physically and mentally." (line 256-257) **"…They almost had his life mapped out for him of what he needed to achieve by certain ages." (line 588-589)** "…… poor mum…" (line 736) **"…you do feel like you're going behind their back…" (line 564-565)** "…best part of a year if not longer to get these children the right support that they need…" (line 47-48) **"…Word for word what you've written, it's not been changed." (line 67)** "…Where do these children go? Where's the support out there for them?" (line 229-230) **"…you don't want to upset the parents…" (line 179)** "…we try and kind of like empathise with them." (line 183-184) **"…They took parents money, looked after her child and didn't cater for his needs." (line 123-124)** **"…**Down's syndrome, he has had leukaemia, he is fed by a tube, he's in nappies, he has significant speech and language delay. No Care Plan started." (line 418-420)
SENCo unappreciated	Unseen work, unacknowledged SENCo not appreciated Parents not listening to SENCo SENCo not viewed as expert, needs back up SENCo knows what they are talking about	"…more of what was I would say was behind the scenes…" (line 761) **"…we really, really work hard to support all the children…" (line 210-211)** "…I said I cannot get one to one support for a child who swings off the ceiling, he's not going to get one to one sup… I'm going to put it anyway." (line 289-291) **"…as many professionals as possible saying the same thing…" (line151-152)** **"…**taking our sort of professional insight into account…" (line 625-626)

Superordinate theme: Feeling isolated, wanting support

Subordinate Theme	Emergent Themes	Sample of quotes
SENCo needing support	Sense of Camaraderie with other SENCos Back up available if needed Being held in mind Other local SENCos source of support SEN officer available support Reduced isolation Unsure of self	"…we started a little SENCo group…"(line 793) **"…I've got my Pitbull on side if I need her…" (line 669-670)** "…They'd put a lot of thought into it and they'd given us a lot of resources to use so that was good." (line 10-11) **"…I met a group of local SENCos who have become good friends and we are constantly emailing…" (line 791-792)** "…she is contactable by email and phone…" (line 779-780) **"…we've got the cluster meetings that are…erm… three times a year for the SEN funding so that's a good time." (line798-800)** "…now it just seems that I'm writing, someone's checking it and then it's getting sent back to me." (line 70-71)
SENCo feeling alone	SENCo working alone Starting from scratch Desperate for evidence of need Resenting asking for help Working alone Desire for specialist help Frustration at other professionals Frustration at other professionals SENCo looking unprofessional due to not being informed by others. SENCo being forgotten.	"… they didn't arrive with those, we had to get to them didn't we?" (line 219-220) **"…no one had put anything in place for her…" (line 97 -98)** "…When there isn't anything in place when they arrive even, even just evidence that you can use to go with…" (line 528 -529) **"…begrudge calling them in." (line 225-226)** "…Not one single health professional had started a Care Plan." (line 101-102) **"…But if there was someone to come in and support." (line 468-469)** "…but they've not actually started the process…" (line 56-57) **"…why if all these professionals are on board why hasn't anyone started a Care Plan?"(line 455-456)** "…I've said what I've been told and then something else happens…" (line 336-337) **"…I didn't know it had to be done at that point…" (line 811)**

Superordinate theme: Unclear remit of SENCo role		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
Unclear remit of SENCo role (Previously named: SENCo being left to take up additional roles – nobody else doing them)	Desire for someone else to educate parents Responsibility left to SENCo Perception that workload had been passed on to SENCo SENCo left to initiate EHC conversation Being burdened with informing parents Burdened with responsibility SENCo picking up the slack SENCo left to be advocate SENCo left to explain SENCo doing all the work SENCo desperate for evidence of need/support Indignant at being forced to be the 'bad guys' Sense of needing to do child's needs justice SENCo as advocate	"…If nobody has explained that…" (line 304) **"…taken away from people who write it at County and give them to us." (line60-61)** "…now I'm doing a lot more of the things that the SEN officer would have done on my behalf." (line 763 -764) **"…it's mainly… us speaking to parents." (line 399)** "…there's no one to explain it to them…" (line 40) **"…They leave it all to us…" (line 104)** "…So they didn't have anything, they didn't have IEPs or any kind of targets for him." (line 119-120) **"…They're happy to assess a child and write a report but nobody wants to take that role on." (line 356-357)** "…nobodies bothered to tell them." (line428) "…we're pretty much writing the Care Plan…" (line 64) **"…isn't anything in place when they arrive even…" (line 529)** "..we don't have any relationship with them and then we're saying to them, right your child's got a need." (line155-156) **"…detailed description of the child. I can't write that as accurately as if the child was in Year 2 and I've known them." (line 438-439)** "…which is always me…" (line 353)

Superordinate theme: Building the SENCO-parent relationship		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
Building the SENCo-parent relationship	Wider understanding/experience of parent than just the EHC. Having to figure out what parents want in the relationship EHC doesn't facilitate the relationships Needing to respond to parents needs. Need to have a plan of action of parent interaction Humanising self to build relationship.	"…So it's taken a long time to get them to that point so you almost had to go through the first one to get them to understand…" (line 175-177) **"…it's getting to know parents…" (line 738)** "…whole process a lot more clinical. These are conversations that I was having naturally with parents…" (line 750-751) **"…We've got parents who have got their own needs so they find it hard to do things like that…"(line 23-24)** "…I'm a bit more, right let me go into that sort of slowly, I'll talk about that this time, then we'll talk about that next time." (line 670-671) **"…I said to her well I wouldn't take my girls on a plane by myself, you're doing an amazing job…" (line 742-743)** **"…**I quite often use my family as examples…" (line 741) **"…working together depends on the parents…" (line 634-635)**

	SENCo wanting to be seen as a parent.	"…Whereas I'm a bit more softly, softly…" (line 669)
	Parents dictate relationship	**"…, I said, obviously we were sad he hit but we were so happy, that's an interaction…" (line 734-735)**
	SENCo approach is personal.	
	SENCo not always the bearer of bad news	

Superordinate theme: Demands of the EHCP process		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
Demands of the EHC process	Need to get right support EHC process increased workload Workload Trapped by paperwork Lack of time Time commitment/consuming Duration of process Duration of process Time consuming Time consuming Pressure to get support in place Need to prioritise actions Loss of other aspects of role Sense SENCo has lost something positive and gained something negative Deprived of interacting with children Sense of loss Intense process	"…he's only just moved to Special Provision…" (line 111) **"…seems a lot more work I think…" (line 760)** "…so ten Statements, ten conversions in Care Plans." (line 362-363) **"…I'm in here all the time doing paperwork…" (line 772)** "…the first Care Plan I did took us five hours, we were here the whole day…" (line 368) **"…Still took a year…" (line 111)** "…That takes so long, so long because all of these services…" (line 135-136) **"…SENCo more less concentrates on the paperwork side of things…" (line 80)** "…they take a lot longer, a lot more of my time than the Statements used to…" (line 765-766) **"…We didn't go there for the long term…" (line 592)** "…basically my working week wasn't it? That's all I did."(line 78) **"…Everything's harder…" (line 816)** "…I didn't get to see children at all really…" (line 83) **"…I'm not working with children on the SEN register that are below that Care Plan level…" (line 767-768)** "…It's not a natural conversation. You know, I don't spend five hours with parents things like that." (line 753-754)

Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
Control/power – who	Belief that the decision is made by both Balance in listening to and only listen to	"…Well…it's a little bit both isn't it?" (line 381) **"…don't get me wrong they should be taken on board but they need… they're not always… They don't see the**

has it?	parents More accessible to parents (email) Respecting parent's wishes Parents not always confident to challenge SENCo working alongside parents Unbalanced relationship SENCo controlling what information to give parent Dependency on parents Parents should have opportunities to make decisions Unrealistic views disempowering parents	bigger picture." (line 560 -562) "…I'm doing a lot more on email than I used to." (line 373) "…… they don't treat her as she has a need, parents are very much, no she's fine let her get on with it." (line 696-697) "…fobbed off by the doctor…" (line 392) "…making that joint application to LA…" (line 521) "…I don't think it's always a fair working together and I think ideally it would be…" (line 622 -623) "…it's picking your battles…" (line188-189) "…You couldn't send your bit off until the parents had done their bit…" (line 19) "…opportunities to make decisions whilst taking our sort of professional insight into account…" (line 625-626) "…I find that then shunts them down from that decision making role." (line 295-296)
Ideal parent (previously named Role of parents)	Parents need to be 'open'. On board parents easier Parents would be knowledgeable Parents don't question SENCo. Parents actively involved, working relationship with SENCo Trust needed from both sides. SENCo needs to trust parents	"…it certainly helps… we get more from some parents than others."(line 705-706) "…what have you got? What can you give me?" (line 107) "…ideally it's parents having that awareness of that journey…" (line 618) "…she has trust in me…" (line 628) "…they've got that awareness that that should be in place for him so then I'm sort of working on their behalf…" (line 638-639) "…she'd say I do this, I do this. We'd try it in school and he'd explode, you think well you don't do that…" (line 716-717) "…there are times when you think actually that's not…" (line 610-611)

SENCO 4 – Superordinate themes, related Subordinate themes, and related emergent themes

Superordinate theme: Emotions, self-doubt, and judging success		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
SENCo managing own complex feelings	SENCo having to manage own feelings Pity for parents SENCo empathetic SENCo empathy for parents SENCo frustrated by restrictive forms. SENCos not respected by parents SENCo worried about parental perceptions of their professionalism. SENCo a personal role SENCo feeling vulnerable Need to protect self Taking it personally SENCos need to be immune SENCo role is not an easy role. Indignant to support parents.	"…that's flattering but I knew I wasn't going to take that at face value because I knew their ultimate aim…" (line 235-236) **"… and I felt sorry for them…" (line 359-360)** "…the frustration for parents because it isn't like that." (line 386) **"…still working to that confine when you were presenting your case." (line 14-15)** "…… I think it's just courtesy, actually." (line 767-768) **"…your parents are telling you this, you look completely inept…" (line 145-146)** "Angry. I was really… you haven't listened to everything we've told you…" (line 586) **"…… you feel quite vulnerable actually as a person…" (line 659-660)** "……but actually do you have the time for that too? So it's a bit of a self-preservation as well." (line 666-667) **"…it was actually insulting and that's when I got very cross." (line 466)** "…a bit battle hardened and can cope with it." (line 670) **"…You have to have a thick skin. Don't take things personally." (line 815-816)** "…Do I have to do that with them?" (line 614-615)
SENCo not feeling respecting by parents	SENCo feeling dismissed by parents Parents not valuing SENCo opinion Parental suspicion of SENCo motive SENCo not respected as a professional by parents Parents not respecting SENCo SENCo needing another professional to echo opinion for parents to accept it SENCo suspicious of parents.	"…I had told them on numerous occasions this child, your child is not exceptional enough…" (line 251) **"…they didn't perceive that we knew what we were doing…" (line 619)** "…because there is that distrust…" (line 280-281) **"…Mr and Mrs X have requested an assessment for an EHCP and I was like, 'hello? No one's told me'…" (line 567-568)** "…… it's rude, you've not even consulted us." (line 587-588) **"…the SEN officer and I were both telling them everything that they should have known a long time before." (line 604-604)** "…the parents are trying to trip you up because you don't know what you're doing and we're going to teach you…" (line 589-591)
Responsibility of SENCo role	Feeling the weight of the role SENCo integral role EHC process is a high responsibility part of the SENCo role	"…at the end of the day that's a child's future. It's not… a case is it?" (line 566-567) **"…I put everything and I wrote reams, and reams, and reams, and showed absolutely everything that we were doing that was having an impact…" (line 75-77)** "…I felt like a lawyer. I took my code of practice in, big wodge, …" (line 521-522)

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Pressure on SENCo to be successful	Success or a fail Pressure on SENCo to be successful SENCo feeling responsible for achieving parent's wishes SENCo responsible for gaining an EHC plan Parents judge SENCo on outcome of application Pressure to provide detailed information SENCo responsible for success or failure of application	"…I did win the case…" (line 70) **"…the SENCO is pivotal I think to the success or failure really…" (line 687-688)** "…I just wanted to get what was best for them…" (line 515) **"…and that was myself that did that, it wasn't the class teacher…" (line 564-565)** "…I thought the parent must think I'm rubbish…" (line 444-445) **"…I know, I had to try and paint a picture of this child…" (line 527-528)** "…the SENCOs role in writing that education section is crucial to whether something will be approved or not…" (line 441-442)
SENCo questioning own ability/needing reassurance?	SENCo needing reassurance SENCo questioning own ability EHC decision validates SENCo view. Belief other professionals can provide better information	"…That's when I spoke to… erm…and she went absolutely no.." (line 448-449) **"…is this something I've done wrong? Am I not writing it properly?" (line 477-478)** "…the EHCP was turned down or the assessment for was turned down…" (line 270-271) **"…when the EP came in as part of the process to say and meet with the child and have that conversation." (line 536-537)**

Superordinate theme: Allegiance of the SENCO		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
Alliance of SENCo (Previously named: Side taking/alignment)	Neutral advocate needed Taking parents side Opportunity to challenge decisions SENCo on the side of the parent. Parents aligned with SENCo Allegiances Side taking Side-taking SENCo defending teachers. Siding with parent SENCo/teachers perceived to align with LA	"…somebody who knows both camps they can act as an intermediary…" (line 269-270) **"….they can jump on the bandwagon…" (line 261)** "…to sit down with myself and the parent…" (line 38-39) **"…we managed to negotiate…" (line 46)** "…parent I felt that… she was almost kind of defending me." (line 471-472) **"…who do you work for because that comes down to it." (line 475)** "…and it can be them and us." (line 688-689) **"…became a 'them and us' against the authority." (line 473)** "…was fighting the corner for the parent and for the children but it isn't a personal vendetta." (line 402-403) **"…they're working for the authorities…" (line 267)** "…we're not out to get you, we're not out to trip you up. We want what's best for your child…" (line 774-775)

	SENCo on child's side.	

Superordinate theme: SENCO as teacher, manager and carer of parents		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
Parents lack of understanding	Professional's time is wasted due to parents lack of understanding Lack of parental understanding of inclusive teaching Parents doing what they think is best with the information that they have Parents lack understanding Parents lack the understanding of inclusive teaching Parents not understanding inclusive teaching Parents are too child centred Parents lack knowledge of what is exceptional need. Parents' belief that EHC is more general Parents need to understand teacher's responsibility for supporting SEN	"…that isn't clear to parents. So we had to go through all of this meeting…" (line 166) **"…they get hung up on, well I want them to have one to one support and I want them to have this." (line 776 -777)** "…that was the parent initiating it, thinking that that would help him…" (line 171-172) **"…look this is what we do but you're not seeing it." (line 507)** "…Whereas they don't see the bigger picture." (line 161-162) **"…and I was also the SENCO so their parents felt, erm…probably not correctly but they felt that things were looked at Year 1 and they were looked at in 5…" (line 187-189)** "…comes a point when a specialist provision… any authority there are only so many places…" (line 287-288) **"…we all think, until you've worked in a school, 'oh my child's needs are exceptional'…" (line 159-160)** "…the marketing out there have made it such that any child with additional needs…" (line 248-249) **"…there is no perception, and I don't know how that can be resolved, by the parents of the holistic approach that a teacher has to take." (line 405-407)**
SENCo explaining process/expanding understanding of parents	SENCo needing to explain several areas to parents SENCo educating parents SENCo feeling responsible for empowering parents through education SENCo teaching parents	"…when they're not in school they don't know, they can't see what they're like in school…" (line 310-311) **"…I feel like I'm the educator of them…" (line 496)** "…There's a lot to learn there…" (line 342) **"…and ask these questions about the secondary school." (line 344-345)**
SENCo managing parents expectations	SENCo needing adjust parent's expectations. SENCo managing parents expectations.	"…mentoring with the family and that I think the penny dropped then." (line 258-259) **"… guide that parent into thinking is this really going to fulfil what I want?" (line 643-644)** "…there almost needs to be a checklist, an EHCP, you want to request one; number one have you spoken to

	Parents expectations need to be managed. Parents become one-minded Managing parent expectations Difficult role to perform in SENCo-parent relationship.	the child's educational setting, SENCO?" (line 579 -581) **"…if anything they were very blinkered and they were just out on a mission…" (line 594-595)** "…to support them about the realistic outcomes…" (line 635-636) **"…you have to be very careful not to come across as condescending…"(line 499)**
Managing emotional situations	SENCo needing to provide support when others can't SENCo counselling parents Difficult relationship SENCo as counsellor Parents unsettled by change Parents needing to be comforted SENCo wants to emotionally support parents SENCo managing parental emotions SEN made to feel different Parents can be difficult to manage Age of SENCo different dynamic	"…they can't do that so therefore it is the role…" (line 686-687) **"…almost becoming like a counsellor…" (line 637)** "…That's what I mean you've got these two entities and they're at loggerheads." (line 808-809) **"…they have to come round to that view…" (line 683-684)** "…I think it's really tough for parents actually at that… Year 6/7 transition is really, really hard…" (line 374-375) **"…they were scared. So that's what I mean, they almost needed their hand holding…" (line 363-364)** "…you want to come and take them by the hand…" (line 389) **"…the parent was absolutely fuming…" (line 220)** "…… you felt embarrassed… 'ou can I see the SENCO please?'" (line 372 -373) "…a particular parent is very forthright and can be actually very aggressive." (line 658-659) **"…if you are young and you are having to work with parents who are a lot older than you who can actually be very forthright and try and belittle you…" (line 653-655)**

Superordinate theme: Need for skills and support		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
Desire for more confidence	More training needed. Additional skills needed to do role. SENCo learning how to support parental understanding of SEN need/support Feeling untrained	"…you can learn that and you can be… so I think that should be on every SEN award training…" (line 703-704) **"…you've done your SEN award it's very hard… it's a real skill actually and you know I've done counselling courses…" (line 650 -651)** "…actually there in black and white, when she did it on a big flip chart in black and white…" (line 304 -305) **"…I thought I'm a teacher I'm not a lawyer…" (line 524)**
SENCos need additional skills	Age and being a parent important to undertaking the role SENCo being a parent is helpful SENCo having other skills to draw on is beneficial	"……as an older person, haha, I think… and I've had children and I know those emotions…" (line 500-501) **"…I've been through that as a parent myself…" (line 646)** "…I've been a teacher, and I've done other things. So I've got different experiences to add to that role…" (line 648-649) **"……. all these books at home I'm reading at the minute. One was How to Deal with Difficult People…"**

	Need for SENCo to develop additional skills	(line 678 -679)
Need for other professionals support	Other professionals support SENCo Desire for more evidence to support SENCo's work Support increases SENCo confidence Other professional can provide better information.	"…that's where having the professional support saying, yes they have done a really good job actually…" (line 85-86) **"…They need to see more of a holistic approach not just what the SENCo's written down…" (line 534 -535)** "…I recommended and that the EP agreed with previously would be beneficial…" (line 96-97) **"…she is that professional to write… really clearly, well actually they've done all of this…" (line 541-542)**

Superordinate theme: Power/control – who has it?		
Subordinate Theme	Emergent Themes	Sample of quotes
Power/control – who has it?	Perceived power-shift to parents Information is powerful, needed to be successful Knowledge is power Information is power, need to have it. SENCo feeling powerless. Parents gaining knowledge/power. SENCo feeling threatened. SENCo feeling reduction in status/ability to influence Parents have the power but not the knowledge. SENCo's control being limited. SENCos have the power to influence EHC decision Parents being secretive/holding the power. SENCo needing to regain control. SENCo doesn't have the power to stop unnecessary applications.	"…parents to say well, you're not going to meet their needs…" (line 111-112) **"…I had all that ammunition from two previous applications and I had lots of information…" (line 10-11)** "…who shouts loudest with regard to parents and if you've got that knowledge…" (line 73-74) **"…all the information was easily accessible…" (line 713-714)** "…went straight there, right that's my right I'm going to do that…" (line 575) **"…more so now parents erm need to share any private consultations…" (line 719-720)** "…they did it completely on their own…" (line 20) **"…… there was too much power with the teachers…" (line 244-245)** "…… this parent went through that route herself and then we had the have the SEN officer from the other local authority come into us here." (line 154-156) **"…I was just confined to the education section." (line 21-22)** "…it's the education side that has… is the one that makes the decision." (line 423-433) **"…They have to be honest…" (line 722)** "…… I left it and left it in the meeting and I got to the very crux of it…" (line 597-598) **"…parents need to have shown due consideration of the school's perception…" (line 750-751)**

Subordinate Theme	Emergent Themes	Sample of quotes
Ideal parent (previously named: Ideal Role of parents)	Ideal that parents should lead process Parent should be the driver of the process Parents need to be completely honest Parents on board.	"…actually they are the ones… I believe the parents are the ones leading it…" (line 414) **"…the parent is the instigator…" (line 149)** "…for the parents to be completely honest with you and give you all the information…" (line 716-717) **"…some parents that will be very collaborative…" (line 677)**
Lack of understanding of SENCo role (previously named: Lack of clarity of SENCos' remit)	Wider system doesn't understand the details of the SENCo role Unclear role description, open to interpretation Teacher/SENCo roles unclear Inequality of SENCo circumstances	"…some SENCOs that have just been given it, 'oh, can you do that?' And they're also class teacher…" (line 671-672) **"…no real job description to say as a SENCo when you're doing EHCP you have to do this, this, this and this." (line 662-663)** "…now the code of practice the teacher is the lead, they're responsible…" (line 184-185) **"….I had nothing to lose by saying that. And that shouldn't be the case…" (line 479 -480)**
History of SENCo-parent relationship (Previously named: SENCo-parent relationship important to process.)	SENCo as an advocate for family SENCo needs to know family SENCo-parent relationship more than professional SENCo-parent relationship began before EHC application New dynamic to the SENCo-parent relationship.	"…But this family didn't have that and that's where I saw the…erm… inequality…" (line 65-66) **"…I knew the complete family history, the whole dynamics of the family situation…" (line 725-727)** "…I can't go with them although I have done with the child I got the EHCP for, the older brother I did do that." (line 353-355) **"…That was through CAF…" (line 563)** "…The EHCP now isn't you're doing a Statement for the parent. It is now that the parent is requesting an EHCP and you are supporting the process." (line 827 -829)

SENCO 5 - Superordinate themes, related Subordinate themes, and related emergent themes

Superordinate theme: 'Facilitator', carer, protector, and manager		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
SENCo as facilitator	SENCo trusted to be facilitator. Facilitator role part of SENCo role SENCo in a unique position to facilitate Facilitating part of the process.	"..the parents have named me as facilitator each time…" (line 39-40) **"…it's only an extra if you view statutory assessment as an extra." (line 94-95)** "…I'm on the inside and I know the system." (line 86-87) **"…It's not very much more to help them go through their documents." (line 99-100)**
Preparing parents/managing their expectations	SENCo teaching parents about the EHC Parents lacking knowledge of school expectations Parents lacking knowledge of education. SENCo needing to manage parents lack of perceiving child's needs SENCo needs to prepare a parent Preparing parents Conversations about possible future need to start early SENCo slowly introducing plans for EHC Communicating from the very beginning Process is mentally preparing parents Parents previous experiences had prepared them for EHC. Balancing parent's concerns and child's attainment	"…Erm, so sometimes I'm a bit kind of, 'well no and I'll give you the reasons why but that doesn't mean we can't look at it in the future'…" (line 285-287) **"…it's the understanding that there are 29 other children that we have to keep safe…" (line 170-171)** "…no understanding of actually whether it's appropriate for that child…" (line 232-233) **"…she very much said, well he lives with his grandparents so I don't have a problem with him…" (line 147- 149)** "…because we have continued to pursue regular fortnightly meetings, really good home/school links…" (line 158-159) **"…we're having all these meetings. Again, so when mum comes in it's not a shock to her…" (line 269-270)** "…when you start the conversations you need to start them early…" (line 266-267) **"…drip feeding really." (line 179-180)** "…getting them… getting the parents to the point of admitting there's an issue…" (line 21-22) **"…they're quite heavily involved in that so they're actually used to the process…" (line 390-391)** "…you know, shucks she's doing so well, erm that you kind of, it's a bit of a balance…" (line 256-257)
SENCo managing parents emotions	SENCo as emotional support SENCo listening and responding to parents SENCo feeling responsible for emotional well-being of parent SENCo wanting to comfort upset parents SENCo having to manage difficult conversations Parents realisation of the reality of situation.	"…you pull down the blind, you grab them their tissues and you sit and you talk…" (line 307-308) **"…'okay, alright it looks bad now but what can we put in place? Together let's work on what's our plan'…" (line 317-318)** "…She'd told that enough so at one point I said, right that's the last time you're going to say that, I'll say it for you." (line 75-76) **"…… to not understand the documents that you are sent and to be confronted by that information is going to be incredibly upsetting." (line 302-304)** "…parents will come to us and suggest it and I'll say, okay well let me have a look at the levels…" (line 233-

		234)
	SENCo as co-parent Importance of parents being aware of child being thought about Parents need to trust SENCo is fighting for their child	**"…everything all in one place it can… it took them back a little bit…" (line 121-122)** "…she'd come in and she'd say things like, you know this has happened in class, tell whether I should be annoyed or you know tell me what I should be doing." (line 67-70) **"…I had this conversation with mum yesterday…" (line 250)** "…I'm going to keep going until your child leaves my school…." (line 342-343)

Superordinate theme: Professional friend		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
Building and continuation of SENCo-parent relationship	EHC part of a continuing journey SENCo established relationships EHC facilitates relationship with parents. SENCO has existing relationship with parents Containment grows the relationship. SENCo has a relationship with parents SENCo needing to develop parental relationships. Parent and SENCo journey lasts longer than EHC process. SENCo and parent sharing a journey. SENCo and parent finding their way through the EHC process. Important that SENCo is seen as parents equal.	"…the EHC process it doesn't stop, it carries on because you're constantly monitoring, you've got the annual reviews, you've got perhaps specialist provision…" (line 588-560) **"…Now there wouldn't be that conversation…" (line 290)** "…you do build a relationship with the families doing this…" (line 599-600) **"…we already have that relationship." (line 34)** "…when you kind of make your big steps and you build that relationship because you can say 'okay, alright it looks bad now but what can we put in place?" (line 316-318) **"…they don't have that relationship with their secondary school yet…" (line 45-46)** "…for some the journey doesn't end there it continues on into specialist provision and provision panels…" (line 411-412) **"…we were doing it together, we were in it together…" (line 70-71)** "…so we kind of forged our way together…through that…" (line 12-13) **"…you talk about your family, you make yourself into a real person…" (line 308-309)**
Trust needed for effective relationship	Honesty important to relationship Importance of transparency SENCo needs to be transparent with parents Collaboration important Parent trusting SENCo	"…I've always told my parents I'm not going to lie to you…" (line 262-263) **"…because I wanted them to know what was going." (line 117-118)** "…they have to read everything because I want them to know what's sent…" (line 384-385) **"…it's an absolute… it's co-ownership, it's co-authoring." (line 201-202)** "…only person that she trusted enough…" (line 66-67)
Intimacy of the parent-SENCo	SENCo intimately involved with process Relationship more than professional Relationship is more than working together	"…let's all work together, friendly, friendly, hold hands kind of thing but actually it's more powerful in terms of getting the families to the right… to the place that they need to…" (line 593-595) **"…we're constantly talking so I get Christmas cards and birthday cards…" (line 402-403)** "…working together. I guess what it doesn't show is the additional that you're doing…" (line 349-350)

| relationship | Relationship is more than working together
SENCo as a professional friend
Balance between professional and personal relationship
SENCo protecting parents
SENCo feels responsibility to be accessible.
SENCo needs to be contactable outside of hours
Huge commitment to communication with parents
Intensity of parent involvement | **"…if I got married again she would be bridesmaid because we spend that much time together." (line 378-379)**
"…his mum still contacts me to ask me stuff…" (line 357)
"…they need to be fully informed and not in a harsh horrible, you know, your child's this. But you have to do it as a friend…" (line 322-323)
"…Knowing how much his mum has suffered and knowing err… how her she's an always upbeat person…" (line 300-302)
"…I give them ways to reach me. I work part time but they can contact me any day…" (line 140-141)
"…I give my home number because actually for them I know they're not going to abuse it and I know that, that school hours or my working hours don't necessarily fit…" (line 310-312)
"…literally calling every family in, this is me, this is what I do, this is how you can contact me…" (line 374-375)
"…in every single week in helping and contributing to things…" (line 392-393) |

Superordinate theme: Emotional and self-elicited pressure		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
SENCo managing own emotions evoked by the process	SENCo being a parent enables empathy SENCo sympathising SENCO having to watch support fail in order to gain more support Child and parents emotive background story SENCo feeling responsible for parents upset SENCO sympathy towards parents SENCO feeling responsible for parents upset Relief when EHC process is over Parents thinking they know better than SENCo Professional and personal aspect to role.	"…I'm a parent and I perhaps wouldn't like to on the first day of school be told, oh your child's got all these needs…" (line 176-177) **"…I feel incredibly sorry for them sometimes when I'm saying no…" (line 199-200)** "…the hardest thing I've found. That you actually have to give them time to begin to fail…" (line 190-191) **"…they were told she would never walk, she wouldn't make it to her first birthday…" (line 252-253)** "…and having her break down in tears…" (line 126) **"…That poor little boy had had hypoglycaemic fits from the point of his birth, he'd been resuscitated multiple times…" (line 62-64)** "…I don't like tears, I don't like making people cry." (line 320-321) **"…yeah annoyance in the extreme on occasion." (line 294-295)** "…it's all gone well and they've got what they needed and what they wanted erm, it's sweetness and light…" (line 407-409) **"…They've pushed for it and I've had to say, well actually no not at the moment…" (line 188-189)** "…the professional in me would like say, absolutely, serene and calm and fine, the person in me erm kind of thinks well okay I know my job." (line 279-281)
SENCo being judged by self and parents	SENCo judging self on success of EHCs SENCo judging success on EHC outcome SENCo's knowledge being judged by parents	"…well they've all been successful but you know one has fallen apart for reasons that I couldn't really control…" (line 35-36) **"…it might not get through but if it doesn't get through I'm going to keep going…" (line 341-343)** "…I'm the one who's supposed to show parents that I know what I'm doing." (line 433-434)

SENCo feeling alone/unsupported	SENCo feeling helpless SENCo feeling unsupported by LA Frustration at lack of clarity of new process SENCo left to support parents Frustration at being left to figure it out. Lack of communication impacts on SENCos knowledge of process Despondent towards LA for lack of information	"…How are you supposed to build up that relationship with them?" (line 512-513) **"No one's actually supporting you anymore…" (line 482)** "…I'll phone up and I'll say, is there a new format, you know, to review the EHC? And they'll say no use the old format." (line 447-448) **"…I am always the one that writes it with parents…" (line 205)** "…I'll find my way erm but it is very frustrating…" (line 439) **"…not be told that you have to convert your Pathfinder into regular EHC…" (line 431-432)** "…I wasn't fully informed but you… this is going to sound awful but you come to expect that…" (line 463-464)

Superordinate theme: Understanding parents psychological journey		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
Parents on own journey of acceptance	Parents on own journey Parents experiencing child's difficulties through the actions of other parents Parents needing to experience child's difficulties for themselves. Parent on own journey EHC more than a legal process.	"…for them it's a bigger journey…" (line 127) **"…almost been ostracised by the rest of the parents…" (line 172-173)** "…it's the journey that they need to go on to admit there's a problem…" (line 166-167) **"…his mum had been on a journey…" (line 11)** "…actually it's more powerful in terms of getting the families to the right… to the place that they need to…" (line 594-595)
Need for SENCo to understand parents experience to be able to communicate it.	Communication with parents enables story to be gathered Regular communication is important Difficulties in communication mean less informed EHC SENCo as conduit SENCo as translator of parents' experiences Close working is essential to process. SENCo feeling protective of parents.	"…there wasn't very much information in it because the parents were Lithuanian so that relationship how… they spoke little to no English." (line 501 -503) **"…regular fortnightly meetings, really good home/school links…" (line 159)** "…the EHC was not as full, you know, as populated, as useful a tool…" (line 527-528) **"…trying to take what they wanted to say, trying to put it so that the, the panel would actually understand…" (line 558-559)** "…for me to kind of take their everyday and weave it into the way that I knew that it should be read." (line 113-114) **"Making sure that they've said everything that they need to…" (line 541-542)** "…I said, right that's the last time you're going to say that, I'll say it for you." (line 76-77)

Superordinate theme: Needing support and being understood		
Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
SENCo needing support to build self-confidence	Child with multiple and complex needs daunting for SENCo SENCo crediting relationship with parents to luck not skill Other SENCos providing support, building SENCo confidence Successful first EHC building SENCo confidence SENCo should be trained SENCo not trained	"…You have got like a shotgun effect of issues going on, having someone come along and go, oh yes this is really complex…" (line 472-473) **"…I'm really lucky with my parents…" (line 359-360)** "…it's only actually networking with the other SENCos that you go, okay I need to do this can you help me?" (line 483-484) **"…positive view of the first one…" (line 80)** "…It's not like the national SENCO award really took you through how to do a statutory assessment…" (line 479 -480) **"…I'm expected to be an EHC writer without actually knowing what that entails or how to go about that." (line 477-478)**
School support enables SENCo to do role	School support needed School support essential to SENCo success Importance of relationship with parents recognised by school SENCo needing to work within her own system to support parents.	"…again the support from the SLT, the support from school to give me the time to do that…" (line 561-562) **"…SLT is incredibly supportive and that's why they've given me additional working days…" (line 361-362)** "…gave me more time actually than was advertised because we needed to build that relationship with people…" (line 368-370) **"…no Lithuanian translator around here and then County quite helpfully suggests that maybe we should go to the local Lithuanian community centre and see if someone will translate." (line 507 – 510)**

Subordinate Theme	**Emergent Themes**	**Sample of quotes**
Demands of the EHC process	SENCo role is demanding EHC requires a lot of time and emotional effort from SENCo. EHC reduces ability to do other duties EHC huge commitment SENCos role essential to EHC process SENCo responsible for gathering evidence	"…… I mean I struggle with it sometimes because I'm part time…" (line 329-330) **"…you put in a lot of work." (line 18-19)** "…it basically takes priority over everything…" (line 582) **"…I'm supposed to lead SEN through the school but that completely… you're working two and half physical days at school that completely overrides everything." (line 584-586)** "…it's what we do, it's a massive part of my job…" (line 580-591) **"…you keep copious notes and your record keeping really have to be tiptop…" (line 238-239)**
Control/power in the process	SENCo helpless without parents Parents hold the power SENCo wanting to be in control. SENCo powerless if parents don't agree	"…they could block me at every turn…" (line 220) **"…again I would rather it was me than anybody else." (line 103 -104)** "…I can push and I can push but if they are not ready to hear then you know, it's never going to go anywhere…" (line 132-133) **"…she's the person who's in control…" (line 149)**

	SENCo needing parental permission to help pupil SENCo reliant on information that parents have Parents reliant on SENCo to explain paperwork Need for parents to agree with process Parents legally knowledgeable Parents being driven SENCo wants to maintain central. SENCo dependent on parents to fulfil role	"…I didn't really know them very well. Erm, so for me the people that know the children the best are going to be the parents…" (line 109-111) **"…I get phone calls saying, I've received all this paperwork but I don't understand it, you know. Can you help me through?" (line 396-398)** "…we're pushing them to do this and they're not on-board…" (line 27) **"…some of our families are incredibly erm well versed in the rights of children with special needs…" (line 227-228)** "…parents are absolutely pushing for it…" (line 210) **"…I would rather it was me than anybody else…" (line 51)** "…I wouldn't be able to get anywhere without them…" (line 200-201)

Appendix F3: Key to notations

SENCO transcripts were transcribed verbatim with pauses and utterances being represented in the transcripts. The following table is a key to how pauses and utterances were recorded.

Notation	Representing
…	Denotes a pause in the SENCO's speech when not used to denote the lead in or lead out of a quote.
Err Umm ahh	Denotes filler use, a non-word, a sound that the SENCO made.
Haha	Laughter
[ ]	Researcher added contextual information contained within brackets

Appendix F4: Additional superordinate themes from individual SENCOS

This appendix contains descriptions of the additional superordinate themes that arose from each individual SENCO's data that did not emerge as part of an overarching theme.

Table F1: Table to show the additional superordinate themes from individuals SENCOs

SENCO 3	SENCO 4
Demands of the EHCP process	Allegiance of the SENCO
Building the SENCO-parent relationship	

SENCO 3

Demands of the EHCP process

This was a subordinate theme that became a superordinate theme due to the demands of the EHCP process being a huge part of SENCO 3's experience of working with parents through the EHCP process. For SENCO 3 the administrative side of the EHCP process took up a vast amount of her time, and enhanced her feelings of isolation;

"…I'm in here all the time doing paperwork…" (Line 772)

Further to this, the additional time demand of the paperwork was experienced as a direct loss of time spent working with children, an aspect that SENCO 3 had considered to be a main aspect of the SENCO role;

"…I didn't get to see children at all really…" (Line 83)

For SENCO 3 she was struggling to fit in this change with her existing perception of the SENCO role;

"…I'm not working with children on the SEN register that are below that Care Plan level…"

(Line 767-768)

The loss of working with children for paperwork made it difficult for SENCO 3 to see the benefit of the process. Conversations with parents as part of the EHCP process were considered as another time consuming event;

"…It's not a natural conversation. You know, I don't spend five hours with parents..." (Line

753-754) (in regards to her very first meeting with a parent to fill in the EHCP application

form)

The EHCP process was a high demand responsibility that SENCO 3 could not justify the sacrifices that she had had to make for it. The demands of the EHCP process challenged SENCO 3's conceptions of the SENCO role and resulted in her viewing it negatively as it opposed her accepted view of the SENCO role.

Building the SENCO-parent relationship

This was another subordinate theme that gained superordinate theme status for SENCO 3. This theme was closely related to the first shared superordinate theme for SENCO 3: SENCO in parenting role however, its reference to the SENCO-parent relationship beginning before the EHCP process justified its separation.

For SENCO 3 the relationship between SENCO and parent began before the EHCP process;

"…So it's taken a long time to get them to that point so you almost had to go through the first one to get them to understand…" (Line 175-177)

Part of the building of the relationship was for SENCO 3 was to understand the role parents wanted her to fulfil;

"…it's getting to know parents and there are some you can have that laugh and a joke with, some where you're more professional.…" (Line 738)

Further to this, it was important to SENCO 3 to understand the needs of her parents as;

"…We've got parents who have got their own needs so they find it hard to do things like that…" (Line 23-24)

For SENCO 3 the process was a gradual one and one which needed to be approached tentatively so not to jeopardise the emerging relationship by acting to quickly or in a way that would upset or discourage parents;

"…Whereas I'm a bit more softly, softly…" (Line 669)

Another aspect of building the SENCO-parent relationship for SENCO 3 was to be seen by parents as an equal, a parent, an individual who could understand their position;

"…I said to her well I wouldn't take my girls on a plane by myself, you're doing an amazing job…" (Line 742-743)

For SENCO 3 the EHCP process was not the beginning of the SENCO-parent relationship. Prior to working with parents through the process SENCO 3 had tried to build a relationship with parents. For SENCO 3 this involved understanding the needs of parents, the role they wanted her to fulfil, being seen as a parent and most importantly the gradual building of this relationship to avoid distressing parents.

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<u>SENCO 4</u>

Allegiance of the SENCO

For SENCO 4 the *allegiance of the SENCO* was a potent subordinate theme that emerged from the data and gained superordinate status. This theme encapsulated SENCO 4's struggle with allegiance, side-taking for the SENCO and also parents perception of who the SENCO was affiliated with.

SENCO 4 perceived herself to be aligned with parents against the authority when applying for EHCPs;

"…and it can be them and us." (Line 688-689)

SENCO 4 also perceived this allegiance to be felt by parents;

"…parent I felt that… she was almost kind of defending me." (Line 471-472)

However, she was also aware that SENCO affiliation with the LA could influence parents' perceptions of SENCO loyalties and the 'truthfulness' of her opinions;

"…who do you work for because that comes down to it." (Line 475)

In contrast to this, SENCO 4 held the perception that agencies set up to provide parents with information were themselves bias towards parents;

"….they can jump on the bandwagon…" (Line 261)

This created a dilemma over trust and who parents chose to trust and listen to. For SENCO 4 this led to her holding a belief that parents needed to perceive an individual to be 'neutral' or aligned with them, in order for parents to accept their opinions or views about the process.

Appendix ALR1: Emotional Labour studies information

Study	Design	Participants	Data collection methods	Outcomes
Kinman, Wray and Strange (2011) Emotional labour, burnout and job satisfaction in UK teachers: the role of workplace social support.	Quantitative exploratory design into the relationships between EL and burnout and job satisfaction, EL and job experience, and EL and workplace support.	Purposeful sampling; 628 secondary school teachers from schools in the south-east of England and the midlands.	Questionnaires; Five-item scale developed to assess emotional dissonance (Zapf *et al*, 1999), 22-item Maslach burnout inventory (Maslach and Jackson, 1986), 15-item measure for job satisfaction (Warr, Cook and Wall, 1979), 8-item measure to assess levels of support from different sources at work (Yberna and Smulders, 2002).	**EL and burnout and job satisfaction;** *Significant positive association between EL and both emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation. *Negative association between EL and job satisfaction. *Weak positive relationship between EL and feelings of personal accomplishment. **Support;** *Teachers who reported higher levels of workplace social support tended to report less EL, emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation, and more personal accomplishment and job satisfaction. *social support might to some extend protect teachers from the negative impact of EL. **Experience;** *Weak association between length of experience in teaching role was positively related to EL, teachers longer in service reported more EL.
Robson and Bailey (2009) 'Bowing from the heart': an investigation into discourses of professionalism and the work of caring for students in further education	Qualitative exploratory design into the perceptions of staff (teachers and learning support workers, LSWs) in the constructions of the respective role and perceived	Purposeful sampling; 19 participants (9 teachers, 10 LSWs) all from further education colleges.	Semi-structured interviews	*EL was experienced by both teachers and LSWs but in different ways. *LSWs struggled to avoid 'mollycoddling, avoid being taken advantage of: by teachers and students, encourage students to 'drop their barriers' (producing a 'proper state of mind in others'). *Teachers' EL focused on maintaining discipline within the class, coping with stress and exercising authority in educational settings.

	nature of their work and professional relationships.			*FE teachers strove to maintain a dispassionate and rational approach by suppressing their feelings. *LSWs were constructed to be able to express themselves more freely and appear to build more natural relationships with students. *Respondents reported rewards and costs of EL. * Introduction of LSW role may be enabling FE teachers to stand back from students' personal problems.
Johnson *et al.* (2005) The experience of work-related stress across occupations.	Quantitative comparison design into the reported stresses of individuals in 26 different occupations.	Used existing data from the ASSET questionnaire database from which 26 occupations were selected, data from 25, 352 individuals was used.	Completion of the ASSET questionnaire: a short stress evaluation tool. The researchers specifically focussed on three of the twelve factors: your job; physical health; and psychological well-being.	*Teachers were identified as one of six occupations that reported worse than average scores on each of the three factors: *physical health, psychological well-being, job satisfaction.* *All six occupations involved emotional labour (although the paper did not reference Hochschild the definition of emotional labour was in accordance to Emotional labour theory) *Emotional component relevant, it cannot be the only explanation; lack of control over work issues, work overload were also suggested. *Teachers experienced higher levels of stress and lower job satisfaction than head teachers and teaching assistants. Reasons suggested: frequency of emotional labour; accountability of teachers for the performance of pupils; high levels of paperwork.

- Kirk, J., and Wall, C. (2010). Resilience and loss in work identities: a narrative analysis of some retried teachers' work-life histories. *British Educational Research Journal.* 36 (4) 627 – 641. – used the term 'emotional labour' in their paper however, it was not in reference to Emotional Labour theory.
- Page, D. (2013). Teacher misbehaviour: an analysis of disciplinary orders by the General Teaching Council for England. *British Educational Research Journal.* 39 (3) 545- 564. – used the term 'emotional labour' in their abstract but did not link this to Emotional Labour theory.

Appendix D1: Summary sheet of findings and proposed implications shared with participants.

Summary of findings and implications for practice

This doctoral research aimed to explore the experiences of primary school SENCOs working with parent/carers through the EHCP process. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (an approach which is concerned with exploring individual's experiences in its own terms) to analysis semi-structured interviews from five primary SENCOs four overarching themes emerged from the data described in the table below;

Theme	Description
Inner turmoil of the SENCO	This overarching theme reflected all five SENCOs emotional experience when working with parents through the EHCP process. The SENCOs experienced complex emotions that were evoked by working with parents through the EHCP process. These emotions fed into the SENCOs perception of their practice and abilities, the way they interacted with parents, the way they perceived parents' views of the SENCO role, and also the way they judged their professional performance: through successful EHCP applications.
Feeling adrift in need of an anchor	This theme encapsulated the SENCOs sense of difference, isolation and need for support, whether this was desired or fulfilled. The SENCOs longed for or sought out other professionals to confirm their interpretations and bolster their self-confidence. Furthermore, having empathetic connections to other SENCOs or professionals reduced their feelings of isolation and provided the longed for support for the EHCP process.
Differing roles, intimacy and professionalism	This theme reflected the variety of roles the SENCOs perceived themselves to have, the depth of the relationship that the SENCOs had with parents, as well as the challenges that this intimacy entailed. These differing roles served to educate parents, console parents, and manage parents' expectations of the process/outcomes and their child's needs. The mixture of personal support roles and professional roles made it challenging for the SENCOs not to take parents actions personally.
Varying expectations of the SENCO role	The lack of clarity around the SENCO role meant that SENCOs needed to create their own understanding of the role. However, alongside this, parents and other professionals were also constructing their own understanding of the scope and responsibilities of the SENCO, which were not always congruent with the SENCOs constructed understanding.

Implications for practice

- Schools need to be made aware and understand the demands of the SENCO role the importance and necessity of the relationships they build with parents/carers and therefore the essentialness of SENCOs being provided with the time and resources to be able to undertake their role effectively.
- Training for individuals who take on the role of SENCO could be provided to support their understanding of the emotional demands of the SENCO role. This training could provide SENCOs with a psychological understanding of working with parents in challenging situations. This could support SENCOs to develop their awareness of the potential negative effects of working with stresses, conflict, and emotions, in order for them to be able to identify when they need to seek additional support.
- Clarity of the available support for SENCOs would enable SENCOs to know who to contact, or would reveal support that needs to be put in place as when the SENCOs were unsure who to contact or to where to find information from they felt increasingly isolated and unsupported, for example, tribunal information or tribunal support.
- Formalised support for SENCOs so every SENCO has access to, and can benefit from, the support that peers can provide. This formalised support could be in the form of peer supervision.

- Individual SENCO supervision could provide a safe, confidential space for SENCOs to maintain their thinking capacity, reflect on their experiences, share their true emotions, gain an 'outsiders' perspective, as well as a supportive connection with another professional, in order for them to reflect, learn, and move forward in their work.