Change management and the SENCo role: developing key performance indicators in the strategic development of inclusivity

Abstract

This article follows an earlier publication highlighting the changing role of special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCos) in England. SENCos are now required to manage change strategically and deliver inclusive school cultures. School-based action research undertaken by a teacher who is studying for the postgraduate National Award for SEN Co-ordination (NASENCO) is featured within the article; a strategic review of resource allocation increased the availability and quality of interventions for students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The commentary which frames the study acknowledges that many SENCos are not yet members of a senior school management team (SMT) despite their mandated strategic whole-school remit. Featuring the process through which one SENCo has strived to enhance SEND provision and develop context-specific key performance indicators brings official guidance on the SENCo's role in strategic change management into sharp focus, raising questions that should concern both SMTs and non-SMT SENCos.

Key words: special educational needs co-ordination, change management, policy enactment, inclusive pedagogy.

Introduction

This article is the second in a series highlighting the changing role of SENCos in England. A revised Code of Practice issued by the Department for Education and Department of Health

(DfE/DoH, 2014) requires SENCos to deliver inclusive school cultures as a matter of compliance, confirming a shift towards a more organisationally-focused SENCo role. Accordingly, strategic development and leadership figure prominently in the syllabi of postgraduate programmes leading to a mandatory national award for newly appointed SENCos. The expectation is that SENCos will increasingly engage in organisational-level activities, e.g. formulation of school policy, financial planning and performance evaluation. This shift implies a dual focus on both the strategic and operational aspects of coordination and hinges on two assumptions; firstly, that SENCos are members of their school SMT and, secondly, that responsibility for coordination is shared between senior managers, middle management and SENCos (Norwich, 2010, p. 39). Both assumptions were evidenced in statutory guidance and key policy statements issued by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES, 2001, 2004) that pre-date the latest SEND Code of Practice (DfE / DoH, 2014).

Shared responsibility

The assumption of SMT membership has been consistently challenged in research conducted between 2007 and 2012 (Pearson, 2008; Pearson and Mitchell, 2013; Pearson, Rapti and Mitchell, 2015). During this period, the total percentage of SENCos in SMTs rose by only 10.5% (from 45.5% to 56%); the increase at primary phase was similarly modest (rising from 68.4% to 73%), whilst a significant increase at secondary phase resulted in less than a third of SENCos occupying senior management roles (rising from a low base of 17.3% to 30%) (Mitchell, 2014, p. 2). The concept of shared responsibility for coordination of SEND provision and inclusion-related strategic development has given rise to a potentially unhelpful disconnect between 'official models' and localised practice (Norwich, 2010, p. 47). The tensions and ambiguities generated by this assumption have been well-documented (Garner, 2001, p. 123; Norwich, 2010, p. 41) and, prior to publication of the latest SEND Code of

Practice (DfE / DoH, 2014), Rosen-Webb (2011, p. 161) proposed that 'recruiters and trainers' should be provided with 'examples of different ways of enacting the SENCo role'. This proposal followed empirical research into SENCo identity which drew heavily on Kearns' (2005) typology of SENCo roles and earlier studies highlighting role conflict and role unmanageability (Kearns, 2003; McKenzie, 2007). Rosen-Webb (2011, p. 165) also suggests, however, that the structured framework of mandatory NASENCO training and accreditation, which includes 'strategic and managerial training', should equip SENCos to fulfil all aspects of their stipulated role.

Anecdotally, teachers studying towards the postgraduate NASENCO frequently suggest that the literature related to SENCos and SEND seems out-dated given the rapid pace of change in the legislative, socio-political and educational contexts within which the SENCo role is now enacted. It is, therefore, worth re-emphasising that neither the SEND Code of Practice (DfE / DoH, 2014), nor NASENCO syllabi linked to statutory guidance, invite SENCos to choose between a 'dominant teaching orientation' or a 'dominant management focus' (Rosen-Webb, 2011, p. 161). The fulfilment of expectations that SENCos function as strategic change managers or leaders may have, historically, been inhibited by an absence of any 'clear specification' as to what this might entail (Norwich, 2010, p. 39); but this should no longer be the case given that NASENCO syllabi seek to replace over-generalised business management rhetoric (Gunter, 2004, p. 25) with a concept of strategic change management as proactive and informed advocacy, and introduce SENCos to management tools and techniques that can assist them in forcing change.

Changing demographics

Findings on retirement planning (Mitchell, 2014, p. 2) suggest a changing demographic profile of the SENCo population; and looking beyond the SENCO-related literature, there are indications (e.g. Ball, Maguire and Braun, 2012) that teachers now routinely negotiate varied and conflicting discourses without experiencing the stressful 'role conflict' described by Rosen-Webb (2011, p. 161). The response to Kearns' (2005, pp. 137-144) typology of SENCO roles ('arbitrator', 'rescuer', 'auditor', 'collaborator') from one SENCo on the NASENCO programme with which the authors are involved–*I am all of these* (Mullet, 2016, unpublished), is suggestive of a poststructuralist rejection of either / or logics (Deleuze, 1995, p. 44). Ball *et al.* (2012) interpret such apparent flexibility as symptomatic of a diminished capacity for critical reflexivity, i.e. sociological analysis of how teachers are positioned within, and controlled by, political narratives. We would maintain, however, that it is understandable that SENCos who refuse to view a disability or special educational need as the defining feature of a pupil's identity are similarly reluctant to be pigeon-holed or define their own role through reductive or potentially prescriptive categorical terms; such flexibility should be welcomed, if SENCOs are to negotiate the tensions noted by Garner (2001, p. 123) and Norwich (2010, p. 41).

This endorsement of flexibility does not imply a neglect of the power relations within which SENCos are variously embedded but, rather, an insistence that SENCos who are not yet members of SMTs can be supported to evolve their own style of leadership as they simultaneously develop the strategic and managerial aspect of their role. One newly-appointed SENCo on the aforementioned programme researched the effectiveness of a remedial literacy resource introduced by her predecessor; having demonstrated that its producer's claims were exaggerated, the subsequent recommendation that alternative resources could be trialled to the benefit of pupils with SEN was compelling and likely to

influence SMT decision-making (Cooper-Smith, 2016, unpublished). The cumulative impact of carefully supported recommendations on SMTs should not be under-estimated. As Sergiovanni (2005, p. 5) argues, effective visions are those which acquire a 'moral authority' throughout a school and 'obligate' others to assess both their routine and strategic decision-making. On this account, SENCos play a pivotal role in leading change, whatever their formal status, through modelling the translation of visions of inclusivity into specific actions and responsibilities.

Abstract processes

Sergiovanni (2005, p. 6) rejects conceptualisations of leadership and strategic development that rely on abstract processes – on the 'how' not the 'what', arguing that they promote a 'bureaucratic authority' which hinders whole-school change built around a key idea. In Gunter's analysis, such abstract processes are indicative of an ascendant 'performance leadership' that has displaced 'educational leadership' (2004, pp. 30, 32); and this displacement is held to have occurred, in part, through an expansion of the head teacher or principal role to include budgetary management and installation of management information systems that facilitate data-based accountability (p. 31). The overriding objective of performance leadership, Gunter (2004, pp. 29, 37) maintains, is a school-wide cognitive and emotional commitment to external policy agendas and government reform; and a corollary is knowledge production that is confined to 'instrumental relevance' or demonstrations of progress in meeting governmental policy objectives.

One theme in Gunter's critique of performance leadership which resonates strongly with the SENCo-related literature is 'work intensification' (2004, pp. 33, 37). The SENCo workload is, unsurprisingly, mentioned in the featured study. What distinguishes this study, however, is

the SENCo's determination to familiarise herself with the type of management tools and techniques that head teachers or principals and SMTs might deploy in their strategic planning and management. She does this in order to enhance SEND provision within her school at a time when schools in England are facing significant reductions in funding. University-based NASENCO syllabi afford opportunities for theoretically-informed critique; but it is equally important that SENCos are introduced to the cost management aspect of SEND provision if they are to influence senior-management decision-making when resources are scarce and / or diminishing. Sergiovanni (2005) neglects this aspect of leadership even though the school-wide pursuit of an idea, such as inclusivity, will have cost implications that senior management cannot simply ignore. Notably, the featured study also mobilises key performance indicators (KPIs) to focus her attention, as SENCo, and avoid work overload.

The first article in this series sought to illustrate some key principles of strategic change management (Done, Murphy and Bedford, 2016). The study reproduced below illustrates how the dual foci of the SENCo role – the operational / managerial and strategic (Norwich, 2010, p. 39), can be combined. This action research was awarded an excellent pass for several reasons. It is brave in its transparency and exploratory orientation, revealing an ongoing process of trial and refinement in the application of abstract business management principles and techniques within a complex educational setting; to paraphrase the researcher, it marks the beginning of a process and charting of novel terrain. This refusal to select a familiar SEND-related research topic is pedagogically significant; exposure to the techniques associated with strategic change management does not mean that SENCos will find it easy to adopt a whole-school perspective and apply such techniques. Closing the gap between localised activities and official guidance assumes that opportunities for experiential learning are created through NASENCO programmes.

Sample NASENCO study

As before, the study reproduced below is an abbreviated version. Sections have been omitted to preserve anonymity and confidentiality in accordance with British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines (BERA, 2011). The appendices have also been removed and the references merged with our own.

Action research to improve the strategic management and implementation of SEND provision within an inner city primary school

Introduction

This action research was undertaken in an 'Outstanding' inner city Primary School with 350 children on roll - 29% FSM (free school meal) and 19% on the SEND register; the latter is higher than the current national average of 15% (DfE, 2015). The roll is due to rise year on year until the school is of two-form entry, reinforcing the need for a strategic system of Individual Education Plan (IEP) reviews to be introduced and embedded across the school.

Children identified as SEND are closely monitored through the graduated approach (Friswell, 2014) and considerable support is provided through high quality teaching and targeted interventions. However, since being involved with once termly IEP reviews, as a class teacher and now as part of the SEN team, I have become aware that it is sometimes challenging for IEP provisions to be provided frequently and consistently for varied reasons; provision is often duplicated throughout the school. In an earlier evaluative study staff voiced their frustration at being unable to find effective ways of consistently implementing IEP provision (Watt, 2015, unpublished).

Action research describes a solution-orientated process (Koshy, 2005). The study reported here begins the development of a more strategic approach to the management of SEN interventions, primarily through the introduction of provision mapping. Provision maps are 'an efficient way of showing all the provision that the school makes which is additional to and different from that offered through the school's curriculum' (DfE/ DoH, 2014, 6.76). Although not compulsory, provision maps that are used consistently are useful tools for SENCos in managing resources and available support staff; they provide an overview of programmes and interventions used with different pupil groups and a basis for monitoring levels of intervention.

Action research is also cyclical, reflective and collaborative (Waters-Adams, 2006) and similar to the circular process of 'assess, plan, review and do' recommended to SENCos (Friswell, 2014). The current cycle involved the SENCo and class teachers working collaboratively to set SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, timely) targets for children requiring IEPs. Targets were reviewed in the following term and a key performance indicator (KPI) was developed: total number of targets set against the total number of targets achieved expressed as a percentage. This research into the effectiveness of provision mapping as a management tool was conducted in accordance with British Educational Research Association ethical guidelines (BERA 2011).

Procedures and Methods

A primarily quantitative methodology was adopted. Data relating to IEP interventions over three school terms was collated and analysed to assess the impact of provision mapping on pupil performance in selected interventions. The research can be described as pragmatic and instrumental as it was informed by the specific objectives of improving practice and better

supporting pupil needs. Cohen and Manion (1994, p. 186) define action research as 'a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention'. Review meetings with class teachers and teaching assistants (TAs) were organised at the end of each term to gain feedback on how provision mapping had addressed concerns.

Performance indicators

The impact of provision mapping was measured by analysing the number of IEP targets set in Term 1 against the number achieved expressed as a percentage. Each target has a 1-10 scale; when targets are first set a 'perceived baseline' and 'post-intervention expected' are highlighted on the scale. At review stage, the scale is highlighted at the level of achievement of the target. For analysis purposes, this scale was used as a performance indicator (PI); achieving a score at the expected level or above was considered an achievement of the target.

When new IEP targets for Term 2 were set a provision map was also created documenting all provisions and interventions recorded on IEPs; this was then shared with class teachers and TAs, allowing each team to manage their interventions more effectively; e.g. if the map indicated that three Year 1 children required a 3x15 minute weekly motor skills intervention with a TA, as well as two Year 2 children, this was clearly seen by the SENCo and class teachers. A group of five could be organised, supported by a single TA, rather than the same intervention being unnecessarily repeated. This re-organisation encouraged more communication, particularly between classes of the same cohort and key stage (KS), allowing staff to work collaboratively to ensure that more interventions took place.

This process was repeated at each termly IEP review meeting where the number of targets set and achieved was recorded using the PI scale and expressed as a percentage. Tables 1 – 5 below present the termly data analysis and show how a key performance indicator (KPI) was developed to monitor whole-school performance.

This research followed BERA (2011) ethical guidelines; informed consent was not required as normal teaching functions were not significantly exceeded. Participants were advised, however, that their names and that of the school would be excluded from the research report, thereby preserving anonymity and confidentiality (BERA, 2011).

Presentation and Analysis of Findings

The interventions chosen for research purposes were those involving small groups managed by class teachers and executed by TAs, rather than pastoral-based IEPs requiring, e.g. weekly therapy sessions with a therapist.

Developing a key performance indictor (KPI)

Table 1 below shows that in all year groups an average of 34% of IEP targets set in Term 1 were achieved by the review date approximately 12 weeks later.

Year	Term 1: no. of targets set	Term 1: no. of targets met	Term 1: % of targets met
Reception	12	4	33%
1	24	6	25%
2	10	3	30%
3	26	9	35%
4	14	5	36%

5	25	16	42%
Average			**35.5%**

Table 1. Term 1: percentage of targets met by year group

Data from the same year groups was analysed at the end of Term 2 and an increase in the percentage of IEP targets set compared to those achieved was noted (Table 2). An average of 64.7% of IEP targets set in Term 2 was achieved. This increase of 30.3% suggests that provision mapping had positively impacted the proportion of interventions carried out consistently, resulting in a percentage increase in IEP targets achieved.

Class teachers reported that provision mapping facilitated effective management of intervention timetables and greater efficiency in their use of allocated TA time. Some of their interventions were executed by TAs from other year groups forming small groups of children with similar needs, whilst their own TA did likewise but focused on different intervention requirements. Distributing workload and targeting interventions in this manner led to improvements in consistency and, therefore, the quality of interventions.

Year	Term 2: no. of targets set	Term 2: no. of targets met	Term 2: % of targets met
Reception	14	9	64%
1	22	15	68%
2	10	6	60%
3	23	15	65%
4	15	10	67%
5	25	16	64%

Average			**64.66%**

Table 2: Term 2: percentage of targets met by year group

TAs could focus on an area of need that particularly interested them and provide high quality interventions in that area; e.g. a TA who had previously trained to become an Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) selected all pupils identified as likely to benefit from interventions in this area and allocated them to appropriate groups. The TA then managed these groups, overseen by the SENCo, and withdrew the children regularly to provide a consistent high quality intervention. Prior to the introduction of provision mapping, an ELSA-trained TA may not have used their training and skills if no need for those skills was identified within their specific class base.

Provision mapping permitted much closer matching of TA skills and interests to pupil needs. Consequently, the SEND team is now better-equipped to proactively lead SEND provision across the school. Further consideration will be given to the future deployment of TAs to ensure optimal use of their skills.

Trend analysis

Table 3 below shows that, in contrast to Term 2 where 64.7% of set targets were met compared to 34.5% in Term 1, no increase between Terms 2 and 3 was evidenced.

Year	Term 3: no. of targets set	Term 3: no. of targets met	Term 3: % of targets met
Reception	13	7	54%
1	20	14	70%

2	10	6	60%
3	20	14	70%
4	15	10	67%
5	23	15	65%
Average			**64.33%**

Table 3: Term 3: percentage of targets met by year group

The significant increase between Terms 1 and 2 demonstrates the positive change that provision mapping can deliver and smaller changes would be expected thereafter. Termly average percentages will, however, be charted and monitored over time to check that this enhanced performance level is maintained given the importance of a whole-school perspective (DfE / DoH, 2014). As SENCo, I will be liaising with Senior Leaders to consider what is an acceptable of overall school performance and taking action should the average percentage figure fall below this level.

Although charting overall trends using KPIs is important, particularly where stakeholders such as school governors and Ofsted wish to see evidence of positive trends and continuous improvement, as SENCo, I intend to use such performance data diagnostically and focus my time and efforts strategically for the benefit of pupils placed in interventions.

Ranking

The school roll is due to rise significantly and, as SENCo, I need to rapidly identify interventions where inadequate progress is being made. Table 4 below ranks the data from Table 3 so that the worst performing year group is immediately identifiable. When year group

data contributing to the outlined KPI (% of targets achieved across the school) is ranked in this way, the data has a diagnostic function, prompting investigation and action if and where required. In 2012, 50% of SENCos had plans to leave their post as SENCo and heavy work-load was a commonly reported factor (Mitchell, 2014). This rapid diagnostic function is a valuable way of quickly identifying where SENCo intervention is required.

Year	Term 3: no. of targets set	Term 3: no. of targets met	Term 3: % of targets met
Reception	13	7	54%
2	10	6	60%
5	23	15	65%
4	15	10	67%
3	20	14	70%
1	20	14	70%
Average			**64.33%**

Table 4: Term 3: ranked percentage of targets met by year group

Table 4 shows that the lowest percentage of targets was achieved in Reception Class (54%). Consultations with staff suggested that this relatively poor performance could have been due to the inexperience of the TA concerned, highlighting a possible training requirement. Also, one child could not access allocated interventions due to long term sickness, potentially skewing the data. It became apparent, through such targeted diagnostic investigation, that staff needed advice on how to address such situations when compiling data to ensure its usefulness in future cycles of IEP target setting and reviews.

Since provision mapping permits children from different year groups to be placed in the same intervention, led by the same dedicated TA, it was important to assess the relative performance of specific interventions. Similar investigations by the SENCo can be initiated if an intervention appears less effective than others. Such information can help to identify further training requirements or other issues that must be addressed. Table 5 shows the relative performance of a sample of Term 3 interventions; Speech and Language had relatively low impact (38% of targets achieved) compared to Motor Skills (64%) and KS2 Phonics (71%), highlighting a possible training requirement for the TA delivering the Speech and Language intervention.

Intervention	Term 3: no. of targets set	Term 3: no. of targets met	Term 3: % of targets met
Speech & Language	8	3	38%
Motor Skills	11	7	64%
KS2 Phonics	17	12	71%
Average			**61%**

Table 5: Term 3: ranked percentage of a sample of intervention targets met.

Planned future research

Further research cycles will investigate the effectiveness of withdrawing TAs completely from allocated class bases to focus them on providing high quality interventions. An initial trial will be organised for part of each afternoon for Years 1-6 whilst the whole class is engaged in foundation subjects.

More effective ways of recording target-led interventions will be explored, i.e. alternatives to the traditional IEP. Morewood (2015) advocates better ways of supporting engagement and enhancing progress for our most vulnerable learners as part of an inclusive whole-school approach rather than, for example, imposing targets in a bureaucratic process to satisfy 'criteria'. Student passports (Morewood, 2015) deserve consideration as they are not re-labelled IEPs but designed to effect change in school culture and central to inclusive whole-school strategies.

Additionally, online provision mapping tools will be considered. These may become crucial for SENCos who must strategically and effectively manage the complexity of SEN provision. Support must be provided to the children for whom it is intended without impacting so greatly on SENCO workloads that it becomes unmanageable and compromises their capacity for leadership.

Conclusion

Class teachers reported that a provision map showing SEND intervention requirements assisted them in managing their intervention timetables and TA time more effectively and efficiently. A pooling of resources resulted in more consistent delivery of interventions across the school rather than, as previously, one TA trying to find an appropriate time to withdraw children for varied interventions in an already busy timetable whilst another struggled to find time to run an almost identical set of interventions in a neighbouring classroom.

TA skills and interests were more finely matched to children's needs and TAs expressed interest in further training in their area of focus, enabling the SENCo to fulfil other duties more effectively, e.g. ensuring that all practitioners understand their responsibilities to

children with SEND and their setting's approach to identifying and meeting SEN, and advising and supporting colleagues (DfE/DoH, 2014). The strategic element of the SENCo role includes monitoring performance at whole-school level. Developing KPIs facilitates this monitoring whilst allowing SENCos to identify issues and proactively address them.

Concluding remarks

The featured research challenges Gunter's (2004) dichotomous presentation of educational and performance leadership, as value and data driven respectively, since techniques associated with strategic change management were deployed to improve the learning outcomes of SEND-designated pupils. The distinction drawn between schools led by abstract processes and those led by an idea (Sergiovanni, 2005) is similarly difficult to sustain as the SENCo in question puts abstract processes to work in the service of an idea of inclusivity.

The import of figures is not self-evident. Contextualisation and judgements are invariably required. Hence, the SENCo's mention of liaison with 'Senior Leaders' to discuss what level of target achievement across the school should be aimed for; and, crucially, her illustration of the diagnostic function of KPIs. Both are significant as they speak to the assumptions that can complicate enactment of the SENCo role (Garner, 2001; Norwich, 2010). Where SENCos are not yet SMT members, their capacity to influence SMT decision-making in the area of SEND provision is likely to be enhanced if they are sensitive to senior management priorities and able to speak the same language. Indeed, the concept of SEND-related strategic change management as informed proactive advocacy implies some familiarity with the abstract processes and techniques associated with senior managerial responsibility.

Where SENCos are already part of an SMT, and attention to costs is not confined to eliminating waste - in this instance, the duplication of similar interventions, the featured study could be developed in a variety of ways, including calculation of an average hourly cost of TA time and expenditure per intervention. In the event of choices being made between similar interventions, judgements will still have to be made based on varied data such as the anticipated costs of re-training, relative pedagogic effectiveness and so forth. The broader socio-political climate in England, in which social justice is to be delivered against a backdrop of real reductions in funding, underlines the importance of the NASENCO in facilitating SENCo involvement in both strategic and operational decision-making.

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