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# An IPA study exploring SENCOs' experiences of a support group using a reflecting team approach

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore Special Educational Needs Coordinators' (SENCOs') experiences of a support group, facilitated by myself, using a reflecting team process. Five female SENCOs accepted my invitation to attend sessions where I combined a reflecting team and solution circle approach. SENCOs were asked to keep a reflective log after each session which were analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and used to generate questions for semi-structured interviews.

Interviews were carried out with all SENCOs who had a range of experience in the role. IPA was applied to the transcripts and a number of emergent themes allowed for sub-ordinate and super-ordinate themes to emerge for each individual. Four master themes emerged across participants: we felt safe, we found a sense of belonging, we valued the process and we had an opportunity to reflect.

Research findings were discussed in the light of the extant literature relating to group dynamics, the reflecting team process and reflective practice. Implications for Educational Psychologists in providing support for SENCOs include: the need for reflexivity, a stance of curiosity, provision of restorative support for teachers and opportunities for reflective practice, the consideration given to group dynamics and need for supervision. Suggestions for further research include a study of the extent to which restorative and formative support benefits the performance of SENCOs and hence pupil outcomes. It is proposed that the reflecting team approach may be applicable to other staff groups in schools.

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## Section One: Introduction

It's the endless stream of new government initiatives, the targets, the constant Ofsted monitoring ... you end up pushing yourself to excel in everything that's thrown at you. Of course that's impossible, so you end up feeling like you're never able to do anything well enough. You don't see that you've worked yourself into such a state of exhaustion that you're too tired to benefit the children any more. You end up with your self-confidence and self-esteem on the floor.

(Hill, 2008)

From experiences in my previous role as a secondary school teacher and middle manager I am arguing that stress in the profession is very real. Throughout the thesis I use the first person pronoun, 'I', because I feel this fits well with an interpretive phenomenological study as it is important to fully acknowledge the part of the researcher in the process. Common sources of stress for teachers have been found to be: teaching pupils who lack motivation, maintaining discipline, time pressures and workload, coping with change, being evaluated by others, dealings with colleagues, self-esteem and status, administration and management, role conflict and ambiguity and poor working conditions (Kyriacou, 2000). Hawkins and Shohet (2006) suggest that we become stressed when we absorb more 'dis-ease' from our interpersonal relationships than we are able to release (p.26).

The effects of teacher stress impacts hugely on teachers, their families, staff relationships and the children they teach (Wilson, 2002). Recently, the UK government has been concerned with the levels of retention within the teaching profession (Jepson and Forest, 2006) and recruitment difficulties were highlighted as adversely impacting on pupils' standards of academic achievement.

As a teacher, supervision was a foreign word to me. I became accustomed to one meeting a year with my line manager to discuss my continuing professional development. Supervision, for want of a better word, took place in the staffroom or informally with colleagues in and out of school. Throughout my training on the Doctoral Programme in Educational and Child Psychology, I have gained experience in supervision and become increasingly concerned that teachers do not receive this form of support when they are at the front line delivering services to children.

In my capacity as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, I have been working more closely with SENCOs. A SENCO will often be my first point of contact with the school and they will be coordinating the learning, social, behavioural and emotional needs of children. Through conversations with SENCOs and observations of schools as organisations, I sense that SENCOs also experience the above pressures. I have also realised how difficult it is for SENCOs to remain child-focused in organisations where there are conflicting priorities, competing agendas and resources in short supply. One way to manage the 'dis-ease' that SENCOs feel when stressed, is to provide restorative and formative support because as in all helping professions, a teacher will only be effective if they are supported in doing their work.

As a Trainee Educational Psychologist I have acquired skills in group consultation at university with my peer group. In addition I have come across the reflecting team process (Andersen, 1987) which was first introduced in peer supervision (and widely used in family therapy) on placement in an Educational Psychology Service. In the current study I explore the experiences of five SENCOs who agreed to participate in a support group, facilitated by me, using a reflecting team approach. However, as SENCOs conveyed an interest in a solution-focussed

approach (after they had training on this in the local authority) I decided to conclude sessions with a solution focus in order to adapt the session to their requests.

I argue that the support group was underpinned by a social constructionist position. This position contends that our ways of understanding the world come from daily interactions between people in the course of social life (Burr, 2003). Social interaction, and particularly language, is the concern of social constructionists. This means that our shared versions of knowledge are constructed and what we accept as truth is temporally and culturally situated. In the reflecting team, knowledge was constructed between the multiple perspectives of participants in the group; I took a collaborative, not knowing, position seeking to facilitate without imparting expert knowledge.

The reflecting team approach has its origins in family therapy. Dallos and Drapor (2000) proposed a three-phase framework to systemic family therapy which moved from an essentialist position, to a constructivist one and then to a social constructionist position. The first phase (mid-1950s to mid-1970s) was based on the view that psychology should be science based, objective and able to classify families according to various disorders and treatments, mapping family dynamics. As research and therapy progressed, it became apparent that often therapists tended to view families from different perspectives and that different ways of working with a family could produce equally positive changes. A move to the second phase (mid-1970s to mid-1980s) promoted the constructivist view that a simple cause and effect delineation of family dynamics was unsatisfactory, as although there is a reality out there we can only interpret it through our own personal lenses (Watzlawick, 1978). Hence, there is not one accurate view of reality but multiple views. This view has been criticised for its emphasis on individual autonomy rather than the social and

cultural factors that impact on free will; criticised for condoning patterns of inequality in society by ignoring them. Dallos and Drapor (2000) contend that there is a third phase (mid-1980s till present day) that emerges from social constructionist theory, which suggests that language is the critical ingredient in family dynamics, actually creating the reality. In this phase there is a growing awareness of the social and cultural influences on family life, with the difficulties that families experience not just being unique to the individual family, but part of a wider societal system. The third phase includes the reflecting team and solution-focussed approaches.

Fox (2009) considers two separate traditions that Educational Psychologists in the UK have for working with systems. One of these is 'systems work' with organisations such as schools. The other is 'systemic thinking' which tends to be used ambiguously. He suggests that the terms have become entwined and clarifies the connections with reference to the thinking of Dallos and Draper (2000), cited above. Fox (2009) suggests that the classic view of 'systems' work is that an organisation is mechanistic and that feedback helps modify to it in some way. He suggests that, between 1950 and 1975, Educational Psychologists became detached from the systemic thinking that was developing in family therapy, with the move to systems work that was developing in schools. Fox (2009) suggests that Burden's (1999) biggest regret was the absence of paradigm shift that occurred in systemic thinking, but not in systems work for Educational Psychologists. Quick (1982) suggests that systems were still seen from a largely deterministic and mechanistic perspective. Essentially, Educational Psychologists were still seeking to fix systems with problems, instead of focusing on the meaning of the problem and a co-construction of new perspectives. Fox (2009) argues that:

When consultation is seen as a collaborative process where the EP, as a non-expert, helps in a collaborative way to co-construct new ways of seeing problems – this is systemic thinking

(2009, p. 255).

He provides an example of working that incorporate 'systems' work and 'systemic' thinking where solution-focused approaches are combined with action research in schools (Simm and Ingram, 2008). He further argues that reflecting teams are part of the 'new century (2000-)' as they are 'a powerful technique for taking a different perspective on one's work and opening up other ways of viewing the issue or system' (p. 255). I argue that the work carried out with SENCOs was systemic, as although I didn't work with the school as a system directly, SENCOs were able to co-construct new ways of seeing their problems and apply the lessons learned to their work.

As a researcher-practitioner I wanted to undertake a study that remained grounded in what I do as an Educational Psychologist, providing a service that is helpful to people, listening to and hearing their experiences. I could have undertaken a study that looked at impact, cause and effect or manipulated certain variables in order to measure an outcome. Yet, I do not feel this would have provided me with the kind of information that I, personally, could use to become a more effective practitioner. I wanted rich, detailed, personal accounts that shed light on participants' experiences of the support group, in order that I may implement the lessons learned in future. I wanted to know what helps but I didn't want to limit what participants wanted to say by introducing hypotheses and testing them out. My hope was to study a natural working environment (a support group for SENCOS) and hear what my clients thought and felt about it, mirroring what I already do as a Trainee Educational

Psychologist in other areas of work: facilitate, listen, question, interpret, reflect and act.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is seen as an interpretative activity so the final analysis is seen as the product of that engagement with the data, a co-construction between the researchers and participants (Osborn and Smith, 2006, p. 218). Findlay (2009) suggests that 'some would argue that phenomenology offers an inductive methodology to explore human subjectivity systematically in terms of what individuals are *really* feeling and experiencing' (p. 15). I do not adhere to this position and suggest that in the current study, findings were co-constructed with SENCOs telling their experiences and me interpreting them. Burr (2003) suggests that 'mind, that is our ability to reflect on our experience, is not possible until we use language to represent events to ourselves' (p.193) and conversation acquires meaning through others' responses. In terms of using IPA in the current study, I suggest that experiences of the phenomenon emerged from social interaction which took place in the reflecting team, interview and my interpretation of it.

I undertook an interpretive phenomenological study of SENCOs' experiences of a reflecting team because I wanted to know how SENCOs experienced the phenomenon. SENCOs had expressed to me that they lacked formative and restorative support in their roles and the reflecting team was one way to address this. The reflecting team process was chosen for a number of reasons including: its potential for exploring systemic issues, capacity to provide restorative support and regard for interpersonal relationships. Although there have been studies carried out using group consultation approaches in schools, they have tended to be evaluative (Stringer, 1992; Evans, 2005) and findings of studies suggest that the focus of these support groups has been on providing formative rather than restorative support for

teachers (Bozic and Carter, 2002). Bennett and Monsen (2011) suggest that an understanding of group processes is not addressed in the literature surrounding problem-solving approaches within educational settings and I argue that this is an essential part of the restorative function of a group. An interpretative phenomenological study would inductively explore personal accounts of the phenomenon and the reflecting team process would address the need for restorative support.

I used a number of different search strategies throughout the thesis including: use of seminal texts along with their bibliographies and reference sections, citation references and key words in search engines as well as journals relating to Educational Psychology and family therapy. Examples of seminal texts include: Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), Hanko (1985), Bion (1961), Anderson (1987) and Schön (1983). Electronic searches of computerised databases were conducted to find relevant studies (e.g., PsycINFO, Google Scholar, ERIC). Examples of keyword combinations for electronic database searches can be found in the table below.

Table 1 Keyword combinations for electronic database searches

Topic area	Example of keyword combination
Supervision	Restorative + supervision
Group consultation	Group + consultation + school
Reflecting team	Reflecting team + supervision

Topic area	Example of keyword combination
Solution focussed	Solution-focussed + approach
Reflective practice	Reflective practice + school
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis + critique
Belonging	Belonging + hypothesis + teachers

Journals which were searched by hand (because they frequently appeared in reference sections to journal articles found) included: *Educational Psychology in Practice, Family Process, Journal of Family Therapy, Journal of Systemic Therapies, Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, Journal of Health Psychology, Health Psychology Review and Reflective Practice.*

In the following chapter I review the literature relating to support systems for professional practice for those working with vulnerable children and young people including: group consultation with teachers, psychodynamic approaches, reflective practice and reflecting teams, as well as briefly considering the solution-focused approach. In the methodology section, I justify my choice of approach, critique alternative approaches and consider three broad areas that underpin IPA: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography. The procedures section provides participant information, explains data collection methods (including reflective logs and

semi-structured interviews), considers how data was analysed and describes criteria I used for assessing rigour in qualitative research. Interpretive findings are presented under the four master themes that emerged for the group and considered further in the discussion section with reference to the extant literature. Limitations of the study are presented in terms of the intervention used, methodology and procedures. Finally some suggestions are presented for further research as well as conclusions and implications for Educational Psychology practice.

## **Section Two: Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

In this section I explore support systems for professional practice for those working with vulnerable children and young people. Although much of the Educational Psychology literature focuses on providing support through consultation, I also review the literature relating to the therapeutic realm. Literature relating to group consultation in schools carried out by Educational Psychologists indicated there is a lack of focus on group dynamics. Bennett and Monsen (2011) critically appraised approaches which support teachers' problem-solving within educational settings and suggest there is a lack of focus on group dynamics, both in terms of the individuals in the group and the wider influences of the school culture.

In the absence of a focus on group process the group may not 'know what it knows' or 'experience what it experiences'.

(Clarke and Rowan, 2009, p.99)

I argue that without a focus on group or institutional processes the restorative function and emotional well-being of a support group is neglected.

### **Supervision**

Supervision has been described as,

The hawk in your mind constantly circling over your head watching and advising on your actions – while you are practising

(Bolton, 2001, p.15)

However, I have difficulty with this metaphor for two reasons; firstly, the hawk denotes something predatory and secondly it 'advises.' From my perspective support should be non-judgemental and, therefore, offered in the absence of external evaluation. I would further argue that being 'watched like a hawk' can create anxiety and inhibit learning so a critical friend is a better analogy from that point of view. I would also argue that learning is something that happens between people, it is not done to someone else. The literature on adult learning suggests that:

Learner and educator in an adult learning context are encouraged to engage with each other as peers. This involves a conscious effort on behalf of the educator to reduce the influence of prestige, counter the right-wrong dialogue commonly found in schools, and encourage critical reflection in a context of openness towards alternative perspectives

(Mezirow, 1997, p.13, cited in Scaife, 2009, p. 33)

Therefore, I feel advice-giving in the context of supervision between adults is counterproductive and self-reflection may be better encouraged through careful questioning such as 'How did that feel?' (Scaife, 2009, p.34).

Some of the key features that characterise effective supervision are: enhancing the work carried out with clients, mutual respect and trust and personal and professional development of the supervisee (Scaife, 2009). Hence supervision serves formative, restorative and normative functions (Inskipp and Proctor, 1993). The formative function of supervision focuses on a supervisee's knowledge. The normative function of supervision ensures that the supervisee complies with the requirements of the organisation in which they work (placing the supervisor in a managerial role) and also ensures that the supervisee has the resources and structures to perform their duties. The restorative function of supervision

acknowledges the emotional impact of work. In one study that considered the changing role of careers advisors in the Connexions service, it was found that what advisers appeared to want was a restorative space, within their work time, to unburden the weight of responsibility they feel for their clients (Reid, 2007). All participants in this study had an investment in training opportunities and professional development, and referred to ethical standards (the formative and normative functions; Inskipp & Proctor, 1993 in Reid, 2007).

I would argue that it is the normative function of supervision which creates the most difficulties between supervisor and supervisee as:

When one person has the power to influence the progression and promotion of the other, there is bound to be some influence over what takes place in supervision

(Scaife, 2009.p.18)

Indeed Butterworth (1992) wished to dissociate the role of supervisor from a position of authority and power arguing that 'supervision is linked conceptually to an authority figure ... supervision is often negatively associated with more traditional disciplinary dealings between managers and their staff' (p.9). I would argue that the Educational Psychologist is in a good position to fulfil restorative and formative functions of supervision through group work with SENCOs as the normative function need not come into play. Hawkins and Shohet (2006) describe 'cooperative' group supervision where the facilitator takes responsibility for group management, but the supervision is given by group members and it is this form that I am advocating.

Hawkins and Shohet (2006) suggest that groups tend to progress through a number of stages (Tuckman, 1965; Bion, 1961). In the initial stages of contracting, a group clarify issues of confidentiality and practicality (forming) and following this

group members test out power issues within the group (fight/flight, authority and storming). Only when these unconscious issues are resolved can a group be productive.

## **Psychodynamic approach**

The psychodynamic concepts of splitting, projective identification, containment and valency are explored, as unconscious processes in groups and the workplace inevitably affect support group experiences. Yet 'seeing individual psychopathology in an institution leads to a blind alley' (Obholzer and Zagier Roberts, 1994, p.133). A social constructionist position is one that focuses on institutional and relational processes (rather than individual pathology), in order that members of staff can resume work on the primary task.

Klein (1946) suggests that we are only able to learn from experience when we give up a 'paranoid-schizoid position' and enter a 'depressive' one. In a paranoid-schizoid position there is a lack of capacity to deal with anxiety, so defences are employed including denial, projection and splitting. In anxiety provoking situations we split off parts of the self, perceived as bad, and project them onto external figures who become hated and feared. In this situation the self becomes idealised and the other becomes bad which reinforces persecutory anxieties (Klein, 1946). Whenever self-esteem is threatened there is a tendency to return to a paranoid schizoid position (Halton, 1994). In the depressive position, on the other hand, the reality of the situation is more clearly interpreted so that people are able to review their situation and consider improving them rather locating the problem somewhere else. I would argue that in a work situation and especially in institutions associated with care (e.g.

education and health) there is a tendency to focus on practical matters and neglect emotional and interpersonal concerns, especially when pain and anxiety can be difficult to bear. Processes of splitting, projection and denial are unconsciously used as a means of defence from this anxiety. If institutions do not have processes in place to manage these unconscious processes then interpersonal relationships suffer.

Projective identification is a process whereby recipients of a projection experience the same emotion as the donor and unconsciously identify with projected feelings (Klein, 1946):

The baby projects the feelings it cannot manage onto the mother, so that – through feeling them herself – she can process them on the baby's behalf

(Moylan, 1994, p. 52)

Yet the capacity to hear the projection in order that it may be properly 'contained' is dependent on an accurate appraisal of it. In order to hear the projection, it is necessary to focus on our own feelings and not just what has been said (Moylan, 1994). I would argue that in an increasingly competitive school culture, with government cuts and much focus on raising standards, as well as meeting targets, there is a neglect of emotional well-being and reflective practice. Yet ironically without a focus on feelings and emotions the institutions dis-ease manifests itself with absenteeism, stress related illness and fragmentation, leading to low 'productivity' where everyone suffers. It is only in the depressive state, where we realise that no-one has an answer or a simple solution, that the potential for greater sharing of difficulties can be actualised with a move towards teamwork rather than competition and blame (Obholzer, 1994).

Bion (1970) suggests that the psychoanalytic group functions to make an individual aware of the gap between his idealised self (superego) and un-psychoanalysed self (ego), yet this 'reality' is hard to bear; the function of the 'Establishment', therefore, is to take up and absorb the consequences so that the group is not destroyed. If unconscious processes are not addressed, they will become acted out in the group. Bion (1961) suggests that groups have a tendency to function in two modes: work group mentality (rational, scientific and looking for solutions) and basic assumption mentality (using various defences to protect them from anxiety).

Just as the emotions in the basic assumption group appear to be linked together, so the mental phenomena of the work group seem to be linked together

(Bion, 1961, p. 99)

The three types of basic assumption mentality, each give rise to particular feelings: in Basic Assumption Dependency position (baD) there is dependence on the group leader for protection from the emotional stress of coming together; in Basic Assumption Fight-Flight position (baF) there are negative emotions which cause the group to fight or run away; and in the Basic Assumption Pairing position (baP) there is a view that the future will be better as a pair promotes the survival of the group.

Bion (1961) also writes about 'valency,' a term to describe 'an individual's readiness to enter into combination with the group in making and acting on basic assumptions' (p. 116). Workers are drawn to certain professions because it offers opportunities to work through their own unresolved issues (Zagier Roberts, 1994). This means that groups may well attract individuals with a propensity towards acting on certain basic assumptions, impeding task performance. This means that:

Unless the management of an organisation is sufficiently stable to provide ... a reliable container for the inevitable ambivalent feelings of those they employ towards those in authority, then the organisation will express its disorder through individual and interpersonal disorder in its members

(Stokes, 1994, p.128)

Support groups are one way in which school staff are able to understand the difficulties of organisational life, but I propose that the facilitator of such group's needs additional supervision if it is to be a safe container.

## **Group Consultation in Schools**

There are various models of consultation in use by Educational Psychologists and I would argue that they all work with a problem experienced by clients to bring about change. The following critique of models of group consultation provides a rationale for the model I facilitated, which became the phenomenon under investigation in this study. I begin, however, by reviewing a general approach to group collaborative problem solving which was introduced by Hanko (1985) derived from mental health and systems consultation. The argument for mental health consultation was that community professionals (who are not mental health experts) are in the best position to prevent mental health difficulties in the population.

In fact widows do not regularly seek help from clergyman, and those who do are often disappointed. Widows do not usually obtain support from other community professionals either. Most of them get help from other widows ...

(Caplan, 1993, p.47)

Hence one way of providing support to teaching staff is to facilitate a space where they can offer mutual support. Caplan (1993) states which aspects of mental

health consultation have stood the test of time: a non-coercive consultation relationship (allowing the consultee freedom to reject what the consultant says); consultee-centred consultation (the consultant does not have to see the client); avoiding uncovering types of psychotherapy (avoiding drawing attention to specific sources of work difficulty for the consultee); orderly reflection (unhurried and avoids premature closure); widening frames of reference (drawing on the intrapsychic, interpersonal and institutional systems of client, consultant and consultee); and drawing up a contract, as a consultant is not merely a person of goodwill, but a representative of an organisation (pp. 41-44). More recently, Caplan and Caplan-Moskovich (2004) have suggested a number of benefits to their mental health consultation approach compared with in-service training used by school psychologists. In the United States (US) and Canada, university-based academics are more likely to be known as Educational Psychologists, whereas practitioners in schools are identified as School Psychologists. This distinction is, however, avoided mainly in the United Kingdom (UK) where Educational Psychologists are frequently considered to be both researchers and practitioners. Caplan and Caplan-Moskovich (2004) argue that mental health consultation promotes professional autonomy rather than dependency on a professional mentor, deals with current problems rather than imparting a predetermined body of information and is active, not passive.

Systems consultation, on the other hand, draws on family therapy literature. Of prime importance in systemic practice is focusing on fostering autonomy and avoiding a within-person stance, as well as seeing people as a part of their surroundings (Andersen, 1984). Sometimes when people have a difficulty, the solution becomes the problem and a cycle of repetitive, unhelpful behaviour patterns occur (Watzlawick et al., 1974). The situation becomes 'stuck' and the only way an

individual can break the cycle is if *they* realise a different way to resolve the difficulty. Resolution can be best achieved through careful questioning from other people, one or two questions that the individual would not normally think to ask themselves (Andersen, 1984).

When teachers perceive the experts to be inaccessible, they want to absolve responsibility to other professionals, viewing the problem as within-child (Hanko, 1995). It is this perception that prompted Gerda Hanko (1985, 1995) to bring teachers together, in a group collaborative problem-solving approach, to share concerns. Benefits to the consultee included: an ability to distance themselves from the situation, recognising their own situations in others and refocusing their attention on their own behaviour rather than a within-child approach (Hanko, 1995, p. 120).

Hanko (1995) provides some tips in the early stages of setting up a staff consultation group: staff should willingly attend and not be forced or singled out, a head teacher's presence may inhibit staff from speaking freely, confidentiality needs to be wholly respected and the whole staff should be given concrete descriptions of the group's purpose and procedures. Furthermore, Hanko (1995) describes, in detail, how to set up the group itself: including information around ground rules, obligation, group size, range and function of membership, length of pilot course, individuals' attendance during a course and length and time of sessions.

Yet Hanko recognises there were limitations to her work, including a lack of time and focus on systemic issues and too much focus on individual children (not leaving enough time to alleviate teachers' anxieties relating to other work related pressures). Hanko also warns that the consultant needs to be aware of the expectations and feelings that may be aroused in teachers in response to him or her

as they may feel envy, admiration, disillusion or rejection. The consultant must remain non-judgemental and make it clear that acknowledging negative feelings about a child or parent isn't the same as approving of them. Also, if the consultant feels tired, he or she may unwittingly collude with the consultee.

Stringer et al. (1992) discussed the impact of occupational stress for teachers and the acceptability of sharing concerns and seeking support. He suggests it is insufficient to search for solutions in case work or organisational matters at the expense of the needs of teachers. In their study, Stringer and colleagues trained school staff to set up their own groups which included a five session workshop running over three days. Manuals for the facilitator, tutor and group members were provided and there was also a facilitator support group. To evaluate the impact of the course, pre-course questionnaires were sent out to head teachers and teachers who were going to be trained as facilitators. Post-course questionnaires were sent out to consultees immediately after the course and again nine months later (in order to assess the long term impact).

The main limitations reported were lack of time, senior staff becoming suspicious, other staff viewing the group as a clique and maintaining sessions. New members could be encouraged to attend group sessions in order to overcome the issue of staff perceiving the group as a clique, but opting in and out of groups meant that structure was lost. Most of the staff who engaged in the group consultation sessions were female and it was felt that men were reluctant to acknowledge they had difficulties. It is important to note, therefore, that there was a gender bias in the evaluation of the course.

Advantages of participation in the group were reported as being able to discuss problems without interruption in an atmosphere of trust and concern and feeling less isolated when everyone is so busy. An enthusiastic, skilled and respected facilitator who was valued by the senior leadership team helped to make a group successful, as well as a committed group. One head teacher, realised that the facilitator promoted trust and sharing and suggested that it was now up to the senior leadership team to respond positively and supportively.

Bozic and Carter (2002) carried out a study using an adaptation of Stringer's group consultation model with teachers. The issues that teachers brought to the consultation related to pupils, groups of pupils, classes or a systemic feature of the school. They were interested to investigate whether staff felt that consultation groups were a good use of their time, the main effects of their participation in the groups and how confident they were to set up and sustain the groups without an external consultant. Four groups were set up which comprised of staff both within and between schools. The authors measured the main effects of taking part in a consultation group using six benefits that Hanks had previously identified, namely: increased reflection about individual children, increased awareness of teaching strategies, trying out new things in the classroom, raised confidence in working with children with special educational needs, the generation of interest in collaborative problem solving across the school and a reduction in feelings of job-related stress.

The percentage of respondents who agreed that attending was a good use of their time ranged from 66-100%. Overall, the three strongest reported effects of participation in a group (of the six offered) were: to make teachers think more deeply about the way that they worked with individual children in their classes (92%), to raise awareness of strategies that could be used in the classroom (80%) and to try

something new as a result of being in the group (64%). However, an interesting finding was that 48% didn't feel less stressed as a result of participating in group consultation. This seems to indicate that the intervention did not primarily provide a restorative function. Another interesting finding was that only six out of twenty teachers felt confident that they could continue with the group without the external consultant, raising the question of sustainability.

More recently Evans (2005) carried out a study implementing group consultation across 16 schools with each school having three sessions. The psychological theory underpinning the group consultation approach was reported to be solution-focused. Evans triangulated evidence from three sources, including session evaluation, information entered on a database and notes made by Educational Psychologists in sessions of participant observation. The session evaluation questions focussed on three areas which included: efficiency of practice, cooperation with others and empowerment of teachers. Questions around efficient practice and cooperation scored consistently highly, whereas the empowerment question had the lowest ratings. Notes made by Educational Psychologists, also pointed to the anxiety they felt as facilitators. Evans mentioned that further research is underway focusing on how group consultation contributes towards improved practice for pupils with SEN.

Although there is not scope to review other group consultation models in more depth here, Bennett and Monsen (2011) critically appraised four approaches to problem solving within educational settings (they do not use the term consultation in their paper): 'circles of adults' (Wilson and Newton, 2006), 'teacher coaching' (Monsen and Cameron, 2002), 'collaborative problem-solving' (Hanko, 1985 and 1995) and the 'staff sharing scheme' (Gill and Monsen, 1996). They argue that there

is a lack of empirical evidence to support all the approaches above and that the existing research could be improved by the inclusion of validated pre- and post-intervention measures along with statistical analysis of the data presented using a control group. Yet, Fox (2011) considers the limitations of randomised controlled trials and the difficulties of obtaining sufficient evidence about the effectiveness of interventions:

Psychologists argue that Randomised Control Trials (RCTs) are based on the wrong assumptions – that “one size fits all”. In other words a RCT can never be the basis for the decision that a particular psychological intervention is effective for a particular individual

(Fox, 2011, p.327)

Fox (2011) presents the argument that RCTs destroy the relationship of the psychologist to the client and the meaning that the client brings to the intervention. This in turn reduces the measure of effectiveness of the intervention. Fox goes on to argue that:

It is not acceptable to argue that unless one is involved in a RCT there is no point in researching practice (Fox, Martin and Green, 2007). Practitioner research is in the long term one way to develop a research base for psychologists’ own work and to challenge the tapestry that they have so closely woven

(Fox, 2011, p.327)

Fox (2011) makes reference to Schön’s (1987) notion of ‘indeterminate zones of practice’ whereby ‘every intervention with a pupil or family is different and in any situation there are alternative ways of seeing things’ (p.328). He calls for the challenge to provide ‘practice-based evidence’ (inductive) rather than ‘evidence-

based practice' (deductive). I, therefore, argue that an experiential study on which to base my research is invaluable because it is inductive and meaningful.

Bennett and Monsen (2011) point out that some articles they reviewed on teacher support systems expressed an interest in using the collaborative problem-solving approach. They cite a survey which asked 1000 SENCOs, in 12 different local authorities, about the prevalence of support groups (Creese, Norwich and Daniels, 1998). The survey indicated that approximately 25% had such groups, but were not necessarily using the collaborative problem-solving techniques referred to above. Another finding was the lack of time taken for a facilitator to develop a deep enough understanding of group dynamics in order to manage the needs of the group.

In order to address the issue of effective group functioning, Farouk (2004) describes a collaborative problem-solving approach that followed Hanko's model for structure and a model for group dynamics based on the work of Schein (1988). Farouk considers the 'task' and 'maintenance' functions of a group as put forward by Schein (1988). The former relates to the consultant keeping the group focused and on task, while the latter relates to the consultant maintaining the group by attending to its intrapersonal and interpersonal needs. Farouk suggests:

In contrast to such a prescribed technical approach of teaching towards a narrow set of performance indicators, the group consultation approach outlined here gives teachers the space and time to reflect upon the nature of their relationships with pupils and the often strong emotions that they feel, in a mutually supportive context.

(Farouk, 2004, p.219)

Farouk argues that a teacher's work has become increasingly prescriptive and technically accountable which decreases opportunities for mutual support and collaboration and I would have to agree.

In summary I propose that the key issues emerging from the literature review around teacher support groups based on collaborative problem solving are as follows:

- The role of the facilitator (who facilitates and how)
- Group dynamics (being aware of unconscious processes in group situations)
- Models of consultation (the paradigm that underpins the model used)
- Outcomes (the importance of having a solution).

Much of the research cited in Bennett and Monsen's (2011) paper, relating to problem-solving in schools, tends to come from a cognitive-behavioural paradigm and is quite linear in its approach to dealing with problems. In contrast the reflecting team (discussed in more detail in the next section) is a more circular approach, focusing more on the interactive space between participants, where constructive feedback and questioning is crucial.

Although the reflecting team was initially set up for use in family therapy it has been more widely applied to group supervision practice in Educational Psychology and other settings. Dowling and Manning (2004) used the reflecting team model in an Assertive Outreach Service and point to alternative settings where the approach has been used (Manojlovic and Partridge, 2001 and Hughes and Ekdawi, 2001). In the

next section I, therefore, explore the literature in this area as a potential means of supporting SENCOs.

## **The Reflecting Team**

Bosocolo: We were already constructivist, without knowing it. Bateson was a constructivist, and even a social constructionist, although he never used these labels. When we abandoned the reductionism of the strategic model, which dealt just with behaviour and symptoms, we entered, with Bateson, into the domain of complexity, paying attention to meanings, epistemological premises, and emotions, even to stories. The session was no longer limited to information gathering, but was rather a dialogue with the clients, aimed to be a joint exploration of their stories

(Bertrando, 2004)

The origins of the reflecting team can be traced back to the Milan team (1970s) where there was a shift in thinking that challenged the prevailing, pathologising views of the medical model.

Problems and pathology which had hitherto been regarded as individual phenomena came to be viewed as resulting from interpersonal processes

(Dallos and Draper, 2000, p.23)

In the early days of the reflecting team the family were initially consulted by the team but the approach was still seen as exclusionary and 'expert' because assessment, generation of hypotheses and feed-back to the interviewer took place out-of-view of the family. On the contrary, Andersen abandoned the tendency to have any ideas beforehand, avoiding hypotheses if possible (Andersen, 1991). Hypotheses were seen as directive and presumptive of an objective reality, whereas

in Andersen's model the hypothesis does not follow from the dialogue, it is the dialogue (Bertrando & Arcelloni, 2006). Another key difference in Andersen's approach to reflecting teams was that the family had direct access to the team's reflections, rather than indirectly through the interviewer (Andersen, 1987).

For the first time ever, the therapeutic team opens to clients its sancta sanctorum leaving secrecy behind

(Bertrando & Arcelloni, 2006, p. 373)

There is something more transparent and less 'expert' about seeing the dialogue played out in the open, where every voice counts. Not only this, but clients are able to synthesise dialogue in seeing others working through the problem.

The team discuss their perceptions of what they heard between the interviewer and family then the family listen to the multiple perspectives generated by the team. By encouraging multiple viewpoints of a situation, reflecting teams can help promote a more relativist and less rigid conceptualization of the situation, as well as promoting confidence that all ideas are valid and worth sharing (Shurts et al., 2006). The family are then able to derive their own meaning.

Cecchin: The problem is not the family any more, but your way of understanding the family, of talking about and to the family. Everything must always be discussed. There's no more 'final idea' about the family: there is always someone else with a new idea. There's no truth any more, the truth is always eluding you: you go on searching, but you can't find it. And it's this research that makes the conversation therapeutic

(Bertrando, 2004)

Once again, and using the example drawn from therapy, another helping profession, I believe being understood is essential in the role of an Educational

Psychologist as technical terminology, when used, is exclusionary to the client and serves to preserve the power of the expert. It is not helpful, in my view.

For Tom, therapy was a way of *being* with others ... He always called our attention to what it means to be human—often, with simplicity, saying *being human* is talking and speaking in such a way that others can understand

(Andersen, 2007)

The reflecting team process involves three stages (which are outlined in appendix I).

In a review of the development of reflecting teams and its significance in present-day, Brownlee and McKenna (2009) highlight three strengths of the reflecting team: the collaborative nature of the team, hearing multiple perspectives and emphasising strengths. The collaborative nature of the team promotes more egalitarian relationships (O'Connor et al., 1997) as it breaks down hierarchies that existed in previous models where only the interviewer was seen as the expert. Hearing multiple perspectives is very useful because the family are offered a variety of possibilities and are able to hear team members disagree. It:

(allowed) clients to witness that doubt and ambiguity (could) exist on a team, and that there was not always one solution to a dilemma

(Haley, 2002, p.29)

Also, in emphasising strengths, a family is more open to hearing areas of concern which highlights the importance of the language used by the team. Not only this, but I would argue that emphasising strengths is humane and important for creating rapport. It demonstrates a more balanced understanding of the situation and

is less problem-saturated. It also lightens spirits and is more respectful of the efforts people have made.

In summary, the reflecting team is a collaborative and egalitarian process, involving a co-construction of new ways of seeing problems (Dallos and Draper, 2000). It employs circular questioning techniques which are often successful in shifting clients' understanding of 'the problem' from 'troubled individuals' to troubled relationships (Gergen, 2008). It allows clients to widen their frames of reference through hearing the multiple perspectives. The reflecting team is not prescriptive and, from a non-expert position, allows people to find their own way.

In the support group, I first approached the problem using a reflecting team process, but introduced steps two and four of the solution circle at the end of the session. This was in response to the request of SENCOs to be able to take away some tangible outcomes and also to provide further opportunities to be less problem-saturated.

## **Solution Focussed Approaches**

Firstly, 'solution focussed brief therapy' (SFBT) is a strength based, goal directed approach that was developed by Insoo Kim Berg, de Shazer and colleagues at the Milwaukee Brief Family Therapy Center in the early 1980s (De Shazer & Dolan, 2007). The major tenets of SFBT are 'if it isn't broken don't fix it,' 'if it works do more of it,' 'if it's not working do something different,' 'small steps can lead to big changes,' 'the solution is not always directly related to the problem,' 'the language for solution development is different from that needed to describe a problem,' 'no

problems happen all the time, there are always exceptions that can be utilised' and 'the future is both created and negotiable.'

In my view the strengths of this approach are that it views situations positively and focuses on the potential for individuals to make changes in their lives. It looks to maximise the contexts in which strengths and exceptions occur. Actions are agreed rather than recommendations made and people feel empowered because the approach focuses on what they are doing already and on what skills and resources they bring to the situation.

Yet I feel that a limitation of this approach is that it doesn't stay with the problem for long enough to deal with the emotional distress that may be caused by it. Often people want an opportunity to explore emotional reactions to situations so I am not sure that this model will adequately contain the emotions that may be present.

Secondly, the 'solution circle' was first introduced by Marsha Forest and Jack Pearpoint (1996) and is a problem solving process used for helping people in 'stuck' situations. It assumes that the nearby people in any community have the capacity to help and puts forward the idea that 'together we are better.' The solution circle is a process that includes four steps: the problem presenter outlines the problem, the team brainstorm solutions, the problem presenter leads a dialogue with the group to explore and clarify the problem and finally the problem presenter and team decide on steps that will be taken within the next three days to resolve the problem.

In summary, the solution circle is similar to the solution focussed approach in that it is outcome driven, pragmatic and promotes that the future is created and negotiable. It is different to SFBT because it doesn't use a whole raft of techniques to develop solutions e.g. problem free talk, the miracle question and scaling. On

undertaking a literature search there also appears to be a limited research base for the solution circle, but a wide research base for SFBT. However, the solution circle has been cited in a number of professional contexts including work relating to autism (Falvo, 2007), teaching (Times Education Supplement, TES, 2010) and in the Scottish Health Council, SHC (accessed on December, 2011).

## **Reflective Practice**

Professionals often find that they work in areas of uncertainty. Schön (1987) argues that indeterminate zones of practice are those that are unique and which 'escape the canons of technical rationality' (p.6). He argues for 'the experience of learning by doing' (p.17) which is a similar notion to Fox's (2011) 'practice-based-evidence'. Schön (1987) suggests that when practitioners hold a reflective conversation, they 'remake a part of their practice world and thereby reveal the usually tacit processes of world-making that underlie all of their practice' (p.36). In this way reflection has a critical function where we question our everyday assumptions. The 'practicum' is a setting designed for learning a practice, which doesn't take for granted certain rules or facts and allows practitioners to make sense of conflicted situations of practice, where new understandings are constructed and problems are reframed. Yet, in order that people are able to understand each other, they need to get inside each other's points of view. This means that practitioners need to be in touch with their own tacit knowing, stand aside from it and enter into the unknown world of another person. Although this can be uncomfortable, I argue it promotes better relationships and facilitates a collaborative problem-solving process. A reflective practitioner, therefore, has to be honest about what one thinks and feels,

take a genuine stance of inquiry, be less concerned with winning, more concerned with understanding and open to learning something new.

## **Summary, Research Aims and Research Question**

I took an interpretative phenomenological position to researching how SENCOs make sense of a reflecting team (a process which is rooted in social constructionist theory). An interpretative phenomenological position is one that acknowledges the role of the researcher in attempts to get 'experience close'. Researchers analyse what participants say, to learn about how they make sense of their experience and in particular their cognitive and affective reactions to what is happening to them (Smith, 2011a). Smith refers to the 'double hermeneutic' (making sense of people making sense of experience) and this requires reflexivity as well as moving forwards and backwards in the text. The reflecting team process is underpinned by social constructionism because three areas take centre stage: the language used, a focus on interpersonal relationships and a consideration of the social and cultural context (in terms of the school systems in which the SENCOs worked). It does not lay the blame for problems within individuals but seeks to shed light on how the problem is created between individuals. It seeks to enlighten, empower and reassure through appropriate questioning, careful use of language and stance taken. The SENCOs operated within a school system and not in isolation so in order to unpick the difficulties they faced in their work it was necessary to consider the wider social and cultural contexts through a circular mode of questioning. This mode of questioning lent itself to a type of consultation which is seen as collaborative, non-expert and co-constructive and this is indicative of systemic

practice (Fox, 2009). Unconscious processes at work inevitably affect individuals, relationships and the functioning of the organisation as a whole. During the process of analysis, as an interpretative phenomenologist, I was able to take a more central role in organising the notes into themes and consider the psychological essence of the transcripts. It emerged that SENCOs often experienced their organisations as 'stormy containers' and that the time and space to reflect on interpersonal concerns was an important part of the reflecting team experience. It emerged that the focus on institutional and relational processes (rather than individual pathology), helped members of staff to resume work on the primary task and this reflects the social constructionist underpinnings of the reflecting team.

The literature review revealed a number of key issues around providing support systems for SENCOs in schools. There is no culture of supervision in the teaching profession, but a need for restorative and formative support processes. There are various models of group consultation being offered to teachers in schools by Educational Psychologists, but a lack of focus on group dynamics. The reflecting team has been used in family therapy and more widely in supervision, in different settings, and has restorative, as well as, formative potential. The reflecting team and solution-focussed approaches offer a social constructionist position towards systemic issues and are part of the 'new century' (Fox, 2011, p.254). As there is a lack of inductive and experiential research on the area of SENCO support groups, I aim explore how SENCOs experience a support group, set up and facilitated by me, using a reflecting team process. I ask one question:

How do SENCOs experience a support group using a reflecting team approach?

## Section Three: Methodology

### Justification for the approach

I wanted to know how participants experienced a 'reflecting team' support group set up and facilitated by me, the researcher, and hoped to make sense of participants making sense of the phenomenon in question. I take the position that the pure experience isn't accessible so I can only get 'experience close' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009, p.33). What I can know is therefore, considered interpretative. I don't claim to be able to transcend the phenomenon and describe it purely, as it was, but I do claim to be making sense of my participants' sense-making. I believe that our observations are always made from a position of our own and the best we can manage is an interpretation (Shaw, 2010). Any findings will, therefore, be a co-construction between the researcher and participants. I maintained a level of reflexivity throughout by acknowledging how my background, assumptions, positioning and behaviour impacted on the research process (Finlay and Gough, 2003) in my research diary.

Heidegger states, 'The world is therefore something 'wherein' Dasein (being human) as an entity already was ...' (Heidegger, 1927/1962, p. 106). Hence any attempt to bracket the world, as Husserl (1982) does, will not do justice to man's mode of existence (Lewis & Staehler, 2010, p. 69). We are in the world and in order to do justice to our humanity, we need to have a genuine experience of phenomena. I am, therefore, more comfortable with using the term 'reflexivity' rather than 'bracketing,' in my attempts to get 'experience close.'

I listened to SENCOs experiences of the support group and recognise that their accounts are historically, culturally and linguistically situated (Willig, 2001). Furthermore, their accounts took place within a particular time and space so our being in the world is contextual; all of this applies to me, the researcher, with the task of interpreting their accounts.

### **Critique of Alternative approaches**

As the research question asks how participants experience a support group using a reflecting team approach, the study orientates towards a phenomenological approach. Yet, I could have chosen a different research question around the topic and this would have necessitated a different research method (see Table 2, an idea borrowed from Smith et al., 2009, p.45). In this section, on critiquing alternative approaches, I consider the reasons why I did not chose them.

Table 2 Different questions for different approaches

<b>Research question</b>	<b>Suitable approach</b>	<b>Key features</b>
What are the main features of a support group using a reflecting approach?	Descriptive Phenomenology (as an alternative to IPA)	Focus on common structures of a phenomenon as an experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).
What stories do people tell to describe a	Narrative	Focus on ordering the events within a narrative into a meaningful whole

<b>Research question</b>	<b>Suitable approach</b>	<b>Key features</b>
support group using a reflecting team approach?		(Langdrige, 2007).
What factors influence how SENCOs experience a support group using a reflecting team approach?	Grounded Theory	Developing an explanatory account/ a theory of a social psychological process through engaging intensively with the data (Charmaz and Henwood, 2008)
How do SENCOs position themselves and others in reflecting team sessions through talk?	Discursive Psychology	A focus on how talk creates effects within the session. The central topic is discourse i.e. talk or text (Wiggins and Potter, 2008)
Evaluating the impact of a SENCO support group	Action Research	Identifying a change issue that might make progress towards a desired future (Kagan, Burton and Siddiquee, 2008)

I have presented descriptive phenomenology as a separate approach to IPA because in descriptive phenomenology the viewpoint of the experiencer is primary, as opposed to the researcher's perspective. In IPA there is a greater interpretative engagement with the data and a move away from the search for essences than

would be found with descriptive phenomenology (Langdridge, 2007, p.109). In descriptive phenomenology there are pre-transcendental and transcendental approaches to deriving a general structure of the experience of the phenomenal. Both approaches endorse bracketing all past knowledge about the phenomenon being researched in order to attend to the current instant of it (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008), but transcendental approaches further purport that it is possible to view what is given from a non-human perspective. This is a field of consciousness greater than any individual human consciousness and forms of human consciousness emerge from it (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008). Counter to this claim it is my view that we are in the world and attempts to transcend it are not a genuine reflection of that position. Heidegger (1962) emphasised 'Dasein' rather than consciousness, for as humans we are thrown into the world and are restricted by a world in which we already find ourselves. We can project meanings of things ahead of ourselves but are always restricted by our past (Lewis & Staehler, 2010). Heidegger purports that we can access meanings when we stop and reflect on our actions. Heidegger's phenomenological approach moves from looking at present-at-hand objects to ready-to-hand relational beings, so as the world is not 'Dasein-free' the phenomenal and ontological coincide (Inwood, 1997).

In IPA there is a stronger focus on the interpretative, as Heidegger, from an ontological position, declares interpretation is primary, not description (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008). Finlay (in Finlay and Gough, 2003) writes about hermeneutic reflection occurring within existential-phenomenological approaches and describes the hermeneutic circle as a cycle of:

(1)Fore-understanding, (2) meeting a 'resistance' when interrogating experience and (3) an interpretative revision of the fore-understanding ... reflexivity is thus the process of continually reflecting on our interpretations of both our experience and the phenomena being studied so as to move beyond the partiality of our previous understandings and our investment in particular research outcomes

(Finlay, 2003, p.108)

Smith et al. (2009) point out a different way in which IPA operates a double hermeneutic (the researcher making sense of the participant's sense making) and cites Ricoeur (1970) who distinguishes between a hermeneutics of empathy and a hermeneutics of suspicion. The former reconstructs the original experience but the latter uses extant theory to shed light on the phenomenon. I would argue that it is this hermeneutics of 'questioning' (Smith et al., 2009, p.36) that separates IPA from descriptive phenomenology as the analysis may,

... move away from representing what the participant would say of themselves and become more reliant on the interpretative work of the researcher

(Smith et al., 2009, p.36)

Narrative approaches suggest that we participate in the construction of our own identities and we are the assembled stories that we tell about ourselves (Hiles and Čermák, 2008). A narrative approach may focus on the particular way the story is told, looking at 'the what and how' of the telling and interviews are not seen as an interrogation but a mutual exchange of views. Hiles and Čermák (2008) refer to the narrative approach as a 'double signature'; it is social constructionist in terms of the situated occasion, but phenomenological in terms of meaning-making. The reality is the meaning that is constructed in the story.

Smith (2009) contends that IPA has a strong intellectual connection with narrative analysis. 'IPA is centrally concerned with meaning-making and the construction of a narrative is one way of making meaning' (p. 196). Yet IPA offers a methodology that allows for cross-case analysis and in the context of my study exploring group experiences, best suited the research question.

Grounded theorists set out to generate a theoretical level account of a particular phenomenon and this often requires sampling on a rather large scale (Smith et al., 2009). A grounded theory approach aims to push towards a more conceptual explanatory level where individual accounts are drawn on to illustrate the theoretical claim. Grounded theorists sample until they achieve theoretical saturation, that is to say, they see no new categories or connections between categories and continue to ask questions until all responses fit into one category or another.

Yet grounded theory doesn't have the same idiographic focus as IPA. With IPA I was able to analyse each individual account as well as interpret the group's experiences as a whole. Also due to sampling constraints, I was unable to sample on a very large scale.

Discursive psychology treats mind in terms of how it is constructed in discourse and versions of the world are considered to be products of talk itself. The approach starts with a view of people as social and relational and has the potential to be an emancipatory approach as people can shape reality through talk.

Yet IPA provides a detailed experiential account of the person's involvement with the context allowing for a development of self, through the interpretative action that takes place between people. It is this focus on the experiential that is the focus of my study.

Action research is an orientation to inquiry which combines development of theory with action or change (Kagan, Burton and Siddiquee, in Willig, 2008). Its purpose is to produce practical knowledge that is useful, as essentially theory without action is meaningless. It is deeply collaborative and an action plan is developed. The process is then to identify a problem, make a plan, act, evaluate action and reflect. It assesses the current situation and a possible future.

Yet the problem with action research is it is difficult to outline explicitly what will happen, to whom and for how long. It is a cyclical process where the end point is not easily determined so for this reason, I didn't feel action research was an option. It was also a practical concern as the data collection period was limited.

## **Why IPA?**

I have indicated above that the research question, 'How do SENCOs experience a support group using a reflecting team approach?' arose out of a concern to be idiographic, an interest in rich, detailed, personal accounts of an experience and a wish to make sense of this. My position is interpretivist as I am not claiming to have captured reality as it really is, but I am hoping to get 'experience close' (Smith et al., 2009, p.33) and put forward my interpretation of others' sense making. Therefore, IPA addresses the research question. IPA as a method was founded by Jonathan Smith in the mid-1990s and has its roots in three areas which are phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography, elaborated upon below.

## Phenomenology

Phenomenology is about how we experience things (events and objects). Smith et al. (2009) consider the work of four phenomenological philosophers as a background to IPA: namely Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre.

Husserl (1913/1982) famously argued that we should 'go back to the things themselves' (in Smith et al., 2009, p.12), meaning we should concentrate on our experiences in their own right, instead of fitting things into a priori categorisation systems. He was concerned to capture experiences adopting a phenomenological attitude instead of our everyday natural attitude. He was concerned with reflecting on phenomena until we become conscious of them, until they 'appear.' In order to become conscious of phenomena we first need to 'bracket' our everyday perception of them so that we can get to their essence. An example of this is a technique called 'free imaginative variation' (Langdridge, 2007, p.19) which considers different possibilities of a phenomena; for example, how would this session feel with a different group of people? Husserl also wanted to go further, advocating for 'transcendental reduction' in order to get access to conscious experience itself. Husserl often employed the terms 'reduction' and 'epoché' interchangeably (Lewis & Staehler, 2010) with 'epoché' meaning bracketing and 'reduction' meaning redirection of attention to the ways in which phenomena appear in consciousness. Transcendental reduction would be an ability to tap into a universal, essential, conscious reality (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008) through bracketing. Husserl was concerned with the way science has privileged knowledge claims and as a trained scientist hoped that by using a more phenomenological approach, science could be more authentic.

Heidegger (1927/1962) was a student of Husserl's who thought that transcendental phenomenology was not possible, as we will always be interpreting phenomena from within the world (inside it). He thought that to be 'authentic' one has to be true to oneself, that we are 'thrown' into the world with past experience and history, that our concern should be paying careful attention to the world, that foresight is involved in all interpretation and all experience is situated in a particular time and space.

Merleau-Ponty, along with Heidegger, 'emphasises the situated and interpretative quality of our knowledge about the world' (Smith et al., p.18). He describes the 'lived body' as a human body that is not merely physical (Lewis & Staehler, 2010) and problematizes how both intellectualism (mental realm) and empiricism (physical realm), alone, account for our bodily experiences. He uses the phantom limb as an example of this problem i.e. the fact that amputees continue to experience a limb even when it has been amputated. He suggests that the physical and psychological realm blend into each other so there is nothing purely physical or psychological. In relation to expressive language, Merleau-Ponty suggests that thought tends towards expression and expression completes a thought and that we need to recognise words within the context of their references.

Sartre's (1957) 'existentialism' is the idea that human beings are in each case unique and this is freely decided upon by each of us as we live our lives. No facts or situations can eliminate this freedom. Nevertheless our freedom is situated as the choices we make depend on certain facts about our history, society and place which we take into account when making decisions (Lewis & Staehler, 2010). Sartre described the human state as being-for-itself (conscious) yet also being-in-itself (non-conscious). 'Being-in-itself' is 'being', non-relational and simply what it is (a physical

state of being), whereas 'being-for-itself' is a 'pre-reflexive self-consciousness' and enjoys a minimum self-relation (Lewis & Staehler, 2010, p. 147). Sartre's interest was when the two came into contact, relate and mix, with the understanding that one is never independent of the world in which one is placed.

I am suggesting that IPA takes from Husserl a strive to understand 'the things themselves,' from Heidegger the interpretative quality of a human being situated within the world when understanding phenomena, from Merleau-Ponty the importance of the embodied subject and contextual nature of words and from Sartre, the idea that we are able to go beyond our physical being and see meaning in our existence.

## **Hermeneutics**

Hermeneutics is about meaning-making or interpretation and has its roots in the interpretation of biblical texts. Smith et al. (2009) point to three hermeneutic theorists who will be explored further here; namely Schleiermacher, Heidegger and Gadamer.

Schleiermacher was concerned with grammatical and psychological interpretation, the task being to understand the speaker as well as the text. Schleiermacher believed that a comprehensive engagement with the text could lead to 'an understanding of the utterer better than he understands himself' (Schleiermacher, 1998, cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 266). Yet, I would argue that this is a grand claim as although my interpretation may offer meaningful insights it is still, nevertheless, my interpretation. Indeed, Gadamer argues that 'it is enough to say that we understand in a different way, if we understand at all' (Gadamer, 1989, in

Moran and Mooney, 2002, p.330). Gadamer's concern, however, was with understanding the text rather than the person (Smith et al., 2009). I am suggesting that the endeavour should include both an attempt to understand the text, but also what this tells us about the person. Yet the process of analysis is, nevertheless, interpretivist and, even with recourse to the extant literature, the discussion will be affected by the particular slant that I take.

Heidegger was concerned with 'uncovering' how things appear stating that 'covered-up-ness is the counter-concept to phenomenon' (Heidegger, 1962, p.36). Discourse for Heidegger is the way in which meaning is presented for human beings and the concern with speech acts is one part of this (Langdrige, 2007). Heidegger stated that whenever we interpret something we do so bringing our 'fore-conceptions' (prior experiences, understandings) into play, yet it is also possible to work out 'our fore-structure in terms of the things themselves' (Heidegger, 1967, p.195). This, again, points to the importance of reflexivity when engaging with text so that the interpreter can get closer to the experience presented and the fore-structure doesn't become an obstacle to it.

Gadamer says that we can't stick blindly to our own fore-understandings if we want to understand the meaning of another, but we can't forget them.

All that is asked is we remain open to the meaning of the other person or text ...aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meanings

(Gadamer, 1989, in Moran and Mooney, 2002, p.314)

Gadamer recalls the hermeneutic rule that we must understand the whole in terms of the detail and the detail in terms of the whole. In terms of a textual analysis this means understanding the word in terms of the sentence and the sentence in

terms of the whole. Heidegger proposes moving forward and backwards along the text until the meaning is 'most fully realised' (as the meaning elicited will always be determined by fore-understandings). These ideas are resonant in hermeneutic theory and have been coined as the 'hermeneutic circle' (Heidegger, 1962).

I am suggesting that IPA takes from Schleiermacher the focus on grammatical and psychological interpretation, from Heidegger the importance of attending to our fore-understandings and reflexivity in the act of interpretation and from Gadamer 'the dialogue between what we can bring to the text, and what the text brings to us' (Smith et al. , 2009, p.26). I am not suggesting that I am able to uncover the phenomenon, but present an interpretation of it through my close engagement with the text.

## **Idiography**

Idiography is a focus on the particular. It seeks to understand how individuals experience phenomena. Smith et al. (2009) state that much of psychology is 'nomothetic' seeking to make claims at the group or population level in a manner which prevents the retrieval of the individuals who provided the information. Yet IPA is committed to the experiences of individual people in a particular context. I feel my study has a number of advantages that are also consistent with case methodology which Wellington (2000) outlines as: illustrative because they provide examples; illuminating because they highlight which aspects of the workplace may be effective; accessible because they relate to peoples experiences; attention-holding because they can explore peoples stories which appeals to human side of our nature; and vivid because they are pertinent to real life and not abstract or meaningless. Also,

Flyvbjerg (2006) suggests formal generalisation is overvalued as a source of scientific development whereas the force for example is understated. I would argue that all these points are also applicable to IPA.

However, IPA also adopts analytic procedures for moving from single cases to general statements in looking for patterns across cases and I would argue that at one level this could be seen as 'nomothetic.' Yet Smith et al. (2009) highlight the fact that the procedures still allow for the individual's claims to be retrieved and have been 'increasingly advocating the case study in IPA' (p.38).

Within the following chapter I outline the application of IPA in terms of the research process. The procedures are outlined with reference to data collection techniques and analysis of data, as well as the criteria I used for assessing rigour and trustworthiness in research.

## Section Four: Procedures

### Pilot study

When I originally set out to do my research, my research questions were quite different to the evolved, final question. Initially I asked:

1. What does supervision add to the professional relationship between me, as an Educational Psychologist, and a SENCO and
2. To what extent does this enhance the SENCOs perceived self-efficacy in her SENCO role?

I took these questions to a focus group in the Educational Psychology Service in which I work and asked a number of related questions which derived from tutorials with various tutors at the university. I was interested to know whether Educational Psychologists in the service felt my research project was feasible and what practical applications they felt they could derive from it. I then applied a thematic analysis to the transcription of the focus group, using a version suggested by Braun and Clark (2006).

I learned much from undertaking this pilot study: Educational Psychologists in the service didn't feel the study would be possible because supervision is not part of the teaching culture and suggested that a focus on consultation would be more relevant. They were also concerned about boundary issues in my offering supervision and themes emerged around power relationships, consent, a contract, confidentiality and the code of ethics. This led me to feel that I would need more

experience in being supervised and supervising before I could offer this approach to SENCOs.

However, the Educational Psychologists in the service did feel the following practices would be feasible: offering active listening, constructive, empathic support and being a sounding board for problems.

In attempting a Braun and Clark version of Thematic Analysis I learned how to generate initial codes, search for themes and review themes using a thematic map. Yet I found it very difficult to allow the themes to emerge inductively and they simply became my focus group questions. Hence the method became deductive as I was simply linking the codes to the initial a priori questions. I realised that the questions that I used in my final study would need to be more open-ended allowing for new themes to emerge.

After analysing the themes from the focus group discussion and carefully considering the findings from questionnaires that I also sent out to SENCOs, I changed the focus of my study to one based on the experiences of a support group using a reflecting team approach.

## **Participants**

I have chosen to use the term 'participants' rather than sample because the term sample implies that the findings of the research can be generalised to the wider population and I am not suggesting this. I do suggest that the findings will provide lessons to be learned for Educational Psychologists seeking to facilitate a support group using a reflecting team approach.

The group size was determined from a letter and questionnaire that I sent out to eight primary SENCOs in my patch of schools that I cover as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, in an urban area in the north of England. It described the various models of SENCO support that I was proposing to deliver (see appendix II). I felt that it was very important to ask the SENCOs what model of support they preferred for a number of reasons:

- It is ethical, as they have been given a choice and consent
- They are more likely to engage with the process if they have been given an element of choice so that I can worry less about participants dropping out

All the questionnaires were returned and the results indicated that model one was the preferred model of support by SENCOs. See table below for a brief description of participants.

Table 3 Brief descriptions of participants

SENCO	Age	Gender	Length of time in service (in years)	Number of sessions attended
One	29	Female	Five	3
Two	28	Female	Six	2
Three	26	Female	One	2
Four	25	Female	One	3
Five	37	Female	Ten	4

Smith et al. (2009) state that those undertaking professional doctorates typically carry out between four and ten interviews 'and that range seems about right' (p.52). I used SENCOs' reflective logs after each session as a data collection device, as well as carrying out semi-structured interviews after the fourth session. In total I analysed five semi-structured interview transcripts (see appendix III for an example) and thirteen reflective logs (although Senco Five attended all four sessions, she only completed three reflective logs).

### **Myself as the researcher**

I have already mentioned (p.2) that I had experienced one reflecting team session before the research was carried out in group supervision. In this session I didn't act as facilitator or problem holder but was part of the reflecting team. I experienced this process as being like a 'fly on the wall' and enjoyed having the opportunity to sit back and reflect on what was being said without feeling the need to talk. I was able to take time to watch the body language of the problem holder and think of questions that I was curious to ask. I experienced some tensions in the group as I was concerned to say the 'right' thing and hoped that others wouldn't belittle what I had to say. I was aware that my supervisor was in the room and hoped to impress her with my observations and comments.

Since carrying out the research I have experienced many more reflecting team sessions during peer supervision in the Educational Psychology Service where I work and have taken on the role of facilitator, problem holder and been part of the reflecting team. I also continue to meet with the SENCOs in the study. This has inevitably helped to build on my knowledge base and experience of the phenomenon.

I believe one of my core values is around equality and strongly believe in giving people a voice. I previously mentioned that I was a middle manager in my teaching career and remember the lack of time in the job to reflect, the pressures of meeting targets and the jostling for position amongst peers. I wanted to create time and space where SENCOs were able to reflect on the daily pressures of the job and then analyse their experience of it. As a researcher-practitioner I wanted to gain greater insight into what it feels like to be part of a reflecting team.

## **Ethics**

SENCOs were free to choose issues for discussion and were not forced or made to feel uncomfortable in doing so. SENCOs brought both practical and interpersonal matters as issues for discussion and consequently confidentiality was taken very seriously. SENCOs were made aware that the success of the support group was, to a large degree, dependent on a respect for confidentiality and that if they were affected by issues that arose in the group, they could arrange for a follow up session with me. The reflecting team process promotes positive relationships in the following ways: reframing situations, tentative questioning, a respect for multiple viewpoints, uninterrupted time to talk and use of active listening techniques. In these ways SENCOs were encouraged to be supportive to one another.

The effects of the interview were monitored and questions rephrased or avoided if I suspected the participant felt uncomfortable. I paid close attention to the participants' non-verbal, as well as their verbal responses during the interview. At the end of the interview, I ensured participants' appropriate protection by asking them

how they felt as well as ensuring that they knew where to turn for extra support if they were affected by issues that arose during interview.

After interviews I kept reflexive notes in order to process my thoughts and feelings, as well as modify my practice appropriately. For example, I could have been disappointed to learn that SENCOS experienced the group consultation sessions negatively (thus reflecting on my skills as a facilitator). It was made clear that issues raised from the session would be taken to fieldwork supervision, as I am already engaged in casework with the schools. SENCOS were made aware that if a child protection issue was raised then the named child protection officer in the school would be contacted as well as any appropriate agencies.

SENCOS were consulted about the nature of the group and volunteered their participation. I ensured their appropriate protection by fully anonymising all data. SENCOS were given my fieldwork supervisors contact details in the event of a complaint being made.

SENCOS were asked to complete and sign a participant consent form (see appendix IV). Fully informed consent was obtained by giving them an information sheet (see appendix V) as well as a participant consent form. This gave SENCOS information regarding the background of the research, the process and contact details. The information sheet outlined the following key facts: the project's purpose, why the SENCOS had been chosen, whether they had to take part, what would happen if they took part, the possible disadvantages and risks, possible benefits, what would happen if something went wrong, issues of confidentiality, what would happen to the results of the research project, who organised and funded the

research, who ethically reviews the project, how they would be recorded and used as well as relevant contact information.

Confidentiality was maintained by anonymising all data (no references were made to SENCOS' names, local authority or school). I made it clear in the information sheet that research may be published in the public domain, as well as in my thesis. No financial payments were offered to SENCOS.

During interviews I used a digital voice recorder in order to transcribe data from the unstructured interviews. The information sheet states that all recorded data will be destroyed on completion of the research project.

## **Data collection**

At the end of each group consultation session I gave everyone fifteen minutes to write down some reflections about the session, whilst I wrote my own reflections. I then collected SENCOS' reflective written logs, as I felt this would capture what they thought and felt about the process in that time and space. I analysed participants' logs using IPA (Smith et al., 2009). I used my own logs to maintain a degree of reflexivity throughout the sessions (see appendix VI).

After facilitating four sessions I carried out semi-structured interviews to collect more rich and detailed accounts of the SENCOS' experiences of the sessions and analysed the transcripts using IPA. For more information on how I carried out the interviews see below.

I then merged all of the data for each participant (reflective logs and interview per participant) and analysed this making exploratory comments and identifying

emergent themes, which I felt would provide an intimate focus on each individual's experience (see appendix VII, for example).

## **Reflective logs**

The SENCOs were given minimal guidance on how to construct their reflections as I wanted the experience portrayed to come from them. I wanted the data to emerge inductively, with little influence from me. Therefore, I gave them a very open-ended request, which was to write about their reflections of the group consultation session. Some of the SENCOs did ask for more guidance on how to write their reflections and I simply said they could consider their thoughts and feelings about the session as this is in accordance with the types of semi-structured questioning that IPA promotes (Smith et al., 2009, p.68).

## **Semi-structured interviews**

I carried out my five semi-structured interviews following the advice from Smith et al. (2009) and Shaw (2010). Essentially I designed a schedule which invited participants to describe and narrate their experiences as well as evaluate and contrast them. I also used many prompts and probes such as can you tell me more about that? How? Why? How did you feel? (See appendix VIII). I tried to avoid questions that were over-empathic, manipulative, leading or closed and asked no more than eight questions in total. In terms of rapport, although I already had a relationship with my participants, I was sensitive to their reactions.

Furthermore, I used my prior analysis of the logs during the interviews to devise specific questions around each participant's emergent themes. This was in order to probe deeper into the experiences of my SENCOS. As the logs were written in a different time and space to the interview setting, I gave my participants an element of control over the process by inviting them to select and answer three or four specific questions which they felt were most pertinent to them at the time of interview (see appendix IX). I also feel that this personalised the interview, in line with IPA's commitment to idiography.

In order that I remained sensitive to my questioning style and the impact this was having on the research process, I kept detailed reflexive notes after transcribing each interview (see appendix X).

All the interviews were recorded using a digital recorder and then transcribed, verbatim. Smith et al. (2009) suggest that as IPA seeks to interpret the meaning of the participant's account it is unnecessary to keep a detailed record of the prosodic features of the recording. Therefore, as the analysis focuses on the meaning of the words spoken, I transcribed the account verbatim, putting into brackets emphases, laughter and pauses.

## **Analysis of data**

After transcribing the data I set about analysing it using the process put forward by Smith et al. (2009). From the beginning I commented and thematized on the computer as this is close to my normal working practice and I was able to set up tables and columns to track data, aiding analysis.

The first step was to immerse myself in the data by reading and re-reading the reflective logs and original transcripts. Here I referred to my reflexive notes which not only focused on my interview style but also my reactions to what was being said. All of this helped me to focus on the participants' unique experience of the sessions.

I then set about making initial notes commenting on descriptive content and linguistic features of the text, as well as conceptual annotating. Descriptive commenting focuses on describing the content of what the participant had said within the transcript. Linguistic commenting focuses on exploring the specific use of language by the participant i.e. pronoun use, pauses, laughter, repetition, tone, degree of fluency, metaphor. Whereas conceptual commenting involves interrogating the transcripts, which led me back to the data to re-analyse or reflect on what it may mean. At times I would read sentences backwards to deconstruct the text and get a feel for the particular words that were being used. The method of noting that I used was to take a section of the transcript at a time and then apply descriptive, linguistic and conceptual commenting consecutively.

The task of developing emergent themes is to reduce the volume of detail in the transcript and initial noting 'whilst maintaining complexity in terms of mapping the interrelationships, connections and patterns between exploratory noting' (Smith et al., 2009, p.91). At this stage I gave myself a more central role in organising and interpreting the analysis, while remaining involved with the lived experiences of the participant.

The next task was to search for connections across emergent themes to develop sub-ordinate themes for each participant. At this stage of the process I wrote out all of the emergent themes on a separate post-it note every time they appeared

(which gave me an indication of the frequency of the theme) and then set about moving them around on my study floor. Here I employed a number of techniques including: abstraction (putting like with like); subsumption (where the emergent theme becomes the super-ordinate theme); numeration (the frequency of the theme) and consideration to function of the language used following the process of analysis as outlined by Smith et al. (2009). At this stage I found the jump too great to develop super-ordinate themes for each individual, as I still had between 18 and 29 sub-ordinate themes for each case (see appendix XI).

After developing emergent and sub-ordinate themes for each individual case, I realised that I needed to return to my research question and in the light of these themes asked 'How does this SENCO experience a support group using a reflecting team approach?' During this stage there was a lot of moving themes around with some emergent themes moving from one sub-ordinate theme to another. I focussed particularly on the meaning of the themes with respect to the research question, continually referring back to the transcript to achieve this. At this stage some sub-ordinate themes were subsumed and re-named under new sub-ordinate themes e.g. 'the importance of group size' was subsumed within 'I felt contained with increased familiarity'. Four super-ordinate themes emerged for each individual SENCO through a process called abstraction. For example, the sub-ordinate theme 'I felt contained with increased familiarity' was interpreted as the SENCO feeling safe with increased experience of the process, shared rules of engagement and meeting the same SENCOs. This sub-ordinate theme was then placed under the super-ordinate theme 'I felt safe' (see appendix XII). Any emergent theme that pertained to the research question was subsumed within a sub-ordinate and super-ordinate theme for an individual.

During the next stage of analysis I looked across individual cases (super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes for each individual case) to identify master themes for the group. At this stage I laid out super-ordinate themes for individuals (with their sub-ordinate themes, below) on the floor and looked horizontally across the sub-ordinate themes. The master themes for the group were the same four super-ordinate themes that individual SENCOS shared, but there were differences in the number of sub-ordinate themes that SENCOS shared (see tables in the results section). For example, four sub-ordinate themes emerged for participant one but overall five sub-ordinate themes emerged for the group (the group sub-ordinate theme 'our facilitator was containing' did not emerge for participant one or four, but did emerge for the other three participants). Furthermore, in some cases participants demonstrated unique idiosyncratic instances e.g. 'we had differing views on the value of solutions' (sub-ordinate theme) under 'we valued the process' (super-ordinate theme). In order to corroborate what I had previously found and apply more rigour to the process, I also took all the sub-ordinate themes for individuals (see appendix XIII) and clustered them into master themes for the group. At this stage, a deep understanding of the meanings within the transcript allowed me to place sub-ordinate themes into master themes for the group and the same four master themes emerged.

Figure 1 maps the journey of an emergent theme.

Figure 1: Tracking the journey of one emergent theme from participant one



Although the figure appears linear, in the tracking of a theme, it is important to note the process here was not linear and there was some reconfiguring and relabeling of themes (as Smith et al. suggest on p.101).

Finally, I looked for patterns across participants including the potency of master themes through numeration of the sub-ordinate themes for individuals as well as the function of the language use (pointing to the richness of the text). Divergence of sub-ordinate themes within master themes was also considered.

### **Criteria for assessing rigour and trustworthiness in research**

A number of researchers have discussed the difficulties in applying scientific methodological criteria to qualitative research (Guba and Lincoln, 2007; Henwood and Pidgeon, 1992; Elliott, Fischer and Rennie, 1999; Yardley 2000, 2008). I have decided to focus on criteria from each of the authors named above that I feel are appropriate to my study.

Increased credibility means, amongst others, prolonged engagement with research participants, persistent observation and peer debriefing and I would argue that I adhered to these criteria for credibility (Guba and Lincoln, 2007) as I carried out in-depth interviews, immersed myself in the data and met with a peer on the course to act as a critical friend to each other. Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) argue for member checking and although I didn't ask SENCOs to check the credibility of the emergent themes during the interview, for reasons that I have already explained, they were given opportunity to select questions. So I suppose one might argue this was an indirect credibility check, as all SENCOs were able to select relevant questions.

Sensitivity to context can be established by remaining acutely aware of the socio-cultural environment in which the study is situated, the existing literature on the topic and material obtained from participants (Yardley, 2000). I have made it clear that the participants were SENCOs that I work with in my daily life as a Trainee Educational Psychologist and have described the setting in which the research took place. All of the SENCOs were invited to attend reflecting team sessions and I have been open about how many sessions each SENCO attended. During the interview process I was aware of the balance of power between myself as the researcher and the participants, as well as the willingness for all involved to be open and share reflections. The fact that I was asking participants to share their experiences of sessions facilitated by me, may have influenced or inhibited what they had to say as they may have been concerned about offending me, for example. I needed to anticipate negative feedback as, although, I hoped that the session would be helpful (my values), I may have been disappointed to learn otherwise and my reaction, in turn, may have influenced what they said.

In terms of the substantive and theoretical context, although I carried out a critical literature review in order to prepare myself for setting up the sessions, I tried to remain focussed on what the participant had said, in keeping with IPA's idiographic stance and my own value system (client-centred). Emerging findings were then analysed at a more interpretative level and discussed with recourse to the extant literature. In this way I hoped to remain sensitive to the literature on the phenomenon in question, as well as IPA as a research method itself.

During my analysis of interview transcripts I maintained a level of reflexivity by recording my thoughts and feelings along the way, as well as how this might impact on my noting, commenting and developing themes. This was recorded in my

research diary. I feel this helped me to stay close to my participants lived experience, but also gave me an opportunity to grow as a researcher-practitioner, as it facilitated a better understanding of what matters to me, but also an understanding of how this underpinned everything that I did, from the very beginning.

As a general rule, reflexivity implies rendering explicit hidden agendas and half-formed intentions, but not just at the start of the research process – this should be a continuous endeavour

(Gough, 2003)

Linked to the above concept of reflexivity is the notion of transparency (Yardley, 2000). I believe I have presented a level of openness throughout my research by presenting an audit trail of one participant in my appendices. Henwood and Pidgeon (1992) are also concerned with a similar issue in their guideline of 'documentation.'

Coherence is a principle outlined by Elliott et al. (1999) and Yardley (2000). Here the emphasis is on integrating information in such a way that it hangs together logically (Smith et al. 2009). I would argue that I have demonstrated coherence throughout the research by, for example, including the rationale behind the research question, making explicit the choice of method, explaining my inclusion of participants, conducting a systematic method of analysis and subsequent recourse to the extant literature in the discussion.

Langdrige (2007), suggests that transparency and coherence are two of the most important criteria for validity,

With no ability to make grand truth claims about the nature of reality, the communication of our findings to our peers, and their critical interrogation of them, is a vital part of the research process ... the case must be internally coherent and the most plausible of all possible interpretations, and if it is not, then it should be refuted.

(p.157)

Elliott et al. (1999) argues for resonance in research (that it should expand or clarify understanding) and Yardley (2000) argues for impact and importance (that the research should be interesting, important or useful). I feel that the impact of the research on me, as a Trainee Educational Psychologist, has been hugely enlightening, providing an opportunity to learn more about group processes, develop relationships with the SENCOs that I work with, have a deeper understanding of the those questions which empower others and make positive changes to my practice.

At the time of writing, the service in which I work has rolled out a system of providing group consultation to SENCOs, whereby each Educational Psychologist has been given time to facilitate this process with SENCOs in their patch of schools. I have also been tasked with facilitating group supervision to my Locality Area Team using this process (which is made up of professionals from different disciplines) and offering group consultation within a reflecting team to senior leaders who are SENCOs in schools.

## Section Five: Findings

### Introduction

Before presenting my findings I provide a picture portrait of each participant's resonant themes to further include the idiographic element of IPA. Senco One's interview was emotive and she highlighted the stressful nature of her role. The experience of trust was a resonant theme and she used metaphor to convey the importance of it (*'I think it's the linch pin that holds it all together to be honest'*, line 428, interview transcript) and she was very concerned that the group should be a safe space to explore issues. Senco One was keen for sessions to continue and she highlighted the importance of empathy and shared experiences. She felt very isolated in her role and did not feel supported in her place of work.

Senco Two presented as being quite pragmatic in her approach to sessions. She was keen to have practical solutions to take away (*'Because then you do feel like you've achieved something and everyone likes to achieve and you've got like a little target which is nice you go away thinking about it you don't just go away thinking well I've had time to talk about my problem and that's it well we'll just leave it there then'*, lines 431-434, interview transcript). She highlighted how difficult it can be, to both think of and share problems. Senco Two also felt that trust was an essential part of the process and the facilitator had an important role to play. A lack of time in the job was a resonant theme.

Senco Three was overwhelmingly positive in her approach to sessions. She found them useful and they helped to build her confidence (*'I was given a lot more confidence to go straight in there and be more confident in what I am doing'*, lines

373-374, interview transcript). She also pointed to the lack of time in the job and the need for more reflective practice in the teaching profession. She valued the opportunity to meet with others in a similar role.

Senco Four was the least experienced SENCO and much of what she said communicated her insecurities around this. She valued opportunities to listen to SENCOs speak who had more experience than herself but also believed that learning is an on-going process. She wanted solutions to her problems and preferred sessions that focussed on practical rather than interpersonal issues. There was much polarisation within Senco Four's transcript and I think this reflected her changing opinions as she grappled with a new role (*'It's not everything's perfect it's just one of those jobs'* (lines 363-365, interview transcript) contrasting with a previous view that confidence is a matter of personality, *'They are really confident in themselves so I think that is really individual to the person'* (lines 123-124, interview transcript).

Senco Five was a little defended in her responses to questions, in interview, often immediately saying, *'I don't know'* and conveying that she would need to know someone very well in order for her to relax (lines 548-549, interview transcript). Being familiar with the people and process helped her to feel more comfortable in the reflecting team. She felt the facilitator was an important person for setting boundaries and following the process. She also felt there was a need for more reflective practice in schools and valued time for reflection in the sessions. Senco Five felt some problems were more relevant to some SENCOs than others.

Through the process of analysis that I have previously described, four master themes for the group emerged: we felt safe, we found a sense of belonging, we valued the process and we were given an opportunity to reflect.

Before interpreting each master theme for the group, I begin by presenting a table that shows how sub-ordinate themes are subsumed within each master theme and the prevalence of sub-ordinate themes across participants.

Throughout this chapter I draw links between sub-ordinate and master themes, highlighting the extent to which a sub-ordinate theme within one master theme for the group further illuminates another sub-ordinate theme, as well as another master theme. I do this because I feel it ties together themes and conveys the holistic picture of SENCOS' experiences within a reflecting team.

**Table 4 Master theme: We Felt Safe**

<b>Sub-ordinate Theme</b>	<b>Senco One</b>	<b>Senco Two</b>	<b>Senco Three</b>	<b>Senco Four</b>	<b>Senco Five</b>
We trusted each other	√	√	√	√	√
We needed familiarity	√	√	√	√	√
We were equals/power dynamics affect the group	√	√	√	√	√
We didn't judge each other	√			√	√
Our facilitator was containing		√	√		√

## Trust

All SENCOs experienced a sense of trust within the group:

I think it's the linchpin that holds it all together to be honest

(Senco One, line 428, interview transcript)

The metaphor of the 'linch pin' is strong and conveys the vital part that trust played in feeling safe; without trust the group would fall apart. It 'holds' the group together and is containing. It is interesting that the SENCO uses the word 'honesty' in this context, as other SENCOs also point to the inextricable link between trust and honesty:

Everyone has to be open with each other, otherwise you just go away and you feel like it was pointless

(Senco Two, lines 473-47, interview transcript)

SENCOs felt that without honesty the reflecting team experience is meaningless, it has no purpose; a clear identification of the problem is the beginning from where the whole session follows. Yet they also realise the risks involved in placing their trust in an unfamiliar group:

Because you don't know who they are ... even though you know nothing goes out of this room ... that's still at the back of your mind really

(Senco Five, lines 497-500, interview transcript)

She experiences familiarity as being linked to trust and trust as being linked to confidentiality. Two SENCOs indicated that 'fear' of breaking confidentiality compromises trust (Senco One, lines 273-274, interview transcript and Senco Two, lines 51-53, interview transcript), particularly the possibility of head teachers hearing what was said (the impact of power on group dynamics is discussed below). This

'fear' of talking would prevent SENCOs from speaking freely and this links back to the previous point regarding honesty, the meeting is meaningless without it. One SENCO said she would not talk about interpersonal conflicts at work with a head teacher present in the group:

Unless I knew it was completely private and completely kept in this room then I wouldn't open up about a colleague because I'd be too scared that ... I'd think oh (laughs) she doesn't sound very nice ...

(Senco Two, lines 178-181, interview transcript)

Here the SENCO uses the language of fear as she is 'scared.' Her repetition of 'completely' indicates the importance of keeping confidence and her laugh is indicative of a nervousness that she feels around those in power and the lack of honesty that hence ensues between levels of hierarchy in an organisation. She can't be open if there is a possibility of being negatively judged by her head teacher and perhaps this was related to her anxieties around competence. Overwhelmingly, however, SENCOs experienced the group as a place where they could speak freely:

You can talk freely in this situation whereas in school you can't always speak as freely to everybody

(Senco Four, lines 110-111, interview transcript)

Where the need for confidentiality was clear:

It was like we were private and we were on our own and we would never have told anybody so they probably opened up a lot more

(Senco Four, lines 54-57, interview transcript)

Yet, SENCOs conveyed that trust and confidentiality take time to build and this is also apparent by the way SENCOs talked about the initial anxiety they felt, for example:

I didn't know everyone, I didn't trust them

(Senco One, line 246, interview transcript)

This line conveys the explicit link between trust and familiarity which developed over time.

In summary, SENCOS experienced trust as the 'linch-pin.' They promoted the importance of honesty but also highlighted the element of risk-taking involved. They strongly advocated maintaining confidentiality. Trust is, therefore, essential for managing anxieties around negative judgement and feeling safe.

### **Familiarity**

All SENCOS experienced the need for familiarity in order to feel safe. For Senco Five, the need for familiarity was a resonant theme. She experienced anxiety in the initial meeting, particularly because she worried about how others might perceive her:

You know you are a professional person and you don't want everyone to look at you and say, 'Did she really say that?'

(Senco Five, lines 218-220, interview transcript)

She needs to know the group before she feels confident in speaking freely and this links back to the previous theme on trust because if she felt inhibited, her honesty was compromised. The other interesting point here is that the SENCO makes reference to her professional identity and the difference that this can make to the group dynamic:

You don't want to look a bit stupid by saying the wrong thing

(Senco Five, lines 207-208, interview transcript)

This concern to say the right thing relates to a theme around not feeling judged which is discussed below. She also implies that there is a 'wrong' and 'right' thing to say and that this belief in an absolute truth prohibits her from speaking openly. The SENCO needed to be familiar with the group. This initial anxiety was experienced by four SENCOs:

I was ... wary because I didn't know what to expect

(Senco One, lines 423-424, interview transcript)

SENCOs indicated that they could have been better prepared for the session as a lack of expectations created anxiety, but they also talked about a number of experiences that helped to reduce the initial anxiety, including the sharing of rules and use of positive language:

The rules shared with us ...gave us a way into talking

(Senco One, lines 8-10, reflective log)

It's a really good way of praising each other ... and saying you know you are doing a really good job

(Senco Two, lines 207-207, interview transcript)

The rules gave SENCOs appropriate tools that provided structure and containment which relieved anxiety by promoting participation. I would argue that a lack of familiarity with the process, in part, underpinned the anxiety that SENCOs felt and that they could have been better prepared for this. SENCOs experienced a smaller group size as performing a function in getting to know each other:

It would be very hard to get to know ten people quite well

(Senco One, line 526, interview transcript)

The intimacy of the small group helped SENCOS to feel more relaxed and facilitated a space for friendships to grow. For this reason it was important that the core group remained the same, to feel safe (Senco Three, lines 470-478, interview transcript).

The link between being familiar and trust is clear as SENCOS experienced trust increasing over time, and the impact of power dynamics on trust and honesty is discussed below.

In summary, SENCOS experiences around familiarity are presented as important in feeling safe and this includes familiarity with each other and the process.

### **Power Dynamics**

There was an overriding sense that SENCOS experienced the group as a place where they were equals. The active engagement by all was a feature of the group that SENCOS felt promoted equality:

Whereas this one I take a more active role and I feel more comfortable in taking a more active role

(Senco Four, lines 376-378, interview transcript)

Senco Four states that she feels more comfortable in having a role to play. Earlier in her transcript she refers to meetings where she is ‘talked at for an hour’ (lines 131-132, interview transcript) and where the same few people dominate the group:

Sometimes you go to meetings and there is just somebody there who knows everything and just talks and talks and talks ... we haven’t got one of those I don’t think

(Senco Four, lines 385-387, interview transcript)

This SENCO highlights the dreariness of having to listen to someone who dominates the group by her repetition of the word talk. Perhaps she also indicates a sense of anxiety that there is someone who appears to know everything, where she does not. She highlights a situation where a dominant personality takes over and leaves her feeling unheard, which could indirectly make her feel less important and unsafe. Other SENCOs experienced the importance of active listening where all are engaged with the process:

Not saying nothing is just as ineffective as taking over, saying too much is just as harmful as saying nothing

(Senco One, lines 292-294, interview transcript)

Here the SENCO refers to a rule around active engagement that we established at the beginning, 'don't be a hog or a log.' Her use of language is illuminating; ineffectiveness is clearly unsatisfactory but doing harm is totally unacceptable. Allowing particular voices to dominate in the group is clearly dangerous as it gives the message that these voices are more important, more deserving of respect. Yet in the group the SENCOs all had a part and were equally respected (in spite of age, level of experience or qualification).

Three SENCOs explicitly stated that that they wouldn't be able to talk freely if there was a head teacher present in the group and two SENCOs implied this. One SENCO, in particular, implied the destructive forces she experienced around power:

You feel your voice is heard in sessions like that rather than being ignored and stamped on

(Senco One, lines 332-333, interview transcript)

Although Senco One doesn't explicitly mention her difficult relationship with her head teacher, it is implied throughout her transcript. She uses strong words to convey how she feels treated in school; not only is she ignored, but if her words are heard they are immediately 'stamped on.' This evokes a violent image, an image of oppression and links back to the importance of equality and respect in the group for feeling safe. She was liberated in these sessions because she felt her voice was worthy of being heard and maybe for this short time, she was able to feel like a human being again. This is resonant with the above quotation from Senco Four who indicates she has a role, she is included and is more 'comfortable' with this.

Other SENCOS expressed that they hide things from senior leadership, were concerned to be viewed in a positive light and implied that they were fearful for their jobs; for all these reasons, they inferred that head teachers should not be present in the group:

Only if you are brave enough to go and speak to your head about (quietly) them, which is not easy is it?

(Senco Five, lines 180-181 interview transcript)

All this links back to the importance of honesty and trust; the group is pointless if you can't be honest, yet the presence of a powerful figure inhibits talk.

In summary, SENCOS experienced the group as safe, partly, because power dynamics didn't negatively affect group dynamics. It was important for SENCOS to feel respected as equals and that head teachers weren't present in the group.

### **Being non-judgemental**

Three SENCOS experienced the group as non-judgemental:

There wasn't anybody that made me feel that I couldn't speak or didn't know what I was talking about

(Senco Four, lines 536-537, interview transcript)

This positive regard for others is also echoed in Senco Three's words. The group:

...did not make me feel negative in any way. Opinions were aired without arrogance

(Senco Three, lines 7-8, reflective log)

The importance of being able to talk freely is again highlighted, as SENCOS felt more comfortable when they didn't feel judged. It is interesting that both SENCOS referred to not being 'made to feel' negative or unable to talk. What others do is out of their control. It seems that the issue is out there rather than within them and highlights the importance of the role everyone has in creating a safe space where no one feels judged. Senco Two experienced the positive body language in the room which, as well as the verbal language used, helped her not to feel judged:

Everyone's facial expressions were right, encouraging

(Senco Two, line 511, interview transcript)

She further highlights the importance of body language when she compared this meeting to staff meetings at school where:

They give you this look, you know it's very obvious how they feel and that can set the whole atmosphere of the room, feeling tension, awkwardness, you could cut tension with a knife

(Senco Two, lines 514-517, interview transcript)

This SENCO has clearly experienced meetings where she did feel judged and she suggests that this affects the whole group negatively. She uses violent metaphor to convey the damage that is done when people express judgement through body language, repeating the word 'tension.' It is damaging, so it is unsafe.

In summary, the group didn't feel judged by each other as they experienced positive spoken and body language. Nevertheless, this has strong implications for the value of reflexivity; that group members remain self-aware so that they are not harmful to others. SENCOs experienced the group as safe because, in part, they were non-judgemental. This is not to say that they wouldn't have had a strong reaction to something said in the future and this would clearly need careful managing.

### **The facilitator**

Three SENCOs implied that the facilitator has a containing role. They felt the facilitator knew the process and was important for maintaining boundaries as:

Had a teacher done the Educational Psychologist's role in the process they would probably have joined in

(Senco Three, lines 6-7, reflective log)

Interestingly one SENCO explicitly stated:

The rest of us wouldn't have been able to do that would we?

(Senco Five, lines 551-552, interview transcript)

This indicates that the role has a unique skill set that only a trained professional could exercise. Indeed another SENCO raised difficulties with the practice of 'coaching', that all staff in her school had been trained to offer:

If I went to a member of staff to do like a coaching session it might make them feel uncomfortable and think they don't think I am doing this properly – they wouldn't take it as a positive way of helping – they would take it as criticism

(Senco Three, lines 326-329, interview transcript)

This all seems to imply that the facilitator has a containing role, helping the group feel comfortable and promoting positivity. It is interesting that the group didn't feel the negative criticism described in a coaching session above and maybe there is something different about having an external facilitator:

But you don't have that person just to go to, just to go and let them know - well I've done this and it's worked really well, just so to speak about things you've done - I've tried this and it doesn't work, releasing some of the negative experiences you've had that week, instead of just them building and building up on top of each other

(Senco Three, lines 353-355, interview transcript)

This clearly points to the need for an individual who can provide a more restorative function and highlights the lack of this type of support in the teaching profession. There is a need for a person who can frame the SENCO's work positively and provide containment for her negative feelings in the job. It is clear that these negative feelings have been neglected and allowed to 'build.' The importance of asking non-threatening questions and remaining impartial (non- judgemental) is echoed in the following quotes:

The questions/prompts Nicola asked were non-threatening

(Senco Two, lines 6-7, reflective log)

That's the word isn't it? Facilitate something means you don't have your input in it and you don't bring your own emotions into it

(Senco Two, 480-483, interview transcript)

The facilitator helps create a safe space with careful questioning and adopting a neutral position. Earlier in her transcript this SENCO highlighted the importance of facilitator neutrality, suggesting that a SENCO is too close to the situation to carry out the role effectively (line 258, interview transcript). Senco Two experienced the facilitator as a role model:

How you are with us individually meant we could see how friendly you are and kind of that atmosphere rubbed off

(Senco Two, lines 524-527, interview transcript)

The facilitator sets the tone of the whole meeting and acts as a container. Personality characteristics and professional role helped the group to bond and feel safe.

In summary, the facilitator was perceived as knowing the process, having a unique skill set, maintaining boundaries, promoting positivity, remaining impartial and acting as a role model. I would argue that this served to contain the group and, in part, helped members to feel safe.

**Table 5 Master Theme: We Found a Sense of Belonging**

<b>Sub-ordinate Theme</b>	<b>Senco One</b>	<b>Senco Two</b>	<b>Senco Three</b>	<b>Senco Four</b>	<b>Senco Five</b>
We had a shared identity	√	√	√	√	√
We felt less isolated	√	√	√	√	√
We felt supported (restorative and formative)	√	√	√	√	√

### **Shared identity**

The identity that all SENCOs shared was important in feeling a sense of belonging. They shared values:

Meeting with other SENCOs they also have the same view as me they are wanting the same thing, they are wanting the children that have the most difficulties to thrive

(Senco Three, lines 304-307, interview transcript)

Her repetition of the words 'same' and 'want' emphasise her sense of shared values with the group. This strikes to the core of why SENCOs do the job and promotes a sense of belonging. The SENCOs had shared interests, which they don't have with other teachers in school:

You can talk about it to people here ... they are probably not really interested because they are not doing the role

(Senco Four, lines 466-467, interview transcript)

This highlights the importance of 'doing' the role in order to have an interest in it and the lack of people in school who share it. The shared role meant that SENCOS had shared interests which encouraged them to speak and listen and this led to an increased sense of belonging where they felt heard. 'Doing' the role also facilitated reflective practice (see below). The shared role also promoted empathy:

Cos we were all in the same situation they know exactly how I was feeling

(Senco Two, lines 66-68, interview transcript)

The SENCO indicates that it is knowing the role and having experience of it that means others can empathise with her and this increases her connectedness with the group. This ability to empathise is clearly important for relieving burden:

Knowing someone else is suffering the same, makes suffering (pause) a problem halved doesn't it?

(Senco One, lines 390-392, interview transcript)

Senco One's repetition of the word suffering is an indication of her psychological pain. It's interesting that knowing others suffered made her suffering less painful, because the thought that others suffer is an uncomfortable one. Yet it infers that she had found a sense of belonging, a community of others who were also struggling to cope with the demands of the job, so she felt less isolated.

Senco Two makes reference to Senco One when she states:

I was a part of that group

(Senco Two, line 544, interview transcript)

She highlighted that a bond was forming in the group and that she wanted to continue to support Senco One outside of the group meetings; when a community of support develops it is important to be there for each other. She was a 'part' of the group; she belonged to it and it belonged to her.

In summary, I have highlighted the importance of having a shared identity in feeling a sense of belonging: knowing the role, increased levels of empathy, shared values and interests and decreased feelings of isolation all helped SENCOS to feel like they were a part of the group.

### **Isolation**

Thank God it's not just me

(Senco One, line 99, interview transcript)

This line epitomises what all SENCOS felt and realised. It was a resonant theme for everyone. The group provided an outlet to share experiences and give support to one another, which SENCOS did not experience anywhere else:

There is no other place those SENCOS have been able to do that

(Senco Five, line 86, interview transcript)

In the group SENCOS found a sense of belonging. A number of SENCOS experienced feeling a failure on their own:

I think it's failure isn't it I hate that idea that I'm failing on my own

(Senco Two, lines 203-204, interview transcript)

This can lead to a false belief:

You sort of worry that every other school is running well and we wasn't

(Senco Four, lines 353-354, interview transcript)

With no opportunities to share experiences, in an isolated role, a false sense of self can emerge leading SENCOS to internalise their problems, lowering self-esteem. It was only by listening to others' difficulties in the group that SENCOS were able to externalise their own problems and recognise the situational factors involved:

Listening to other people I sort of think well maybe, if I say, I'm not doing so bad ... I'm not putting other people down at all

(Senco Four lines, 360-361, interview transcript)

It is interesting that Senco Four felt the need to qualify her statement above with 'I'm not putting other people down at all' and tentatively stated 'if I say': it wasn't easy for her to acknowledge that she might be doing OK, which further indicates that working alone can lead to an embedded sense of failure and shame. It also indicates the increased levels of self-esteem that SENCOS feel when meeting with others in a similar position.

In summary, the SENCOS are in an isolated role which means that they felt a weight of responsibility, often blaming themselves when things went wrong. Listening to others in a similar position helped them to relieve burden and see themselves in a more positive light. They felt less isolated in the group; the group was for them and they belonged to it.

## **Support**

SENCOS experienced the group as supportive because they felt safe to share problems, had a shared identity and felt less isolated creating a sense of belonging. All SENCOS experienced the group as providing restorative and formative functions, with the restorative function coming across as the most resonant theme:

It was a really good way of, actually, making the person get off their chest everything that person had kept probably inside for a long, long time

(Senco Two, lines 49-51, interview transcript)

The need to talk was clear for everyone and particularly a need for more frequent opportunities to talk, relieving burden:

Sometimes later's not good enough I need an answer now

(Senco One, lines 339-340, interview transcript)

Here, Senco One's sense of anger was conveyed both in tone and words and she continued to use strong language to convey her need for support. She clearly felt unsupported in school and that affected her sense of belonging to the institution, so with nowhere to turn, she turns to the group:

That's all I want to know at the end of the day that I'll be OK and come out of the other side alive

(Senco One, lines 476-477, interview transcript)

The level of stress that she feels is undeniable when she questions her ability to survive the job. She even stated:

It's my time not schools time so that I can say what I like

(Senco One, lines 502-504, interview transcript)

Sessions took place at the end of the school day as this was the most convenient time for everyone to meet and it is clear the SENCO wanted the arrangement to continue. Again, the quotation conveys her anger; she gives a lot of her time to school but she is not supported there. One senses not only her need to separate herself from school, but also her feeling of belonging to the group. She

experiences stress and a need to talk. She clearly saw the session as time for her to feel supported and implied that she gives too much time to school already:

I don't really shut off till later in the night anyway

(Senco One, line 543, interview transcript)

Time for self was a theme that also emerged for other SENCOS. They indicated that they take work home and experienced the session as a supportive and time-saving tool:

I can go this summer and I won't think about her once now ... you know when people say lifting it off your shoulders

(Senco Two, lines 448-449, interview transcript)

So it actually helped me to do a year's worth of work in two hours, well an hour

(Senco Three, lines 145-146, interview transcript)

The group saves time, but it is also time for them, a place where they belong. The relief of burden that came from one hour of group work was a weight off Senco Two's shoulders allowing her to separate work from home. This served as restorative support allowing her to feel better about both home and school. Senco Three also appreciated the formative function of the meeting (above) when she was able to resolve an issue related to intervention work. Other SENCOS also experienced the group as providing formative support, particularly appreciating the experience and knowledge in the room:

Do you know there just isn't that bank of knowledge in this school at all

(Senco Four, lines 268-269, interview transcript)

You know just to steal each other's experience

(Senco Two, line 220, interview transcript)

Senco Four indicates that there is a store of knowledge in the room and this links back to the role that SENCOs share, increasing their sense of belonging and need for the group. The word 'steal' implies that Senco Two experiences the group as a rare and valuable opportunity to learn from others in the role. It also implies that this type of support is forbidden, inferring a lack of formative support in the role. Senco Four also recognises, however, that differing levels of experience do not mean that one SENCO has less to offer than another. All have something valuable to say and all can learn something new:

Even if you've been a SENCO for a long time I think in this ... in this job you are constantly learning new things

(Senco Four, lines 234-237, interview transcript)

This SENCO raises an interesting point about knowledge; it is continually evolving and never stands still. The group provided an opportunity to share knowledge, ideas and skills where everyone's contribution was equally valued. Yet in the profession Senco Three questions the false assumption that teachers do not need this type of support:

In your NQT year ... you have your mentor and you have your meetings but after that it just stops and you're expected to just get on with it

(Senco Three, lines 345-347, interview transcript)

One senses Senco Three's disbelief that it 'just' stops and at the unreasonable expectations that are put upon teaching staff. She goes on to explain how much difference it made to her that she was able to share knowledge:

It made a lot of difference to me because now I'm not concerned about my interventions ... at all (laughs) ... and I was getting to the point where I was really panicking about them and I felt when I got the folder out to sort it, I would just put it away and do something else and when I took the folder home to have a look at it, I would do the ironing (laughs)

(Senco Three, lines 358-362, interview transcript)

She used to procrastinate in order to delay addressing her problems, but the concerns remained. The group provided the support she needed to co-construct a plan of action and this took her from 'real panic' to being 'not concerned ... at all'. She uses tense to convey her new found sense of enlightenment.

In summary, in feeling supported SENCOS found a sense of belonging where they were able to share experiences, co-construct solutions and feel reassured.

**Table 6 Master Theme: We valued the Process**

<b>Sub-ordinate Theme</b>	<b>Senco One</b>	<b>Senco Two</b>	<b>Senco Three</b>	<b>Senco Four</b>	<b>Senco Five</b>
The process is empowering	√	√	√	√	√
The process is unusual	√	√	√		√
There were issues around bringing the problem	√	√		√	√
We had differing views on the value of solutions	√	√		√	√

**Empowerment**

All SENCOs experienced the process as empowering. The structure of the session helped SENCOs to arrive at their own decisions about a way forward:

I think because of how it's structured that helped me to come to those decisions about how I was going about it, because it was logically thought out really

(Senco Three, lines 563-565, interview transcript)

Senco Three indicates that she was able to come to her own decisions about what to do and later in her transcript implies that the process promoted active

listening and honest talking. The logical process is also picked up on by Senco Two which she feels is more purposeful:

But the structure the 10 minutes this, 5 minutes this, 10 minutes ...it meant that it was like a lesson which is what we are very good at and making sure we stuck to that so by the end of it we went away and felt like we had something purposeful happening and it never just went into let's just talk about something for the sake of talking about it everything had a purpose

(Senco Two, lines 421-426, interview transcript)

Senco Two is comfortable with the more structured session because as a teacher it resonates with her pedagogy; this is evident through her reference to 'lesson' and 'purpose,' 'which we are very good at'. This further links to the theme of empowerment as it was a person-centred process. She experiences a session where every word counts and objectives were clear (line 19, reflective log). Other SENCOs referred to the importance of constructive talk:

We've tried to provide opportunities to do something about what we're learning about rather than just moaning about them

(Senco Five, lines 595-596, interview transcript)

Senco Five compares this session with other meetings which always turn into a 'moaning' session. In this session, however, she felt more empowered to learn, achieve and move the situation on. Three SENCOs had something to say about the importance of tentative suggestions, which we established as a rule in the set-up meeting:

They weren't saying you must do this and you must do that. Like if I'd spoken to the head I might have got well you need to do this this this and this and I might have felt overwhelmed

(Senco Three, lines 181-183, interview transcript)

Not only do tentative suggestions empower her to make her own decisions, but advice giving makes her feel helpless. She goes on to say that people work to their own strengths so they need to come to their own decisions about a way forward; this means that there isn't just one way to resolve a problem. Yet interestingly Senco One presents a polarised view when she states:

I don't like people asking 'What do you think you should do?' (in a mocking voice) because I can try and answer that but if I've asked for opinions or want opinions I want you to tell me what you would do and I can think well actually I don't agree with that and I don't think I should do it that way but maybe I would try it that way and give it a shot ... yeh

(Senco One, lines 238-239, interview transcript)

Senco One experiences advice-giving in a more positive light and feels patronised when the question is thrown back at her. She states that just because she has been told what to do, it doesn't mean that she will go away and do it. I wonder, however, at the extent to which her feelings of helplessness in school emerge here. She wants advice and this could be a further indication of her cry for help.

In summary the structure of the session, non-directive suggestions and constructive talk helped to facilitate experiences of the process as empowering.

## Unusual process

SENCOs commented on the unusual process which didn't feel natural but provided a unique opportunity to listen, talk and reflect:

And it was like a window between us so it was like she can see us. We had to pretend we couldn't see her and it actually worked for that reason

(Senco Two, lines 319-321, interview transcript)

The problem holder and facilitator were separated by an imaginary glass mirror. The 'window' created a line, over which SENCOs were unable to cross, facilitating a reflective space for listening and watching:

I think you can get more out of the fact that you can just sit and speak and just be heard

(Senco Three, lines 71-73, interview transcript)

I just wanted to add this bit in but knowing there was this (pause) made it much easier for me definitely – sit back and listen and stop talking (laughs)

(Senco Two, lines 333-342, interview transcript)

One gets the sense that SENCOs appreciated the opportunity to be allowed to listen. They didn't feel the pressure to talk because listening time was built into the process. Yet another SENCO experienced difficulties in not interacting with the team:

You know you're supposed to be behind a glass wall but it's difficult isn't it and because with the best will in the world when you're talking about the problem, you're looking at those people sat there ...

(Senco Five, lines 303-306, interview transcript)

Nevertheless, this SENCO still felt the 'glass wall' was an essential part of the process and agreed that alternative seating arrangements would 'make more of a

point' (line 314, interview transcript). Senco Five indicated that individual differences can make it harder for some to remain quiet than others:

I don't know if everybody else had the same problem or it was just me that can't keep my mouth shut

(Senco Five, lines 318-319, interview transcript)

A need for self-discipline and note paper to remind her of what was said, were strategies she suggested for keeping quiet and listening. The importance of uninterrupted time to talk is further emphasised in the following quotation:

You need to give people a chance to tell you what the problem is and get the whole thing out, rather than, you know, unpick the whole problem - rather than just little bits of it - and if you keep interrupting (pause) well you can't do that can you?

(Senco Five, lines 291-294, interview transcript)

Not only did SENCOs experience the process as facilitating active listening, respect and uninterrupted time to talk, but it also allowed the SENCOs time for sense-making. SENCOs needed to have an understanding of the whole before they started to make sense of each part. Senco Two also makes the point that in school, uninterrupted time is completely unheard of:

Clearly the one thing in school is that you never, ever have like a monologue conversation

(Senco Two, lines 354-355, interview transcript)

I felt like I could get for five, ten minutes all of it – the bad bits and the good bits off my chest without one person saying something that stopped me from telling the full story

(Senco Two, lines 364-366, interview transcript)

The 'monologue conversation' is a contradiction and further illustrates the impossibility of time to talk in school. One senses her relief that she was given time to talk, her need to tell the 'whole' story and her experience of the situation as unusual.

In summary, SENCOs experienced the process as unusual because of the uninterrupted time to talk which was facilitated by the imaginary 'glass wall.'

### **The problem**

The purpose of the process was to facilitate a space to work through a problem, but there were two main issues that centred on bringing the problem, which were feeling vulnerable and relevance of the problem. SENCOs point to the anxiety around bringing their problem to the group:

In front of a class of children it's easy to stand there and put an act on but it's very hard to do that in front of a group of adults so you almost feel a bit vulnerable

(Senco One, lines 123-125, interview transcript)

In this statement Senco One points out the differences between the public and private self. The reflecting team is an unusual process where SENCOs are 'in the limelight' (Senco Two, line 34, reflective log) on the one hand with a role to play, yet on the other hand there is no room for acting, as honesty is crucial. Senco One points to the differences between the teaching role and reflecting team roles, the difference in her feelings in front of an audience of children compared to an audience of peers. Her feeling vulnerable is part of the risk-taking that I described above, it is part of her concerns around others judging her private self and this has implications for managing anxiety in the group.

Two SENCOs experienced concerns around the relevance of the problem as in group work there was time spent on issues that were not of interest to everyone:

But they can become completely irrelevant to your work or the way you work

(Senco Four, lines 77-78, interview transcript)

They felt that problems around practical matters, e.g. interventions or case work, would have been more useful to them because everyone experiences them. Senco Four distinguishes between the actual work and the way people work; there are practical and personal elements to the problem. Yet on further questioning both SENCOs felt that freedom to choose the problem was of paramount importance especially because matters around Special Educational Needs may not be 'necessarily a problem you've had' (Senco Five, lines 440-442, interview transcript). SENCOs point to the idiographic nature of people and problems; all people and all problems are different so each should be considered on an individual basis. What came across as clear was that safety was of prime concern for these SENCOs:

I think that's the whole point in this because it's you can talk freely with each other in this situation

(Senco Four, lines 109-110, interview transcript)

If I did have that kind of problem then it would be a place where I could do that

(Senco Five, lines 88-89, interview transcript)

Freedom of speech, honesty and trust are the point. The group is a place for developing relationships and demonstrating reciprocal altruism where individuals come first.

In summary, in this section I have considered issues around bringing the problem as part of the process. Bringing problems to a reflecting team can be anxiety

provoking especially as the situation is unusual. Although some problems are not particularly relevant to everyone, it was considered that freedom to bring any work related issue (interpersonal as well as practical) was an essential part of the process.

## **Solutions**

SENCOs experienced positive feelings around having practical outcomes to take away but also negative feelings in one session where this was lacking. One SENCO presents a polarised view on the need for solutions. For two SENCOs the importance of having a practical outcome was resonant:

Ummm well it's kind of the whole point isn't it (laughs). That's why they've brought it as an issue because they want help, they want a solution. You need a list of solutions

(Senco Four, lines 162-166, interview transcript)

I've achieved what I wanted to achieve after our meeting and I feel like I've really resolved something

(Senco Two, lines 69-70, interview transcript)

Senco Four's laugh is a further indication that she felt the point of the process should be finding a solution; she laughs because she thinks it is obvious, there could be no other point because it's the 'whole' point. She experiences helping as providing a list of solutions. This indicates that for Senco Four there isn't just one solution to the problem, but finding a solution is what the process is about. Yet later in the interview, Senco Four questions the possibility of having a solution in every session (lines 505-506, interview transcript) and suggests sessions as being more of a 'sounding board' to talk. Senco Two indicated above that the session spoke to her pedagogical style; she uses the word 'achievement' and later suggests the session is

'like a lesson' (line 422, interview transcript). She values practical outcomes and indicates there is something innate about teachers striving for outcomes:

I think we are solution finders as well you know

(Senco Two, lines 381, interview transcript)

Yet in one session at the end of the summer term where only three SENCOs were able to attend, all experienced the session as frustrating as exemplified below:

I felt the session lacked ideas and enthusiasm. I don't feel that I contributed anything useful to the discussion

(Senco One, lines 24-28, reflective log)

The SENCO indicates several possibilities for her feelings of frustration but the most resonant possibility is shared by two other SENCOs and it pertained to the lack of ideas and answers:

It was just frustrating because you knew you wanted to help her. I think me and XX just felt like we didn't help her in the end.

(Senco Four, lines 499-501, interview transcript)

What the hell can we do you know? What else can we do for him?

(Senco Five, line 346, interview transcript)

There is a strong link between having answers and helping. Senco Five conveys anger and despair in her lack of answers to her problem. Yet Senco Five also indicates that there might not be a solution:

If you come with a problem you do want a magic solution if you like, which is never gonna happen

(Senco Five, lines 133-135, interview transcript)

The solution is likened to magic, it doesn't exist and it's never going to happen. One senses the whole groups need for containment in this session. Yet Senco One presents the polarised view of the need for a solution in her experience of the most important thing:

It wouldn't matter if I didn't get any answers it would just be even just people saying I know how you feel

(Senco One, lines 388-389, interview transcript)

Here we return to the safe space where the SENCO belongs and feels understood, where experience of empathy is more important than getting answers.

In summary, the SENCOs present mixed experiences of the need for solutions. They appreciated having clear outcomes, but also felt frustrated when they were in short supply. One SENCO felt solutions were 'the point' whilst another didn't need solutions at all.

**Table 7 Master Theme: We had an Opportunity to Reflect**

Sub-ordinate Theme	Senco One	Senco Two	Senco Three	Senco Four	Senco Five
We valued listening to multiple perspectives	√	√	√	√	√
We appreciated the time to reflect	√	√	√		√
The session facilitates reflexivity		√	√	√	√

**Multiple Perspectives**

All SENCOs valued opportunities to reflect on different viewpoints and recognised the impact of group size on the generation of ideas. They experienced hearing multiple perspectives as helpful in situations that have become stuck and appreciated the time to sit back and listen.

It’s just there are more opinions and different ways of thinking and everybody thinks differently and every school’s different for various different reasons

(Senco One, lines 152-153 interview transcript)

The word ‘difference’ resonates in the above quotation and throughout Senco One’s transcript. It was as if the SENCO was saying, ‘It’s OK to be different, we don’t all have to think the same.’ It makes me wonder to the extent that she felt accepted in her school particularly as later in her interview she mentions that she was reluctant to talk to staff about SEN issues, but meeting with the group helped her to gain the

confidence to do this. She was able to accept her differences and relished the opportunity to learn new skills. Senco Two expresses the unique experience of hearing it back:

Sometimes when you hear things back again (pause) from someone else's perspective it makes it really, really different

(Senco Two, lines 45-47, interview transcript)

She hears the other person's voice (in her interpersonal problem) echoed in the team's voices, it allowed her to step back, outside of herself and gain a different view. SENCOS looked forward to hearing differing perspectives on their problem. Senco Two felt the experience was captivating describing it as being like '100% in your own bubble' (line 543, interview transcript). However, group size can impact on the generation of ideas:

It's quite hard if there are only two in the team ... but then you don't want it to be unmanageable either, you want everyone to have a chance to say something

(Senco Five, line 465 ... 477-479, interview transcript)

She experiences the need for others to 'trigger' ideas, but the number in the group has to be manageable. SENCOS generally experienced between four and nine as an ideal number.

SENCOS portrayed the experience of feeling stuck:

You get some sort of mental block. You can't think about anything else and somebody else will come along

(Senco Four, lines 246-247, interview transcript)

Sometimes you get so stuck in your own blinkered vision that you can't see everything else

(Senco One, lines 376-377, interview transcript)

In this situation the SENCOS experienced the need to get a different perspective, to break the cycle of 'going round it in your head' (Senco One, line 466, interview transcript) and liberate themselves from their own stuck thoughts. Others were able to provide a fresh set of eyes and encouraged them to take a helicopter view.

In summary, the value of hearing multiple perspectives was a resonant theme for all SENCOS. It opened their minds to multiple possibilities, promoted tolerance of difference and was particularly meaningful for SENCOS who work in isolation.

### **Time to reflect**

SENCOS appreciated the time given for reflection and it was clear that they were not given time for this in their job:

I can't think of anything because it is never at the forefront of your mind but then on reflection I started thinking oh I've this issue and this issue and this one and I've got an important one here and when you said it's your turn to bring one to the table I was like I've got a really big one

(Senco Two, line 565 to 568, interview transcript)

Senco Two experienced difficulties in bringing a problem, but this was because she hadn't ever thought about it. It was only when she was given the time to reflect that she surprised herself in recognising that she had 'a really big one' (line 568, interview transcript). She further suggests that part of the session could be set aside for problem identification and this highlights the need for and lack of reflective

practice in schools. Another SENCO highlights the discomfort that teachers feel in confronting their problems:

If I went to a member of staff to do like a coaching session it might make them feel uncomfortable and think they don't think I am doing this properly. They wouldn't take it as a positive way of helping; they would take it as criticism.

(Senco Three, lines 326-329, interview transcript)

She goes on to suggest that the reason teachers are so defensive about their difficulties is that they are not given the time to reflect in the job:

It's perhaps because it's maybe not something that's done in the teaching role, you're not given the time

(Senco Three, lines 344-345, interview transcript)

Senco Two suggests that the reflecting team model should also be made available to other teaching staff:

I think that if that could be shared amongst some of the other staff – if they could just have the opportunity to just sit back. They don't get the opportunity to sit back and think

(Senco Two, lines 307-310, interview transcript)

Her experience is stark - teachers do not even get the time to think. Yet in the reflecting team SENCOs experienced the time and space to reflect.

In summary, SENCOs were allowed to acknowledge that they did have problems, but some had difficulties identifying them. They experienced a process that allowed them to sit back and look in on the problem. The contrast between their rushed job and this relaxed space was resonant.

## Reflexivity

SENCOs experienced the session as a rare opportunity to consider how they impact on what they do and also how what they do impacts on them:

It gave me a chance to stand back from myself if you like

(Senco Three, line 171, interview transcript)

SENCOs expressed that they often only think about what they are not doing:

You feel like you can never do enough in this role and you get to a meeting and you think I didn't even know that about the child, how awful am I

(Senco Two, lines 194-196, interview transcript)

One senses Senco Two's feelings of negativity in the language used above. The role can be stressful, drains confidence and leads her to believe she's a bad person, but the session allowed her to separate the job from herself. Other SENCOs found they were able to positively evaluate themselves:

Reflecting on what we already do and make me realise how much I already do for him

(Senco Five, lines 149-150, interview transcript)

Although this SENCO was unable to find a solution to her problem, she was able to see herself in a more positive light. Although the team expressed frustration at not being able to help her, she was able to appreciate her own efforts to resolve her problem. Yet Senco Five was able to identify the feeling that underpinned her reaction to the problem:

Senco Five: Um (pause) it's really hard it's like I suppose in a way I feel quite angry about it cos I just don't know like we seem to have tried everything ... If he's only classed as having a moderate learning difficulty ... You know quite angry at the whole situation really at what point does somebody say actually you are not meeting this child's needs ...

(Senco Five, lines 353-361, interview transcript)

I suppose it made us ... not necessarily with the anger thing, cos I don't ... it's a bit of a strong word really ... but the feeling of failing him I suppose at least it made me think we we've tried this and we've tried this and he's had this and we've done this so actually although we are not making any progress with him we are doing everything in our (emphasis) power to help him or a lot of things we can do to help him

(Senco Five, lines 390-399, interview transcript)

In the above sections Senco Five experiences feelings of anger when she feels that the system has failed the child. This was indicated in her tone of voice and frequency of the word 'angry' (in sections not included here). However, the session helped her to re-evaluate herself in a more positive light:

I suppose it made me feel that actually I'm not as bad as I think you know cos we've actually tried a lot of things with him

(Senco Five, lines 344-345, interview transcript)

Senco Two experienced difficulty in separating herself from the issues that others were bringing. She saw herself in their problems and found it difficult to refrain from talking about herself:

I found it really hard not to talk about my own experience. You kind of go on yourself and you want to say actually (laughs) this happened to me and this is how I felt

(Senco Two, lines 38-40, interview transcript)

She implies that she shouldn't talk about her own experiences but doesn't elaborate further. Perhaps Senco Two felt that it might take something away from the problem holder? Although the time was for everyone, the problem was considered on an individual basis. This does raise issues for reflexivity though. It is inevitable that SENCO's will be affected by what they hear:

It brings your issues to the surface

(Senco Two, line 561, interview transcript)

Perhaps SENCOs needed time to explore issues around reflexivity in more detail.

In summary, SENCOs experienced sessions as an opportunity to step back from themselves and consider the positive things they do. They were able to consider how situations made them feel and saw themselves in others' situations. SENCOs experiences raised implications for exploring the meaning of reflexivity in greater depth in sessions.

## **Review of findings**

In this chapter I have interpreted SENCOs experiences of the reflecting team as: feeling safe, finding a sense of belonging, valuing the process and an opportunity to reflect.

What was most interesting for me, as the researcher, was the amount of convergence across the group with all of the sub-ordinate themes being subsumed within master themes. The SENCOs talked about the value of difference and I expected there to be more of it.

The main areas of divergence were found within the master theme of valuing the process, particularly around the need for solutions, advice giving and bringing a problem. One SENCO felt solutions were 'the point' and another expressed that it didn't matter if she didn't get any answers at all. One SENCO wanted to be told what to do whereas others preferred tentative suggestions. Some SENCOs preferred sessions around practical concerns whereas others preferred sessions relating to interpersonal issues at work, nevertheless, all SENCOs felt they should be free to choose the problem.

I would argue that SENCOs' experience of the sessions was overwhelmingly positive. They felt supported and empowered which was largely attributable to their shared sense of identity. They felt less isolated as they were able to share ideas in a non-judgemental setting. Power dynamics didn't negatively affect the group because they regarded themselves as equals and trusted each other. The unusual process provoked initial anxiety but SENCOs became more comfortable as they grew familiar with it. The sessions provided a reflective space to generate ideas with the facilitator acting as a 'container' for the emotions that arose. SENCOs were given a rare opportunity to share a problem yet the need for a solution was debateable.

In the next chapter the findings are discussed in the light of the extant literature around creating a safe space, feeling a sense of belonging, experience of the process and reflective practice.

## Section Six: Discussion

### Introduction

In the absence of a focus on group process the group may not 'know what it knows' or 'experience what it experiences'.

(Clarke and Rowan, 2009, p.99)

As the study was inductive in both the methodology (IPA) and intervention used (a reflecting team where SENCOs could bring any work-related issue), I could not predict what SENCOs would say. What emerged was that the value of the 'restorative' function of the group was a significant finding. Recent research suggests that supervisors may place less focus on group process than they did historically (Riva & Cornish, 2008), which I argue neglects the restorative function.

Maslow (1943) proposed a hierarchical theory of human need which has clear parallels with the work that I carried out with SENCOs: physiological, safety, love, esteem and the need for self-actualisation. I have found, in response to my research question, that SENCOs experienced a safe space in which to discuss problems in their work (e.g. non-threatening), a sense of belonging (e.g. positive group relationships) and, a valuable process which was linked to feelings of empowerment (e.g. experiencing confidence and a sense of worth). In addition, I also found that SENCOs valued the opportunity to reflect. Although I would be hesitant to place the master themes into a hierarchy, I would argue that the importance of feeling safe was a very resonant theme. In the discussion I present a more detailed look at my findings, particularly the need for more restorative support, with reference to the extant literature.

## **Experiencing safety**

In my experience, one of the most important factors to a functional working relationship is the experience of feeling safe

(Scaife, 2009, p.91)

In a study on group supervision that focussed on group process and learning it was found that when students reported feeling safe, more learning took place (Fleming, Glass, Fujisaki, Toner, 2010) and this is not surprising considering the research around the relationship between learning and anxiety (Fox and Shankoff, 2011).

## **Trust**

There is a general idea that you need to establish trust in the therapeutic relationship before you can take risks ... in the last couple of years in my teaching and practice I have begun to see the relationship between trust and risk taking in a different way, that of a relationship of mutual influence

(Mason, 2005, p.164)

Senco One talks about the relationship between trust and honesty; if SENCOS are not honest then the session is pointless, yet in being honest she is taking a risk. She saw herself as a role model, setting the safe context in which others were able to do the same. Johnson (1996) argues that fear is one of the most dominant human emotions which causes distorted thinking and that the antidote is trust. In fear mode, a threat leads to us to panic and the panic leads to distorted thinking, where little learning takes place. Yet trust allays fear, allows one to enter into a relationship and learn.

A psychodynamic response to anxieties around confidentiality would be to restate the primary aim of the support group which is not about measuring staff

performance but addressing the restorative and formative needs of the group (Clulow, 1994). SENCOS compared the trust they felt in the group with the lack of trust that they felt around senior colleagues. Acknowledging and addressing fear is a priority in any support group.

### **Familiarity**

SENCOS initially experienced the session as anxiety provoking but felt that the rules shared made it easier to talk. Bion (1970) suggests that rules should attract rather than repel, help rather than hinder the promotion of new ideas and this is essential to the groups continued existence. Indeed ground rules do not prevent covert conflicts from taking place. Clarke and Rowan (2005) suggest that the rules can sometimes contribute towards covert conflicts within a group, as members hide what they really think fearing that nothing will change or negative judgement from others. The rules centred on being positive, tentative, praising one another and being encouraging and although this was safe, perhaps it wasn't entirely honest. What if the SENCOS had something less positive to say? Andersen (1987) suggests that it is especially important that connotations are positive and never negative because the screen 'tends to magnify criticisms and remarks' of the negative kind. Although the rules shared made it easier to talk, it didn't mean that the group was safe from covert conflict. Fine (2003) suggests ways of working with more covert conflict in a reflecting team (see below).

SENCOS felt that the group size was important for generating ideas and developing relationships. Jenkins (1996) suggests that the number in a reflecting team might vary from two to seven (but SENCOS felt that two in the team was not enough to gain multiple perspectives). Yalom (2005) suggests there is an inversely proportionate relationship between group size and the number of verbal interactions

between members. SENCOS felt there was an ideal number which ranged between three and nine.

Perhaps the most important thing about being familiar with each other and the process is that it fosters a sense of security where trust and belonging can grow.

### **Group and power dynamics**

Power dynamics impacted on group safety and a key finding was that SENCOS experienced a sense of equality within the group. Yet Zimmerman (2011) suggests that to work collaboratively means 'to labour together as equals' (p.219) which is an inadequate description of what is implied in a therapist-client relationship. In the reflecting team, although SENCOS had a shared identity, there were differences in their levels of experience, qualification and age. In addition to these differences, I always acted as a facilitator in the group, was perceived as being more knowledgeable about the process, was the researcher and had a different professional role (which could be seen as powerful). Zimmerman (2011) argues for acknowledging these power differentials rather than ignoring them. Hawkins and Shohet (2006) suggest using the following statements to explore deeper dynamics of the group including:

The unwritten rules of this group are ...

What I find hard to admit about my work in this team is ...

What I think we avoid talking about here is ...

What I hold back on saying about other people here is ...

The hidden agendas that this group carries are ...

We are at our best when ...

(p.177)

SENCOs highlighted the importance of taking an active role where everyone's voice was heard. They cited examples of meetings where individuals take over and appear to 'know everything' which leaves them feeling 'uncomfortable.'

Power, for example, is arguably not simply something that an individual possesses (e.g. within a team) thus representing a unitary construct, but rather is linked to an individual's ability to draw on certain discourses, bodies of knowledge and institutional supports to define a situation in a way that allows her to realize her wants and preferences over those of others.

(Clarke and Rowan, 2009, p. 97)

I wonder how a psychologist might deal with the potential covert conflict outlined above. Individuals are 'powerful' in the sense that they use their position (in all manner of ways) to exert their influence over others. If group members wittingly or unwittingly make others feel uncomfortable, there may be a need for restorative practice (Wright, 1999).

SENCOs said that they wouldn't have spoken openly if a head teacher had been present in the group. Previous research points to the difficulties associated with both leadership presence in and absence from the group (Hanko, 1985; 1990; 1995 and Stringer et al., 1992); staff may feel inhibited to talk with leaders present, yet senior staff may become suspicious if they are absent. Senco Two relayed to me a frank conversation with her head teacher, where she explained that she would fear negative judgement with a head in the group. In a similar way, Fines (2003) illustrates the challenge for trainee supervisees in reflecting team sessions where their supervisors are present:

Students are aware of the gaze of the supervisor and typically want to be seen as acceptable in his or her eyes. Indeed, if their therapeutic work is judged unsatisfactory, they risk not being officially sanctioned by the legitimizing academic and professional bodies.

(Fines, 2003, p.243)

In my literature review, I suggested that the supervisor role should be dissociated from line management responsibilities, to allow for more effective restorative and formative provision. Nevertheless, one might argue that in a professional environment one always feels on guard and the potential to feel negatively judged (Senco Five was concerned that others saw her as a professional and was able to uphold her reputation). It would be interesting to explore ways of working with schools to alleviate the suspicion that senior staff may feel or ways of enabling teachers to speak freely in a group where senior staff are present. Indeed Obholzer and Zagier Roberts (1994) suggest that instead of scapegoating particular colleagues the organisation makes an institutional move to 'We all have ambivalent feelings which we need to own, and those that relate to our work in the institution need to be taken up at work' (p.132). Further, treating a problem as an individual's problem, allows others in the institution to disown and project aspects of themselves. Although it wasn't a finding for the group I do feel it's important to consider the impact that choosing certain reflections over others may have had on the group. It could,

... be seen as a form of collusive avoidance of power/competition issues within the team itself.

(Clarke and Rowan, 2009, p.96)

Team members may compete with each other over reflections chosen and the problem holder may collude with the group. In the group I reminded team members that it wasn't a competition and that every voice was equally important, but this may

not have been enough. Fine (2003) states that in our competitive western culture, it may be difficult for team members to adopt a collaborative mentality and suggests declaring the undeclared in the form of a question to the team:

I sometimes think that I go into reflecting-team mode hoping that my reflections will be the most meaningful ones - the ones the family comments on-the ones that have the greatest impact. I wonder if any of you occasionally sit behind the mirror after a reflection, waiting for family members to say that it was your reflection that was really the most meaningful and consequential?

(Fine, 2003, p. 345)

Fine goes onto explain that he has tried this with some success and suggests asking the team how unmentioned reflections make them feel. He points out that the avoidance of some suggestions offered, may be more indicative of the difficulty in implementing the intervention (than it being less useful).

### **Being non-judgemental**

Rogers (1967) proposes that significant learning will only take place in a climate of 'unconditional positive regard', where individuals feel accepted and allowed to attach personal meanings to experiences. SENCOs experienced a lack of judgement from others in the group in both words and body language and this was experienced positively. They conveyed that feeling judged would close down opportunities for personal growth and development. They simply wouldn't speak about issues that were a concern.

Refrain from communicating (by your pauses, facial expression, tone of voice) that you need a certain kind of response from clients ... Because you are with and stand aside from your experience with a careful curiosity, you can model for family members ways that they might gain distance and reflect on events in their lives

(Roberts, 2005, p.56)

One must be honest in a reflecting team, yet refrain from demonstrating negative judgement and this is the challenge. The importance of reflexivity is highlighted in the above quotation and the inevitable challenges of coming together with different world views. One has to stand aside from personal experience and adopt a stance of curiosity. This ability to stand aside is helpful to others and it allows them to take a meta-perspective on their own life. From a psychodynamic perspective, as we are in a much 'better position to change our own behaviour than that of others, insight into unconscious processes needs to be used to primarily manage ourselves' (Obholzer and Zagier Roberts, 1994, p.135). Parker (2005) makes the interesting point that it is a short step in 'interpreting' what interviewees tell you to believing that you really do have 'knowledge of the way in which their inner worlds allow them to experience the outer world' (p. 109). He suggests common pitfalls in psychoanalytic research include describing psychoanalytic pathologies as moral faults, discovering developmental deficits or using it to disregard what people say. In these ways I argue that the researcher is being judgemental. Parker (2005) suggests that pathology doesn't lie inside us but in the process that divides the inside from the outside. Perhaps there was scope to train SENCOS about reflexivity in order that their role in the team could be more helpful, not only to the problem holder, but also to themselves.

Self-awareness of one's worldview and the impact of this on how we practise is also in keeping with the increasing value that we attach to self-awareness and self-reflexivity.

(Eisler, 2006, p.330)

It is important for everyone in a reflecting team that one is able to couple advocating one's view with inquiry (Schön, 1987). It seems to me that the only way I can demonstrate positive regard for another is if I adopt a position (as defined by Anderson) of 'not-knowing,' because if I already know the answer, then it is not surprising that I demonstrate conditional positive regard.

A not-knowing position does not mean the therapist does not know anything or that the therapist throws away or does not use what she or he already knows. It does not mean the therapist just sits back and does nothing or cannot offer an opinion . . . . The therapist's contributions, whether they are questions, opinions, speculations, or suggestions, are presented in a manner that conveys a tentative posture and portrays respect for and openness to the other and to newness.

(Anderson, 2005, p.503)

The challenge is to remain ever self-aware so that one remains humble about what one knows, yet makes the contribution that is needed from one's position of knowledge. Hawkins and Shohet (2006) suggest that the idea we are helpers as opposed to channels for help is a dangerous one, because we then find ourselves 'lurching wildly between impotence and omnipotence' (p.9). They, instead, suggest they are a 'caretaker' of the therapeutic space. SENCOs appreciated the positive regard in which they were held and they conveyed the judgements that they felt on a daily basis in their role, but it seemed a revelation to praise one another.

Cecchin: If they see a positive connotation of their story, of their existence, of how they got stuck in that situation, they can experience some admiration, which sometimes leads them to find a way out, to think they can work it out, because they are accustomed to a continuous reproach. Finding somebody sincerely admired for their battle is a radical novelty

(Bertrando, 2004, p.219)

It sometimes surprises me that teachers, who well know the importance of praise, forget to offer this to each other. Instead of feeling a failure SENCOS were able to recognise how much they already do. Seeing positive connotation provides a more balanced picture, increases motivation and is empowering.

### **The facilitator**

The rest of us wouldn't have been able to do that would we?

(Senco Five, lines 551-552)

In Stringer et al.'s (1992) programme of establishing consultation groups in schools, teachers were trained as facilitators. They suggested that the facilitator should be enthusiastic, skilful and well-respected by colleagues. Yet a number of other studies set up consultation groups where the Educational Psychologist acted as facilitator (Bozic and Carter, 2002; Farouk, 2004; Evans, 2005). Bozic and Carter (2002) suggested that the majority of participants still felt the need for input from an external facilitator. In Farouk's study (2004) the facilitator attended to psychodynamic processes such as task and maintenance functions of the group. Yalom (2005) suggests the therapist is 'enormously' influential in setting norms within group therapy, through technical expertise (e.g. making suggestions) and modelling (e.g. interpersonal honesty). He suggests there are four basic leadership functions in a group: emotional activation (e.g. personal risk-taking), caring (e.g. offering praise, acceptance, warmth and genuineness), meaning attribution (e.g. explaining,

clarifying and interpreting) and executive function (e.g. setting norms, rules, managing time and pace, p.536).

Halton (1994) suggests that the consultant's willingness and ability to contain or hold onto the projected feelings stirred up by ambiguity, until the group is ready to use it is crucial or it will be seen as an attack or blaming. Bion (1970) argues that the group functions to produce a 'genius' (create new ideas) but the Establishment (which I interpret as the facilitator) is to take up and absorb the consequences so that the group is not destroyed (p. 82). The work of the facilitator to maintain a depressive position is on-going, as when self-esteem is threatened there is always a tendency to return to a paranoid-schizoid position. In the fourth session all SENCOs experienced the projections of Senco Five and identified with it. She blamed the parents, the local authority and lack of resources for the child's difficulties and this resulted in feelings of anger and frustration for everyone in the group. Yet in the interview when I questioned her about her feelings of anger and frustration in this session, she said that the group helped her to realise everything that she had done already (positive connotation), as well as to see that there isn't a 'magic solution.' It was only after she was able to see herself more positively and the situation more realistically, that she was able to return to the primary task of promoting positive outcomes for the child.

More recently Pellegrini (2010) described how he uses psychodynamic processes of splitting and projection in his work as an Educational Psychologist suggesting that the profession has a crucial role in helping clients to understand complex and confusing emotional situations. Pellegrini also cites the work of Dennison, McBay and Shaldon (2006) who reflect on the contribution that Educational Psychologists can make to effective teamwork. Dennison et al. (2006) suggest that Educational Psychologists can draw upon psychodynamic, systemic and

social constructionist thinking. It is arguable whether a teacher, as a facilitator, would be in position to draw upon such bodies of knowledge.

## **Experiencing belonging**

There is in infants an in-built need to be in touch with and to cling to a human being. In this sense there is a need for an object independent of food which is as primary as the need for food and warmth

(Bowlby, 1958, p. 350)

Attachment theory suggests that forming strong emotional bonds with others is as important for our emotional and mental well-being as our physical needs and existing research supports the hypothesis that 'the need to belong is a powerful, fundamental, and extremely pervasive motivation' (Baumeister and Leary, 1995, p.497). There is much research to support the theory that forming social support networks not only helps us to feel better, but also has a correlational relationship with physical illness (Cohen and Wills, 1985; Hennessy, Kaiser and Sachser, 2009). In group psychotherapy, Yalom (2005) argues that group cohesiveness is key factor in its success where successful clients have described being 'a part of' the group (p.56). In the teaching profession there is a considerable direct relationship between social support and staff turnover (Pomaki, DeLongis, Frey, Short and Woehrle, 2009). In the reflecting team all SENCOs felt accepted and indicated a preference for continuing to meet.

## Shared identity

A growing body of work indicates that social support is more likely to be given, received, and interpreted in the spirit in which it is intended to the extent that those who are in a position to provide and receive that support perceive themselves to share a sense of social identity

(Haslam, Jetten, Postmes and Haslam, 2009, p.11)

SENCOs in the group felt a sense of belonging because they had shared interests and values which they linked to a shared professional role. They referred to each other as 'experts' (Senco Four, line 331) and were intrigued to hear what was said. Social identification proves to be a strong predictor of wellbeing in a wide range of contexts (e.g. organisational, clinical, educational; Haslam, O'Brien, Jetten, Vormedal, & Penna, 2005; Wegge, Van Dick, Fisher, Wecking, & Moltzen, 2006) so the well-being and mental functioning of groups should be enhanced through interventions that aim to maintain or increase individuals' sense of shared social identity (Haslam et al., 2009). Examples of improved well-being and mental functioning include: emotional bonding, collaborative learning, intellectual stimulation, a life with meaning, increased self-esteem and a reduction in feelings of isolation (Haslam, 2009). Yet it was interesting that one SENCO used the word 'steal' in reference to gaining experience from other group members. I wonder to what extent our competitive, western culture impacts on the sharing of ideas and collaborative problem-solving, particularly in an increasingly commercialised environment?

SENCOs experienced the group as a place where they could relieve burden with others who could empathise because of their shared professional role. Yalom (2005) found that 'being able to say what was bothering me instead of keeping it in', was ranked second of sixty therapeutic factors which he placed under the category of

'catharsis'. He suggests this conveys a ventilating quality, a sense of liberation and an opportunity to acquire skills for the future (p.90).

Although I have already indicated some of the problems associated with my different professional role within the group, it seems pertinent to revisit this issue here. In one session I felt uncomfortable and conflicted between my role as a facilitator for the group and Educational Psychologist for the school. I had worked with the child and wondered if some of the frustration was directed at me:

We are doing everything in our (emphasis) power to help him

(Senco Five, line 398)

This links to the influence of power dynamics on the group and the difficulties with holding a dual role. If Educational Psychologists are viewed as powerful then how can they 'facilitate' such a group and how does this impact on the group's overall sense of belonging? Bion's (1961) concept of 'valency' is also relevant here. SENCOs felt a shared sense of identity because, 'They want the children with the most difficulties to thrive' (Senco Two, lines 306-307). Yet to what extent did this give rise to basic assumptions in the group. At times I certainly felt a weight of responsibility, as the facilitator, to meet the needs of the group and wonder if the group entered into a Basic Assumption Dependency position. I also wondered, especially with my dual role (as Educational Psychologist for their schools as well as facilitator for the group), whether SENCOs were able to fully accept me as a facilitator? One line is resonant here, 'We are doing everything in our (emphasis) power to help him' (Senco Five, lines 398-399). It certainly made me think more about what I could do to help her with the particular case that she brought.

## **Isolation**

'No person is an island'

(John Donne, 1624/1975)

Every SENCO seemed to echo the sentiment 'thank God I'm not alone.' Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest that competition for limited resources provides a powerful argument for forming a group. None of the SENCOs wanted to work in isolation but they played a lone role in their schools. Senco Three indicated that she felt abandoned after her NQT year as the support 'just stops.' Limited time and resources in the teaching profession mean that many teachers struggle on alone with little to no time to reflect. Baumeister and Leary (1995) provide reference to many studies showing the correlation between loneliness and physical and mental illness. Peer, team or staff supervision (Carroll, 1996) are ways in which restorative and formative support can be provided in a profession where resources are scarce. There is no culture of supervision in the teaching profession, yet a clear need for both formative and restorative support.

Unless management includes the management opportunities for staff to understand these pressures, there will inevitably be an increase in stress at the personal level.

(Stokes, 1994, p. 128)

## **Support**

A search of the data base of ERIC in February 2012 generated 517 citations using the key words 'supporting teachers in schools' (over the last three years). Yet when I undertook a more detailed look at the first 200 abstracts very few related to teacher support and many more related to student support. Ways of supporting staff

tended to be heavily formative using approaches such as collaborative enquiry, problem-based learning, coaching and action research. Yet there was very little on more restorative support. In the United States, 50% of beginning teachers leave the classroom in their first 5 years of teaching (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004) and eight factors were found to be predictors of beginning teacher's satisfaction and retention: mentor support, colleague support, administration support, classroom management, student success, instructional resources, assignment and workload and parental contacts (Corbell, Osborne, Reiman, 2010). Having support was a strong indicator of staff satisfaction and retention.

When teachers trust each other, they share more, they help one another more, and they are more supportive of one another. Likewise, when teachers trust administrators, they feel less threatened and more likely to take risks in creating learning opportunities. With trust, building communities will more likely occur.

(Matthews and Crowe, 2010, p.45)

I wonder how children feel a sense of belonging to a school, if the staff do not?  
How do we manage the emotional challenges that teachers face in their work?  
Emotion has been viewed as:

Natural rather than cultural, irrational rather than rational, chaotic rather than ordered, subjective rather than universal, physical rather than mental or intellectual, unintended and uncontrollable, and hence often dangerous

(Lutz, 1990, p. 69, in Dallos and Draper, 2000, p. 143)

I wonder if cognitive-behavioural approaches to collaborative problem solving have been privileged because they are seen as more rational, ordered, universal, intellectual, controllable and safe. SENCOs experiences in the group suggest that

there is a place for emotion, a study of process and a need for restorative as well as formative forms of support for teachers.

## **Experiencing the process**

### **Empowerment**

Cecchin: So, what is therapy, after all? It is making persons active... I esteem you as an independent, active person, you can be active even in your tragedy. This is the postmodern message.

(Bertrando, 2004, p.221)

The process was empowering because it facilitated constructive opportunities for speaking and listening where the SENCOs themselves offered ideas and support. The tentative questioning wasn't intrusive or threatening, but it was perceived as being helpful.

### **Unusual process**

In his paper on the reflecting team, Andersen (1987) suggests that the setting is fully explained to the problem holder so that they have informed consent before taking part. Individuals who find the process too unusual can then excuse themselves from it. Willott, Hatton and Oyeboode (2010) suggest that the 'conversational pause' is facilitated by the real or imaginary one way mirror. This provides a shift in gaze and uninterrupted space. It slows the process down and allows clients to take a step back. The spatial separation also allows them to hear the problem 'differently'. The process is unusual but it is precisely this unusualness that promotes speaking and listening.

## **The problem**

In the beginning SENCOS had difficulty thinking of a problem, yet as sessions continued, with increased opportunities for reflection, they realised that they had more problems than they initially thought. SENCOS complained that they had limited opportunities to reflect and I suggest that this further supports this claim. It seems there is a need for more reflective practice in schools.

SENCOS also experienced some problems as not relevant to them, yet conceded that 'if I did have that kind of problem then it would be a place where I could do that' (Senco Five, lines 88-89) or that listening to others motivated them to resolve their own issues (Senco Four, lines 50-51). I wonder to what extent this lack of desire to engage with problems that were more of an interpersonal nature was a defence mechanism against the anxiety it produced? It could be that these SENCOS were splitting off (Klein, 1946) the more negative aspects of their interpersonal work relationships to preserve a sense of self-idealisation.

Nevertheless all SENCOS felt the problem brought should be the choice of the individual problem holder, paving the way for role-modelling, increased trust and self-reflection.

## **Solutions**

SENCOS had a range of views on the need for solutions including: they don't matter, they're not always practical, they are useful and they are the whole point of the session. SENCOS were relieved when they realised what they could do, discouraged when they didn't find an answer and ambivalent about the need for solutions when empathy was on offer. Yalom (2005) suggests that giving and seeking advice is a characteristic of a group early in formation. He suggests that if

advice is given the least effective is a direct suggestion and the most effective are a series of alternative suggestions.

One of the problems about finding solutions is the word solutions itself. Unfortunately the everyday attribution given to this word tends to encompass the idea of finality ... solutions are only dilemmas that are less of a dilemma than the dilemma one had

(Mason, 1993, p. 193)

In my own reflections I wrote about the problem with solutions indicating that they seem to suggest finality, but don't go away. Mason (1993) further explains that the solution-focused approach has been misunderstood, that there is no finality attached to the word solution, only uncertainty as 'like a river we are always in flow' (p.193). Schön (1987) provides an example of a parallel process of disillusionment in therapy that resulted from a lack of a solution:

Both he and his patient expected magical help from others in the form of right answers. And the group became aware that, as they waited to be given the right answers, they were experiencing in the conference what the patient herself was experiencing in therapy

(Schön, 1987, p.245)

In session four we all experienced feelings of despair when the answer seemed non-existent. Schön suggests the facilitator points out the 'parallelism' in order to understand better the thoughts and feelings of the problem holder, thereby reflecting on the frustration rather than the solution.

The questions posed are very indicative of an individual's stance. In the reflecting team instead of asking linear questions and strategic questions, circular and reflexive questions are asked to illuminate the situation (Dozier, Hicks, Cornille

and Peterson, 1998). Linear questions aim to get to the origin of the problem, whereas circular questions explore patterns that connect people, ideas and events. Reflexive questions facilitate clients to solve their own problems, whereas strategic questions attempt to influence a client's thoughts and actions. Tomm (1988) proposes that circular and reflexive questions support the establishment of a therapeutic alliance, whereas strategic and lineal questions tend to hinder its development. Senco Two suggested that the questions asked were non-threatening (lines, 6-7) and I would suggest the circular questions allowed her to experience the circularity of the school system, reducing feelings of blame.

## **Experiencing reflection**

Schön (1987) argues that 'reflection-in action' is a reflection that can still make a difference to the situation at hand, which includes reframing problems and trying out new actions to explore new phenomena. Physicians are aware that about 85 percent of cases are 'not in the book' (Schön, 1987) and it is this 'indeterminate zone of practice' that requires reflection-in-action. A 'practicum' is a setting designed for learning a practice, which lies in the indeterminate, virtual world. I am suggesting that the reflecting team was a practicum, going beyond the facts and co-constructing new ways of framing problems. Schön (1987) suggests a number of ways in which a practicum elicits new learning; reframing, modelling, intermediate reflection, shifts in stance, drawing upon past experience and the safety of a virtual world. I would argue that the reflecting team goes some way into performing these functions.

If we can use reflective practices to enhance human flourishing, we may make a significant contribution to reducing depression, enabling people to do better at work, to stay healthier, to become more resilient and even to live longer!

(Ghaye, 2010, p.2)

Ghaye (2010) seems to echo the sentiment of positive psychology when he suggests positive emotion, positive engagement, positive relationships and a focus on meaning and purpose. He promotes appreciative intent when he focusses on talents, enhancing relationships, betterment of organisation and developing learning-enriched conversational groups. In order for a group to reflect, emotions, relationships and meanings need to be a strong focus of attention.

Nevertheless, Schön (1987) points to examples of where reflective practice can go wrong, particularly the communication difficulties that can arise from a difference in 'stance' and theories-in-use that are brought to an interaction. This can create a 'learning-bind' (an unhelpful pattern of interaction where learning is inhibited). Schön suggests a more productive manner and style of interaction which is less about 'winning':

Its strategies include advocacy of one's views and interests coupled with inquiry into the views and interests of others

(p.141)

It seems to me that the framing of the questions that one asks of others is the difference between opening up or closing down possibilities. One has to place a higher value on curiosity than winning, understanding points of view rather than presenting the facts. In the reflecting team a stance of curiosity was advocated and felt strongly in the form of tentative questioning.

## **Multiple perspectives**

The supervisor or team is seen as charged with actively intervening in the supervision/therapy team system to find the right balance or a 'difference that makes a difference'

(Bateson, 1979, in Clarke and Rowan, 2009, p. 92)

SENCOs experienced the different perspectives as shedding greater light on their situations. Bateson points to the importance of finding the right balance of difference and Andersen (1987) echoes this sentiment; if the difference is too small it goes unnoticed, but if it is too big it can have a disorganising effect. I feel that hearing something radically different to one's normal working practice can promote a more detailed reflection on what one does and why one does it. This would need careful managing and a respect for different ways of working, when one considers emotional responses to different world views. Hickson (2011) uses the term 'structured uncertainty' (p.836) to refer to a framework that allows an individual to contain what is uncertain; individuals are allowed to see that something is not right or wrong, but are encouraged to try something different.

## **Time to reflect**

In a workshop which posed the question, 'How would I know that every member of staff mattered in your school?'(Bergmark, Ghaye and Alerby, 2007), teachers' answers included: everyone is valued and needed, all pedagogies are respected, difference is tolerated, colleagues are trustworthy and the ethos is positive and encouraging. I would argue that SENCOs felt valued, trusted and respected in the group because a time and space was purposefully put aside for this endeavour. I suggest that group dynamics inevitably impact on any organisation, but unless time is

spent addressing issues such as trust, belonging and reflective practice then staff may feel disengaged from it.

## **Reflexivity**

SENCOs appreciated having the opportunity to 'sit back' and listen to an array of multiple perspectives on their problem. Prest, Darden and Keller (1990) found that benefits of the reflecting team for the problem holder, included being at a meta-level in the problem and feeling safer through being able to sit and listen to the reflecting team (knowing that there will be an opportunity to respond). They found that it seemed to add more depth to the process and gave participants another dimension. Finlay and Gough (2003), state that the origin of the word 'reflexive' means 'to bend back upon oneself' and SENCOs conveyed that listening to the array of voices in the reflecting team gave them an opportunity to hear the problem back, differently.

The famous physicist and Nobel laureate Werner Heisenberg (1990) rather audaciously stated, 'conception of objective reality has evaporated'. The observing eye (I) is an integral part of the observed reality and, through the process of observing, the observer changes the world he perceives. So the linear discourse of old sciences that X causes Y no longer exist; instead cause and effect depends on one's vantage point.

(Merza and Corless, 2009, p.209)

Perhaps there was something enlightening in hearing others inject new meanings into the problem. One is stuck when one only sees one way; the multiple vantage points allow new possibilities to emerge.

Although I had discouraged SENCOs from discussing 'self' in response to the problem holder, because 'emotional valence of a session should not be tipped away from the clients' (Roberts, 2005, p.56), there is evidence that it can be helpful:

It was so good to hear the person say what had happened in their own lives; it helped me understand why the comment was made; I didn't feel so much like I was being told what to do, but rather that's what helped the person who said it

(Dickerson, 2011, p.)

Perhaps hearing others on the team sharing issues means SENCOs, not only feel less alone, but also more confident as they realise they all experience similar problems. Another benefit of having SENCOs in the reflecting team, rather than other professionals, is that the language is more accessible and less 'expert':

I have watched family members' eyes glaze over as reflecting teams, enamoured of their intricate understandings of familial dynamics, go on too long with their observations. Therapists can be prone to showing their erudition in ways that highlight that they have access to education, and thus power

(Roberts, 2005)

Rather than helping, erudition can serve to exclude those with the problem. I wonder in the above example if the team was serving the family or themselves? SENCOs spoke in a language that they all understood so they were helpful, because they were accessible.

## **Review of discussion**

SENCOs experiences of a support group using a reflecting team approach suggest that the need for a focus on process is essential in creating a safe climate. SENCOs instinctively recognised the mutual relationship between trust and risk which was a springboard for developing relationships. Group cohesiveness, where individuals feel a sense of belonging and unconditional warmth, is a key factor in a

successful group. The reflecting team provides mutual support for working in indeterminate zones of practice. In this unique and uncertain place it is necessary to adopt a stance of curiosity, as different world views need to be respected. As all SENCOs were caretakers of the reflective space, they were encouraged to adopt a 'not-knowing' position. This helped to empower individuals who realised their own way through their difficulties. The conversational pause, in the form of an imaginary window, added space and time for reflection in the sessions and promoted speaking and listening. As emotional factors should not be ignored in collaborative problem-solving, the facilitator will need to be able to draw upon psychological paradigms in order to manage covert conflicts in the group. I have included psychodynamic processes of splitting, projection, projective identification, containment and valency as relevant to the study, particularly offering ways of interpreting our experiences of stress at work. In some (if not all) cases, the need for social support was more important than the problem itself, yet there is a lack of literature focussing on restorative support for teachers and, in particular, SENCOs. It seems that the questions one asks, the use the language (body and spoken) and group dynamics are all important in building a cohesive group experience. This study indicates that important benefits can come from using reflecting teams. They could provide bonding and support to SENCOs, exchange of best practice and experience and 'less of dilemma than dilemma one had' (Mason, 1993, p.193).

In my literature review I presented three processes underlying my work with SENCOs which I would argue overlap in a number of ways (see figure below):

Figure 2: The overlap between Supervision, Consultation and the Reflecting Team approach



Figure 2 shows the main ways three processes overlap, however consultation can be restorative. For example, in the literature review, Stringer et al. (1992) suggest that consultation is a way of reducing the impact of occupational stress for teachers; they found that group consultation offered an atmosphere of trust, allowed staff to share good practice and helped them to feel less isolated. The reflecting team model has also increasingly been adapted to incorporate different psychological paradigms (e.g. the solution focussed reflecting team, Johnson et al, 1997).

SENCOs experienced a group work process which was based on a social constructionist paradigm. In the introduction section of the thesis the reflecting team was positioned in the third phase of a three phase framework to systemic family therapy which moved from essentialism to constructivism and then to social constructionism. This shift challenged the prevailing, pathologising views of the

medical model. The reflecting team served formative and restorative functions and this has clear parallels with the formative and restorative functions of supervision which were outlined in the literature review (Inskipp and Proctor, 1993). The literature review also made reference to the wider applications of the reflecting team (initially set up for use in family therapy) to group supervision in Educational Psychology and other settings. I advocated, in the literature review, for a form of 'cooperative' group supervision' (Hawkins and Shohet, 2006) where the facilitator takes responsibility for group management, but the supervision is given by group members. Hawkins and Shohet (2006) argue that, at its best, 'cooperative group supervision' is empowering for all members of the group. The reflecting team operated systemically, as SENCOs collaboratively considered the wider social and cultural contexts within which they worked. Multiple perspectives were heard and respected because it took adult learning, non-expert approach. In the literature review, reference was made to the adult learning literature where educator and learner are encouraged to engage as peers. The adult learning approach serves to reduce the influence of prestige, promotes openness towards alternative points of view and counters the right-wrong dialogue so often found in educational settings (Mezirow, 1997, p.13, cited in Scaife, 2009, p. 33). SENCOs were able to co-construct new ways of seeing problems in an environment which was made safe through careful attention to language use, therapeutic pause and stance taken and this helped to provide a restorative function.

## **Section Seven: Limitations of this study**

### **Limitations of the intervention**

Reflecting teams are usually made up of practitioners who have had training, often in family therapy or clinical settings. It could be argued that SENCOs did not have adequate training for 'being' in a reflecting team. Although I provided some rules for engagement, that I acquired from the reflecting team literature, and acted as a technical facilitator, the intervention could have been improved with more initial training for both myself and SENCOs. This may, in turn, have reduced some of the initial anxiety that SENCOs experienced during the process.

An open system is one with boundaries that allows for information to flow in and outside of it, whereas a closed system has more rigid boundaries that are not easily crossed (Dallos and Draper, 2000). Successful organisations would need both open and closed systems. This study has been concerned with the intimate system of the reflecting team that has systemic potential. We must now consider the communications outside of the group. In contrast to other participants, who commented that the reflecting team had provided useful strategies (which were applied successfully in school), one SENCO in the study indicated that a session had a limited effect in her school (but did make her feel better). Constructive use of information generated in the group is in accord with the study by Stringer et al. (1992), where one head teacher highlighted the need for schools to recognise their normative responsibilities:

The initial challenge, which has been successfully met by the facilitator, lay in leading colleagues to trust and share without feeling reduced. The next key challenge is for management to respond positively and supportively when it is appropriate

(Stringer et al, 1992, p.92)

I am suggesting that for successful practical outcomes (from the reflecting team) to be applied in school, the school system needs to be open to them. Perhaps there is further work to be carried out at the boundary of the reflecting team and in communication with the school.

The timing of the session (end of the school day) created some difficulties for SENCOs in that it was not a timetabled event and, therefore, was not a school priority. This meant that if issues arose in school, SENCOs were unable to attend. Inconsistent attendance affects the cohesiveness of the group for a number of reasons: the group falls short on numbers (and, therefore, ideas), members become suspicious about the attractiveness of sessions to others and a group who can't regularly attend 'must be apathetic and indifferent to the sufferings' of others (Bion, 1961, p.48). The timing between sessions is another factor that caused some difficulties. All four sessions took place in the summer term and this was experienced as a 'bit rushed' by participants. The frequency of meeting is another factor that impacts on group cohesion so if SENCOs meet too regularly or irregularly it could have a negative impact on the group dynamics.

Although the group continues to meet (at the time of writing), analysis took place after the fourth session. At this stage the group was early in formation thus providing limited opportunities for exploring group dynamics over time. SENCOs

responses were overwhelmingly positive but this may have been partly because the group were new to each other.

Not all the problems appealed to everyone. Some SENCOs wanted to discuss problems of a practical nature, whereas others wished to explore interpersonal concerns. Also as I only ran four sessions with five SENCOs, not everyone had an opportunity to discuss their problem. Nevertheless, SENCOs felt that the problem should be chosen on an individual basis, as social support was considered more important than the problem itself.

To my knowledge, there appear to be a lack of studies using reflecting teams with school staff. This means it is difficult to compare experiences of this phenomenon in a school teaching context.

## **Limitations of the methodology**

Chamberlain (2011) raised interesting points about IPA methodology in a manner she characterises as 'troubling'. She states that the allegiance to phenomenology needs to be clearer as other phenomenological approaches employ epoché and imaginative variation. Yet I argue that the aim of IPA is get 'experience close' as there is not a direct route to it and attempts at phenomenological reduction presuppose that it is possible to achieve a 'God's eye view'. I suggest that IPA has its ontological roots in Heidegger's, rather than Husserl's, philosophy as he believes that we are already 'thrown' into the world, continually interpreting and engaging with the environment around us; it is because we do this that there is a world at all and not a collection of entities.

There is an argument that IPA needs to be more strongly rooted in hermeneutic tradition in order to move beyond themes (Chamberlain, 2011). Yet I suggest that there is a strong process of engagement with the data through various types of commenting, a high degree of reflexivity on the part of the researcher and moving in a circular fashion through the text between part and whole. Themes emerge from this meaning making activity.

Chamberlain (2011) also argues that analysis needs to be clearly identified as phenomenological and interpretive so that it is set apart from other qualitative methodologies such as thematic analysis. She suggests the focus should be on what the data means, not what it is. Smith (2011b), on the other hand, states that a good paper should reveal what the data are, how it was obtained as well as what it means. Therefore, a good paper will be transparent, descriptive and interpretive.

Chamberlain (2011), states that according to Smith (2011a) themes are only valid if they are quantifiably common in the data, but surely a single sensitive comment can provide valuable insights into meaning. Smith (2011b) clarified his position by agreeing that single sensitive comments can, indeed, provide valuable insights into meaning and that the weight of each comment is not equally distributed. IPA makes room for divergence and convergence and this is a mark of a good paper.

There is an argument that focussing on individual experience means that broader more structural perspectives are excluded (Kaptein, 2011). On the other hand, I feel that the accounts given by SENCOs were inevitably tied up with the school systems in which they worked so the wider social and cultural context was embedded in their accounts.

Smith (2011a) points to the creative flair that IPA promotes which means that it is not a prescriptive methodology. He suggests that IPA is still in its relative infancy so we can expect to see improvements over time.

## **Limitations of the procedures**

The small group could be considered a problem if a study is only considered generalisable on the basis of statistical rather than analytical reasoning. Yin (2009) argues that analytical reasoning generalises the results of a study to a broader theory, expanding and generalising theories. Statistical analysis, on the other hand, aims to quantify the significance of results before applying them to larger populations, enumerating frequencies. I cannot claim to be able to generalise results to a wider population, yet hope to have shed light on a reflecting team intervention, with specific SENCOs underpinned by systemic theory and social constructionism. In the study, group dynamics emerged as another important factor for consideration in the experiences of the group. The other interesting point is that although the group size could be considered a weakness in the methodology, it was a strength in the intervention (between three and nine participants was considered optimal). It seems that in the researcher-practitioner world, enumerating frequencies is not always practical or desirable.

All SENCOs in the study were female. As there are no male SENCOs in my patch of schools, invitations were only sent to female participants. This presents a gender bias in the study. It would be useful to examine male experiences of the reflecting team.

I have already indicated some difficulties concerning my role in both the research and intervention. My aim, as a researcher, was to understand how SENCOS experienced the reflecting team process, but my relationship with them as facilitator in the intervention, researcher in the study and Educational Psychologist for their schools inevitably impacted on this experience. As I facilitated the intervention, the SENCOS may have sought to please me in their interview responses, presenting the experience favourably. In the same way, as I facilitated the intervention I could have presented their experiences in the best possible light or searched for information that simply confirmed my own preconceptions (Fox, 2011). However, I tried to maintain a high degree of reflexivity, throughout the process, by keeping notes in my research diary along the way, considering not only how I affected the process, but also how it affected me. It was interesting that SENCOS experienced the group as a place where they were equals. I already mentioned that I believe equality to be a core value of mine and as I facilitated the group, it is not surprising that a theme around power dynamics emerged for participants. This is further evidence, for me, that as a researcher-practitioner I was totally entwined in the process. It is important to establish a bond with participants in the interview, but this had already been established throughout the previous nine months in working with the SENCOS in my role as an Educational Psychologist. Perhaps the SENCOS who agreed to take part in the study did so, because they felt they had a good working relationship with me. The SENCOS experience of the sessions was undoubtedly affected by my being an Educational Psychologist for the school. For example, in reference to session four, Senco Five indirectly infers that I had a role to play in the case that she'd brought for discussion. It felt uncomfortable for me and almost certainly impacted on group dynamics.

Writing the reflective logs could have affected the overall experience. SENCOs conveyed difficulties in writing reflectively as well as a lack of training in this area, but also the act of writing may have led them to reflect more fully on the experience, thus changing the account presented in interview.

## Section Eight: Suggestions for Further Research

In the following section I suggest areas for further research based on my interpretations of SENCOs experiences in a reflecting team. I present the suggestions in the form of list of general areas for inquiry:

- Optimisation of the use of reflecting teams with teachers in schools is required and consideration of different types of support that teachers feel they need
- An exploration of the transferability of the four themes (we felt safe, we found a sense of belonging, we valued the process and we had an opportunity to reflect) to other studies that use a reflecting team approach with teachers in schools
- A longitudinal study exploring how group dynamics change over time using a reflecting team approach
- How to safely understand and uncover unconscious material in a teacher support group
- A consideration of how talk creates effects using a reflecting team approach in schools
- Working with safe uncertainty in Educational Psychology
- What factors influence the sustainability of a teacher support group
- How do circular and reflexive questions help?
- How do SENCOs experience a multi-agency reflecting team?

## Section Nine: Conclusions

I present conclusions as SENCOs' experiences but remind the reader that they are my interpretations. SENCOs experienced the reflecting team as a safe space in which to explore their concerns. They experienced a mutual relationship between trust and risk, a greater sense of security as they became familiar with each other and the process, unconditional positive regard, a sense of equality with others in the group and a containing facilitator. However, it is important to acknowledge that the group was early in formation and that covert conflict could have affected group dynamics. For example, in one session all participants were affected by the parallel process of despair that one SENCO felt in her case work.

SENCOs feel isolated in their role, yet experienced a sense of belonging in the group because of a shared identity. In the group SENCOs experienced increasing levels of confidence, emotional bonding and collaborative learning. Yet I wonder how a sense of belonging and safety was affected by my presence as a facilitator in the group? I held a different role to the SENCOs and worked with them in my role as an Educational Psychologist for their schools so perhaps they sensed my unease at times. For example, in one session my inner dialogue was questioning if I was perceived as being part of the problem, as a gate-keeper to resources.

SENCOs experienced the curious stance and tentative questioning as empowering, because it wasn't prescriptive or threatening. The conversational pause (imaginary window) was experienced as respectful because others were unable to interrupt. It was also experienced as a rare opportunity to listen and time for reflection. Although not all problems were relevant to their practice, SENCOs felt that offering support was more important than the choice of problem. There were a

mixture of views on the need for solutions and perhaps the word solution is problematic. Mason (1993) suggests that the word 'dilemma' is a more useful construct, with the solution being 'less of a dilemma than the dilemma one had' (p.193). SENCOs generally valued having practical outcomes to go away with and try.

SENCOs valued the multiple perspectives that were generated in the session and the time to reflect. They experienced an opportunity to hear their problem back through the voices in the reflecting team which injected a different perspective on their problem. SENCOs experiences suggest that teachers need more time and space for, as well as training on, reflective practice.

I have already indicated that a consideration given to group dynamics is essential for a well-functioning group (Bion, 1961; Tuckman, 1975; Yalom, 2005; and Hawkins and Shohet, 2006). A number of factors affect group functioning, including: the containing role of the facilitator, unaddressed covert conflict (brought about for fear of being negatively judged, for example), risk and trust and a feeling of belonging. Any practitioner undertaking work with groups will need to consider how to work safely with hidden conflict.

## **Section Ten: Implications for Educational Psychologists' practice**

There is a role for Educational Psychologists to provide restorative, as well as formative, support for SENCOs. Research suggests that an inquiring stance combined with tentative language and humility provide a helpful way of being, when working in unique and uncertain situations (Shön, 1987). This is non-judgemental, non-threatening and empowering. I have found that when working with an individual's problems it is necessary to maintain a high degree of reflexivity and listen to one's inner dialogue. Insufficient attention to one's own thoughts and feelings about the problems that we face may mean that we don't hear the problem. Not only this, but a new problem can be created in the interaction with the problem holder. As there are multiple ways of viewing a problem, only a stance of genuine inquiry allows one to engage with the wider discourse around the issue at hand.

SENCOs experiences indicate that there is a lack of reflective practice in schools. Initially SENCOs struggled to think of a problem, they had difficulty with the idea of writing a reflective log and explicitly stated, 'it's hard to reflect on your own' in school (Senco One, line 46). It seems the reflecting team is one way that time and space for reflection can be created. SENCOs themselves suggested that the reflecting team approach should be made available to other teacher groups.

I would argue that facilitating a reflecting team with teachers requires enhanced supervision for the Educational Psychologist, as when dealing with emotional difficulty a certain amount of negative feeling is inevitable. Supervision allows one to explore personal reflexions on the process and to make sure that no harm is done. Recently, in the service in which I work, the 'reflecting team' process

has been introduced for use in Educational Psychology peer supervision. I have suggested that we use this space to explore some of the hidden tensions in our group. If we are to be supportive, for others to be supportive, then we all need support.

To preserve the neutrality and containing role of the Educational Psychologist facilitator, cases that are already on going between a SENCO and facilitator must be discussed elsewhere. Educational Psychologists need to support SENCOs to support children. Resource issues were identified (e.g. lack of time or budget constraints) which inhibited SENCOs from carrying out their roles effectively. I suggest schools need to consider these normative issues which affect SENCO performance.

The SENCO role is clearly an important one and any support that can help to raise the status of special educational needs in schools is a worthy cause. The evidence suggests that time and space is needed to build a reflecting team and this has implications for continuity. It is not possible to define a life span for an individual group, but this aspect clearly warrants further investigation.

## Glossary

**Basic assumption mentality** a work group function whereby group members use various defences to protect them from anxiety (Bion, 1961)

**Bracketing** putting aside taken-for-granted knowledge in order to concentrate on the phenomenon at hand (Smith et al., 2009)

**Circle of adults** a problem solving process with 10 steps that enables professionals to think and feel differently about young people and find solutions (Wilson and Newton, 2006)

**Circular questioning** a type of questioning which explores views from all sides of a relationship in order to get a sense of the whole (Penn, 1982)

**Collaborative problem solving** a group problem-solving process that aims to support school staff who are concerned about children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (Hanko, 1985 and 1995 )

**Constructivist** an approach within psychology that sees individuals as actively creating their experiences, each perceiving the world differently and deriving their own meaning from events (Burr, 2003)

**Consultation** a problem-solving process working with clients to bring about positive change

**Containment** where anxiety-provoking feelings can be tolerated in order that change is made possible. A group needs to take up and absorb the anxiety that is provoked, in order that the group is not destroyed. Unconscious processes will need to be addressed if a group is able to focus on its primary task (Bion, 1970).

**Cooperative Group Supervision** where a facilitator takes responsibility for the group management but leaves supervision to the group members (Hawkins and Shohet, 2006)

**Dasein** being-there, being human (Heidegger, 1962)

**Depressive position** the reality of a situation is clearly interpreted so that people are able to review their situation and consider improving them rather than locating them elsewhere (Klein, 1946)

**Essentialist** the view that something has an inherent nature that can be discovered (Burr, 2003)

**Hermeneutic** a theory of interpretation that is concerned with meaning-making (Smith et al., 2009)

**Idiography** a concern with the particular, in terms of the detail of an individual's experience (Smith et al., 2009)

**Indeterminate zones of practice** an area of one's practice that is unique and uncertain, requiring new categories of understanding (Schön, 1987)

**Maintenance functions** a consultants role in attending to interpersonal and intrapersonal needs of the group including: initiating, information seeking, information giving, opinion seeking, opinion giving, clarifying, elaborating, summarising, and consensus testing (Schein, 1988)

**Mental health consultation** a method of primary prevention of mental disorders used by psychiatrists, psychologists and social workers in the community (Caplan, 1970)

**Paranoid-schizoid position** a situation where defence mechanisms are employed to protect oneself in anxiety provoking situations e.g. splitting and projective identification (Klein, 1946)

**Phenomenology** in psychology this refers to the study of human, lived experience (Smith et al., 2009)

**Positive psychology** the change in focus in psychology, from a preoccupation with repairing people to building on their positive qualities (Seligman, 1999)

**Practicum** a virtual world environment where students are able to learn by doing, thereby simulating real-world practice (Schön, 1987)

**Projective Identification** a process whereby an individual projects into another their own feelings, the recipient feels and behaves in congruence with the projection, then after psychological processing, the individual re-internalises their own feelings (Ogden, 1979)

**Psychodynamic** an approach to psychology that is concerned with unconscious processes and past experiences. The term psychodynamic refers to theories of Freud (1856-1939) and his followers.

**Reflection-in-action** a state of being whereby an individual is forced to reflect on a situation that fails to meet their expectations and respond intelligently. In this situation a person is still able to make a difference to their current situation (Schön)

**Reflecting team** a social constructionist process that originated in systemic family therapy. The team's dialogue is heard out in the open so that the multiple perspectives generated can be heard by the problem holder. Knowledge is co-constructed rather than taken-for-granted (Andersen, 1987)

**Reflexivity** to bend back upon oneself. A 'thoughtful, self-aware analysis of the intersubjective dynamics between the researcher and the researched' (Finlay and Gough, 2003, p. ix)

**Social Constructionism** an approach to psychology which is critical of taken-for-granted knowledge, views understandings as historically and culturally situated and maintains that knowledge is sustained by social interaction (Burr, 2003)

**Solution circle** a solution-focussed staged process that is used in groups (Forest and Pearpoint, 1996)

**Solution-focussed** a strength-based and solution-orientated approach which focuses on futures that are created and negotiable (DeShazer and Dolan, 2007)

**Splitting** In anxiety-provoking situations we split off parts of the self, perceived as bad, and project them onto external figures that become hated and feared. In this situation the self becomes idealised and the other becomes bad which reinforces persecutory anxieties (Klein, 1946).

**Staff sharing scheme** a problem-solving approach to working with groups of school staff within the school setting as a system (Gill and Monsen, 1996)

**Supervision** 'a quintessential interpersonal interaction with the general goal that one person, the supervisor, meets with another, the supervisee, in an effort to make the latter more effective in helping people' (Hess, 1980)

**Symbolic interactionism** a theory which emphasises that people create their social worlds through interaction, with a particular focus on the meaning generated through language (Mead, 1934)

**Systemic work** a consultant acts as a non-expert in a collaborative way to co-construct new ways of seeing problems (Fox 2009)

**Systems consultation** working with a whole system to help modify it in some way

**Task functions** techniques the consultant uses to help keep a group on task including: gatekeeping, harmonising, encouraging, compromising, diagnosing standard setting, and standard testing (Schein, 1988)

**Teacher coaching** an approach that aims to help teachers view problems in the work place in a different way (Monsen and Cameron, 2002)

**Unconditional positive regard** a warm, positive, non-possessive attitude towards the client, which is genuinely accepting, without disapproval (Rogers, 1961)

**Valency** 'an individual's readiness to enter into combination with the group in making and acting on basic assumptions' (Bion, 1961, p. 116). Being drawn to a certain profession because it offers opportunities to work through unresolved issues (Zagier Roberts, 1994)

**Work group mentality** a rational approach to carrying out tasks, ignorant of the unconscious forces with which the group has to contend (Bion, 1961)

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# Appendices

## Appendix I

### Stages of the reflecting team process

Andersen (1987) presents main working guidelines for interviewing the family which include asking questions that are different (but not too different) from the questions that the system usually asks itself.

#### Stage one

In the first stage the interviewer discusses the presenting circumstances with the family, as well as oscillating between picture, explanation and alternative levels. The facilitator begins by asking questions to draw his or her own picture of the presenting issue, nuanced by his or her own epistemology. Questions might include, what is the problem? When did it start? Who is involved and how are they involved? Which agencies are already involved? Have there been any shifts? The end result is a wider and more elaborate picture for the all in the session. Explanation level questions might include, what explanation do you have for the problem? What explanation do others have for the problem? How has it evolved over time? What have various people done to resolve the issue? How did others respond when people made attempts at change? What changes would you like to make? What would the consequences be of making the changes? Alternative level questions might include, what explanations might there be for the picture that you've described? How would they affect the changes you would make? Andersen (1987) also presents small

guided steps that can be taken at any point during the session including a history of the decision to seek help and explaining the unusualness of the setting.

### Stage two

During the second stage of the reflecting team process the interviewer invites the team to speak while the family listens.

At some point in therapy when people are ready to develop new and rich stories about their identities and preferred ways of living, an audience of outsider witnesses could be invited to listen to the person's story and reflect on this. The role of the audience (typically a family or other people important to the client) is to help the person to 'make space for an alternative story to emerge' (Roberts, 2000, p. 437).

(Morrison, 2009)

Here the team begin by speculatively presenting their ideas and sensitively connecting them to the verbal and non-verbal material observed in the interview. It is important that the team remembers that their task is to create ideas even if they may be rejected by the family. 'Rules for reflecting' are offered by Johnson, Waters, Webster and Goldman (1997) which include: using tentative language e.g. 'I was wondering about', recognising the contribution by all family members, avoiding critical comments, reassuring and encouraging, emphasizing strengths and focussing on what has been said.

### Stage three

In the third stage of the process the family are invited to comment on what they have heard, focussing on what they liked and disliked as well as what they wish

had been said. Stages two and three may be repeated several times during the session.

## **Appendix II**

### **Letter to SENCOs**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I am thinking about setting up support groups for teachers and/or SENCOs that have a formative and restorative function and am seeking your views in order to decide which model to implement.

I am hoping to be able to do this for the following primary schools: XXXX

Essentially there are four models that I am considering and they are as follows:

#### Model One

Group consultation for SENCOs – this would be a structured, one hour session that would take place after school either on a weekly or fortnightly basis at the XXXX OR in any number of host schools. Issues for discussion could be related to case work or more general issues that pertain to the work of a SENCO. I am happy to facilitate the group consultation sessions and would be looking to carry them out during the whole of the summer term.

#### Model Two

The same as model one but with additional 1:1 sessions for any SENCOs that would like to discuss, in more detail and confidentially, issues that may have arisen from the group consultation session.

#### Model three

Group consultation for members of staff in your school - this would be a structured, one hour session that would take place in your school twice in the summer term.

Issues for discussion could be related to individual children, special educational needs or whole school concerns. I will facilitate the sessions and can potentially facilitate more sessions depending on how many schools wanted to take this up.

#### Model Four

1:1 sessions for teachers in your school to discuss individual children, special educational needs or other work related concerns - I would offer an additional hour on each school visit during the summer term for this, when I could see two teachers in an hour.

Please could you fill in the following questionnaire and return it to me at the XXXX by Friday 4<sup>th</sup> February?

Name of school:

1. Which model of staff support do you prefer?
2. What issues do you envisage may be raised during sessions? E.g. general issues such as teaching pupils who lack motivation, maintaining discipline, time pressures and workload, being evaluated by others, dealings with colleagues, role conflict and ambiguity OR individual cases involving pupils.

3. What are the potential pitfalls with your chosen model?

4. How do you think they could be overcome?

Kind Regards

Nicola Pettit (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

## **Appendix III**

### **Interview and session transcripts**

#### Participant one

##### Session One

1 I found the session extremely useful in tackling the issue that I had. It gave  
2 me reassurance that other people experience similar problems to me and I  
3 am not alone. It gave me ideas for solutions to try and the confidence to talk  
4 to more senior members of staff in my school about the issues. I felt cautious  
5 when talking about staff members in my school as the people at the session  
6 were new and I didn't feel trust. Everyone offered constructive feedback and  
7 did not make me feel negative in any way. Opinions were aired without  
8 arrogance and everybody was encouraged to participate. The rules shared  
9 with us all at the beginning of the session made it clear what was expected  
10 during the different stages and gave people a way into talking.

11 Overall, a very useful experience – am hoping it becomes a long term thing.

##### Session Two

12 I feel that this process is beginning to give confidence to the whole group to  
13 tackle any issues raised. It was interesting to be in a different role as the  
14 listener and a reflector rather than a talker. You could see the difference in  
15 the way the speaker spoke about the subject - she started off quiet and  
16 almost unsure of herself to start with but as the session went along and  
17 feedback was given, she became more vocal and divulged more information.  
18 It made me think about people I have to deal with who make my life more

19 difficult and how I could tackle issues they raise. It made me realise that  
20 sometimes you need to give up tackling a problem one way and get a  
21 different perspective to find a solution. The trust is beginning to build  
22 amongst the group and I feel this is leading to people being more open and  
23 honest.

#### Session four

24 I found today's session very frustrating due to the lack of attendees. I felt the  
25 session lacked ideas and enthusiasm. The problem presented to the group  
26 was very difficult and although, as a listener, I reflected on what was said and  
27 offered my opinion, I don't feel that I contributed anything useful to the  
28 discussion. The trust was still present in the group but feel this session was  
29 hard work

#### Interview

30 *Ok so the first question is could you tell me about any further reflections on*  
31 *your experience of group consultation within a reflecting team that you may*  
32 *have had since we last met as a group?*

33 Can I read the question upside down?

34 Yes

35 It's because if I read it ...

36 *So it's number one*

37 Ok um we're not really a very reflectively team school um so kind of any  
38 reflecting I've done has been on my own. Um, in the 1<sup>st</sup> session we had

39 altogether I obviously spoke about a problem I had first and that kind of  
40 allowed me to get the confidence to approach people that I usually wouldn't  
41 have, erm but had to reflect. I maybe have passing conversations with  
42 somebody about what had gone on but the reflections I've done were mainly  
43 on my own – not as a school.

44 *Um can you tell me more about what it means or more how you felt about*  
45 *having to reflect on your own?*

46 It's quite hard to reflect on your own because you almost want somebody  
47 else's input you want um you want somebody to tell you you've done  
48 something right or give you suggestions how they would have done  
49 something or if I didn't get the outcome I maybe wanted they could have  
50 suggested ways I could have taken it further but having to think about it on  
51 my own, you don't get that because you think you've done the right thing or  
52 (pause)

53 *You know you talked about um not being a particularly reflectively kind of*  
54 *place or school then having to reflect on your own. Did you mean that in the*  
55 *context of the logs or the session? Because you had to write a log at the end*  
56 *didn't you?*

57 Yes

58 *So is that what you found difficult to do in terms of not being particularly*  
59 *reflectivey?*

60 Yes

61 OK

62 Um I just don't know if it was what you wanted when I wrote it down but I just  
63 wrote what I thought?

64 *So how do you think that could have been um made better for you in some*  
65 *way?*

66 I would have liked to have seen an example of a reflective log not necessarily  
67 one from somebody in our group but I just wanted somebody's written  
68 anywhere just so I kind of knew what you expected.

69 *Right (pause) um had you had any other reflections on your experiences*  
70 *apart from not being particularly reflectivey*

71 Um I need to ... any issues I have to have ... seem to go on for a long time,  
72 because I did that before. I need to learn ... I need to address them sooner to  
73 try and get them sorted (pause)

74 *So do you mean that after we came out with outcomes those things could*  
75 *have been sorted more immediately?*

76 No no no no I mean the problem I had brought to the group I should have  
77 dealt with that months and months ago instead of just leaving it and hoping it  
78 would sort itself out. Whereas kind of going to that made me see that ... you  
79 know you can't just leave these things and if I don't sort it out nothing  
80 happens

81 *MMm*

82 So I have got to take the initiative to sort things out otherwise I get nowhere  
83 ... I mean I know I got nowhere anyway but (laughs) ...

84 *Yeh, the fact that you got nowhere anyway ... can you tell me more about*  
85 *what you think about that?*

86 It makes me quite cross to be honest because there are other people in the  
87 school who get more than enough time to do what they need to do and I don't  
88 ... I always seem to be the one that suffers, the one that loses time and next  
89 year I'm going to do the masters for SEN and I'm a bit concerned that I'm  
90 going to have a lot to do at home as well as doing ... and she's promised me  
91 release time and this that and the other

92 *Mmm*

93 But whether or not I'll get it? (raises eye brows)

94 *Um (pause) OK so in terms of the Reflecting Team how do you ... do you still*  
95 *think that helped?*

96 Yes (assertively) um it kind of made me realise it's not just me that has those  
97 problems cos sometimes when you work in school as a SENCO you feel a bit  
98 isolated. I almost came out of the session after I had kind of talked about  
99 what my issue was thinking thank God it's not just me! And from the time  
100 point of view and from the problems with management point of view you can  
101 see that other people suffer from that as well. So it kind of makes you just  
102 relax about the whole thing anyway and not get so stressed about it cos you  
103 think it's not just me so I'm not going to worry about it too much

104 *What do you think about the way sessions were set up in the beginning?*

105 I liked it, I liked the idea of um talking cos I obviously went first. It was really  
106 hard sometimes not to talk to them because they are obviously watching you

107 as an audience as we are having a discussion as a pair um but I liked it  
108 because it forces you to kind of think about what issues come off that one  
109 major problem and it's nice to because I didn't know these people and they  
110 were giving me their opinions ... kind of (pause) oh I don't know ... they are  
111 impartial aren't they because they don't know me and they don't know my  
112 school so it's kind of ... yeh

113 *So how did you feel about them not knowing you and your school and*  
114 *speaking to an audience of people that didn't know you?*

115 It made it a little awkward to talk to start with but then I kind of realised we  
116 were there for the same reason so you just have to get over it but then  
117 obviously by the second session we knew what to expect so I think me biting  
118 the bullet and going first kind of helped everyone else so and I got mine over  
119 and done with (laughs) and don't have to put myself in the spot light anymore  
120 (laughs)

121 *Yes Yes Um well what do you mean by the spotlight?*

122 I'm not very good at like it's me and my issues. I find it very hard as a person.  
123 In front of a class of children it's easy to stand there and put an act on but it's  
124 very hard to do that in front of a group of adults so you almost feel a bit  
125 vulnerable. Cos you are like I'm here talking about my issues, I'm having to  
126 talk about my school, I'm having to mention things that if my boss heard me  
127 she wouldn't be very impressed with ... and it's in front of strangers so it's ...  
128 yeh ... it took a lot of courage to be fair ... so ... mmm

129 *Courage um shall we talk a bit more about that? (pause/no response. Moves*  
130 *on) When I said initially about the way sessions were set up I mean, also I*  
131 *mean prior to the session itself so the way it was organised. Can you tell me*  
132 *anything about what you think about that?*

133 Um well you kind of sent us umm a (pause)

134 *Questionnaire*

135 Questionnaire, thank you, sorry. You sent us a questionnaire we had to fill in  
136 and it was all kind of based around various schools. Not all schools seem to  
137 have taken it on board which I think it is kind of a shame because it would  
138 have been nice to have a bigger group maybe (pause) especially as some  
139 secondary schools were supposed to come in so they would have had a  
140 different perspective

141 *Yeh*

142 But no I think it was set up really well I think that, you know, asking for our  
143 opinions first and then because you almost wanted to do it on a weekly basis  
144 in schools and you kind of listened to what everybody else wanted and did it  
145 round everybody else so I think it worked better. I think (coughs) I put down  
146 about doing something in school but actually now I'm glad I didn't?

147 *Why?*

148 Because I wouldn't have been able to talk freely in the school sessions so  
149 yeh I'm kind of glad everyone else didn't pick something else? (laughs)

150 *What do you think about the impact of a bigger versus a smaller group? You*  
151 *said that it was a shame the other schools didn't ...*

152 It's just there are more opinions and different ways of thinking and everybody  
153 thinks differently and every schools different for various different reasons so  
154 it's... it would have been ... it's nice having an intimate group because you get  
155 to know the people that are there but if you've got a bigger group you've got  
156 more ideas you can take more from it and my outcomes list may have been  
157 slightly different ... had there been more people there because the dynamics  
158 would have been different

159 *Umm and what did you think about the dynamics of the group?*

160 The dynamics of the group of people we've been working in were good.

161 *Can you tell me more about what you mean by good?*

162 Just because that I think that especially after the initial session we all relaxed  
163 we were a bit more freer with our talking and there was a bit more banter and  
164 it was a bit more friendly whereas the first one was quite ... nobody knew  
165 what to expect, nobody knew what to say. Whereas I think by the second one  
166 because there was three of us that had been to the previous one so we were  
167 quite happy you know moving it forward and going again (coughs).

168 *How do you think having a secondary school there would have changed*  
169 *things?*

170 Just because they have different priorities they have a bigger school they  
171 have more children and just because it would be interesting to get the idea of  
172 a SENCO in secondary school. I can imagine their role is very different to my

173 role in primary school and I might say well actually you know I've had that  
174 problem in a different way and this is how we sorted it out. It might have been  
175 just a completely different way of thinking

176 Mmm

177 Just because their circumstances are different to ours (pause)

178 *Umm are there any other differences in the way ... you talked about priorities*  
179 *... is there anything else that would have been different with having a*  
180 *secondary school there?*

181 A primary schools perception of what a secondary school does with SEN  
182 children is quite negative. In that we feel that secondary schools don't always  
183 meet SEN children's needs and it would have be nice to kind of had that  
184 opinion changed maybe

185 *Um um ok so you were looking forward to seeing it maybe in a more positive*  
186 *light*

187 Yeh absolutely ... cos we talk to them and I know they try their hardest to do  
188 ... but the stories you hear like of children going into, to secondary is like if  
189 they've got difficulties it tends to be then we'll get rid of them and exclude  
190 them whereas we don't here, we are very nurturing and it's like we'll keep all  
191 our children together and we'll do everything we can possible it would have  
192 just been nice to find out that that is not actually the case of what happens

193 *How do you think that would have changed your practice?*

194 It might have made me relax a bit more when the children are in y6 and they  
195 are going up into secondary school and we have in the meetings I wouldn't  
196 have been so much like well this child needs this and this needs that I'd have  
197 been confident in the fact that whenever we send them up

198 *MMM And where do you think this view comes from about secondary*

199 It's just stories you hear from parents or from teachers that work in secondary  
200 schools and it's always quite negative

201 *OK um is there anything else you want to say about the way sessions were*  
202 *set up in the beginning*

203 (shakes head no)

204 *So I'm gonna give you some questions about themes that emerged from your*  
205 *reflective logs and then I would like you to choose maybe three or four*  
206 *questions that you would like to explore now*

207 (long pause then)

208 *And you can choose to answer them in any order you wish*

209 Um yeh the first one I picked was actually this one at the bottom which says  
210 about the importance of hearing multiple perspectives. Sometimes when you  
211 are in your job especially in primary school it can as a SENCO be very  
212 isolated and you tackle a problem your way or you ring somebody who  
213 knows the answer and kind of when we went to these sessions ... in session  
214 one I spoke and people gave me feedback ... in session two I listened to  
215 somebody and listened because they had a particular problem with a

216 particular person in school and offered my opinion on what I thought she  
217 should do and my opinion was sometimes very different and sometimes what  
218 I would do was very different about what others would do and I've kind of I've  
219 taken to this in schools ... there's three or four people I'll talk to people in  
220 school about SEN children ... I was very reluctant to do that before but now  
221 I'll do that because everybody tackles things in completely different ways  
222 because we are all different learners we are all different listeners ... and I  
223 think if I'm stuck in my ... that's why I have to take a bit of paper in to read it  
224 because that's how I learn whereas other people learn by doing things and  
225 they'll be like right don't try it like this and actually their way may be much  
226 more successful than my way it'll be harder for me but then if I've engaged a  
227 child down there because I've done something in the way that they  
228 understand then brilliant. So I just adapt what I know and how I know to do  
229 things (pause) it's learning we are all learners at the end of the day and we  
230 have to learn new techniques

231 *I just want to pick up on something you said. You talked about 'their way.' Um*  
232 *how did you feel about being presented with other people's views on how to*  
233 *tackle things?*

234 That's fine (quite definite) – I would rather talk to people and them tell me  
235 what they would do and then I would think right is that how I would do what  
236 could I do from what they've said rather than ... I don't like people asking  
237 'what do you think you should do?' (in a mocking voice) because I can try  
238 and answer that but if I've asked for opinions or want opinions I want you to  
239 tell me what you would do and I can think well actually I don't agree with that

240 and I don't think I should do it that way but maybe I would try it that way and  
241 give it a shot ... yeh

242 *Um is that all you want to say about that question?*

243 *Yeh*

244 *Is there another question on there you want to talk about*

245 Yeh Um the next one I picked was about trust and in session one because I  
246 had to sit and talk to everybody I didn't know everyone I didn't trust them  
247 whereas in session two because we'd done that we trusted each other a little  
248 more because I'd opened up about my school and I kind of really laid it on  
249 the line and really said things that I might of got into trouble for then I feel that  
250 the people who were there thought well if she's done it I can do it I can open  
251 up and I can talk about what I've done and I knew then cos obviously it had  
252 been two weeks I knew then that they hadn't said anything about what I had  
253 talked about so I knew any knowledge that anyone had, had come from me. I  
254 was very cagey about what my head had asked about what had gone on I  
255 was like oh yeh it was fine. But I just think that it helped the group ... it helped  
256 the girl in session two open up more which kind of leads into my next  
257 question which is why I picked that one because she was talking about  
258 someone she had problems with in her school and as she spoke as the  
259 session progressed over the hour a half hours she gave more information as  
260 we were going along and I feel that this was the trust thing that links back to  
261 mine. So if she kind of realised well actually somebody else did this and  
262 nothing came of it ... if I lay it on the line it's not gonna leave the room.

263 *Mmm*

264 Which meant she could talk more freely about the issue that she had ...

265 *Yes so would I be right in saying that openness and transparency is*  
266 *something that is really important*

267 Yeh Yes absolutely (emphasis) if I was sitting there either talking or listening  
268 it wouldn't matter either and I thought someone in the group wasn't taking it  
269 seriously or somebody in the group wasn't kind of taking on board what I was  
270 saying or wasn't listening properly I would clam up, I wouldn't want to speak  
271 to them I wouldn't want to open up. Everybody laying on the line is kind of  
272 how we need to go about it.

273 *And what do you think what sort of things might compromise that?*

274 Fear (laughs)

275 *And how do you think those things could be overcome? I know you've talked*  
276 *about being open and just laying it on the line*

277 Yeh and it's kind of saying that from the off. I don't know if you started  
278 something like this with new people that had never been to a session and  
279 you got one of us who'd already been to quite a few sessions to go and talk  
280 to them and say well actually it's really useful but you can't sit there and not  
281 give everybody the facts you've just got to tell them straight and you've got  
282 (emphasis) to listen to what people is saying and you can't just sit there like  
283 this cos it makes the other person feel uncomfortable

284 *Mmm*

285 I mean you gave us the rules and I know I haven't circled this one but I think  
286 that they helped us to be open and honest and helped to give us all the  
287 information that we needed or the other person needed because we knew  
288 what was expected of us

289 *UM hum*

290 So it was like there was one about us not being a log

291 *Yeh*

292 I can't remember it off the top of my head but sitting there and not saying  
293 nothing is just as ineffective as taking over ... yeh don't be a hog or a log ...  
294 and saying too much is just as harmful as saying nothing. So you've got to  
295 get involved. In the second session you introduced something where each  
296 person had to have a say and repeat back what the previous person said and  
297 then develop it ... I liked that because it meant you didn't just go round and  
298 round in circles of um people repeating the same point. You had to process  
299 what had been said and think right how would I take it further and what would  
300 the next step be and I liked the kind of process of that

301 Umm Hum

302 So yeh

303 *So just going on further about what you liked about the sequential discussion*  
304 *is there anything else that you would have preferred that had been*  
305 *introduced that wasn't? That you can think of*

306 No I was quite happy with it when that was introduced it was kind of like oh  
307 God we all have to take our turn but when we actually did it and did it in that  
308 kind of sequence it worked really well. It's kind of nice to hear what ... the  
309 taking your point and having to kind of move ... it stops our discussion  
310 becoming still and it moves it on all the time and I like that. I didn't think it  
311 would be something I would use in discussions with staff or even with  
312 children kind of in the classroom, you know

313 *So you've seen other applications of it?*

314 Yeh Yeh absolutely

315 *Is there any other question on there that you want to pick up on*

316 Um, there was just number 6 which said in session one you hoped the  
317 sessions would become a long term thing. I think even now it's still important  
318 that it is an on-going process. Even if it is not once a fortnight even if it is just  
319 once a month. It's just to me (hesitation) from a simple personal point of view  
320 if I have an issue I don't want to leave it months and months before I can  
321 speak to anybody who's in the same boat as me about it and I just think you  
322 would have the chance once a month to kind of sit down and say well I have  
323 this issue you know can you help me with it.

324 *Umm what do you think about the opportunities that you get in kind of the RT*  
325 *to present your problem or to present your issue, because you obviously*  
326 *presented it first but it would maybe be 4-5 months wouldn't it before you got*  
327 *an opportunity to bring an issue again. Do you see what I mean?*

328 Yeh but then maybe we could run an email thing almost like so you'd open it  
329 up to whoever had a problem so if I was first in the first month and then had  
330 another issue that arose or if other people had other issues that arose we  
331 could email you and you could decide right OK who do I look at. But it's just a  
332 chance to kind of speak about something isn't it. You feel like your voice is  
333 heard in sessions like that rather than being ignored and stamped on

334 *Did you say stamped on?*

335 Yes (laughs)

336 *What did you mean by that?*

337 It's just sometimes you don't feel that you can voice what you want to say  
338 because people don't listen and dismiss it as rubbish (quietly) or yeh yeh I'll  
339 sort it out later and sometimes later's not good enough I need an answer  
340 now.

341 *So have you got any thoughts about how at the moment it would be once a*  
342 *month ... you said if someone had a pertinent issue maybe they could bring it*  
343 *so you don't take it in turns it's more about if someone has a need that they*  
344 *want to bring*

345 Yeh yeh and I think it's how it should be because if it's your turn but if you  
346 haven't got an issue you are gonna sit there or you're gonna make one up or  
347 it'll be so weak that it's not really an issue and we'll be done in ten minutes. I  
348 don't think it should be done on a turn taking basis I think it should work on ...  
349 cos I'm quite happy now I've got it out in the open I'm quite happy now if it  
350 was my turn for tomorrows session well I haven't got anything to talk about

351 Yeh

352 Whereas other people might have whereas the next time we have one in  
353 September I might have a MASSIVE (emphasis) if we have one in  
354 September I'll have a massive issue so yeh

355 *And what about if there were 3 people that had a massive issue that wanted*  
356 *to bring it to that session would that be a problem or do you think that could*  
357 *be...*

358 Then maybe we could run so like for the same time but condense the  
359 process so then everybody could get an answer because it must be really  
360 hard because they all think theirs is equally important as you would erm but if  
361 you run a kind of condensed then all three people could get their hands  
362 would get an answer and an action plan

363 *Mmm how important is it to have answers and action plans*

364 It depends on the problem for mine I needed one I needed a kick up the bum  
365 excuse my slang I needed the kick up the bum that said actually you need to  
366 go and talk to your head otherwise this will never get sorted whereas  
367 sometimes some problems might need ideas but they might not need an  
368 action plan so it might be different. And then if no one if these three had the  
369 session then the next session you could almost do, if no one had an issue,  
370 you could almost do a reflection back on these three so they'd get longer  
371 time then anyway.

372 *Yeh that's a good point sort of like plan, do, review and maybe Um if you*  
373 *weren't getting an answer or an action plan what else would you be getting*  
374 *from the sessions*

375 Different views on the problem, different ways to tackle it, alternative views to  
376 your own, cos sometimes you get so stuck in your own blinkered vision that  
377 you can't see everything else

378 *Yeh but even with those different views you didn't get an outcome or some*  
379 *sort of action to take away. Without answers what else would you get from*  
380 *the session?*

381 An experience to just get it off my chest cos sometimes that's all it needs  
382 sometimes you just need to get talking about it you realise I don't need  
383 answers or I can do this myself or I know who I can speak to instead or it is  
384 just an airing an airing with people you trust. I know who I trust in my school  
385 and I know who I can speak to with an issue. I know who I wouldn't go and  
386 talk to and I know if they ask 'oh is everything alright'? It's 'yes it's fine'  
387 (bluntly). But I just think we've built up and worked so hard to get that now  
388 that it wouldn't matter if I didn't get any answers it would just be even just  
389 people saying I know how you feel, I empathise with you because I go  
390 through that myself I don't know how to solve it but sometimes just knowing  
391 someone else is suffering the same makes suffering (quietly and a bit  
392 shocked) that sounds awful doesn't it? Makes it a problem halved doesn't it?

393 *Mmm*

394 It just makes it feel better it makes you feel like you are not carrying the  
395 weight of the world on your shoulders

396 *Ok so now I'm going to ask another question which is why is being in a RT*  
397 *any different than to talking with someone that you trust in school?*

398 Because a RT we are all the same we are all SENCOs we are all doing the  
399 same job. So I know the people that are giving me advice or the people that  
400 are listening to what I am saying they know all about the roles I have  
401 whereas talking to my friend here she doesn't have a clue what a SENCO  
402 has to do she has flashes of it when I am sitting down to do paper work but  
403 she doesn't know kind of the pressure of trying to pull all your kids up. She  
404 has an ICT responsibility but the role is very different. So it's just people in  
405 the same role (pause) it's important

406 *OK so could you tell me a little bit more about why it is important that you*  
407 *share a similar role?*

408 Because they understand, they have an understanding and it's empathy as  
409 well. I don't want to sit and talk to somebody about an issue and they would  
410 be like 'yeh I understand, yeh I don't really know what you should do, I don't  
411 really get it' (whiningly). But I know they will instantly get, there's one child  
412 that's not making any progress I've got everything in place and I know that  
413 somewhere in their SENCO experience it's happened to them. That even if  
414 they can't give me the answers I am not on my own (emphasis) cos I'm only  
415 one person here doing one role, but it's all the same does that make sense?

416 *Yes. Was there any other question on there that you wanted to talk through?*

417 No they are the ones I circled

418 *OK so my next question – how did you feel before during and after a*  
419 *session? So it's more about your feelings really.*

420 Are we comparing between sessions one and two because they were very  
421 different (laughs)

422 *Oh well I'll leave that up to you!*

423 Before session one I was a bit, what's the word, wary because I didn't know  
424 what to expect. During the session I felt a bit panicked because I decided that  
425 I wanted to take the plunge, but obviously as the session went on I felt more  
426 confident. After the session I felt confident to tackle it. I was still a bit scared.

427 *Mmm yeh so again it's this importance of developing trust*

428 Yeh absolutely I think it's the linch pin that holds it all together to be honest ...  
429 you have to trust the people in your reflecting team otherwise you can't be  
430 reflective properly.

431 *Yeh*

432 Um before session two I didn't feel very wary at all I was actually quite  
433 looking forward to it because I knew I would get the chance to listen to  
434 someone else ...

435 *Yep*

436 Umm during the session I don't know really how I felt. I kind of I liked the  
437 experience of listening, I liked the experience of trying to find ways that that

438 person could solve their problem or giving them advice or things they could  
439 try or

440 Mm hmm

441 And then afterwards I can't think of a word to describe it. Afterwards I felt erm  
442 just really confident in the whole process I went away thinking that I had  
443 meetings with people that I feel like I knew I can count on. I felt I could ring  
444 XXX up and talk to a SENCO there because I knew her from the sessions  
445 and that she'd be like oh yeh ok maybe you could pop round and we could  
446 have a conversation about something its like its building up further ... like  
447 they said about the SENCO conference which has been cancelled now  
448 because nobody has any money (says it annoyingly) ... sometimes when we  
449 went to SENCO conferences it could be very isolated and people could be  
450 very cliquey and people wouldn't speak to you but if I'd have gone this year  
451 I'd have headed probably straight for those. I would be quite confident in the  
452 fact that I wouldn't have had to sit on my own or with some random person  
453 that I had never met. There would have been familiar faces there that I know  
454 would have actually spoken to me (pause) cos we built up relationships didn't  
455 we?

456 *How important is it to you I mean I am getting a sense I mean this feeling of*  
457 *isolation*

458 Oh yes absolutely

459 *But um how important is it that you develop those relationships and you meet*  
460 *other people. Why is that important? Why is that important to you?*

461 Because I just like to know there are other people out there that go through  
462 the same things that I do that have the same problems I do. That people I  
463 can call upon if I need to talk or people that can call upon ME (emphasis) if  
464 they feel like they need to talk something through. That they are like you  
465 know it's so and so and you know even if it's just through email or something  
466 like that it's another port of call if you are sick of going round it in your head –  
467 it's like someone else's opinion

468 *Ok and what would happen if you didn't have that I guess that you haven't*  
469 *had that and now it has been introduced what you say it was like then*  
470 *compared to now what's the implications of not having that on you*

471 You'd end up feeling very stressed (pause) ummm I just you feel no one  
472 understands you you can't talk to anybody so you just bottle it all up you just  
473 wade through mass of paper work and mass of SEN stuff without anybody  
474 saying look we know how hard it is you know you'll be fine

475 *Ummm*

476 That's all I want to know at the end of the day that I'll be OK and come out of  
477 the other side alive (laughs then coughs)

478 *OK so we talked about how you felt before during and after sessions and*  
479 *then my next question was gonna be can you tell me if you have had any*  
480 *thoughts about any future arrangements for meeting with the group and how*  
481 *it's viable.*

482 Umm I would like to continue I would like to maybe not on a fortnightly basis  
483 because I think sometimes it's too hard to fit in because obviously in a

484 primary school we have lots of other commitments and it can be a bit of a  
485 pain cos obviously the last one I had parents that didn't turn up and things  
486 and it's just like great um but once a month it's easier to fit into each other's  
487 schedules even if the night has to change or

488 *What do you think about timings of sessions after school?*

489 I think the timings were fine – cos we got there at 3.45 and finished about  
490 5.15 I think an hour and a half is enough

491 *Um I mean what do you think about the possibility of group consultation*  
492 *taking place in the school day*

493 Errm thinking about everything else I have to do after school is nicer  
494 especially if you are going into a different school it is nice to have a change of  
495 scenery

496 *Do you feel though with it being after school that it is something extra that*  
497 *you have to do rather than being a part of your job?*

498 No I see it as part of my job and I think because it's after school I may be  
499 more open to talking freely than I would if it was part of my school day

500 *Yeh why would you be feeling like you would be able to speak more freely at*  
501 *that time?*

502 Because sometimes I would be home at that time so it's my time it's not  
503 schools time cos school only pay me to 4 o'clock so after that I can say what  
504 I like. Does that make sense?

505 *Yeh but don't you also feel that it's*

506 I understand why some people would like it as part of the school day so they  
507 can maybe do something after school but I am quite happy to have it at the  
508 end of the day and then it's something different to school

509 *Mmm but does it feel then that it's not a part of the job but it's something um*  
510 *that you have to do almost like a hobby?*

511 No it's not something I have to do it's something I want to do

512 *OK and do you think that group consultation for SENCOs within a RT should*  
513 *be something you have to do rather than something you want to do?*

514 No if you have to do it you won't want to. Does that make sense?

515 *Mmmm*

516 Well that's how I feel anyway somehow if it's something you are forced to do  
517 it makes it not as appealing. It's a choice then.

518 *In the light of what you've said about how it's important for SENCOs to meet*  
519 *and not feel isolated and have the support networks. Do you feel that it is an*  
520 *essential thing for teaching staff or for SENCOs?*

521 No no no I think it is can be useful for lots of people cos I'm sure people in  
522 other subjects have their own issues and things somebody said they went to  
523 one as part of a secondary school but I do think the groups need to be small  
524 and need to be quite small and quite intimate I know I said the group needed  
525 to be big but if you've got kind of any more than 10 people you would lose  
526 some of the ... it would be very hard to get to know 10 people quite well. I just  
527 think the smaller the group the quicker the trust would build up and the

528 quicker people will start to be honest and transparent the things you need to  
529 be to be able to do this

530 *Yeh*

531 You see if you've got a secondary school and all its feeder schools you could  
532 have 15 feeder schools you could have 17 people I wouldn't want to sit in  
533 front of a room of 17 people and talk about all my problems

534 *I'm interested a bit more in this notion of choice and having to do it and I think*  
535 *choice is essential. I am also thinking about how teachers and SENCOs in*  
536 *your role might feel more supported and less stressed so this was a way of*  
537 *maybe doing that and putting the group together, but I was wondering if you*  
538 *should be expected to do that in your own time. That's what I was kind of*  
539 *getting at or whether*

540 Yeh but it's not really my own time my own time really comes after half past  
541 five.

542 *Right OK*

543 So I don't really shut off till later in the night anyway. So the fact that I have to  
544 go somewhere till 5.15 isn't an issue for me. Cos as well I mean I live in this  
545 catchment so all the schools are within 5 minutes of me getting home. XXXX  
546 is round the corner as is XXXX where we are tomorrow. So for me it's not an  
547 issue maybe the people that live further away that have travelling issues  
548 maybe they would say differently.

549 *So just taking your point about it being an area that is quite condensed and*  
550 *close is that so you think it's good that the SENCOs who meet don't have far*  
551 *to travel and live in the same area.*

552 Yeh if I had to travel across town for 3.45 I'd have to leave at 3pm and  
553 sometimes hit and miss make it whereas if I know I've only got 10 mins to go  
554 to xxxx its quite simple its just you're more inclined to want to go

555 *Yeh yeh*

556 Whereas twilight sessions at the village I just think God do I really have to sit  
557 on the xxxx

558 *OK is there anything else that you necessarily wanted to say*

559 No I think I've said everything

560 *OK thank you very much for taking part*

# Appendix IV

## Participant Consent Form

**Title of Project:** Experiences of group consultation within a reflecting team

**Name of researcher:** Nicola Pettit

**Contact details:** xxxx

**Participant Identification Number for this project:**

\_\_\_\_\_

**Please initial box**

• I confirm that I have read and understand the information letter dated (insert date) for the above research project and have had an opportunity to ask questions.

• I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

• I understand that my written responses will be anonymised before analysis and give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses

• I understand that my responses from the unstructured interview will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and anonymised before analysis. I give permission for members of the research team to have access to my anonymised responses.

- I agree to take part in the above research project



Name of participant \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Lead Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

To be signed and dated in the presence of the participant

Copies: Participant/Research file

Once this has been signed by all parties the participant should receive a copy of the signed and dated participant consent form and information sheet. A copy for the signed and dated consent form should be placed in the projects main record, which is kept in a secure location

## **Appendix V**

### **Information Sheet**

This sheet is intended to give you information regarding the background of the research, the research process and contact details. Please take this sheet away with you.

#### Research Project Title: Experiences of group consultation with a reflecting team

You are invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and feel free to discuss it with me if you are unclear about anything or you would like more information.

#### What is the projects purpose?

This project aims to provide a non-threatening, supportive environment, where SENCOs can share expertise in a structured group consultation session. I want to know how both SENCOs and me, as the researcher-practitioner, experience group consultation within a reflecting team. The active part of the research will take place in the summer term.

#### Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to take part because I wanted to offer you something additional to the more typical EP-SENCO consultations that take place in schools. Many of you have said that you do not meet other SENCOs as a group to share expertise and offer support to each other in your role. A number of you have also indicated that you think this is a worthwhile activity.

### Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign a consent form. You can still withdraw at any time. You do not have to give a reason.

At any point, up to July 2011, you could also request that the information you have provided is not included in the project. In this event please feel free to contact me using the details on this sheet.

### What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be invited to three, one hour, group consultation sessions in the summer term. At the end of the session you will be invited to write down your reflections on the experience for a further 15 minutes. I will then collect in the anonymised reflections and analyse them. After the last consultation session you will be invited to take part in an individual, unstructured interview to further explore your experiences of group consultation. This will take place in July and will last between 30-60 minutes. The unstructured interview will be recorded in order to ensure that all the information is captured. This will be kept on a digital recorder until it is transferred to a password encrypted laptop. The information will then be transcribed and analysed before a process of analysis is completed. After I have carried out an analysis of all the data I will send you a preliminary report in order for you to check that my analysis is a credible reflection of your experience. I will destroy all recordings after the study is completed.

### What are the possible benefits of taking part?

There are immediate benefits for you taking part in this research project as it will be an opportunity to share good practice, provide mutual support, create new contacts, meet experienced and less experienced SENCOs and address issues that affect SENCOs specifically. It will also allow you an opportunity to share your experiences of group consultation which will help me to enhance my skills in supporting you. Further it should provide insight to other professionals who intend to use group consultation as part of their practice.

### What are the disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The project involves participants' bringing, potentially sensitive, issues to the group to discuss and this may produce an emotional response. Please feel that you are able to further discuss this with me if you want to do so. There are also ground rules associated with any group consultation session including issues surrounding confidentiality and respect. This is to minimise risk and ensure the group is a safe space to explore presenting issues. There will be a time commitment in terms of the reflective writing logs and an individual unstructured interview in order for me to collect data (a total of one hour and forty five minutes). Yet I hope the benefits of the group consultation sessions will outweigh the cost in terms of the time commitment.

### What if something goes wrong?

If you feel unhappy or concerned about anything, which has taken place during the research process, you can talk directly to me, Nicola Pettit, (the lead researcher). However, if you would like to raise a formal complaint then you can also contact my field work supervisor \*\*\*\*. Further, if you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction then you can contact my research supervisor \*\*\*\*.

Will taking part in this project be kept confidential?

All information that I collect about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be identified in any reports or publications.

What will happen to the results of the research project?

The results from my research will be published in a thesis in July 2012 which will be held in the University of Sheffield. The results from the study will also be reported to the Educational Psychology Service within the Local Authority in order for the lessons learned to be shared.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

The School of Education within the Sheffield University have completed a careful ethical review process. The University's Research Ethics Committee monitors the application and delivery of the University's Ethics Review Procedure across the University.

Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?

You will be recorded through your written reflective logs and an unstructured interview. These recordings will only be used for analysis within this research project. No other use will be made of them without your written permission.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet. Thank you also if you agree to take part in this study.

## **Appendix VI**

### **Facilitator reflections on sessions**

#### Session one

I felt tired as it is the end of a day and I rushed across the city to get here.

I think the outcomes were met and clear

I have learned just how little time SENCOs have to do the job and thought it was really interesting to hear about the power dynamics in schools – the fear head teachers inject into their staff that hinders good working relationships and allows SENCOs to flourish

I feel put on the spot to deliver as an EP but thought it was interesting to hear one SENCO say if we knew the process we could do it ourselves

I liked that even at the end of the day the session held participants attention

It all felt a bit rushed but hope the next session will be less so as introductions and formalities have already taken place

I thought the comments from the reflecting team were useful and insightful

#### Session Two

I liked that P2 felt she had the confidence to not respond to the negativity from the teacher.

She seemed to be very irate and I wonder if she was experiencing some counter transference. It would have been good to explore that further – her feelings – but I wanted to stay with the direction that she wanted to take i.e. how to provide the best intervention for the children. It was interesting though that the key thing she took from the process was managing her own feelings.

I would like to read more about Andersen's thoughts on offering solutions – this has been something that I brought into the process but I am not always sure that offering solutions is most helpful. Solutions seem to point to some finality i.e. the problem is over, but I suppose I see problems more like a river – they don't go but change with the ebb and flow of life.

### Session three

Overall, thought the SENCOs were highly experienced, knowledgeable and respectful. They offered suggestions tentatively.

I liked it when one SENCO offered her own experiences and thought it would have been valuable to the consultee to have heard it.

I am worried about dwindling numbers, but time is of the essence. One SENCO who had committed to attend had called to say that parents had booked to see her today even though she had specifically said she wouldn't be available. It's really difficult when there are so many expectations of teachers to put themselves first. I really feel they need looking after.

An interesting debate took place about who is the problem owner and what the organisation values.

I thought that one speaker in the RT dominated the discussion so was a little disappointed that they didn't follow the sequential discussion I suggested. We didn't totally follow the RT process as at the point where I asked the SENCO what she thought about the RTs discussion it turned into more of a naturalistic discussion. Time was a factor here though, as one of the SENCOs had arrived late so it helped to reduce the amount of time we spent on the session. It also felt more natural to speak directly to each other at this stage.

#### Session four

Oh dear! I have to confess I read the reflective logs before I wrote this one (unlike other sessions) and feel the same as the SENCOs. There was a lack of enthusiasm in the air today which had a knock on effect on the session. I actually came away feeling quite low and blaming myself about the poor outcomes. I think I sometimes take the weight of the world and responsibility on my shoulders. I also think there are a number of reasons why the session went less well today. Firstly one of the SENCOs just didn't turn up – I ended up phoning the school and they said she wouldn't be attending. I ended up feeling let down and disappointed. I was also angry as I had emphasised that a commitment would be necessary for these meetings! Secondly another SENCO turned up late because she went to the wrong school first. This meant the session got off to a late start so there wasn't much time for reflecting. Lateness and lack of attendance made me feel unmotivated. I had also had a difficult day anyway, so found it quite hard to inject my usual energy into the session. However, I realise that it takes more than one to tango so what about the others in the group? With two days till the end of the summer school term they looked tired. I really think I got the timing of this one wrong but felt I was given little choice due to the fact that data collection is summer term and we had to change some meetings

anyway because of other commitments. I really hope this hasn't discouraged the SENCOs to continue with this next year as I believe it to be a positive thing. However, I am a little concerned that issues SENCOs bring have tended to be about systemic work in schools and power dynamics which really necessitates confidentiality and commitment to the group. I wonder why the SENCO didn't turn up today? Another difficulty with today's session is the case that the SENCO brought. This was a child I had been involved with so I felt really on the spot as she had wanted a statement but he didn't meet the criteria! After the session the SENCO mentioned that they say Ed Psycs don't have the power to affect whether a child has a statement, but she felt this not to be true. I felt uncomfortable in this 'powerful' role and sad. I feel that my relationship with this particular SENCO is solid and I feel glad that she can be open with me about her feelings but I wish the systems were different so we could be talking about how to help rather than fighting a system with limited resources. I really feel both as a researcher and a practitioner that I am totally entwined in the process.



## Appendix VII

### Exploratory commenting and developing emergent themes

- Descriptive comments are shown in plain font
  - *Linguistic comments use italics*
  - Conceptual comments are underlined

#### Participant one session one

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
Useful  Need to develop trust in a group of strangers	I found the session extremely useful in tackling the issue that I had. It gave me reassurance that other people experience similar problems to me and I not alone. It gave me ideas for	Session was <i>extremely</i> useful. <i>Issues to be tackled.</i>  Feels reassured that others have similar problems and not alone.  Given ideas for solutions as well as confidence.



Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Importance of sharing rules</p> <p>Wants the experience to be long term</p>	<p>clear what was expected during the different stages and gave people a way into talking.</p> <p>Overall, a very useful experience – am hoping it becomes a long term thing.</p>	<p>Sharing rules made expectations <i>clearer</i> and offered <i>a way into</i> talking.</p> <p>Summary – useful</p> <p>Hopes – long term</p>

Participant one session two

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>The process develops pts'</p>	<p>I feel that this process is beginning to give confidence to</p>	<p>The process <i>beginning</i> to give confidence to <i>whole</i> group to tackle issues. <u>Participant feels that the process is starting to have real</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>confidence</p> <p>Interest in role taking</p> <p>Increase of confidence and openness in the problem holder</p> <p>The process forces reflexivity</p>	<p>the whole group to tackle any issues raised. It was interesting to be in a different role as the listener and a reflector rather than a talker. You could see the difference in the way the speaker spoke about the subject - she started off quiet and almost unsure of herself to start with but as the session went along and feedback was given, she became more vocal and divulged more information. It made me think about people I have to deal with who make my</p>	<p><u>impact in developing confidence. Reference to time. An interest in</u> role taking – listening and observing v talking. Noticing how the speaker’s volume, confidence and openness increases throughout the session.</p> <p>Increase in the participant’s reflexivity. <u>The process forces reflexivity – ‘it made me’....</u> Also a belief that other people can make ‘my life more difficult’. <u>Who is the problem owner?</u> A realisation how a</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>A way to become unstuck and tackle problems</p> <p>An increase in trust over time</p>	<p>life more difficult and how I could tackle issues they raise. It made me realise that sometimes you need to give up tackling a problem one way and get a different perspective to find a solution. The trust is beginning to build amongst the group and I feel this is leading to people being more open and honest.</p>	<p>situation can become stuck and what you need to do instead – get a different perspective. <u>Repetition of the word tackle and so the process encourages participants to develop a strategy in order to deal with and overcome problems.</u></p> <p>Trust <i>beginning</i> to build leading to increased openness and honesty. <u>Repetition of the word beginning – it takes time to develop trust.</u></p>

Participant one session four

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Sessions can be frustrating</p> <p>An optimum number for the group to work well</p> <p>Sessions don't work well when there is a lack of ideas, enthusiasm, lack of anything useful to offer</p> <p>Some problems are more difficult than</p>	<p>I found today's session very frustrating due to the lack of attendees. I felt the session lacked ideas and enthusiasm.</p> <p>The problem presented to the group was very difficult and although, as a listener, I reflected on what was said and offered my opinion, I don't feel that I contributed anything useful to the discussion. The trust was still present in the group but feel this session was hard work</p>	<p><i>Frustration</i> in session because of lack of attendance. <u>Is she frustrated with the other SENCOs? Or does she feel there is an optimum number for the group to work well?</u></p> <p>Lack of ideas and a lack of enthusiasm <u>Was this because of the lack of attendance or were there other factors e.g. tired end of term?</u></p> <p>Difficulty of problem presented <u>some problems are more difficult than others?</u></p> <p>As a listener – listened, reflected, but didn't contribute anything useful <u>what prevented her from offering anything useful?</u></p> <p><i>Mentions trust again – clearly important it was still there after a frustrating session. The session hard work</i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>others</p> <p>Trust very important</p>		

Participant one interview

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
	<p>Ok so the first question is</p> <p>could you tell me about any</p> <p>further reflections on your</p> <p>experience of group consultation</p> <p>within a reflecting team that you</p> <p>may have had since we last met</p>	

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Lack of reflective space and no team ethos</p> <p>She reflects alone</p> <p>Speaking builds confidence to</p>	<p>as a group?</p> <p>Can I read the question upside down?</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>It's because if I read it ...</p> <p>So it's number one</p> <p>Ok um we're not really a very reflectivey team school um so kind of any reflecting I've done has been on my own. Um, in the 1<sup>st</sup> session we had altogether I obviously spoke about a problem I had first and that kind of</p>	<p>Not reflectivey team school – <u>does she wish that she was?</u> Feeling alone in reflecting. <i>Twice reference to reflecting.</i></p> <p>Being the first to speak about a problem</p> <p>Speaking about the problem gives confidence to approach people</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>approach people</p> <p>Confidence rooted in experience</p> <p>Lack of time in school to talk</p> <p>Distinction between herself and the school</p> <p>Difficulty in</p>	<p>allowed me to get the confidence to approach people that I usually wouldn't have, erm but had to reflect. I maybe have passing conversations with somebody about what had gone on but the reflections I've done were mainly on my own – not as a school.</p> <p>Um can you tell me more about what it means or more how you felt about having to reflect on your own?</p> <p>It's quite hard to reflect on your own because you almost want</p>	<p>she wouldn't usually do this</p> <p>Another reference to reflection – <i>having</i> to reflect.</p> <p>Usually have <i>passing conversations</i> with people in school but no real reflecting. <u>A passing conversation seems to indicate a lack of time – always on the move?</u> Reflections have been done on her own – not as a school. <i>Twice reference to reflecting on her own and not being a reflective school.</i> <u>Does this lack of reflecting as a school make her feel lonely?</u> She indicates that she does reflect on her own.</p> <p>Difficulty in reflecting alone – <i>it's quite hard.</i> Wanting somebody</p>





Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>reflect</p> <p>Wanting an example modelled of how to reflect</p>	<p>what you wanted when I wrote it down but I just wrote what I thought?</p> <p>So how do you think that could have been um made better for you in some way?</p> <p>I would have liked to have seen an example of a reflective log not necessarily one from somebody in our group but I just wanted somebody's written anywhere just so I kind of knew what you expected.</p>	<p>knowing what I wanted. <u>Is there a power dynamic here in that she wants to fulfil the expectations of the researcher? What was understanding of the purpose of the reflective log – did she think it was for me?</u> She just writes what she thinks <u>but no reference to feelings or behaviours</u></p> <p>She would <i>have liked</i> to have seen an example of reflective practice in order to fulfil my expectations. It could have been any reflective log from anywhere. She thinks there is a right and wrong way to reflect</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>The need to address issues sooner</p>	<p>Right (pause) um had you had any other reflections on your experiences apart from not being particularly reflectively?</p> <p>Um I need to ... any issues I have to have ... seem to go on for a long time, because I did that before. I need to learn ... I need to address them sooner to try and get them sorted (pause)</p> <p>So do you mean that after we came out with outcomes those things could have been sorted</p>	<p>Issues that go on for an extended period of time. <i>I did that before <u>she reflects on her own personality. I need to learn is she a little frustrated with herself?</u> She needs to address and sort issues sooner. <i>Twice reference to need in the context of learning, addressing and sorting out her issues.</i></i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>The session helped to sort issues out</p>	<p>more immediately?</p> <p>No no no no I mean the problem I had brought to the group I should have dealt with that months and months ago instead of just leaving it and hoping it would sort itself out. Whereas kind of going to that made me see that ... you know you can't just leave these things and if I don't sort it out nothing happens</p> <p>MMm</p> <p>So I have got to take the</p>	<p>She recognises that she has a tendency to leave issues and hope they will sort themselves out. <i>Twice reference to months.</i> The session <i>made</i> her see that you can't leave things because if you don't sort it out nothing happens. <i>Twice reference to sorting out issues.</i></p> <p>Getting nowhere if you don't take the initiative to sort things out <u>Did</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
Taking the initiative	<p>initiative to sort things out</p> <p>otherwise I get nowhere ... I mean I know I got nowhere anyway but (laughs) ...</p> <p>Yeh, the fact that you got nowhere anyway ... can you tell me more about what you think about that?</p>	<p><u>the session provoke this realisation? How did she feel about getting nowhere anyway? Does she think that it is a personal responsibility for taking the initiative?</u></p>
Feeling angry about unfair treatment in school	<p>It makes me quite cross to be honest because there are other people in the school who get more than enough time to do what they need to do and I don't</p>	<p>Feeling angry that her way of sorting it didn't achieve the outcome she wanted. Reference to others who have <i>more than enough time</i> and she doesn't - she <i>always</i> seems to be the one that <i>suffers</i>, looses time. <u>Does she feel victimised?</u> A <i>concern</i> that next year she</p>
Feeling victimised	<p>... I always seem to be the one</p>	<p>will have even less time. She says she has been <i>promised</i> release time <i>and this that and the other</i> <u>rather flippant?</u> And then questions</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>in school</p> <p>Suffering</p> <p>Lack of time to do the job</p> <p>Lack of faith in senior leadership</p>	<p>that suffers, the one that loses time and next year I'm going to do the masters for SEN and I'm a bit concerned that I'm going to have a lot to do at home as well as doing ... and she's promised me release time and this that and the other</p> <p>Mmm</p> <p>But whether or not I'll get it?</p> <p>(raises eye brows)</p> <p>Um (pause) OK so in terms of the Reflecting Team how do you</p>	<p>whether she'll get it. <u>She feels a lack of trust in her head teacher.</u></p> <p><u>Have promises been broken in the past? The raised eyebrow!</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Feeling relief less alone</p> <p>Others share issues of lack of time and problems with senior leadership</p> <p>Feeling relaxed and less stressed and less alone</p>	<p>... do you still think that helped?</p> <p>Yes (assertively) um it kind of made me realise it's not just me that has those problems cos sometimes when you work in school as a SENCO you feel a bit isolated. I almost came out of the session after I had kind of talked about what my issue was thinking thank God it's not just me! And from the time point of view and from the problems with management point of view you can see that other people suffer</p>	<p>The RT still helped because she realised she is not the only one that has the problems. Feeling <i>isolated</i> as a SENCO. <i>Thank God it's not just me. <u>A sense of relief?</u></i></p> <p>Knowing that others <i>suffer</i> with lack of time and problems with management makes her feel more <i>relaxed</i> and <i>less stressed</i>. <i>Polar opposites – not just less stressed but the opposite in feeling relaxed.</i></p> <p><i>Again use of the word suffering – <u>do SENCOs feel pain? Can it be an unbearable role?</u></i></p> <p><i>Another reference to it's not just me, which makes her decide to not worry about it too much. <u>So does the session enable her to take control of her thinking in choosing what to worry about? Does it contain her emotion and provide a space</u></i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Talking as a positive experience</p> <p>Difficulties in the Reflecting Team</p>	<p>from that as well. So it kind of makes you just relax about the whole thing anyway and not get so stressed about it cos you think it's not just me so I'm not going to worry about it too much</p> <p>What do you think about the way sessions were set up in the beginning?</p> <p>I liked it, I liked the idea of um talking cos I obviously went first.</p> <p>It was really hard sometimes not to talk to them because they are obviously watching you as an</p>	<p><i>Three times 'it's not just me.'</i> <u>Is there is something important about shared experiences, feeling connected, not alone and having others agree, empathise and sympathise with her point of view?</u> Use of the word <i>whole</i> – <u>does she feel more whole in realising it is not just her?</u></p> <p><i>Liked</i> the idea of talking. Difficulty in not talking to the <i>audience</i> <u>So does she feel a bit on show and is there something a bit unnatural in the way the RT is set up?</u> Again reference to <i>liking</i> it because it <i>forces you</i> <u>So she likes being forced to do this</u> to think about matters</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>(RT) process</p> <p>Being forced to think around the issue</p> <p>Impartiality of the RTs opinions</p>	<p>audience as we are having a discussion as a pair um but I liked it because it forces you to kind of think about what issues come off that one major problem and it's nice to because I didn't know these people and they were giving me their opinions ... kind of (pause) oh I don't know ... they are impartial aren't they because they don't know me and they don't know my school so it's kind of ... yeh</p> <p>So how did you feel about them</p>	<p>that come off <i>one major problem</i></p> <p>It's <i>nice</i> talking to people who can offer opinions and a degree of <i>impartiality</i> – they don't know her or her school <u>So they can be more objective? They can listen to her story without taking sides? They don't judge her or her school?</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Feelings in time - Initially feeling awkward</p> <p>Joint purpose in meeting as a group</p> <p>Feelings in time - having clear expectations</p>	<p>not knowing you and your school and speaking to an audience of people that didn't know you?</p> <p>It made it a little awkward to talk to start with but then I kind of realised we were there for the same reason so you just have to get over it but then obviously by the second session we knew what to expect so I think me biting the bullet and going first kind of helped everyone else so and I got mine over and done with (laughs) and don't have to</p>	<p>Feeling <i>awkward</i> about the audience but realising that all were there for the same reason. <i>Twice reference to 'audience.'</i> <u>A joint purpose in being there makes it less awkward?</u> So you just have to <i>get over it. It can be a bit of a hurdle to overcome.</i> Knowing what to expect <i>helps</i> as sessions progress. Going first was like <i>biting the bullet taking a risk? Dangerous?</i> But this helped others <u>she wasn't just there for herself</u> and she'd got hers <i>over and done with a sense of relief?</i> and doesn't have to put herself in the <i>spot light</i> anymore <u>feeling like a torch is being shone on her and her problems? or on show again?</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Taking a risk in sharing a problem</p> <p>Helping everyone</p> <p>Difficulty in sharing problems with others</p> <p>Performing in front of children and adults public and private self</p>	<p>put myself in the spot light anymore (laughs)</p> <p>Yes Yes Um well what do you mean by the spotlight?</p> <p>I'm not very good at like it's me and my issues. I find it very hard as a person. In front of a class of children it's easy to stand there and put an act on but it's very hard to do that in front of a group of adults so you almost feel a bit vulnerable. Cos you are like I'm here talking about my issues, I'm having to talk about my school,</p>	<p>She is not very good at talking about herself and her issues <i>emphasis that she finds it difficult as a person.</i> It's easy to stand in front of a class of children and <i>put on an act</i> <u>Is it easy because she is used to it?</u> She puts on an act in front of the children and it is <i>very hard</i> to do that in front of adults. <u>But is she putting on an act in front of the adults? Did she feel awkward because she knew that she had to be herself?</u> She feels <i>vulnerable</i> talking about her issues because it's her school and she is <i>having to</i> mention things that her boss wouldn't be impressed with. <u>Use of the words <i>having to ... why did</i></u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Feeling vulnerable in sharing school issues</p> <p>Demonstrating courage</p>	<p>I'm having to mention things that if my boss heard me she wouldn't be very impressed with ... and it's in front of strangers so it's ... yeh ... it took a lot of courage to be fair ... so ... mmm</p> <p>Courage um shall we talk a bit more about that? (pause/no response. Moves on) When I said initially about the way sessions were set up I mean, also I mean prior to the session itself so the way it was organised. Can you tell me</p>	<p><u>she choose to talk about an issue that made her feel so vulnerable?</u></p> <p>It's also in front of strangers <u>Would it be easier in front of people she knew and why?</u> It took <i>courage to be fair</i> <u>maybe she experiences a sense of pride at being able to share such a sensitive issue? Also she talks about fairness in relation to herself – she did something good and she was able to do this with more time – which is the unfair bit of being in school</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Disappointment about lack of schools involved</p>	<p>anything about what you think about that?</p> <p>Um well you kind of sent us umm a (pause)</p> <p>Questionnaire</p> <p>Questionnaire, thank you, sorry.</p> <p>You sent us a questionnaire we had to fill in and it was all kind of based around various issues in schools. Not all schools seem to have taken it on board which I think it is kind of a shame because it would have been nice</p>	<p>Toys with Disappointment kind of a shame that not all schools have taken it on board – it’s a <i>shame</i> because a bigger group would have been <i>nice</i>. <u>Is a bigger group nice because it offers a greater variety of perspectives?</u> An interest in the perspectives of secondary school SENCOs. <u>Why the interest in the perspectives of secondary school SENCOs?</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Questioning if better with a larger group</p> <p>Importance of different perspectives</p> <p>Importance of seeking opinions in the set up stage</p> <p>Importance of listening to everyone</p>	<p>to have a bigger group maybe (pause) especially as some secondary schools were supposed to come in so they would have had a different perspective</p> <p>Yeh</p> <p>But no I think it was set up really well I think that, you know, asking for our opinions first and then because you almost wanted to do it on a weekly basis in schools and you kind of listened to what everybody else wanted and did it</p>	<p>Appreciative that I asked for SENCOs opinions first and listened to what everybody wanted - <i>twice mentioned everybody</i>. Everybody was listened to as SENCOs the importance of being heard This worked <i>better</i>. SENCO glad that her choice didn't materialise? <u>So in retrospect it worked better that she didn't get her original choice</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Not being able to talk freely in school</p>	<p>round everybody else so I think it worked better. I think (coughs) I put down about doing something in school but actually now I'm glad I didn't?</p> <p>Why?</p> <p>Because I wouldn't have been able to talk freely in the school sessions so yeh I'm kind of glad everyone else didn't pick something else? (laughs)</p> <p>What do you think about the impact of a bigger versus a</p>	<p>Not being able to <i>talk freely</i> in school Why <u>can she not talk freely in school?</u>. <i>Twice reference to being glad that had an opportunity to do SENCO group consultation.</i> She's glad she didn't pick a whole school initiative because she wouldn't have been able to talk freely.</p> <p>So this is for her</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Multiple opinions</p> <p>Different thoughts and experiences</p> <p>Intimacy in a smaller group</p> <p>More ideas in a bigger group</p> <p>Group size affects outcomes</p> <p>Size of group affects group</p>	<p>smaller group? You said that it was a shame the other schools didn't ...</p> <p>It's just there are more opinions and different ways of thinking and everybody thinks differently and every schools different for various different reasons so it's... it would have been ... it's nice having an intimate group because you get to know the people that are there but if you've got a bigger group you've got more ideas you can take more</p>	<p>More opinions, different ways of thinking <i>twice reference to thinking differently</i>, different schools - <i>three times mentions the word different</i>. <u>So something important about respecting difference?</u> An <i>intimate</i> group is <i>nice</i> <u>So a smaller group is more intimate where relationships are closer – you get to know people and it feels comfortable?</u></p> <p>But a bigger group generates <i>ideas</i> so you can take <i>more</i> from it. <u>She would have got more out of a larger group?</u> The outcomes and dynamics may have been different. <u>Having outcomes is important to her?</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>dynamics</p> <p>The importance of good group dynamics</p> <p>Feelings change over time</p>	<p>from it and my outcomes list may have been slightly different had there been more people there because the dynamics would have been different</p> <p>Umm and what did you think about the dynamics of the group?</p> <p>The dynamics of the group of people we've been working in were good.</p> <p>Can you tell me more about what you mean by good?</p> <p>Just because that I think that</p>	<p><u>Practically she would get more out of the bigger group – emotionally she gets more out of smaller group.</u></p> <p>The group dynamics were good</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Importance of clear expectations</p> <p>Ability to build on experiences</p>	<p>           especially after the initial session            we all relaxed we were a bit more            freer with our talking and there            was a bit more banter and it was            a bit more friendly whereas the            first one was quite ... nobody            knew what to expect, nobody            knew what to say. Whereas I            think by the second one because            there was three of us that had            been to the previous one so we            were quite happy you know            moving it forward and going            again (coughs).         </p>	<p>           Good dynamics means being relaxed and talking freely, having            banter and friendliness. It took the initial session to allow this to            ensue as in the first session no one knew what to expect or say         </p> <p> <u>So does having some knowledge about what to expect and say            important in facilitating good group dynamics?</u> </p> <p>           Having prior experience made her happy to move forward and            continue. <u>So does she feel she can build on what she has learned            and move on to a different level?</u> </p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Different roles are interesting</p> <p>Different ways of thinking about a</p>	<p>How do you think having a secondary school there would have changed things?</p> <p>Just because they have different priorities they have a bigger school they have more children and just because it would be interesting to get the idea of a SENCO in secondary school. I can imagine their role is very different to my role in primary school and I might say well actually you know I've had that problem in a different way and</p>	<p>Having secondary SENCOs present would be <i>interesting</i>. She imagines the <i>role</i> is <i>different</i> as they have different <i>priorities</i> and a <i>bigger</i> school. It would be interesting to see how SENCOs in different settings (primary and secondary) tackle similar problems and she may see a different way of thinking. <i>The word different is mentioned four times. <u>So having a secondary SENCO present would inject more difference into the group?</u></i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
problem	<p>this is how we sorted it out. It might have been just a completely different way of thinking</p> <p>Mmm</p> <p>Just because their circumstances are different to ours (pause)</p> <p>Umm are there any other differences in the way ... you talked about priorities ... is there anything else that would have been different with having a secondary school there?</p>	<p>SENCOs at secondary schools operate in different circumstances to SENCOs at primary schools</p> <p>Primary schools have a <i>negative</i> perception of treatment of SEN</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>The potential for sessions to challenge negative stereotypes</p> <p>Reputations of secondary schools</p>	<p>A primary schools perception of what a secondary school does with SEN children is quite negative. In that we feel that secondary schools don't always meet SEN children's needs and it would have be nice to kind of had that opinion changed maybe</p> <p>Um um ok so you were looking forward to seeing it maybe in a more positive light</p> <p>Yeh absolutely ... cos we talk to them and I know they try their hardest to do ... but the stories</p>	<p>children in secondary schools in that they don't always meet their needs. She wishes she had an opportunity for that opinion to be changed. <u>So even though she states the circumstances are very different in primary and secondary schools, she doesn't feel that is an excuse for not meeting SEN children's needs. She hoped that the group consultation session would provide an opportunity to change this negative perception.</u></p> <p>An acknowledgement that Secondary SENCOs <i>try their hardest but <u>there is a but!</u></i> She says the stories are that if the children have</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>as excluding and primary schools as nurturing</p> <p>Importance of hearing different stories</p>	<p>you hear like of children going into, to secondary is like if they've got difficulties it tends to be then we'll get rid of them and exclude them whereas we don't here, we are very nurturing and it's like we'll keep all our children together and we'll do everything we can possible it would have just been nice to find out that that is not actually the case of what happens</p> <p>How do you think that would have changed your practice?</p>	<p>difficulties then <i>get rid of them</i> and <i>exclude them</i> whereas in primary school it is more <i>nurturing</i> and primary schools want to <i>keep all our children</i> and <i>do everything possible</i>. <u>So she has the feeling that primary schools are more inclusive, nurturing and put their neck on the line for the children where as secondary schools exclude children with difficulties.</u> <i>She again states it would have been nice to discover a different story.</i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>The potential for sessions to thwart negative perceptions and instil confidence</p> <p>Story telling</p>	<p>It might have made me relax a bit more when the children are in y6 and they are going up into secondary school and we have in the meetings I wouldn't have been so much like well this child needs this and this needs that I'd have been confident in the fact that whenever we send them up</p> <p>MMM And where do you think this view comes from about secondary</p> <p>It's just stories you hear from parents or from teachers that</p>	<p>Knowing that this isn't the case would have made her more relaxed and confident. <u>So the sessions have the potential to thwart negative perceptions about what others do, make her relax and instil confidence.</u> <i>Twice mention of the word needs.</i> <u>The SENCO is very focussed on the childrens' needs.</u></p> <p>Negative stories from teachers and parents <u>She wants to hear a different story.</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
	<p>work in secondary schools and it's always quite negative</p> <p>OK um is there anything else you want to say about the way sessions were set up in the beginning</p> <p>(shakes head no)</p> <p>So I'm gonna give you some questions about themes that emerged from your reflective logs and then I would like you to choose maybe three or four questions that you would like to</p>	

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Importance of hearing multiple perspectives</p> <p>SENCO role as isolated</p>	<p>explore now</p> <p>(long pause then)</p> <p>And you can choose to answer them in any order you wish</p> <p>Um yeh the first one I picked was actually this one at the bottom which says about the importance of hearing multiple perspectives.</p> <p>Sometimes when you are in your job especially in primary school it can as a SENCO be very isolated and you tackle a problem your way or you ring</p>	<p><i>Repetition of hearing multiple perspectives.</i></p> <p><i>Repetition of isolation of the SENCO role.</i></p> <p>The SENCO would tackle a problem her own way or ring someone who new the answer <u>Before she was very definitive -knows the answer</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Importance of feedback</p> <p>Importance of listening</p> <p>Idiosyncratic nature of people and problems</p> <p>Opinions differ</p> <p>Potential for</p>	<p>somebody who knows the answer and kind of when we went to these sessions ... in session one I spoke and people gave me feedback ... in session two I listened to somebody and listened because they had a particular problem with a particular person in school and offered my opinion on what I thought she should do and my opinion was sometimes very different and sometimes what I would do was very different about what others would do and</p>	<p><u>The sessions offered a new way of tackling problems?</u></p> <p>The importance of hearing feedback and listening. <i>Twice use of the word particular</i> <u>So the SENCO points to the idiosyncratic nature of problems and people.</u></p> <p><i>Twice use of the word opinion</i> <u>so it's a matter of opinion – there is no definite answer?</u> Opinions are different <i>again use of the word different.</i> She takes the lessons learned to schools <u>the sessions offer transferable skills</u></p> <p>Differences in her behaviour before and after sessions. Not reluctant to talk to people in school now about SEN children. <u>A realisation?</u> that everybody tackles things in <i>completely</i> different ways <u>and that's</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>sessions to change practice</p> <p>Acceptance of difference</p> <p>Importance of hearing different opinions when in a stuck situation</p> <p>Importance of adapting to different learning styles and</p>	<p>I've kind of I've taken to this in schools ... there's three or four people I'll talk to people in school about SEN children ... I was very reluctant to do that before but now I'll do that because everybody tackles things in completely different ways because we are all different learners we are all different listeners ... and I think if I'm stuck in my ... that's why I have to take a bit of paper in to read it because that's how I learn whereas other people learn by</p>	<p><u>OK. Again much use of the word difference</u> in reference to learning, listening and tackling problems. <u>Accepting difference seems to be a key theme for this SENCO</u></p> <p>Mention of being stuck <u>Is a RT particularly useful for situations that have become stuck?</u></p> <p>Goes back to how we learn in different ways</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>learning new techniques</p> <p>We are all learners</p>	<p>doing things and they'll be like right don't try it like this and actually their way may be much more successful than my way it'll be harder for me but then if I've engaged a child down there because I've done something in the way that they understand then brilliant. So I just adapt what I know and how I know to do things (pause) it's learning we are all learners at the end of the day and we have to learn new techniques</p>	<p>They'll be like <i>right</i> don't try it like this ... their way may be <i>much more</i> successful than my way. She feels there may be other, more successful ways of doing things and although it may be harder it's important to <i>adapt</i> in order to meet the needs of other people. She says it is <i>brilliant</i> to do something in the way others understand it. We are <i>all</i> learners we <i>have to</i> learn new techniques. <u>Interesting contrast between how we differ and are all the same – we all learn but in different ways – and we need to adapt to meet the needs of others. So does the RT facilitate an environment where difference is tolerated and new techniques are learned?</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Being told how others' tackle things as a positive thing</p>	<p><i>I just want to pick up on something you said. You talked about 'their way.' Um how did you feel about being presented with other people's views on how to tackle things?</i></p> <p>That's fine (quite definite) – I would rather talk to people and them tell me what they would do and then I would think right is that how I would do what could I do from what they've said rather than ... I don't like people asking 'what do you think you</p>	<p>It is definately <i>fine</i> to be presented with other peoples views on how to tackle things. She likes to hear how others would tackle a problem but doesn't like to be told well how do you think YOU should do it?</p> <p><u>Does she feel patronised in being asked well what do you think YOU should do? Is it kind of like – well don't ask me you're the one with the problem? Or ... I might know what I would do, but what does that have to do with you?</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>The importance of hearing others' opinions, yet retaining an ability to make one's own mind up</p> <p>Trust builds with</p>	<p>(emphasis) should do?' (in a mocking voice) because I can try and answer that but if I've asked for opinions or want opinions I want you to tell me what you would do and I can think well actually I don't agree with that and I don't think I should do it that way but maybe I would try it that way and give it a shot ... yeh</p> <p><i>Is there another question on there you want to talk about</i></p> <p>Yeh Um the next one I picked was about trust and in session</p>	<p>If she's asked for opinions that is what she wants!</p> <p>She still has a mind of her own and can disagree, but maybe she would give their way <i>a shot</i>. <u>So she finds it quite empowering to hear what others would do – but only if she's asked for this?</u></p> <p>If you don't know someone you don't have trust</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>time</p> <p>Trust linked to being open and taking risks</p> <p>Being a role model by being open</p> <p>Trust develops with</p>	<p>one because I had to sit and talk to everybody I didn't know everyone I didn't trust them whereas in session two because we'd done that we trusted each other a little more because I'd opened up about my school and I kind of really laid it on the line and really said things that I might of got into trouble for then I feel that the people who were there thought well if she's done it I can do it I can open up and I can talk about what I've done and I knew then cos obviously it had been</p>	<p>Trust builds over time</p> <p>Trust builds when you open up, <i>lay it on the line</i> and say things that you might get in trouble for. <u>Why would she do this with people she didn't know? Did she feel passionately about her problem? Is bravery a core value that she possesses? Was she carrying such a burden that it was a relief to have a group of people that she could talk to openly?</u></p> <p>So she leads by example – she set a precedent - so that others could also open up.</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>the passing of time</p> <p>Trust as</p> <p>maintaining</p> <p>confidentiality</p> <p>Fear</p> <p>Lack of trust of</p> <p>senior leadership in</p> <p>school</p> <p>Taking risks helps</p> <p>others to be more</p> <p>open</p>	<p>two weeks I knew then that they hadn't said anything about what I had talked about so I knew any knowledge that anyone had, had come from me. I was very cagey about what my head had asked about what had gone on I was like oh yeh it was fine. But I just think that it helped the group ... it helped the girl in session two open up more which kind of leads into my next question which is why I picked that one because she was talking about someone she had problems with</p>	<p>She knew she could trust the group with the passing of time as they hadn't said anything.</p> <p>She was <i>cagey</i> when questioned by her head teacher about the group. <u>Is she secretive because she is afraid of management?</u></p> <p>Laying on the line helps the group open up more</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Trust increases with time</p> <p>Taking a risk helps others to see that information can be kept confidentially</p> <p>Trust as liberating</p>	<p>in her school and as she spoke as the session progressed over the hour a half hours she gave more information as we were going along and I feel that this was the trust thing that links back to mine. So if she kind of realised well actually somebody else did this and nothing came of it ... if I lay it on the line it's not gonna leave the room.</p> <p><i>Mmm</i></p> <p>Which meant she could talk more freely about the issue that she</p>	<p>The SENCO notices that the problem holder gave more information as she went along and feels this to be indicative of trust growing – trust increases with time.</p> <p>The SENCO feels that others followed her example in <i>laying it on the line</i>.</p> <p>She feels if it doesn't leave the room people can speak more <i>freely</i></p> <p><u>Has she felt constrained? Like she has held a secret?</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>The importance of taking it seriously</p> <p>The importance of listening</p>	<p>had ...</p> <p><i>Yes so would I be right in saying that openness and transparency is something that is really important</i></p> <p>Yeh Yes absolutely (emphasis) if I was sitting there either talking or listening it wouldn't matter either and I thought someone in the group wasn't taking it seriously or somebody in the group wasn't kind of taking on board what I was saying or wasn't listening properly I would</p>	<p>Openness and transparently are <i>absolutely</i> important. Further, whether talking or listening it is important to take the session <i>seriously</i> and this means listening properly - <i>taking on board</i> what people are saying. She would <i>clam up</i> if people didn't listen properly <u>Has this SENCO felt ignored? Is she starting to feel like a clam that is opening up?</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>The importance of honesty</p> <p>Fear compromises openness and honesty</p> <p>The importance of</p>	<p>clam up, I wouldn't want to speak to them I wouldn't want to open up. Everybody laying on the line is kind of how we need to go about it.</p> <p><i>And what do you think what sort of things might compromise that?</i></p> <p>Fear (laughs)</p> <p><i>And how do you think those things could be overcome? I know you've talked about being open and just laying it on the line</i></p> <p>Yeh and it's kind of saying that</p>	<p><u>So one way of ensuring that everyone takes it seriously is to take a risk and bring a sensitive issue – something that you could get in trouble for!</u></p> <p><i>Fear stops people opening up</i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
beginnings  Sharing good practice     The sessions as useful    Being honest  Listening	from the off. I don't know if you started something like this with new people that had never been to a session and you got one of us who'd already been to quite a few sessions to go and talk to them and say well actually it's really useful but you can't sit there and not give everybody the facts you've just got to tell them straight and you've got (emphasis) to listen to what people is saying and you can't just sit there like this cos it makes the other person feel	In order to overcome fear <i>from the off</i> you've got to understand that you have to be <i>straight, listen to what people are saying and actively engage with the process.</i> <u>She says that someone who had been to quite a few sessions could go and talk to a new group about these things so she feels these are essential for building trust.</u> If you don't do these things others will feel <i>uncomfortable</i> <u>Or fearful? So trust comes from being open, listening and actively engaging – not <i>just sitting there</i></u>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Active participation</p> <p>Having rules helps in being open and honest</p> <p>The importance of knowing what is expected in order to build trust</p> <p>Don't say nothing</p>	<p>uncomfortable</p> <p><i>Mmm</i></p> <p>I mean you gave us the rules and I know I haven't circled this one but I think that they helped us to be open and honest and helped to give us all the information that we needed or the other person needed because we knew what was expected of us</p> <p><i>UM hum</i></p> <p>So it was like there was one about us not being a log</p>	<p>Ground rules help people be honest and open. <i>Twice she mentions need</i> – certain information is needed to know what is expected. <u>So laying down expectations in the form of rules helps build trust.</u></p> <p>She remembers the rule about not being a log</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Saying nothing is ineffective and harmful</p> <p>Saying too much is harmful and ineffective</p> <p>The sequential discussion prevents repetition and</p>	<p><i>Yeh</i></p> <p>I can't remember it off the top of my head but sitting there and not saying nothing is just as ineffective as taking over ... yeh don't be a hog or a log ... and saying too much is just as harmful as saying nothing. So you've got to get involved. In the second session you introduced something where each person had to have a say and repeat back what the previous person said and then develop it ... I liked</p>	<p>And says saying nothing is just as <i>ineffective</i> as taking over</p> <p>And saying too much is just as <i>harmful</i> as saying nothing. <u>So both saying nothing and too much is ineffective and harmful. Interesting contradiction here – ineffective produces no results – but harm is damaging. Maybe the SENCO feels both are at best ineffective and at worst harmful?</u></p> <p>The SENCO likes the sequential discussion <u>and perhaps the introduction of something new?</u></p> <p>The sequential discussion allows it to become unstuck – not going round and round in circles and avoids repetition. It forces you to process what has been said (listen) and then move the discussion on</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>getting stuck</p> <p>Importance of information processing</p> <p>Moving the situation on</p>	<p>that because it meant you didn't just go round and round in circles of um people repeating the same point. You had to process what had been said and think right how would I take it further and what would the next step be and I liked the kind of process of that</p> <p>Umm Hum</p> <p>So yeh</p> <p><i>So just going on further about what you liked about the sequential discussion is there</i></p>	<p>to the next step. <i>Second reference to liking it.</i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>New experiences can be uncomfortable</p> <p>Turn-taking works well</p> <p>Moving a situation on – how to get</p>	<p><i>anything else that you would have preferred that had been introduced that wasn't? That you can think of</i></p> <p>No I was quite happy with it when that was introduced it was kind of like oh God we all have to take our turn but when we actually did it and did it in that kind of sequence it worked really well.</p> <p>It's kind of nice to hear what ... the taking your point and having to kind of move ... it stops our discussion becoming still and it</p>	<p>At first the sequential discussion made the SENCO think 'Oh God we all have to take our turn' so she experienced some discomfort but actually doing it worked <i>really well</i>.</p> <p>It's <i>nice</i> to take a point and <i>move it on</i> So again a reference to becoming unstuck. It doesn't stand still. <i>Another reference to moving the discussion on and liking it.</i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>unstuck</p> <p>Further applications of lessons learned</p>	<p>moves it on all the time and I like that. I didn't think it would be something I would use in discussions with staff or even with children kind of in the classroom, you know</p> <p><i>So you've seen other applications of it?</i></p> <p>Yeh Yeh absolutely</p> <p><i>Is there any other question on there that you want to pick up on</i></p> <p>Um, there was just number 6 which said in session one you</p>	<p><u>So has the SENCO transferred this new skill to a different situation?</u></p> <p>She <i>absolutely</i> sees another application of it</p> <p><i>Even now</i> she wants it to be an ongoing process but maybe less</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Important to continue to meet who have the same problems</p> <p>The importance of regular and frequent opportunities get help</p>	<p>hoped the sessions would become a long term thing. I think even now it's still important that it is an on-going process. Even if it is not once a fortnight even if it is just once a month. It's just to me (hesitation) from a simple personal point of view if I have an issue I don't want to leave it months and months before I can speak to anybody who's in the same boat as me about it and I just think you would have the chance once a month to kind of sit down and say well I have this</p>	<p>often. She says that <i>personally</i> she doesn't want to leave it <i>months and months</i> before she can speak to anybody who's in the <i>same boat as me</i>. <u>She recognises that she has a tendency to leave or run away from problems, but this seems to be because she hasn't got anyone else to speak to. She <i>doesn't want to do this</i>. It is also particularly important for her that the people she speaks to are in the same boat. Is this because she feels they will empathise better?</u></p> <p><i>Twice mention of once a month as a meeting time frame. The group is helpful. <u>She is asking for help.</u></i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>How to decide who brings the problem</p>	<p>issue you know can you help me with it?</p> <p><i>Umm what do you think about the opportunities that you get in kind of the RT to present your problem or to present your issue, because you obviously presented it first but it would maybe be 4-5 months wouldn't it before you got an opportunity to bring an issue again. Do you see what I mean?</i></p> <p>Yeh but then maybe we could run an email thing almost like so you'd open it up to whoever had</p>	<p>The SENCO thinks around a solution to not being able to discuss her own problems on a monthly basis. She thinks it could be up to the</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Opportunities to speak are important and rare</p> <p>Feeling your voice is heard</p> <p>Feeling ignored, stamped on</p>	<p>a problem so if I was first in the first month and then had another issue that arose or if other people had other issues that arose we could email you and you could decide right OK who do I look at.</p> <p>But it's just a chance to kind of speak about something isn't it.</p> <p>You feel like your voice is heard in sessions like that rather than being ignored and stamped on</p> <p><i>Did you say stamped on?</i></p> <p>Yes (laughs)</p>	<p>facilitator to decide which problem is addressed. But overall it's <i>just a chance</i> to be able to speak about something. <u>This SENCO seems to be saying she never gets a chance to speak.</u></p> <p>A chance <u>or rare opportunity?</u></p> <p>The sessions allow her <i>voice to be heard</i> rather than being <i>ignored and stamped on</i>. <u>Ignored and stamped on – emotional and physical harm. Being <i>stamped on</i> presents a disturbing image of being squashed, quietened, destroyed. Being heard is important.</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Feeling unheard and rubbished</p> <p>The need for an immediate response</p>	<p><i>What did you mean by that?</i></p> <p>It's just sometimes you don't feel that you can voice what you want to say because people don't listen and dismiss it as rubbish (quietly) or yeh yeh I'll sort it out later and sometimes later's not good enough I need an answer now.</p> <p><i>So have you got any thoughts about how at the moment it would be once a month ... you said if someone had a pertinent issue maybe they could bring it</i></p>	<p>You don't feel you can speak because <i>people</i> <u>I wonder which people?</u> don't listen and worse they <i>dismiss it as rubbish</i> or make promises they don't keep <i>yeh yeh I sort it out later</i>. <u>The SENCO seems angry – it's <i>not good enough – I need an answer now</i>. She seems to be saying that she needs a more immediate response to her problems. She very much wants her voice heard. <i>Twice mention of voice.</i></u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>The strength of the issue determines who brings the problem</p> <p>Getting out issues</p>	<p><i>so you don't take it in turns it's more about if someone has a need that they want to bring</i></p> <p>Yeh yes and I think it's how it should be because if it's your turn but if you haven't got an issue you are gonna sit there or you're gonna make one up or it'll be so weak that it's not really an issue and we'll be done in ten minutes. I don't think it should be done on a turn taking basis I think it should work on ... cos I'm quite happy now I've got it out in</p>	<p>Repetition of yeh yes that's how it <i>should be</i>. Suggests that the sessions shouldn't be carried out on a turn-taking basis because people might not have an issue or it'll be weak and done in ten minutes. So the problem holder should be chosen on the strength of the issue. <u>Is a weak issue is one that is quickly resolved?</u></p> <p>Feeling <i>happy</i> that her issue is <i>out in the open</i> - again seeming to</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>makes you feel good</p> <p>SENCOs have to deal with massive issues</p>	<p>the open I'm quite happy now if it was my turn for tomorrows session well I haven't got anything to talk about</p> <p><i>Yeh</i></p> <p>Whereas other people might have whereas the next time we have one in September I might have a MASSIVE (emphasis) if we have one in September I'll have a massive issue so yeh</p> <p><i>And what about if there were 3 people that had a massive issue</i></p>	<p>suggest that her issue was hidden</p> <p>Some weeks people might not have an issue to talk about</p> <p><i>Twice mention of massive issue. The first time she states I might have, the second time she states I'll have. <u>Perhaps she predicts that she will have a very big problem to discuss in September?</u></i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>The importance of having an answer to a problem</p> <p>Difficulty in differentiating who brings the problem</p> <p>Answers are difficult to get hold of</p>	<p><i>that wanted to bring it to that session would that be a problem or do you think that could be...</i></p> <p>Then maybe we could run so like for the same time but condense the process so then everybody could get an answer because it must be really hard because they all think theirs is equally important as you would erm but if you run a kind of condensed then all three people could get their hands would get an answer and an action plan</p>	<p>Makes a suggestion that the process is <i>condensed</i> by allowing everyone who has a problem to speak. Everybody <i>could get an answer</i> <u>the importance of having solutions?</u> It <i>must be hard</i> when you don't get a chance to talk about your problem. People think their problems are <i>equally important as you would</i> so it can be difficult to differentiate the severity of problems when you are so intimately involved.</p> <p>People could <i>get their hands</i> on an action plan and answer <u>Answers and actions plans are difficult to get hold of?</u> It would be nice to get <u>hold of them?</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>The need for an answer depends on the problem</p> <p>Action plans make things happen/ solutions are practical</p> <p>The importance of</p>	<p><i>Mmm how important is it to have answers and action plans</i></p> <p>It depends on the problem for mine I needed one I needed a kick up the bum excuse my slang I needed the kick up the bum that said actually you need to go and talk to your head otherwise this will never get sorted whereas sometimes some problems might need ideas but they might not need an action plan so it might be different. And then if no one if these three had the session then</p>	<p>She needed an action plan <i>twice reference to need</i>. <u>So it isn't that she just wants an action plan or answer she actually needs one.</u></p> <p>Sometimes an action plan provides a <i>kick up the bum</i>. A further <i>reference to need</i>. She needed the session to make her take an action and if she hadn't taken the action she would <i>never</i> sort the problem out. <u>So does the session make things happen?</u></p> <p>Not all sessions need an action plan – sometimes ideas are needed – it depends on the problem.</p> <p>To ensure that everyone gets long enough perhaps spend a session reflecting on outcomes of the previous session – if no one has an issue. <u>So does she think deeper reflection is important i.e. what do I</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>reviewing actions taken</p> <p>The importance of giving people adequate time</p> <p>The session offers different views and</p>	<p>the next session you could almost do, if no one had an issue, you could almost do a reflection back on these three so they'd get longer time then anyway.</p> <p><i>Yeh that's a good point sort of like plan, do, review and maybe</i></p> <p><i>Um if you weren't getting an answer or an action plan what else would you be getting from the sessions</i></p> <p>Different views on the problem, different ways to tackle it,</p>	<p><u>think about the action that I took?</u></p> <p>From the RT she gets different view points, different action plans,</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>ways to solve a problem</p> <p>Getting stuck means you can't see</p> <p>The need to talk and expose the problem</p>	<p>alternative views to your own, cos sometimes you get so stuck in your own blinkered vision that you can't see everything else</p> <p><i>Yeh but even with those different views you didn't get an outcome or some sort of action to take away. Without answers what else would you get from the session?</i></p> <p>An experience to just get it off my chest cos sometimes that's all it needs sometimes you just need</p>	<p>alternative views to your own <i>repetition of different</i> she gets another way of doing things. <i>Again reference to getting stuck – so stuck.</i></p> <p>Interesting use of the term <i>blinkered vision</i> she says you <i>can't see everything else</i>. So some problems can blind you and you need more eyes on the problem, to be able to see – the sessions provide this.</p> <p>The experience to <i>get it off my chest – she again uses a phrase which suggests she has been keeping a secret and a sense of relief</i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Answers aren't always important</p> <p>The importance of trust</p> <p>Knowing who you can and cannot trust</p> <p>Trust builds over time and takes work</p> <p>Answers are not as important as having</p>	<p>to get talking about it you realise</p> <p>I don't need answers or I can do this myself or I know who I can speak to instead or it is just an airing an airing with people you trust. I know who I trust in my school and I know who I can speak to with an issue. I know who I wouldn't go and talk to and</p> <p>I know if they ask 'oh is everything alright'? It's 'yes it's fine' (bluntly). But I just think we've built up and worked so hard to get that now that it wouldn't matter if I didn't get any</p>	<p><i>in being able to talk about it.</i></p> <p>Just <i>need</i> to get talking, the importance of talking, to <i>realise</i> you actually don't need answers or you can do it yourself <u>She seems to be now contradicting what she was saying earlier – when she talked about the need for an action plan – now she is saying you don't need answers.</u> <i>Twice says airing – she needs to expose the problem</i></p> <p>Airing problems with people you trust is something she gets from the session.</p> <p><i>Another reference to trust</i> <u>Is there a lack of trust in her school?</u></p> <p>You have to build and work hard and trust and the SENCO feels the group has this ... in fact this is so important to the SENCO that it doesn't matter if she didn't get a single answer – more importantly</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>empathy</p> <p>The importance of others' in the group having similar experiences</p> <p>Suffering in the role of SENCO</p> <p>Knowing you are not alone makes it easier</p> <p>A burden is lifted</p>	<p>answers it would just be even</p> <p>just people saying I know how you feel, I empathise with you because I go through that myself</p> <p>I don't know how to solve it but sometimes just knowing someone else is suffering the same makes suffering (quietly and a bit shocked) that sounds awful doesn't it? Makes it a problem halved doesn't it?</p> <p><i>Mmm</i></p> <p>It just makes it feel better it makes you feel like you are not</p>	<p>just hearing others saying <i>I know how you feel, I empathise with you, I go through that myself.</i> <u>So empathy is of paramount importance, but does she also think that others need to have gone through the experience themselves to fully empathise with her?</u></p> <p>She uses the word <i>suffering</i> and goes on to say it sounds <i>awful</i>. <i>She uses the word twice</i> and says if others suffer too then it makes her problem easier to deal with. <u>So does the fact that others suffer like her make her feel less alone?</u></p> <p>It makes her feel better she no longer <i>carries the weight of the world</i> on her shoulders. <u>So getting it off her chest, feeling empathy from others and knowing they suffer too makes her feel less burdened.</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>The importance of shared role</p> <p>The importance of knowing the role</p>	<p>carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders</p> <p><i>Ok so now I'm going to ask another question which is why is being in a RT any different then to talking with someone that you trust in school?</i></p> <p>Because a RT we are all the same we are all SENCOs we are all doing the same job. So I know the people that are giving me advice or the people that are listening to what I am saying they know all about the roles I have</p>	<p><i>Again reference to talking with someone who is doing the same job.</i></p> <p>She mentions being given advice or being listened to. They know about the roles. <i>Again makes reference to role.</i> Feels there is something different about being listened to and given advice by someone who knows your function in school.</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
The pressure of the role	<p>whereas talking to my friend here she doesn't have a clue what a SENCO has to do she has flashes of it when I am sitting down to do paper work but she doesn't know kind of the pressure of trying to pull all your kids up. She has an ICT responsibility but the role is very different. So it's just people in the same role (pause) it's important</p> <p><i>OK so could you tell me a little bit more about why it is important that you share a similar role?</i></p>	<p>A friend in school <i>doesn't have a clue</i> what a SENCO does</p> <p>Reference to paper work and the different pressure of trying to pull all your kids up.</p> <p>Having people in the same role in the group is <i>important</i>. <i>Three times reference to role.</i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Shared understanding and empathy</p> <p>Frustration when others don't understand</p> <p>Importance of immediacy of understanding</p> <p>Understanding the pressures of the job</p> <p>Feeling alone in the</p>	<p>Because they understand, they have an understanding and it's empathy as well. I don't want to sit and talk to somebody about an issue and they would be like 'yeh I understand, yeh I don't really know what you should do, I don't really get it' (whiningly). But I know they will instantly get, there's one child that's not making any progress I've got everything in place and I know that somewhere in their SENCO experience it's happened to them. That even if they can't give</p>	<p>Sharing the same role makes others more understanding <i>twice</i> <u>reference to understanding</u> and further empathy</p> <p>She feels others don't get it. <i>On the one hand they say they understand and then they say they don't really get it</i> <u>So is she frustrated talking to people who don't share her role? They don't appear to talk sense or empathise – her tone of voice was mimicking a lacking empathy.</u></p> <p>Another SENCO <i>instantly</i> gets it. It will have happened to them – the feeling of having everything in place and a child not making any progress. <u>Presumably this is very stressful – having to pull everyone up, but one child not making any progress. Feeling judged? Feeling sorry for the child?</u></p> <p><i>Again reference to not having answers but not feeling alone.</i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
role	<p>me the answers I am not on my own (emphasis) cos I'm only one person here doing one role, but it's all the same does that make sense?</p> <p><i>Yes. Was there any other question on there that you wanted to talk through?</i></p> <p>No they are the ones I circled</p> <p><i>OK so my next question – how did you feel before during and after a session? So it's more about your feelings really.</i></p>	<p><i>The only one here doing one role. The sameness of the SENCO role.</i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Difference between sessions</p> <p>Feelings over time</p> <p>A lack of expectation makes you wary</p> <p>Taking risks can be scary</p>	<p>Are we comparing between sessions one and two because they were very different (laughs)</p> <p><i>Oh well I'll leave that up to you!</i></p> <p>Before session one I was a bit, what's the word, wary because I didn't know what to expect.</p> <p>During the session I felt a bit panicked because I decided that I wanted to take the plunge, but obviously as the session went on I felt more confident. After the session I felt confident to tackle</p>	<p><i>Wary</i> before the first session because of a lack of expectations.</p> <p><i>Panicked</i> during the session because she <i>took the plunge</i>. Again seeming to suggest that it required bravery to share a problem.</p> <p><i>Confidence</i> develops as the session evolves. <i>Twice reference to confidence</i> – both during and after the session to <i>tackle</i> the issue.</p> <p><i>Still scared</i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Confidence builds over time</p> <p>Trust keeps the group together</p> <p>An opportunity to listen is a positive</p>	<p>it. I was still a bit scared.</p> <p><i>Mmm yeh so again it's this importance of developing trust</i></p> <p>Yeh absolutely I think it's the linchpin that holds it all together to be honest ... you have to trust the people in your reflecting team otherwise you can't be reflective properly.</p> <p><i>Yeh</i></p> <p>Um before session two I didn't feel very wary at all I was actually quite looking forward to it</p>	<p>Trust is the linchpin that holds it together – so without trust it would all fall apart <u>Is trust the most important thing?</u> Certainly the safe space is vital for keeping the session together.</p> <p>Didn't feel wary at all before the next session and was actually <i>quite looking forward to it</i> liked to opportunity to listen to someone else</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>experience</p> <p>Positive experiences in the role of the listener</p> <p>The process inspires confidence</p> <p>The group as</p>	<p>because I knew I would get the chance to listen to someone else</p> <p>...</p> <p><i>Yep</i></p> <p>Umm during the session I don't know really how I felt. I kind of I liked the experience of listening, I liked the experience of trying to find ways that that person could solve their problem or giving them advice or things they could try or</p> <p><i>Mm hmm</i></p>	<p>Liked listening, helping, finding ways, offering advice, things to do</p> <p>Afterwards more <i>confident</i>.</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>dependable</p> <p>Continuation of trust and friendship</p> <p>Annoyance at LA cutbacks as she is stopped from formally meeting other SENCOS</p> <p>Other meetings can</p>	<p>And then afterwards I can't think of a word to describe it.</p> <p>Afterwards I felt erm just really confident in the whole process I went way thinking that I had meetings with people that I feel like I knew I can count on. I felt I could ring XXX up and talk to a SENCO there because I knew her from the sessions and that she'd be like oh yeh ok maybe you could pop round and we could have a conversation about something it's like its building up further ... like they said about the</p>	<p>People she could <i>count on</i> <u>So had she not experienced a meeting like this before? People she could count on?</u></p> <p>She feels she can ring another SENCO and even meet up with her</p> <p>And it continues to build <u>What continues to build? Trust? Friendship?</u></p> <p>Annoyance at school cut backs <u>Was the SENCO conference the only opportunity she had to meet other SENCOS?</u></p> <p>Yet the SENCO conference could be <i>isolated, cliquy and people would speak to you</i>. Again feeling alone and the importance of</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>feel isolating, exclusive</p> <p>The group promotes confidence</p> <p>The group has made her feel less alone</p> <p>Being spoken to is important</p>	<p>SENCO conference which has been cancelled now because nobody has any money (says it annoyingly) ... sometimes when we went to SENCO conferences it could be very isolated and people could be very cliquy and people wouldn't speak to you but if I'd have gone this year I'd have headed probably straight for those. I would be quite confident in the fact that I wouldn't have had to sit on my own or with some random person that I had never met. There would have</p>	<p>talking.</p> <p>Looking forward to being able to head for the SENCOs in the sessions this year</p> <p><i>Again reference to being alone</i></p> <p><i>Familiarity is a positive thing and the importance of speaking</i></p> <p><u>We built up relationships didn't we? It is clear that having trusting relationships with people she can count on is important to this SENCO but she still seems to lack a little confidence – didn't we?</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Building relationships is important – social support networks</p>	<p>been familiar faces there that I know would have actually spoken to me (pause) cos we built up relationships didn't we?</p> <p><i>How important is it to you I mean I am getting a sense I mean this feeling of isolation</i></p> <p>Oh yes absolutely</p> <p><i>But um how important is it that you develop those relationships and you meet other people. Why is that important? Why is that important to you?</i></p>	

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Knowing others have similar experiences</p> <p>Reciprocal nature of the need to talk</p> <p>Importance of means of contact</p> <p>Having a number of different places to take a problem if</p>	<p>Because I just like to know there are other people out there that go through the same things that I do that have the same problems I do. That people I can call upon if I need to talk or people that can call upon ME (emphasis) if they feel like they need to talk something through. That they are like you know it's so and so and you know even if it's just through email or something like that it's another port of call if you are sick of going round it in your head –</p>	<p>She likes to know others go through the <i>same</i> things, the <i>same</i> problems. So the importance of experiencing the same things and importance of reciprocity in a relationship - in the <i>need to talk</i>.</p> <p><i>Repetition of need and talk.</i></p> <p>Reference to alternative ways of contacting others</p> <p>Another port of call – where else she can take her problem</p> <p><i>Sick of going round it in your head – again reference to being stuck –</i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>stuck</p> <p>Feelings without support – stress, not understood, pressure builds</p> <p>Heavy workload</p>	<p>it's like someone else's opinion</p> <p><i>Ok and what would happen if you didn't have that I guess that you haven't had that and now it has been introduced what you say it was like then compared to now what's the implications of not having that on you</i></p> <p>You'd end up feeling very stressed (pause) ummm I just you feel no one understands you you can't talk to anybody so you just bottle it all up you just wade through mass of paper work and</p>	<p><i>going round in circles.</i></p> <p>She felt stressed before, because she didn't feel understood or <i>can't talk to anybody</i> <u>So she felt prevented from talking? She <i>can't talk to anybody.</i></u></p> <p>She <i>bottled it up</i> and it had no where to do – so the pressure</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Feeling alone</p> <p>The need for empathy and encouragement</p> <p>A question of survival</p>	<p>mass of SEN stuff without anybody saying look we know how hard it is you know you'll be fine</p> <p><i>Ummm</i></p> <p>That's all I want to know at the end of the day that I'll be OK and come out of the other side alive (laughs then coughs)</p> <p><i>OK so we talked about how you felt before during and after sessions and then my next</i></p>	<p>increased – hence <i>stressed</i>.</p> <p><i>She waded through the mass of paperwork and SEN stuff without anybody empathising or encouraging/supporting her. <u>So again it seems empathy and encouragement is what she needs.</u></i></p> <p><i>That's all I want to know in the end – that I'll be OK and come out the other side alive. <u>She jokingly talks about a life and death situation, but it is clearly a very stressful one. Her dream is to be OK – with a pulse! So she doesn't even hope that the situation is good – it's enough that she is OK. Does this SENCO experience any job satisfaction?</u></i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Importance of continuing to meet</p> <p>Frequency of meeting</p> <p>Commitments in school</p>	<p><i>question was gonna be can you tell me if you have had any thoughts about any future arrangements for meeting with the group and how it's viable.</i></p> <p>Umm I would like to continue I would like to maybe not on a fortnightly basis because I think sometimes it too its harder to fit in because obviously in a primary school we have lots of other commitments and it can be a bit of a pain cos obviously the last one I had parents that didn't turn</p>	<p>She wants sessions to continue once a month. Any more than that would be a <i>bit of a pain</i> because it is hard to fit in with all the other commitments in primary schools.</p> <p><i>Twice mentions once a month as the frequency with which sessions should take place.</i> First mentions <i>hard</i> in relationship to fortnightly, now <i>easier</i> once a month</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>After school as a time to meet</p> <p>Work load</p> <p>Getting out of school is nice</p>	<p>up and things and it's just like great um but once a month it's easier to fit into each other's schedules even if the night has to change or</p> <p><i>What do you think about timings of sessions after school?</i></p> <p>I think the timings were fine – cos we got there at 3.45 and finished about 5.15 I think an hour and a half is enough</p> <p><i>Um I mean what do you think about the possibility of group</i></p>	<p>After school is fine – no more than one and a half hours</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>The session as work</p> <p>Timing linked to freedom of speech</p>	<p><i>consultation taking place in the school day</i></p> <p>Errm thinking about everything else I have to do after school is nicer especially if you are going into a different school it is nice to have a change of scenery</p> <p><i>Do you feel though with it being after school that it is something extra that you have to do rather than being a part of your job?</i></p> <p>No I see it as part of my job and I think because it's after school I</p>	<p><i>Second reference to work load and fitting it in. Nicer after school.</i></p> <p><i>nice to have a change of scenery. <u>Does this imply that it's not nice to be stuck in the same building all day?</u></i></p> <p>She sees the session as part of her job but feels she can be more open at the end of the school day</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Differentiation between my time, schools time. The session is for me</p>	<p>may be more open to talking freely than I would if it was part of my school day</p> <p><i>Yeh why would you be feeling like you would be able to speak more freely at that time?</i></p> <p>Because sometimes I would be home at that time so it's my time it's not schools time cos school only pay me to 4 o clock so after that I can say what I like. Does that make sense?</p> <p><i>Yeh but don't you also feel that</i></p>	<p>She feels she can more open at the end of the school day because <i>it's her time</i> so she can say <i>what she likes</i> <u>So again I am sensing that this SENCO feels very restricted in speaking in school which means there is a lack of freedom of speech and the sessions give her a voice</u></p> <p><u>Interesting that she sees the session as part of her job but wants it to</u></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>After school is preferred</p> <p>The session as different to school</p> <p>Freedom of choice</p>	<p><i>it's</i></p> <p>I understand why some people would like it as part of the school day so they can maybe do something after school but I am quite happy to have it at the end of the day and then it's something different to school</p> <p><i>Mmm but does it feel then that it's not a part of the job but it's something um that you have to do almost like a hobby?</i></p> <p>No it's not something I have to do</p>	<p><u>take place in her time. Why? Too much to do but is still willing to give up her time for it?</u></p> <p>Understands that others may want to do other things after school but it is still different to school for this SENCO and she would be happy with this timing.</p>



Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Further applications of the session</p> <p>Group size as important</p>	<p><i>In the light of what you've said about how it's important for SENCOs to meet and not feel isolated and have the support networks. Do you feel that it is an essential thing for teaching staff or for SENCOs?</i></p> <p>No no no I think it is can be useful for lots of people cos I'm sure people in other subjects have their own issues and things somebody said they went to one as part of a secondary school but I do think the groups need to be</p>	<p>She sees the application for this for all teachers</p> <p>But thinks the groups need to be small <i>twice mentions small and also uses the word intimate</i>. No more than 10 in a group – it would loose</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Trust builds faster in a smaller group</p> <p>Honesty and transparency important</p> <p>Group size linked to</p>	<p>small and need to be quite small and quite intimate I know I said the group needed to be big but if you've got kind of any more than 10 people you would lose some of the ... it would be very hard to get to know 10 people quite well. I just think the smaller the group the quicker the trust would build up and the quicker people will start to be honest and transparent the things you need to be to be able to do this</p> <p><i>Yeh</i></p>	<p><i>something <u>It would loose the intimacy?</u> It would be hard to know more than 10 people well. A smaller group is important for <i>trust, honesty and transparency</i> – all <i>needed</i> in order for it to work</i></p> <p>The problem of inviting secondary schools and all their feeder schools is she won't want to talk about her problems in a larger</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
talking	<p>You see if you've got a secondary school and all it's feeder schools you could have 15 feeder schools you could have 17 people I wouldn't want to sit in front of a room of 17 people and talk about all my problems</p> <p><i>I'm interested a bit more in this notion of choice and having to do it and I think choice is essential. I am also thinking about how teachers and SENCOs in your role might feel more supported and less stressed so this was a</i></p>	<p>group. <i>Again reference to group size</i></p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>My time, schools time</p> <p>Mental health issues (shut off and safety)</p> <p>Travelling distance</p>	<p><i>way of maybe doing that and putting the group together, but I was wondering if you should be expected to do that in your own time. That's what I was kind of getting at or whether</i></p> <p>Yeh but it's not really my own time my own time really comes after half past five.</p> <p><i>Right OK</i></p> <p>So I don't really shut off till later in the night anyway. So the fact that I have to go somewhere till</p>	<p>A contradiction here – earlier she said after 4pm it's her time now she is saying it <i>really comes</i> after 5.30pm</p> <p>And links this to when she is able to <i>shut off</i> - in fact she says she</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>to session as an issue</p>	<p>5.15 isn't an issue for me. Cos as well I mean I live in this catchment so all the schools are within 5 minutes of me getting home. XXXX is round the corner as is XXXX where we are tomorrow. So for me it's not an issue maybe the people that live further away that have travelling issues maybe they would say differently.</p> <p><i>So just taking your point about it being an area that is quite condensed and close is that so</i></p>	<p>doesn't shut off till later in the night. So she is paid till 4 but unable to shut off till later in the night so group sessions after school <i>isn't an issue</i></p> <p>Further the fact that she lives so close to the other schools – they are <i>round the corner</i> means it's not an issue for her but she accepts it may be different for those who live further away</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
<p>Shorter travelling time is more appealing</p>	<p><i>you think it's good that the SENCOs who meet don't have far to travel and live in the same area.</i></p> <p>Yeh if I had to travel across town for 3.45 I'd have to leave at 3pm and sometimes hit and miss make it whereas if I know I've only got 10 mins to go to xxxx its quite simple it's just you're more inclined to want to go</p> <p><i>Yeh yeh</i></p> <p>Whereas twilight sessions at the</p>	<p>She feels SENCOs will be more inclined to attend if they have a smaller distance to travel</p> <p>And compares this to twilight sessions at the XXX where she has to sit in traffic and this is problematic for her and again seems to be suggesting a lack of choice about it.</p>

Emergent Themes	Original Transcript	Exploratory Comments
	<p>village I just think God do I really have to sit on the xxxx</p> <p><i>OK is there anything else that you necessarily wanted to say</i></p> <p>No I think I've said everything</p> <p><i>OK thank you very much for taking part</i></p>	

## **Appendix VIII**

### **Generic interview questions**

#### At the start

Throughout this interview I am interested in you and your experiences. I value your openness and honesty and would like you to reflect critically. There are no right or wrong answers. I will say very little but this is because I am trying to get to grips with how you understand things. Please take your time in thinking and talking. I have carried out some prior analysis on your reflective logs and will be checking this out during the interview. Some of the questions may seem a little obvious but this is because I am trying to get more depth into what you think and feel.

#### The questions

1. Could you tell me about any further reflections of your experience of group consultation within a reflecting team that you may have had since we last met as a group?
2. What do you think about the way sessions were set up in the beginning?
3. Here are some questions I devised around themes that emerged from your reflective logs. Could you choose 3 to 4 questions that you would like to explore further now?
4. How did you feel before, during and after sessions?
5. Could you tell me if you have any thoughts about future arrangements for meeting with the group?

Prompts throughout

Why?

How?

Can you tell me more about what you were thinking?

How did you feel?

At the end

Thank participant for taking part.

## Appendix IX

### Personalised interview questions

#### Participant One

1. You wrote that you found session one 'extremely useful.' Can you tell me how the sessions were useful to you?
2. In session one you said you didn't feel trust and in session two you said the trust is beginning to build. Can you tell me a bit more about what trust means to you?
3. In session one you wrote that you were given confidence to talk to more senior members of staff and in session two you wrote that this process is beginning to give confidence to the whole group to tackle issues. Could you tell me how you were given more confidence?
4. You wrote in session one that everyone offered constructive feedback and opinions were aired without arrogance. Can you tell me more about what constructive feedback means to you?
5. In session one you wrote that the rules shared with us at the beginning of the session gave people a way into talking. How did they do this?
6. In session one you hoped the sessions would become a long term thing. How important is it to you that the sessions become a long term thing now?

7. In session two you wrote, 'it's interesting to be in a different role as a listener and reflector rather than a talker'. How did you feel in these different roles?
8. In session two you noticed that the speaker became more vocal and divulged more information as the session progressed. Can you tell me what you think about the difference in the way the speaker spoke about the problem as the session progressed?
9. In session two you said it made you think about people you have to deal with who make your life more difficult and how you could tackle issues. Can you tell me more about this?
10. In session two you wrote it made you realise you need to give up tackling a problem one way and get a different perspective to find a solution. Can you tell me what you think about the importance of hearing multiple perspectives?

### Participant two

1. In session one you wrote that you felt the whole process was really well structured and made reference to seating positions. Can you tell me more about what you think about this?
2. In session one you wrote that you felt sorry for the SENCO sat at the front as it was like we were interviewing her and in session two you wrote that you were pleased you decided to be in the 'hot seat'. Can you tell me how it feels to bring a problem to the group?

3. In session one you wrote that it was a brilliant way of allowing someone time, uninterrupted, to express their problem. In session two you mention that you (as the problem holder) found it difficult not to join in with conversations that the reflecting team were having. How important is uninterrupted time to you?
4. In session one you wrote that I asked unthreatening questions. Can you tell me what unthreatening means to you?
5. At one point during session one you wrote that you felt under pressure to speak in the reflecting team and didn't want to make it all about comparing your problems, but you didn't know what else to say. Can you tell me more about this?
6. In session one you wrote that the session gave the SENCO confidence to speak to her head teacher. What do you think about this?
7. In session one you indicated the session structure provided a great way of staying on task and didn't become a moaning session. Can you tell me more about this?
8. In session two you mentioned people were more relaxed and knew their roles better. How do you think sessions evolved over time?
9. In session two you wrote that you felt happier to have shared your issue with a group of people who work in a similar role. How important is it that the reflecting team share a similar role to the problem holder in your view?

10. In session two you indicate it was useful to have clear outcomes and solutions. How important is it that the session is solution-focussed in your view?

### Participant three

1. In session one you mention it was a very positive experience. Can you tell me more about this?

2. In session one you say it helped the SENCO to feel empowered to go and make a change. How do you think the sessions are empowering?

3. In session one you mention that the SENCO wasn't alone. This may seem like an obvious question but why is it important not to feel alone?

4. You mention in session one that you will think carefully about what problem to bring to the group so you can get the best from it. Can you tell me why it is important for you to think carefully in order to get the best from it?

5. In session one you mention the reflection part was good to feed and develop ideas from others' about practice. Can you tell me more about why you think the reflection part was good?

6. In session one you wrote that although we could run the process as a group it was useful to have the Educational Psychologist there to bring the conversation back if it strayed. Could you tell me more about why it was useful to have the Educational Psychologist in the group?

7. In session one you say meeting other SENCO s was mutually agreed as useful. Why was it useful to meet other SENCOS for you?
8. In session three you wrote it would have been more useful had others been here. Can you tell me what you think about the number of people who attended the group sessions?
9. In session three you say even though we cut the timings down I still feel I would have achieved the same solutions. Can you tell me what you think about the structured timing of the session?
10. In session three you indicate that you gained increased commitment to the SENCO role and you realised you needed to be more confident. Can you tell me more about that?

#### Participant four

1. In session one you wrote it was extremely positive and worthwhile. Can you tell me more about this?
2. In session one you say as you are a new SENCO it was good to meet others. How important do you think it is for SENCOS of all levels of experience to attend these groups?
3. In session one you say that you realised others' experience similar situations to you and in session three you indicate that it can be difficult to understand others' situations as every school is different. How important is it for you that others' situations are similar or different?

4. In session one you say it was good to discuss possible solutions and ways forward together. In session three you say it's good to be given a range of solutions. Can you tell me more about what it means to you to discuss and be given solutions to problems?
5. In session one you said that hopefully as sessions continue links can be formed for help and advice. How important is it for you to form links for help and advice?
6. In session one you say the structure was easy to understand. What do you think about this?
7. In session three you say it's good to get others' views of the problems and how they would deal with them. 'New ideas'! Can you tell me more about this?
8. In session three you say it helped to build self-confidence and made you realise you are doing the best you can. How does the session do this?
9. In session four you wrote that you felt unable to help. Can you tell me more about that?
10. In session four you wrote it was hard when there was little time to discuss a complex problem. Could you tell me more about what you think about this?

## Participant five

1. In session one you mention it was difficult to speak out initially. How did you feel about this?
2. In session one you say it was good to hear problems and solutions. Why was this a good thing?
3. In session one you mention three times that it's good to know you are not alone. This may sound like an obvious question but why is it good to know you are not alone?
4. In session one you mention twice that the SENCO already had the solutions to her problems, but she didn't know how to go about it. Can you tell me more about this?
5. In session three you say it makes you think about positives and negatives of your own practice and gives you some time to reflect on the job. How important was this time to reflect for you?
6. In session two you say that the session gave other members of the group things to think about. Can you tell me more about this?
7. In session three you say it's good to find out what other SENCOs do in school. Why is this a good thing?
8. You say that session three was more useful than other sessions, because you could identify with the problem and it was more relevant to SENCOs. Why is it important to you that you can identify with the problem?

9. In session three you say you find it difficult remaining quiet when it's not your turn to speak. What do you think about this part of the Reflecting Team process?

10. In session four you wrote that you felt less useless. Can you tell me more about why you felt less useless?

11. In session four you wrote that you will try out some of the ideas. What did you think of the ideas?

12. In session four you wrote that it made you think of all the things you'd tried and failed. Can you tell me how this made you feel?

## **Appendix X**

### **Facilitator reflections on interviews**

#### Interview one

Line 62 the SENCO makes reference to my expectations. I was quite uncomfortable with this, but understand her point. At university we were given some guidance on reflective practice and this helped to inform my reflective logs. Yet, I didn't want to lead or direct the SENCOS' reflections in any way so chose not to give them training on writing reflectively. I hoped the reflections would be more inductive in this way, with experiences coming more from them (if they wanted to tell me how they felt then that's OK, if they wanted to tell me their thoughts that's OK). Indeed it would be interesting to explore other ways of reflecting (thoughts, feelings and behaviours are a very cognitive-behavioural mode of reflecting). SENCOS were struggled to write reflective logs but I provided minimal advice, endeavouring to keep the process as inductive as possible.

Lines 220-236 I was very surprised that the SENCO brought such a sensitive issue. I thought the SENCO was very brave and admired her honesty and openness in talking about her problem with a group of strangers (in session one). I think that honesty and openness are core values of mine and when I see somebody else displaying such qualities I feel more connected to them. Yet this feels judgemental to me (even if it is a positive judgement). Did the SENCO pick up on my feelings? I was concerned that her problem should stay in the room and that SENCOS keep confidentiality, yet pleased that a safe space appeared to have been created. Would I have used the term 'pleased' if I had not facilitated the group or been in the group at all? I felt very protective towards this SENCO and hoped that others didn't let her

down. As facilitator I felt a sense of responsibility to ensure that group matters were kept in the room.

Lines 332-341 – I moved on to a different subject too quickly (looking back on it). I think I may have been a little uncomfortable by the SENCOs comment of being ‘stamped on’ especially as we were sitting in her school quite near reception and I was conscious that staff may be able to hear what she was saying. I did mention to the SENCO that a different location may be better, but she insisted this location was OK and that others couldn’t hear. I couldn’t help feeling uncomfortable though, in a glass room in full sight of the reception area. Now looking back, I realise I am very interested in this notion of feeling ‘stamped on’ and her converse experience in the group; but would further questioning just have been promoting my agenda, giving more potency to the difference in power dynamics experienced between school and in the reflecting team? Analysis of the script, after the event, highlights areas for further questioning. Yet maybe one interview isn’t enough and maybe it is never enough; in a different time and space thoughts and feelings change so the reality is constructed in the here and now.

I realise now that at times during the interview I moved too quickly on from sensitive issues or at times pursued one avenue to the exclusion of others. I noticed that I moved on more quickly when the SENCO was trying to tell me something negative about the power dynamics in her school and feel this was primarily because of the location of the interview. Yet would this have answered my research question and to what extent is it ethical to move on from issues that are upsetting for a participant?

## Appendix XI

Table of sub-ordinate themes and emergent themes for participant one

Sub-ordinate theme and emergent theme	Line	Key phrase
<b>Trust is the Linch Pin</b>		
The group would fall apart without trust	428	I think it's the linchpin that holds it all together to be honest
Importance of honesty	280-281	You can't sit there and not give everybody the facts you've just got to tell them straight
Fear compromises trust	273-274	<p><i>And what do you think what sort of things might compromise that?</i></p> <p>Fear (laughs)</p>

Sub-ordinate theme and emergent theme	Line	Key phrase
It takes courage to build trust	126-128	If my boss heard me she wouldn't be very impressed with ... it took a lot of courage to be fair
Trust builds over time	246	I didn't know everyone I didn't trust them
Trust means maintaining confidentiality	262	If I lay it on the line it's not gonna leave the room
Trust facilitates freedom of speech	162-163	After the initial session we all relaxed we were a bit more freer with our talking

Sub-ordinate theme and emergent theme	Line	Key phrase
<b>The session promotes confidence</b>		
Talking builds confidence	39-41	I obviously spoke about a problem I had first and that kind of allowed me to get the confidence to approach people that I usually wouldn't have
The sessions develop confidence	14-17	You could see the difference in the way the speaker spoke about the subject - she started off quiet ... unsure of herself ... but as the session went along ...she became more vocal and divulged more information
<b>Lessons for the Reflecting Team</b>		
The importance of	7-8	Did not make me feel negative in any way. Opinions were aired without

<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b> and emergent theme	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
constructive feedback		arrogance
Don't be a log	292-293	Not saying nothing is just as ineffective as taking over
Don't be a hog	294	Saying too much is just as harmful as saying nothing
Advice is OK	238-239	If I've asked for opinions or want opinions I want you to tell me what you would do
Offer ideas and enthusiasm	24-28	I felt the session lacked ideas and enthusiasm ... I don't feel that I contributed anything useful to the discussion.
<b>Creating a safe space</b>		
The importance of sharing rules	8-10	The rules shared with us ... gave us a way into talking

Sub-ordinate theme and emergent theme	Line	Key phrase
Freedom to participate	514	If you have to do it, you won't want to
Expectations need to be clear	423-424	I was ... wary because I didn't know what to expect
Importance of a good set up	277-280	If you started something like this with new people ... and you got one of us who'd already been to quite a few sessions to go and talk to them
Give people time to share their problems	359-360	It must be really hard because they all think theirs is equally important
I can speak more freely if the session is for me	502-504	It's my time it's not schools time ... so that I can say what I like
Not feeling judged	110-112	They are impartial aren't they because they don't know me and they don't

<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b> and emergent theme	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
		know my school
More vulnerable in the beginning	115	It made it a little awkward to talk to start
<b>Sustainability of sessions</b>		
It needs to continue	317-318	Even now it's still important that it is an on-going process
Regular and frequent opportunities to get help	322-323	You would have the chance once a month to kind of sit down and say ... can you help me ...
Addressing issues sooner	339-340	Sometimes later's not good enough I need an answer now.
Continuation of trust and	443-444	I felt I could ring XXX up and talk to a SENCO there because I knew her from

<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b> and emergent theme	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
friendship		the sessions
After school as a time to meet	507-508	Quite happy to have it at the end of the school day
Frequency of meeting	482 -487	Not on a fortnightly basis ... but once a month it's easier
Travelling as an issue	553-554	If I know I've only got 10 mins to go to xxxx ... you're more inclined to want to go
<b>The importance of</b>		

Sub-ordinate theme and emergent theme	Line	Key phrase
<b>shared experiences to a SENCO</b>		
Importance of shared role	404-405	People in the same role (pause) it's important
Feeling less burdened	394-395	It just makes it feel better it makes you feel like you are not carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders
Suffering together	390-392	Knowing someone else is suffering the same, makes suffering ... a problem halved doesn't it?
A joint purpose	115-116	Then I kind of realised we were there for the same reason
Importance of knowing	399-401	The people that are listening to what I am saying they know all about the

Sub-ordinate theme and emergent theme	Line	Key phrase
the role		roles I have ... whereas talking to my friend here she doesn't have a clue
Importance of sharing the same problems	99	Thank God it's not just me!
Shared understanding	411	But I know they will instantly get
<b>Becoming unstuck</b>		
Hearing others when stuck	19-21	It made me realise that sometimes you need to give up tackling a problem one way and get a different perspective
The Sequential Discussion helps you become unstuck	297-297	I liked that because it meant you didn't just go round and round in circles

<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b> and emergent theme	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
Others help you to see	376-377	Sometimes you get so stuck in your own blinkered vision that you can't see everything else
It's good to know you have somewhere else to go	466	It's another port of call if you are sick of going round it in your head
<b>The importance of group size</b>		
Group size affects outcomes	155-156	If you've got a bigger group you've got more ideas you can take more from it
A smaller group is more intimate	526	It would be very hard to get to know 10 people quite well

<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b> and emergent theme	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
A smaller group has different dynamics	162-164	We all relaxed we were a bit more freer with our talking and there was a bit more banter and it was a bit more friendly
There is an optimum group size	525-526	If you've got kind of any more than 10 people you would lose some of the ...
<b>Lack of support in school</b>		
No reflective or team ethos	37	We're not really a very reflectively team school
Anger at unfair treatment	86-87	It makes me quite cross to be honest because there are other people in the school who get more than enough time ... and I don't
Feeling victimised	88	I always seem to be the one that suffers

Sub-ordinate theme and emergent theme	Line	Key phrase
Feeling unheard	338	People don't listen and dismiss it as rubbish
Heavy workload	472-473	You just wade through mass of paper work and mass of SEN stuff
Questioning survival	476-477	That's all I want to know at the end of the day that I'll be OK and come out of the other side alive
Impact on mental health	543	So I don't really shut off till later in the night anyway.
Getting out of school as a positive thing	494-495	Going into a different school it is nice to have a change of scenery
Lack of trust in leadership	90-91	And she's promised me release time and this that and the other ... But whether or not I'll get it? (raises eye brows)

Sub-ordinate theme and emergent theme	Line	Key phrase
<b>Feelings of isolation</b>		
Feeling excluded in the SENCO conference	449-450	It could be very isolated and people could be very cliquy and people wouldn't speak to you
Isolation in the role	414-415	I'm only one person here doing one role
The need for empathy and encouragement	472-474	You can't talk to anybody so you just bottle it all up ... without anybody saying look we know how hard it is you know you'll be fine
Difficulty in reflecting alone	46	It's quite hard to reflect on your own
Not wanting to be alone	1-3	The session ... gave me reassurance that ... I am not alone.
The importance of social	454-455	Cos we built up relationships didn't we?

Sub-ordinate theme and emergent theme	Line	Key phrase
support networks		
A lack of support leads to stress	471-472	You'd end up feeling very stressed ... you feel no one understands you
The group provides interdependence	462-464	People I can call upon if I need to talk or people that can call upon ME (emphasis) if they feel like they need to talk something through.
<b>The importance of talking</b>		
The opportunity to talk freely	148-149	I wouldn't have been able to talk freely in the school sessions ... glad everyone else didn't pick something else
The need to get the problem out	381	An experience to just get it off my chest

<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b> and emergent theme	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
The reciprocal nature of talk	462-464	That people I can call upon if I need to talk or people that can call upon ME (emphasis) if they feel like they need to talk something through.
<b>Celebrating difference</b>		
It's OK to be different	152-153	It's just there are more opinions and different ways of thinking and everybody thinks differently and every schools different for various different reasons
Adapting in the face of difference	229-230	We are all learners at the end of the day and we have to learn new techniques
Different opinions help with issues	375-376	Different views on the problem, different ways to tackle it, alternative views to your own
<b>The value of role models</b>		

<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b> and emergent theme	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
Role models set expectations	66-68	I would have liked to have seen an example of a reflective log ...just so I kind of knew what you expected
Role models can help to build trust	260-261	I feel that this was the trust thing that links back to mine
<b>Issues around solutions</b>		
Taking personal responsibility as a solution	78-80	Whereas kind of going to that made me see that ... if I don't sort it out nothing happens

Sub-ordinate theme and emergent theme	Line	Key phrase
Solutions are practical	365-366	I needed the kick up the bum that said actually you need to go and talk to your head otherwise this will never get sorted
Answers aren't always the most important thing	388-389	It wouldn't matter if I didn't get any answers it would just be even just people saying I know how you feel
<b>The Reflecting Team as theatre</b>		
Difficulty in not interacting with the	106-107	It was really hard sometimes not to talk to them because they are obviously

<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b> and emergent theme	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
audience		watching you as an audience as we are having a discussion as a pair
Public self and private self	123-125	In front of a class of children it's easy to stand there and put an act on but it's very hard to do that in front of a group of adults so you almost feel a bit vulnerable.
<b>Challenging stereotypes</b>		
The potential for sessions to challenge negative stereotypes	181-184	A primary schools perception of what a secondary school does with SEN children is quite negative ... it would have be nice to kind of had that opinion changed maybe
Challenging negative stereotypes makes you	194	It might have made me relax a bit more when the children are in y6

Sub-ordinate theme and emergent theme	Line	Key phrase
feel better		
<b>Aspects of listening</b>		
It's important to actively listen	269-270	Somebody in the group wasn't kind of taking on board what I was saying or wasn't listening properly I would clam up
Listening to what SENCOs want	142-143	I think it was set up really well I think that, you know, asking for our opinions first
Being a thinking listener helps to move a situation on	298-299	You had to process what had been said and think right how would I take it further

<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b> and emergent theme	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
Listening is a rare opportunity	432-434	I was actually quite looking forward to it because I knew I would get the chance to listen to someone else
Listening is liberating	332-333	You feel like your voice is heard in sessions like that rather than being ignored and stamped on
<b>Defining problems</b>		
The problems can be very big	352-354	Whereas the next time we have one in September I might have a MASSIVE (emphasis) if we have one in September I'll have a massive issue so yeh
The size of the problem determines whether it's addressed	346-348	... or it'll be so weak that it's not really an issue and we'll be done in ten minutes. I don't think it should be done on a turn taking basis I think it should work on ...

<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b> and emergent theme	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
The idiosyncratic nature of people and their problems	215-216	because they had a particular problem with a particular person in school

## Appendix XII

### Themes for participant one

<b>Super-ordinate theme: I Felt Safe</b>			
<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key Phrase</b>
Trust is the linch-pin	The group would fall apart without trust	428	I think it's the linchpin that holds it all together to be honest
	Importance of honesty	280-281	You can't sit there and not give everybody the facts you've just got to tell them straight
	It takes courage to build trust	126-128	If my boss heard me she wouldn't be very impressed with ... it took a lot of courage to be fair
	Trust builds over time	246	I didn't know everyone I didn't trust them

<b>Super-ordinate theme: I Felt Safe</b>			
<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key Phrase</b>
	Trust means maintaining confidentiality	262	If I lay it on the line it's not gonna leave the room
	Trust facilitates freedom of speech	162-163	After the initial session we all relaxed we were a bit more freer with our talking
	Role models can help to build trust	260-261	I feel that this was the trust thing that links back to mine
I felt contained with increased familiarity	The importance of sharing rules	8-10	The rules shared with us ... gave us a way into talking
	Expectations need to be clear	423-424	I was ... wary because I didn't know what to expect
	Importance of a good set up	277-280	If you started something like this with new people ... and you got one of us who'd already been to quite a few sessions to go and talk to

<b>Super-ordinate theme: I Felt Safe</b>			
<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key Phrase</b>
			them
	A smaller group is more intimate	526	It would be very hard to get to know 10 people quite well
	There is an optimum group size	525-526	If you've got kind of any more than 10 people you would lose some of the ...
	A smaller group has different dynamics	162-164	We all relaxed we were a bit more freer with our talking and there was a bit more banter and it was a bit more friendly
	More vulnerable in the beginning	115	It made it a little awkward to talk to start
I felt a sense of equality and respect	It's important to actively listen	269-270	Somebody in the group wasn't kind of taking on board what I was saying or wasn't

<b>Super-ordinate theme: I Felt Safe</b>			
<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key Phrase</b>
			listening properly I would clam up
	Listening to what SENCOs want	142-143	I think it was set up really well I think that, you know, asking for our opinions first
	Listening is liberating	332-333	You feel like your voice is heard in sessions like that rather than being ignored and stamped on
	Don't be a log	292-293	Not saying nothing is just as ineffective as taking over
	Don't be a hog	294	Saying too much is just as harmful as saying nothing
	The opportunity to talk freely	148-149	I wouldn't have been able to talk freely in the school sessions ... glad everyone

<b>Super-ordinate theme: I Felt Safe</b>			
<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key Phrase</b>
			else didn't pick something else
I didn't feel judged	The importance of constructive feedback	7-8	Did not make me feel negative in any way. Opinions were aired without arrogance
	Not feeling judged	110-112	They are impartial aren't they because they don't know me and they don't know my school

<b>Super-ordinate theme: I felt a sense of belonging</b>			
<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
I felt a shared sense of identity	Importance of shared role	404-405	People in the same role (pause) it's important

<b>Super-ordinate theme: I felt a sense of belonging</b>			
<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
	Feeling less burdened	394-395	It just makes it feel better it makes you feel like you are not carrying the weight of the world on your shoulders
	Suffering together	390-392	Knowing someone else is suffering the same, makes suffering ... a problem halved doesn't it?
	A joint purpose	115-116	Then I kind of realised we were there for the same reason
	Importance of knowing the role	399-401	The people that are listening to what I am saying they know all about the roles I have ... whereas talking to my friend here she doesn't have

<b>Super-ordinate theme: I felt a sense of belonging</b>			
<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
			a clue
	Importance of sharing the same problems	99	Thank God it's not just me!
	Shared understanding	411	But I know they will instantly get
I felt less isolated	Feeling excluded in the SENCO conference	449-450	It could be very isolated and people could be very cliquey and people wouldn't speak to you
	Isolation in the role	414-415	I'm only one person here doing one role
	The need for empathy and encouragement	472-474	You can't talk to anybody so you just bottle it all up ... without anybody saying look we know how hard it is you

<b>Super-ordinate theme: I felt a sense of belonging</b>			
<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
			know you'll be fine
I felt supported (restoratively)	The importance of social support networks	454-455	Cos we built up relationships didn't we?
	The group provides interdependence	462-464	People I can call upon if I need to talk or people that can call upon ME (emphasis) if they feel like they need to talk something through.
	A lack of support leads to stress	471-472	You'd end up feeling very stressed ... you feel no one understands you
	Surviving the job	476-477	That's all I want to know at the end of the day that I'll be OK and come out of the other side alive

<b>Super-ordinate theme: I felt a sense of belonging</b>			
<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
	The need to get the problem out	381	An experience to just get it off my chest

<b>Super-ordinate theme: I valued the process</b>			
<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
I felt empowered	Talking builds confidence	39-41	I obviously spoke about a problem I had first and that kind of allowed me to get the confidence to approach people that I usually wouldn't have
	The sessions develop confidence	14-17	You could see the difference in the way the speaker spoke about the subject - she started off quiet ... unsure of herself

<b>Super-ordinate theme: I valued the process</b>			
<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
			... but as the session went along ...she became more vocal and divulged more information
Unusual process	Difficulty in not interacting with the audience	106-107	It was really hard sometimes not to talk to them because they are obviously watching you as an audience as we are having a discussion as a pair
	Public self and private self	123-125	In front of a class of children it's easy to stand there and put an act on but it's very hard to do that in front of a group of adults so you almost feel a bit

<b>Super-ordinate theme: I valued the process</b>			
<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
			vulnerable.
I experienced issues around the problem brought	The problems can be very big	352-354	Whereas the next time we have one in September I might have a MASSIVE (emphasis) if we have one in September I'll have a massive issue so yeh
	The size of the problem determines whether it's addressed	346-348	... or it'll be so weak that it's not really an issue and we'll be done in ten minutes. I don't think it should be done on a turn taking basis I think it should work on ...
	The idiosyncratic nature of people and their problems	215-216	because they had a particular problem with a

<b>Super-ordinate theme: I valued the process</b>			
<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
			particular person in school
	Give people time to share their problems	359-360	It must be really hard because they all think theirs is equally important
Solutions aren't the most important thing	Solutions aren't the most important thing	388-389	It wouldn't matter if I didn't get any answers, it would just be, even just people saying I know how you feel

<b>Super-ordinate theme: I had an opportunity to reflect</b>			
<b>Sub-ordinate theme</b>	<b>Emergent theme</b>	<b>Line</b>	<b>Key phrase</b>
I valued listening to multiple perspectives	Hearing others when stuck	19-21	It made me realise that sometimes you need to give up tackling a problem one way and get a different

			perspective
	The sequential discussion helps you become unstuck	297-297	I liked that because it meant you didn't just go round and round in circles
	Others help you to see	376-377	Sometimes you get so stuck in your own blinkered vision that you can't see everything else
	It's good to know you have somewhere else to go	466	It's another port of call if you are sick of going round it in your head
	It's OK to be different	152-153	It's just there are more opinions and different ways of thinking and everybody thinks differently and every schools different for various different reasons
	Adapting in the face of	229-230	We are all learners at the end of the day and we have to

	difference		learn new techniques
	Different opinions help with issues	375-376	Different views on the problem, different ways to tackle it, alternative views to your own
	Group size affects outcomes	155-156	If you've got a bigger group you've got more ideas you can take more from it
I appreciated the time and space for reflection	No reflective or team ethos	37	We're not really a very reflectively team school
	Addressing issues sooner	339-340	Sometimes later's not good enough I need an answer now.
	Lack of trust in leadership	90-91	And she's promised me release time and this that and the other ... But whether or not I'll get it? (raises eye brows)

	Difficulty in reflecting alone	46	It's quite hard to reflect on your own
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## Appendix XIII

### Prevalence of sub-ordinate themes across SENCOS

Sub-ordinate theme (key words)	Number of times sub-ordinate theme arises across SENCOS	Senco One	Senco Two	Senco Three	Senco Four	Senco Five
Confidence	5	√	√	√	√	√
Shared experiences	5	√	√	√	√	√
Isolation	5	√	√	√	√	√
Talk	5	√	√	√	√	√
Trust	5	√	√	√	√	√
Sustainability	4	√	√	√	√	
Group size	4	√		√	√	√
Need for support	4	√	√	√	√	
Nature of problems	4	√	√		√	√
Power/leadership	4		√	√	√	√

<b>Sub-ordinate theme (key words)</b>	<b>Number of times sub-ordinate theme arises across SENCOS</b>	<b>Senco One</b>	<b>Senco Two</b>	<b>Senco Three</b>	<b>Senco Four</b>	<b>Senco Five</b>
The importance of structure	4		√	√	√	√
Timing	4		√	√	√	√
Reflective practice	4		√	√	√	√
Need for solutions?	4	√	√		√	√
Multiple perspectives	3			√	√	√
Issues around listening	3	√	√		√	
RT as theatre	2	√	√			
Need for empathy	2			√	√	
Equality in the group	2				√	√

<b>Sub-ordinate theme (key words)</b>	<b>Number of times sub-ordinate theme arises across SENCOS</b>	<b>Senco One</b>	<b>Senco Two</b>	<b>Senco Three</b>	<b>Senco Four</b>	<b>Senco Five</b>
Session as useful	2		√	√		
Need for relaxation	2		√	√		
Getting unstuck	2	√			√	
Lessons for the RT	2	√	√			
Advice giving	2			√	√	
Improves practice	2		√		√	
Celebrating difference	1	√				
Role models	1	√				
Challenging stereotypes	1	√				
Room layout	1		√			
The self in the	1		√			

<b>Sub-ordinate theme (key words)</b>	<b>Number of times sub-ordinate theme arises across SENCOS</b>	<b>Senco One</b>	<b>Senco Two</b>	<b>Senco Three</b>	<b>Senco Four</b>	<b>Senco Five</b>
problem						
Unconditional Positive regard	1		√			
Session as captivating	1		√			
Session as empowering	1			√		
Need for supervision	1			√		
Session as motivating	1			√		
The need for clarity	1			√		
Session as positive	1				√	

<b>Sub-ordinate theme (key words)</b>	<b>Number of times sub-ordinate theme arises across SENCOS</b>	<b>Senco One</b>	<b>Senco Two</b>	<b>Senco Three</b>	<b>Senco Four</b>	<b>Senco Five</b>
experience						
Level of experience	1				√	
Frustration in the session	1				√	
Freedom of speech	1				√	
Group dynamics	1				√	
Need for knowledge	1				√	
Role conflict	1				√	
Who brings the problem?	1				√	
Locating the answer	1					√
Professional role in	1					√

<b>Sub-ordinate theme (key words)</b>	<b>Number of times sub-ordinate theme arises across SENCOS</b>	<b>Senco One</b>	<b>Senco Two</b>	<b>Senco Three</b>	<b>Senco Four</b>	<b>Senco Five</b>
team						
Negative feelings	1					√
Need for familiarity	1					√
Need to make a difference	1					√
Issues around SEN	1					√