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Teaching Grandmothers to Suck Eggs? Discourses On Gender and Inclusion in Non Maintained Early Years Settings

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ABSTRACT

This small scale qualitative case study explores the experience of being a special educational needs coordinator (Senco) in a non maintained early years setting*. It is based on interviews with fifteen women pre school workers and on observations made both in their places of work and throughout the course of a training programme they attended with the author. Located within a social constructivist paradigm, grounded theory techniques are employed to explore the Sencos' understanding of their role and their approach to working with children with special needs.

The results of the study indicate that the gendered nature of childcare work, combined with limited access to the dominant discourse of the 'Code of Practice'(DfES, 2001) has led to a different, gendered approach to working with children with special educational needs, which has much in common with inclusive practice.

The study concludes that this inclusive practice has evolved over time due to the gendered nature of childcare work and the previous lack of external support. The transition from being classified as care settings to being education settings is identified as a threat to this practice though, due to a wider misunderstanding of the non maintained sector and to the Sencos' lack of confidence in the value of their own practice.

Following in the tradition of Hollway (1989) and Taylor (1996) the study is presented as a dynamic piece of work in which the methodology is not constrained to a single chapter, but evolves alongside of the project. As such questions of methodology appear throughout the study and the reader is invited to engage not only with the final product but also in the research process itself.

* Non maintained early years settings are taken to mean settings other than schools which provide early years education, for example Private day nurseries, Playgroups and Pre-schools. These settings can be further divided into two groups - those that have opted to become government funded providers of early years education (NEF) and those that operate outside of this system. Settings opting to be NEF funded must fulfil a number of criteria including undertaking Ofsted inspections, delivering the Foundation Stage Curriculum and having heed to the Code of Practice. All settings involved in this study were NEF funded non maintained settings.

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APPENDIX 1

INTRODUCTION

WHY HERE? WHY NOW?

This chapter introduces the main area of study and how the project came to be located in this field. In addition to this, a rationale is given for the dynamic nature of the study and an explanation given for some of the process techniques employed.
The reader is also introduced in this chapter to the type face that is used throughout the study to denote personal reflections and musings.

Why here? Why now?

The story I am about to tell describes an investigation in to the world of special needs and non maintained early years provision.

To set the scene, much of my teaching career involved working with children in the early years with my interests pertaining largely to issues of curriculum and the management and implementation of a child centred pedagogy. The philosophy and practice I encountered in the early years seemed intuitively right for all children, not just those in the pre school phase. Furthermore, I began to realise that the way in which nursery education was structured and conceptualised offered huge potential for the inclusion of children with special needs.

Despite this, differences in philosophy and practice between myself and colleagues working with older children in school led to an uneasy relationship. I was engulfed in the general misunderstanding of the value of early education and the marginalisation of those working with such young children.

> "Children under 3 (but usually up to the age of 5) used to be omitted from discussions of educational standards – assumed cared for at home or that carers or practitioners were not concerned for teaching them"
> Hurst, 1997, p.xii

This marginalisation was typified by the lack of a definitive term to describe the particular phase of education I was working in. The terms nursery, pre-school and kindergarten were used interchangeably to describe what happened to children before they commenced 'proper school'. There was also a key split between early years education which was seen as taking place largely within school nurseries, and 'day care' which was seen to be offered in settings other than schools.

On my return to the field some four years later, in my role as Educational Psychologist, I witnessed a startling transformation. The term 'Early Years' had become widely used to describe the period of care and education offered to children between the ages of 0 – 5 (although perhaps more commonly used to describe children between the ages of 3 – 5) and had broadened to encompass not only school based nurseries, but also a range of other settings such as private day nurseries, playgroups and child minders.

A legislative framework had been put in place to enable such non maintained early years settings to apply to become 'validated providers' of early years education as well as childcare. I was struck by the rapid increase in the number of early years providers and the way in which the full day care service many settings were able to offer meant that children with special needs would no longer be catered for exclusively in LEA settings. In my role as Educational Psychologist I might now find myself working across a range of settings with a whole new echelon of Early Years workers.

Whilst previously having seen myself as something of an early years 'expert', I was stunned to realise how limited my experience was. What did I actually know about the non maintained settings? How could I begin to deliver educational psychology services to this sector ? How did Sencos in such settings work? This was a world I really knew very little about. Thus the focus of the study was born - to investigate the experience of Sencos in non maintained early years settings.

*   *   *

To stop here would be to tell only part of the story though. Reason and Marshall (2001) suggest that good research is based on an expression of a need to change or to shift some aspect of one's self (p.415). As this somewhat lengthy extract from my research diary demonstrates, there was also a degree of personal motivation in undertaking the project:

"Had my tutorial with Tom yesterday. His response to my literature review was in essence 'fine but very dull'. It's written at a level that would be acceptable and provides a thorough and logical analysis of the situation, and as such forms an acceptable literature review - but it's not his thing and he's not particularly interested in supervising it. He suggested that maybe, if I wanted to continue in that vein, I would be better being supervised by one of the other tutors.

But I've already been there. As far as I can remember, I've been writing in this style, and I've never been challenged about it. That's nothing against the tutors I've worked with in the past, they've just never really had much to add, and because I'm very self motivated, I've just been left to get on with it.

But I've never really known what it is that I'm doing that makes it OK. Why is my writing suitable for M.Ed / M.Sc / Ed.D? It's just been a stab in the dark. When one of the new doctorate students asked me if the standard of work was higher, I replied that I didn't know - I'd just done what I'd always done and it had been acceptable.

Thinking back, when I started my B. Ed, for most of the time I only scraped by - my marks were low average. But then suddenly they changed and my marks went up to well above average. What happened? Why did things change? - What did I start doing differently? It suddenly hit me - that was when I started to become more politically aware - the poll tax, anti apartheid, Clause 28 all became part of who I was. This illustrated a shift in the way I viewed the world. I had stopped accepting that politicians and those in authority were always right and begun to question. Things were no longer taken at face value and accepted. Assumptions were questioned. This became part of me and my day to day existence.

This critical stance represents in essence a move towards social constructivist thinking. The accepted 'truth' or 'reality' doesn't have to be the only one - there's more to it than that. Going back to my B.Ed work, the gradual introduction of a critical element into the work changed it from borderline to a good academic standard (too late in my case - I came out with a poor 2.2!). This awareness of the need to recognise and deal with different views of reality spurred my interest in and awareness of qualitative research approaches. Although I wasn't aware of it, it was this level of critical thinking that got me through my M.Ed and M.Sc.

But my feeling is that doing the Ed.D should somehow be qualitatively different. I want to be challenged - I don't want it to be just the same as my M.Ed and M.Sc where I'm patted on the head and told that it's very good. So when Tom suggested that I go back to one of the other tutors, I was affronted.

I WANT MORE THAN THAT.

At the same time, I am scared. What if I can't do what I'm trying to do? I don't have a route map and I am going into uncharted waters. Getting by with my current level of thinking has been very comfortable, which is good for me - I find criticism hard to take, and my vulnerable self-esteem doesn't take kindly to risk taking. Trying to do something different will leave me feeling very exposed.

Writing as I've always written, I am in control - I know roughly the workload I am committing myself to and can gauge the time commitment I need to make to achieve that. Trying to do something different, I will no longer have that control - I won't be in the driving seat.

Developing a critical (questioning) stance has taken me to the basic level for academic work, but to achieve that higher plane, it will need to permeate the whole of my philosophy and practice. That will affect both the planning of my work, the way in which I conceptualise the research process, how I collect and analyse the data and how I present it. It will include thinking around the relationship between researcher, research subjects and the nature of the research itself.

In essence it's a meta-cognitive approach to the research process. It's learning about the learning that I'm doing. It's seeing and verbalising the processes that are in operation in my own mind. It's what Holliday (2002) describes as 'showing the workings'. With work I've done before, the 'workings' have been in my head - I've been (more or less) aware of the issues of power etc., but I haven't known what to do about them or how to make them explicit in what I'm doing. Maybe this is where my work this time becomes qualitatively different." Dissertation Journal 6/10/02

Thus, the dissertation tells two stories. Firstly there is the scholarly investigation into the experience of Sencos in non maintained early years settings. Equally, there is my story - the story of the struggle to evolve and develop as a researcher.

Presenting such a dual story has not been easy. In traditional positivistic research, such a human presence would be viewed as unscientific and as detracting from the value of the work. Within the social constructivist paradigm however, there is greater recognition of the difficulties of remaining 'outside' of one's research (Willig, 2001). The way in which the researcher structures the project and the way in which s/he

constructs meaning from the data will all reflect his/her underlying value structures.

Rather than trying to ignore or minimise the voice of the researcher, Taylor (1996) suggests that the presence of the researcher should be made more explicit and open to examination by the reader. The term 'personal reflexivity' is used to describe the process of reflecting upon the way in which the researcher's own values, experiences, interests and beliefs have shaped the research process and vice versa (Holliday, 2002). Burman (1996) argues that acknowledging subjectivity in this way allows for a more honest account of the research subject, as it allows more accountability for the subjective resources that structure both the research process and ensuing reports.

Thus my presence in the study can be justified in terms of reflexivity. Here in this opening chapter, I introduce myself. This is me and this is how I come to the research context. Disclosing personal values and assumptions in this way will allow readers to experience the research through my eyes, and make their own judgements about the interpretations I make. Exposing readers to the messiness of the process (Taylor, 1996) and inviting them to share in the unfolding story allows this process to take place.

Beyond this, Taylor (1996) suggests that:

> "Many traditional academic social science projects are written up in such a way as to reinforce scientific paradigms of idealised research practice. Such pieces of work exclude the failures, the difficulties, the learning as you go along and above all 'what happened'." p.108

To me, the process of carrying out the research and the personal development that has taken place throughout the project has been of equal importance to the subject body of the study. The second, more human story charts both the highs and the lows of the research process:

"Yahoo! I feel really elated, excited and enthused to get on with my dissertation..." Dissertation Journal 6/6/03

"I've sat on the sitting room floor now for three nights running, surrounded in a sea of paper and I still feel totally lost. I can't get my direction and I'm starting to panic..." Dissertation Journal 3/6/03

As well as contributing to the personal reflexivity embedded in the study, engaging the reader in such a personal journey invites an emotional attachment and allows the reader to share in and experience the human story of an emergent researcher.

As such the work is typified by an alternation between academic and personal reflection. Many chapters are prefaced by a personal statement concerning the production of that particular section. Within the body of two of the chapters there is a dual element demonstrating emerging thoughts and understanding. Different typefaces have been used throughout the study to demonstrate this process element.

As Reason & Marshall (2001) comment:

"The intellectual competence required for non traditional forms of research is particularly problematic, because it involves the skill of stepping outside of the framework of one's own thinking" p.417

As a researcher this has certainly been true. Finding an appropriate way of representing the work and the underlying processes has not been easy.

"I feel as though I'm going through the pain barrier with my dissertation at the moment. I feel all out at sea. I keep thinking 'oh, can't I just take a term off?' But I know it wouldn't get any easier. I've just got to grit my teeth and get on with it." Dissertation Journal 2/6/03

In exposing myself in this way and inviting readers to share in my journey, I feel very vulnerable. To me, the struggle has been worthwhile. My hope is that the reader will draw a similar conclusion.
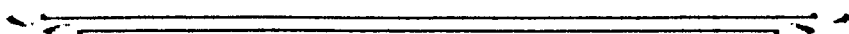
CHAPTER ONE

SETTING THE SCENE

Combining extracts from the three subsidiary data categories* ('Working Conditions', 'Working with Children' and 'Staffing Issues') this chapter provides a vivid insight into the actual context of the research, for those unfamiliar with the non maintained sector.

* For a full explanation of the term subsidiary category please see page 85

SETTING THE SCENE

Welcome to the World of Non Maintained Early Years Provision

Physical Conditions

The settings visited ranged from privately run day nurseries, to playgroups and included crèches and work place nurseries. The differences and distinctions between these categories seemed very subtle and at times confusing:

> "It's hard to know what the distinction is between the various settings. Pre School / Playgroup /Private day nursery. I'm not clear about what the technical difference is." Observation Notes, Setting 6

> "It's been here nearly 40 years. It started off as a little nursery school only open in the mornings. When I got it 14 years ago, we started opening in the afternoon. It's only 4 years since we became a day nursery. " Senco 9

The geographic location of the settings spanned both inner city and rural suburbs of a northern city. Settings seemed to be scattered randomly across the district.

> "The nursery is in a small, converted end terrace that has seen better days. Getting my things together in the car before the interview, I hear angry voices down the street. A man is shouting at a little boy (toddler), threatening to leave him if he doesn't come out of the house straight away. I feel quite uneasy getting out of the car..." Observation Notes, Setting 3

As with schools, the physical appearance of the different settings varied greatly. Of the private day nurseries, the majority seemed to be located in converted houses. This was accomplished with varying degrees of success.

> "The nursery is based in a converted house. When I rang the bell, I was escorted into a carpeted reception area. The rooms off it all seem light and airy." Observation Notes, Setting 4

> "The nursery is in a small end terrace - two rooms downstairs and a double room upstairs. We talked in the spare downstairs room. The toys were all laid out and it was very cramped." Observation Notes, Setting 3

In one case, the nursery was in the basement of a huge inner city chapel which has since been converted into an upmarket Indian restaurant.

"The nursery is in the basement - you go down steep steps straight off the street to get to the door. Inside, the building is on a split level. Downstairs is lit by reasonable sized windows onto the street above, which was quite pleasant when the sun was shining..." Observation Notes, Setting 14

In another case, one part of a split site is located in a local shop:

"The building is part of a row of shops on the high street. It still has a plate glass, shop front window, although the building is obviously a nursery!" Observation Notes, Setting 5

Many of the settings, particularly the housing conversions had a number of staircases that would make access difficult:

"The pre school & toddler room is in a fairly small end terrace - and there's a split level within that - lots of steps and tight corners." Observation Notes, Setting 5

Room size was highly variable depending on the type of building the setting was housed in. This ranged from fairly generous rooms, through to more cramped conditions:

"There were two rooms upstairs and two rooms downstairs. The upstairs rooms are joined and can take up to 12 children - that's really scary - there was hardly room with the 6 that were there." Observation Notes, Setting 3

Of the voluntary groups, the majority of them are housed in multi purpose buildings for example, church halls, village halls, civic buildings.

"The playgroup is based in a huge Victorian hall in the middle of the village. It also houses a swimming pool and a dance hall. The outside of the building must have looked quite grand at one time but now it just looks cold and austere." Observation Notes, Setting 12

"The playgroup is in a draughty old church hall... I had to walk around and knock on a couple of doors before I found the right one. Everything seemed locked up. It looked as though the place had been gutted. There were piles of rubbish at the gate - broken toys, old stair gates and the like..." Observation Notes, Setting 6

Whilst a few of the settings had access to outdoor areas and in some cases had developed these to good effect, this was not the norm and many settings had very limited facilities for outdoor play.

<u>Resources</u>

The standard and quality of play materials available for the children varied greatly between settings.

> "The toys were all laid out but everything was very cramped. The toys all looked a bit grubby and 'past their best'" Observation Notes, Setting 3

The quality of display within settings also varied hugely.

> "The planning is displayed on the stairs and landing. There are lots of displays of work showing the learning intent, but it seems to be mainly adult mass produced - overwriting or tracing." Observation Notes, Setting 3

> "The walls are mushroom coloured and absolutely riddled with holes where staples and pins have damaged the plaster. The plaster is interspersed with wall display boards with children's work on - a combination of 'real' children's work and some adult guided work" Observation Notes, Setting 12

This didn't always tally with the training or general impression of curriculum knowledge given by the setting. On one occasion, there seemed to be as many members of staff engaged with putting up a display as there were interacting with the children:

> "There don't seem to be many staff in attendance - two are busy putting up a new display!" Observation Notes, Setting 14

<u>Ethos</u>

In the settings I visited, the issue of health and safety seemed more prevalent than I would have expected from my work in schools:

> "There were lots of notices around - sugar content in infant juices, what modelling materials can and can't be used - e.g. no cotton wool; pasta must be cooked before using for collage..." Observation Notes, Setting 5

> "The setting had been freshly painted - Fire doors and safety adjustments were very visible..." Observation Notes, Setting 5

Although standards of hygiene were generally good, in some settings this was not the case:

> "The interview was carried out in the kitchen.... Modern, 'sparkly' lino floor, but very grubby - I didn't want to put Eliza (my nine month old daughter) down. As we talked, we were constantly interrupted by children running through the kitchen to go to the toilet and back again." Observation Notes, Setting 6

> "There was a tiny carpeted area, which was coming unfitted at the edge..... Carpets and everything looked a bit shabby ... the toys looked a bit grubby." Observation Notes, Setting 3

On each occasion the Senco had remembered that I was coming and was expecting me. In the majority of cases, there was a warm welcome:

> "I was ushered promptly into the office - the Senco was concerned for my welfare - offered me coffee etc and choice of chair. She was concerned for Eliza too: 'First let's get her some bricks or something...'" Observation Notes, Setting 4

> "The Senco was expecting me. She suggests that we go and talk in the baby room so that Eliza can play with the toys up there." Observation Notes, Setting 9

Only on one occasion did I feel that there was a slight 'edge' to the meeting.

> "I got the feeling that I was being told off - as she took me down to the big office in the basement, a comment was made: 'we don't usually allow babies down here'" Observation Notes, Setting 5

Staffing profile and training

Most of the staff observed working in the settings were in their late teens / early 20s and without exception all were female. Given the age and sex of the workers, issues around pregnancy and maternity leave were prominent.

> "I haven't done it for long because the girl that worked here before me left. She had a baby, came back after maternity and thought that's it and left." Senco 14

> "(I took it on) earlier this year, me and my other colleague but she's actually away on maternity leave at the moment." Senco 3

> "We've got another worker who does the child care......she's off sick. The worker had been on maternity leave and then she came back and then went off sick" Senco 7

In all but two of the settings the Sencos were white European women. The only exceptions to this were in a crèche run for an Asian women's centre, and one Senco with African heritage.

A number of settings had clear management structures which were largely related to level of qualification, and length of time in post. Within a number of the private day nurseries, a 'family tree' showing the people working in the setting and their status and qualifications was prominently displayed, with photographs of the individuals involved. Whilst many of the managers I encountered seemed to be actively involved with the children, this was not the case in all settings. In one particular setting, the manager took what seemed to be a largely 'executive' role.

> "I was met at the door by the nursery manager who was wearing a fitted two piece suit. Talk about the boot being on the other foot! I had deliberately dressed casually to try to equalise any inequalities over status, but now it was me feeling scruffy and un-professional!!" Observation Notes, Setting 5

Most of the settings had staff with a range of qualifications relating to childcare and early childhood education and a number are actively working to develop their training profile...

> "Janet isn't here today, she's done a BTech course, and Mandy she's done Level 2 and me and Tracey are working on Level 3. So we're all qualified." Senco 8

Whilst many of the Sencos described attending short courses attendance seemed to be reliant on not only personal commitment but also issues within the setting.

> "I've been on a Senco course and there were two other courses I was supposed to go on but one of them was cancelled and then I had to cancel as we were short staffed but there are a few I am supposed to go on over the next few months." Senco 1

> "I've been one course. I'm supposed to have been on a course this week at Shipley Community Centre. But I actually missed it because my little girl was ill ....." Senco 3

Whilst in a number of settings there seems to be a level of co-operation and camaraderie about the job...

> "We have staff meetings monthly, or usually it works out six weekly and I pay the staff to come in the evening. Well, we close at six so we do it on a Friday night. One of our teachers is a piano teacher, she works in the week, so it's Friday night from six to half past seven. I think that helps. It's very informal. We don't have a lot written down." Senco 9

<u>Planning the Curriculum</u>

In most settings, there seemed to be well developed planning systems and for many settings, the curricular content of this was explicitly linked to the Foundation Stage planning documentation:

> "I've just had a Mum come in this morning to put her boys name down and she stayed for about half an hour and was asking what we do and she said 'well you're not really like a play group are you'. Because he went to a full time nursery when she worked full time and she said it's on a level with that; because its not Playgroup level any more is it, because of guidelines etc. " Senco 8

However, there were also settings where the curricular intent of the planning was less obvious and the curriculum knowledge of the staff limited.

> "They have an exercise book in which they write the progression. What the child can do now and what he could do before. So you can just go to that and know that this child didn't know the colours but now he knows the colours. They put comments on every child. They've got a book, she'll show you it." Senco 7

Whilst the planning was on display in a number of settings, this didn't always seem to be reflected in what was happening in the rooms:

> "In the Senco's room, despite the planning, the children seemed to be milling around without much to do. I don't know whether that was it was getting towards lunch time, or whether it was general." Observation Notes, Setting 5

All of the settings seemed to have some form of ongoing record keeping for the children in attendance. This was usually carried out by individuals within the setting:

> "That's what we start with, filled in by the parents. Then we have those as a quick check and go through other individual. The leaders made these up really and the observations we do of different areas. One session a week." Senco 6

However, in some settings, this became more of a shared activity although this required higher levels of organisation and commitment:

> "We have early learning goals records. We have a daily book where if anything special comes up or they done something different, we just have a jotter that we write it down in and then once a fortnight when the children have gone home on a Thursday we sit in here and we all have so many allocated children and we bring the records up to date. If there's something in the records like, we've five

levels of these records, so we do one per half term if they haven't achieved it at the beginning of that half term we'll be looking out to see if they've achieved by middle or so." Senco 8

Role of the Staff

In most settings, staff seemed to a large extent to be engaged with the children. However, this was not always the case:

> "In the first room, the 3 - 5 year olds are engaged in a colouring activity and seem to have a large degree of freedom in this (ie no adult input)" Observation Notes, Setting 14

> "The 2 - 3 year olds were watching TV. There are 2 - 3 members of staff with them - one in particular is sitting engrossed watching the TV. There is very little interaction going on with the children - no mediation of the programme." Observation Notes, Setting 14

Also, the content and appropriateness of the activity for the children could on occasions be questioned:

> "As I walked through the room, the chairs were all around in a circle practising for the Christmas concert. They were nearly all boys, between the ages of 2 - 3. How long had they been sitting there for?!!" Observation Notes, Setting 8

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

This chapter explores the dilemmas of writing a literature review that demonstrates not only the researcher's final understanding of the context but that also reflects the process of this development. As such the chapter is presented as a series of extracts from the first draft of the literature review, followed by a probing and questioning of the stance taken. Plain text and italics are used to illustrate this chronology of initial and later thought.

Embarking upon this project, I was to some extent prepared for the ensuing difficulties of attempting to write a literature review. Previous experience of carrying out two other qualitative research projects had made the dilemmas of establishing parameters around the literature all too familiar. Despite this understanding, the experience this time was no different.

> "Everything seems so vague at the moment... as though I'm walking through fog... it makes talking coherently about it to others very difficult. I just have to keep on going and hope it starts to take shape soon!" Dissertation Journal 10/6/02

One of the threads continuing from my previous experience of qualitative studies was the desire not to specify too early in the study what the key issues might be:

> "...it would be me deciding what I think the key issues should be, - enforcing my views on the data rather than allowing the data and actors to speak for themselves." Dissertation Journal 5/2/97

With a view to developing a service delivery model to the non maintained early years sector, the focus of the study was on exploring the experience of being a Senco in such settings. As such the literature review needed to look at contextual issue such as recent changes in early years policy, as well as issues of early years practice and how they relate to children with special needs.

In line with this, the background reading had been very wide, so as not to leave any avenue unexplored or to discount anything. Strauss and Corbin (1990) acknowledge that this may give rise to some difficulties. They suggest that whilst developing a general understanding of the area of study is essential, it doesn't need to be so specific as to pre-empt or preclude any research findings.

> "You will come to the research situation with some background in the technical literature...however, there is no need to review all of the literature

beforehand, because if we are effective in our analysis new data categories will emerge that no one has thought of previously" Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.50

Strauss and Corbin (1990) go on to propose that the initial review of the literature should stimulate what they describe as 'theoretical sensitivity' ie: personal awareness of the subtleties of meaning in the data. The use of technical literature is said to enhance this sensitivity:

> "By having some familiarity with these publications you have a rich background of information that sensitises you to what is going on with the phenomenon you are studying" Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.43

As such, the initial literature review served its purpose.

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Returning to the literature review some 12 months later, having collected and analysed the data, I was faced with a dilemma. The data had, as desired, taken on a life and direction of its own. This however resulted in much of the content of the original literature review now being incongruous with the emerging focus of the work. Whilst still describing the experience of being a Senco in the non maintained sector, issues that I had not even considered such as the gendered nature of the care education split had come to the fore.

Whilst the logical response to this may have been to disregard the original literature review and start again from scratch, I was uneasy with this as an action. Responding in this way would devalue the learning that had gone on and present the whole project as an 'end product' rather than as a process of continuous development.

> "What has been bothering me is chronology. My thinking is developing all of the time and some of the ways in which I'm thinking now, I hadn't even thought about when I started my literature review almost two years ago. If I

insert a couple of paragraphs about feminist methodology it's going to stick out a mile. The alternative is to change the whole lot. But then it would look as though I've always thought in this way, which isn't true." Dissertation Journal 6/10/03

Whilst Strauss & Corbin (1990) suggest that a researcher might go back to the literature following categorisation in order to discover if a category is there, this didn't fully reflect the experience. I was coming back to the literature and viewing it from a whole new standpoint. As Alvesson (2002) describes, the social research project had been carried out in a fairly conventional way, but I was now returning to it and reinterpreting it, establishing different meanings and understandings.

"The mobilisation of radical questioning under the banner of postmodernism offers a strong impetus for us to rethink what we do and see if things can be done differently." Alvesson, 2002, p.12

Further reading of research methodology presented a possible way forward. Within the feminist research tradition, such a process approach to research is encouraged as it is thought to increase the authenticity of the project. Rather than hiding this personal development, within the feminist tradition, it is suggested that this should be celebrated and made into an integral part of the project.

"Many traditional academic social science projects are written up in such a way as to reinforce the scientific paradigm of idealised research practice. Such pieces of work exclude the failures, the difficulties, the learning as you go along and above all, what actually happened." Taylor, 1996, p.108

Thus, there was a way that much of the original literature review could be preserved, but at the same time new emerging thinking exposed. By posing a series of questions about my original thinking, coherence could be maintained whilst preserving the integrity of the work.

Despite this, I was still uneasy about the way forward. In order to explore the findings and to justify the approach to the research process itself, the study was drawing more and more on feminist writings.

"I don't feel that I know enough about the politics of this (feminist research / psychology). If I went down this route, I would need to write like Erica Burman or other feminist psychologists but I don't know that I feel comfortable in that style. Couldn't I just do it as me? Or would that be too incongruous - radical feminist ideas and deconstructions in a non radical feminist sort of way?" Dissertation Journal 4/10/03

Thus, the study ground to a halt. The enormity of rethinking the project and the lack of congruence between the way the research was leading and my own core values rendered me impotent.

"I feel disempowered by the feminist psychologists. That I don't have any authority to speak. I don't know enough - I'm just working from the experience of the Sencos I interviewed." Dissertation Journal 4/10/03

But wasn't this a replaying of exactly the same situation I had been describing for the women in my study? The notion of the 'expert' feminist psychologist was leading to a devaluation my own experience and insight. Why shouldn't I write as me? Couldn't I take from the different traditions what I need without having to pass myself off as an expert?

So where did this leave the study? In developing theoretical sensitivity, the original literature review had led to an increased understanding of the changes that had taken place in the early years and the situations the Sencos might find themselves in. This would help contextualise the experiences of the Sencos and focus readers in on the current early years context. At the same time in returning to the literature review and questioning some of the underlying assumptions initially made, the door would be open to a more insightful interpretation of the ensuing data.

At last there was a way forward.

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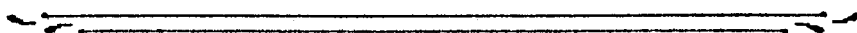
REVIEWING THE LITERATURE

The Development Of Theoretical Sensitivity.

What Do We Currently Know About Non Maintained Early Years Provision?

Academics and commentators on the early years have long since berated the state of such provision in this country. Moss & Penn (1996) comment:

> "Early Childhood services are fragmented, inflexible, incoherent and full of inequalities, unable to meet the changing and varied needs of families. They rely on a workforce most of whom are poorly paid and poorly trained. Like many other parts of the national infrastructure early childhood services suffer the consequences of chronic under funding." Moss & Penn, 1996, p.87

These concerns reflect earlier political and social studies (e.g. Rumbold Report (DES, 1990); Ball, 1994) which also identified concerns. In 1996, the Labour Party published a policy document *'Early Excellence'*, bringing together many of these criticisms, whilst at the same time proposing a model for development. This policy document was later to enter the statute books as a part of the *'Excellence in Schools'* documentation (DfEE, 1997). In addition to this, *'Early Excellence'* was to form the basis of the key policy document: *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (DfEE, 1998).

Based on previous evidence, *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (DfEE, 1998) highlighted a triad of difficulties relating to early years provision. These difficulties can be summarised as follows:

1) Quality

The report found that the quality of childcare was highly variable between settings. A number of other studies (e.g. Moss & Penn, 1996; Hevey & Curtis, 1996) also found quality in day care settings to be particularly poor. This is attributed largely to the level of training and status afforded to those working with children in the early years.

> "Low levels of training, poor pay, third rate conditions of employment are a statement about how society views both young children and those working with

them. It is also a recipe for a variety of ills including high staff turnover and instability for children, poor quality provision and exploitation of a predominantly female workforce." Moss & Penn, 1996, p.105

Hevey & Curtis (1996) suggest that 97% of those working with young children are women, most of whom have family responsibilities of their own. Many are said to work part time, some as unpaid volunteers; wages are said to be low and turnover rates high.

Blenkin & Yue (1994) attempted to profile the professional training of staff working in early years settings. They found that 65.7% lacked any specific training. Levels of initial training were low – 19.3% having a degree level qualification, 20.9% NNEB and 0.9% a higher degree. In addition to this, they found that many workers received little or no in -service training and there were few incentives to undertake any further training.

"One is forced to conclude that this lack of concern over training and qualifications for what are in reality highly responsible roles...reflects confused and out-dated public attitudes which commonly regard the care of young children as an extension of the mothering role...Such attitudes in turn reinforce the low status of early years work, helping to keep pay low and turnover high." Hevey & Curtis, 1996, p.212

Whitbrook, Howes & Phillips (1989) in their study into quality in American childcare settings concluded that the quality of early learning was being severely damaged by factors such as massive staff turnover, due largely to poor pay and conditions and lack of training opportunities.

2) Access to Childcare

'Meeting the Childcare Challenge' (DfEE, 1998) suggested that there was a shortage nationally of childcare places and that parents' access to these places was being hampered by poor information about what was available.

Moss & Penn (1996) describe how traditionally, early years services have fallen into one of three categories: i.e. Care (e.g. private day nurseries, nannies, childminders etc); Welfare (e.g. Social Services Nurseries) or Education (e.g. nursery schools and classes).

Within each category, a range of publicly and privately funded settings are identified, alongside of both voluntary and non-profit making institutions. Depending on the type and designation of the setting, they suggest that there will be differences in: governing legislation, administration, admissions policies, values & philosophies, staffing levels, age range catered for, hours of attendance and cost and funding arrangements. The outcome of this is an idiosyncratic pattern of services, with access depending on geographical location and personal circumstance.

> "Nursery education represents a limited service – part time, short term for a narrow range of children; predicated on a view of mothers at home available to look after their children..." Moss and Penn, 1996, p. 97

3) Cost of Childcare

The cost of childcare was found to be prohibitive in many circumstances, unless parents were able to access service provided by the local council, or were eligible for more specialist services such as social services day care. Goffin (1998) explores what he terms the 'trilemma' of early years services, focusing on affordability, availability and quality. The trilemma arises when changes in any one of the three elements leads to a subsequent change in the other two. For example, if the price of nursery provision is increased, it becomes less accessible for many families. Improving quality of provision leads to it becoming more expensive and hence less accessible to many families.

As such, the picture of early years provision in this country at the end of the 20th century seemed bleak. Whilst examples of outstanding practice could be found, due to training and other historical factors, quality was largely poor. Availability of provision varied greatly and even when services were available, the costs involved made it prohibitive to many families.

Summary 1a: Non maintained early years provision has historically been epitomised by variable quality, poor working conditions and unequal access.

Penn (1998) in a research study of students training to work in childcare found the students to be almost exclusively female and subsequently named childcare as amongst the most gendered of all professions. How has this situation arisen?

Marks (1996) proposes that the notion of occupations as bodiless, gender neutral constructs is misguided, and that instead, categories of workers are divided, amongst other ways along gender lines in terms of the distribution of labour, space, power and activity.

> *"The public domain of work exists in relation to and thus reproduces the divisions within the private sphere, through the gendered distribution of power and knowledge." Marks, 1996, p.126*

There has been a longstanding cultural association between woman and discourses of care. Burman (1996) suggests that such positioning is axiomatic of the positions women have been accorded over the generation, within patriarchal relations. Thus, the social positioning of women as carers has come to have powerful significance for the construction of female identity, with caring providing external evidence of 'womanliness' (Marks, 1996). Walkerdine (1990) proposes that such socially constructed roles come to be subjectively experienced by women and as such become 'lived as fact'. Penn's (1998) study of childcare students clearly demonstrates this notion of socially constructed gender positions becoming fact. A large number of the students felt that they brought intrinsic talents to the job and that this talent was at least as important, if not more important than any knowledge they acquired through the course of training.

> *"Mothering is natural, it's an instinct, it comes naturally to most mothers... "*
>
> *"... it's intrinsic to being a woman"*

Cameron, Moss, & Owen (1999) suggest that such views of women as carers not only influence the ways in which the women view themselves, but moreover form the backbone of childcare provision in this country:

"The context of childcare work is structured by policy (both national, such as legislation and guidance, and local, including internally devised ways of working) based on notions of tradition and 'the natural' and underpinned by dominant ideologies of caring." Cameron, Moss, & Owen, 1999, p.167

Penn (1998) concludes that the limited, feminised view childcare workers have of their role, combined with the gendered nature of the work suggests that the current situation is unlikely to change in the near future.

But Why Is The Quality Of Provision So Poor?

This may relate in part to the nature of childcare in this country. In contrast to a number of Scandinavian and European countries, where childcare is provided largely by the state, in Anglo-American society childcare is largely the province of voluntary or private providers (Penn, 1998). As such the questions of quality are based on financial rather than philanthropic prerogatives. Also, lack of consensus over the purposes of early childhood education and care make any agreement over what constitutes quality difficult. The notion of natural, scientifically established attributes of childhood which aspiring practitioners need to know about in order to inform practice is gradually being eroded.

"By drawing on abstract maps of children's lives and thus decontextualising the child, we are losing sight of children, their lives, their concrete experiences and their capabilities." Dahlberg, 1999, p.36

Faced with this dilemma over what constitutes quality in early education and care, Dahlberg (1999) suggests that discourses on quality tend to lead to questions of a technical nature, aimed at standardisation, predictability and control. Examples of this are organisational features (e.g. space, staffing levels), child development outcomes, later educational achievement and parental satisfaction. Thus, in settings where there is a clear financial imperative, the children's actual experiences may subsequently suffer.

In addition to this structured view of quality, Prosser (1992) identifies a number of process characteristics of quality early education and care. These focus largely on developing a secure, loving environment and emotional as well as intellectual growth. Clarke-Stewart (1992) echoes this, highlighting critical factors relating to the quality of

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provision, the most important of which is the behaviour of the caregiver. Clarke-Stewart reports that the most effective caregivers have the following characteristics: they are responsive, positive, accepting, informative and give choices. This is contrasted with a more custodial, demeaning role whereby children are directed and controlled. This mirrors earlier work of Tizard and Hughes (1984) which identifies sensitivity as one of the key factors in working with young children. Sensitivity is interpreted as having an awareness of children's behaviour, being able to respond promptly and engaging and talking with them as part of every day business e.g. shopping. Woollett and Phoenix (1991) suggest that the conditions under which such sensitivity can be achieved constitute a scientific justification for mothers and not fathers to stay at home with young children.

Penn (1998) records how the qualities of patience, kindness, understanding tolerance, flexibility consistency and reliability are frequently cited as qualities women bring with them to childcare, rather than qualities acquired by training. When such qualities correspond so closely to the factors identified by both Prosser (1992) and Clark-Stewart (1992) how is it that quality in settings can be so low? Moyles and Suschitzky (2000) suggest that this may in part be due to the criteria against which the notion of quality is judged. In observing differentially trained adults operating in the same settings, they observe:

> "Teachers exhibit more of the characteristics identified by Ofsted than either of the two other groups (ie nursery nurses and classroom assistants). The implication of this is that they would be in a better position to provide quality learning experiences for children." Moyles and Suschizky, 2000, p.129

However, on more careful inspection it was clear that each group had different strengths. The teachers placed greater emphasis on the underlying processes of the child's learning, the nursery nurses gave greater focus to the child as a whole and classroom assistants concentrated more on products. As such each group had a distinct contribution to make. Clark Stewart (1992) suggests that when practitioners have taken more training in child development they develop an academic orientation which translates in the daycare classroom into an emphasis on school activities (e.g. reading or counting) to the exclusion of activities to promote social and emotional development. As such, in some cases more could be seen as less. Moyles & Suschizky (2000) raise the

question of whether the competencies of differentially trained adults can or should be measured against the same criteria. The same question could also be asked of the different settings providing early education and care. To measure them using only one set of criteria may miss out the variety of qualities the different sectors bring.

Summary 1: Whilst women have been positioned into the role of carer this has now become 'lived as fact' with women believing that their gender predisposes them for childcare work. Whilst quality in childcare has been criticised, this needs to be viewed in the light of public policy relating to childcare and the notion of what constitutes quality in early education and care.

What Changes Have Taken Place In The Early Years And What Difference Have They Made?

The National Childcare Strategy

The National Childcare Strategy emerged from the Green Paper *'Meeting the Childcare Challenge'* and demonstrates the government's commitment to development in the early years. The aim of the Green Paper is cited as being:

> "To ensure good quality, affordable childcare for children 0 – 14 in every neighbourhood, including both formal childcare and support for informal arrangements. The strategy is founded on a commitment to promoting the well being of children, offering equal opportunities for parents especially women and supporting families in balancing work and family life." DfEE, 1998

The key objectives of the strategy are cited as being: to increase quality of early years provision; to make childcare more affordable and to make childcare more accessible.

The Early Years Development and Childcare Partnership

The policy paper *'Early Excellence'* included the recommendation that each local authority should create an 'Early Years Partnership' which would draw up an Early Years Development Plan. The subsequent legislation in connection with *'Meeting the Childcare Challenge'* (DfEE 1998) expands on this notion of partnership, recognising the need to combine both care and education, thus requiring local authorities to develop

'Early Years _Development and Childcare_ Partnerships,' (EYDCPs). The EYDCP is charged with the responsibility, at local level of bringing together the various strands of legislation emanating from the National Child Care strategy and other sources and developing a plan as to how the government's targets will be met.

Improving Quality and Access

In order to address the criticisms of existing early years provision, a number of measures were introduced and have, to a large extent been successful in bringing about the desired changes. Margaret Hodge (2001) describes how since 1997, seventy thousand new childcare places have been created across private day nurseries, childminders and out of school clubs. The benefits that these settings are able to offer, in terms of hours of work and being open all year round mean that an increasing number of parents are opting for such non maintained rather than school based provision for their pre school children. This trend has been further encouraged by the introduction of the Nursery Education Grant (NEG) system, which enables parents to offset the costs of non maintained provision for three and four year old children. At the same time, the NEG system has also been influential in increasing the quality of non maintained provision. In order to register for NEG, settings have to meet a number of quality control criteria including undergoing inspection by Ofsted. This in itself introduces the requirements for settings to deliver the Foundation Stage Curriculum (DfEE, 2000) and to operate within the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001)

Summary 2a: The National Childcare Strategy has introduced a number of measures to address issues of quality and access. These include establishing Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships to coordinate provision and developing a framework to encourage settings to work within the Foundation Stage.

So Why All This Interest In The Early Years?

As described in the previous section, the historical situation relating to early years provision in this country paints a bleak picture. Issues around young children, low pay

and a predominantly female workforce seem to offer little political capital. So why have the early years become so important?

Burman (1994) describes how in the period following the Second World War, the notion of 'home and hearth' was strongly promoted in order to encourage women to vacate their paid employment to provide jobs for servicemen returning from abroad. Much of this argument was predicated on psychological theories which supposedly demonstrated that children would suffer long lasting psychological damage through being separated from their mothers. Bowlby (1969) suggested that maternal care was essential to developing firm attachments and any separation through either death, temporary separation or daycare would be equally traumatic and significant for the young child. Thus the roles of devoted mother and working women came to be seen as divergent and incompatible, with any later moral or psychological aberrations being attributed to the mother (Burman, 1994). As such the need for childcare was for many years diminished.

Whilst such theories have since been refuted (e.g. Rutter, 1981; Tizard, 1991) associated taboos about women and work have been perpetuated over a number of years. Brannan (1999) describes how as recently as 1979, only 24% of women returned to work within the first nine months of childbirth. This trend is changing though. In a comparative study Brannan (1999) found the number of women returning to work within the first nine months had increased to 67% in 1991. The National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998) also clearly demonstrates this trend. The documentation describes how over the past 10 years, the number of mothers of pre school children returning to work has risen from 32 - 51%. However, the document goes on to describe how this number is being restricted due to demographic changes. Mothers are less likely to have extended family close by to provide informal childcare and instead they need to rely on formal childcare arrangements. Poor access to childcare is cited as being one of the key factors affecting the working habits of lone parents. In those countries where formal childcare is more readily available such as Italy, France and Sweden, up to 70% of lone mothers are said to be in work, compared to only half this number in the UK.

"In many households, managing employment and family life depends on the mother finding a job whose hours, both in terms of length and when worked fit in with the limited childcare arrangements that are available, affordable and acceptable." Moss & Penn, 1996, p.127

Given the goals of reducing levels of unemployment, and increasing the participation of women in the labour market it starts to become clear why early years education and care has become an important issue for all of the main political parties. The more women employed, the greater the family income (i.e. less reliance on benefits) and hence the greater savings and income to the exchequer.

As such an increase in women's employment can be seen as being due to the needs of the economy, the workforce and a skills shortage:

"Suddenly, industry is interested in childcare initiatives and flexible working hours to enable mothers of young children to remain in employment." Lewis, 1991 p.197

Thus although the changes in the early years serve an emancipatory purpose for women and may be founded on a benevolent model of child development this must not be allowed to disguise the underlying motives of such interest.

"One wonders how visionary the new left vision is... some would claim it is very difficult for politicians to be visionary, driven as they are by political expediency and global markets" Abbott & Moylett,1999, p.27

Summary 2b: Whilst changes in the early years might be applauded at many levels, the underlying motives and assumptions relating to the position of women in work and in society must not be overlooked.

What Is It About The Early Years? Pedagogy And Practice.

In Taking up the Nursery Education Grant, early years care settings commit themselves to working within the Foundation Stage and as such make the transition from being care to being education establishments.

The Foundation Stage documentation describes how it aims to ensure quality practice across all early years providers, stating:

> "All settings and schools that receive grant funding for the education of children between the ages of 3 – 5 are required to plan activities and experiences that will help children to make progress in their development and learning." QCA / DfEE, 2000, p8

But what is the quality practice that is referred to? What is the basis of good early years education? Blenkin & Kelly (1987) argue that the prime concern of education should be to develop to the maximum the potential of every child to function as a human being. This view of 'education as development' is common to most early years trained teachers. Within early years' philosophy, both the empiricist view of the child as an empty vessel to be filled (e.g. Scheffer, 1967) and the nativist view that children are pre programmed to unfold in certain directions (e.g. Chomsky, 1976) are rejected. Instead, an interactionist stance is taken, whereby a child's development is seen as an interaction between environmental events and maturationally generated behaviours (Bower, 1974). This implicitly places the teacher not as a giver of knowledge but as a facilitator, engaging children so that they can develop strategies and responses to shape their own development (Bruce, 1987). Such a stance has implications for both what counts as knowledge and how a child's development is affected.

In considering what constitutes good practice in the early years, Bruce (1987) identifies a number of key principles which she suggests guided the practice of the pioneers of early years education (e.g. Montessori; Steiner; Froebel.) and should continue to guide practice for young children today. Underpinning these principles is the work not only of Piaget (e.g. 1969), but also Bruner (e.g. 1977) and Vygotsky (e.g. 1978).These principles include:

- The need to consider the whole child;
- The need to develop intrinsic motivation ie balancing child and adult initiated tasks;
- Taking what children can do (rather than what they can't do) as the starting point for development;

- Emphasising the central importance of people (children and adults) with whom a child interacts;
- Viewing a child's development as an interaction between the child and the environment that s/he is in.

Despite these guiding principles, studies cited earlier in this chapter suggest that much practice in early years settings has been of poor quality. Some of this will certainly relate to the training, experience and working conditions of early years practitioners. Lally (1991) proposes that much previous poor practice has related to practitioners misunderstanding the underlying principles of early years work:

Dowling (1992) suggests that today there is a need for even closer scrutiny of practice, to ensure that nursery education is recognised and valued. As such the establishing of the 'Foundation Stage' and the 'Early Learning Goals' (QCA, 2000) has been largely welcomed. Rather than being purely skills based, the Foundation Stage has a greater emphasis on play and early experience. Curriculum areas such as 'Communication', 'Language and Literacy' and 'Knowledge and Understanding of the World' are broad and allow for the individual patterns of learning different children may have.

> "Young children will have had a wide range of different experiences and will have a wide range of skills and interests when they join a setting or school...They will need a well planned and resourced curriculum to take their learning forward and provide opportunities for all children to succeed in an atmosphere of care and feeling valued." QCA, 2000, p8

Thus, the Foundation Stage combines the need to develop a more rigorous approach to curriculum planning whilst at the same time adhering to the underlying principles which have guided Early Years practice through the years (Mortimer, 2002). The requirement that all settings in receipt of nursery grant funding adhere to the requirements of this legislation ensures some consistency of approach and purpose between private and public settings.

Summary 3a: Early years education is founded on the interactionist principles of Bruner and Vygotsky. As such, a child centred model of practice has evolved. The requirement that all settings in receipt of Nursery Education Grant funding adhere to the

requirements of the Foundation Stage legislation ensures some consistency of approach and purpose between school based and non maintained settings.

So That All Seems Quite Straight Forward Then. Early Years Education Is Grounded In Developmental Psychology And A Child Centred Approach, Which Is Good.

Or is it? It's true that the link between a child centred pedagogy and developmental psychology is axiomatic.

> *"Practices such as particular pedagogies and forms of schooling aren't just applications of a scientific approach, but should be understood as centrally and strategically implicated in the possibilities of developmental psychology." Walkerdine, 1984, p.154*

So in accepting the pedagogic practices of early years we are in effect colluding with the values and assumptions implicit in the discipline of developmental psychology. Burman (1996) cautions against such wholesale acceptance suggesting that the shape of the discipline of developmental psychology is structured through an inherently gendered agenda. This reinforces Walkerdine's (1984) claim that developmental psychology is premised on a set of truth claims which are historically and culturally specific, and not the only or necessary way to understand children.

Central to both developmental psychology and early years practice is the notion of the gradually unfolding child. Whilst Piaget's notion that this will happen for all children, given the right environment has more recently been eclipsed by the more interactionist stance of Vygotsky and Bruner, Piaget's notion of a developmental stages remains influential in pedagogic practice.

> *"Pedagogic practices are totally saturated with the notion of a normalised sequence of development, so those practices help produce children as objects of their gaze." Walkerdine, 1984, p.155*

What such a staged model of development neglects are the social and cultural practices which construct our notion of appropriate and normal development. This relates not only to the Eurocentric notion of what childhood represents and how children should

behave (Miller, 2000) but also to the gendered practices implicit within this. Assumed differences due to the timing of unfolding cognitive strengths do not account for the ways in which adults differentially shape and control their interactions with children.

"Cultural norms organise ways that as adults we alter our interactional style depending on what we think appropriate for a girl or a boy of a certain age." Bird, 1999, p.18

This becomes an issue when normative judgements, based on a model of developmental stages are used to divide and classify children. Those not conforming to the given developmental time frames will be found wanting (Burman, 1996).

Dahlberg (1999) proposes that: 'post modern children are inscribed in multiple and overlapping identities in whose construction they are active participants' (p.57). Accepting this view has implications for both pedagogy and practice. Woodhead (1998) sets out the features of what he believes a more contextually sensitive approach would include, such as:

- Practice based on local variations in children's growth, age and individuality;
- The social context of their care;
- Their roles and responsibility within the community;
- Patterns of communication language;
- Recognition of cultural difference;
- Recognition that children learn in a variety of ways;
- And that the teacher's role is adapted to the resources available and the standards, values and social environment of the local community.

In making such criticisms, there is the danger though that we might throw the early years baby out with the bathwater. There are difficulties associated with the social and cultural assumptions of the pedagogy's developmental psychology base. However, contrasted with educational approaches emphasising performance in terms of the achievement of standard forms of accreditation with a fixed curriculum divided into specific disciplines and with formal teaching methods (Burman, 1994), early years practice has much to recommend it. Whilst endorsing the fundamental principles of

early years education, it is admissible to challenge some of the long accepted assumptions, practices and beliefs associated with this pedagogy and consider them in relation to diverse social and cultural contexts.

And All Of These Early Year Settings Deliver The Same Early Education Then?

Well, yes and no. The inception of Nursery Education Grant scheme was intended to introduce an element of choice for parents and stimulate a market economy approach to early years education. In order for this to work though, there had to be some baseline - some agreement about what counted as education. In order to achieve this, settings that had previously been seen as mainly providing private day care were offered a route to be able to offer early years education as well as care. Thus, through going through a process of registration, including adopting the Foundation Stage curriculum any setting could become a validated provider of early years education. In achieving this status, validated settings technically achieved equivalent status to school based provision. Prior to this, things were very different. There was a definite care / education split. We have already established that 'caring' is a heavily gendered profession that women are cultured into:

> *"Femininity is a construct, the contours of which reflect the intersections of a variety of institutional power relations" Burman, 1996, p.3*

Whilst caring is established as 'women's work', education in contrast, with its roots in scientific thought and psychology is most certainly male in gender. Burman (1994) highlights the significance of how the 'child study movement' of which Piaget was a part 'observed' children. A gendered division was created in the establishment of developmental theory and pedagogic practice. Men were seen as having the necessary detachment and rationality to engage in scientific endeavour, with women being seen as too sentimental to participate (Burman, 1994). Thus within the current context, discourses on care play a key role in allotting participants into gendered subject positions. Childcare as a female gendered occupation is subjugated to the dominant discourse of education.

Penn (2000) describes how this is played out in recruitment to training courses, with average or high achieving women being directed towards teaching, and lower ability

students being directed to childcare. The logic behind this, assumedly is that teaching is a theoretical and academic arena, whereas childcare is instinctual. As Walkerdine (1984) demonstrates, such notions go on to become 'lived fiction', with childcare students regarding the knowledge input on courses, relating to child development prescriptive and superfluous.

> *"Childcare students tend to see themselves as naturals building on their personal experiences in looking after children, and see their strengths as lying in their everyday practice rather than in the acquisition and application of knowledge about children." Penn, 2000, p.104*

Despite not valuing the theoretical aspects of the course, childcare students expressed the view that jobs in schools or local authority day nurseries were most prestigious, as they offered more status and respectability. The job that was ranked most highly was that of nursery nurse in a school, where by proxy the child care worker was seen as a teacher (Penn, 2000).

Moyles and Suschitzky (2000) describe how when working in the same settings education and care staff go to great lengths to be seen to be doing the same job. However, in exploring this further, they come to the conclusion that although equal at practical and procedural levels this equality does not extend to theoretical or conceptual understanding of the nature of the work. Thus, although working and delivering technically equivalent early years education the experience is in fact very different, due to issues of gender and training. This leads Penn (2000) to conclude:

> *"Heavily gendered attitudes amount to the devaluing of theory and professionalism. If childcare is natural then the theory and knowledge of practice and the ethics and standards associated with professionalism are to an extent superfluous." Penn, 1998, p.30*

Summary 3b: Whilst technically delivering the same curriculum and early education experiences, gendered attitudes and differential training ensure that the experiences in maintained and non maintained settings remain different.

Responding To Children With Special Needs: Inclusive Principles And Early Years Practice.

In becoming validated providers of early years education, settings commit themselves to paying heed to the Code of Practice. As such they are required to put in place a Senco and operate within the staged model of the Code of Practice.

Traditionally, special education has been located within a behaviourist paradigm (Farrell, 1992), which has led to the development of parallel pedagogy between specialist and mainstream educational practices. This in turn has made the transition to more inclusive approaches difficult to achieve (Dyson, 2001).

In contrast, early years education has been based firmly on social / cognitive theories of learning, taking as its mainstay the writings of Piaget, Vygotsky and Bruner. Recognising and responding to children's individual learning needs is widely seen as being central to good early years practice (Dowling, 1992). This notion of responding to the diversity of all students is often cited as the hallmark of inclusive education (Stainbeck & Stainbeck, 1990; Wheldall, 1995). As such, Sencos working within early years settings should be ideally suited to pursue an inclusive approach. Four key elements of early years practice can be seen as contributing to the development of such an inclusive stance.

1) The Role of the Learner

Booth et al (2000) writing on inclusive education state that:

> "Diversity is not viewed as a problem to be overcome but as a rich resource to support learning for all." p.12

Within early years settings, the child is seen as the essential starting point of any learning, with prior knowledge and experience being very much respected and valued. This is reflected in the way in which activities are planned to reflect individual children's interests and experiences. The early years curriculum encourages children to be active learners and most activities are presented in such a way as to allow children to

explore, experiment and learn at their own rate. Harris, writing on creating effective learning environments for all children cites this as being a crucial to effective teaching and learning.

> "Effective teaching and learning was stimulated and strengthened when there was an attempt to involve pupils actively in the learning process…" Harris, 1996, p.63

2) The Role of the Adult.

Within the early years, the adult's role has two major aspects ie planning the learning environment and facilitating the children's learning. The teacher needs to plan and resource the learning environment in order to maximise learning opportunities for all children. Long-term planning will include deciding what areas of learning will be on offer and what resources will be on offer there to promote learning. Short and medium term planning involve planning for the delivery of the curriculum but also allowing interests and learning needs of individual students to be followed up.

Providing a responsive context in which learning can occur is regarded by Wheldall & Glynn (1988) as being central to a more inclusive approach to learning, going on to state that it is:

> "…essential for the teacher to be interactively responsive to the children's intentions." Ibid, p.132

This is echoed by Farrell (1992) who suggests:

> "The role of the teacher is to encourage the child's active interaction with the environment, by picking up cues from the pupil instead of sticking directly to the flow of activities." Ibid, p.146

Vygotsky (1978), in particular emphasised the role that more learned others have to play in extending thought in young children .This is expanded upon by Bruner (1966) and Wood (1988) who use the term 'scaffolding' to describe how an adult / teacher might work with a child.

Whilst scaffolding is frequently taken to refer to the teacher / adult, Vygotsky stresses that this role can be carried out by anyone at a more advanced stage of development e.g. other children. Ainscow (1995) as well as nursery theorists such as Dowling (1992) point out that other children within the setting can be skilfully employed, through pairing or small group work to support the learning of other children.

> "Young children do not come into a setting in a neat package of social, emotional, physical and intellectual development...The strategies used in learning and teaching should vary and should be adapted to suit the needs of the child." DfEE, 2000, p.22

Both the role of planner and learning facilitator depend to a large extent on the adult being very familiar with the developmental level and interests of all the individuals within the setting. In order to achieve this, a vigorous approach to record keeping is needed. Mortimore et al (1988) cite this as being one of the factors leading to a school being more effective. In early years settings, written observations are frequently used to note new skills as they are observed, and this information is then used to inform future planning and guide the adult in scaffolding the learning of the individual at the correct level.

3) The Learning Environment

Whilst compulsory schooling has become increasingly subject led, within early years settings, the environment continues to be divided into broad areas of interest which provide cross curricular learning potential. Whilst being officially sanctioned by the Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage (DfEE, 2000) this is also recognised as being a success factor in inclusive settings (Vlachou & Barton,1994).A typical early years setting will have large and small construction areas, sand and water, home area, technology and painting all permanently available. Within each area, there will be a range of books and writing materials, in addition to the standard equipment associated with that area, to allow the development of reading, writing and number to be incorporated into the play in a situation that is meaningful to the child.

In addition to this, the learning environment is frequently structured in such a way as to encourage the children to be responsible for planning and resourcing their own learning.

All materials are visible and accessible, and templates / marked boxes on the shelves allow equipment to be returned to its correct place after use. Similarly, menial administrative tasks such as registering are kept to a minimum through the use of self-registration systems. Whilst developing the autonomy and confidence of individual children in the setting, planning the learning environment in this way frees the adults from many of the low level organisational tasks, thus allowing more time for interaction with the children and to support their learning.

> "Unless children take on some of the responsibility for what goes on, there will be no possibility of the adults having the freedom to work with individuals or small groups." Hurst, 1991, p.87

This is echoed by Ainscow & Florek (1989) who describe how in order to meet individual needs, all available resources within the classroom will need to be used, for example allowing children to access their own learning resources. Ainscow (2000) suggests that in order to produce a more responsive classroom, administrative routines should be kept to a minimum.

> "At the heart of the (inclusion) process is an emphasis on making better use of resources, particularly human resources, in order to foster and support more welcoming and supportive classroom contexts." Ainscow, 2000, p.3

4) The Early Years Curriculum.

Whereas the traditional behavioural model of learning regards knowledge as sequential and hierarchical (Clark & Easen, 1993), cognitive theorists see learning as being more holistic:

> "The early years curriculum is concerned with the child and the context or setting in which the learning takes place, as well as the content of the learning." The Early Years Curriculum Group, 1989, p.27

This is reflected in the 'Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage' (DfEE, 2000). The Foundation Stage curriculum is organised into six broad areas of learning, to help practitioners plan the environment, activities and experiences for children in the setting. The guidance is clear though that this should not be used in a rigid way:

"This does not mean that all of young children's learning is divided up into areas. One experience may provide a child with opportunities to develop a number of competencies, skills and concepts across several areas of learning" DfEE, 2000, p.26

Also, the value of prior learning and experience is recognised and practitioners are advised that this knowledge of individual children should guide the planning and delivery of the curriculum. Again, this is recognised by advocates of inclusive education as being one of the key conditions leading to classrooms becoming more effective.

"Pupils have to be helped to establish a sense of personal meaning about tasks and activities in which they engage" Ainscow & Florek, 1989, p.183

Thus it can be seen that the combination of these four elements of early years practice lead to a distinctly child centred approach and at the same time make it synonymous with the conditions commonly associated with inclusive settings. This is reiterated by Dowling (1992) who, writing on nursery education states:

"If children are truly to be seen as individual, then everyone can be seen as having special needs" Dowling, 1992, p.128

Summary 4a: Key principles of early years education including the role of the learner, the role of the adult, the learning environment and the way the curriculum is viewed are seen to be synonymous with the principles of inclusive practice.

And They All Share This View Of Inclusion Do They, The People That Work In These Settings?

Well, maybe not. The way in which women childcare workers tend to base their approach on instinct rather than practices derived from theory (Penn, 2000) has previously been explored. As such, rather than this theorised view of inclusion, it might be assumed that the Sencos relate the meeting of special needs more to an intuitive approach based on their insight as women.

Marks (1996) highlights how there is a clear stratification between professionals or 'experts' and those who are with the children on a day to day basis (usually carers).

"Caring is a gendered activity which both binds and separates women as professionals or mothers." Marks, 1996, p.127

Alldred (1996) explores this gendered interpretation, proposing that the rise of the 'expert' role in relation to childcare is an elaboration of the scientific, male gendered, objective approach to the subject, as opposed to the mother's position based in experience.

Although having a degree of training, childcare workers continue to position themselves more in the role of ' carer' rather than as 'professional' (Penn, 2000). As such it could be assumed that the knowledge of workers in early education settings, which is grounded in their daily experience, will be regarded as less valid than the more authoritative, scientific overview of early years professionals. Thus the Sencos' knowledge might be understood as what Foucault called 'subjugated knowledge' ie one accorded lower status than scientific knowledge (Alldred, 1996).

Such subjugation has implications for how childcare workers speak about children with special needs and how they are viewed within wider professional circles. Marks (1996) suggests that the male, scientific colonisation of women's experiences leads to the pattern of women 'telling stories', and professionals achieving solid, factual classifications.

"Psychological discourses on the child do not necessarily present new knowledge, but what is significant is the epistemological backing that ideas have once encased in the rhetoric of psychological knowledge, because of its authority as expert and scientific knowledge." Alldred, 1996, p.137

Marks (1996) goes on to explore how such stratification of knowledge impacts on the way mothers, or carers are able to contribute to professional discussions about children.

"The right to speak tends to be correlated with lower level of contact with the children and greater access to abstract knowledge." Marks, 1996, p.130

The reality of such subjugation is illustrated by Penn (2000) who describes how workers involved in childcare regard the way in which they talk about children as being one of the key barriers to their contribution to the education process being recognised.

> *"What they (teachers) have is access to the middle class terminology that teachers use; it's learning the jargon to get involved in a conversation." Penn, 2000, p.122*

Thus although in theory there is a clear links between the early years and inclusion, this conceptualisation may not be shared by the childcare workers themselves.

Summary 4b: Although those engaged in education or professionalised occupations relating to children may regard the links between the early years and inclusion in this way, this conceptualisation may not be shared by the childcare workers themselves.

The Dawning Of Theoretical Sensitivity

Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that in a qualitative study, the research question is a statement that identifies the phenomenon to be studied, helping the researcher to stay focused throughout the investigation. In the spirit of induction, this area of focus is intended to be broad in order not to preclude any findings.

> "Whilst the initial research question starts out broadly, it becomes progressively narrowed and more focused during the research process." Strauss and Corbin, 1990, p.37

Thus the main research question: What was the experience of being a Senco in a non maintained early years setting? had been left purposefully open so as to allow the voices of the Sencos to be heard and the issues important to them to emerge.

Starting from such a broad base, there was little wonder that writing a literature review had been so daunting! The area of special needs and non maintained early years settings is on the one hand so vast, but on the other so limited, with a paucity of material relating directly to those areas of most relevance to the study.

However, in writing the chapter, some understanding of the situation in which the Sencos might find themselves had been gained and some of the assumptions underpinning early years education and care explored. With this degree of theoretical sensitivity, I felt confident that I would be able to make some sense of the data and hence I was ready to start planning the investigation.

CHAPTER THREE

DEVELOPING THE RESEARCH DESIGN

In addition to presenting the methodology for the research project, this chapter also further explores the process element of the study, engendered by the so termed *'Dilemmas of a novice researcher.*

Again, plain and italic text are used to illustrate the different processes in operation.

Re-reading the first draft of the methodology chapter, it was clearly a comprehensive and scholarly review of the topic, but it somehow missed the point. Presenting a straightforward outline of the research methods employed and the eventual format of the study played down the immense thought processes that I had been through in developing the study. Issues that had been burning throughout the project and the way in which the research methodology had been shaped by the research process itself were not visible at all.

Reading through the notes taken from methodology texts consulted during the study, and the debates over methodology presented in my diary, I was struck by the array of issues that had concerned me. But these were some how lost in a scholarly presentation of a methodology chapter.

Salmon (2003) suggests that researchers are expected to follow a set of rules and conventions in order to 'make their work difficult' and distinguish it from journalism. But in doing this, I had lost the essence of the study. Reason and Marshall (2001) echo these reflections on the methodology chapter being unrepresentative of the research process, suggesting:

> "Academic spectres emerge, partly to allay anxieties, and the writing becomes dry, cryptic distanced and very different from the lively and sometimes chaotic process of the research." Reason & Marshall, 2001, p.417

Meloy (1994) attempts to explain this, suggesting that traditional formats offer the comfort of how to present material so that it is easily understood. Going back to my research diary, it was clear that adherence to a traditional methodology chapter in the first draft was linked to insecurity and attempts to preserve my integrity as a researcher:

"Writing as I've always written, I am in control - I know roughly the workload I am committing myself to and can gauge the time commitment I need to make to achieve that. Trying to do something different, I will no longer have that control - I won't be in the driving seat." Dissertation Journal 6/10/03

The traditional structure for a research project is that the methodology chapter is to a large extent finalised before embarking on the research itself, and one measure of the efficacy of the study is the degree to which the chosen methodology is appropriate to the subject of the research. The main difficulty in attempting to write a final version of the methodology chapter was that my thoughts had shifted over time both in response to the research process and in response to a growing awareness of issues pertaining to the ethics of social research. For example, my understanding of the nature and value of reflexivity and the influence of feminist research methodology had only gradually come to influence the project. Although important now, it would be misleading to suggest that this had been the intended structure when initially designing the methodology.

Meloy (1994) reinforces these feelings, suggesting that the efforts to manage and understand the research process are often as memorable as the substance of the thesis itself:

"At the beginning, I didn't know how different from my ordinary ways of making sense of the world the research process was going to be... I had no idea of what it felt like to do research. Writing the dissertation was an experience in itself." Meloy, 1994, p.2

In order to capture this process element - the learning as I went along, I would need to think carefully about the presentation of the methodology chapter. Although it would mean more work, adopting an alternative format would provide a more contextually grounded and interactive study, illuminating not only the research subject but the experience of carrying out the research too. Consequently, the methodology chapter presented here offers two parallel stories. Firstly, there is the academic presentation of the methodology, as produced for the first draft of the work. This presentation

demonstrates an earnest but somewhat naïve understanding of the research process. The second story is the more human one. It demonstrates a personal struggle against a series of methodological issues that trouble me throughout the project. Working through the so termed 'Dilemmas of a novice researcher' in this way leads to a new and different level of thinking about the nature of the research itself.

DEVELOPING THE RESEARCH DESIGN.

Establishing The Research Paradigm.

From background reading, there were clearly a number of questions surrounding the phenomenon of Sencos working in non maintained early years settings, which warranted investigation. However, there was as yet no hypothesis and no definite idea of the exact focus of the study. This concern was addressed to some extent by Bogdan & Biklen (1982):

> "Some qualitative studies start without a hypothesis or objectives being specified. The investigators will have an idea of what they are doing, but they will not devise detailed procedures before they begin. The study will structure the research rather than the other way around." Bogdan & Biklen, 1982 p.44

It seemed that such a qualitative style of research would best suit what it was I was trying to achieve. Rather than trying to test a hypothesis, the aim was to establish and explore the main issues in relation to the experience of Sencos in non maintained early years settings. This matches Merriam's (1988) proposal that one of the key features of qualitative research is that it is primarily inductive ie building theory and that it is generally concerned with processes such as how rather than why things happen. Considering Hitchcock and Hughes' (1992) comparison of positivistic and interpretive research designs reinforced this notion. They suggest that a key difference between qualitative and quantitative research lies in the way that in qualitative research, theories and concepts are generated after the data collection stage, rather than before it (p.41).

Deciding On The Methodology.

Having established the research paradigm, it was necessary to establish which methodology would best suit this purpose. To some extent the notion of choice of methodology is spurious. Working full time as an educational psychologist and having three young children I was not about to embark upon a large scale project. My choice of area of study by default had to be realistic and manageable. Indeed part of the skill of researching is to recognise what is and isn't possible within given resources (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1992). Given personal and professional circumstances, the investigation would by necessity be a piece of small scale qualitative research.

The chosen area of focus was the experience of Sencos in non maintained early years settings. As such this seemed to be a bounded 'case'. Combined with previous experience of the research process, this seemed to suggest a qualitative case study:

> "Case study methodology allows the researcher to concentrate on a specific instance or situation and to identify or attempt to identify the various interactive processes at work." Bell, 1987, p.6

Comparing my planned intention with Merriam's (1988) four main characteristics of case study research reinforces the use of case study research as being wholly appropriate:

- A case study is particularistic – *ie it focuses on a particular event or phenomenon. Ie working with Sencos in non maintained settings.*
- A case study is descriptive - *The research by its nature would contain elements of description, in order to give a rich picture of the situation.*
- A case study is heuristic – it illuminates understanding of the phenomenon under study. - *The level of description and the way in which I was aiming to allow the voices of the Sencos to be heard would ensure that this was the case.*
- A case study is inductive – concepts are generated out of the data collected - *I had no priori foci. The study was to be one of exploration and discovery.*

Dilemma 1 - Allowing The Data To Speak For Itself

The Role Of Induction

Previous experience of qualitative research had instilled in me the notion of 'allowing the data to speak for itself' ie allowing the findings to shape the research direction rather than specifying beforehand what will be found.

> *"Qualitative research studies are open ended and set up research opportunities designed to lead the researcher to unforeseen areas of discovery within the lives of the people she is studying." Holliday, 2002, p.5*

This demonstrates one of the key differences between qualitative and quantitative research designs. However, as a novice researcher, working within a model of induction posed a number of problems. As induction aims to allow the issues to arise from the data, it is difficult to specify beforehand what the research is about. Whilst the research would comment on the experience of the Senco in non maintained early years settings, it was not possible to be any more specific than this.

> *"The research question is really open... so all I can do is talk generally about SEN and Inclusion - have a chat and see what emerges. It doesn't seem very scientific!" Dissertation Journal 13/10/03*

Meloy (1994) offers succour, commenting: "'What are the priori foci?' and 'What will you have when you are finished?' are examples of the types of questions we have been led to believe we should be able to answer from the beginning." (p.2)

This reflects previous experience of carrying out qualitative studies:

> *"I've never really felt as though my tutors were enthusiastic about this way of working nor necessarily knew any more about it than me. Questions such as 'yes, but what are your research questions' seem very familiar." Dissertation Journal 13/9/02*

Remaining faithful to a notion of induction and having faith that the research will eventually find its own form is a lonely and frightening road to take, as the following diary extract demonstrates:

"I can feel the grip of blind panic in my stomach... I really don't know how to move this forward... I still can't say categorically what the whole thing is about." Dissertation Journal 4/10/03

However, the experience this time was very different. Not only did I have a tutor who fully supported a qualitative style of research:

"I'm really excited that Tom knows his qualitative stuff! ... He's really aware of issues such as allowing the data to speak for itself and giving people a voice." Dissertation Journal 1/9/02

But I also found support in the literature. This came in the form of both methodological validation:

"Qualitative research questions identify the process, object or entity that the researcher wants to investigate. It points us in a direction without predicting what we might find." Willig, 2001, p.19

and emotional support. Meloy's (1994) comments summed up my feelings perfectly:

"I was never alone in my research classes, but I found that I was always alone collecting and analysing data for my thesis. I did not have the companionship of an a priori hypothesis or a statistical design to guide and structure me." Meloy, 1994, p.1

In this context, induction it seemed was as much about holding my nerve and having faith in the research process, as it was about methodology.

The Evolving Shape Of The Study

In accepting a model of induction, it was also necessary to accept that the eventual shape of the research and the findings themselves may be different from the initial starting point. This is reinforced by Willig (2001) who suggests that the researcher must be open to the possibility that the research focus may have to change during the process of the research.

The initial starting point of the study had been an interest in developing a means of delivering educational psychology services to non maintained early year settings. To these ends I had developed the 'Inclusion ABC' - a model of service delivery based on the principles of inclusion, for non maintained early years settings This was envisaged as a three stage model. Stage one saw the development of clusters of early years settings and the development of a link psychologist; stage two was the delivery of the Inclusion ABC training course and stage three was the institution of regular consultations between an educational psychologist and a cluster of Sencos from non maintained settings (See Appendix 2 for full details of the Inclusion ABC project). Early entries in my research journal show how this clearly dominated the writing, reflecting the mental model I was working from:

> "I keep forgetting that the Inclusion ABC is only a part of the project. It's about delivering EP services to early year settings" Dissertation Journal 29/10/02

However, through the process of collecting and interpreting the data, the project started to lead in a different direction. Rather than an evaluation of a service delivery model, the focus was becoming more situated in the lived experiences of the Sencos, and the way in which they conceptualised their work in relation to children with special needs. This brought the initial research design and the desire to remain faithful to the notion of induction into clear conflict.

> "What I'm trying to avoid is following the aspect of the study that most interests me ie the care / education / inclusion debate. I'm not sure why I'm avoiding it. I think it's because it takes me into uncharted waters again. I don't feel that I know enough about the politics of this. " Dissertation Journal 4/10/03

Attempting to remain faithful to the initial area of interest rather than following the route that the study was taking led to a confused end picture. This is reflected in the tutor's comments on the first draft of the dissertation:

> "... the feminist structure for SEN you suggest came as somewhat a surprise, although not an unwelcome one I should add...I think now is the ideal time to contemplate and decide on once and for all what your study is going to be about... once you have made that decision, you will be free to achieve consistently the necessary level of critique. " Tutor's Comments On First Draft, 25.8.03

In order to produce a coherent piece of work, decisions needed to be made about the story I wanted to tell. The advice given by my tutor was that I should give the work longer to 'cook' - to allow the brain to assimilate and make sense of the data. Whilst seeming at the time to be an institutional device for delaying completion of the study, this was in fact a most formative piece of advice. It was only months after submitting the first draft that the work really started to make sense.

> *"Had a really exhilarating tutorial with Tom... for the first time I felt almost confident in talking to him about my findings and my development. I almost discovered that authority that Tom and Simon insinuated that I was lacking. And what's more, I feel that I'm on a roll. I've got more to read, more to write and more to say. Yippee!" Dissertation Journal 19/10/03*

Whilst within a traditional positivist research paradigm, this radical departure from the initial area of interest could be seen as a failure, this time I felt confident that it could be justified methodologically and could be seen as demonstrating a sound grasp of the nature of qualitative work. This is reinforced by Meloy (1994) who comments:

> *"It is only at the end of the experience that we begin to see how the whole is constructed... by the end of the dissertation I was able to explain why the thesis looked like it did." Meloy, 1994, p.1*

Whose Story Is It Anyway?

From the beginning, I had been clear that this was a journey of discovery. Delivering educational psychology services to non maintained early years settings represented an unknown field. The aim of the research was to find out more about the experience of working with these Sencos and the issues that were important to them. As such the work was grounded clearly in a qualitative paradigm.

However, an emerging understanding of the notion of subjectivity brought the notion of 'allowing the data to speak for itself' into question. 'Allowing the data to speak for itself' assumes a specific epistemological position. It suggests that there is an essential truth that the researcher can bring forth and put on display to the reader. Willig (2001) locates this within the positivist paradigm whereby the researcher's influence on the data is not recognised or credited.

The initial planned course of action had been to collect data from a number of Sencos from non maintained early years settings and present the themes derived from this using grounded theory techniques. Hollway (1989) describes how such 'descriptive' work is indicative of traditional feminist social psychology research, whereby extracts are presented to speak for themselves and hence represent women's experiences. Hollway (1989) goes on to suggests that such an approach does nothing to expose the conditions or circumstances that have constructed the displayed positions and hence makes no challenge to the status quo.

> *"People's subjectivities are produced within discourses, history and relations and the meanings that they produce in accounts of their experiences and themselves both reproduce these subjectivities as well as modifying them." Hollway, 1989, p.40*

The research would be presenting firstly the subject position revealed by the Sencos in their conversations with me and secondly an interpretation of this position, based on my own knowledge and experience. Willig (2001) suggests that mediating human experience in such a way is consistent with the social constructionist paradigm, whereby:

> *"What we perceive is never a direct reflection of the environment, but a specific reading of these conditions" Willig, 2001, p.7*

This is reinforced by Hollway (1989), who proposes that whilst descriptive research exposes a person's experience in relation to a certain topic, this is open to any number of interpretations.

Thus, developing an understanding of subjectivity had moved the research beyond a positivist form of qualitative inquiry, into a previously unknown area. The study would be grounded firmly in a social constructivist epistemology.

Establishing The Primary Methods Of Data Collection

In the same way that epistemological roots dictate to a large part the research paradigm, research methodology also dictates more or less appropriate methods of data collection.

There are a number of research methods commonly associated with case study research, which would help elicit the desired information about the experience of Sencos in non maintained early years settings.

Questionnaires.

Although the use of a questionnaire would elicit a sample of opinion, there were a number of factors predicating against the use of this method of data collection.

Bell (1987) suggests that the first stage of planning a questionnaire is to decide exactly what you want to find out. With a purpose of discovery, it was clear that ideas about the relative importance of issues should not be forced onto the participants. This concern is echoed by Hitchcock & Hughes (1992):

> "Questionnaires may structure responses too much or they may lead to participants answering in a certain way, thus effecting accuracy." Hitchcock & Hughes, 1992, p.25

How could the questionnaire be made flexible enough to allow the respondents to bring up the issues that were important to them? This question is again raised by Hitchcock & Hughes:

> "A questionnaire may not be flexible enough to enable the respondents' true feelings or attitudes to come out." Hitchcock & Hughes, 1992, p.25

Also, given that the average response rate to a postal questionnaire is 30% (Cohen & Manion, 1998) then 100 questionnaires would need to be sent out to ensure a reasonable response. This seems like a large undertaking as part of a small-scale study. As such, the notion of using a questionnaire was rejected.

Interviews.

Bogdan & Biklen (1992) cite interviewing as one of the most common forms of data collection linked to case study research. They go on to suggest that the style of interview chosen depends on exactly what it is the researcher wants to find out.

Whereas structured interviews with closed questions will yield a great deal of information on specific questions, semi structured interviews with more open questions:

> "Allow depth to be achieved through providing opportunities on the part of the interviewer to probe and expand on the interviewees experiences. " Hitchcock & Hughes, 1992, p.83

Although the study had a loose focus, it did not seem appropriate to limit the research by asking closed questions. I was interested in hearing what the interviewees had to say about the subject. Bogdan & Biklen (1992) sum this up saying:

> "(Qualitative) interviewing is used to gather descriptive data in the subject's own words, so that the researcher can develop insights into how the subject interprets some part of the world." Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p.96

From this, it seemed that a semi structured interview would best suit the purpose. Interviewing Sencos prior to their engagement with the Inclusion ABC course would allow some degree of freedom for the interviewees to express their opinions, whilst at the same time allowing questioning to be focused in a specific arena.

Focus Group Interviews

A focus group interview is a particular type of group interview that involves the researcher leading a discussion with a group of interviewees. Flick (1998) describes how it:

> "Attempts to further contextualise data collected to create an interactional situation that comes closer to everyday life than the (often one off) encounter of the interviewer and interviewee." Flick, 1998, p.114

In the focus group interview, rather than leading the conversation, the role of the interviewer is to moderate a discussion between group members on a topic of interest to the researcher.

In exploring the reasons for the use of focus group methodology, Flick (1998) suggests that such a technique corresponds more closely to the way in which opinions are produced, expressed and exchanged in everyday life. At the same time, it allows

corrections to be made by the group concerning extreme views or incorrect portrayals of purported shared experiences. However, Willig (2001) cautions the indiscriminate use of focus group interviewing, particularly if the subject matter is sensitive. She suggests that that disclosure is not necessarily enhanced by the presence of other participants and in this case, semi structured interviews may be more appropriate.

In addition to this, Flick (1998) highlights a number of additional concerns that would need to be addressed by the researcher if this technique were to be used. For example, how data can be documented to allow for the identification of individual speakers and differentiation between statements of parallel speakers, or how the researcher can balance accommodating the dynamics of the group whilst at the same time steering the discussion.

Whilst necessitating careful planning in order to accommodate these concerns, the focus group interview seemed to offer much potential, given that as part of the Inclusion ABC training programme, I would have a ready made focus group. The focus group interview would allow me to explore issues arising from the individual interviews, whilst providing an additional source of data in its own right.

Dilemma 2 - The Spectres Of Power & Influence

The second dilemma arising from my methodological wrangling revolved around the dual issues of power and influence. Over and above the social constructivist stance adopted, an increasing awareness of the Foucauldian notion of power relations shaping subjectivities was troubling.

> *"For Foucault, knowledge of all sorts is thoroughly enmeshed in the clash of petty domination as well as in the larger battles which constitute our world."*
> *Rabinow, 1991, p.6*

Approaching Sencos in non maintained early years settings as an educational psychologist would make an immediate statement about power and authority. I might easily be cast into the role of 'expert' and maintaining Foucault's language, I would be seen to be 'operating within the regime of truth'. To ask questions about such an emotive subject as inclusion and children with special needs would give an indication of

'the right thing to say', and would influence the answers given to my questions. This is reinforced by Hollway (1989) who suggests that researchers through their position as expert will have considerable power within the research context (p.23).

This dilemma is visible in the diary entries around the time that I needed to make the initial contact with the settings:

> *"Eventually plucked up courage to start ringing around. To my surprise, everyone sounded really positive ... what's going on? Is this the power / relationship thing starting already? By introducing myself as an EP do I set the stakes too high? Do they feel duty bound to say yes? Do they feel intimidated and want to make a good impression?" Dissertation Journal 9/10/02*

These concerns are reflected in Hollway & Jefferson's (2002) notion of the 'defended subject[i] ie when subjects invest in discourses to provide protection against anxiety and support identity (p.23)

> *"Conflict, suffering and threats to self operate on the psyche in ways that affect people's positioning and investment in certain discourses, rather than others." Hollway &Jefferson, 2002, p.19*

It seemed important to minimise Sencos responding to the interview questions with answers that they felt should be given to an educational psychologist or putting them in a position where they felt they needed to disguise the meanings of their thoughts or actions. This needed to be addressed at two levels. Firstly, it was necessary to consider how the image of an Educational Psychologist, and the associated preconceptions would affect my relationships with the Sencos. Secondly, it was necessary to look at how the interviews could be conducted in such a way as to make the outcomes less predictable.

The first of these concerns was resolved with relatively little difficulty. Holloway and Jefferson (2002) describe how in feminist research methodology there is a recognition of the need for symmetry in the social identities of the interview pair. Personally, I was having difficulties in organising childcare for my nine month old baby during the interview phase. A simple solution was that I should take her with me. Although not disguising the fact that I was an Educational Psychologist, the interviews could be

conduct with me in the role of the mother of a young child. As either mothers of young children themselves or carers for young children the Sencos might then be put at ease.

Attention to dress was also important. Rather than arriving to conduct the interviews dressed as an archetypal educational psychologist, it would be appropriate to dress more casually, to avoid perpetuating any preconceptions. As such my interview outfit was jeans and a jumper. Whilst in most instances this contributed to an easy relationship with the Sencos, on one occasion this was not the case.

> "I was met at the door by the nursery manager wearing a fitted two piece suit! Talk about the boot being on the other foot. I had dressed casually to try to equalise some of the interview inequalities, but now I felt scruffy and unprofessional!" Observation notes, Setting 5.

Although backfiring on this occasion this in itself was interesting data and on the whole, I felt confident that the measures taken would go some way to achieving the desired degree of symmetry between researcher and subject.

The second concern relating to the nature of the interview itself was more difficult to address. In considering the power relationships between interviewers and interviewees, Hollway & Jefferson (2002) identify the problems of shared meaning and prompting of particular answers. They suggest that some interviewees are not knowledgeable about how and why they have done things and that post rationalisation can be very different to processes in operation during a prior event.

In order to reduce my influence on the type of data generated, references to value laden terms such as 'inclusion' would need to be avoided and questions posed in less emotive terms. If the interviews were to elicit more than just a version of 'what I ought to say to a psychologist about children with special needs' the issues highlighted by Holloway and Jefferson (ibid)would need to be addressed. The notion of using a narrative style of interviewing is proposed by Hollway & Jefferson (2002) as an antidote to some of these difficulties. Using this technique, rather than post rationalising their experiences, interviewees are encouraged to tell their own stories. In order to achieve this, four guiding principles are proposed:

- *Questions should be open;*
- *The aim should be to elicit stories ie accounts of real life events rather than explanations;*
- *'Why?' questions should be avoided in order to prevent post rationalisation and defensive dialogue;*
- *The interview should follow the respondents ordering and phrasing to allow the interviewee to take responsibility for making the relevance of certain aspects clear. .*

Thus, the eventual questions devised to inquire about the experiences of the Sencos were open, inviting the interviewees to tell their stories, for example: 'Tell me about a time you had a child with special needs in your setting... ' At the same time, references to educational psychology were reduced in order to encourage a frank exchanged.

> *"This impression management stuff is really apparent in what I'm doing. I've spent all day drafting a simple letter to confirm sessions and dates. I had to get the font right so it was more friendly. I was really aware of the preconceptions of the word 'psychologist' and people being scared of it... " Dissertation Journal 13/10/02*

Whilst a narrative approach wouldn't provide a transparent account of the experience of being a Senco in a non maintained setting, following it would allow perhaps a closer understanding the reality of their situation.

Participant Observation.

Merriam (1988) describes participant observation as being the mainstay of qualitative case study research, saying:

> "It is a major means of collecting data in case study research. It gives a first hand account of the situation under study and when combined with interviews and documentary analysis, allows for holistic interpretation of the phenomenon being investigated. It is the technique of choice when behaviour can be observed or when people cannot or will not talk about the research topic." Merriam, 1988, p.102

Visiting Sencos in their settings to conduct the interviews, would afford an opportunity to look around the settings and get a feel for the different places. As presenter of the Inclusion ABC training course there would also be additional opportunities for collecting data.

Much of the literature on observation seems to be dedicated to techniques, which require the researcher to be very clear prior to observation what they are looking at (Cohen & Manion, 1998). This seemed to contradict the way in which the study had been planned ie letting the issues emerge from the data. Merriam (1988) suggests the taking of field notes is more appropriate to qualitative studies, ie:

> "A written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data." Merriam, 1988, p.96

Spradley (1980) goes further suggesting that the initial stages of participant observation should be broad and descriptive. From the analysis of this data, more detailed questions can then be formulated leading to a more focused stage of investigation. Thus, observation could be seen as a further source of information both to supplement the interviews and to help the interrogation of the initial interview data.

Research Journals.

Within qualitative research, the role of the researcher is to mediate between the research data and the audience. Holly (1989) proposes the use of a research journal both to collect data and also to ensure that issues of reflexivity are recorded.

> "A research journal can be used to keep comprehensive, descriptive documentation; to record facts, procedures and interactions and keep analytical and interpretative notes." Holly, 1989, p.21

Keeping a research journal would enable both analytical and factual notes about the research to be kept, whilst at the same time charting my own progress along the research path, showing clearly my development as a researcher.

Dilemma 3 - Reflexivity And Me

In adopting a social constructivist stance there is an implicit acceptance of the notion that any interpretation of data is grounded in the researcher's own opinions and prejudices. This personal interest would also be reflected in the data collection and analytic phases of the study. Willig (2001) points out that all research is shaped by the researcher's own subjectivity:

> *"Researcher's decisions, the questions they ask of the data, the way they use the method as well as personal, philosophical, and methodological background shape the research and ultimately the findings." Willig, 2001, p.44*

Hollway (1989) comments that such subjectivity is frequently seen as being the binary opposite of objectivity, which in positivist research is lauded as an indicator of quality. Taylor (1996) notes:

> *"Social science researchers are taught to mistrust experience, to regard it as inferior to theory and to believe the use of research techniques can provide data unclouded by values, beliefs and involvement." Taylor, 1996, p.108*

With the implicit understanding that I would be active in constructing a picture of the experience of the Senco in non maintained early years settings, how could this be done in an academic and scholarly way?

Ahmed (1999) proposes that rather than making the researcher invisible in the research, the researcher's role in the unfolding process should be acknowledged. This is reinforced by Burman (1996) who proposes that such attention to issues of reflexivity is essential in order to produce an explicit account of the area of study. Such an approach is endorsed by Maguire (2001) who makes a case for the use of 'conscious reflexivity' to avoid the production of alienated knowledge which leaves no trace of the conditions of its production or the social conditions from which it has arisen (p.65).

So how does one go about this? Holliday (2002) proposes the notion of reflexivity, which he describes as:

"The way in which the researcher comes to terms with and capitalises upon the complexities of their presence within the research setting, in a methodological way." Holliday, 1999, p.146

Willig (2001) further differentiates between two forms of reflexivity. Personal reflexivity is described as the process of reflecting on how the researcher's own values and assumptions have shaped the research. Epistemological reflexivity is described as the way in which the methodological stance is interrogated to examine how it has shaped what might be found.

Leaving an 'audit trail' or as Holliday (2002) describes 'showing the workings' is proposed as a strategy to enable the reader to follow the research journey and see clearly how particular readings of the data have been made and conclusions constructed. Maintaining a visible presence throughout the research and demonstrating the progressive development of ideas should leave the reader clear as to how and why the conclusions have been drawn. My subjective observations made both in the Dissertation Journal and throughout my engagement with the Sencos would provide clear evidence of this development.

In addition to this, Holliday (2002) proposes that in order to achieve this level of subjectivity then the researcher should develop a separate voice in the text, to allow data to be distinguished from interpretation. Although this does not address the issue of the selection of extracts in the first place, it does allow the reader to follow the research process and the researcher's interpretation.

"By making this separation apparent in the text, the researcher shows the workings of what she has done, as far as possible making it transparent to the reader... this display of clarity adds to the validity of the written study, revealing to a large extent how subjectivity has been managed." Holliday, 1989, p.19

By presenting not only the Analytical Stories suggested by Straus & Corbin (1990) but also 'Discursive Commentaries' (Holliday, 2002) I would achieve a degree of separation between data and interpretation. Thus the contemplation on subjectivity had led to an affirmation of the stance I was taking and provided a possible way of achieving this.

Addressing The Issues Of Validity And Reliability

Internal Validity

The traditional positivist interpretation of validity concerns how far the findings of a study match reality.

> "Validity refers to the extent to which the materials collected are true and represent an accurate picture of who or what is being studied."
> Hitchcock and Hughes, 1992, p.45

However, the basic assumption of a social constructivist paradigm is that reality is not a fixed entity; it is grounded in the thoughts and experiences of the various participants, at that point in time. Consequently, assessing validity by comparing findings to reality is inappropriate (Merriam, 1988).

If the aim of the research was to identify the Senco's constructions of reality, then the most important measure of validity must be the extent to which this is achieved. Guba and Lincoln (1981) suggest that validity is:

> "...the extent to which multiple truths have been adequately represented ie their reconstruction is credible to the original constructors." Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p.87

Examination of the available literature suggests that there are a number of possible means of achieving a degree of internal validity, the most common of which is triangulation. Merriam (1988) describes triangulation as follows:

> "Using multiple investigators, multiple sources of data or multiple methods to confirm emerging findings." Merriam, 1988, p.169

Thus rather than relying on one source of data, efforts should be made to 'cross examine' the emerging findings. Within the context of this project, combining data from multiple data sources (Sencos) as well as multiple data collection methods (Participant Observation, Interviews, Focus Group and Dissertation Journal) should address this to some extent.

External Validity.

This describes the extent to which the findings of a study can be applied to other situations ie 'generalisation'. It seems clear from the literature that generalisation is neither the aim, nor the purpose of qualitative research. In choosing a qualitative research design, one is generally interested in understanding in depth, a particular situation or phenomenon, and not looking for general rules.

> "A qualitative study will provide the reader with a three dimensional picture and will illustrate relationships, micro political issues and patterns of influence in a particular context" Bell, 1987, p.7

Given this background, is it ever possible to extend the findings of a qualitative study to a larger population? Merriam (1988) proposes three means by which the researcher can improve the generalisability of research findings:

1. Through providing such rich description so that the readers can make their own judgement as to the possibility of generalisation.
2. Through establishing the typicality of a particular phenomenon / event or individual.
3. Through conducting cross case / cross-site studies ie comparing the findings in one particular setting with those in a comparable one.

Due to time constraints only the first of these three measures seemed applicable to this project. Using a combination of data collection techniques to provide rich description was a realistic option.

Reliability.

Bell (1987) describes reliability as:

> "The extent to which a task or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions." Bell, 1987, p.50

Thus, the traditional notion of reliability could be described as the extent to which the findings of a study can be replicated. Again, due to the nature and philosophical

underpinnings of social constructivist research, this becomes more complicated. Given the assumption that there is no single interpretation of a situation, and different actors will interpret situations in different ways, then there is no benchmark against which to take repeated measures.

> "Because what is being studied in education is assumed to be in flux, multifaceted and highly contextual, because information gathered is a function of who gives it and how skilled the researcher is at getting it and because of the emergent design…reliability in the traditional sense is not only fanciful, but impossible!" Merriam, 1988, p.171

Guba and Lincoln (1981) question the notion of reliability in qualitative studies, suggesting that since it is impossible to have internal validity without reliability, then validity should be pursued in preference to reliability. They suggest that instead of reliability a notion of 'dependability of consistency' should be fostered ie the extent to which another researcher would draw the same conclusions from the same raw data. This requires that the original researcher leaves what Merriam (1988) terms a 'clear audit trail' ie enough information and description so that any independent judge could authenticate the findings.

Incorporating elements of rich description as well as a commentary on the process of the research should allow such reading to take place.

Dilemma 4 - What Does It All Mean Anyway?

If issues of validity and reliability are seen as indicative of quality in traditional positivistic research, where does that leave the qualitative researcher? Applying the notions of validity and reliability to the proposed research project seemed rather tenuous and of limited value. This reflection is reinforced by Hollway & Jefferson (2002) who suggest that traditional measures of validity and reliability are invalid criteria for any such work, as all meanings are unique and shared and therefore no situation is replicable (p79). So what was I aiming for? What should good qualitative research look like?

This question is answered to some extent by Willig (2001):

> *"Good practice in qualitative research requires the systematic and clear presentation of analyses, which are demonstrably grounded in the data and which pay attention to reflexivity issues. In addition, such work is characterised by an awareness of its contextual and theoretical specificity and the limitations this imposes on its relevance and applicability." Willig, 2001, p.144*

This interpretation is based in part, upon the guidelines for quality in qualitative research put forward by Henwood & Pidgeon (1992) and by Elliot et al (1999). In addressing grounded theory, Henwood & Pidgeon (1992) propose seven steps which they suggest will ensure the rigour of qualitative research whilst at the same time acknowledging the idiosyncrasy and creativity of the research process itself. Ensuring that my work was in line with these criteria should increase the chances of producing a sound piece of research. Thus, the seven stages are as follows:

1) *Importance of fit between the data and the categories. Developing coherence within and between categories and making it clear how the categories had been derived would address this.*

2) *Integration of theory. Developing a separate voice in the text would enable the reader to follow the transition from data to theory. Using both Analytical Stories to present the Sencos' experiences followed by Discursive Commentaries to explain the identification salient points would allow this to happen.*

3) *Reflexivity. Maintaining a visible presence throughout the research and engaging the reader in the unfolding story would ensure a high degree of reflexivity.*

4) *Documentation. The parallel story of me the researcher should contribute to the production of an inclusive and comprehensive account of what was done and why.*

5) *Theoretical sampling. The collection of data over a period of time (Initial interviews and Inclusion ABC course) would allow for the continuous exploration of the emerging themes in light of new data.*

6) *Sensitivity to negotiated realities. Presenting the findings to the focus group, to check out emerging findings would help provide some feedback on the work. Additional reality checks would come through discussing the findings with a*

colleague, whose role as area Senco involves her working with Sencos from the non maintained sector on a daily basis.

7) *Transferability. Ensuring that the data was rich in detail would enable an 'audit trail' to be left so that the data could tell its own story and so that fellow researchers / professionals would be able to draw their own conclusions from it.*

How Will The Data Be Analysed?

Beyond deciding on how to collect the data, decisions also had to be made as to how collected data would be analysed. Cohen & Manion (1998) suggest either coding according to a pre determined schedule, or post coding from interview notes or transcripts. Being on an information finding mission, the best way forward seemed to be post coding, following a grounded theory style approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1992). From a general 'eyeballing' of the data, general units of meaning would be established, which then could be used to develop more specific categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Glaser & Strauss (1967) suggest that theory can be built inductively from the phenomenon it represents to form what they term 'grounded theory'.

> "One does not begin with a theory and then prove it. Rather, one begins with an area of study and what is relevant to that area is allowed to emerge." Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.34

Through carrying out a systematic set of procedures, theory is inductively built about a phenomenon. In doing this Glaser and Strauss (1967) suggest that the theory built will be faithful to and illuminate the area under study. When combined with similar research on the same phenomenon, it should be possible to apply this emerging 'grounded theory' to other situations.

Dilemma 5 - Matching Epistemology And Data Analysis

Willig (2001) suggests that how the data is recorded and analysed is equally bounded by epistemological position. This is reinforced by Flick (1998) who proposes that the view we take of the data collected and what it is seen to represent will have a direct

influence on the choice of data analysis technique. Basing the study within a social constructionist epistemology would require data analysis techniques to be reviewed and revised.

With the aim of exploring the experience of Sencos in the non maintained sector, the research was clearly inductive, hence the initial draw to grounded theory. However, conflicts exist between this methodology and the stated epistemological position. Charmaz (2000) highlights the positivist assumptions implicit in many of the early grounded theory texts. The data collected is seen to be a direct reading of reality - a so called 'window into the soul'. Having rejected this position, how could I ever hope to make sense of my data? The options available seemed to be discourse analysis or what Charmaz (2000) describes as a social constructivist version of grounded theory.

Discourse Analysis

The emergence of discursive analysis represents a shift from the cognitive view of 'language as a window to the soul' to a stance whereby language is seen as a tool by which individuals structure and position themselves in order to create a reality.

Willig (2001) describes how there are two main schools of discourse analysis - 'discursive psychology' which studies what people seek to construct through language, and 'Foucauldian Discourse Analysis' which seeks to describe the way in which discourse shapes social and psychological life, including notions of power and control.

In most cases, discourse analysis will be carried out from transcripts of speech or written documents, although within Foucauldian analysis this could be extended to any symbolic system. Analysis will be carried out through a process of interacting with the text to establish action orientation (ie what is the text doing?) rather than simply reading for meaning.

Whilst offering a viable way of analysing the data, there were a number of points mitigating against the use of this methodology. Primarily, there was a concern with whether a form of discourse analysis would elicit the information the research had set out to find. The study really was starting from a point of little or no understanding and

knowledge about the experience of the Sencos. The study was aimed at gathering information about Sencos in non maintained settings and identifying issues important to them. As such it was less about how versions of reality are negotiated and more about identifying themes and issues. Whilst this information may then direct the researcher to further discursive work, as an initial means of analysis, this methodology was rejected.

Social Constructivist Versions Of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory can be referred to as both method and end product. Grounded theory is the process through which categories of meaning are progressively identified from the data and relationships between categories identified. It can also refer to the building of new theory and understanding of the area under study by comparing identified themes within and across similar research projects.

Although grounded theory is described as a way of allowing issues to arise from the data, the procedures set down by Strauss & Corbin (1990) continued to cause me some anxiety. Whatever happened, it would be me as the researcher identifying the categories and my values and assumptions guiding what is regarded as significant.

Willig (2001) addresses these concerns, introducing the notion of a 'social constructivist' version of grounded theory. Such an approach attempts to recognise that the essence of a situation can never be captured entirely and that the voice of the researcher is implicit in design and analysis. This is echoed by Charmaz (2000) who suggests:

> "A social constructivist grounded theory recognises that the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed. Data do not provide a window on reality. Rather the 'discovered' reality arises from the interactive process and its temporal, cultural and structural contexts."
> Charmaz, 2000, p.524

Charmaz goes on to describe a number of strategies that can be employed by the researcher in order to ensure a social constructivist reading of the work. These include ensuring the researcher is visible and 'part of what is viewed' in order for influences and decisions to be clear to the reader and the development of a style of research that

allows the research subjects to 'cast their stories in their own terms'. Each of these measures, one by one could be matched to the series of considerations recorded previously in this chapter as the researcher's 'dilemmas'. As such, I seemed to have stumbled upon the study's methodological home. By employing a combination of inductive grounded theory, combined with clear statements identifying issues of reflexivity, it should be possible to illuminate the Sencos' experiences whilst at the same time demonstrating to the reader how such a reading has been made. As such, a social constructivist version of grounded theory would represent an appropriate means of analysing the collected data.

The Emerging Shape Of The Research Project

Thus, eventually, the research project began to take shape. The plan was to collect data from a number of Sencos in non maintained early years settings, through semi structured, narrative style interviews held in the Sencos' places of work. During this time, there would also be a chance to look around and observe in the settings.

Working with the same Sencos delivering the Inclusion ABC course would allow further data collection and the checking out of emerging themes from the interview data. A group interview at the end of this process would help clarify some of the emerging findings of the study.

The use of a research journal would allow personal progress through the research project to be charted addressing issues of reflexivity.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="2">Research Project Summary</td></tr>
<tr><td>Epistemological position:</td><td>Social constructivist</td></tr>
<tr><td>Paradigm:</td><td>Inductive, qualitative</td></tr>
<tr><td>Methodology:</td><td>Case study</td></tr>
</table>

Data collection techniques:	Semi structured interviews based on narrative style; participant observation; research journal; focus group interview.
Reflexivity:	Personal & epistemological recorded in research journal.
Ethics:	Triangulation through multiple data sources and data collection techniques; member checks; rich description.
Data analysis technique:	Inductive, social constructivist, grounded theory.

Finalising the Procedures

The following section describes the actual practise of collecting and analysing the data as well as practical considerations concerning the setting up of the project.

Gaining Access

In preparation for the project, I had become a regular member of the Special Needs and Inclusion task group of the local Early Years Partnership (EYCP). As such a good working relationship had been developed with the 'Equality and Inclusion' manager who coordinated the group.

> "Incredible meeting with R. She is so supportive. She has encouraged me to put in a proposal regarding funding and has offered to pay £50 per setting to encourage them to attend. What's going on? I think part of it is about R herself. She's so passionately committed to inclusion. She's a 'can do' person willing to try things and take risks." Dissertation Journal 2/10/02

However, negotiating access wasn't without difficulty. The following diary extract demonstrates my excitement at the support offered, mixed with frustrations over bureaucracy.

> "She (Inclusion & Equality manager) seems really keen and supportive... it seems that who you know is important...but everything has to be done officially - going through the Special Needs task group, through the Executive Committee etc. It just seems that the more people you involve the more official channels you have to go through and the more complex it gets." Dissertation Journal 18/7/02

In the end, it seemed that timing too had a large part to play in gaining access. My diary describes my feelings on finding that the EYCP had appointed their first Area Senco.

> "This is really good news for me. I know M and can work with her. She's coming from the same angle as me re inclusion etc... she stated that her post was from September but as yet there was no clear role for her. This was brilliant news. If I play my cards right, I could end up running the course jointly with her." Dissertation Journal 3/7/03

Having presented the project to the Special Needs and Inclusion task group and to the EYCP executive, permission was granted for the research to be carried out with local non maintained early years settings. As such the route to approaching and accessing the settings was opened. My suggestion that I should collaborate with the newly appointed area Senco was welcome by the EYCP, offering an intrinsic opportunity for checking the validity of the findings.

Selecting The Sample Group

Given that the study was a small scale case study the issue of deciding on a sample was not too onerous. Cohen & Manion (1998) propose a number of ways of deciding on non-probability samples, one of which is convenience sampling. With convenience sampling, participants are chosen for reason such as location or prior links. Working with the Area Senco, it seemed appropriate to select participants from the area of the city that she would be working with. Discussion with the 'Inclusion and Special Needs' task group defined that my involvement should be initially with Nursery Education Grant (NEG) registered settings. This suited the purpose of the study, as although children with special needs might be found in any setting, non NEG settings may not be operating under the Code of Practice and may not have a Senco in place.

All twenty-four of the validated settings in the Area Senco's domain were invited to join the research project, which incorporated both interviews and the Inclusion ABC training course. This was introduced through an initial discussion with the Area Senco, followed by a telephone call from the researcher, to allow time for the Sencos to consider whether they wanted to participate. An added incentive to participate was the offer of supply cover funding from the EYCP.

As I was only available on Thursday mornings to conduct the research, in the end this proved to be the major selection criterion. Whilst the majority of the Sencos contacted expressed much interest in the project, only fourteen were able to attend the Inclusion ABC training sessions on the given dates and times. Issues such as other staff being out on training on Thursdays and annual leave were cited as reasons for non participation. A number of settings who were unable to attend asked to be placed on the waiting list for the next course. The target number of participants was set at fifteen. As such, all of the Sencos available to attend were accepted onto the project and a fifteenth participant was chosen from one of the settings requesting an additional place.

Carrying Out The Individual Interviews

Although the focus of the interviews was intentionally loose, in order that the interviewees had flexibility to talk about the issues they felt important, there was also the need for a degree of structure. This caused some difficulty though:

> "It's difficult writing an initial interview schedule when you don't really have a research question. The research question is really open-ended - what is the experience of being a Senco in a non maintained setting? All I can do is talk generally about special needs - have a chat and see what evolves!" Dissertation Journal 13/10/03

Given the initial research focus on the experience of being a Senco, it was possible to come up with a number of broad areas for questioning, including training, past experience and working with external agencies. Whilst directing the interview to some extent, this still allowed a great deal of flexibility (The final interview schedule can be found in Appendix 3). In addition to this, the interview schedule reflected aspects of the narrative approach propounded by Hollway and Jefferson (2002). The questions devised

were open, and invited the interviewees to tell their stories for example: 'Tell me about when you had a child with special needs in the nursery...' At the same time, references to my professional role were reduced in order to encourage a frank exchanged.

The interviews were carried out over an eight week period during November and December 2002. Between two and three interviews were carried out each session in the Senco's own setting. Interviews were of between 20 and 40 minutes in duration, depending on the extent to which the Senco engaged with the notion of telling their story and interviews were recorded in order to allow them to be studied in detail following the meeting. Interviews were recorded and typed transcripts produced.

Carrying Out The Observations

Even though Spradley (1980) advises the development of a loose structure for observations, the nature of the opportunities for observation mitigated against this. With no formal arrangement for observation, any observation would be incidental, arising from either passing through the setting or being shown around by the Senco. Consequently it was decided that comments or observations should be noted following each visit. There would be however, no criteria to guide the observation. The observations noted would then be used to assist in making sense of the interview data and developing a cohesive picture of each setting.

Similarly, observations made throughout the Inclusion ABC training course would be recorded in an informal commentary which could be used both as a source of data and to explore emerging findings.

Carrying Out The Group Interview

Part of the final training session was given over to the focus group interview. The focus group interview lasted approximately 40 minutes, and twelve Sencos participated. The interview was recorded and as far as possible transcribed.

The focus group interview questions reflected the aims established in the development of the Inclusion ABC training course, but also allowed scope to explore issues arising

from ongoing analysis of the interview and session data. In order to prevent participants being overly influenced by more dominant members of the group, an interview prompt sheet was distributed prior to the interview, to help the Sencos gather their thoughts. In addition to this, throughout the course, the onus was placed on the Sencos to give feedback on this a pilot study, in order to inform decisions about whether the course should be offered more widely. As such negative as well as positive comments were legitimised.

Research Journal.

Throughout the whole of the research project, a journal was kept to record my developing understanding of the issues relating to the case and moreover the experience of the research process itself.

Checking For Reliability And Validity

The use of multiple data collection techniques, combined with multiple data sources (ie the different participants) is intended to provide a degree of internal validity. Further to this, there was an opportunity through an existing parallel group of Sencos, to check out the emerging findings - to see if they rang true. This was done at an evening meeting in April 2003. Additional checks on validity came through discussing the findings with the Area Senco, whose role involved her working with Sencos from the non maintained sector on a daily basis.

Ensuring that the data was rich in detail would allow an 'audit trail' to be left so that fellow researchers or professionals in the field would be able to draw their own conclusions from it. In this way, some degree of reliability and external validity might be achieved. In addition to this, through articulating my own presence in the research, I hoped to achieve a good degree of reflexivity - both in terms of influence on the research process and construction of the findings.

Analysing The Data

The first stage of the data analysis would be through open coding. Having transcribed the interviews, an initial reading of the scripts would allow 'Units of Meaning' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to be identified. These 'Units of Meaning' would then be put together with similar units from other scripts to form what Strauss & Corbin (1990) term 'Concepts'. These concepts would then to be grouped together with concepts on a similar theme to form what Straus and Corbin (1990) term 'Categories'.

The second stage of data analysis would be the development of the Analytical Stories. Strauss & Corbin (1990) describe how having identified concepts within a category, these concepts need to be brought together to form a cohesive account. They term this the 'Analytical Story' - ie a reconstituting of the analysed data to give a cohesive picture of themes and issues arising from the data. The Analytical Stories are intended to be rich in description to allow a lively picture of the situation to be portrayed.

The third stage of data analysis would be the development of the 'Discursive Commentaries'. Following each Analytical Story, Holliday (2002) proposes a Discursive Commentary, which seeks to identify salient points within the category in relation either to the literature or to the developing understanding emerging from the data. This stage moves from a representative to interpretive stage of the data analysis. Separating the Analytical Story and Discursive Commentary in this way allows the separate voices of the researched and the researcher to be clearly seen, addressing social constructivist concerns over grounded theory techniques.

A final stage of analysis would be the bringing together of the Discursive Commentaries to explore a new theoretical understanding of the situation under study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Analytical Stories are presented for the four core data categories. These stories are then explored and salient points highlighted in the *Discursive Commentaries*. Summaries are also given of the three subsidiary data categories (*Analytical Stories* and *Discursive Commentaries* for these categories can be found in Appendix 1)

RESULTS

Introduction To The Results Chapter

Analysing the data

The data collected has been analysed in three main stages:

1. Individual interview data, observational and session data were first scanned for separate 'units of meaning'.
2. Units of meaning from different sources were put together with those on a similar topic to form what Strauss and Corbin (1990) term 'concepts'.
3. Concepts pertaining to similar themes were then grouped together in order to form what Strauss and Corbin (1990) term 'categories of meaning'.

Data categories have been further divided into core and subsidiary categories.

Core categories form the basis of the study, containing rich data relating to the role of the Senco in the non maintained sector. These categories are presented fully in the main body of the dissertation

Subsidiary categories do not relate directly to the research focus but never the less provide additional insights into the non maintained sector. These categories are presented in summary form in the main body of the dissertation. The full text of these categories can be found in Appendix 1.

Reporting The Results

The analysed data is presented in a number of different forms.

1. Firstly, a summative web diagram illustrates all categories and summarises their content. (Figure 1). Core categories are highlighted indicating that they are fully reported in the body of the dissertation. Subsidiary categories are

presented in summary form only (Full versions of the subsidiary categories can be found in Appendix 1).

For Core Categories

1. Each category is expanded upon through a <u>web diagram</u>, illustrating each of the concepts within it as well as an overall summary.
2. Categories are further expanded upon, through the presentation of an '<u>Analytical Story'</u>. This story is built up out of direct quotes from the Sencos themselves and attempts to bring together the different units of meaning into a cohesive story. Issues arising from the observations notes are also used to triangulate the data at this stage.
3. For core categories a <u>Discursive Commentary</u> also follows the analytical story, highlighting salient points and issues of interest.

For Subsidiary Categories

1. Each category is expanded on through a <u>web diagram</u>, to illustrate each of the concepts within it as well as an overall summary.
2. This is followed by an overall <u>Category Summary</u> which presents the content of each concept within the category.

"It's not playgroup level anymore, is it?"- working with children (Category 7)

This category gives a picture of the day to day working practices for all children in the setting.

"I just wanted to know how to help..." - on being a Senco (Category 1)

This category gives rich data describing the people who are setting based Sencos and the perceived issues pertaining to their role.

"We've just got a gut feeling..." - working with children with SEN (Category 2)

This category describes the experiences Sencos have had of working with children with special needs in the past.

"It's a fine balance..." - staffing issues in non maintained settings (Category 6)

This category gives a rich picture of the human contexts in which the Sencos are working.

The Senco experience
11/5/04 - v19

"It's like banging your head against a wall..." - working with other people (Category 3)

This category comments on the the way settings have been supported in the past, both internally and by external agencies

"The nursery looked just like a double glazing showroom!" - the physical working conditions (Category 5)

This category gives a rich picture of the types of environments the Sencos are working in.

"It's not like that at home..." - working with parents (Category 4)

This category describes the experiences Sencos have had addressing issues of special needs with parents.

Figure 1.Core and Subsidiary Categories.mmp - 11/5/04 - Ruth Dennis - dennis@bradford18.freeserve.co.uk

Recognising the value of existing practice
Insecurity of not doing the right thing
Confidence through experience

Confidence

Age
Length of time as Senco
Children with special needs in the setting
Personal experience

Personal Experience

Coordination / administration
1:1 Work
Working with parents

Senco Tasks

Category 1: " I just wanted to know how to help..." - on being a Senco

9/5/04 - v13

Content
Relevance
Effect on staff / setting
Previous Experiences

Limitations

Training

Status of the Senco

Management links
Time for Senco duties

This category describes how Sencos
have come to be doing the job and the
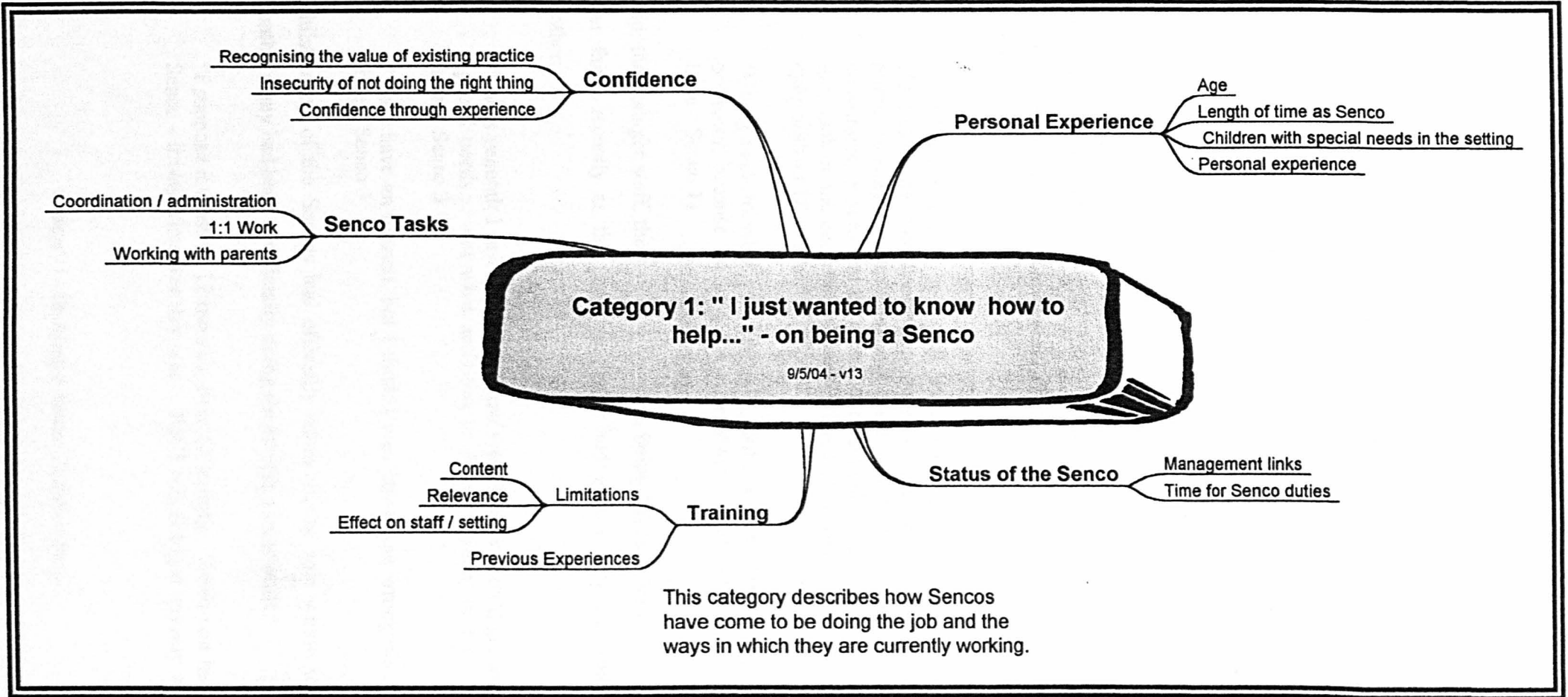ways in which they are currently working.

Figure 2. Category 1 On being a Senco .mmp - 9/5/04 - Ruth Dennis - dennis@bradford18.freeserve.co.uk

CATEGORY ONE

"I Just Wanted To Know How To Help Them..."
On Being A Senco

This category describes how the Sencos have come to be doing the jobs they're doing and the ways in which they are currently working.

Personal Experience.

Whilst a large proportion of staff in the settings visited were in their teens or early twenties, in most cases the Sencos were more mature in years. This is commented on by one Senco:

> "I've been here five years but the nursery I was at before had a couple of children, more with health problems or social and emotional problems. The nursery manager seemed to think that I was the sort of person to do it. Parents sometimes seem to feel far more confident talking to someone whose a bit older they look on me because I've had children of my own, where they may not be as open with an 18 year old." Senco 4

> "Going back to what you just said, that's why we are the special needs co-ordinator, because we have the experience and knowledge that the staff don't have." Senco 11

With the younger staff, the rationale for them being Senco is less clear. One had taken over fairly recently as the previous Senco had gone off on maternity leave. With another:

> "It was general; I just wanted to know what help we could get for children with special needs... and what activities to do with them, or how we could help them." Senco 3

> "I did have an interest, but I think I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time!" Senco 3

Whilst many of the Sencos had officially taken on the role within the past twelve months, many had been unofficially doing the job for a long while:

> "I suppose it must be 12 months, over 12 months. When you had to have your Senco - it was whenever that was... But I was doing it anyway without being a

named person... going to the nursery, taking all the details and following it through." Senco 2

All of the Sencos describe experiences of having children with special needs in their settings, although numbers were quite small:

"We haven't got any one in at the moment with special needs but I'm looking to have her in January. She actually started in September and she had some problems which was really aggression ... so mum's taken her away and we've said she's welcome back in January. So we just give her a bit longer." Senco 6

"In our situation, they've had a handful in my 13 years of being here." Senco 2

"Well I've only worked with the little boy that had the hearing ..." Senco 8

However, three of the Sencos have a stronger personal motivation for working with children with special needs:

"I've been at this one [pre school] only since the 16th June ... I still had quite a lot to do with special needs ... my son's special needs. He's ADHD and Dyslexic so I know it from the other side, from the parent's side..." Senco 6

"I have a little boy with special needs, so I have a personal interest in it. He's 7 now and we've had quite a horrendous time through school. So I'd be interested to know how you stop it going like that." Senco 12

Status of the Senco

A number of the Sencos were either setting managers or of similar status within the organisations they worked for:

"I've been here five years but the nursery I was at before had a couple of children, more with health problems or social and emotional problems. The nursery manager seemed to think that I was the sort of person to do it." Senco 4

This is reflected in the time that the Sencos are given to attend to tasks relating to their role and the access they have to resources such as meeting rooms. This was clearly demonstrated as I moved around the settings to conduct the interviews. In situations where the Senco was manager or of a similar status, I was generally well received:

"I was ushered into a private office, offered coffee and a choice of chair...." Observation notes, Setting 4

This contrasts sharply with my experience in another setting, where the Senco had no management status:

> "When I arrived, there was no where for us to go to talk, so we sat on the prickly carpet in the foyer area, between the buggies. Eventually someone came and told us we could use the 'Out of School' area to talk." Observation Notes, Setting 1.

The conflicts associated with being the Senco, but not having any management status were also described:

> "It's difficult when the manager says you have to have Mother's Day cards. We try to give children choice, but at the end of the day we have to do it - and it has to be done over a whole week as some only come one session a week." Senco 5, Session 2.3.

Even when Sencos are managers, there are also pressures from parents who expect the Senco to have a degree of authority within the medical arena:

> "You're the one they see most and they put pressure on you when nothing's happening. I think they think we would have some clout - but I don't know whether we have..." Senco 6, Session 3.3.

Or even from other members of staff within the setting:

> "They're all nursery nurses and they've all done development. They're coming in and we still have to do all of the SEN paperwork - you can't ignore it, so it takes up a lot of our time." Senco 2, Session 4.1.

Another factor impacting on the effectiveness of the Sencos is that of time. Lack of time is said to reduce the ability to carry out certain tasks:

> "I don't have time to do tracking observations - they're too time consuming. But I just know if someone is always doing the same thing." Senco 5, Session 2.3.

> "Its only time stopping us - I'm sure staff would be willing to go through it [the audit]. When you only run two and a half hours per morning it can be difficult to be out of the room - especially if you are short staffed." Senco 14

And also to make communication and sharing of practice difficult to achieve:

> "We've verbally fed this back, but it's usually as we've been setting out the toys - but unfortunately that's just how it has to be." Senco 14

As such, the ABC training course was seen as a positive opportunity to 'step back':

"Even though we work together, we've spent more time here discussing SEN and going through things." Senco 13

"I like the grown-up ness of it - being able to concentrate uninterrupted; getting removed from your setting. Because even when someone comes in to do something with you, you've always got an eye on what's going on." Senco 10

Training

All of the Sencos describe having attended some training relating to the role of Senco:

"I've been on a special needs introduction course and then on the familiarisation ... so I more or less started off there." Senco 5

"What have I done? - I've done the days course that was compulsory with the early years, I've done a NCFE, behaviour modification course, with somebody called........she's the Educational Psychologist and that covered autism etc. then I've done the early years courses, as many as possible." Senco 4

Some of this training has been provided by the Early Years Partnership and other by local pre school organisations.

"I just done two weeks of a 60 hour one, at Shipley College with Bradford Under 5s...We've only done two weeks. First week we were finding out what we were doing and last week we were doing the history of it. How the language is changing etc." Senco 6

Whilst on the whole this training has been received positively, Sencos make a number of points, relating to content / relevance:

"Yes, again they're limited, but they have to be I suppose. I always feel, especially with behavioural management ... everybody's got their specific case that they want to know more about. I've been on a couple of those. One of them was absolutely useless "Senco 9

"It's quite difficult because we don't have children with special needs in this nursery. It's hard to remember." Senco 5

And also to the implications the training has on the institution:

"I must say at times we feel overpowered by the amount of stuff that's coming at us at the moment ...we have gone from one extreme to the other in this. When we started there was nobody much out there for us ... All this training and everything that's thrown at us, and you're right, we have been dealing with this here and we do understand what inclusion is, and we do understand what we can do and how we can do it." Senco 11

and on the staff working there:

> "The staff would like to I think because you send them on a course for Autism and they think every child in the world has autism. It's the danger; a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. It's terrible. It's a very difficult thing to send people on courses and things and they come back with this little gem of knowledge whatever, whether it's about child management or autism or what ever, you've got to be very wary. They do jump to conclusions, the staff. " Senco 11

Whilst the Inclusion ABC course was well received, this was partly related to the previous lack of appropriate training:

> "I think we've all really valued it - we all go on courses that are a bit airy fairy and we feel as though we knew what we were supposed to do." Senco 10.

Whilst there was a general commitment to training:

> "There are always things to learn - you might have been doing it for years, but there's always something new." Senco 2

The practicalities of this for workers in the non maintained sector were all to clear:

> "I was trying to get her on the course that the Area Senco did, but we were too short staffed so she couldn't go." Senco 5

Senco Tasks

Sencos describe a range of activities that they might be involved in relating their role. (See Category 2 'Working with Children with Special Needs'.)

Sometimes, when the setting doesn't have any children with special needs, the role seems to become a paper one:

> "I'm not doing much at the moment basically I've just been passed the information and I'm just looking at the information we've got and it's just a case of reading it up." Senco 1

In other cases the role is that of coordinator or administrator:

> "All the children have key workers. I'm not a key worker for any of them. I just oversee it." Senco 9

"As I see it it's to monitor the children and make a bond with them and the parents. I've been there as well so I know what it is like. Even when you're working in the afternoons (the child I mentioned is in the morning) so I come in then. Write IEPs. I want to have a good look at what equipment we've got. I don't find here that there is a solid base for special needs. They haven't had to do anything." Senco 6

In addition to this, some Sencos describe their role as working pro-actively with the children with special needs:

"And I went on the course for the new guidelines, so we know now how to do observations on children, so I'm finding that. Where before with private nurseries, you felt as if your hands were tied. You couldn't do anything" Senco 4

"I'm involved with activities which will help her with speech at the moment, I haven't actually had any training so I wasn't sure what to do but I have been doing activities that involve speech." Senco 3

" I was the one doing the one to one because we decided that with me being Senco, but the two members who were in there were also involved in doing activities with him and spending time with him" Senco 4

"I worked with a special needs little boy when I first came here that just had a hearing difficulty and was waiting to have an operation for grommets, and it was really just working closer to him on a one to one." Senco 8

Working with parents was also seen as an integral part of the job (See Category 4 'Working with Parents').

Confidence

A lack of confidence about whether they were doing the right thing was wide spread:

"We had a child psychologist coming in and again, that was very good - to have someone else saying you've been doing it all right - it's just someone else telling you that. We all have the insecurity of maybe not doing the right thing." Senco 2

"You need that reassurance - to look at the positive things and not just focus on the one negative thing that's concerning you - that you see the child as a whole." Senco 6

"I said to him what I'm doing is what I think is right but I'd rather be doing something that's been recommend." Senco 8

"The girls were quite nervous at first but after she'd been coming a while they realised that there was no problem there was always someone there to support them." Senco 5

"We know we're not professionals in that field" Senco 2

And in one case, the Senco describes her feeling of vulnerability relating to working with these children...

"Because I always used to say I don't want it on my head if she's not assessed right or if she doesn't get the proper help when she gets to school and I don't want that responsibility. "Senco 8

The Inclusion ABC course was said to be instrumental in raising the confidence of Sencos, in relation to both their existing practice, and how to work with children with special needs.

" .. not to sell ourselves short, because we do do a lot of good things and we have got a lot of things there - we don't pat ourselves on the back for doing them and that's not good for the morale of staff." Senco 2

"It's not frightening any more... doesn't put you off - make you want to shut your eyes and back off... you can cope with it." Senco 2

"I'm more confident in dealing with children with special needs now. Not to take them to one side and to sort of get them more included with everyone else. Don't make them feel any different - just make them like a normal child." Senco 1

Despite this lack of confidence, many Sencos report successes in the work they've done with children with special needs...

"It's hard work sometimes. I think we've been successful. I won't say we've cured all the problems, but we've had success" Senco 2

"... and we progressed by the time he left us. He joined us in the September and left us in the April and by the April he was sitting in with the children at dinner times. He was quite happy to let children go up to him and tickle him, which was brilliant, and we'd just got him that he was sitting at the table with other children and he would do a picture with the others. We thought this was absolutely, you know...." Senco 4

CATEGORY ONE
Discursive Commentary

Personal Experience

Discussion with the Sencos indicates that although they have all worked with children with identified special needs in the past, the number of children in a setting at any one time is small. The result of this is that Sencos have a relatively small bank of experience regarding how to manage when they do have such children. Whilst the collective experience of the Sencos is much greater, there is no formal link between settings and in some instances market economics means that they are in direct competition with one another.

The inception of the 'Area Senco' may provide a focal point for settings, and if the sharing of experience is to be fostered than the establishment of cluster support groups should be seen as a key task associated with this role.

Status of the Senco

Whilst many of the Sencos interviewed were senior managers or the equivalent in their settings, a significant number were carrying out the role of Senco as ordinary employees. This difference in status was graphically illustrated as I visited the different places of work:

> "When I arrived, there was no where for us to go to talk, so we sat on the prickly carpet in the foyer area, between the buggies. Eventually someone came and told us we could use the 'Out of School' area to talk." Observation Notes, Setting 1.

The degree to which Sencos are able to pursue their role and implement tasks and procedures relating to children with special needs will certainly be affected by this factor. This is recognised by the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001)

> "The setting's management group and the head of the setting should give careful thought to the Senco's time allocation in the light of the Code, and in the context of the resources available to the setting. Settings may find it effective for the

Senco to be a member of the senior management team." (DfES 2001, Section 4: 17)

Although the Code does make reference to the 'resources available to the setting', this does not recognise fully the variety of circumstances in which the Sencos are working. As 'private day nurseries' many settings are small businesses, and other settings are run on a voluntary basis. Whereas schools receive a base allocation of funding for managing children with special needs, no such allocation is available to early years settings. As such, time to carry out Senco duties is at the discretion of the management team or out of the goodwill of the Sencos themselves. Establishing some base allocation to all non-maintained settings to ensure that there is time for the Senco to carry out her duties, would seem essential if there is to be equality of provision across sectors.

Training

A number of Sencos indicated that they currently had no children with special needs in their settings. As such, much of the training offered seemed irrelevant:

"It's quite difficult because we don't have children with special needs in this nursery. It's hard to remember." Senco 5

Whilst in such cases training is perhaps irrelevant, another unanticipated consequence is the hypervigilance that such training arouses in staff. One Senco describes this clearly:

"The staff would like to think because you send them on a course for Autism... and they think every child in the world has autism. It's the danger; a little knowledge is a dangerous thing. It's terrible. It's a very difficult thing to send people on courses and things and they come back with this little gem of knowledge whatever, whether it's about child management or autism or what ever, you've got to be very wary. They do jump to conclusions, the staff. " Senco 11

If this is to be avoided, training approaches need to focus more not on what makes certain children different, but on the similarities between children and what a setting needs to do to include such children within their existing practice. This has implications not only for training relating to specific conditions but also to general training such as that on the Code of Practice.

All of the Sencos interviewed described having undertaken some training in connection with their role, with some partaking widely in available courses relating to children with special needs. As such settings themselves, as well as the Early Years Partnership have invested heavily in increasing the knowledge base of these individuals. Retaining staff is widely recognised within the non maintained early years sector as being an area of difficulty (Moss & Penn, 1996). To lose this knowledge when Sencos change jobs would seem to be an inefficient use of resources. Developing an accredited Senco training course for setting based Sencos may go some way to ensuring that this investment is not wasted and increase the likelihood of the experience gained being used in the Senco's new setting.

Senco Tasks

Discussion with the Sencos suggests that their role involves them in working with children with special needs at a number of different levels, including through coordinating the work of other staff to direct teaching and support to the child and his/her family. The ways in which this work is undertaken are explored more fully in Category 2 - 'Working with Children with Special Needs'.

Confidence

The idea of working from instinct or experience was frequently expressed throughout the interviews, with Sencos recalling stories of the successes they had had. However, despite this, Sencos also expressed much anxiety about whether their practice was appropriate.

> "We all have the insecurity of maybe not doing the right thing." Senco 2

> "I said to him what I'm doing is what I think is right but I'd rather be doing something that's been recommend." Senco 8

This seems to be linked to the view that as workers within early years settings, they are not experts.

> "We know we're not professionals in that field" Senco 2

In conceptualising their work as being based on instinct, the Sencos align themselves more with carers than fellow professionals. Aldred (1996) proposes that the knowledge of those working with children on a day to day basis is afforded less status of that of other professionals who have more academic knowledge. This seems to be enshrined in the Sencos' thinking and resulting lack of confidence about what they do. As such the role of the external professional is seen to be that of expert advisor, ensuring that they are doing the right thing.

Whilst the Sencos describe examples of their current practice being reinforced by visiting professionals, this could be seen as further endorsing the stratified roles between non maintained settings and outside 'professionals'.

Implications:

- Setting based Sencos would benefit from regular opportunities to meet together to share experiences. Peer support networks for setting based Sencos would be one way of addressing this.
- Consideration should be given to allocating a base amount of funding to early years settings in order to facilitate the Senco role.
- In order to avoid hypervigilance, any training in connection with special educational needs should increasingly focus on the setting's responsibility in terms of including such children rather than the difficulties the children may have. This would also address the fact that at any one time, a number of settings may have no children identified as having special needs.
- There should be a move towards an accredited course for setting based Sencos. Such a course would focus primarily on inclusion as well as the 'Code of Practice' and lead to recognised 'Qualified Senco' status.
- External professionals need to be aware of the dynamics of their relationships with Sencos in non maintained settings and actively strive to endorse them as fellow professionals.

Category 2: "We've just got a gut feeling..." - working with children with special needs

9/5/04 - v14

General Attitude
- Helping
- Including
- Building confidence
- Within child model

Resources
- Accessing funding
- Behaviour
- 1:1 workers
- Working within existing resources

Identification
- Initial records
- Gut feeling / Instinct
- Observation
- Giving children time

Inclusive Practices
- Adapting the environment
- Incorporating into existing activities
- SEN as a continuum of normal development
- Lack of awareness of inclusive practice
- Giving children time

Meeting Individual Needs through the Code of Practice
- Devising individual programmes
- Following programmes provided by external agencies
- Setting targets
- RecordKeeping
- Policy and Procedure

This category describes the experiences Sencos have had in the past, of working with children with special needs
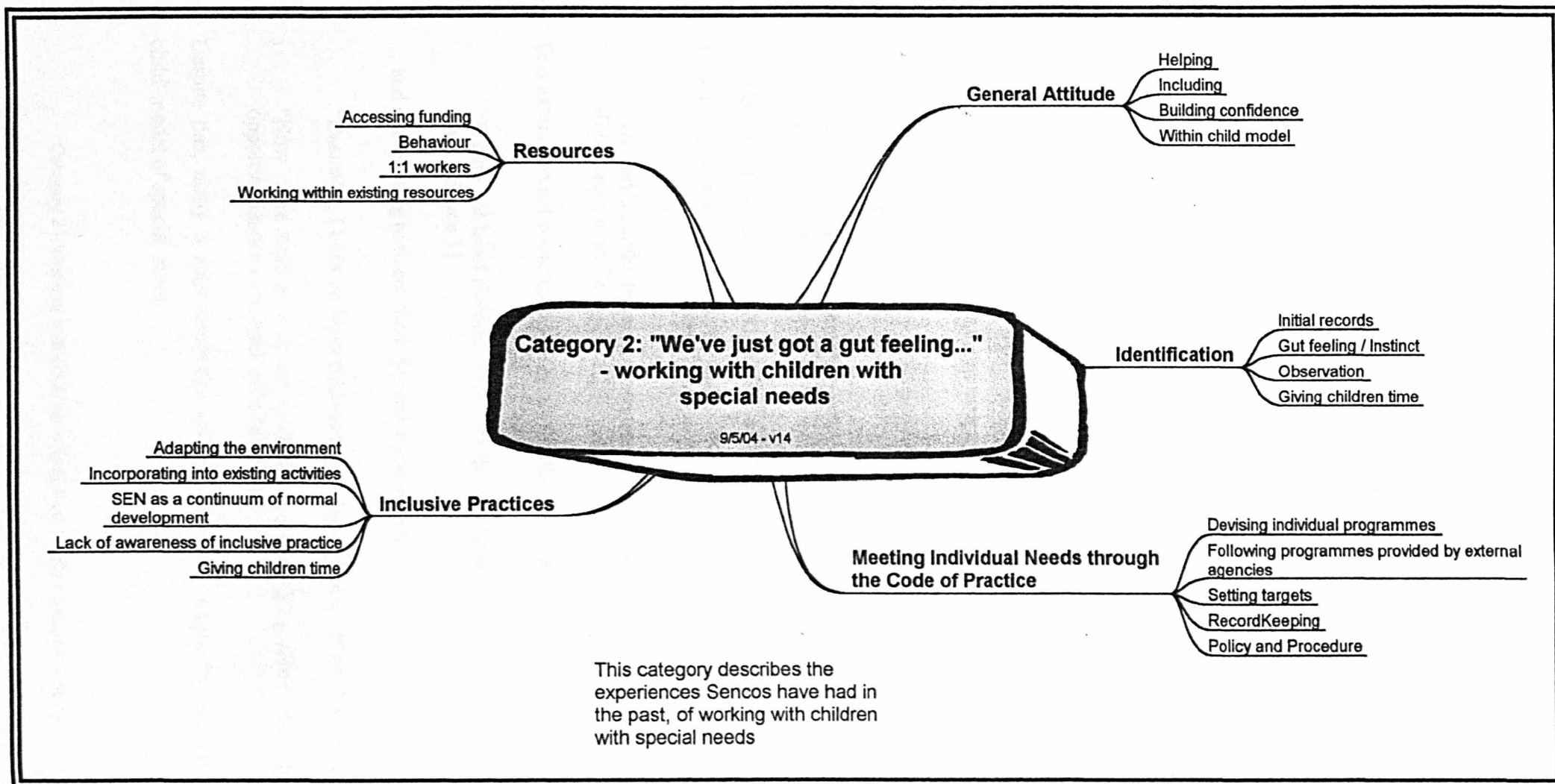
Figure 3. Category 2 Working with Children with Special Needs revised.mmp - 9/5/04 - Ruth Dennis - dennis@bradford18.freeserve.co.uk

"We've Just Got A Gut Feeling..."
- Working With Children With Special Needs.

This category describes the experiences Sencos have had in the past of working with children with special needs. Much work with these children is said to be based on 'instinct' and to involve a range of different strategies.

General Attitude

The general attitude of Sencos towards children with special needs can be described as positive. In many cases, this is based on a charitable model of 'helping'

> "I just wanted to know what activities to do with them, or how we could help them." Senco 3

> "We're always trying to help. Come on, you can play in the water, do some painting, because we want to encourage him to do this" Senco 7

In addition to this, many Sencos are aware of the need to include children, and speak of not wanting to make them feel 'different'.

> "We did actually try to include them in everything as much as we could; we didn't want to make them feel any different..." Senco 1

This extends to not wanting to categorise or label children....

> "We do not label children here. We do not guess it might be this or it might be that..." Senco 11

... and not wanting to make them dependent on support.

> "Basically, I built up his confidence and I weaned him off me." Senco 6

> "Now we're finding with her mobility and socialising more, there have been opportunities for us to back off a bit" Senco 9

Despite this, many Sencos implicitly and in some cases explicitly operate a 'within child' model of special needs:

"As soon as the child registers they make sure whether anything is wrong with them." Senco 7

"He came, and we thought that there was something wrong..." Senco 14

Identification

The initial registration sheets for the various settings are cited as the primary way of identifying children with special needs.

"We've got a form for when a child starts... We put the details - what are their diets or special needs..."
Senco 3

In addition to this, a number of Sencos talk about 'gut feeling' or 'instinct' allowing them to identify children with special needs.

"We know instinctively when something isn't right." Senco 2

"I'm finding staff come to me, even with babies and say 'we're concerned... we've just got a gut feeling....'" Senco 4

"We have them for a long time, and as they're going along, we begin to notice things..." Senco 11

This is generally then backed up by more focused observation...

"We say - right - lets start observations. We'll monitor it and see how it goes." Senco 4

"What we're going to do is just watch her over the next week or so. The Senco is going to follow her and monitor her and see if there's anything we can do." Senco 12

"Staff... will come and sound the alarm bell with us and we will go and observe them over a period of time, see what we think, listen and watch.... There's no one here jumps in quickly." Senco 11

Giving Children Time

Whilst recognising the need to identify children with special needs early, concern was expressed by some Sencos around the need to 'give children time'.

"It's a tender age, and I always want to give the child the benefit of the doubt, because I think nurseries should be the place where they do iron out the problems, because they're all different anyway. Sometimes you have terrible concerns about a child and suddenly six months down the line, you realise you've forgotten." Senco 9

"I think maybe we're jumping the gun a bit. I think there's a tendency to do that sometimes...I think it's sometimes forgotten in this country that children develop at different rates. When all's said and done, they're still only little, they're still learning new skills..." Senco 14

" We may say 'no just lets see what happens, just lets take this very steadily, this could just be, you know', and we would then just use our experience. We've known children who are still sitting on their bottoms not moving at 16 months, still OK paediatricly, still alright" Senco 11

The notion of 'giving children time' is also explored in relation to working with children with identified needs. This is based on the premise that children should be allowed to develop at their own rate:

"For me, that is part of the normal development - it's no different... when you get a child (who hasn't been diagnosed) you're doing it all the time. You're seeing that a child has a difficulty - what can we do to help that child? You're doing that from the start just automatically.... It doesn't mean a child has something wrong - has special needs. In actual fact they're just having difficulties in their development - not difficulties - just a phase" Senco 15, Session 3.4

"I've got a big 16 month old I was called to talk about. This 16 month old is a big lad - as big as a two year old... and he's boisterous... he throws himself about and he doesn't have full control of everything... the little -ies are getting upset. The more I work with this boy though, I thought 'there isn't anything there'. He's just a big boy and his presence is felt by everybody. He's hard work, and that's it from the staff's point of view." Senco 2, Session 4.2

And also of not making children un-necessarily different:

"It's a case of going with the development... when you've just learnt to walk you don't want to stop. You don't go against that.... You think about where and how. Can we help these children run and walk more? Let's take them outside; let's take them on walks..." Senco 2, Session 4.2

Consequently, the approach of meeting children's individual needs through differentiation or inclusion feels comfortable to the Sencos and rings true with their existing practice. As such the Inclusion ABC, with its focus on inclusion is quite

different to other training courses. This stance is given further weight by feedback from participants:

> "J was saying that she thinks the audit fills a real gap in the market. She talked about a little girl at nursery who is very 'up tight' all of the time. Now she doesn't think there's anything 'wrong', and wouldn't want to start talking SEN but there is a need to do something more for her - to include her more. 'Actions for Inclusion' would do this without getting too heavy." Session Commentary, 3.1

And from my own explorations:

> "It's interesting - I looked at the Audit Commission website the other day. Although there are examples of schemes that work with Early Years Sencos it's all going down the IEP route and extracting and making the child different. I think maybe what we are doing here is unique. "Session Commentary, 3.1

Meeting Individual Needs through the Code of Practice

Having identified a child as having special needs, Sencos report a range of ways of addressing the child's particular needs. Sometimes this involves following a programme provided by an external professional ...

> "There were certain things like going through sounding out letters and things which the speech therapist had told mum to do and she came in and told us. We used to do that." Senco 5

> "(the physio) actually explained what she did with the little girl and she actually said to us that rather than go outside, we could try to do exercises with her, that we could get the other children involved in too.." Senco 1

or devising their own individual programmes...

> "Because he had a hearing difficulty, it was like his name, and I did a little bit of 1:1 work with him learning his name." Senco 8

> "I bought a book on stammering (which was very thick!) and we used our common sense. We talked to him so he could see our mouths, so the sound wasn't coming at him..." Senco 11

> "It was trying to get him to be included with the rest of them. He wouldn't sit with them at snack time but we gradually worked him in. We'd sit at another table at snack time then we'd move his table six inches nearer until he went and sat on a chair at that table." Senco 13

"If it's confidence she needs, let's give her a job and find something for her to do..." Senco 13

Setting targets for the children with special needs is seen as an important part of the job:

> " I first started working with her I knew I had concerns and I'd gone to the health visitor and the health visitor came and spoke to us and involved Bradford Under 5's special needs worker and I set assignments, goals etc., for her to reach. She talked with any adult on a one to one basis but with other children around she was oblivious of the children being there. So I was setting assignments to work with two children together and just kept a record of it, of different ones and we evaluated it again after a certain time and see if she'd improved after that. "Senco 8

> "The actual girls who are working with them set the targets they'll say OK he's no concentration, lets see if we can get two minutes doing something that normally he doesn't like to do. Nothing that will overstretch but just something that we can have something positive about. We never like saying what we think if it's going to make disappointment, so we just go lightly. So if that happens, we just set some tiny little targets." Senco 2

However, one Senco comments on the difficulties of planning for individuals in this way...

> "It's hard to sort them 1:1...if you try to you get 'he's at this target she's at that target its quite hard..." Senco 1

A number of Sencos comment on how the Code of Practice has introduced more rigorous requirements for documentation in relation to children with special needs:

> "When you're dealing with perhaps one or two children, if those needs or requirements can be put there in the normal working day... each adult has their individual knowledge of the children so they would be working with that child in a different way. On that one, I spent time with the key worker talking about X's problem, about what they could do and what she could do in the working day. So it's been very much more in that way we've done it rather than documenting everything down." Senco 11

> "I'm very new to all this we have an IEP directive now. We used review fortnightly but now it's going to termly. The Area Senco is really helping us because were so new to this. I'm monitoring it like that. We were monitoring on the IEP every little stage, but now were doing it in our normal records." Senco 9

> "I think there's more required of us in terms of record keeping for special needs, than there was, but certainly as far as say, X was concerned, we would have incorporated that in his normal record keeping and not made it special to go in the file particularly.... We just did what we thought was right and what we knew

we should do...I would say now there's a lot more expectation to keep records."
Senco 11

However, there was a general lack of engagement with the Code of Practice. An informal poll in Session 2 highlighted that of the 13 settings present, one had a statemented child, three had inherited children at Early Years Action Plus, but no one had a child at Early Years Action. Any children identified by the setting were managed through differentiation of existing practice.

Whilst all settings that are registered to receive the Nursery Education Grant have an SEN policy, only one setting made direct reference to following any written procedures:

> "This is our Special Needs policy and that's how we follow it ... I went on that course at ... and we've changed quite a lot of the things... that makes you focus on what you're doing and what your weaknesses are and how you can improve."
> Senco 2

> "He was also a very bright child and needed some stimulation, but he was aggressive, so we just went through the policy that we have in that we keep up the observations." Senco 2

Inclusive Practices

Sencos described different ways in which they have addressed children's needs in more inclusive ways, including adapting the environment to incorporate a child's needs...

> "I was thinking of outdoor play. They have a session where they do lots of physical so Z could be encouraged to be quite physical or to participate in an activity. It just helped to get her mobile, to burn up calories. ..So we concentrated quite a lot upon the physical and also again at lunch time, meal times, we encouraged fruit. She was encouraged attend to her own needs, do her own toileting..." Senco 11

> "She was one so she was with us but she left us before she came down, because we were working out ways that would need smaller chairs etc. things like that." Senco 4

and also adapting activities that are on offer to all of the children...

> "...I think it helps the child, if you can bend and do things as you go along in the normal day and the child is not made to feel different. They're so sensitive and pick things up so quickly as babies, they quickly get the idea. I think we have to

blend in and bend and put things in place, almost without them not knowing that it's happening" Senco 11

Some of the Sencos also questioned how the Code of Practice should be implemented for children who do not attend full time and may for example only attend two afternoons per week. For these Sencos, the notion of addressing individual needs through inclusion is a welcome notion as this is what they have previously done:

> "I think what you are saying is perfectly right and it is what we would do... turning it on its head... so this child is 16 months old and not moving about yet. What can we do to encourage it? Not what's wrong with her, because they're probably isn't anything wrong. That's what our job is about." Senco 11, Session 2.3

Operating in such a way clearly matches the model of recognised good Early Years and Inclusive practice. However, this largely goes unnoticed by the Sencos who continue to put their practice down to instinct rather than professional judgement:

> "A lot of it you do automatically - you don't always recognise what you're doing and it's not written down. You don't normally get chance to think about it." Senco 15, Session 2.4

> "You do it, but you do it without thinking about it - you know so and so together is a bad idea, so you put them at another table..." Senco 14, Session 2.4

> "You're doing that, from the beginning - just automatically - it doesn't mean a child has something wrong..." Senco 15, Session 3.4

The Inclusion ABC course is said to have been influential in raising awareness of the value of their approach:

> "I think a lot of us did work in that way, but now we've got a name for it - it's inclusion." Senco 11

Central to this is the understanding that SEN can be seen as part of the continuum of normal development:

> "It's made me focus and understand about inclusion. That if you're working in an inclusive way in your setting then you're going to be covering all children's needs and differences... not taking it apart as something special anymore - it's just part of inclusion." Senco 11

> "It's somehow shifted the SEN bit - that feels a lot better than thinking of SEN as 'well this child has *special needs*'. They've all got needs at different times and we need to do something to help." Senco 11

This developing understanding is said to have impacted on policy,

> "I've got an SEN policy, but we are going to write a new policy called 'Inclusion and SEN' so it's put the SEN in a different perspective." Senco 11

management,

> "It's made me understand that it may not be the child who has the needs, but the setting and the lack of staff training." Senco 4

> "For me it's what these children can bring rather than what we can give them - knowing that they can bring so much to our settings." Senco 15

and practice for individual children:

> "We will now have the knowledge to treat any child the same and offer a full and varied learning programme." Senco 4

> "SEN doesn't have to be an identifiable problem... everyone has needs and staff have to be aware... it doesn't have to be anything big - just making small changes." Senco 5

Resources.

The difficulties in accessing funding for additional support are commented on a number of times:

> "From the private nursery sector it is the heart of it......because obviously we have to work at a profit. But we kept being told that funding would be available but it was just going round and round trying to find out who was responsible. By the time it was, he'd gone." Senco 4

Children with behavioural difficulties are highlighted on a number of occasions as being the most frequently occurring special need...

> "She actually started in September and she had some problems which was really aggression, she's being very boisterous with the other children. Toileting was a bit of a problem, so mum's taken her away and we've said she's welcome back in January. So we just give her a bit longer." Senco 6

> "In the past we've had children and it's been behaviour problems..." Senco 2

And managing this group of children is cited as being particularly difficult...

"Unfortunately that is what the experience has been in the past when it's been behavioural problems, you think, who's going to pay? ....and it's, well can we get anyone to pay to fund this extra and usually we've had to stand it. ...it's all down to money." Senco 2

"Are we going to get somebody? And we do need to do more one-to-one with this child. At least we do have a budget; it always comes down to money. Usually you do need extra staffing in because of this behaviour..." Senco 2

and it also causes difficulties with other parents:

"That's right and there was also a group of Mums in at the time whose children weren't the best behaved in the group but who had decided that this little boy was naughty and must have proceeded to tell their children the same. So we had that to deal with. They would say 'Oh he's a naughty boy' and point at him, so that was something we had to deal with as well. He's not a 'naughty boy'." Senco 12

However, some settings do report more positive resource situations:

"They told us if we felt we could cope with her they would fund support which they did. It was brilliant! We had somebody that came out and showed us how to do the physio; somebody to show us how to tube feed; everything we needed to know somebody came. It was very good. We always felt that there was somebody there," Senco 5

"She's here for fifty and she's got forty hours a week support which is wonderful. Because really her major difficulty was she couldn't walk when she came down from the playroom and you saw what it was like. It's quite boisterous so she had support for walking." Senco 9

In most instances, Sencos describe the need for 1:1 workers for the children with special needs...

"We then actually got all the help we needed, more than enough help. Because he'd gone through the statementing process, we had a member of staff, because that's the only thing we have to look at. We couldn't have coped with him as he got older, so a member of staff was brought in just to work with him in the different units he was in." Senco 11

" It was felt that he was autistic... he used to come two mornings a week and we had to have a member of staff on a one to one with him. We were told at the time that we would get funding, but it never came through...He was in a small group of only 11 children and he had a one to one member of staff." Senco 4

However, in situations where support isn't forthcoming, Sencos describe planning ways of 'absorbing' the children from within their own resources...

"When she was coming downstairs and they weren't sure that we could have any support we did sort of talk about having someone to keep an eye on her so she could move for activities." Senco 9

"When you're dealing with perhaps one or two children, if those needs or requirements can be put there, in the normal working day ... each adult has their individual knowledge of the children so they would be working with that child in a different way." Senco 11

CATEGORY TWO
Discursive Commentary

Identifying Individual Needs

When referring to how they identify children with special needs, a number of Sencos used terms such as 'gut feeling', 'instinct' and 'noticing'. Rather than relating practice to academic training it was associated more with experience or something essential to them as pre school workers. This resonates with the findings of Penn's study (2000) which found that childcare students related their success to the fact that they were women and that as such, the work was natural to them.

This language of instinct is far removed from the professional, academic language used in relation to children with special needs and might suggests an amateur approach to practice. Adopting Foucault's notion of 'dominant discourses' (Foucault, 1991) by operating outside of the dominant discourse of the Code of Practice, the work of the Sencos will continue to be subjugated to that of other 'professionals' working within the field. This in turn will reinforce the negative stereotypes that these agencies may have of non maintained provision. If this is to be avoided, there needs to be a move from practice to praxis and the development of a shared vocabulary that the Sencos can use to describe their practice of inclusion.

Giving Children Time

The notion of 'giving children time' is mentioned on a number of occasions both in relation to the process of identifying children's individual needs and planning individual programmes.

> "I think it's sometimes forgotten in this country that children develop at different rates. When all's said and done, they're still only little, they're still learning new skills..." Senco 14

Identifying a child as having special needs and placing a child at 'Early Years Action' is seen as making premature judgements about a child and labelling them. Instead of this, there is a genuine desire to 'give children time' to develop.

"For me, that is part of the normal development - it's no different... when you get a child (who hasn't been diagnosed) you're doing it all the time. You're seeing that a child has a difficulty - what can we do to help that child? You're doing that from the start just automatically.... It doesn't mean a child has something wrong - has special needs. In actual fact they're just having difficulties in their development - not difficulties - just a phase" Senco 15, Session 3.4

One possible explanation for this stance relates to the nature of early years philosophy and practice. The philosophy of early years education is based very much around a notion of working from the individual rather than on arbitrary notions such as age bands. The guiding principles for this have traditionally been those of developmental psychology and have come under a degree of criticism. Many of the assumptions inherent in such an approach have been challenged (Burman, 1994) and their implications for individual children falling outside of the perceived 'norm' explored (Bird, 1999). However, working largely on instinct and experience rather than academic training, many of the Sencos are freed from these developmental constraints. Since many settings cater for children from three months of age through to five, Sencos are familiar with a wide range of development. As such, they are more at ease with the notion of children achieving different developmental milestones at different ages.

In addition to this, as pre school settings they have less external pressure to perform, in terms of statutory testing of children. Not having this pressure allows settings to be more relaxed about the rate at which individual children develop. Consequently, as the Sencos suggest through their words and practice, children's individual differences tend to be catered for automatically, through normal nursery practice, rather than being highlighted as having 'special needs'.

Meeting Individual Needs through the Code of Practice

An informal poll carried out during one of the training sessions indicated that Sencos were generally managing children with special needs outside of the Code of Practice, except where the child had previously been identified by an external agency, and in this case the child would be managed at 'Early Years Action Plus'. This could be seen as reflecting a general lack of confidence in engaging with the Code of Practice on the part of the Sencos, or perhaps a conscious decision founded in 'giving children time'.

Despite not working within the Code of Practice in this way, the Sencos were able to demonstrate that they were aware of and addressing individual needs, setting measurable and realistic targets.

> "OK he's no concentration; let's see if we can get two minutes doing something that normally he doesn't like to do. Nothing that will overstretch but just something that we can have something positive about. We never like saying what we think if it's going to make disappointment, so we just go lightly. So if that happens, we just set some tiny little targets." Senco 2

This seemed to be achieved though in a less formal way that fits more with the notion of 'differentiation'. A distinction thus emerges between the 'individual' approach encouraged by the Code of Practice, and the 'individualised' approach that the Sencos describe as 'instinct'. The latter, it could be argued is far more inclusive, but this is undermined by the 'authority' of the practices enshrined in the Code of Practice. Focusing mainly on the drawing up of IEPs and thus individualising children, rather than focusing on meeting needs through differentiation, Sencos are led to believe that their previous way of working (through differentiation) was wrong and they ought to be developing a more individual approach.

> "We'd have done that; we'd have just incorporated it. I think there's more required of us in terms of record keeping for special needs, than there was, but certainly as far as say, X was concerned, we would have incorporated that in his normal record keeping and not made it special to go in the file particularly." Senco 11

Inclusive Practices

Despite the pejorative vocabulary used by the Sencos to describe their practice, further exploration of what they actually do, demonstrates that far from being amateur, the way in which the needs of the children are met fits within the parameters of good inclusive practice. When describing the ways in which they have attempted to address the special needs of individual children, Sencos describe a range of strategies, including adapting the environment and adapting the activities that are available for all of the children in the setting.

"It was trying to get him to be included with the rest of them. He wouldn't sit with them at snack time but we gradually worked him in. We'd sit at another table at snack time then we'd move his table six inches nearer until he went and sat on a chair at that table." Senco 13

Rather than being taught that they should be meeting children's needs through inclusion, the Sencos' practice seems to have evolved by default, due to the limited support and resources hitherto available to the non maintained sector. As such, Sencos fail to recognise their practice as a valid and professional way of working with children with special needs, commenting "It's just something we would have done...".

Instead of endorsing such inclusive practice, the introduction of the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) to early years settings further undermines what the Sencos are doing and pushes them into developing individual programmes for identified children. This is particularly pertinent to non maintained early year settings, who for many years have been cast as second class in terms of early education provision. Whilst now, in theory being equivalent to school based providers, the legacy of their inferior status is difficult for settings to overcome. As such, there is pressure on the Sencos to adopt the Code of Practice, which is widely practiced in schools. As one Senco comments:

"If someone picks up on them in school and then we haven't done it right... we've got to be seen to be saying something" Senco 2, Session 4.1

The Sencos' limited awareness and vocabulary pertaining to how they are meeting the needs of children with SEN can only perpetuate the view of non maintained settings as offering second rate provision. If they are to compete equally with schools, Sencos need to develop an awareness of what they are doing and develop a professional vocabulary through which they can describe and share their practice.

Resources

Whilst the needs of most of the children are met through what could be termed inclusive practice, there were some children for whom the Sencos described the need for 1:1 support. With these children, the issue of who should pay for the support was critical. Within schools, there is a base allocation of money to help address issues of special needs at early stages. Within the non maintained sector, this is not the case. There is no

core allocation to enable settings to respond flexibly to children's special needs and unless a child has previously been identified by medical agencies, statementing is rarely an option. This is particularly significant for the private sector, for as one Senco put it:

> "From the private nursery sector it is the heart of it...because obviously we have to work at a profit." Senco 4

Whilst the development of the EYDCP has led to some clarification of routes of support, there still seem to be numerous 'pockets' of money that can be accessed, depending on certain criteria or on membership of a particular group. If Sencos are to be encouraged to include all children in their settings, then it is imperative that additional support and advice is not linked solely to an individual deficit model.

Implications:

- Whilst the accountability emanating from the Code of Practice is to be welcomed, trainers need to be aware that they may be jeopardising current inclusive practice by encouraging Sencos down the individual, within child route. Setting based Sencos need to be provided with a way of recording and demonstrating what it is they do to meet the individual needs of children within their setting. This will necessitate a radical rethink of current planning and recording practices relating to children with special needs.

- Training for Sencos needs to focus on enabling Sencos to recognise and articulate those things which up until now they have regarded as 'instinct' or 'gut feeling '. Sencos need to develop a professional vocabulary to describe how they meet individual needs in order to improve their confidence and status both internally and with external agencies such as schools.

- Routes to funding and additional support need to be reviewed and one clear system established. This may involve developing a core allocation of money and or support to all non maintained settings.
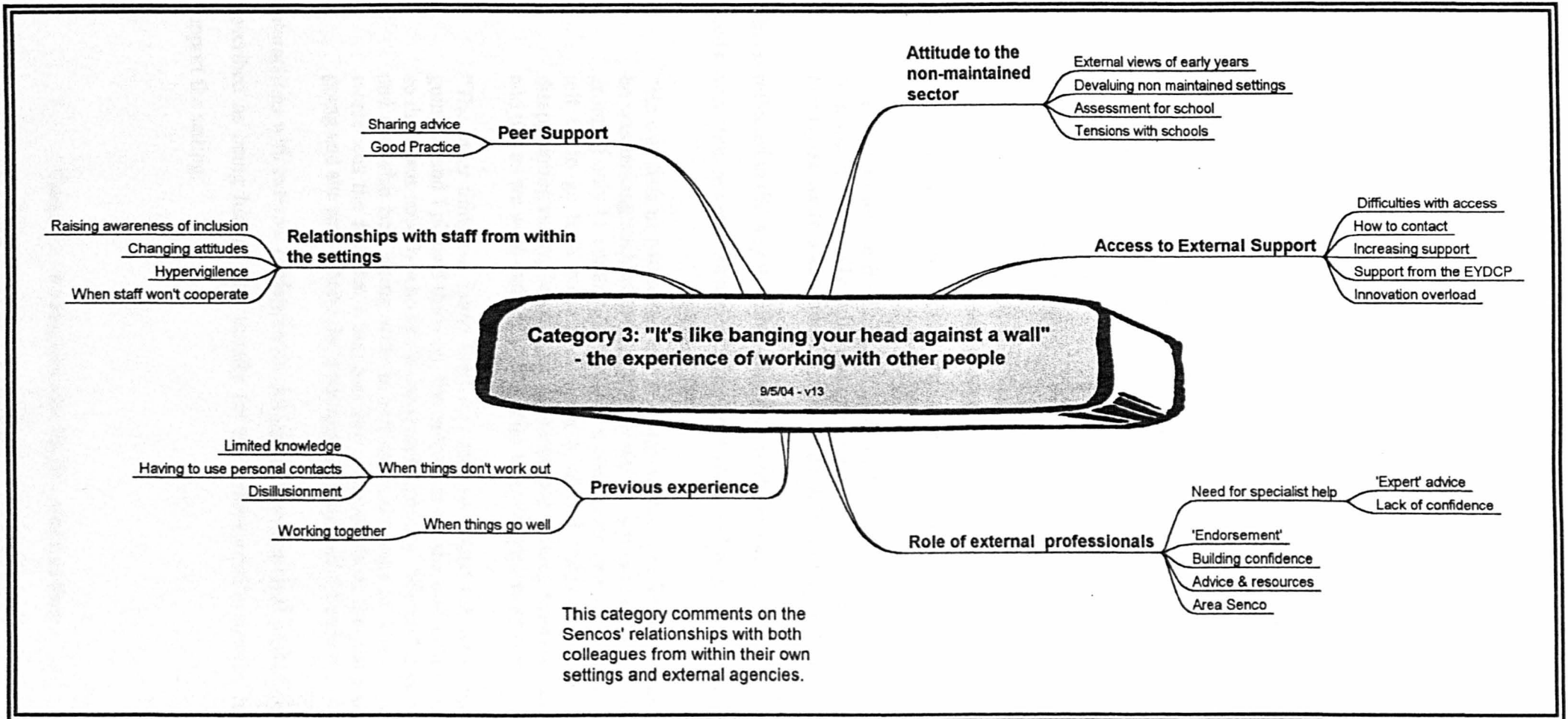
Figure 4. Category 3 Working with Other People .mmp - 9/5/04 - Ruth Dennis - dennis@bradford18.freeserve.co.uk

The mind map contains the following text:

Attitude to the non-maintained sector
- External views of early years
- Devaluing non maintained settings
- Assessment for school
- Tensions with schools

Peer Support
- Sharing advice
- Good Practice

Relationships with staff from within the settings
- Raising awareness of inclusion
- Changing attitudes
- Hypervigilence
- When staff won't cooperate

Access to External Support
- Difficulties with access
- How to contact
- Increasing support
- Support from the EYDCP
- Innovation overload

Category 3: "It's like banging your head against a wall" - the experience of working with other people

9/5/04 - v13

Previous experience
- When things don't work out
  - Limited knowledge
  - Having to use personal contacts
  - Disillusionment
- When things go well
  - Working together

Role of external professionals
- Need for specialist help
  - 'Expert' advice
  - Lack of confidence
- 'Endorsement'
- Building confidence
- Advice & resources
- Area Senco

This category comments on the Sencos' relationships with both colleagues from within their own settings and external agencies.

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CATEGORY THREE

"It's Like Banging Your Head Against A Wall" - The Experience Of Working With Other People

This category comments on the Sencos' relationships both with colleagues from within their own settings and with external agencies. Whilst the Sencos are keen to access external support, this has hitherto been difficult to achieve in practice, leading to feelings of disappointment and disheartenment.

Attitude to the non-maintained sector

The Sencos describe how they suffer from outside professionals not recognising that their provision is equivalent to that in the maintained sector:

> "They don't realise it's the same thing and it is. It's convincing them that it is. It is still just basically children to them isn't it? We are a long way down the line. It just needs acknowledging though doesn't it, by everybody. " Senco 2

This is reflected in the way in which education professionals direct children with special needs away from non-maintained settings, towards school based provision:

> "He was with us two terms and in a way it was hard for us because we thought he was making such headway because we are a small group - he was in a small group of only 11 children and he had a one to one member of staff. But then he left us to go to a nursery that has a special needs unit. So it was a bit disappointing really, because he'd just started making headway and everything, and just as we were making progress he was whipped away again. "Senco 4

> "The other thing we found hard was that we found out what nursery he was going to and I phoned them up, but unfortunately the unit didn't work mornings so there was nobody who could come and visit him. We said if you want to visit and see what he's doing with us and see what stage he's at. ... what made it worse was the fact that I bumped into someone from the place where he was going and she said 'Oh no, he's not making progress'." Senco 4

Interactions with external professionals, for example educational psychologists are also described as being limited and usually for the professional's benefit, rather than to support the setting:

"Occasionally the educational psychologist (has been in) for children that have been identified already. I wouldn't say that they'd really been support because they'd be coming to do their own thing." Senco 9

"The educational psychologist and that came in because she was getting ready for school and they were assessing her for school.... He just came in assessed her and did reports, and asked us what we were doing. I wanted more ... for him to set a pattern of learning for her, but he said what we were doing was fine and gave us a lot of encouragement as to what we were doing." Senco 8

There is a perceived tension between the settings and schools. A number of Sencos comment that school's should take more heed of the Early Years approach to children's education:

"I think schools should do it (Inclusion ABC audit) a bit more!!" Senco 6, Session 1.3

" We should tell parents that they don't have to send them to school until the term after they're five - keep them in nursery where they have a chance to catch up - they need time. " Senco 11, Session 3.5

At the same time, there is also a notion that early years settings should be emulating the school model more in order to prove their status:

"If someone picks up on them in school and then we haven't done it right... we've got to be seen to be saying something" Senco 2, Session 4.1

This uneasy relationship with schools is probably not helped by the weighting towards early years settings in the ABC training course. This is picked up on in the session commentary:

"Don't put schools down so much! I know we want to boost the confidence of settings, but not at the expense of other sectors." Session Commentary, 2.2

Access to External support

The availability of support from external agencies is commented on regularly by Sencos. Difficulties in accessing advice or support were widely reported:

" We don't know of any contact. Good job up to now we haven't had a child like that. If we came across a child we wouldn't know who to refer to." Senco 7

Previously, the health visitor would have been one of the first professionals a setting would turn to when they had a concern:

> "Before the last year and a half, we would have said to the parents, is it all right to speak to the health visitor? Shall the health visitor come in? But we'd have done everything through her." Senco 11

> "The only time we've contacted any outside agency was when it was a little girl with social problems when we had to contact the health visitor because the Mum's ability to look after the child was .... It was her physical ability ... the child had head lice but so did the mother. The mother was disabled in such a way that she couldn't physically sort it out so we had to get the health visitor to help." Senco 13

However, as the situation is said to have improved, this pattern has changed slightly:

> "It's a lot better than it was. Two years ago even, we were really like a in a wilderness, we didn't know who to contact, or anything and you find yourself on a roundabout. Somebody would say we'd find such and such and then 'Oh no we can't' and in the end it was such frustration and you were getting nowhere." Senco 4

> "When we've needed them it's always been a struggle to get the right person, and who do we contact first to find out how we get to that person. That's always been the struggle. Since that course I did last May we do have a better link now and we know who to go to, but before that we were completely in the dark. Who would be the best person? and so you think...there would be BUFA, BAPPA... Do you know anybody? Well we do but if you're not a member we can't give you any information and there was all those problems." Senco 2

And more access to support and advice is now perceived to being available:

> "I'm trying to think back, it's a few years ago and I think we were really expected to go on by ourselves. I think now ... I would definitely go through Bradford Under 5's and hopefully get advice from them." Senco 9

> "Well, now we'd ring the Early Years Service, now. Pre Early Years Service we would have probably more or less waited, through the parent, for the help to start coming in. Now we can be a little more active about that and say we would like some help please. There are people now employed who would come and speak to us about this particular special need." Senco 11

> "For the first time now, I have people - faces to get in touch with if I need help... it wasn't there for us in our settings and now it is... that's good - really helpful. To know that if I have a problem - anything to do with SEN, I know exactly who to go to and that there's help there. That feels really good." Senco 11, Session 1.3

"I've worked in my setting for 15 years now, so you to me are... because I can pick up the phone and ask for advice and support with SEN. For all those years I've had nobody." Senco 11

"It's good to have the Area Senco... it's like having a little Senco manager - so if you're stuck on anything, you just ring up." Senco 5

The emergence of the EYDCP is seen to be associated with this improvement:

"But now a year and a half into Early Years, we can at least speak to somebody who will understand and help us and know what we're going through. The training is coming in. Prior to that we had a special needs policy but it was mighty difficult to get anybody to help you to write it or to know what the heck to put in it. " Senco 11

"I think since we've been involved with the Partnership we've done a number of courses so we've got to meet the staff there so you can go there and even if they're not... – they can put you in contact with somebody who can help ... and I think with the Area Senco being appointed it should hopefully make the job easier.." Senco 4

In celebrating the progress in this area, existing SEN support mechanisms such as the Under Five's Association are inadvertently put down. This is picked up in the session commentary:

"I don't like the way we 'dis' the existing support for settings through BUFA and BAPA. A couple of Sencos rightly stuck up for them and the support they offer. We are doing this whole power / knowledge thing ourselves - telling them what they had before was wrong" Session Commentary, 4.4

However, when this is questioned by a participant, a second participant suggests that the situation now is qualitatively different:

"Have you not had a voluntary group? We've had support from voluntary bodies..." Senco 14

"Yes but in a different way... I know that this is something very different. You've got a number; a person to ring and someone to come and advise with individual children." Senco 11

Despite welcoming the changes, the current high profile of non-maintained settings is said to have its drawbacks:

"I must say at times we feel overpowered by the amount of stuff that's coming at us at the moment for the last 12 months certainly. Almost weekly a new person falls on the desk, and it may be to do with special needs and it may be something else. We have gone from one extreme to the other in this. We've been here 14 years. When we started there was nobody much out there for us and so we really have gone from one extreme to the other and that's sometimes quite hard to cope with." Senco 11

The role of external professionals

The need for 'expert advice' was cited by a number of Sencos:

"His parents knew that he had it and they were asking what help they could get and we advised them to see a specialist for him," Senco 3

".... we know we're not professionals in that field..." Senco 2

Some of this is linked to the Sencos' lack of confidence in working with children with special needs:

"You do think, 'Oh, am I doing the right things?' I said to him "What I'm doing is what I think is right but I'd rather be doing something that's been recommend". Because I always used to say "I don't want it on my head if she's not assessed right or if she doesn't get the proper help when she gets to school and I don't want that responsibility"." Senco 8

Thus the role of the external agency is largely seen as one of confirming or endorsing the concerns that a Senco has regarding a particular child:

"I think if somebody like you could endorse what we're saying even, that might quicken up the process of getting some more funding." Senco 2

"I'd like an outside opinion as to whether this is serious or whether it could be, and whether we then need to then inform the parents. It's that about confirming our suspicions before we have to upset the parents." Senco 9

and building the confidence of the setting that they are doing the right thing with a child:

" We managed to get X ... he came in and spent the morning and he was really good and gave us some ideas how we could progress. He gave us the confidence that what we were doing was fine." Senco 4

" He said what we were doing was fine and gave us a lot of encouragement as to what we were doing." Senco 8

Delivering of advice and resources were also cited as roles that external professionals might take:

> " She (the physio) was really good. She actually explained what she did with the little girl and she actually said to us that rather than go outside could we try and do exercises with her which we got other children involved with as well so we made it a group thing so she didn't feel left out." Senco 1

> "Somebody actually came in and did us some training. Talked to all the staff about it and what we should do." Senco 14

The role of the Area Senco was particularly welcomed:

> " We used to review fortnightly but now it's going to termly. The Area Senco is really helping us because were so new to this. I'm monitoring it like that. We were monitoring on the IEP every little stage, but now were doing it in our normal records." Senco 9

> "The Area Senco helped with a problem we had with a health matter, which we were totally stuck on ... and she ... half of the staff have had training and are already using it and know what to do. "Senco 4

Previous Experience

When things go well...

There were a number of examples where working together with external agencies had resulted in positive outcomes for the child and the setting concerned. Factors affecting this related to access and support available:

> " That came along with the statement, all the support. We found that very helpful, and in terms of we had people from the VI service, new equipment. So they very much worked with the worker who was there then for him on a one to one. We saw them too. We found that supportive, we found it helpful, and we found it invaluable. Very, very generous with equipment and what exercises to do. Very, very helpful. It was just like a lifeline as he grew, as he got to two and beyond. We couldn't have managed without it and it just came to us which was good." Senco 11

> "There was a paediatrician, GP, Health Visitor a full team of about 20 at the Team meeting and they told us if we felt we could cope with her, they would fund support which they did. It was brilliant. We had somebody that came out and showed us how to do the physio somebody to show us how to tube feed; everything we needed to know, somebody came. It was very good. We always felt that there was somebody there, the girls were quite nervous at first but after

she'd been coming a while they realised that there was no problem; there was always someone there to support them. "Senco 5

When things don't work out...

When things don't work out with external agencies, Sencos describe having to work largely from their own contacts:

" I made it up as I went along.   I have contacts at the Child and Adolescence Centre because I go there with my son." Senco 6

and even when support is there, it isn't always enough:

"Last time I went through them, she came in and observed and wrote us a programme and that was it. That was like the limit and extent of her knowledge and then we had to work from there. "Senco 9

... leading to the Sencos feeling generally despondent and disheartened:

" Frustrated and down. It was a lot of hard work... You felt at times as if you were just hitting you're head against a brick wall." Senco 4

" The staff must get disillusioned and come to us which is what they have to do and say it's like banging your head against a wall, what am I going to do. So we have to be very careful, it's not easy." Senco 11

Working as a Whole Setting

A number of Sencos comment on the need to work as part of a team in order to best meet individual children's needs...

"T and I will get together and the points we bring out, we check with other staff ... if they've seen it or if they think..." Senco 13

"We share everybody's thoughts and ideas... they come up with all sorts that does work ..." Senco 2

Raising the awareness of other staff members about inclusion is seen as a key part of the role of the Senco:

"I might know about it, the management team might know about it but do the rest of them know?" Senco 15

"Check that the staff know and not assume they're all aware of it cos they're not." Senco 2

"We don't think all of the staff are aware of our policies and who they can contact... with the staff in community settings, we visit them but don't always get them together.... We've managed to get all of the community staff in and we've told them about inclusion and I think that's something they wouldn't have been aware of. I've made sure they've all got policy files and know who to contact." Senco 2

In some cases, this extends to working with staff to develop their attitudes to and understanding of children with special needs:

"You've got to include your staff in the knowledge, working and practice to then go on and include children." Senco 10

"Although all people are aware of (the SEN policy) and have a copy, you still can't be sure they all really understand it. You need to keep 'drip, drip, drip...' " Senco 2, Session 1.1

Although the Sencos themselves seem to support an inclusive approach to working with children with special needs, the attitude of other the members of staff was proposed as a possible inhibitor:

"When you have four or five nursery nurses working together, you may have one who says this child has special needs and the others don't. And you've had to convince.... It might be a temporary blip - not something you really need to be worrying about. You've got to think this is not a SEN - just calm down - OK you can take notes but it's not necessary straight away to say it's an SEN." Senco 2, Session 3.3

Much of this is put down to the emphasis of many training courses on difference rather than similarity.

"Raising awareness of SEN we think that people are maybe looking for things that we think aren't there and we're thinking 'Is it us'? What I would think of as normal behaviour some of the staff are coming back saying 'oh no it's not normal'. But I've looked after so many children over the years, including my own, who can't have been normal! This is one of the things I'm finding" Senco 15, Session 4.1

"There is a danger of the Code of Practice encouraging staff to pick up on things that may be perfectly normal and within parameters that professionals would say are normal. Staff identify things 'Oh he's hyperactive; Oh she's autistic; she's this that and the other'. Alarm bells ring in my head... in fact we've banned it - they know not to label any children." Senco 11, Session 2.3

" You find when staff have been on a course, say on autism, they start to label - its very dangerous - they come back and spot autism all over the nursery" Senco 4, Session 2.3

The Inclusion ABC course is suggested by Sencos as a possible way of tackling this:

"The course would be useful as well to people who aren't Sencos, to give them some insight onto what they need to do to work within inclusion." Senco 6

"An idea I was thinking of is to photocopy the audit and actually display it on the wall - so its like a drip, drip, drip and people might look at it as they're going to get some stock out... at least it might make people come to you and say - I've seen that..." Senco 6

However, despite their efforts, some Sencos report difficulties in engaging other members of staff in issues relating to special needs. This relates both to apathy:

"You see, I've spread the word in my setting, but they're just not interested. I did the staff meeting and questionnaire, but they're just giving it back in dribs and drabs... even the manager hasn't given it back to me." Senco 5

... And to staff wanting the Senco to take sole responsibility for the children with special needs:

"What it sounds like to me is some buck passing - you are the Senco - you do something about it. And that isn't the idea at all." Senco 14, Session 4.2

"That's it - we've told you. And when the other mothers are looking a bit funny it's up to you..." Senco 15, Session 4.2

However, there is a suggestion of a more direct approach to working with other staff:

"Maybe instead of doing a report, I'd go and observe for a couple of weeks. It's referring it back - giving responsibility back to them - you think there's a problem - lets have some more information then..." Senco 13, Session 4.2

And attempts to tackle apathy through developing the staff's skills:

"It's to build their confidence in what they're doing. Sometimes if they're not sure and if you say to them you've done that, gone back, changed that - make them more confident - not just passing it on to someone else." Senco 2, Session 4.2

<u>Peer Support</u>

The notion of support is based largely on external, 'professional' help, rather than support from peers or other sources. However, throughout the training sessions, the insight Sencos who work in the non maintained sector can bring becomes clear:

> "The questions asked by Sencos are really pertinent - sometimes things I didn't think to ask - how long is she there for? etc." Session Commentary, 4.3

A parallel development takes place for the Sencos, both in terms of recognising that they can offer each other advice:

> "Getting ideas from other people, that's been useful too. You (other participant) told me about using the symbols, and that is such a good idea. Sometimes it's difficult, you're trying to work it out, but someone else might come in and see it..." Senco 15

> "If you know, you can understand the problems a bit more - you know what you're working with. It's like you saying you work on two levels, probably the picture I've got in my head isn't your actual working conditions." Senco 15

And the sharing of good practice:

> "It would be good to go to other people's settings, I think that helps. I've worked at my setting for 6 years now and I don't think I've ever been anywhere else. I think my ideas now are getting a bit stale sometime." Senco 5

> "You can only think of so much, and then it's nice to see what other people are doing." Senco 5

CATEGORY THREE
Discursive Commentary

Attitude To The Non Maintained Sector

Whilst pre school workers and the settings they work in are adapting to the changes emanating from 'Meeting the Childcare Challenge' (DfEE, 1998), it seems that its implications are slow to filter through to colleagues in other sectors. The legacy of the education/care split seems entrenched. This is epitomised by children with special needs being re-directed by education professionals to 'specialist' school based nurseries, regardless of the quality of provision in the non maintained sector or progress being made by the child.

> "He was with us two terms and in a way it was hard for us because we thought he was making such headway because we are small group - he was in a small group of only 11 children and he had a one to one member of staff. But then he left us to go to a nursery that a special needs unit. So it was a bit disappointing really, because he'd just started making headway and everything, and just as we were making progress he was whipped away again. "Senco 4

Not only does this undermine the work done in the non maintained sector but also, it reduces choice of placement for parents of children with special needs. This is counter to the underlying aim of improving access to early education enshrined in the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998). If this is to be addressed, there needs to be a major promotional operation in order to familiarise colleagues in health and education sectors with the new role of the non maintained sector.

Access

Accessing external support is described as hitherto having been a lottery:

> "When we've needed them it's always been a struggle to get the right person, and who do we contact first to find out how we get to that person ... Who would be the best person and so you think...there would be BUFA, BAPPA... do you know anybody. Well we do but if you're not a member we can't give you any information and there was all those problems." Senco 2

Within education settings, there is usually some understanding of how support services from within the education sector can be accessed and an associated referral route. This has not been the case for non maintained settings, and in many cases there is still no referral route to educational support services, including the educational psychology service. The only way these services can be accessed is via a medical referral, reinforcing a within child model. There is no routine input into settings, which would lead to more systemic working, as is the model in schools.

When services do become involved, Sencos describe how, in particular the educational psychology service seem to be there for their own ends, rather than to support the Senco.

> "Occasionally the educational psychologist's been in for children that have been identified already. I wouldn't say that they'd really been support because they'd be coming to do their own thing." Senco 9

By choosing a non-maintained sector placement for their child, parents of children with special needs are again disadvantaged. The setting of their choice may receive inferior support from educational support agencies, and be accessed only through making an individual referral via a medical agency.

Sencos credit the Early Years Partnership with having improved the situation greatly, through clarifying and bringing together different agencies. However, in many cases, voluntary, medical and educational support agencies are still working in parallel in early years settings and access routes are confused. In order to ensure equality of access, there needs to be further work to clarify and disseminate information about what support is available, the criteria for accessing such support, and referral routes.

The Role of External Professionals

A number of Sencos describe the need for an external professional to verify that what they are doing is the 'right thing'. The Sencos express uncertainty as to whether they should be offering something intrinsically 'different' to children with special needs. This view is reinforced to a large extent by the training offered in connection with the

Code of Practice. Whilst there is a general ethos of inclusion, the focus on the mechanics of the stages of the Code of Practice and Individual Education Plans confirms that something different is required. What this neglects though is that many of the children's individual needs will be being met intrinsically, by the nature of early years practice on offer. Even with the Foundation Stage, pre school provision continues to be largely child centred with a developmental basis (Blenkin & Kelly, 1994). As such children's education and development is much more closely linked to their individual needs and experiences. The logical extension of this is that at any given stage there will be a range of children in a setting with a broad range of developmental needs. Dowling (1992) comments:

> "If children are truly to be seen as individual, then everyone can be seen as having special needs" Dowling, 1992, p.128

External professionals could be seen as colluding with this notion of children with special needs needing something different, reinforcing it by nature of their 'expert' status. With a limited knowledge of early years philosophy, many external professionals will encourage Sencos to adopt an approach that is indeed different, rather than encouraging the Senco to look at how the child's needs can be met through their existing practice. This in effect acts against the notion of inclusion, enshrined by current legislation for children with special needs.

Whilst there is some movement within early years circles to reinforce the expertise of early year professionals and highlight the inclusive nature of early years provision (eg Mortimer, 2002) this is not wide spread and training continues to push Sencos towards an approach based on 'difference'.

Working As A Whole Setting

There seems to be an inherent sense of isolation in many of the statements made by Sencos. Hitherto, Sencos have been isolated not only from external support but they have also been isolated within their own settings.

Whilst the natural inclinations of the Sencos may be to 'give children time', the dominant culture of special needs is that of individualisation. Sencos describe how many of the courses attended in connection with special needs push them towards an individual approach. The Code of Practice is cited as being particularly guilty of this:

"There is a danger of the Code of Practice encouraging staff to pick up on things that may be perfectly normal and within parameters that professionals would say are normal. Staff identify things 'Oh he's hyperactive; Oh she's autistic; she's this that and the other. Alarm bells ring in my head... in fact we've banned it - they know not to label any children." Senco 11, Session 2.3

Sencos suggest that other staff are particularly susceptible to this pressure towards 'difference' based model, and that much of the Sencos' effort is directed to developing the attitude of others within the setting. When courses do not draw the link between inclusion and good early years' practice, previous inclusive practice is undermined.

Sencos describe their difficulties in trying to disseminate information about inclusion to other members of staff. There are obvious parallels here with the experiences of school based Sencos, where responsibility for children with special needs often becomes focused within the role of the Senco. This was particularly difficult for the younger, less experienced Sencos:

"You see, I've spread the word in my setting, but they're just not interested. I did the staff meeting and questionnaire, but they're just giving it back in dribs and drabs... even the manager hasn't given it back to me." Senco 5

So why is it so difficult to engage other members of staff? They are working within the same early years framework as the Sencos, and as such should be able to incorporate children with special needs into what they do routinely. Maybe the difference is that with training, the Sencos are now starting to recognise and develop a confidence that what they have previously been doing is right. They have a name for it and an emerging vocabulary. For other staff who haven't had this opportunity, there is still a feeling that for children with special needs, they should be doing something different.

In order to pursue this agenda in their individual settings, Sencos need to be secure in the knowledge of what they are doing and continue to develop the vocabulary to support this. This again points to the need for any training for Sencos to focus on highlighting

the links between what Sencos are already doing as part of good early years practice, and meeting special needs through inclusion.

Peer Support

Pushing forward this agenda in their individual settings will be difficult for Sencos to pursue in isolation. What Sencos began to realise though, throughout the sessions was that they could be a good source of support and inspiration for each other. In many cases this has hitherto not happened. There have not been support networks for Sencos in non maintained settings. This is partly related to the nature of non-maintained provision. Many settings are private businesses set up in direct competition with one another. However, the development of the role of the Area Senco presents an ideal opportunity for breaking down some of these barriers and forging links between Sencos.

Implications

- In order to ensure equality of access for parents of children with special needs, action needs to be taken to combat the discrimination of professionals working in this field, against non maintained settings. This will include updating knowledge on recent changes and raising awareness of current status inclusive practice.
- There needs to be further clarification and dissemination of information about available sources of support for non maintained settings, criteria for accessing this support and referral routes.
- Training for Sencos in non maintained early years settings needs to focus on establishing links between what staff are already doing as part of good early years practice and meeting special needs through inclusion.
- Developing a vocabulary to describe what the Sencos do would help give credence to existing practice and increase the confidence of Sencos to disseminate this amongst other members of staff.
- The development of peer support networks would counter the feelings of isolation experienced by Sencos and support them to develop and disseminate inclusive practice within their own settings.
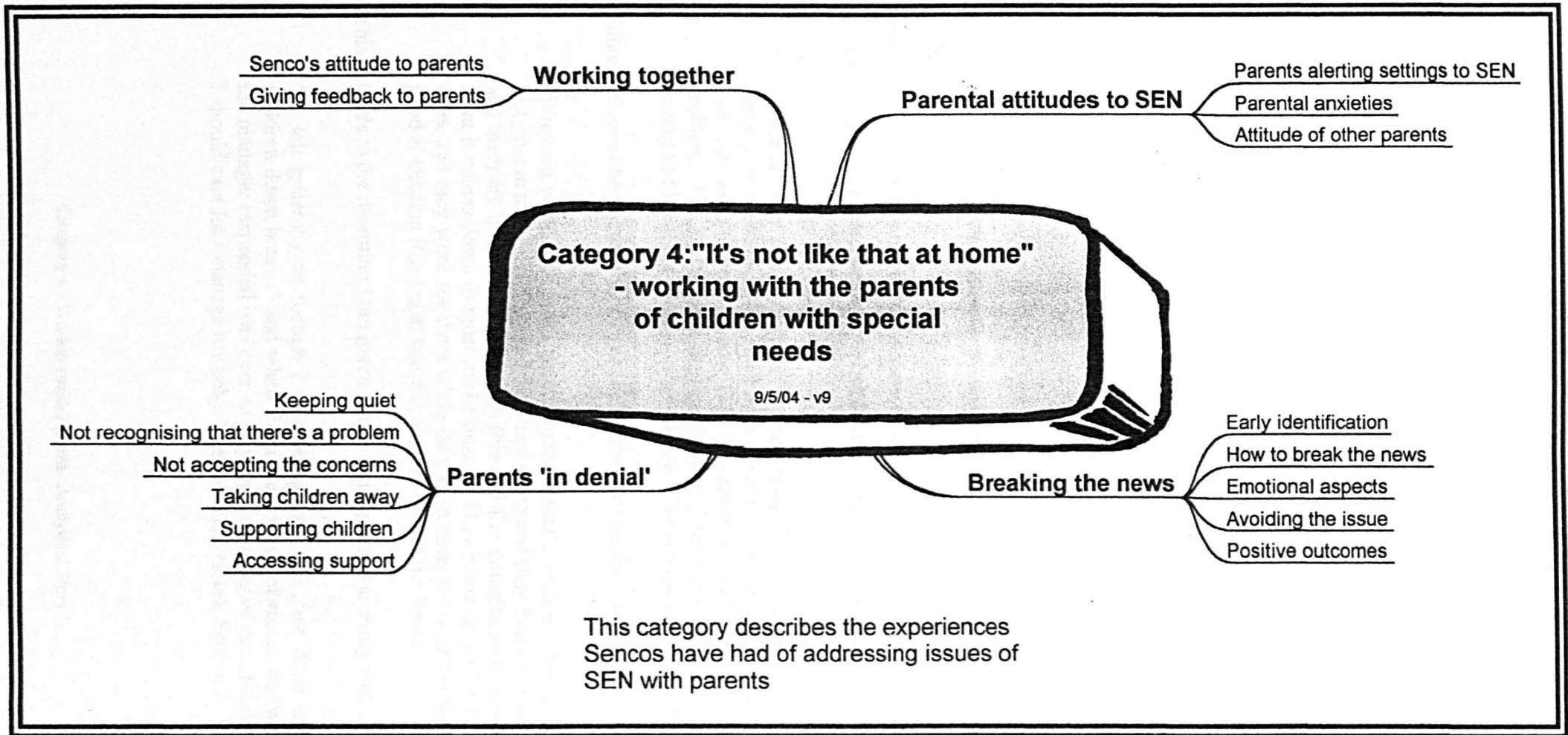
Category 4:"It's not like that at home"
- working with the parents
of children with special
needs

9/5/04 - v9

Working together
- Senco's attitude to parents
- Giving feedback to parents

Parental attitudes to SEN
- Parents alerting settings to SEN
- Parental anxieties
- Attitude of other parents

Parents 'in denial'
- Keeping quiet
- Not recognising that there's a problem
- Not accepting the concerns
- Taking children away
- Supporting children
- Accessing support

Breaking the news
- Early identification
- How to break the news
- Emotional aspects
- Avoiding the issue
- Positive outcomes

This category describes the experiences
Sencos have had of addressing issues of
SEN with parents

Figure 5. Category 4 Working with Parents.mmp - 9/5/04 - Ruth Dennis - dennis@bradford18.freeserve.co.uk

CATEGORY FOUR

"It's Not Like That At Home..."
- Working With The Parents Of Children With Special Needs.

This category describes the experiences Sencos have had of working with the parents of children with special needs. Whilst working with parents is recognised as being important, this is sometimes difficult to achieve in practice if parents do not share the concerns.

Working Together

Generally, working with parents is seen as important to achieving progress with children with special needs. However, sometimes underlying currents in the conversation suggest a more mixed view of the role of parents. Whilst one Senco, from personal experience describes how special needs is an interactive process:

> "There are a lot of people under the impression I feel, that if there's a problem at nursery or at school, there must be a problem at home. Not necessarily so, not from my experience. I know that sometimes it can be the setting that's the problem. Not that there's anything wrong. That the child can't deal with the setting and I feel the parents need to know it's not their fault." Senco 12

Other Sencos either explicitly or covertly harbour less positive views of parents:

> "What we've decided is it's parenting skills that's what it comes down to. They just give in to the children and then they come and they find there are boundaries and there are limits and I don't like this and I'm going to kick up a fuss. That's what it comes down to most of the time.... They come up with all sorts that do work and they work for them while they're in here, but whether the parents are good at keeping it going at home is another side of it." Senco 2

This extends to the reception I am given in one setting, when arriving with my baby:

> " I felt generally as though I was being told off..."we don't usually allow children down here..." and when Eliza ate a piece of tissue, the way in which the manager responded was ever so slightly chastising of me...teaching me how I should care for / manage my baby." Observation Notes, Setting 5

However, on the whole, Sencos have developed a number of ways of working with parents and communicating how things are progressing:

> "I used to have a chat with her each week 'He's done this' and 'he's done that'". Senco 4

> "At one time I did a daily report on her and I used to do that during the week and give it to her Mum to read over the weekend and bring it back on Monday." Senco 8

> "But all those things were fed back to mum, so all the things that the staff did extra, Mum would then be told 'we thought this would be a good idea to do this for whatever reason' so it wasn't done behind mum's back she was always fully aware." Senco 11

The interactions with parents focus on giving positive feedback on the developments of the particular child...

> "That just took the pressure off mum. Instead of saying "we think this is what we should do," it was just like explaining " this is what we've done today and he anticipated ... " and encouraging mum to know how well he'd done. " Senco 11

> " When we had the little boy with autism, normally what we do for the children we have a folder, and we have development sheets which we tick off, write little comments on and put little observations in on what we were doing, etc., but we decided it might not been not be advantageous for mum to put a development sheet in like we were for his sister, because it could make her feel somewhat.... instead of which we just used to keep a diary and put in some photographic evidence. We didn't do it every session, because I thought if he had down days...., so we used to do it at the end of each month or whatever and just give her the general review with all the positives." Senco 4

Parental Attitudes to Special Needs.

A number of Sencos report instances where parents have broached the subject of their child's special needs prior to entry to the setting.

> "A little boy who's mum came to see us. He was a twin, so she wanted to know if we could take him before he was three. He'd already been seen by an Education Psychologist and it was felt that he was autistic." Senco 4

This was regarded as being a positive, allowing additional resources to be sought.

"Well her parents really came to me ... I think as well its half the battle if you're working together. Once she'd approached me and we'd approached the health visitor I said to her we can get somebody from Under Fives - special needs workers and she just wanted any help she could get." Senco 8

On these occasions, when parents are open about their child's needs, the situation is said to be more comfortable for the Sencos:

"X's mother was quite happy for other people to be aware that there was a problem. ... She was never bothered, like when our children go out, all the parents are stood outside and we only let them out one at a time when we see the parent. So I'd be going out and giving her the book and she would just say thanks I'll bring it back on Monday. People treat different situations differently don't they?" Senco 8

However, on occasions, parental anxieties about their children make working with children with special needs difficult.

"One of the parents came in and just watched, as she was very unsteady. She was actually paralysed, half of her body was paralysed and her parents were very careful around her. She was fussing over her all the time and we said 'we just wanted to try to include her; we don't want to make her feel any different'. We tried to get that across to the parent really because she was trying to treat her a bit differently." Senco 1

Also on occasions, parents are described as having been the driving force in chasing additional support for their child despite settings feeling that this isn't altogether necessary.

"She's the sister of a child we've had before and we were just trying to absorb her in and see how it went but her Mum thinks its very important and was very keen to push for support and she managed to get forty hours a week." Senco 9

The attitude of other parents to children with special needs is also commented upon:

"There was also a group of mums in at the time whose children weren't the best behaved in the group but who had decided that this little boy was naughty and must have proceeded to tell their children the same. So we had that to deal with." Senco 12

"She was.... not a bit of a bully... she'd just, if we were having a quiet time and she saw a space in the middle it didn't matter who she stood over to get to that space.........other parents were thinking like....their children , " X did this and X did that. " Senco 8

Breaking the News

Working in early years settings with children from three months upwards, many Sencos are in the position that they may be the first person outside of the family to identify that a child has special needs.

> " ...its normally we've picked them up ourselves, because we do find a lot of parents don't recognise that there is a problem, maybe that's because we get them so young rather than in schools or as they get a bit older." Senco 2

> "Most of our children, we begin to see things whilst they're here. That's the more normal thing that happens here. The child comes and everything's fine but then because the child comes as a baby, because most of them do and stay until they go to school, we have them for a long time, and as they're going along we begin to notice things ... then we approach the parents." Senco 11

Broaching this with parents is widely acknowledged as being one of the most difficult aspects of the Senco's role:

> "These are child care workers who have got a basic qualification, but you're expecting them to talk to parents, and say not to label children, but to say we're really concerned because, we think it would be a good idea if you went to the Doctor, if you went to the Health visitor. It's a hard thing to do that." Senco 11

> "We knew when he first came at 2 year old ... he was very bright, or appeared to be very bright but you never got eye contact with him. As he got older he got worse and worse and worse. Nobody said anything that they thought was there just that but they just thought we should speak to a Health Visitor because we'd got concerns about it. I don't know if was approached rightly or not." Senco 5

The emotional aspects of this are described as being amongst the most distressing:

> "We've had two children where we have actually had to say we think there is something .... and they've been distraught. I've done it so carefully" Senco 9

> "It's ways of approaching that and saying to those people, 'we've got a concern'. Alarm bells start ringing don't they?" Senco 12

> " And it doesn't matter how carefully you put it, and we do, 'we're just a little bit concerned,' 'how is he at home', you know we don't go in with hobnailed boots on with this, but this is very, very difficult, and that for us has got to be the big issue that you can address" Senco 11

"I'd like an outside opinion as to whether this is serious or whether it could be, and whether we then need to then inform the parents. It's about confirming our suspicions before we have to upset the parents." Senco 9

One Senco relates how in her experience, this results in some settings opting not to broach the subject of special needs with parents at all:

"The only unhappy thing was that he could have been having help so much earlier. He didn't come until he was four and when I said 'why didn't you...' it was 'well we didn't really know what to do, nobody really talked to us at the other place where he was'." Senco 11

When the subject of special needs is broached, this is sometimes embraced or welcomed by the parents:

"We've got the group where you approach and you say to parents, you know... and they say 'I'm so glad you said that'. Then you can work with them. "Senco 11

"When we spoke to mum.....what came out was that it was in the family on the father's side. He had been a stammerer and she agreed then. That was good we got a good response from her. She went to the Doctor, she went to the health visitor, they got the referral and they waited for the appointment. We did what we could for him but that was referred on by the parent." Senco 11

" If it's still a problem then I would usually talk to mum and say 'we're a bit worried about this; we're going to do this, have you noticed' Just to see if there's any more outside information that might help us. Not 'Oh there's something wrong with your child'...Sometimes then mum will say 'well yes, at home so and so does that for her so she doesn't. That's why she does it." Senco 13

"We did contact the mum and said we're concerned about one or two things. She said yes, and we got a bit of background information. It was a bit turbulent at home so you could understand why ... The mum accepted that there was a problem so we agreed on things we could do to try and overcome this aggressive behaviour, his concentration and that sort of thing and we worked all through the year with that. Things changed and he did improve and she was most grateful for everything that had happened." Senco 2

Working with Parents 'in denial'.

However, by far the more common experience is that the parent does not accept the concerns of the Sencos. On some occasions this might be a case of parents already having some concerns about their child but not sharing these with the setting:

"We originally thought there was maybe something a bit, not wrong, but not quite right and we spoke about it. I think the parents actually knew about it but they'd not said anything. "Senco 1

"I have a child whose just been registered with us and I really think she might have special education needs, but the parents haven't said anything. I've only had the one meeting with her but from snippets the parents came out with once they'd registered her I think it might be." Senco 4

Or a case of the parent lacking the experience to recognise the problems:

"We do find a lot of parents don't recognise that there is a problem," Senco 2

"She said that she'd had another little boy. There was 18 months or just short of two years between and it wasn't until R started doing things that she realised that G wasn't. She says herself now that she didn't realise about G because it was only when R began that she realised." Senco 8

·"He couldn't sit down in one place for five minutes. He goes everywhere and then when we are singing he didn't want to sit. Mum said no because he he's alone at home that's why he did it. We can't say anything to mum." Senco 7

"When he came mum was in denial, because she had an older child with autism but the older child had quite good language, and this little one had no language, but mum was convinced that he had." Senco 4

On other occasions it seems that parents are unwilling to accept that there is a concern.

"X came to us as a baby. She went through the nursery and we noticed that she was quite an obese child so we talked to Mum about that issue but 'no, she's not obese'. Staff noticed that she had problems with her eyesight, that she would have things close to her. When Mum was asked about this 'Oh no at home she's fine'." Senco 11

"It's like they don't want to come to terms with it somehow and they don't want to admit that there is a problem and that is a big hurdle to get over. Accepting that there is a problem and that you can't do it on your own." Senco 2

"Mum just wouldn't go there at all. Mum thought that she was developing just like any other child, no problems with regard to her size, her language development, her sight, her co-ordination, her mobility at times. That was quite · a struggle for us as care workers." Senco 11

"We know for a fact that Y went to an educational psychologist once he got to school, but mum just wouldn't go, she wouldn't take the step and go to talk to the health visitor or the doctor even though we were encouraging her." Senco 11

"It's about not facing the problem that their child is showing and denying that if we say what it's like here, 'well, it's not like that at home' 'he plays with other

children' and making out that it's all us. We must be seeing things that aren't there, that's how it comes across isn't it." Senco 11

Sencos describe a number of occasions when parents, not accepting the Senco's concerns, take drastic action and remove their child from the setting:

> "I've done it so carefully but they took her straight away and I heard later that she'd tried a few settings and obviously they would come back with the same." Senco 9

> "....when we voiced concerns to the parents they took the huff and took him somewhere else but they also voiced concern.... No, he did come back for a while before he went to school... They decided we were a good nursery. In fact one of the other nurseries refused to have him." Senco 5

In one particular instance, attempts to raise the issue of a child's possible special needs were rejected so strongly by parents that they threatened to charge the Senco with harassment:

> "Special needs isn't a problem. Inclusion isn't a problem here. Only when you're working with parents who are in denial and will not go with you, and actually getting to the point like X's Mum saying 'if you insist in this I will take a case out against you." Senco 11

When children with special needs remain in the setting, when their parents feel that there isn't a problem, supporting the child is difficult:

> "....but what we ourselves did we did do things that were helpful, like it was our pushing that got her the 'specs. We did other things, little things that we could do but we did just in the normal day. We didn't have to make a big issue out of them because Mum was hostile" Senco 11

> "And on the spectacles, do you remember as well, we'd really pushed to get her to the hospital, even and she'd missed appointments, it was us finally got those spectacles, it was like a break through and then she wouldn't bring them, do you remember. Many a time 'where are the spectacles?' We had to encourage her to get something to hold them on, but everything was a push and a struggle. So we really had to talk to her a bit more 'she really needs these spectacles' Anyway we pushed and she did bring them in the end, mostly, but not all the time. Then they'd get broken. It was really difficult, but we just persisted, gently." Senco 11

Another difficulty when parents do not share the concern relates to accessing external support or advice;

"You can't go, unless the parent has agreed for us to make any contact with anybody, but you have to go through the parent because that's the way you have to go. We're non statutory. You have to go that way because there is no other way that I know of; otherwise you can be accused of all sorts of interference."
Senco 11

"You cannot go above a parent's head, as far as we know and if that parent is sitting there saying 'I don't agree, I don't think my child has got a problem, I don't think this, I don't think that' you just sit there and think what can we do."
Senco 11

This is contrasted with the way in which schools have more status to engage parents:

"So this child has now gone to school and we are sure that there has been an issue with the school because the school has rung here to check out all these things, but we were really stuck. We realised that something needed to be done before she went to school, but then we have no power and that's what you were saying about how do we get help when the parents won't acknowledge that something is wrong... Like Y, that was behavioural and we know for a fact that he went to an educational psychologist once he got to school, but Mum just wouldn't go, she wouldn't take the step and go to talk to the health visitor or the doctor even though we were encouraging her. "Senco 11

" What tends to happen, I think always happens, except for the Z case, is that it's taken out of our hands but the schools then pick it up and they have to face it then because its Statutory. They don't hang about; they say right Psychologist in, whatever.... That's right, it's very different, you have to go to school once the child's turned five. Its statutory, that's the big difference for us." Senco 11

CATEGORY FOUR
Discursive Commentary

Working Together

Although there seems to be a general agreement over the need to work together with the parents of children with special needs, there is an interesting cultural shift in the way the Sencos view their role. Whilst in other situations, the Sencos present themselves as not being experts and as lacking in confidence relating to children with special needs, in this context they are happy to become 'experts'. The Sencos feel confident to persist with the notion of a child having special needs, even when this is challenged by parents. There seems to be a hierarchy in the status of knowledge, of which in most cases Sencos and parents are at the bottom. However, when operating independently with parents, Sencos are able to rise to an elevated position. This mirrors Marks' (1996) observation that in case conferences:

> "Different categories of participants are positioned along a continuum of expertise. The right to speak tends to be correlated with lower levels of contact with the child and greater access to abstract knowledge." Marks, 1996, p.130

Breaking the News

Children may begin attending non-maintained provision from as young as three months. As such, staff in these settings are often the first people to have regular contact with the child, outside of the family. Consequently, they may be the first to identify that a child is experiencing some kind of difficulty or delayed development. Sencos describe broaching this subject with parents as being one of the most difficult aspects of their role. However carefully this has been handled by the Sencos, it has been traumatic both for the parents involved and for the Sencos themselves. Whilst tackling this issue is recognised within the medical arena as an area needing specialist training (DfES, 2002), this has not been a priority within education settings. Usually, when a child enters school, any difficulties will have already been picked up through regular contact with other agencies such as health visitors. As front line professionals Sencos in non maintained settings need training and support to manage such situations and this needs to become a core part of their training.

Working With Parents 'In Denial'

The implications of parents not sharing a Senco's concerns over a child's needs are reported in different ways. In a number of instances, parents are seen to take the extreme step of removing their child from the setting in order to distance themselves from the source of the concern. This situation is probably unique to the private sector, due to the competitive nature of the provision. With school based early years provision, children will often have their names down on a waiting list from birth and to find another nursery at short notice would in most cases be very difficult. Within the non-maintained sector, with the increasing number of settings there is generally less difficulty over access. This puts Sencos under a degree of pressure when attempting to engage with parents. If they are working for profit, pursuing the issue of special needs with reluctant parents may result in a drop in revenue. This may be particularly difficult for less senior members of staff who take on the role of Senco and may conceivably be under pressure from their manager to keep parents happy.

A second implication of parents not accepting the Sencos' concerns is that this then blocks access to any external support. Access to the majority of external services is largely based on an individual referral and can only be done in collaboration with parents. Even access to the Area Senco is constrained by individual referral in agreement with parents. The Sencos interviewed describe having to use their own personal contacts to get advice, or relying on the goodwill of external agencies when they come in to work with someone who has been referred to them through the normal channels. If staff are to be encouraged to meet the needs of all the children in their setting, they need to be able to access advice and support on a regular basis without reliance on an individual referral model. Whilst this does not negate the need for parental agreement to any individual consultation regarding their child, it would enable Sencos to explore how they might respond to and accommodate the needs of the range of children in their settings.

Implications
- Training on working with parents should become a core component of Senco training for non-maintained settings. This should draw on the existing good practice,

relating how to manage emotionally charged interactions and also on how to engage parents who do not share the concerns of the setting.

- Early Years Partnerships need to address the issue of how to offer regular support to setting based Sencos, that isn't based on an individual referral model. This would support Sencos in developing their potential for including all of the children in their setting and also offer a way accessing advice regarding how to work with individual children, even when parental consent isn't forthcoming.
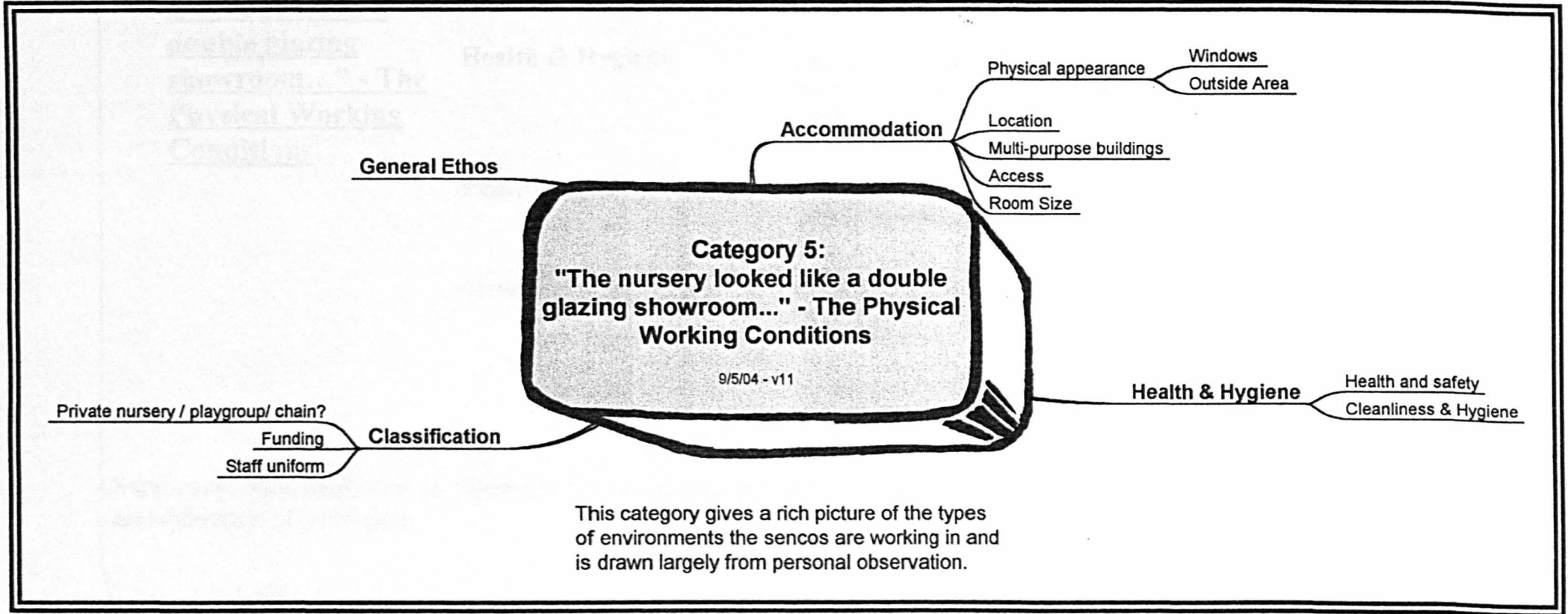
Category 5:
"The nursery looked like a double glazing showroom..." - The Physical Working Conditions

9/5/04 - v11

General Ethos

Accommodation
- Physical appearance
  - Windows
  - Outside Area
- Location
- Multi-purpose buildings
- Access
- Room Size

Health & Hygiene
- Health and safety
- Cleanliness & Hygiene

Classification
- Private nursery / playgroup/ chain?
- Funding
- Staff uniform

This category gives a rich picture of the types of environments the sencos are working in and is drawn largely from personal observation.

Figure 6. Category 5 Working conditions of Sencos.mmp - 9/5/04 - Ruth Dennis - dennis@bradford18.freeserve.co.uk

Category 5: "The nursery looked just like a double glazing showroom..." - The Physical Working Conditions

Accommodation

The size and location of the settings is very varied. Very few settings have purpose built premises. Many settings are located in converted houses or multi purpose buildings such as church halls.

Health & Hygiene

Issues of health & safety and hygiene are more prominent than in schools. Despite this, adherence to these varies between settings.

Classification

The distinction between the different types of setting/ provision is subtle and somewhat transient.

General Ethos

On almost every occasion, the ethos of the setting was welcoming.

Summary: The conditions in which the Sencos work vary greatly depending on location, accommodation and classification of provision.

Figure 7
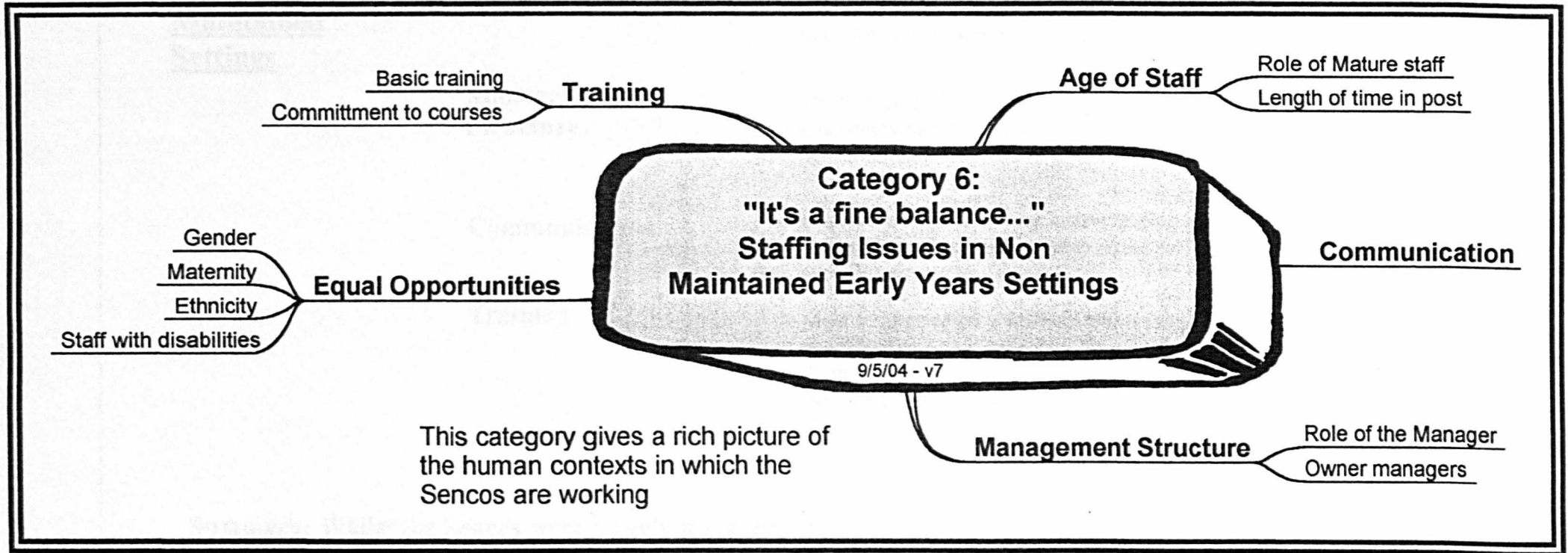Category 5 Summary: Physical Working Conditions

Category 6:
"It's a fine balance..."
Staffing Issues in Non
Maintained Early Years Settings

9/5/04 - v7

Training
- Basic training
- Committment to courses

Age of Staff
- Role of Mature staff
- Length of time in post

Equal Opportunities
- Gender
- Maternity
- Ethnicity
- Staff with disabilities

Communication

Management Structure
- Role of the Manager
- Owner managers

This category gives a rich picture of the human contexts in which the Sencos are working

Figure 8. Category 6 Staffing Issues.mmp - 9/5/04 - Ruth Dennis - dennis@bradford18.freeserve.co.uk

<u>**Category Six:**</u>
<u>**"It's a fine**</u>
<u>**balance..." Staffing**</u>
<u>**Issues in Non**</u>
<u>**Maintained**</u>
<u>**Settings**</u>

Age of staff

Most of the Sencos interviewed were aged between 35 - 50. This was seen as being a deliberate move, capitalising on the Sencos maturity and experience.

Equal opportunities

All of the Sencos interviewed were female, and mainly from white British backgrounds. Issues around pregnancy and maternity leave were prominent in many interviews.

Management Structure

Most settings had a clear management structure, related to qualifications and time in post. The role of manager varied, from active childcare, to a more 'executive' role.

Communication

In some settings there was a clear feeling of co-operation and camaraderie about the job, with issues such as planning being tackled socially, as a group.

Training

Most settings employ workers with a range of appropriate qualifications, and improving the qualifications of staff was part of an ongoing programme. Issues relating to not being able to 'get out' to training were raised.

Summary: Whilst the Sencos were largely mature women, within the settings the remaining workers were from a wide age range with varying levels of training and experience.

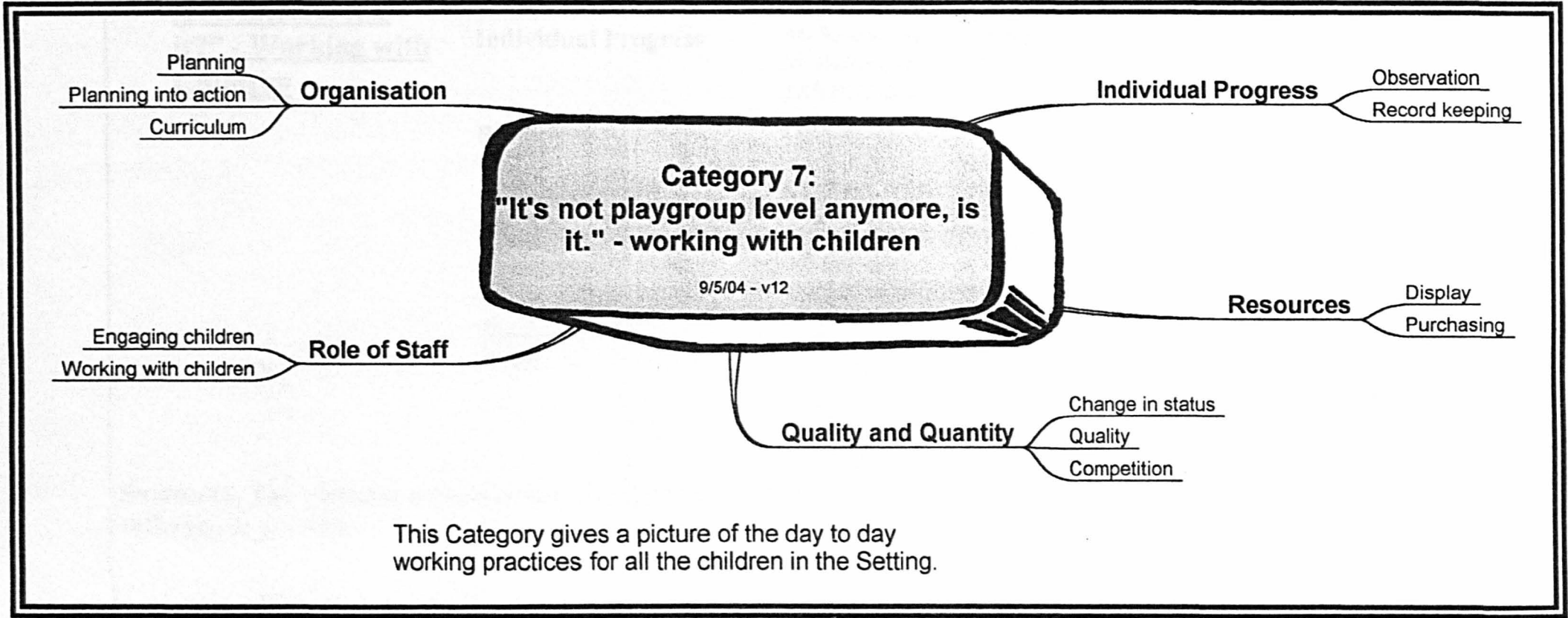Figure 9. Category 6 Summary : Staffing Issues In Non Maintained Settings

Figure 10. Category 7 Working with Children.mmp - 9/5/04 - Ruth Dennis - dennis@bradford18.freeserve.co.uk

Category 7:
It's not playgroup
level anymore, is
it?" - Working with
Children

Organisation

Most Sencos described well-developed planning and recording systems, although this did not always seem to follow through into practice.

Individual Progress

All Sencos described some form of ongoing record keeping for children in their setting. In some settings the keeping of such records is tackled as a whole staff, on a regular basis.

Resources

The standard of resources / displays varies between settings, This doesn't always relate to the level of training of staff or curricular expertise.

Quality and
Quantity

The government focus on improving quality in pre school settings has led to an increased emphasis on planning, recording and curriculum focus.

Role of the
Staff

In most settings, staff seemed to be largely engaged with children, although this was not always the case.

Summary: The planning and recording systems for all children seem to be well developed, although this isn't always reflected in practice

Figure 11. Category 7 Summary: Working with Children

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSING THE ISSUES

This chapter draws together the main themes emerging from the research and explores them in the light of the social and political context of non maintained early years provision, in order to develop a new conceptual framework.

DISCUSSING THE ISSUES
Developing A New Conceptual Framework.

In writing the initial research proposal, it had been clear that the research question should be:

> "...loose, to enable issues emerging from the data to form the framework for the study". Dissertation Proposal 21/1/02

This is standard methodological practice for qualitative research projects (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Hitchcock & Hughes 1992). The degree to which the emerging issues had shaped and changed the direction of the study though gave some cause for concern.

> "Woah!! ... And suddenly I am at the discussion chapter. The landscape though, looks so totally different from what I was expecting that it's hard to find my bearings. Starting out, I was expecting to complete a study that gave feedback on the role of the Senco and the 'Inclusion ABC' project. But somehow, along the way, priorities have altered and foci shifted. I guess what I'm saying is that the research has taken on a voice or identity of its own. In some ways that is brilliant - Corbin and Strauss would be proud of me!! But at the same time, I'm thinking 'will my tutors and the external examiner see it like that'? Will they just pull me to pieces for having a poor research design?" Dissertation Journal, 19/6/03

Returning to the literature offered some support. Mason (2002) suggests that in qualitative research, decisions about design and strategy are ongoing and grounded in the process, practice and context of the research itself. As such, it would seem that as with other aspects of the research design, the initial area of focus may shift and bend as it interacts with the research context. This is reinforced by Meloy (1994), who aptly entitles a chapter in her book 'understanding by finishing: The end is the beginning.' Meloy goes on to suggest:

> "It is only at the end of the experience that we begin to see how the whole is constructed. To committees and graduate students, such last minute

knowledge is not yet acceptable. "What are the priori foci? And "what will you have when you are finished?" are examples of the questions we are led to believe we should be able to answer from the beginning." Meloy, 1994, p.1

Looking back at the initial research focus, this seemed to reflect the processes that I had been through. The initial research question had really been no more than a broad theme. In addressing this, a range of other issues had arisen from the data itself, which had shaped the final direction of the study. Finally, at the end of the research process, the focus was becoming clear! I was able to say what the project was about.

Despite this revelation, finding a suitable model for the discussion chapter proved difficult. In traditional positivistic research, the discussion chapter is where the results are referred back to the previously reviewed literature, and explored in this context. Strauss and Corbin (1990) suggest that in qualitative studies, this is not the case though.

> "Since discovery is our purpose, we do not have beforehand knowledge of all the categories relevant to our theory. It is only after a category has emerged as pertinent that we might go back to the literature to determine if this category is there. Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p.50.

Indeed, Strauss & Corbin (1990) go on to suggest that restraining the discussion to the issues identified initially in the literature may be unhelpful, in that it may get in the way of discovery. Considering this point leads to the conclusion that the discussion chapter should primarily represent a coming together of the themes arising from the analytical stories and the issues identified in the discursive commentaries. As such a rich picture of the research subject that is clearly grounded in the research context will become clearly visible. Relating this then to existing literature allows an even fuller picture to emerge which is grounded both in the field but also in a wider social and political context.
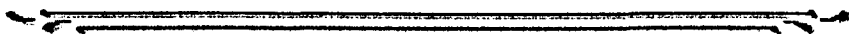
WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A SENCO IN A NON MAINTAINED EARLY YEARS SETTING?

The Legacy of the Care / Education Split

It was clear from the early stages of the research project that the circumstances in which setting based Sencos were working differed greatly from those found in schools. This related both to the actual settings (Category 5 - Physical Working Conditions') and the people working within them (Category 6 - Staffing Issues). Over and above this, Category 7 (Working with Children) highlights the way in which non-maintained settings have been subject to rapid change over recent years. This relates both to the way in which the provision is classified and the services on offer:

> "It's been here nearly 40 years. It started off as a little nursery school only open in the mornings. When I got it 14 years ago, we started opening in the afternoon. It's only 4 years since we became a day nursery... and open all hours. It used to be closed in school holidays. It was called Nursery School and then when I took over it was children over five so it couldn't be called Nursery School any more, it had to be a playgroup. Then it became a Day Nursery. " Senco 9 (Category 7, Working with Children)

More specifically, changes emanating from 'Meeting the Childcare Challenge' (DfEE, 1998) have initiated developments in the curriculum and overall ethos of settings. All of the participating settings have opted to undergo Ofsted inspection and become registered, non-maintained providers of early years education. As such they in theory attain the equivalent status of school based provision. Sencos describe how this has impacted on practice within their settings and has lead to a perceived increased quality.

> "I still say play-group, because I started when my two were going to play group but now it's pre-school. I have to be more structured now you've got all your recording. ...It was just to give them social skills and make that break from the parents. Now we get inspected as well." Senco 6 (Category 7, Working with Children)

Whilst this transition from care to education has been made on paper, discussion with the Sencos suggests that this may be at a superficial level only. Social policy research suggests that the provision of care is imbued with a number of underlying values and gendered assumptions.

"A central feature of virtually every childcare institution is that it is gendered; not just because the workforce is nearly always female but because of the way the work is thought about by parents, workers, government policies, colleges who train workers, managers, policy makers and not least wider society, which assumes childcare to be women's work." Cameron, Moss & Owen, 1999, p.xi

Childcare work is widely understood to be and is actually practiced as 'women's work' or as something women do naturally (Penn,1998). As such the role of caring and 'mothering' is embedded within the institutions and practices of non maintained early years provision. This is in contrast to the more scientific, male gendered assumptions associated with Education settings (Walkerdine, 1984).

Many of the issues emanating from the data can be seen to reflect these different, gendered assumptions and the way in which they interact with the transition from childcare to educational provision. These gendered assumptions are visible both in the language used by the Sencos and the practices they describe. Changing the way in which settings are described, to comply with the demands of 'Meeting the Childcare Challenge' can be seen as being only the tip of the iceberg.

Summary 1: Settings have been subject to rapid change over recent years relating to both how they are categorised and the services they deliver. The changes however have not addressed the underlying assumptions associated with the gendered division of care and education.

Changes in Policy and Resourcing.

Despite the nominal change in status, the assumptions and ideologies associated with the gendered divisions between childcare and education remain largely intact. Cameron (1999) proposes that the context of childcare work is structured by policy based on notions of 'tradition' and underpinned by dominant ideologies of caring. Caring is seen to be natural for women, and care is what children with special needs are seen to primarily need (Marks, 1996). Many children with special educational needs have been cared for by women in non maintained early education settings without the need for additional resources or support. In the transition from care to education this status quo

has not been challenged or addressed. This is reflected in the continuing inequitable distribution of resources and differential access to external support services for non maintained settings. Although Nursery Education Grant funded non maintained early years settings now work within the Code of Practice and are subject to Ofsted inspections in the same way as their school based counterparts, they do not have access to the same level of funding or support. This is reflected clearly in the data in Category 1 (On Being a Senco) and Category 2 (Working with Children with Special Needs).

Issues of Funding and Support

Non maintained settings have until recently operated largely as independent bodies, with no umbrella organisation or equivalent of a Local Education Authority to support them. As such there has been no additional funding to support children with additional needs, as is available to schools. Within school based provision, there is usually a formula funded allocation of money to allow children with short term additional needs or minor difficulties to be catered for from within the setting. This funding also allows for time for the Senco to attend to administrative tasks and also for the funding of training.

Having no additional funding means that there is little flexibility to allow Sencos time to attend to tasks associated with their role. Although the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) recommends that nursery governing bodies or management boards consider allocating time for Sencos to attend to their responsibilities, none of the Sencos in the study make reference to any such luxury. Sencos describe using their lunchtimes or days off to carry out observations or planning meetings. On numerous occasions, Sencos describe how due to staff shortages and lack of cover, places on training courses have been cancelled.

This lack of core funding also reduces the setting's ability to respond flexibly to children with additional needs.

> "From the private nursery sector it is the heart of it......because obviously we
> have to work at a profit. But we kept being told that funding would be available
> but it was just going round and round trying to find out who was responsible.
> By the time it was, he'd gone." Senco 4, (Category 2, Working with Children
> with Special Needs)

In addition to the issue of inequitable funding, discussion with the Sencos also suggests that non maintained settings have been disadvantaged in terms of the support or specialist advice they can access (Category 3 - Working with Other People).

Working long hours, there has been a limited opportunity for support from colleagues in other settings. This is further constrained by the fact that as privately run businesses, many settings are in direct competition with one another.

At the same time access to external agencies is said to have been limited:

> "...Two years ago even, we were really like a in a wilderness, we didn't know who to contact, or anything and you find yourself on a roundabout somebody would say we'd find such and such and then Oh no we can't and in the end it was such frustration and you were getting nowhere." Senco 4 (Category 3, Working with Other People)

Sencos describe how the situation regarding advice is much improved since the inception of the Early Years Partnership, and the appointment of the Area Sencos. However, access to other educational services such as educational psychology is still focused very much on an individual, 'within child' model. Unlike schools, non-maintained early years settings do not have routine access to educational support services to discuss more generic issues. Offering support in this way is cited as being one of the key contributory factors leading to more inclusive practice (DfEE, 2000). Sencos describe how support, when it has come has always been linked to an individual child and input at a more systemic level has rarely been seen:

> "Occasionally the educational psychologist (has been in) for children that have been identified already. I wouldn't say that they'd really been support because they'd be coming to do their own thing." Senco 9 (Category 3, Working with Other People)

This situation has implications not only for the settings that the Sencos work within but also for the parents of children with special needs. Although non-maintained settings now work within the Code of Practice, in choosing a non-maintained setting for their child with special needs, parents may be disadvantaging their child in terms of the

resources and expert advice that will be available. For these parents, Meeting the Childcare Challenge (DfEE, 1998) has done little to increase access or equality of opportunity.

This perceived anomaly may have prompted the government to begin to address this issue. The recent SEN strategy document (DfES, 2004) states clearly that it will:

> "...bring all early years settings including those in the private and voluntary sector, within the same networks of specialist advice and support enjoyed by the school sector." DfES, 2004, p.15

Whilst not addressing the issue of funding, in this way at least gaining access to external support will be more equitable between maintained and non maintained settings.

Responding to Children in Need

In most cases, the only way for non maintained settings to access additional advice or support has been through an individual referral via either a health visitor or the child's GP (Category 3 - Working with Other People). Although this route is viable when parents are in agreement, many Sencos report incidences where parents have not shared their concerns or have not been willing to consent to a referral to an external agency. In such cases, access to any advice is effectively blocked.

> "You can't go, unless the parent had agreed for us to make any contact with anybody, but you have to go through the parent because that's the way you have to go. We're non statutory. You have to go that way because there is no other way that I know of; otherwise you can be accused of all sorts of interference." Senco 11, (Category 4, Working with Parents)

In such cases, the Sencos are faced with a stark choice. Working within the private sector, many Sencos cannot afford to offend their clients by pursuing the issue of special needs with a reluctant parent. Examples were given of parents taking children out of settings in response to concerns over special needs being raised.

> " ...When we voiced concerns to the parents they took the huff and took him somewhere else but they also voiced concerns...No, he did come back for a while before he came to school... they decided we were a good nursery after all.

In fact one of the other nurseries refused to have him." Senco 5 (Category 4, Working with Parents)

In such cases, the Sencos have only two choices. They can refuse to accept the child into their setting which would result in reduced revenue. Alternatively, as frequently seems to be the case, they can find a way of accommodating the child from within existing resources.

In addition to the financial imperative, this second response could be seen as further evidence of the gendered, caring dimension associated with the childcare sector. The imperative to care which falls disproportionately on women is magnified within this context of childcare and children with special needs. Marks (1996) comments:

> "Professionals taking a masculine, authoritative position continue to avoid responsibility for providing care or effecting change in a system which fails to meet the concerns of a number of pupils, professionals and parents." Marks, 1996, p.138

Rather than turn a child away, the Sencos are compelled to accept them, often at increased financial or emotional costs to themselves. In Category 1 (On Being A Senco), the Sencos describe taking on additional work or working on their day off in order to ensure a child's needs are addressed.

> "...Even when you're working in the afternoons (the child I mentioned is in the morning) I come in then..." Senco 6 (Category 1, On Being a Senco)

Working within a paradigm of gendered care, rather than pursuing the issue of special needs with reluctant parents, children have largely been assimilated into existing provision and practices. Whilst it might be anticipated that in these circumstances, the needs of the child might go unmet, this does not seem to be the case. Examples are given of settings funding additional support from within their own budgets or re arranging existing staffing patterns to support a child (Category 2 – Working with Children with Special Needs). Amending and altering the curriculum and adapting activities on offer are also described as ways in which a child's individual needs have been met without the need for additional resources. As such children are 'absorbed' and included into the wider culture of the setting as any child would be.

Summary 2: The gendered nature of the work combined with the lack of external funding / support has led to the development of inclusive working practices that cater for children with special needs without recourse for additional resources.

Walking the Talk

Category 3 (Working with Other People) illustrates how the Sencos feel that they are not 'experts' in relation to children with special needs. This is reflected in the language they use to talk about such children, the way they describe their practice and their approach to children who don't follow the usual developmental profile.

The Language Of Instinct

Many of the Sencos describe their work with children with special needs in terms of *'gut feeling'* or *'just doing what I thought was best'* (Category 2, Working with Children with Special Needs). Similarly, the Sencos put their skills down to instinct, rather than relating their practice to specific training or skills.

> "We know instinctively when something isn't right." Senco 2 (Category 2, Working with Children with Special Needs)

Working with trainee childcare workers, Penn (1998) similarly found that these women attributed their success largely to issues connected to their gender and the naturalness of caring work for women rather than to any academic qualifications.

The vocabulary of 'instinct' employed by the Sencos is used to describe both the identification of children with special needs and also the development of provision to meet those identified needs (Category 2, Working With Children With Special Needs). Although reference is occasionally made to special needs training courses, they describe their approach as being largely instinctive.

Inclusive Practice

Foucault proposes that each society has its regime of truth that is, the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true, and the status of those saying what counts as true (Rabinow,1984). In this instance, the dominant discourse in relation to children with special needs is that of the Code of Practice. The Code is enshrined in statute and proponents justify its use on both moral and educational grounds. It takes the form of a scientific discourse, based in behavioural psychology and as such is irreproachable. At the same time, the Code of Practice could also be interpreted as a gendered concept. Based on a hierarchical model aimed at identifying differences between children, the Code enshrines notions of individualising children's difficulties and the need for an objective expert (Benjamin, 2002).

In describing the ways in which they have met children's special needs in the past, the Sencos make little reference to the Code of Practice. Indeed when questioned about the Code, Sencos describe engagement with only *'Early Years Action Plus'* or children with *'Statements of Special Educational Needs'*. In both cases, engagement with the Code of Practice is linked with external agency input rather than being something initiated within the setting. *'Differentiation'* and *'Early Years Action'* are not referred to in relation to working with children with special needs and none of the Sencos in the study indicated that they had children at either of these two stages.

As demonstrated in Category 2 (Working with Children with Special Needs), the Sencos seem to have developed their own ways of addressing children's special needs through including them in their regular practice. This is in contrast to the staged model proposed by the Code of Practice. Similarly, rather than talking in the Code of Practice terms of 'assessment' and 'targets', the vocabulary used by the Sencos to describe their practice is less technical. Their language of emotionality, feeling and experience could be seen as the feminised, binary opposite of the rational scientific model of the Code of Practice (Lawthorn & Burman, 1999).

Despite seemingly operating outside of the dominant discourse of the Code of Practice, the Sencos clearly describe a range of strategies and intervention techniques they have used to address individual needs.

"I think it helps the child, if you can bend and do things as you go along in the normal day and the child is not made to feel different. They're so sensitive and pick things up so quickly as babies, they quickly get the idea. I think we have to blend in and bend and put things in place, almost without them knowing that it's happening" Senco 11, (Category 2, Working with Children with Special Needs)

On closer examination, it is possible to identify clear parallels between this gendered approach to special needs and the espoused principles of inclusion. Ainscow (1995) suggests that the ability to modify plans and activities whilst they are occurring in response to the reactions of individuals within class is a key tenet of successful inclusive practice:

"Practice develops through a largely intuitive process by which teachers 'tinker' with their classroom plans, arrangements and responses in the light of feedback from members of their classes." Ainscow, 1995, p.149

Thus, the Sencos' limited engagement with the Code of Practice and its associated language does not equate to a lack of awareness of special needs. The Sencos' intuitive practice, which they put down to instinct and their innate abilities, is now being heralded as the way forward in schools. In schools however, the legacy of individualised approaches to special needs has made it difficult for teachers to adjust to inclusive practice and has led to a degree of resistance (Gross, 2000). Despite this, the Sencos interviewed seemed unaware of the value of the way in which they were working, persisting with the notion that they were not experts in this field.

Giving Children Time

One of the phrases used repeatedly by Sencos is that of 'giving children time' (Category 2 - Working with Children with Special Needs). Rather than relating their work with children with special needs to the Code of Practice, the notion of 'giving children time' is applied to both the identification of individual needs and the way in which such needs are met. In essence, 'giving children time' concerns reserving judgement about children and allowing them to develop at their own rate. It is about matching provision to a child's developmental level and accepting that there is a range of normal development. This mindset allows for all children to be treated as individuals and legitimises differentiating the curriculum in order to meet a child's needs.

"For me, that is part of the normal development - it's no different... when you get a child (who hasn't been diagnosed) you're doing it all the time. You're seeing that a child has a difficulty - what can we do to help that child? You're doing that from the start just automatically.... It doesn't mean a child has something wrong - has special needs. In actual fact they're just having difficulties in their development - not difficulties - just a phase" Senco 15 (Category 2, Working with Children with Special Needs)

Historically, the focus on psychological theories and by default educational practice (Dahlberg et al, 1999) has been on the normal individual with deviations from this models being interpreted negatively (Bird, 1999). Burman (1994) writes extensively about the normative model of child development and argues that such a notion is socially constructed. As such, issues of domination and categorisation abound. Billington (1999) suggests that such an application of science is intended to regulate economic potential and to apportion difference.

The way in which the Sencos view children with special needs demonstrates a degree of rejection of this mode of pathologising children. Rather than relying on scientific or academic interpretations of child development, the Sencos seem to be working on their own experience of children - on their instinct. This again could be interpreted as a gendered response to the subject of working with children with special needs, reflecting both the Sencos' gender and their limited access education or training which reinforces the dominant scientific model. At the same time, 'giving children time' can be seen to echo the sentiments of Booth et al's (2000) proposal that in inclusive education, diversity is not viewed as a problem to be overcome but as a rich resource to support learning for all.

Thus, whilst the Sencos lack confidence and describe themselves as not being experts, the stories that they tell of their practice and of how they have managed children with special needs in the past present a picture of mature, inclusive practice. This can be seen as demonstrating the emergence of a gendered response to the notion of special needs, which has developed both through the gendered nature of childcare work (ie the gender balance within the profession) and the gendered institutions and practices associated with caring for young children. Rather than being based in the male scientific paradigm associated with the Code of Practice, the approach is more relational and intuitive.

Summary 3: Whilst the language used by the Sencos to describe their work with children with special needs relates mainly to instinct, this belies a mature model of inclusive practice that has evolved.

4)   From the outside looking in

As the separate traditions of care and education have evolved over time, staff working within education settings, by virtue of academic training have been tutored in the dominant discourse of special needs, based on a male, scientific model (Walkerdine, 1984).

> "The enterprise of academic institutions is primarily the production of rational, scientific knowledge, in contrast to its thereby feminised binary opposite domain of emotionality, feeling and experience." Burman, 1999, p.37

The limited training of those in traditional 'care' settings (Blenkin & Yue, 1994), combined with historical and cultural factors associated with their work has resulted in the development of a very different, feminised discourse around children with special needs.

The New Care / Education Conflict

In bringing education and care settings together through the Nursery Education Grant, these discourses have been brought into direct conflict. In associating themselves more with an intuitive practice, the knowledge and work of the Sencos is subjugated to that of other professionals engaged in the dominant discourse of the Code of Practice (Alldred, 1994). As Marks (1996) suggests, the knowledge of those involved with children on a day to day basis (usually the mother) appears groundless, limited, local and subsequently less authoritative. Although on paper offering equal educational opportunities, the way in which the Sencos talk about what they do is easily interpreted as being inferior as it does not engage with the dominant discourse around children with special needs. This is demonstrated through examples of external support staff discriminating against the Sencos and demonstrating continued ignorance about their

practice. For example, on one occasion, this is manifested in children with special needs who are making good progress in non maintained settings being directed to specialist school based provision.

> "He was with us two terms and in a way it was hard for us because we thought he was making such headway because we are a small group - he was in a small group of only 11 children and he had a one to one member of staff. But then he left us to go to a nursery that has a special needs unit. So it was a bit disappointing really, because he'd just started making headway and everything, and just as we were making progress he was whipped away again. "Senco 4 (Category 3, Working with Other People)

Despite this, the practice described by the Sencos fits largely within a model of good inclusive practice currently being promoted. As Penn (2000) concludes, the limited feminised view that childcare students have of their work is likely to contribute to their continued status as second class providers of early years education. The same outcome might be predicted for Sencos in non maintained early years settings. Without a shared vocabulary, the Sencos inclusive practice is unlikely to be recognised as such and they will continue to be seen as less effective than their school based counterparts.

Pressure To Conform With The Code Of Practice

In order to attain the same status as school based provision, as well as to meet the criteria set out by Ofsted, Sencos need to be seen to be operating within the same dominant discourse as education establishments. With regard to children with special needs this relates largely to adopting the language and practices of the Code of Practice. All Sencos in Nursery Education Grant funded settings are directed to attend a training course to introduce them to the requirements and procedures of the Code of Practice.

Whilst being based nominally within a framework of inclusion, the approach adopted by the Code is still intrinsically 'within child' which is at odds with the approach that Sencos in non maintained settings have developed (Category 2, Working with Children with Special Needs). At the same time, Code of Practice training is generally delivered by professionals operating within the dominant discourse of the Code of Practice and who have a limited understanding of the existing inclusive nature of non maintained early years provision.

It has previously been highlighted that the Sencos are aware of their status in the heirachy of working with children with special needs and regard themselves as 'not being experts' in this area (Category1, On Being a Senco). This is manifested in low confidence in their ability to meet the needs of children with special educational needs (Category 2 - Working with Children with Special Needs) and the feeling that they have to be seen to be doing something in order to be as 'professional' as schools (Category 3, Working with Other People)

> "I don't want it on my head if she's not assessed right or if she doesn't get the proper help when she gets to school and I don't want that responsibility"." Senco 8 (Category 1, On Being a Senco)

This reinforces Penn's (1998) finding that whilst being sceptical of teachers, childcare students strive to be like them because of the status and respect engendered in the profession.

The poor self esteem and the lack of confidence of the Sencos combined with their need to be seen to be as good as schools allows them to be seduced by the language and status afforded by the Code of Practice. Implicit in this is the notion of an individual response to children with special needs. Consequently, Sencos are encouraged to turn their back on their existing practice, despite the fact that this has a solid foundation in inclusion. Instead of endorsing existing inclusive practice, the Code of Practice pushes Sencos towards the individualising response of an Individual Education Programme.

> "There's more required of us in terms of record keeping for special needs...we would have incorporated that into his normal record and not made it special to go in the file particularly... we just did what we thought was right and what we thought we should do.. I would say now there's much more expectation to keep records." Senco 11 (Category 2, Working with Children with Special Needs)

The recommendation made in 'Removing Barriers to Achievement' (DfES, 2004) that Sencos from non maintained settings should be included in the same professional development and networking opportunities as their school based counterparts whilst well meaning, shows little recognition of the different cultures that the Sencos are operating within.

Thus, a complex picture emerges whereby access to the dominant discourse of the Code of Practice serves to maintain the stratification between maintained and non maintained settings. Whilst practice for children with special needs in non maintained settings is on the whole inclusive, the Sencos in these settings are largely unaware of the value of what they are doing. The language they use to describe their practice underlines this and reinforces their status as 'second rate'. The Sencos' existing practice, which has developed out of necessity, is undermined by their lack of confidence in their own abilities and the desire to become 'just like schools'. Sencos are seduced into rejecting their existing inclusive practice in their efforts to engage with the dominant discourse and the status that it brings with it.

> Summary 4: The way in which the Sencos talk about children with special needs reinforces many of the assumptions external agencies make about the non maintained sector. Sencos are keen to embrace the Code of Practice as it offers a way of attaining equivalent status to school based provision. This is done however at the expense of existing inclusive practice.

From Parent to Professional

Role Transition

Whilst the Sencos demonstrate limited confidence in relation to external professionals and their ability to work with children with special needs (Category 1, On being a Senco), there is one exception to this. Whilst engaging in discourses relating to the parents of children with special needs, there is a subtle shift from aligning themselves with the mother/carer role, to an alignment with a professional group. On a number of occasions, parents are described as *'not recognising that there is a problem'*, or *'fussing over their children with special needs and trying to make them different.'*(Category 4, Working with Parents)

In these discourses, rather than seeing themselves as non-experts, the Sencos are confident in their ability to identify children with special needs and certain of the validity of their approach.

> "One of the parents came in and just watched, as she was very unsteady. She was actually paralysed, half of her body was paralysed and her parents were very careful around her. She was fussing over her all the time and we said 'we just wanted to try to include her; we don't want to make her feel any different'. We tried to get that across to the parent really because she was trying to treat her a bit differently." Senco 1 (Category 4, Working with Parents)

During one of the interviews, I was also confronted by this more assertive, professional stance. On arriving at one setting with my baby I was given a very frost reception:

> " I felt generally as though I was being told off..."we don't usually allow children down here..." and when Eliza ate a piece of tissue, the way in which the manager responded was ever so slightly chastising of me...teaching me how I should care for / manage my baby." Observation Notes, Setting 5 (Category 4, Working with Parents)

This interplay between roles of carer and professional is highlighted by Marks (1996) who suggests that caring is a gendered activity which both binds and separates women as professionals and mothers. Similarly, Marshall suggests:

> "Expert advice from both doctors and psychologists concerning motherhood, which is based on observation rather than experience, is more valid than women's experiences." Marshall, 1991, p.83

The Sencos seem to oscillate between these twin roles of carer and professional. Situations where parents do not share the Sencos' concerns seem to exaggerate this dichotomy. The notion of 'parents in denial' is indicative of this, with the Sencos as professionals presenting themselves as having greater insight relating to children with special needs than their parents. The parents' knowledge is subjugated to them as early years practitioners.

> "A mother's own knowledge gained through experience of mothering might be understood as what Foucault called *subjugated knowledge* ie one accorded lower status than scientific knowledge." Alldred, 1996, p.149

Penn (2000) identifies that there is a hierarchy of prestige attached to different sectors of childcare work. School based work is valued most highly, because of the status it procures, with those sectors providing the least formal, 'mothering' type care being valued least. This is despite the fact that, in Penn's study (2000) the students were proud of the differences between them and teachers.

> "We don't think about it - we just do it. It's the jargon - I comfort a child because he's sad, not because he's having an *emotional crisis'*." Childcare student, cited in Penn, 2000, p.123

In addressing issues of special needs with parents, the Sencos reposition themselves in the hierarchy so that they are afforded greater status.

Breaking the News

This transition from carer to professional is most frequently witnessed when there is a need to access additional advice or support regarding a child with possible special educational needs. In order to process such a request, Sencos first have to talk to parents and gain their consent to proceed with a referral. Sencos describe this initial act of 'breaking the news' as being one of the most traumatic parts of their job (Category 4, Working with Parents):

> "And it doesn't matter how carefully you put it, and we do, 'we're just a little bit concerned,' 'how is he at home', you know we don't go in with hobnailed boots on with this, but this very, very difficult, and that for us has got to be the big issue that you can address" Senco 11 (Category 4, Working with Parents)

In 'breaking the news' the Sencos' dual positioning as carer and professional are brought into direct conflict. The Sencos' intuitive response to a child with special needs would be through an inclusive approach. However, in their role as professional and in order to attract additional resources or advice, Sencos are called upon to operate in a very different way.

Within school based settings, it is rare for such a task to fall to nursery staff, as the majority of children will have previously been identified by a health visitor or other medical professional. However, patterns of attendance in non-maintained settings are different. Children may begin attending from as young as three months of age and may

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spend up to ten hours a day with nursery staff. As such, workers in the setting may be the first person outside of the family to have regular contact with a child and the first to identify that the child's development is delayed. Recent changes to health visitor practice reducing routine inspections by health visitors to six days and six weeks are bound to exacerbate this trend, leading to more children being identified in early years settings.

Whilst the emotional aspects of delivering 'bad news' to patients is recognised within health sector, this has not, until now been an area of need within education. As such there is very little training or support available to Sencos in relation to this topic. Recent developments in this area such as the 'Sharing Concerns' project (Birmingham City Council, 2002) and 'Together from the Start' (DfEE / DoH, 2002) demonstrate that this issue is now gaining some recognition.

Summary 5: When working with parents the Sencos' role shifts from being aligned with the carer role to being aligned with the professional role.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSION CHAPTER AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION CHAPTER AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE.

Although it is widely recognised that generalisation is neither the aim nor the purpose of qualitative research, a number of implications arising from the discussion chapter may offer an insight into this area for others in the field. There follows a summary of the key findings of the research and possible implications for practice.

The Legacy of the Care / Education Split

- Whilst there have been changes in the categorisation of settings both in terms of how they are referred to and what they deliver, these changes have not addressed the underlying gendered assumptions which delineate the practices of care and education.

Changes in Policy and Resources

- The gendered divisions between education and childcare are illustrated by the differential access to resources and external support services.

- Whilst technically equivalent, the mechanisms for funding children with special needs in maintained and non maintained settings are inequitable. This is particularly pertinent to private day nurseries and other profit making organisations.

- The lack of additonal funds for children with special needs leads to the Sencos rarely having paid time to carry out tasks associated with their role. Sencos are said to carry out these tasks largely in their own time.

- In addition to inequitable funding, there is also a discrepancy between maintained and non maintained settings in relation to access to external specialist support. Sencos describe how until recently, they have had no clear way of accessing such advice.

- When support has been available, it has come largely as a result of a medical referral. Such an approach encourages an individual, within child deficit model of special needs.

- Such a referral led system is dependent on the parent being in agreement with the Senco's concern. Sencos report numerous instances of this agreement not being forthcoming. In such situations Sencos have no access to specialist advice.

- Raising the issue of special needs with parents has on numerous occasions led to the child being removed from the setting, which in effect reduces the setting's income.

- When parents are not in agreement with the referral, rather than turn children away, Sencos have developed their own strategies for supporting children with special needs, from within existing resources.

- As such a form of inclusive practice has evolved relating to both the gendered nature of their work and the lack of external support or resources.

Walking the Talk

- The Sencos generally lack confidence in their ability to manage children with special needs and feel that they are not 'the experts'.

- The language used by the Sencos to describe how they meet a child's special needs is based around *instinct* and *gut feeling* rather than academic training or professional practice. This is consistent with the findings of other research relating to workers in non maintained childcare settings (Penn, 2000).

- Taking the Code of Practice as the dominant discourse around special needs, based in a male scientific model, the language used by the Sencos is seen to fall

outside of this and be a more female gendered response to special needs, based on women's positions as carers.

- The term 'giving children time' is widely used, referring to not making premature judgements about children. This relates to a more intuitive approach to education and less access to academic training.

- Strategies such as responding to individual needs through normal day to day activities and 'bending things slightly as they go along' are cited as ways in which the Sencos have worked with children with special needs. These strategies that have evolved have much in common with the features of good inclusive practice.

From The Outside Looking In.

- Operating outside of the dominant discourse of the Code of Practice places the Sencos in a subjugated position in relation to the external professionals they are working with.

- This serves to reinforce the notion of the non maintained sector as amateur childcare rather than education, despite the fact that they are technically equivalent according to 'Meeting the Childcare Challenge'. This is reflected in children with special needs being directed towards school based settings by external professionals.

- Poor self esteem and confidence in their own status leads to Sencos adopting much of the rhetoric of the Code of Practice, in an attempt to be seen to be like schools.

From Parent to Professional

- In discourses relating to parents of children with special needs, the Sencos align themselves more with a professional group, than with the women / carer role.

- In these discourses, rather than seeing themselves as non experts, the Sencos are confident in their ability to identify children with special needs and the validity of their approach.

- This is particularly evident when addressing issues of special needs with a parent who doesn't share the Senco's concern. In these cases, parents are seen as lacking in experience or knowledge and in some cases being 'in denial'.

- Concerns and difficulties in raising the issue of special needs with parent are widely reported. These relate to both emotional and practical aspects of this task.

So What Are The Implications Of These Findings?

Primarily, there needs to be wider recognition amongst those working in the non maintained sector that much of the practice is inclusive. Whilst this in part stems from the nature of early years provision itself, it is also a reflection of the historical factors ie settings have had no option but to include children if they want the revenue they bring and to the gendered nature of the work.

Although the nature of the provision may be inclusive, the language used by the Sencos to describe their practice is outside of the dominant discourse of the Code of Practice. This language is not that of targets and stages but a more relational language of feeling and intuition. If the Sencos' current inclusive practice is to be preserved then careful consideration needs to be given to how external agencies offer support to those working in non maintained settings.

With a legacy of being 'second best' to schools and lacking confidence in their own skills in the area of special needs, the Sencos are very susceptible to the dominant discourse of the Code of Practice. Rather than focusing on adopting the Code of Practice, greater emphasis needs to be placed on reinforcing and validating existing practice within settings.

Validating the Sencos' inclusive practice and helping them to develop a professional language that mirrors the Code of Practice would both preserve existing practice and enable Sencos to operate with more confidence within the special needs arena. The development of such a vocabulary would also help address the residual assumptions amongst professionals about the nature of non maintained provision and the people that work in that sector.

If settings are to be placed on an even footing with school based provision, then consideration needs to be given to the issues of funding and external support. It is now recognised within schools that moving away from an individual referral led model of resourcing is influential in the development of more inclusive practice (DfES, 2004). Currently, non maintained settings have no routine access to external support (although the gradual introduction of the Area Senco model may address this at one level) and the only way to access additional funding is through an individual referral. The development of funding models which allow settings to make adjustments to staffing and resources flexibly and allow routine access to external services such as the educational psychology service may go some way to addressing this.

Making the distribution of support and resources more equitable in this way would also address the issues of equal access and choice of placement for the parents of children with special needs.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Analytical Stories are presented for the four core data categories. These stories are then explored and salient points highlighted in the *Discursive Commentaries*. Summaries are also given of the three subsidiary data categories (*Analytical Stories* and *Discursive Commentaries* for these categories can be found in Appendix 1)

LIMITATIONS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

Grounding the Findings in Practice.

Having adopted a social constructivist stance, how is it possible to know that the issues identified as important are representative of the Sencos and the subject under study? Would a different researcher with a different background and different experiences identify alternative themes in the data and reach different conclusions?

> "I'm concerned that the outcomes of the initial interviews all support the project. Is it because I'm making this happen, or is it that I was right all along? Does it matter? I guess the important part will be M's feedback, the feedback / evaluation by the participants and the feedback from the Airedale group of Sencos. ..."Session Commentary, Session 3.2

Two measures have been employed to address this, with some degree of success. Firstly, use of multiple data sources over time has allowed triangulation of the data. Points from the initial interviews were brought back to the Sencos for verification during the training session.

> "Final consultation session today. Only one taker. After the consultation, got on to talking generally about the private day nursery experience etc. Everything that M and M said, it rang true with my findings. Everything they said, I wanted to jump up and say "Yes, that's just what I found!" It was so exhilarating and exciting!" Dissertation Journal, 10/4/03

Secondly, following the data analysis, summary copies of the results were given to a parallel group of Sencos from non maintained settings, to see if they felt the issues identified were grounded in their experience. The outcome of this was very favourable with many comments relating to the accuracy of the situation portrayed. This was further verified by my co presenter who in her role as 'Area Senco' spends a large part of her week working with Sencos from the non maintained sector. Issues identified through the process of data analysis are said to be on the whole recognisable to her.

> "I ran the issue of 'Breaking the News' and 'Working with Parents in Denial' past Maggie. She said it was clear from going around settings that these are key issues. She has people every week asking her about this..."Session Commentary, Session 3.1

As such, it seems that the findings are representative of the situation many Sencos find themselves in. This was further reinforced on a subsequent presentation of the Inclusion ABC training course:

> "Final session of the second cohort Inclusion ABC course. It was like having a massive attack of deja-vu. In the group discussion, three of my four main categories came up (unprompted) and even the language being used was the same: 'I don't want to say anything's wrong, but I've just got a gut feeling...'; 'I just want to know I'm doing the right thing...' " Dissertation Journal, 4/12/03

The Nature of the Sample Group

Despite such positive feedback it could be argued that by the very nature of responding to the invitation to participate in the study, the Sencos had some vested interest in the area of special needs. Similarly, the groups with which the findings were sounded out had a similar inclination. Thus a second limitation could be construed to be the nature of the sample group itself.

The Sencos' positive responses to the ABC training course typify this and this tension is apparent from the session commentary:

> "My worry is that the ones that are on the course are somehow the ones who would have been interested in SEN anyway, so they were nearly there. But that can't be the case except for by chance. I asked all settings in West area, and the ones that came were the ones who were free on Thursday mornings. The others were keen, but couldn't do the dates." Session Commentary, Session 3.2

The only way to verify this would be to offer the course more widely. This is currently being negotiated with the Early Years Partnership and data from the repeated course will hopefully inform this issue.

Power and Influence

An additional concern relates to the effects of the power relationship between the researcher as an educational psychologist and the Sencos involved. Whilst for the initial interview stage, concrete steps were taken to address this (see methodology chapter) it

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was more difficult during the training sessions and evaluation stage where the values and ideals of the researcher were more visible. The findings of the research highlight notions of the dominant professional discourse and the subjugation of those working outside of that discourse. The extent to which this influenced what the Sencos were prepared to reveal needs to be taken into account when reading the research report. How much what the Sencos described reflects practice in their settings is thus unclear.

Limitations of Grounded Theory

The process of developing grounded theory necessitates the generalisation of themes across interviewees, within the research context. But from the interviews, it is clear that some of the themes are more driven by particular participants. For example, the notion of parents refusing to accept concerns over their child's development whilst widespread was definitely driven by one particular Senco. The strength of feeling on some of the issues may have led to them being over prominently represented within the research. In order to address this, a more discursive approach would need to be adopted in order to establish how individuals construct themselves in response to the individual themes and issues arising from the data.

The Quality of Non Maintained Early Years Provision

The central findings of the study suggest that in general, non maintained settings have developed an inclusive approach and provide well for children with special needs. However, as anyone working within this sector will recognise, there is a huge variation in the quality of such provision. Not all settings can be regarded as providing well for young children, let alone those with additional needs. Some of the practice observed during the observations in settings reinforces this.

> "From what the Senco was saying, I got a sense that practice should seem better - but it didn't. As I came into the room, all of the 2 - 5 year olds were sitting on chairs in a circle to listen to a story. One of the workers was telling one of the younger ones off and chasing him back to his chair. The Senco said she knew it wasn't working, but they hadn't had chance to change it yet." Observation Notes, Setting 9

The recent changes emanating from 'Meeting the Childcare Challenge' (DfEE,1998) have been targeted particularly at raising standards. Despite this, a recent study into the effective provision of pre school education suggests that non maintained provision continues to be less effective than the majority of maintained provision (EPPE Project, 2001).

Poor early years provision, with a non reflexive curriculum is not good for any child. As such the notion of including children with special needs and not treating them any differently to the other children takes on a negative connotation. In such a situation, the case for developing an individual approach for a child with special needs, based on the model of the Code of Practice might be preferable, in that it would ensure some response to children's individual differences.

CHAPTER EIGHT

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH.

As highlighted in the previous section, this study has served to raise a number of issues around the experience of being a Senco in non maintained setting. Having established these issues, it would be appropriate to use a more discursive approach to investigate how the Sencos construct themselves in relation to these themes.

Issues raised about access to both funding and support pose questions relating to equality of access to early years provision for children with special needs. There is a case for investigating both how this impacts on parents and the children themselves and how a system for delivering such funding and support might be developed.

At the same time there is a need for further research into the quality of provision in non maintained settings. This relates both to the way in which early years philosophy and practice are implemented and the way in which children's individual needs are met. Evidence from participating Sencos suggests that they are meeting children's needs in an inclusive way, although they may not recognise that this is what they are doing. Is this the case, or are those children's needs going un-met?

Finally, the notion of inclusion as a gendered approach to special needs warrants further investigation on account of its value to both pedagogic and feminist research. How much does the language used by the Sencos reflect their status, gender and training? Should Sencos be trained in the dominant discourse of the Code of Practice? What impact would this have on their practice and status?

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

The focus of this study has been on the experiences of Sencos working in non maintained early years settings, starting from the proposition that in order to work effectively in this sector, it is important to develop a greater understanding of existing practice.

In carrying out the study, it has become clear that the issues surrounding the experience of being a Senco in this sector are by no means straightforward. Analysis of the data identifies a number of issues which are novel and different to those experienced when working with school based early years settings.

The legacy of the previous care / education split continues to exert much influence. Although according to 'Meeting the Childcare Challenge', non maintained settings are technically equivalent to school based provision, continuing differences over funding and access to external support ensure that this is not the case. This in turn impacts on the notion of equality of access for children with special needs and their parents.

The economic circumstances that many of the settings are working within make identifying children as having special needs particularly problematic. Sencos report instances of parents removing their children from their settings rather than engaging with the notion of special needs. For profit making institutions, this has an impact on the degree to which they are able to work in partnership. At the same time, if settings wish to access external advice or additional funding to help them manage a child, the only route open to them is to ask parents to make a referral to the GP or health visitor. If parents do not consent to this, Sencos are left with no option but to manage it on their own.

Limited external support combined with the gendered nature of the work has led to many Sencos developing a range of practices and ways of working with children with special needs that do not require additional resources. These practices would widely be regarded as being inclusive (Ainscow, 1996; Booth et al, 2000). Despite this, Sencos themselves are largely unaware of the value of their practice, expressing feelings of inferiority in relation to their school based counterparts.

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Phrases such as 'gut feeling' and 'instinct' are used by the Sencos to describe what they do, rather than the professional vocabulary used by school based Sencos. The use of this female gendered language is at odds with the dominant discourse of the Code of Practice which in turn reinforces the Sencos' self perceived lowly status. This is reinforced by examples of external support agencies directing children away from non maintained settings toward school based provision.

Consideration of these issues combined with the gendered nature of the context of childcare work leads to the development of a gendered model for understanding the experience of being a Senco in a non maintained early years setting.

Whilst starting from the position of delivering educational psychology services to the non maintained sector, the research also has wider implications for all professionals coming into contact with this sector. If the Sencos' existing inclusive practice is to be preserved, then the way in which external professionals interact with Sencos, the way in which they deliver training to non maintained settings and the status that they afford such settings will all need to be re-examined. Rather than focusing on tutoring Sencos in the Code of Practice and other aspects of the dominant discourse, a model will need to be developed which confirms the Sencos' existing inclusive practice and supports them in developing an appropriate vocabulary to describe what it is they are doing. Issues relating to inequalities in funding and differential access to external support will also need to be addressed if there is to be equality of provision for children with special needs across both maintained and non maintained sectors.

As a matter of urgency, educational psychology services and other support agencies need to develop both policy and practice which take into account the findings of this research and ensure that all staff are aware of the needs and inclusive practices of the non maintained sector. Only in this way will some of the stereotypes and inequalities that remain between the different categories of early years provision begin to be addressed.

Beyond these direct implications the work also has relevance at a broader strategic level. With the proposed move towards more joined up services for young children and their families, it is anticipated that a number of professional groups will be combined to

form what are termed 'Children's Trusts' (DfES, 2003). In the same way that early years providers from the non-maintained and maintained sectors were joined in statute, the same will happen across education, social services and eventually health. The findings of this study highlight the underlying difficulties of such a move, for example the use of different professional languages and conflicting ideological assumptions. As such the research has resonance in this new context and has a valuable contribution to make not only in connection with the delivery of services to early years settings, but in larger discussions relating to 'remodelling the workforce' and the planning of future provision for all children.

CHAPTER TEN

Closing Words

So here I am!! It's with a sense of joy and relief that I'm finally writing the closing words to my dissertation. Throughout the writing up of the project, I've worked hard to maintain a visible presence and now that it's finally finished the question has to be asked 'how was it for me?'

My experience of this whole process has been typified by wildly swinging emotions, from elation to despair, often within hours of each other

> "I'm getting on with writing up the evaluation of the course, it's dead exciting. It's suddenly coming together in a big way..." Dissertation Journal 9/4/03

> "I feel as though I'm going through the pain barrier with the dissertation at the moment... I keep thinking oh can't I just take a term off, but I know it wouldn't get any easier." Dissertation Journal 3/6/03

The project has transcended pregnancy, birth and the first two and a half years of Eliza's life. I've worked doggedly every Sunday morning and Wednesday evening for almost two years now. Neither lack of sleep nor hangover (nor even food poisoning) has detracted me from my purpose.

> "Jake is upstairs, howling in an over dramatic fashion about some feigned injury. Eliza, in that endearing way she's developed is bellowing up the stairs at Jake, to find out what's wrong. Molly is calling Eliza to come and play with her and Simon is calling to Eliza to stop yelling. The washer is just reaching the peak of its spin cycle and the Taverner Quartet are carrying on in the background. God! It's a wonder I ever get any work done!!!" Dissertation Journal 29/2/04

There have been other sacrifices too. I realised early on that if I was going to succeed then other things would have to give. Out went the piano lessons and band and as for social life - what's that? With so little free time, any time I'm not working goes to

my three young children and my long suffering husband who has supported me throughout.

The project has challenged me at every turn, bringing a wealth of new experiences. Forays into negotiating and contracting with the Early Years Partnership engendered in the project have been invaluable and this experience is currently guiding further negotiations with Sure Start. Presenting and delivering training, which I have hitherto avoided became central to the project, bringing its own challenges.

> "The first training session is tomorrow and I'm really nervous. What if it's crap? What of no one turns up? What if I can't do it? I really don't like presenting and find it really hard. I've spent two evenings practicing out loud and I still don't feel too confident. I'll let you know tomorrow how it goes!" Dissertation Journal 15/1/03

I said in one of my earlier statements 'I want more than this'. I wanted to be challenged intellectually by the doctorate I was doing - to go that extra mile. Looking back on previous dissertations, in the same way that the Sencos describe their work in terms of gut feeling, I described how intuition shaped my research design. My experience this time has been different though. I really feel that I understand why I've done what I've done and can explain the philosophical underpinnings. I, like the Sencos, have moved from practice to praxis.

So how do I feel, having finished the project? Part of it is about pride. I'm proud of my commitment, my dedication and my perseverance. And there's pride in the achievement too - me the 'two E's at A' level girl' completing the final hurdle of a doctoral thesis. I don't think there would be many of my teachers or undergraduate tutors who would have predicted this for me.

But it's also tinged with regret. My thinking has moved on so far that now, if embarking upon the same project I would do so in a totally different way. I am slightly disappointed in the end product. I would love to go back to the data and

reinterpret it using a more discursive style. But this would not be in keeping with my desire to demonstrate process and development. Without doing what I've done, I would never have arrived at this point.

So where to now? I've already had three articles accepted for publication from my doctoral work, and I've discovered that I actually like the intellectual stimulation of writing. The Inclusion ABC course I devised is also doing well. The Early Years Partnership are considering adopting it as a core training course for all Sencos in non maintained settings and have asked me to develop a number of other courses for them in response to recommendations made in my evaluation. Interest from EP colleagues across numerous local authorities suggests that there may also be scope for publishing the Inclusion ABC materials as a training package. All in good time though.

At the end of the project, I've come to recognise that maybe this is something I'm good at. I'm good at innovating - at coming up with the ideas, planning a programme of action and implementing it. The experience I've gained of the qualitative research process has sharpened up my skills and I would feel confident to undertake another such project using this methodology. Above all else, doing the project has demonstrated I have the tenacity to see things through to the bitter end!

I guess what I've realised is that this is where I want to be. I relish the excitement of developing and running with something new. I want to be leading - at the cutting edge - not just plodding along. So for me, alongside any academic achievement there's been a personal one too in terms of both my increased sense of direction and the sense of pride in my accomplishment. I know where I want to be and I'm confident that I can get there.

THE END
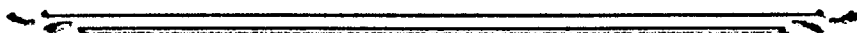
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APPENDIX 1

CATEGORY FIVE

"The Nursery Looked Just Like A Double Glazing Showroom!"
Physical Working Conditions

Accommodation

The area chosen as the focus of the study is one of four education areas of a large metropolitan borough, containing a mixture of urban and more rural / suburban landscapes. Within the area there are many contrasts. This includes *'nice'* parts of a suburban village, as well as more deprived inner city areas.

> "The nursery is in a small, converted end terrace that has seen better days. Getting my things together in the car before the interview, I hear angry voices down the street. A man is shouting at a little boy (toddler), threatening to leave him if he doesn't come out of the house straight away. I feel quite uneasy getting out of the car..." Observation Notes, Setting 3

With another setting, I am advised to leave my car at a nearby Social Services car park, as it will be safer there, than on the street.

As with schools, the physical appearance of the different settings varies greatly. Those nurseries run on a 'not for profit' basis seem to be housed on the whole in purpose built accommodation of some description.

> "The nursery is in what looks like two old static terrapins, on the same site as the college building." Observation Notes, Setting 2

> "The nursery is housed in a permanent, modern construction with lots of glass and open beams, on what seems to be the grounds of a local school. It used to be only a small part of a community centre, but now it has taken over the whole building." Observation Notes, Setting 10

Of the private day nurseries, the majority seem to be located in converted houses. This is accomplished with varying degrees of success.

> "The nursery is based in a converted house. When I rang the bell, I was escorted into a carpeted reception area. The rooms off it all seem light and airy." Observation Notes, Setting 4

> "The nursery is in a small end terrace - two rooms downstairs and a double room upstairs. We talked in the spare downstairs room. The toys were all laid out and it was very cramped." Observation Notes, Setting 3

In one case, the nursery was in the basement of a huge inner city chapel which had since been converted into a smart Indian restaurant.

> "The nursery is in the basement - you go down steep steps straight off the street to get to the door. Inside, the building is on a split level. Downstairs is lit by reasonable sized windows onto the street above, which was quite pleasant when the sun was shining..." Observation Notes, Setting 14

The issue of 'light' and 'windows' became increasingly prominent as I worked my way though the settings.

> "The nursery looked just like a double glazing showroom - all white UP VC - even going as far as having a conservatory on one of the rooms!" Observation Notes, Setting 4

> "The building is part of a row of shops on the high street. It still has a plate glass, shop front window; although the building is obviously a nursery!" Observation Notes, Setting 5

Room size varies, depending on the type of building the setting is housed in. This ranges from fairly generous rooms:

> "The rooms were nice and big - light and airy" Observation Notes, Setting 4

Through to more cramped conditions:

> "There are two rooms upstairs and two rooms downstairs. The upstairs rooms are joined and can take up to 12 children - that's really scary - there was hardly room with the 6 that were there." Observation Notes, Setting 3

Of the voluntary groups, the majority of them were housed in multi purpose buildings for example, church halls, village halls, civic buildings.

"The playgroup is based in a huge Victorian hall in the middle of the village. It also houses a swimming pool and a dance hall. The outside of the building must have looked quite grand at one time but now it just looks cold and austere." Observation Notes, Setting 12

"The playgroup is in a draughty old church hall... I had to walk around and knock on a couple of doors before I found the right one. Everything seemed locked up. It looked as though the place had been gutted. There were piles of rubbish at the gate - broken toys, old stair gates and the like..." Observation Notes, Setting 6

Many of the settings, particularly the housing conversions had a number of staircases that would make access difficult:

"The pre school & toddler room is in a fairly small end terrace - and there's a split level within that - lots of steps and tight corners." Observation Notes, Setting 5

Whilst a few of the settings had access to outdoor areas and in some cases had developed these to good effect:

"A grant from the EYDCP has paid for a nice outside area - benches, raised beds, sensory garden and a wishing well they use for story time..." Observation Notes, Setting 10

... this was not the norm and many settings had very limited facilities for outdoor play.

Health and Hygiene

The issues of health and safety seemed a lot more prevalent in the settings I visited, than I expected from my work in schools:

"there were lots of notices around - Sugar content in infant juices; what modelling materials can and can't be used - e.g. no cotton wool; pasta must be cooked before using for collage..." Observation Notes, Setting 5

"The setting had been freshly painted - Fire doors and safety adjustments were very visible..." Observation Notes, Setting 5

Standards of hygiene were generally good:

"As we walked around, everything seemed clean and there was a fresh smell..." Observation Notes, Setting 4

"Everything seemed clean and organised... the planning was out on the table..."
Observation Notes, Setting 5

However, in some settings this was not the case:

"The interview was carried out in the kitchen.... Modern, 'sparkly' lino floor, but very grubby - I didn't want to put Eliza down. As we talked, we were constantly interrupted by children running through the kitchen to go to the toilet and back again." Observation Notes, Setting 6

"There was a tiny carpeted area, which was coming unfitted at the edge..... Carpets and everything looked a bit shabby ... the toys looked a bit grubby." Observation Notes, Setting 3

Classification

The settings visited ranged from privately run day nurseries, to playgroups, to pre-schools, and included crèches and 'not for profit' nurseries.

The differences and distinctions between these categories seem very subtle and at times confusing:

"It's hard to know what the distinction is between the various settings. Pre School / Playgroup /Private Day Nursery. I'm not clear about what the technical difference is." Observation Notes, Setting 6

"It's been here nearly 40 years. It started off as a little nursery school only open in the mornings. When I got it 14 years ago, we started opening in the afternoon. Its only 4 years since we became a day nursery. " Senco 9

"I still say play-group, because I started when my two were going to play group but now it's pre-school. It has to be more structured now you've got all your recording." Senco 6

Sometimes it relates to the source of funding for the groups - whether this is income generated, or through council or other grants

"The setting runs mainly on grants / project funds, which means most workers are on temporary contracts..." Observation Notes, Setting 7

"That...from the private nursery sector is the heart of it......because obviously we have to work at a profit." Senco 4

A number of settings had staff uniforms - usually sweatshirts with an embroidered logo.

General Ethos

On each occasion the Senco had remembered that I was coming and was expecting me. In the majority of cases, there was a warm welcome:

> "I was ushered promptly into the office - the Senco was concerned for my welfare - offered me coffee etc and choice of chair. She was concerned for Eliza too: 'First let's get her some bricks or something...'" Observation Notes, Setting 4

> "The Senco was expecting me. She suggests that we go and talk in the baby room so that Eliza can play with the toys up there..." Observation Notes, Setting 9

Only on one occasion did I feel that there was a slight 'edge' to the meeting.

> "I got the feeling that I was being told off - as she took me down to the big office in the basement, a comment was made: 'we don't usually allow babies down here'" Observation Notes, Setting 5

Equal But Different

The key issue from this category is that all of the settings are very different to one another and although there seem to be some similarities within different types of provision e.g. playgroup accommodation, even this is very tenuous.

Very few settings are operating in purpose built accommodation. As such they are constrained to varying degrees by the accommodation in which they find themselves. Those settings operating in converted houses have issues such as position of stairs and windows to deal with. Settings functioning in shared function buildings have the problem of the temporary nature of anything they do - ie it has to be cleared up / packed away at the end of each session.

As such, a hierarchy of accommodation might be:

- Purpose built, single function building;
- Converted, single function building;
- Shared function building.

Whilst all of the settings were functioning more or less successfully within their own personal circumstances, the conditions in a number of the settings might be regarded as less than satisfactory. This goes to reinforce the low status generally afforded to workers in this sector.

> " Low levels of training, poor pay, third rate conditions of employment are a statement about how society views both young children and those working with them. It is also a recipe for a variety of ills including high staff turnover and instability for children, poor quality provision and exploitation of a predominantly female workforce." Moss & Penn, 1996, p.105

In terms of working with pre-school settings, the implication is that all settings are different. It would be unwise to make assumptions about the situation in which a Senco

is working and external agencies need to be aware of the individual circumstances of each of the settings they are working with, when making recommendations for action.

CATEGORY SIX

"It's A Fine Balance..."
- Staffing Issues In Non Maintained Early Years Settings

<u>Age Of Staff</u>

Whilst many of the people working in the settings were in their late teens or early 20s, most of the Sencos didn't fit into this age bracket and might be described as more mature in years ie 35 - 50. This phenomenon is commented on a number of occasions

> "The nursery manager seemed to think that I was the sort of person to do it. Parents sometimes seem to feel far more confident talking to someone who's a bit older. They look on me because I've had children of my own, where they may not be as open with an 18 year old." Senco 4

> "The Government have done a survey and they find that it's very rare for a person to stop in the private sector for longer than 3 years. It's a combination, they come into it young, they're trained as nursery nurses but they go on to do other things, some find that after 2 or 3 years that its not for them, or they leave when they get married and have families of their own, and maybe come back to it. .... (something about professional people....) I think it's more I went into it late, I've, been doing it now 20 years. I went in through Playgroups with my own children and then went and trained." Senco 4

Having a younger staff is recognised as having some inherent difficulties, particularly relating to working with children with special needs:

> "That's why we are so careful because we acknowledge that a lot of our staff don't actually have children and we try to use a lot of empathy, well how would you feel..." Senco 11

And achieving a balance is seen as *desirable:*

> "It's a balance - we have quite a few middle aged staff and just a few young ones ...You want older people and you want young ideas as well. It has to be a fine balance. I think Mrs. B downstairs has been here 26 years and she's wonderful and she has such high standards. I took my standards from her and I think everybody else does as well." Senco 9

Equal Opportunities

All of the staff I spoke to were female, and given the age of many of the workers, issues around pregnancy and maternity leave were prominent.

> "I haven't done it for long because the girl that worked here before me left. She had a baby, came back after maternity and thought that's it and left." Senco 14

> "(I took it on) earlier this year, me and my other colleague but she's actually away on maternity leave at the moment." Senco 3

> " We've got another worker who does the child care......she's off sick. The worker had been on maternity leave and then she came back and then went off sick" Senco 7

In all but two of the settings the Sencos were white European women. The only exceptions to this were in a crèche run for a women's centre, in an area with a high South East Asian population, where all the worker seemed to be from a South East Asian background, and one Senco with African Caribbean heritage.

The issue of staff with a disability was raised only once, in connection with a recently attended training course on the Disability Rights Act.

> "What we were concerned about was if anything happened to any of the children when we had somebody with a disability. Like we had a student who has epilepsy in one of our nurseries and she hasn't had a seizure for a year, but if we said no you can't we would be going contrary to the act, because apparently, I think its 12 months now when if they've been clear they're fine. So what if she drops a child because she has a seizure and a parent takes us to court, we're legless because it's legal. It doesn't make sense though does it? It's hard but that's it. You've got to follow it." Senco 2

Training

Most but not all of the settings had staff with a range of qualifications relating to childcare / early childhood education.

> "One thing she said was that now the crèche should be run by qualified people and that we don't. We only have one person who's qualified in there an NEB person and that's the development worker. Most of the play workers are unqualified. One is qualified but she's qualified from back in India. But it needs to be NVQ3 and she's NVQ2 so we need to put them on training. That is

something on the action plan that I've started looking at. We'll send them on courses." Senco 7

and a number were actively working to develop their training profile:

> "All our staff, apart from Barbara who's just been in, Barbara is 60 and she didn't want to do any training, which I can understand. She only lives next door and she's worth her weight in gold. We call her stock controller. Apart from that, Janet isn't here today, she's done a BTech course, and Mandy she's done Level 2 and me and Tracey are working on Level 3. So were all qualified." Senco 8

And in one setting, qualifications and training courses were displayed for parents in personal portfolio:

> "It shows we've got copies of different courses we've been on and qualifications we have." Senco 6

Whilst many of the Sencos described attending short courses on special needs issues, attendance was reliant to some extent on personal commitment, and the status of the Senco within the setting. Whilst the not for profit nurseries and playgroups seemed fairly confident about being able to attend, workers from private day nurseries were more reserved.

> "I've been on a Senco course and there were two other courses I was supposed to go on but one of them was cancelled and then I had to cancel as we were short staffed but there are a few I am supposed to go on over the next few months." Senco 1

> "I've been one course. I'm supposed to have been on a course this week at Shipley Community Centre. But I actually missed it because my little girl was ill ....." Senco 3

Management Structure

A number of settings had clear management structures which were largely related to level of qualification, and length of time in post. Within a number of the Private Day nurseries, a 'family tree' showing the people working in the setting and their status and qualifications was prominently displayed, with photographs of the individuals involved.

The advantages of having 'owner managers' were described by settings falling into that category. This related to issues of being able to purchase resources more easily, and to issues of staffing.

"We're all isolated here we've all been here hundreds of years as well. When I first bought the nursery there were one or two teachers said ... and I had worked here for the previous owner. We're careful who we chose and we never advertise for staff. It's always word of mouth. Leslie's just come to us because we knew that she was good." Senco 9

Whilst the owner managers encountered seemed to be actively involved with the children, this was not the case in all settings. In one particular setting, the manager took what seemed to be a largely 'executive' role.

"I was met at the door by the nursery manager who was wearing a fitted two piece suit. Talk about the boot being on the other foot! I had deliberately dressed casually to try to equalise any inequalities over status, but now it was me feeling scruffy and un-professional!" Observation Notes, Setting 5

Communication

Whilst in a number of settings there seems to be a level of co-operation and camaraderie about the job...

"We have staff meetings monthly, or usually it works out six weekly and I pay the staff to come in the evening. Well, we close at six so we do it on a Friday night. One of our teachers is a piano teacher, she works in the week, so it's Friday night from six to half past seven. I think that helps. It's very informal. We don't have a lot written down." Senco 9

"Once a fortnight when the children have gone home on a Thursday we sit in here and we all have so many allocated children and we bring the records up to date." Senco 10

In one instance, communication between the different workers in the setting seemed to have broken down...

"When she (Ofsted Inspector) came in she started asking for stuff so they were all looking for it, so she just put 'wasn't there'. And then eventually, when she finished all the things were there because while she was talking to the crèche workers I looked in the drawers. For myself I recorded it as well. I think it's the development workers job, she's been told. I've arranged a meeting to say I wasn't happy about it, because nobody was managing her so that's why she just stopped. If you came in now and asked for the safety policy etc. I should be able to give this to you straight away. Not looking for it all over the place." Senco 7

CATEGORY SIX
Discursive Commentary

Age of Staff

The age of the Senco is seen as being very important. This is put down to both to breadth of experience, (in that they are less likely to jump to conclusions) and also the assumption that parents 'feel more confident in talking to someone who's a bit older' (Senco 4). This undermines to some extent the value of academic training and experience. As such, Sencos who are younger in age may face double discrimination not only from parents but also from their more mature colleagues. These younger Sencos would be supported in their role by the introduction of an accredited training course for setting based Sencos. Such a course would ensure that they have a core of basic experience, which is comparable with their colleagues. At the same time they need to be able to access support and advice quickly and easily, to compensate for their limited experience. As such routine access to the Area Senco or peer support network seems essential.

Equal Opportunities

The workforce within early year settings is predominantly female, and there are a large percentage of young women workers (Moss & Penn, 1996). As such pregnancy and issues pertaining to maternity leave are high on the agenda. Of the Sencos interviewed, one was pregnant and another had recently returned from maternity leave. Three other Sencos had come into role as a result of the previous Senco leaving to have a baby. Whilst this is inevitable given the general make up of staff in settings, there is a real issue about the efficiency of losing Sencos through maternity. One Senco comments:

> "The Government have done a survey and they find that it's very rare for a person to stop in the private sector for longer than 3 years. It's a combination, they come into it young, they're trained as nursery nurses but they go on to do other things, some find that after 2 or 3 years that its not for them, or they leave when they get married and have families of their own, and maybe don't come back to it. " Senco 4

If Sencos are to be encouraged to return to post after they have had a baby, there needs to be some incentive to do so. Within many settings this is not happening. Senco duties are carried out on top of existing duties, with little or no financial recompense.
Until this is addressed, there is likely to be little change.

Commitment to Training

Due to the size of settings, and the fact that many of the Sencos have day to day commitments within their setting, attendance at courses is highly dependent on management support, in providing cover. Sencos recounted previous attempts at attending courses ending in failure due to staff absences on the day.

> " I've been on a Senco course and there were two other courses I was supposed to go on but one of them was cancelled and then I had to cancel as we were short staffed but there are a few I am supposed to go on over the next few months."
> Senco 1

Despite this, many Sencos show immense personal commitment in attending training on their day off or in free time. In providing training for early years settings, there needs to be a recognition of the particular circumstances of the settings, and courses need to be offered at a range of times and on a range of days if maximum take up is to be ensured.

Implications:

- Younger Sencos may be supported in their role, by the introduction of an accredited training course for setting based Sencos.
- Younger Sencos in particular need to be able to access support and advice quickly and easily, to compensate for their limited experience. As such routine access to the Area Senco or peer support network would seem essential.
- If Sencos are to be encouraged to return to post after they have had a baby, there needs to be some incentive for them to do so. This might take the form of financial incentive or specific time to carry out their role.
- In providing training for early years settings, there needs to be a recognition of the particular circumstances of the settings, and courses need to be offered at a range of times and on a range of days if maximum take up is to be ensured.

CATEGORY SEVEN

"It's Not Playgroup Level Any More, Is It?"
- Working With Children

Organisation

Most Sencos described well developed planning systems for their settings:

> "What they do is they have meetings and they plan the programme they need to do for the full week. We know as part of our work what is going on then." Senco 7

> "The Senco described how planning was done on a termly / weekly / daily basis..." Observation Notes, Setting 6

> "The planning is displayed on the stairs and landing" Observation Notes, Setting 3

For many settings, the curricular content of this is explicit and linked to the Foundation Stage planning document. This is commented on by Sencos:

> I still say play-group, because I started when my two were going to play group but now it's pre-school. It has to be more structured now you've got all your recording. ....It was just to give them social skills and make that break from the parents. Now we get inspected as well." Senco 6

> "I've just had a Mum come in this morning to put her boys name down and she stayed for about half an hour and was asking what we do and she said 'well you're not really like a play group are you' because he went to a full time nursery when she worked full time and she said its on a level with that, because its not Playgroup level any more is it, because of guidelines etc. " Senco 8

There were also settings where the curricular intent of the planning was less obvious and the curriculum knowledge of the staff limited.

> "They have an exercise book in which they write the progression. What the child can do now and what he could do before. So you can just go to that and know that this child didn't know the colours but now he knows the colours. They put comments on every child. They've got a book, she'll show you it." Senco 7

Whilst the planning was on display in a number of settings:

"The Senco seemed really keen on planning. There were planning files in each room and they did seem to be in use..." DJ Setting 5

...this didn't always seem to be reflected in what was happening in the rooms:

"In the Senco's room, despite the planning, the children seemed to be milling around without much to do. I don't know whether that was it was getting towards lunch time, or whether it was general."

Also, on other occasions, although the planning seemed very sound this didn't seem to be reflected in practice...

"From what the Senco was saying, I got a sense that practice should seem better, but it didn't. As I came into the room, all of the 2 - 5 year olds were sitting on chairs in a circle to listen to a story. One of the workers was telling one of the younger ones off and chasing him back to his chair. The Senco said she knew it wasn't working, but they hadn't had chance to change it yet." Observation Notes, Setting 9

Individual progress.

All of the Senco's described some form of ongoing record keeping for the children in their setting. This is usually carried out by individuals within the setting:

"That's what we start with, filled in by the parents. Then we have those as a quick check and go through other individual. The leaders made these up really and the observations we do of different areas. One session a week." Senco 6

However, in some settings, this became more of a shared activity although this required higher levels of organisation and commitment:

"We have early learning goals records. We have a daily book where if anything special comes up or they done something different, we just have a jotter that we write it down in and then once a fortnight when the children have gone home on a Thursday we sit in here and we all have so many allocated children and we bring the records up to date. If there's something in the records like, we've five levels of these records, so we do one per half term if they haven't achieved it at the beginning of that half term we'll be looking out to see if they've achieved by middle or so." Senco 8

"We have staff meetings monthly, or usually it works out six weekly and I pay the staff to come in the evening... we close at six so we do it on a Friday night. One of our teachers is a piano teacher, she works in the week, so it's Friday night from six to half past seven. I think that helps. It's very informal. We don't have a lot written down." Senco 9

<u>Resources</u>

The standard and quality of play materials available for the children varied greatly between settings.

> "The toys were all laid out but everything was very cramped. The toys all looked a bit grubby and 'past their best'" Observation Notes, Setting 3

One Senco commented on the benefits of 'owner / manager' nurseries:

> "Access to resources is better - if I say we need something, we can usually get it. The manager has young children of her own, so she knows what we need." Senco 4

The quality of display within settings also varied hugely.

> "The planning is displayed on the stairs and landing. There are lots of displays of work showing the learning intent, but it seems to be mainly adult mass produced - overwriting or tracing." Observation Notes, Setting 3

> "The walls are mushroom coloured and absolutely riddled with holes where staples and pins have damaged the plaster. The plaster is interspersed with wall display boards with children's work on - a combination of 'real' children's work and some adult guided work" Observation Notes, Setting 12

This didn't always tally with the training or general impression of curriculum knowledge given by the setting. In one of the settings with the least qualified staff, I comment:

> "The displays in the toddler room were really good, and showed 'real' children's work, not adult versions of it!" Observation Notes, Setting 7

On one occasion, there seemed to be as many members of staff engaged with putting up a display as there were interacting with the children:

> "There don't seem to be many staff in attendance - two are busy putting up a new display!" Observation Notes, Setting 14

<u>Role of Staff</u>

In most settings, staff seemed to a large extent, to be engaged with the children. However, this was not always the case:

"In the first room, the 3 - 5 year olds are engaged in a colouring activity and seem to have a large degree of freedom in this (ie no adult input)" Observation Notes, Setting 14

"The 2 - 3 year olds were watching TV. There are 2 - 3 members of staff with them - one in particular is sitting engrossed watching the TV. There is very little interaction going on with the children - no mediation of the programme." Observation Notes, Setting 14

Also, the content and appropriateness of the activity for the children could also be questioned:

"As I walked through the room, the chairs were all around in a circle practicing for the Christmas concert. They were nearly all boys, between the ages of 2 - 3. How long had they been sitting there for?!!" Observation Notes, Setting 8

CATEGORY SEVEN
Discursive Commentary

The Quality of Early Years Provision

Whilst the introduction of the Foundation Stage and move to education status is credited by Sencos as having improved the quality of planning and recording within settings, this was not always evident in the practice observed. Throughout the interviews / observation, there were a number of examples where staff were failing to engage with and extend the learning of children; displays showed predominantly adult assisted work and activities were not appropriate to the age range of the children. This view is reinforced by the findings of a DfEE funded research programme into Effective provision of Pre-school Education (Sylva, 1999). This project identified that the quality of early learning was highest in nursery schools and combined centres and the lowest in playgroups and private day nurseries.

However, in talking individually to Sencos, the majority seemed to have a reasonable grasp of early years philosophy and practice. There seems to be a discrepancy between what people know and what people do. There are a number of possible reasons for this phenomenon.

- Within settings, staff have a range of qualifications, including those with little or no formal training relevant to their role. The relative proportions of such staff, combined with their status within the organisation may have an impact on an individual's ability to effect practice. This may particularly be the case where the setting manager has little or no understanding of Early year's philosophy.
- In many cases, the settings are service providers - parents are paying customers. As such they are bound to provide what the parents want. Part of the difficulty may be the general poor understanding of child development and the value of play.
- Settings in many instances are competing for custom with schools. Settings may aim to provide a more formal 'educational' set up, in order to level the playing field.

Whatever the reason, if the quality of early years experience offered to children is to be equitable across maintained and non maintained settings, the issue of theory into

practice needs to be addressed. One of the basic tenets of this study is that Early Years provision and Inclusive provision go hand in hand. If the provision in these settings is not based on this foundation, then there will be limited benefit in working with Sencos based on this notion.

Implications:

- An increasing percentage of those working with pre school children need to have at least a basic training in early years philosophy and practice.
- Settings need access to advice and support from professionals who themselves have a sound understanding of early years philosophy and practice. In this way settings can be supported and challenged to develop their provision.
- There needs to be a general move to publicise the value of play and early childhood experience with the wider community.

APPENDIX 2

Delivering Educational Psychology Services To Non-Maintained Early Years Settings: Inclusion ABC

Abstract

This paper describes a pilot project aimed at developing a cohesive service delivery model to the large numbers of non maintained early years settings which may now in theory request the support of an educational psychologist. Based on an inclusive model, a cluster of sencos met on a regular basis with an educational psychologist and were trained to audit their settings for inclusion. Once this basic training had been completed, regular consultation sessions were held, in order to help the sencos develop inclusive solutions for all the children in their care. This qualitative evaluation of the project describes its planning and implementation and will be of interest to any educational psychology service contemplating service delivery to this sector.

Introduction

Academics and commentators have long since berated the state of early years provision in this country (Moss & Penn, 1996). Early years provision in this context is taken to mean any setting providing care and education for children from birth through to when they start school. The policy document *'Early Excellence'*, published by the Labour Party in 1996 brought together many of these criticisms, whilst at the same time proposing a model for development. This was later to enter the statute books as a part of the *'Excellence in Schools'* documentation (DfEE, 1997). Based on previous evidence, *Meeting the Childcare Challenge* (DfEE, 1998) highlights a triad of difficulties relating to early years provision. Reflecting the findings of both Rumbold (DES, 1990) and Ball (1994), the report found that the quality of childcare was highly variable between settings. It was also found that there was a shortage nationally of childcare places and that parents' access to these places was hampered by poor information about what was available. In addition to this, the cost of childcare was found to be prohibitive in many circumstances, unless parents were able to access services provided by the local council, or were eligible for more specialist services such as social services day care.

In order to address these criticisms, a number of measures were introduced and have, to a large extent been successful in bringing about the desired changes. Margaret Hodge

(2001) describes how since 1997, seventy thousand new childcare places have been created across private day nurseries, childminders and out of school clubs. The benefits that these settings are able to offer, in terms of hours of work and being open all year round mean that an increasing number of parents are opting for such non maintained rather than school based provision for their pre school children. This trend has been further encouraged by the introduction of the Nursery Education Grant (NEG) system, which enables parents to offset the costs of non maintained provision for three and four year old children. At the same time, the NEG system has also been influential in increasing the quality of non maintained provision. In order to register for NEG, settings have to meet a number of quality control criteria including undergoing inspection by Ofsted. This in itself introduces the requirements for settings to deliver the Foundation Stage Curriculum (DfEE, 2000) and to operate within the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001).

These developments suggest that educational psychology services may be about to experience major changes in the pattern of referrals and casework demands in relation to pre school children. Firstly, the increasing number of children being catered for in non maintained early years settings indicates that there will be a parallel increase in the number of children with special needs being identified in this sector. Anecdotally, this is already happening, with colleagues in pre-school support services and within educational psychology services reporting an increased amount of casework in non maintained settings. Secondly, current practice is that these referrals are made largely via the medical route - senior clinical medical officer or paediatrician. There is however, an increasing likelihood of referrals being made directly by special needs coordinators (sencos) in these non maintained settings, as is their prerogative under the Code of Practice (DfES, 2001).

In order to manage these changes effectively, educational psychology service managers will need to consider carefully how to plan their response. Rather than simply replicating what has happened in schools, developing a service delivery model to a whole new client group could be seen as an exciting opportunity. As yet, educational psychologists have very little history of working with non maintained early years settings, and vice versa. The time is ripe to evaluate current service delivery models (ie to schools) and identify those elements which work well and those that are less useful.

Using this information should help to provide a framework for developing a new service delivery model for non maintained settings.

This paper describes an attempt to do just this - to develop a totally new service delivery model for non maintained early year settings. The Inclusion ABC project was devised in an attempt to address both the logistical and philosophical conundrums associated with developing a service delivery model to this sector. The paper is presented in three parts. Firstly, a background to the development of the model is explored, culminating in the Inclusion ABC project. Secondly, a qualitative evaluation of one aspect of the Inclusion ABC project - the Inclusion ABC training course is presented, and finally, issues emanating from the project are discussed and areas for possible future development proposed. These areas for development have subsequently been communicated to the Early Years Partnership which commissioned the work.

Introducing the Inclusion ABC

The recent review of current practice within educational psychology (DfEE, 2000) provides a vast amount of information regarding areas of celebration and concern relating to the role of the educational psychologist. Within this, key issues are identified that operate as barriers to or opportunities for a shift in the focus of educational psychology services. Identified barriers include the way in which special needs have come to be regarded as being within the individual child, rather than as an interplay between an individual and the environment in which they are located (Dyson, 2001); the learned helplessness of schools leading to the view that children with special needs are the responsibility of the local authority rather than the school that they attend (Wagner, 2000) and the way in which such views have been reinforced by government legislation (Gross, 2000).

The corollary of the identified barriers is wholly compatible with what is currently being promoted as inclusive practice. As such, in order to address these concerns, any new service delivery model adopted should take as its focus the development of the practices and principles of inclusive education. In order to address this, the 'Inclusion ABC' project was devised presenting a three staged model of service delivery to non maintained early years settings, with its guiding principle being that of inclusion.

<u>Stage 1</u> of the service delivery model involves clusters of early year settings being allocated a link EP, with whom they meet on a regular basis. Not only does this correspond with the model of 'area Sencos' being developed by Early Years Partnerships, but it also provides a response to the logistical problem of servicing the needs of such a vastly increased number of clients. Justification for such an approach can also be found from a number of other sources. Mortimer (1997) found that lack of confidence was a key issue for Sencos working in non maintained early years settings. As such an approach that offers emotional support as well as developing skills would seem essential. Baskett (1983) suggests that social sources of knowledge from peers, supervisors and external professionals are of great value. In this context the support offered from colleagues combined with the training element of the course should support the successful implementation of the project.

<u>Stage 2</u> of the model is the Inclusion ABC training course. Whilst there is a plethora of material aimed at developing inclusive practice in schools (see Booth et al, 1999) there are very few examples of this aimed specifically at non maintained early years settings. Prior to any casework, setting based sencos are trained in the philosophy and practices of inclusion. This is a proactive attempt to avoid many of the difficulties identified in school based work (DfEE, 2000).

The stated aims of the Inclusion ABC training course are:

- To develop an ethos and culture whereby settings maintain responsibility for all of their children, including those with special educational needs;

- To develop a response to special educational needs which looks beyond the problem being located within the child and encourages a social dynamic approach whereby teaching content and style are examined;

- To help practitioners recognise the inclusive potential of what they already do;

- To place the meeting of special needs at the heart of improvement rather than seeing it as a bureaucratic exercise;

- To support the development of a system, which allows access to advice, support and resources without recourse for statementing.

The course comprises of four taught sessions presented over an eight week period. Following a taught input, setting based sencos are supported to audit their settings for inclusive potential in four key areas ie 'Identifying Individual Needs, 'Learning and Teaching', 'Working Together' and 'Setting the Scene'. Following the audit, sencos negotiate their own targets in each of the four areas, in order to develop and extend inclusive practice. Progress towards these targets is reviewed with colleagues during subsequent sessions.

Stage 3 of the Inclusion ABC model provides a structure for looking at individual needs on the basis of inclusion ie what the setting needs to do to include a child. This is practiced through regular meetings with an educational psychologist, affording sencos the opportunity to discuss individual cases from their setting and develop appropriate 'Actions for Inclusion'.

Methodological Considerations

The Early Years Partnership commissioned the author to run the Inclusion ABC project on a trial basis, with one cohort of setting based sencos. The project was run jointly with the newly appointed area senco for that group of settings, between January and April 2003. All 42 non maintained settings in an identified geographical area were contacted and offered the opportunity to participate. Ultimately fifteen sencos expressed a firm interest and participated in the project.

This evaluation is based on a group interview held during the final session of the Inclusion ABC training course. This approach was adopted in an attempt to contextualise the data and create an interactional situation that would come closer to 'real life' than isolated interviews between the author and individual participants (Flick, 1998).In addition to this, as part of a wider doctoral research project, participants also consented to each session being recorded in order to capture ongoing discussions.

The group interview lasted for approximately 40 minutes and was subsequently transcribed. The interview questions were loosely shaped around the aims established in the development of the Inclusion ABC training course, but also allowed scope to explore issues arising from ongoing analysis of data collected throughout the previous sessions. An interview prompt sheet was distributed to participants prior to the

interview, in order to help them to gather their thoughts and to avoid the discussion being swayed by more dominant members of the group. In all, twelve of the fifteen participants participated in the group interview.

Transcribed data from both the interview and training sessions was analysed using grounded theory techniques (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Units of meaning were identified in the text and put together with other units pertaining to a similar theme to form categories. The use of multiple data collection techniques combined with multiple data sources (ie the different participants) is intended to enhance the internal validity of the findings (Merriam, 1988). Further to this, additional validity checks were made through discussing the data and my interpretation of it with the area senco with whom the course was co presented.

The analysed data provides an insight into a wide range of issues affecting sencos in the non maintained sector. Whilst being relevant to those involved in the field, it is beyond the scope of this paper to report all of the findings and only data relating directly to the project is subsequently included. Thus, the evaluation is presented in two main sections:

1. A qualitative analysis of the Sencos responses to the course, based on the evaluative interview and session data;
2. Examples of the type of projects undertaken by the sencos, which demonstrate the development of inclusive practice within their individual settings;

1. To what extent did the course achieve its stated aims?
The course was well received by all participants:

> "I think we really valued it - we all go on courses that are a bit airy fairy and we feel we know what we were supposed to do. We valued this." Senco 10

Examining the Sencos responses in respect of each aim, there is evidence to suggest that each has been achieved.

Aim 1. To develop an ethos and culture whereby settings maintain responsibility for all of their children, including those with special educational needs;

All participants described and in most cases demonstrated an increased understanding of the concept and practices of inclusion. Whilst some sencos were at an early stage in this process, others demonstrated a profound understanding of the notion of inclusion:

> "It's made me focus and understand about inclusion. That if you work in an inclusive way in your setting then you're going to be covering all of the children's needs / differences, and it somehow plays down the SEN part... not taking it aside as something special any more. Its just part of inclusion." Senco 11

> "It's somehow shifted the SEN bit... that feels a lot better than thinking of SEN as "this child has 'special' needs". They've all got needs at different times and we need to do something to help." Senco 2

And it has also increased awareness of the need to amend and develop practice within settings:

> "I will try not to disable children in the nursery environment - make changes where necessary to include all children" Senco 1

> "I hope that we will have the knowledge to treat any child the same and offer a full and varied learning programme" Senco 4

Aim 2. To develop a response to special educational needs which looks beyond the problem being located within the child and encourages a social dynamic approach whereby teaching content and style are examined;

Participants expressed an increased awareness that SEN is an interaction between child and environment:

> "(The course) has made me understand that it may not be the child who has the needs but the setting and the lack of staff training." Senco 4

And that special needs can be seen as part of the range of normal development:

"I see that all children have special needs to varying degrees." Senco 9

"SEN doesn't have to be an identifiable problem... that everyone has needs and staff have to be aware - it doesn't have to be anything big - just making small changes." Senco 5

Aim 3.   To help practitioners recognise the inclusive potential of what they already do.

Many participants reported increased confidence and a more positive view of children with special needs and described how the course has given them increased confidence in their role.

"It's not frightening any more - it doesn't put you off - make you want to shut your eyes and back off. You can cope with it" Senco 2

This confidence relates to an increased understanding of the links between early years practice and inclusion:

"We shouldn't sell ourselves short because we have got a lot of things there and we do do a lot of good things. We don't pat ourselves on the back for doing them and that's not good for the morale of the staff" Senco 2

And to the fact that the course has broken down 'Inclusion' into a series of tasks:

"I think it helps to break the whole thing into manageable parts. Instead if thinking as I did 'there's a lot to do, I don't know where to start', it helps you to pin it down..." Senco 6

Aim 4. To place the meeting of special needs at the heart of improvement rather than seeing it as a bureaucratic exercise:

Participants also report an increased confidence and ability to look at and evaluate practice within their settings.

"Sometimes I know what needs doing, but I don't know how to go about it. So when the course is over, I'll be able to go back and go through the audit again." Senco 5

And confidence to make changes:

"I'm looking at my whole place and thinking 'am I doing the right things to be inclusive? That's what it's done for me" Senco 6

Aim 5. To support the development of a system, which allows access to advice, support and resources without recourse for statementing.

The course is also said to have influenced how sencos view their role within their setting particularly with regard to sharing responsibility for the children with special needs. This has influenced both thinking and practice.

"You've got to include your staff in the knowledge, working and practice to then go on and include children." Senco 10

Alongside setting based issues, participants also valued having the opportunity to work with other sencos from the non-maintained sector.

"Getting ideas from what other people do - that's been useful too." Senco 15

A number of sencos also felt that one of the most valuable aspects of the course was the increased awareness of support available to them:

"There is a lot of help out there if I get stuck, or need to share my concerns with someone." Senco 5

"I've worked at my setting for 15 years now, so you, to me are.... I can pick up the phone and ask for advice and support with SEN. For all those years I've had nobody..." Senco 11

2. Examples of the type of projects undertaken by the sencos, which demonstrate the development of inclusive practice within individual settings

An important measure of the effectiveness of a course is whether it has led to any change in practice. Following each phase of the ABC audit, sencos set themselves targets and associated tasks to develop inclusive practice within their settings. The following extracts, presented under the four areas of the Inclusion ABC audit, demonstrate some of the tasks that the sencos set themselves, and completed as part of the course.

Setting the Scene

"(Developed) a new information brochure including a community language or welcome in a different language" Senco 10

"At a community staff meeting, involving 24 members of staff working in community crèches, we distributed SEN policy files to all. We raised inclusion awareness amongst staff and asked them to assess the suitability of their setting for inclusion and any adaptations that may need to be made." Senco 2

Learning and Teaching

"Started to use a digital camera. Put up a display in the doorway of 8 - 10 photos of what children have been doing that week. It is a talking point for parents. Future plans to talk to children about this - what we have done and what we can do next." Senco 4

"Set planning with inclusion always in mind. Leave room on the planning for adding on extra activities" Senco 10

Identifying Individual needs

"I take far more time to praise what children do and activities they take part in. Will discuss with staff whether we feel our children are too young to discuss Record of Achievement files and any ways we can discuss with them what they have done." Senco 4

"Created a new checklist - child friendly so that children can help record their own development" Senco 13

Working Together

"Put up notice on the hours key workers work and are available to talk to parents. If not suitable, we can arrange different times."

"Working more closely with a group of staff around SEN and inclusion. Work with one member of staff from, each section, (in a group) - write an inclusion policy together, pass on information, ideas etc. around inclusion." Senco 11

Issues arising so far from the Inclusion ABC project.

From the data collected, it would appear that the course has been successful in achieving its aims, and feedback from participants indicates that it was well received. There are however a number of issues arising from the project which warrant further discussion. These are presented in relation to the three stages of the service delivery model.

Stage 1 - Working with clusters of early years sencos.

Participants valued the opportunity to work together and widely supported the idea of regular meetings with sencos from other early years settings. The Sencos justified this, suggesting that their particular circumstances and the issues effecting them were difficult for those in other sectors of education to appreciate. Receiving support from colleagues in similar circumstances was cited as being most helpful. Further information about the possible content and frequency of these meetings is currently being collected by the area Senco involved. Preliminary feedback from the course participants suggests the following:

i)   In the first instance, sencos would like the meetings to be organised for them by the area Senco rather than managing the group themselves;

ii) They would like a regular focus for the group for example an outside speaker or input on a specific subject such as behaviour management.

iii) They would like regular opportunities to discuss concerns with external professionals such as an educational psychologist or an area senco.

Analysis of the session data suggests that it takes some time for sencos to build up confidence and trust in one another. This matches the findings of Cline, Frederickson and Wright (1990) who suggest that adults in the work place seem to have even more to lose than children in terms of status and self esteem, if they feel that they are shown to be incompetent. As such, it would be advisable to maintain a degree of consistency amongst cluster group members and link professionals. This is reinforced through the feedback that the development of personal relationships between presenters and participants was a significant factor impacting on both attendance and commitment.

At the same time the training and experience of the presenters may also have been an influencing factor on the success of the project. A number of Sencos commented on the previous lack of focused and appropriate training for Sencos in non maintained early years settings. Both presenters of the course were experienced early years practitioners and strong proponents of inclusion. As such it was possible to highlight and reinforce the inclusive potential of good early years practice. Drawing links between early years practice and inclusion enabled sencos to recognise the potential of their existing practice, in terms of inclusion and develop the confidence to begin to apply this to all children in their setting. This developing understanding is reflected clearly in the statements made by the sencos during the evaluation, both in terms of their confidence and the way in which they talk about children with special needs.

Stage 2 - Training sencos in the philosophy and practice of inclusion.
From the evaluation exercises, it seems that there has been an increase in the understanding and practice of inclusion. To what extent though, are the things that the sencos describe an accurate reflection of practice in their settings? For example, how do we know that the rankings they awarded themselves in the audit are realistic?

At one level, it might be argued that the accuracy or otherwise of the audit is not essential to the success of the Inclusion ABC project. The Inclusion ABC is about developing understanding of and attitudes towards including children with special needs and the audit provides a practical way of doing this. Although primarily a benchmarking exercise, more importantly the Inclusion ABC audit process sets the context so that when sencos have concerns about individual children, they have a framework around which to structure their thoughts and this is grounded in inclusion.

It could also be argued that the way in which the Inclusion ABC audit is presented, ie as part of a taught course on Inclusion, ensures some degree of validity. Rather than sencos filling out the audit on their own in their settings, they completed the process with a group of colleagues and had to justify to them how and to what extent they met the criteria. At the same time, the course presenters worked with each of the groups of sencos in turn in order to challenge sencos to justify and explain their thinking. Not only did this lead to the audit being completed with some rigour, it also allowed for some degree of moderation across settings.

Interestingly, a pattern seemed to emerge whereby those sencos working in the most inclusive settings tended to be most critical of themselves and grade themselves as poor. Conversely, the sencos who awarded themselves the highest scores tended to operate in the less inclusive settings. The reasons for this are unclear and warrant further investigation.

Participants reported positively on having to set themselves inclusion targets. The fact that they would have to share their progress with colleagues during the following sessions was cited as a good source of motivation. The evidence collected of the 'Actions for Inclusion' undertaken by sencos makes for impressive reading. Feedback from colleagues who visit these settings regularly suggests that the changes that sencos describe are happening in practice.

A further extension of the audit would be to extend it into a charter mark for inclusion in early years settings. As such, settings achieving a certain level would receive recognised status from the Early Years Partnership and be able to advertise themselves as such.

Stage 3 - Inclusion based consultation sessions

In the evaluation, sencos expressed a firm desire to have regular consultation sessions with an educational psychologist. In addition to the consultation session modelled as part of the Inclusion ABC training course, two additional consultation sessions were held but uptake of these was limited. The first session was attended by three sencos (plus two community crèche workers) and the second by only one senco. It is difficult however, to predict from these two sessions what future take up might be. Following on

directly from the Inclusion ABC training course, many participants may have been confident enough to 'have a go' with the children in their settings, rather than needing support or advice. However, as time goes on, this may change. Also, feedback from the Sencos themselves indicated that they would be most likely to attend consultations when there was an additional impetus to attend such as a training input. As yet this has not been piloted.

Evidence from other Educational Psychology services (Godfrey, 2003) suggests that fortnightly consultation sessions with a cluster of settings may be an appropriate frequency at which to offer support. However, as most services are in a similar situation in that they are only now starting to develop service delivery models for non maintained early years settings there is no general picture and no information regarding uptake of such a service..

Those sencos participating in the Inclusion ABC training course suggested that the understanding developed through the course was an important factor in enabling them to benefit fully from the consultation sessions. Initial impressions of running the consultation sessions reinforces this. Even after the course, many of the sencos remained at an early stage in developing their understanding of inclusion. During the consultations, they needed regular prompting and support to maintain an inclusive stance and not revert to a problem focused model. The 'Actions for Inclusion' prompt sheet promoted during the course was particularly useful in structuring the consultations sessions and helping sencos develop an 'Action plan for Inclusion'. Rather than focusing on what the child needs to do to fit into the setting, the emphasis is on what the setting needs to do to include the child more fully. Whilst senco's commented positively on the use of this format, it could easily be undermined by other support providers directing sencos towards more within child based approaches. If this is to be avoided some agreement will need to be reached between external agencies working in the non maintained sector. The minimum would be that an introduction to the Inclusion ABC model is offered to other agencies working with early years settings so that they are familiar with the format and principles enshrined in it.

<u>Other Issues</u>

<u>Inclusion ABC and 'Out of School provision' and Child Minders.</u>

Out of school clubs and child minders were not included in the pilot project as they were thought to be two distinct groups needing a slightly different emphasis. The evaluation of the project for playgroups and private day nurseries indicates that it has been instrumental in raising awareness of inclusion, developing positive attitudes and raising confidence of providers. It also provides a framework for meeting individual needs through inclusion rather than through individualisation.

The practical implications of developing an inclusive approach, based on adaptation of existing provision seems appropriate to out of school clubs and child minders, who generally provide less formal educational opportunities for children and for whom IEP based approaches are difficult to implement. As such the development of an adapted version of the Inclusion ABC would provide an appropriate way of supporting children with special needs in these contexts.

<u>Practical Considerations</u>

Many sencos expressed an interest in visiting each other's places of work. A next step would be to draw up a list of settings who have the facilities to be able to host consultation sessions or cluster group meetings. As participants recognised, no course will be at the right time or day for everyone. As such, Inclusion ABC sessions will need to be offered on a range of days and times, in order to maximise participation. Most participants voiced strong opposition to sessions being held in the evenings, on the grounds that they usually didn't finish work until at least 6pm. Given the high turn over of sencos, the Inclusion ABC training course would also have to be run as a rolling programme in order to ensure that new sencos were able to benefit from the training.

<u>Limitations of the Inclusion ABC training project.</u>

Although some consideration has been given to the issue of validity, an important measure of success is the extent to which these changes and developments are maintained. This requires a more long term commitment to the Inclusion ABC model by both the educational psychology service and the Early Years Partnership. As yet this has not been established and the Inclusion ABC stands alone as an individual case study.

Next Steps

One would be ill advised to make generalisations or major policy recommendations from such a small pilot. However, feedback from the participants combined with data collected throughout the sessions suggests a number of possible next steps, which have subsequently been communicated to the Early Years Partnership for consideration. These relate to both the training course and the general model of delivering educational psychology services. These next steps are as follows:

Inclusion ABC model:

1)   Inclusion ABC model to be extended to all non maintained setting based sencos across the city.

2)   Trainers should ideally be experienced in both early years philosophy / practice and inclusion

3)   Training to be offered on a range of days / times in order to maximise participation.

Cluster group / Consultation sessions

4)   A link psychologist to be established for each cluster group, in order to develop trust and positive relationship.

5)   Regular cluster group meetings to be organised by the area senco with a named focus as proposed by participants.

6)   Regular consultation sessions with an educational psychologist to be offered, initially on basis of one session per term, per cluster group.

7)   A list of settings with facilities to host cluster meetings / consultation sessions drawn up.

Development of the Inclusion ABC training programme

8)   Inclusion ABC audit to be developed as quality charter mark for 'Inclusion in the Early Years'.

9)   An adapted version of the Inclusion ABC project to be developed for child minders and Out of School clubs.

Multi disciplinary support for Inclusion

10) An introduction to 'Inclusion ABC' to be offered to all agencies offering support to early years settings to develop consistency of practice.

11) 'Actions for Inclusion' plan to be promoted by all support workers offering support/ advice to early years settings.

Conclusion

The Inclusion ABC training course represents an innovative response to the question of how educational psychology services can begin offering support to non maintained early years settings. It takes as its starting point the view that these settings should maintain responsibility for all of their children, including those with special needs and that these children should be seen as the starting point for the development of the setting itself. A three staged model is proposed, in order to progress this, and evidence from the pilot project suggests that it has been successful in encouraging both inclusive thought and practice.

In considering how to address these new responsibilities to non maintained settings, it is time for educational psychologists to consider how they want to work - to shape their own future. As Taylor (1994) suggests, once a system has been put into operation, it is difficult to alter. Once a within child stance is adopted, it is very difficult to change, as we have found to our cost in schools. If we believe in inclusion and want to work in an inclusive way we need to actively pursue this. Developing a service delivery model to non maintained early years settings gives us the chance to put our words into action.

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APPENDIX 3

Initial Interview Prompt Sheet

Areas for discussion

- Tell me about a time that you've had a child with special needs in the nursery. What happened? (Identification, addressing needs, support.)

- Tell me about a time you've worked with / got support from someone from another service. What happened?

- Tell me about any training you've done in connection with children with special needs.

- Tell me some of the things you've done in your role as Senco in your setting.

- Tell me about the record keeping / planning do you do normally for all the children?

- Any other questions?

APPENDIX 4

Tape 1 Interview 4.

Thinking about children with special needs -
Can you think back to a time when you had some children with special needs?

Yes, we've had two. One was a little boy whose Mum came to see us. He was a twin, so she wanted to know if we could take him before he was three. He'd already been seen by an Education Psychologist and it was felt that he was autistic but Mum, he used to come two mornings a week and we had to have a member of staff on a one to one with him. We were told at the time that we would get funding, but it never came through. He was with us two terms and in a way it was hard for us because we thought he was making such headways because we are small groups. He was in a small group of only 11 children and he had a one to one member of staff. But then he left us to go to a nursery that a special needs unit. So it was a bit disappointing really, because he'd just started making headways and everything, and just as we were making progress he was whipped away again..

(margin handwriting) 1:1; funding; transienal SEN.

Did you have to foot the bill for the one-to-one in that case?

Yes, which from the private nursery sector is the heart(?)......because obviously we have to work at a profit. But we kept being told that funding would be available but it was just going round and round trying to find out who was responsile. By the time it was, he'd gone.
The other was a little girl she had....... I can't remember the actual name. She was a little person, but her Mum was as well, and her Mum was a friend who I'd known for a number of years. She came, then there were personal problems and she was taken out of nursery. The main problem we found was from the Mums point of view because she was in the baby unit and our baby unit is upstairs and Mum come not climb up the stairs. Luckily she was confident in us and she said could somebody meet her downstairs and take her from her Mum. We managed to do that. (R.The little girl was OK with that was she?) She was a one so she was with us but she left us before she came down, because we were working out ways that would need smaller chairs etc. things like that.

(margin handwriting) funding; transienal SEN.; access; adapting the env.

Can I take you back to the boy with autism - How did you manage that?

When he came Mum was in denial, because she had an older child with autism but the older child had quite good language, and this little one had no language, but Mum was convinced that he had. She was getting very frustrated and she couldn't see that he was progressing in any way, so therefore because there was no language there was no progression. When he came to us all he would do at first was hide himself in a corner. He'd found a secure place for himself behind the paint easel and he'd spend the whole session behind the paint easel. He would........ and we progressed by the time he left us. He joined us in the September and left us in the April and by the April he was sitting in with the children at dinner times He was quite happy to let children go up to him and tickle him, which was brilliant, and we'd just got him that he was sitting at the table with other children and he would do a picture with the others. We thought this was absolutely, you know....

(margin handwriting) working with parent denial; chn making progress

So how did you manage with Mum, did she come to see that he was making progress?

No . I used to have a chat with her each week 'He's done this' and 'he's done that' but 'What has he said?' We told her that because – but because it was language. It was really hard. The other thing we found hard was that we found out what nursery he was going to and I phoned them up, but unfortunately the unit didn't work mornings so there was nobody who could come and visit him. We said if you want to visit and see what he's doing with us and see what stage he's at. There was no way they could because nobody could come out.

(margin handwriting) +ve feedb.; working wth parents; rel wth school; → attitude to PON

So how did you feel about that – it sounds as if you were......

Frustrated and down. It was a lot of hard work. I was the one doing the one to one because we decided that with me being Senco, but the two members who were in there were also involved in doing activities with him and spending time with him and he was used to the three of us and it was frustrating for them but

(margin handwriting) role of Sen; nursery hc

1

what made it more so the fact that I bumped into someone from the place where he was going and she said 'Oh no he's not making progress'. So obviously it was the change that upset him and knocked him back. But then Mum was saying,,'Oh well I'm not planning on keeping him there.' ' I want him to move.' You felt at times as if you were just hitting you're head against a brick wall.

So actually the easy bit was dealing with the child?

We managed to get (she couldn't remember his name)   John (autism man)..... he came in and spent the morning and he was really good and gave us some ideas how we could progress. He gave us the confidence that what we were doing was fine. But apart from that everything else was negative.

Was there anybody else involved apart from John?

No.

So you never got to see any teachers........?

So that's what I'm hoping, especially now we've started Maggie. Because already she helped with a problem we had with a health matter, which we were totally stuck on and where the child with a ......?....had been in hospital...?....but unfortunately they'd been given the...?.....but not shown how to use it. So Mum brought it in. I had training a few years ago, so I was a bit rusty , but I do have the idea of what to do so I told Maggie and she arranged and we've had her nursing and half of the staff have had training and are already using it and know what to do.

With the code of Practice.......... There's no route to go. Tell me.....

It's getting better . It's a lot better than it was. Two years ago even, we were really like a in a wilderness, we didn't know who to contact, or anything and you find yourself on a roundabout somebody would say we'd find such and such and then Oh no we can't and in the end it was such frustration and you were getting nowhere. You'd no help for parents and no help for the children but I think since we've been involved with the partnership we've done a number of courses so we've got to meet the staff there so you can go there and even if they're not... – they can put you in contact with somebody who can help so we don't feel....?   and I think with Maggie being appointed it should hopefully make the job..

Support from other services......It sounds as if you've been Senco for some while, have you been that for some time? Are you the Nursery Manager?

No I'm the deputy, I've been here five years but the nursery I was at before had a couple of children, more with health problems or social and emotional problems. The nursery manager seemed to think that I was the sort of person to do it.   (Coughing – can't hear properly) Parents sometimes seem to feel far more confident talking to someone whose a bit older they look on me because I've had children of my own, where they may not be as open with an 18 year old.

All the people in the nurseries I've visited seem to be young girls, there don't seem to be any older age group. What happens to them, where do they all go?

Nurseries nurses – the Government have done a survey and they find that its very rare for a person to stop in the private sector for longer than 3 years. It's a combination, they come into it young, they're trained as nursery nurses but they go on to do other things, some find that after 2 or 3 years that its not for them, or they leave when they get married and have families of their own, and maybe come back to it. ....(something about professional people....) I think its more I went into it late, I've, been doing it now 20 years. I went in through Play Groups, with my own children. And then went and trained.

How much training have you had as Senco, have you had a reasonable amount of training.

2

What have I done? - I've done the days course that was compulsory with the early years, I've done NCFE, *[SEN]* behaviour modification course, with somebody called........she's the Educational Psychologist and that *[training]* covered autism etc. then I've done the early years courses, as many as possible. I took some training.

As Senco has the role changed, because you were doing it before you became official Senco?

It has now because since we've been involved with early years, and I went on the course for the new *[procedures]* guidelines, so we know now how to do observations on children, so I'me finding that, the staff where before with Private nurseries, you felt as if your hands were tied. You couldn't do anything, nobody seemed it was all geared to...?..   where now I'me finding staff come to me, even with babies and say *[instinct]* we're concerned, we've just got a gut feeling. And we say right start observations, we'll monitor it and see how it goes.

[procedures.]

So they all know that you're Senco?

Yes.

What happens in terms of record keeping how do you do that?

When we had the little boy with autism, normally what we do for the children we have a folder, and we *[working with parents]* have development sheets which we tick off, write little comments on and put little observations in on what we were doing, etc., but we decided it might not been not be advantageous for Mum to put a development sheet in like we were for his sister because it could make her feel somewhat...instead of which we just used to keep a diary and put in some photographic evidence. We didn't do it every session, because I *[Record keeping]* thought if he had down days, so we used to do it at the end of each month or whatever and just give her the general revue with all the positives. Mum took that with her when they left so they have a more or less positive record of what he'd done here.   I told her to take it to his nursery and let them have a read. **(Ruth...which is good because you're getting around the communication between Mum and the nursery......)** You don't know about the confidentiality.

Is there anything you want to ask me about the training?

No I don't think so, there'll probably be a lot more when we start.

Explanation about confidentiality........

I hope it can be helpful because we sometimes get gut feelings. I have a child whose just been registered *[instinct.]* with us and I really think she might have a special education needs, but the parents haven't said anything. *[parents]* I've only had the one meeting with her but from snippets the parents came out with once they'd registered her I think it might be.

Opportunity during training for what shall I do etc.

I did some training, but you don't really do enough and you sometimes feel who have I got to help and support.

Ex 'pre school' (term time only; school hours)
Down an unmade road in 'mill' part of Claytons.   ] accommodation
Entrance down side, through tall gate.

All the children are getting coats on ready to go out to play.

Senco's greeting me. Offers to go and talk in the babyroom so that] welcome
Eliza can play up there with the top.

Senco 40s - asner manager.
really good attitude about children with special needs - about] attitude to
giving them time; not panicing + supporting them.   SEN.

Eliza was really settled in the nursery - she played on her own
with one other children for 40 mins.

in the babyroom, there were 3 adults to 6 (plus Eliza)] age/exp
An mature workers, with experience.   of staff.

As I came down, All of the children 2-5 were sitting in a] nursery
circle on chairs to listen + a story. One of the workers was   practice
shouting at one of the younger ones, releasing them back to their
chair. Senco said that they're going to have t alter it
but haven't had chance yet

Really welcoming

There just seemed to be a sense that from what she was] theory +
saying, the practice should seem better, but it didn't.] practice.

They wanted to ask advice about a girl who was "gangly"
+ seemed to have areas of development that weren't right'
But they hadn't even done specific observations on her
to establish what it was they were concerned about

[procedures

few more absentees this time. None from [illegible] which surprises me, and the [illegible] didn't turn up, although Maggie had seen them in the week.

Maggie and me dead in it, they've got agn using [illegible]. They've put this signs she [illegible] of display and have a poster of a lady signing to her child, and have [illegible] [illegible] go with it, call [illegible] 'setting the scene.'

'Ran the issues of creating news/working with parents past Maggie. She said it was clear from going around setting that there were key issues she has people every week asking her about [illegible]. She pointed me towards the Birmingham stuff on 'Breaking the News' but also commented that she was unsure how much [illegible] news they get for this, as they're generally crap!

Joan was saying she thinks what we done is filling a real gap in the market. She talked about a [illegible] and all [illegible] why is very diff 'up front' all the time. Now she doesn't think there's anything 'wrong' and wouldn't want to start talking SEN, but there is a need to do something more for her — including her more 'Actions for inclusion' would [illegible] without getting too wordy.

Its interesting, I looked at the AC stuff the other day. Although there are cpy of schemes that work with Ky [illegible] — its all going down the [illegible] route, and [illegible] making diff for the [illegible]. I think maybe what we are doing is unique. I wonder how much uptake there is in training running this under the school nurseries.

Janet commented — 'you always doubt us!' She was joking, but its true — I didn't think many would turn up. 'didn't think they would [illegible] the training exercise, but they have. I've been impressed with the tasks they've planned, [illegible] with it done, also the way they adapted to the 'action for inclusion' case studies.

I think the 'Action for Inclusion' sheet needs to have a summary of the 4 areas on it, as they got a bit muddled between them and found it really matters.

It took quite a long time to do the case studies. Were going to have a job to get through all of them next time. I think they'll need to prioritise ① = urgent — need advice asap
② = quite urgent but can wait til next time
③ = not urgent, but would like chance to talk about at some stage. + wonder

wonder when we do the consultations whether we should ac a phone booking system, if people want to guarantee a slot? /or a form to fill in for next time

[boxed sketch with the words:]
income
setting

2 of 7
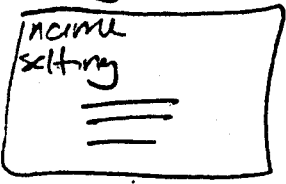
Maggie talked to me about Sam. She's probably the only one who hasn't really got it. She wanted a basic on activities for pre-school children which sort of demonstrates where she's at. She's forgotten her stuff on a couple of occasions, + she was struggling with the audit.

Maggie handled it well & sent her off with a task this week + said she'd arranged to visit her setting, to go through it + help her do it personally.

I wonder whether Sam represents a majority of settings? This is more like the response I expected, based on my previous intro training experience. My worry is that the ones that are on the course are somehow the ones who have an interest in this anyway, & they were nearly there. But that can't be the case across the whole channel, because I asked all settings in the project, and the ones that came were the ones who could do the course in. The others were keen, but couldn't do the dates.

I really need to do some number crunching & convince me about how many training sessions would be needed for all of them, and how many reg. consultation sessions that means on a regular basis.

Can I make a case for a 12m secondment? Do training + consultation sessions. God - it would be boring if that's all you did.

200 settings:
  20 at a time ⇒   10 ×   40 sessions

Child nurseries ⇒ $\frac{5}{5}$ ×   16 sessions
OOS   = $\frac{5}{5}$ ×   20 sessions
Nursery schools?   =   76

$\frac{20}{..}$ $\frac{1}{3}$ $/1\frac{1}{2}$ day 1.

⇒ 20 consultation sessions per ½ term

Who do you need presenting? Could it be Maggie alone, or do need s/o else? Need 'social construction' of that person, not medical. Need s/o who understands ZT philosophy + practice. (EY services together?)

- The game was excruciating! partly because they're not used to playing games; I'm not sure if it was just me being crap at explaining it, or them being dense, but a weaker person could have given up long before me! It was quite a laugh though, in that it was so crap, and they all cheered up laughing & it improved the atmosphere.

Concerned that the outcomes of the initial interviews all support the project idea. Is that because I'm making this happen? or is it that I was right all along? Does it matter? I guess the important part will be Maggie's feedback; Evaluation June + the feedback from Arrodale group. Maybe I need to do some further exploration until I've completed the story — or have I done enough?

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all of the staff workers in all the circles/outpick to get to understand
their responsibilities - a double counting really - inclusion -
making sure they all feel part of BEE, + is declars in for sen

* There some confusion over the content + difference between
the different areas of the audit. This needs to be made
more explicit, + maybe written on forms.

* Eg of differentiating 'Jolly Phonics' work. Rather than whole gp
session - what we do now, anytime she does sit down, is say "can you
find anything ..." Making it a lot more practical

* declaration - even though mandy missed session 2, she's set target for
I+A, + L+T and started to work towards them   attend.

* "I've suggested it before but it's never happened - now that there's a sort of
change (number of workers left) I thought I could just sneak it in !" data

T+L • Didn't do as much last week cos I didn't have time. - I did do some art
but I wasn't with down

Stuff booklet about key points of inclusion, told staff questionnaire.
Definition.   - Inclusion in Action
                                                 T+L / Working try

* I'm really positive + enthusiastic about what they've done / are doing
for tasks

IA   Developing care/forms for all children.   - Inc in action
                                                    Ind Ass

~   Some asking of questions this week / challenging. Maybe
      because people are feeling more confident.
      Q, how can we
      'don't see how we can make that happen' (co-ord appointments)
      'what about when have to go to London for appointments'

      " You're the one they see most and they put pressure on you when
      nothing happening & I think they tend to think we could have
      some clout, but I don't know whether we have.   status of sen

*   Session over ran by 15 mins this week, - still felt
      really rushed. 2½ or 3 hours might have been better.
      Even the delivery of the content feels rushed. It assumes an
      awful lot about what they know etc.

      " When 4/5 NN working try, you may have 1 who says this
      ch was SEN, + others don't + you had to convince ... you've
      all got to be in agreement ... it might just be a temporary
      blip - not sthg really need to be worrying about - got to think
      this is not of SEN + just calm down + ok you can take the
      notes, but it's not necessarily saying strong intervention is
      SEN." BCC
            push back to audit. ✓

                                                    244

• was chatting as they do the audit this week.

✱ "got all info (re props) but just not all together in   GT

✗ "we make a real effort with parents so they feel comfortable   working
enough to come to you   key
"put time aside in planning so can discuss if worried. we rearrange so
there extra staff so they can do it

✗ Some of settings don't have local ways/— community group determined   Work
by other criteria eg college nursery / Local Auth employees   key
↓ "Tend to be sophisticated..."
"Might be Airedale, might be Leeds, so I tend to do it on a
child basis."

✗ People seem to go for things that are most easily attainable — then to
be less competent ——— get down matter too much — see it on   Inc
growing confidence" moving on.   target
                                                                 setting

• I do well as anything out — the links between what others here were
as doing + pushing them back to talk to one another. If we had more time time
feeding back to whole group on what doing would be good, to   group
enable them to make those links themselves   ethic

Discussion about person, maps + materials + huge cost associated
with such "graphics" materials.
I idea floated of having "resource bank" at EYDCP, that can be accessed   resour-
by settings — borrowing books/posters etc. This might be a way of   ces
getting people in for consultations/resource issuing.

: "a lot of lost time + opportunities"   (case study Stephen)] Inc in
"a lot of it we do on a daily basis..."   Action

one of main things need to go in to school if be able to socialise
"for me, that is part of normal development — it's no different .... when you
get a child (who hasn't been diagnosed) you're doing it all the time
— you're seeing that a child has a difficulty — what can we do to help
that child. You'd doing that from the beginning — just automatically
... it doesn't mean a child has something wrong — has SEN in actual
fact they're just having difficulties in their development — not
difficulties + just a phase."
                                        — alternative to SEN
                                        — Approaches to
: As to eval — how often. Do you need to have done this   working se
              course to be able to benefit from meeting the SE

✗ Great ideas from all studies — show real understanding of what can   Case stu
do as a setting, + how can help, really seen to have taken
on board.

: "sometimes we do things + they don't know they're doing it."

∝ Should tell prof. that don't have to send Eschun until term after his 5 — keep him in [crossed out] nursery where he has a chance to catch up — he needs that time …] giving

∝ Full rejectn of 8.31 – 10.30 ⟹ many are in work before then] practical — most feel can get out early enough onto this am.

Tom was really into the interview data — to recognise it as being 'real'. It's great that he's so supportive of equal research methodology — his whole keynote speech to BECP was on literature/science divide. So was able to have a reasonable conversation with him about how to incorporate 'The Keg Eater' and also my diary notes into the structure.

He was quite dismissive of my results " You're going to have an evaluation of a training package." But at this time, I held out & argued my case better that is more than that. There is a whole political element emerging about the role of non-intrinsic sec. power / knowledge / language.

I'm sort of been nothing whatever, as I know it has implications in terms of harder teaching matter, but if I want to move beyond pure 'evaluation' I guess that's where I have to go [illegible] — well I came!

4/10/03. I can feel the grip of panic in my stomach I really don't know how to move this forward. I've got all these ideas washing about in my head I've read around 9 4 and discourses of care, but I feel even more confused. Yes, it fits with some of what I'm doing, but not all. Yet I still can't say categorically what the writing is about. By taking a 9 stance, am I going to cut out all of the pragmatic stuff about parents? Can I keep that in or will it jar too much with the contrasting styles? Help.

What I'm trying to avoid is following the aspect that is of most interest to me is the care/education/inclusion debate. I'm not sure why I'm avoiding it. I think it's because in talking me in unidirectional insofar as I don't feel that I know enough that the paths of th If I went down this route, I would feel I needed to write like Tina Burman or Anne g t and I don't know that I feel comfortable with that style. Could I just do it as me? or would I feel too unconfident — 9 ideas/decons not just on a non-academic 9 day?

Both Fran + Simon commented that I need to write with more authority. Its funny I feel disempowering the feminist 9's — that I don't have the authority to speak — I don't know enough — I'm only writing from experience of the social sences. Academia requires that I authenticate my work with 'expert' opinion. But isn't that what I'm fighting against? Why can't scrutiny in jour be in experience based work?

6/10/03. What's been bothering me is chronology. My thinking is developing all the time and some of the ways of thinking I have now, I hadn't even thought about when I first wrote my lit rev two years ago. If I now insert a section on feminist 9, its going to stick out a mile. The alternative is to change the whole lot. But then it would look like I've always thought in this way — which isn't true. I don't want to try and pass myself off as a radical feminist if its new to me